



The Gospel of John - Chapter Seventeen

- III John 13:1-20:31 - The Farewell Discourse and the Passion Narrative (continues)
- III.a John 13:1-17:26 - The cleansing and instruction of the new messianic community and Jesus' final prayer (continues/concludes)
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Summary of Chapter Seventeen

This chapter contains the most extensive and profound prayer of Jesus that exists in written form or oral tradition. When Jesus prayed at Lazarus' tomb he made it clear that he had no need of expressing prayer because he is one with God in his whole life, the union true prayer expresses. Nevertheless, he prayed for the benefit of those present (11:41-42), and the same is true here as well.

Jesus' whole life has been a revelation of the Father, based on Jesus' union with him, so it is appropriate that his teaching concludes in the form of prayer, the genre most closely associated with union with God. Other farewell discourses also conclude with prayers, but in Jesus' case prayer is itself related to the essence of his message.

As Jesus starts to speak with his Father it is as if he has already departed the world and is speaking from the perspective of eternity, yet he also makes it clear that he is still with his disciples so the prayer transcends both time and space. Jesus' intercession for his disciples from within God's presence anticipates his role after his ascension.

Because this intercession corresponds to the role of the high priest elsewhere in the NT, and because Jesus uses sacrificial language when he refers to sanctifying himself, this prayer has been known as the High Priestly Prayer. Indeed, there are many who may refer to this as the Lord's Prayer rather than the one traditionally given this title when Jesus taught his disciples to pray (Matthew 6:9-13).

This chapter completes the chiasm of the farewell discourse spelled out in 13:31-35, with a return to the glory mentioned. This passage concentrates on the relationship of the Father and the Son and the glory they share. The Father is seen as the one who gives, used thirteen times in this prayer, highlighting his grace and his role as source of all. Jesus focuses specifically on the Father's gift to the Son of disciples. The Son continues to show himself to be the revealer sent from the Father, but he is seen also as a giver: he gives his disciples the Father's word, glory and eternal life.

This prayer gathers many of the key themes found throughout the Gospel. The Son's work in the disciples is developed through the themes of faith, knowledge, love, indwelling, oneness and God's name. There is also an emphasis on the world, including its separation from God, God's love for it and the disciples' mission to it.

III.a.ii.6 John 17:1-26 - Jesus Prays for His Disciples

In his final prayer, Jesus gives an account of his earthly mission to the Father who sent him. He prays, first for himself (vv.1-5), then for his disciples (vv.6-19), and finally for later believers (vv.20-26).

¹ After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 17:1-3

Jesus looked up to heaven, thus striking a customary posture in prayer, as indicated in: <<*To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens!*>> (Psalm 123:1), <<*Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', that is, 'Be opened'*>> (Mark 7:34), <<*But the tax-collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!"*>> (Luke 18:13).

The hour has come. In John, Jesus' hour is the time of his crucifixion and the events that follow it, at which time his saving work is accomplished in his atoning death. This hour has cast its shadow over the whole story (2:4), and its arrival has already been signalled (12:23), with its implications for glory (12:27-28), judgment (12:31-32), and Jesus' return to the Father (13:1). As with many of Jesus' cryptic sayings in John the use of hour meant nothing at the time and yet means everything through later revelation.

The opening petition glorify your Son implies a claim to deity, since the OT affirms that God will not give his glory to another: <<*I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to idols*>> (Isaiah 42:8), and: <<*For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for why should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another*>> (Isaiah 48:11). He does not give it to any other except to himself in the person of his Son. As usual in John, Jesus'

focus is not on himself but on his Father, revealing that God is glorified particularly through the Cross of Christ. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has revealed the Father's glory by manifesting his characteristic gracious love. In the death of the Son this same love is revealed most profoundly, for God is love: **<<Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love>>** (1 John 4:8), and love is the laying down of one's life. Thus, in his death, Jesus will reveal his own character and his Father's character to be gracious love.

Eternal life comes from knowing God and Jesus, the sent Son: **<<But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name>>** (John 20:31), and is given **to all whom you have given him**, that is, all the people that the Father has given to the Son. Knowing God is not confined to intellectual knowledge but entails living in fellowship with him. This verse is commonly viewed as a parenthetical statement added by John, like a footnote. However, it flows quite naturally even when understood as Jesus' comment on what he has just said, much as verses 6-8 will comment on v.4. Jesus' reference to himself in the third person seems strange, but the OT contains similar examples, e.g. **<<And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord God!>>** (2 Samuel 7:20).

