

“Children, Listen to the Lord Praying”
John 17:11-19

There are several key issues that emerge in this section of Scripture. There is the question of the Church’s involvement in the world without becoming “of the world.” Another issue is the loss of conviction of objective truth. George Adam Smith asked: “How better to describe a half-fed people, a half-cultured society, a half-lived religion, a half-hearted policy, than by the Prophet’s statement that the people of God are like a cake not turned?”

A more contemporary issue is the question of the nature of the Church’s mission. Is it political, as opposed to moral and spiritual? The truth, of course, no matter what the World Council of Churches might say, is not political, or social, or economic – although such areas of life can be radically transformed by the Message of Christianity. Our task is the publishing of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it is a task that we must be everlastingly at until God calls us home.

Many years ago John Hutton wrote, “Whenever lamps burn low in the Church, and love waxes cold, and watchers slumber while the Bridegroom tarries, the Restorer and Sustainer of His people is always standing at the door. Amid fightings within and fears without the modern church can still say, “I know that my Redeemer liveth.”

With this in mind we turn to John 17. Jesus has prayed for Himself (1-5), and He has now turned His attention to His apostles (6-19). He has clarified their identity, emphasizing that they are the given ones, and that He has manifested the name of the Father to them, which revelation they have received and believed, having become convinced that He has come from God. In the verses before us we listen carefully to His petitions for His beloved ones.

I. A REQUEST FOR PRESERVATION

THE NATURE OF THE REQUEST (John 17:11,15). In verse 9 Jesus said **I PRAY FOR THEM**, referring to His apostles. Here, we find out the content of His prayer. **HOLY FATHER, KEEP THEM IN THY NAME, THE NAME WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME.”** The Key word is **KEEP**, and the meaning seems to be that He wishes them to be protected in a way that is true to the being and attributes of God. In Calvin’s words: “He brooded them under his wings as a hen doth her chickens. Upon His impending departure, He asks God to safeguard them.

Jesus fully realized the necessity of security, illustrated by the fact that elsewhere in Scripture we read **“BEHOLD, HE THAT KEEPETH ISRAEL SHALL NEITHER SLUMBER NOR SLEEP. THE LORD IS THY KEEPER: THE LORD IS THY SHADE UPON THEY RIGHT HAND (psalm 121:4,5).**

As you look at 11, 12-15, remember the story of how Jesus said to Peter, **SIMON, SIMON, BEHOLD SATAN HATH DESIRED TO HAVE YOU, THAT HE MAY SIFT YOU AS WHEAT.** Twice in this section, Jesus says **I COME TO THEE (11,13).** **THE**

NAME WHICH THOU HAST GIVEN ME occurs in both verses 11 and 12 and points to the Son as the full and final revealer of the Father. In fact, it establishes the Son as the One who is in charge of their welfare.

But what is meant by the words AND NONE OF THEM IS LOST, BUT THE SON OF PERDITION? Of course, the reference is to Judas, but it is instructive to ponder the words of Bishop Moule. He said: “Are we to refer from the word EXCEPT that the Son of ruin was once a GIVEN ONE? I would argue from the language idiom used that it was not so. The same word EXCEPT is used in Revelation 21:27. It is obvious there that the idiom is used to describe a contrast between who enters and who does not enter heaven.

I HAVE GIVEN THEM THY WORD, our Lord continues. The result is THAT THE WORLD HATES THEM (14). Why? They had become salt in the wounds of the world. They had become light in a room the world tried to keep dark. Their new birth and new nature, with the heavenly hopes, concerns, and goals that they produced, gave them a convicting influence that the world could not take without offense. The world of the world and the world of the saints are different worlds, naturally at odds and in constant conflict.

It is clear that the early church was not isolationist, for if they had been so, then the world would not have had the contact necessary with them necessary to develop its animosity to them. Nor did the early church amalgamate with the world. What is the practical implication for us today? We should be a people busy, striving, organizing, loving, and sharing the gospel with the dust of the world on our shoes, but refusing to do anything but CARRY OUR SHRINE IN OUR HEART WITH US; EVERYWHERE
Declaring by deeds and words our first love.

III> REQUEST FOR CONSECRATION

PREPARATION AND DECCLARATION 916,17). The word “sanctify” is a word that means “to set apart and dedicate a person or thing to God’s service as a sacrifice.” We see that in terms of God’s intercession, His petition SANCTIFY THEM must refer to the enduement of them with power and purpose for the truth. The TRUTH is the message about the Father in Christ, that which is now contained in the Bible. Truth is to be the surrounding, constraining, and persevering environment for them in their work.

Notice that the word SANCTIFY is not meant to imply what elsewhere is called the doctrine of “progressive sanctification.” There is a truth there to refer to a maturity and growth of all believers. Growth is not the main emphasis here – going is the main emphasis. They are being sent forth in the world as the bearers of the message of God.

THE MOTIVE (18,19). Jesus prays AS THOU HAST SENT ME INTO THE WORLD, EVEN SO HAVE I ALSO SENT THEM INTO THE WORLD. Jesus is entrusting to them the very same work He came into the world to start. Then, He was personally and physically present with the disciples. Now, He is continuing His ministry as described

through the post-resurrection words: LO, I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS, EVEN UNTO THE END OF THE WORLD. For the apostles it is not a man but the SON OF GOD upon whom they rely. Jesus goes on: FOR THEIR SAKES I SANCTIFY MYSELF, THAT THEY ALSO MIGHT BE SANCTIFIED THROUGH THE TRUTH. When Jesus says I SANCTIFY MYSELF, we are not to understand that He means that He is making Himself holy. He did not make Himself righteous that the apostles might have an example for imitation. The reference is clearly to His setting Himself apart for Divine service, that they, too, might be set apart.

He doubtless has in mind what will transpire soon at the Last Passover and the First Lord's Supper, when He will explain His coming death and its relation to the consummation of the New Covenant in the ceremony of the bread and the wine. In other words, He here is "Interpreting" for them what it means to be a sacrifice through sanctification.

The words THAT THEY ALSO MAY BE SANCTIFIED must be understood to include a setting apart in the surrounding, constraining, and preserving environment of the truth that might involve a sacrificial death. HIS SANCTIFICATION was necessary for theirs. In other words, the saving work of the cross is necessary for all success in the ministry of Christ.

CONCLUSION: Ancient and contemporary issues collide and are addressed by our Lord's Words here. The church is a commissioned representative of the Lord Jesus Christ to minister His and the Father's truth in the world. They are a separated body, in the sense that their inmost life and disposition is not earthly but heavenly in their interests, concerns, and goals. However, separation is not meant to imply isolation OR amalgamation. Our Lord's words put it most succinctly and beautifully. We are IN the world, but not OF the world.

Further our Lord's petitions make it clear that the mission of the church is not essentially a politically, sociological, or economic one. IT IS A SPIRITUAL MISSION, a mission whose chief goal is to unfold to the world the truth of God, revealed in and through the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those of us who belong to that church are likewise to be purveyors of that undying truth.

The conviction that this is our mission is a necessity for its success. There is the account of an incident in the life of the German poet, Henrich Heine. He stood with a friend before a great cathedral in France.

"Tell me, Heinrich," said his friend, "why can't people build structures like this any more?"

Heine replied, "My dear friend, in those days people had convictions. We moderns have opinions. It takes much more than an opinion to build a Gothic Cathedral."

Nowonder Jesus said SANCTIFY THEM WITH YOUR WORD: YOUR WORD IS TRUTH.