

“JESUS, SON OF GOD, OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST”

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (Hebrews 4:14 NKJV)

John 17

When I was out of high school and working as a draftsman for Western Electric Corporation, I was the volunteer youth director at Inverness Presbyterian Church in Dundalk, Maryland. The minister knew that I felt called to the ministry. He did everything to encourage me. He even took me with him on pastoral calls. In the youth group there were at least two youths, still in high school, who also wanted to become ministers. One of these young men later went to a seminary that I tried to attend, but the Lord blocked the way and I went to another one.

I lost track of both of these young men. I heard that one of them went to the seminary I had tried to attend, graduated from that seminary, but he was never ordained. He worked as a social worker until he retired. I learned that, as a result of what he was taught in that seminary, he did not believe that Jesus was the divine Son of God. He was examined for ordination twice. Both times he refused to say that he believed Jesus was both man and God. The Presbytery refused to ordain him.

The Gospel of John emphasizes that Jesus was the eternal Son of God who came to earth and was born in human form as a baby conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. Before His birth as a baby, He was and continued to be the eternal Son of God. This is very clear to those who believe the Bible, God's Word.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. (John 1:1-3 NKJV)

1.) Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was." (John 17:1-5 NKJV)

Jesus uses the form of address "Father" six times in this prayer. It is used over a hundred times in the Gospel of John. It expresses the unique intimacy the Son of God enjoys throughout eternity with the Father. He is "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father,"(John 1:18b). Those who are born again believers in Christ have been given the right to address God as "Father" by virtue of their adoption in Christ.

"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)
"...therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. (Matthew 6:9 NKJV)

"Father, the hour has come..." When Jesus and His disciples came to Jerusalem for the last time, Jesus foretold His impending death,

But Jesus answered them, saying, "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." (John 12:23-24 NKJV)

"Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name." Then a voice came from heaven, saying, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again." (John 12:27-28 NKJV)

"as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him." Jesus uses the verb "give" sixteen times in this prayer. He is thinking of His imminent victory over death after dying on the cross. This is foretold in Daniel 7:13,14. Paul writes of it, And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. (Colossians 2:13-15 NKJV)

2.) "I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."

(John 17:9-16 NKJV)

The role of a priest is to be a mediator, a go-between, for two different parties. In this case, Christ is our mediator between God who is in heaven and believers who are in this world. We have no telephone, no internet connection with God. What we have is Jesus Christ, our great High Priest seated at the right hand of the Father. He intercedes for us as one who lived among us and knows our trials.

Jesus makes a distinction between believers and unbelieving sinners in the world. He does not pray for everyone in the world but only those who are trusting in Him for their forgiveness and salvation. The world hates God and hates believers because God does not love people who disobey His laws, blatantly indulge their lusts, selfish, take advantage of others, violent. They hate God because He will judge them and then throw them into Hell. Eleven times in these eight verse Jesus uses the word "world" making a distinction between His followers and the world.

However, Jesus does not ask that His followers be taken out of the world. They are the "salt of the earth". The world would be much more wicked without them. They are witnesses to those who are lost. God does not desire the death of sinners, but that they should be saved.

3.) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:18-24 NKJV)

Jesus prays that the Father will sanctify the believers whom He is sending out into the world, to those and us whom He commanded "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation." He prays that we would be more holy, more spiritual, more pure, more saintly. Sinners can argue with us about the Bible, about Jesus, about hypocrites, but there is no argument against a godly life. The advantage a godly life gives Christians in winning others to Christ is important. Just as important is that holy living prepares us for life in heaven. If we do not hunger for God's presence and His approval while we are in this life, we would be uncomfortable in heaven where everything would be strange and unfamiliar to us.

Notice the emphasis Jesus gives to all believers being one even as He and the Father are one. How can we rationalize, explain, excuse the many divisions among Christians in the light of this prayer by Jesus. If Jesus wants us to be one, how dare we defy His wishes? We are divided by race. We are divided by differences in interpreting the Bible. We are divided by politics, by social status. How dare we? Do you love God? Do you love Jesus? Then love all those in whom Jesus, by His Spirit, is dwelling. Love those for whom Jesus is preparing a place to dwell – right alongside of us.