That they may know you implies an intimate relationship that involves actually knowing God as a person. Paul makes this clear in his letters, especially: **<<More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ>>** (Philippians 3:8).

That God is **the only true God** is affirmed supremely in Deuteronomy 6:4 **<<Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone>>**. Jesus, in turn, is the one-of-a-kind Son sent by the Father: **<<And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth>>** (John 1:14), and is the only way to God (14:6). The phrase **only true God** is not attributed to Jesus elsewhere, but it is similar to John's own language: **<<And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life>>** (1 John 5:20). Likewise, nowhere else does Jesus refer to himself as Jesus Christ, but this expression is very common outside the Gospels. Indeed, this double reference to the one true God and to Jesus is similar to texts in Paul contrasting the Christian faith with pagan polytheism and idolatry: **<<For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming>>** (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10).

The Father's granting of **authority over all people** to Jesus (5:27) marks the start of a new era: **<<For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time**

onwards and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this>> (Isaiah 9:6-7), <<As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him. To him was given dominion and glory and kingship, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed>> (Daniel 7:13-14), <<And Jesus came and said to them, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me'>> (Matthew 28:18).

All people, Greek *pases sarkos*, literally 'all flesh', means the entire human race and not just those who make a commitment to follow Jesus. The phrase can also be used to indicate 'all life' and this would be in keeping with Jesus' role in the creation of all things (1:3).

⁴ I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

⁵ So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

John 17:4-5

I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. The glorification of the Father has been the distinguishing feature of Jesus' life throughout the Gospel, a glory characterised by grace and truth (1:14). The work was given to him by the Father. So the character of the works revealed the character of him who gave them to the Son to do, and in this way the words and deeds of Jesus revealed the Father's glory. But also in the Son's obedience itself is seen the glory of God, since his humility, obedience and sacrifice reflect the love that is the laying down of one's life.

So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence. Jesus had come from the Father, was one with the Father and therefore shared in the glory of the Father. Yet he did not exploit this exalted position and gave it all up to fulfil the Father's will: *<<Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross>> (Philippians 2:5-8).*

Jesus again claims that he existed before the world existed, or 'before the world was'. This implies that the material universe is not eternal but was brought into being by God. Before that, nothing material existed. However, God has existed eternally as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and here Jesus speaks of a sharing of glory between the Father and the Son prior to creation, implying that there was mutual giving of honour in the interpersonal relationships of the Trinity from all eternity.

⁶ 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.'

John 17:6

Jesus' revelation of God's name entails making known the Father in his whole person, both his works and words: <<*No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known*>> (John 1:18).

The disciples were given to Jesus by the Father from the world, another reference to the amazing grace of God since it is a reference that everyone was alienated from God at some point. The Father is the ultimate agent in the disciples' lives just as he is in Jesus' life. Jesus states the pattern of relationships very succinctly: They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

What does it mean that they were God's? Some would see here a reference to predestination; they were the Father's through 'the eternity of election' according to Calvin. But Paul, who develops this specific theme, writes that the election 'before the creation of the world' is in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). If this text referred to this election it would seem to drive a wedge between the Father and the pre-existent Son, a false inference from this text.

Jesus is probably speaking not of an eternal relationship but of a relationship within salvation history, that is, the relationship the first disciples had with God through the covenant with Israel. Those true Israelites (1:47), who had an affinity with God (8:47), were already God's and were awaiting his Messiah, who would bring them to the fulfilment of that relationship. The Father gave them to the Son for this purpose; and through their faith and obedience, as they were drawn by God to the Son and his teaching, they demonstrated that they were God's.

This relationship is about to be changed radically, for the disciples are now on the brink of the birth from above. Thus, the disciples were already of the Father, there was an affinity, just as the opponents were of their father, the devil (8:42-47). This interpretation leads to the question why some had and have an affinity for God and others do not; why some but not others have hardness of heart that alienates them from the life of God: <<*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart*>> (Ephesians 4:18). Since both divine grace and human responsibility are mentioned together in this Gospel, the answer probably lies in some combination of the two, a combination that eludes humanity's full understanding.

⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me is from you; ⁸ for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

John 17:7-8

Now they know that everything you have given me is from you. Jesus does then address the disciples' response to himself. These disciples, who are of God and are

given by God to the Son, have been able to recognise and receive as from the Father all that the Son has received from the Father and passed on to them.

For the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you. The specific reference is to Jesus' teaching, which they have received. Jesus' words are God's words: <<***Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me***>> (John 14:24), and these bring life and judgment. Thus, Jesus' teaching has been grounded on his own identity as the Son sent from the Father. Accordingly, these disciples have been given to the Son; the focus is on him and their acceptance of him. They knew for certain that he came from the Father, and they believed that the Father sent him. So they knew and believed the truth about both the Son and the Father in their mutual relationship.

⁹ I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

John 17:9

I am asking on their behalf. Jesus made petition on behalf of his disciples. One example of this is when he prayed for Peter, knowing that Peter's courage would fail him for a while: <<***Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers***>> (Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus' frank statement I am not asking on behalf of the world may sound as though he has nothing to do with the world, and it has even led some to think he only ever prays for the elect. But, in fact, he does go on to pray for the world (vv.21-23)! So here he means the petitions that follow about protection, sanctification and union with God are prayers only for the disciples. None of these petitions are applicable to the world, to the system and those beings in rebellion against God. Since it is through the disciples' witness that the world will continue to be challenged with God's love and call, Jesus' prayer for his disciples is actually an indirect prayer for the world.

Those whom you gave me are those who have believed or who would come to believe in Christ. These belong to both Jesus and to God: because they are yours. They were the Father's before he gave them to the Son, and they remain the Father's after he gives them to the Son.

¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

John 17:10

All mine are yours, and yours are mine. Here is the fundamental truth of this Gospel, the oneness of the Father and the Son expressed in terms of possession, stated earlier on in the discourse as well: <<***All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you***>> (John

16:15). The disciples' very relationships with the Father and Son bear witness to this foundational truth. They have been given to the Son and yet remain the Father's because of the divine oneness. Here, as throughout this Gospel, Jesus' words and deeds make no sense unless one realises he is God. Indeed, this very statement bears witness to this claim.

I have been glorified in them. The glory that Jesus says has come to him through them comes from both the Father and the disciples. In the Father's giving the disciples to Jesus, the Father bore witness to this relationship of oneness; and the disciples, who were of the Father, recognised him and believed in him.

¹¹ And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

John 17:11

I am no longer in the world. Jesus knows that his ministry has been completed and now his death awaits him within a matter of hours. The past tense seems to indicate that Jesus has already gone into heaven but that would not actually occur for a further six weeks. Jesus is speaking prophetically for he knows this event will be as certain as his death and resurrection.

The word holy in **Holy Father** echoes the assertion of God's awesome purity as described in: <<*For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy*>> (Leviticus 11:44a), further confirmed in: <<*I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel*>> (Psalm 71:22), <<*He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant for ever. Holy and awesome is his name*>> (Psalm 111:9), <<*And one called to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory'*>> (Isaiah 6:3); this is the only time in the NT that this form of address is used with reference to the first person of the Godhead.

Protect them in your name that you have given me. Jesus asks that those who have been specially given to him will be kept to the end, i.e. preserved from denying Christ, because Jesus knows they are to face many trials and temptations because **they are in the world, and I am coming to you.** However, since it is Jesus who now intercedes for his disciples, his petition will most certainly be answered.

That they may be one, as we are one. Jesus shows the kind of profound unity that should be the norm among genuine believers. As the following verses through to v.26 indicate, this is to be a reflection of the unity that has existed eternally between the Father and the Son. Namely, the unity of a common mind and purpose, an unqualified mutual love, and a sustained comprehensive togetherness in mission, as revealed in the Father-Son relationship characterised by Jesus' own ministry. Such unity is the result of Jesus' active work of protecting and guarding; it results in believers being filled with joy; it is rooted in the truth of God's word; it involves sanctification, that is, in the sense of consecration to serve; it becomes a witness to the world: <<*so that the world may believe*>> (v.21). It is for the

revelation of God's glory (v.24); and it results in the experience of the indwelling love of God and the presence of Christ (v.26).

The kind of unity that is central to Jesus' high priestly prayer is not organisational but is an all-encompassing relational reality that binds believers together with each other and with their Lord – a unity that can be achieved only through the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Although individual Christians, and the church in general, tend to fall short of the fullness of unity that the Lord intends, whenever such unity is even partially realised, although never at the expense of truth or holiness, the result will always be deep joy (v.13), a persuasive witness to the world, and a display of God's glory (v.22).

¹² While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

John 17:12

While I was with them. Once again, Jesus is speaking as if his departure has already taken place, for he knew that the main part of his work in teaching the disciples had been accomplished.

I protected them in your name that you have given me. Jesus came in the authority of the Father and, in a deeper sense, represented the entire character of the Father, for his name in an OT sense represented all that was true about him. Those who are in Christ now have the right to bear his name as long as they are prepared to represent his entire character. It was on the instructions of God that Jesus was named: <<*But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins'*>> (Matthew 1:20-21); but he will be given a new name when the new age finally comes: <<*His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God*>> (Revelation 19:12-13).

I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost. Many rejected Jesus as the Son of God and others turned away because his teaching was too difficult to accept. Yet the eleven remained as true as they could. Judas was the only one from the inner core who did not believe, for he was destined to become the betrayer.

So that the scripture might be fulfilled. Even Judas' betrayal took place in fulfilment of Scripture. The antecedent passage is primarily Psalm 41:9 <<*Even my bosom friend in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted the heel against me*>>, which was applied to Jesus in John 13:18. Other Scriptures fulfilled through Judas are: <<*May their camp be a desolation; let no one live in their tents*>> (Psalm 69:25), and: <<*May his days be few; may another seize his position*>> (Psalm 109:8), both of which are cited in Acts 1:20.

¹³ But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

John 17:13

I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. Before Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension: now I am coming to you, Jesus is promising his disciples complete joy. This can be manifested regardless of any personal situation or circumstance. Joy should be a characteristic of all those who profess to be Christians. It was seen in the witness of John the Baptist: *<<He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled>>* (John 3:29).

¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

John 17:14

Your word does not refer to the OT Scriptures but Jesus' own teachings, and more broadly, the whole of his life, which is the revelation of himself as the Word of God: *<<In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God>>* (John 1:1). It is both the word that comes from God and the word that is all about God.

The world has hated them. In John 15:19 Jesus had revealed the reason why the world hates them. It is because Jesus had chosen them to rise above the world view that opposed Jesus and thus are opposed to God. They were being trained to speak the words of Jesus that would convict those in the world of their sin. Many therefore would hate the disciples for this.

¹⁵ I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

John 17:15

Even though God's people in the midst of hardship may sometimes want to be taken out of the world, such as Moses: *<<If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once – if I have found favour in your sight – and do not let me see my misery>>* (Numbers 11:15); Elijah: *<<But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree. He asked that he might die: 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors'>>* (1 Kings 19:4); and Jonah: *<<And now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live>>* (Jonah 4:3), Jesus does not ask for that. The place of believers during this lifetime is not to withdraw from the world but to remain in the world and to influence it continually for good, as difficult as that may be.

I ask you to protect them. The central request of the prayer is repeated again (v.11). Jesus prays that his own will be guarded from the evil one, that is, Satan, who would attack them to destroy their lives and their ministries. But the Greek

phrase *ek tou ponērou* can also mean ‘from evil’, since Greek nouns denoting abstract qualities often take a definite article, in which case it would be a prayer that their lives and ministries would not be overcome by Satan or by any other kind of evil, and that they be kept from doing evil as well: <<***We know that we are God’s children, and that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one***>> (1 John 5:19).

¹⁶ They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

John 17:16

Those who believe in Christ do not belong to the world, meaning that they have an entirely different nature (3:3-8), including different heart desires, different fundamental goals, and ultimately a different God. The common saying that Christians are ‘in the world but not of the world’ is not found exactly anywhere in Scripture, but the idea is true and is taken from vv.15-16.

¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

John 17:17

Sanctify them. The sanctification of Christians is a lifelong process. It involves both a relational component; that is, separation from participating in and being influenced by evil, and a moral component, i.e. growth in holiness or moral purity in attitudes, thoughts and actions. This occurs in the truth, that is, as Christians believe, think, and live according to the truth in relation to God, themselves, and the world.

This truth comprises the entire Bible, for Jesus says, your word is truth. The Greek word is surprisingly not an adjective meaning ‘your word is true’ but the noun *alētheia*, meaning truth. This implies that God’s Word does not simply conform to some other external standard of truth, but that it is truth itself, as recognised in OT times: <<***And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant***>> (2 Samuel 7:28), and: <<***So the woman said to Elijah, ‘Now I know that you are a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth’***>> (1 Kings 17:24). That is, it embodies truth and it therefore is the standard of truth against which everything else must be tested and compared, as Paul confirms: <<***Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good***>> (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).

¹⁸ As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

John 17:18-19

I have sent them into the world probably refers to the teaching that Jesus had just been giving to his disciples, teaching that assumed that they would remain in the world and minister to the world and bear fruit for the Kingdom, although Jesus

would more formally declare that he is sending them in 20:21, and would repeat that commission at his ascension into heaven (Matthew 28:19-20). This ministry will commence in accordance with Jesus' final instructions to his disciples: <<***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***>> (Acts 1:8).

For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. Jesus concludes this section of his prayer with another reference to sanctification, which draws out yet another nuance of the term and goes to the heart of his work and the life to which he calls his disciples. When he says for their sakes I sanctify myself, Jesus alludes to the consecration of sacrificial animals: <<***Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine***>> (Exodus 13:2), and: <<***Every firstling male born of your herd and flock you shall consecrate to the Lord your God; you shall not do work with your firstling ox nor shear the firstling of your flock. You shall eat it, you together with your household, in the presence of the Lord your God year by year at the place that the Lord will choose. But if it has any defect – any serious defect, such as lameness or blindness – you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord your God***>> (Deuteronomy 15:19-21), and so speaks of his impending death as a sacrifice.

Introduction to John 17:20-26

Jesus does not stop at praying for himself (vv.1-5), or his disciples (vv.6-19), but now prays for those who will believe in him in the future. Jesus' concern is for his followers' unity (vv.21-23), and love (v.26). The vision of a unified people of God has previously been expressed in 10:16 and 11:52. Believers' unity results from being united in God. Once unified, they will be able to bear witness to the true identity of Jesus as the one sent by God.

²⁰ 'I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

John 17:20-21

Jesus' disciples are described by him as those who will believe in me through their word. All later belief, Jesus implies here, is to come through the apostolic word, thereby showing that the apostolic foundation of the church: <<***And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it***>> (Matthew 16:18), <<***So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone***>> (Ephesians 2:19-20), <<***And the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb***>> (Revelation 21:14), was the will of Christ himself. This Gospel does not speak much of the twelve apostles as such (6:67), but important truths about them are conveyed, especially in the

farewell discourse, which is addressed to them. Most importantly, they are to become the chief witnesses to Jesus.

That they may all be one. Concerning the unity that Jesus prays for and that he intends for his own, refer back to the comments on v.11.

In us refers to spiritual union with God and also the personal fellowship resulting from that union.

So that the world may believe that you have sent me. This is a fundamental point of the Gospel message. It is not sufficient to believe that Jesus was a good man, a good teacher or even a good prophet. He was sent by the Father and all that he has said has revealed the Father to the world, and part of that revelation is the oneness of Jesus and God. This is a fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam, where Jesus is held to be a prophet from God but no more than that.

²² The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

John 17:22-23

Glory probably refers to the manifestation of the excellence of God's entire character in Jesus' life (1:14).

Jesus has given this to all believers (v.20): his entire life revealed the glory of God and therefore he imparted it to his followers, and Christians should now reflect God's Excellency in their own lives, in imitation of Christ.

So that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one. In the 1st Century there was a widespread belief among Jews, Greeks and Romans in the unity of humanity. Various sources for this unity were suggested, including the concept of one God, the recognition of one universal human nature, the recognition of a universal law and the notion of one world. Efforts were made to embody this unity. For example, Alexander the Great had set out to unite the inhabited world, and later the Romans picked up the same goal. On a smaller scale, the members of the community at Qumran referred to themselves as 'the unity', which included a unity with the angels, thus linking heaven and earth. So Jesus' prayer would speak to an issue of great interest, but the oneness he refers to is distinctive in its nature from other notions of unity. It is grounded in the one God, as were some other views of unity, but also in himself and his own relationship with the one God and with his own disciples: <<***On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you***>> (John 14:20). He claims to offer the unity that many desired, but this unity is grounded in his own relationship with his Father. Furthermore, he says that the band of disciples there in the room with him is the nucleus of the one unified humanity.

So that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. Again, Jesus reiterates that the world must come to

recognise that Jesus comes directly from the Father and is not a mere human envoy. He also wants them to know that the Father's love for the world is comparable to his love for Jesus Christ: **<<For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him>>** (John 3:16-17).

²⁴ Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

John 17:24

Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am. The whole purpose of salvation is communicated in this verse. The foretaste of this is now, but the fullness of it lies beyond this present age. For this purpose Jesus promises them a place in his new home: **<<In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also>>** (John 14:2-3).

To see my glory represents the Greek word *theōreō*, 'to observe with sustained attention', and includes the idea of entering into and experiencing something. Jesus acknowledges this itself was a gift from his Father: which you have given me because you loved me.

You loved me before the foundation of the world implies that love and interpersonal interaction among the members of the Trinity did not begin at any point in time but has existed eternally (v.5). The plans for creation and its purpose were drawn up long before anything material existed, as Jesus confirms: **<<Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world">>** (Matthew 25:34).

²⁵ 'Righteous Father, the world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me.

John 17:25

The OT teaches that God is righteous and just, such as: **<<Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful>>** (Psalm 116:5), **<<You are righteous, O Lord, and your judgements are right>>** (Psalm 119:137), and: **<<You will be in the right, O Lord, when I lay charges against you; but let me put my case to you. Why does the way of the guilty prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?>>** (Jeremiah 12:1). With Jesus' betrayal and innocent suffering imminent, he affirms the righteousness of God his Father.

The world does not know you, but I know you; and these know that you have sent me. Jesus begins with the bad news: the world did not know or recognise the one true God. In contrast, the good news is that Jesus knows the Father and his

disciples know that the Father has sent the Son. This antithesis with the world's ignorance of the Father is not the disciples' knowledge of the Father, but their knowledge of the Son as sent by the Father. Once again the primacy of Jesus' role comes to the fore. It is precisely in and through the Son that they know the Father, for the Son has made known to them the Father's name. Earlier in the prayer, the name was an expression for the revelation brought by the Son that actually brings contact with God and not just information about him.

²⁶ I made your name known to them, and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.'

John 17:26

I made your name known to them. One of the primary purposes of Jesus' mission was to reveal the true nature and character of God to the people, many of whom had formed a different opinion based on the interpretations of the Scriptures and the traditions of their ancestors that had been taught instead.

I will make it known. Jesus' pledge to continue to make the Father's name known to his disciples in the future is, on one important level, a reference to his imminent death and resurrection, for these events are the climax of his revelation of the Father, which shows most clearly the love of God. On another level, he is speaking of his continued presence among the believers and his continued revelation of the Father to them after his ascension. He is repeating his promise to be with them in his resurrection appearances and beyond. His continued revelation parallels the activity of the Spirit.

The purpose of Jesus making God's name known to them is not that they would have information about God, but that they would have intimacy in order that the love you have loved me may be in them and I in them. In his ministry Jesus has revealed the Father's love for them, and in the future he will continue to help his disciples actually receive this love within each of them and amongst them as a community. But again, he himself is the point of contact. It is precisely by his being in them that they will receive the love of the Father, for it is the Father's love for the Son that they are enabled to share. The Son's coming to earth brought the presence of God's love, and his coming into the lives of believers also brings that love, for God is love. A believer's relationship with the Father will always be mediated through the Son, even in eternity.

The phrase I in them is filled with covenantal overtones (14:20). After the giving of the law at Sinai, God came to dwell in the midst of Israel in the tabernacle: <<***Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle***>> (Exodus 40:34). As they moved towards the Promised Land, God frequently assured his people that he was in their midst: <<***I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the Lord their God***>> (Exodus 29:45-46), <<***Have no dread of them, for the Lord your God, who is present with you, is a great and awesome God***>> (Deuteronomy 7:21), and: <<***Because the Lord your God travels along with your camp, to save you and to hand over your enemies to you, therefore your camp must be holy, so that he may not see anything indecent among you and turn away from you***>> (Deuteronomy 23:14).