

John 17

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Overview

The Lord has finished his teaching to the disciples, and now he turns to the Father. Though he is now praying rather than teaching, the discourse is built around the same three themes that we have seen throughout the URD:

- His imminent return to the Father (1-5)
- The relation of believers to the world (6-19)
- The love among believers (20-26)

17:1a, Introduction

17:1 These words spake Jesus.--As in 12:36 and all OT uses of the phrase (Gen 49:28; Deut 5:22; Est 1:13), it marks the conclusion to a preceding discourse. He has done speaking with his disciples, and now turns to his Father.

and lifted up his eyes to heaven.--Cf. 11:41, but contrast the publican in Luke 18:13. His posture shows an attitude of confident access to the Father. He has said much to them in recent verses about the access they will enjoy, and perhaps offers this prayer now to illustrate to them the kinds of petitions they can offer.

1-5, Return to the Father: Glory

Internal symmetry marks these verses as a unit. The frequent repetition of “glory” and “glorify” (5x in 5 vv) recalls the concentration (5x in 2vv) in 13:31-33, where he first introduced his departure. For them it would bring sorrow, but for him it is a return to his pre-incarnate glory.

Father.--He has authorized them to go directly to the Father, and now he demonstrates it in this prayer. Six times he addresses him, 4x simply as “Father” (1, 5, 21, 24), once as “Holy Father” (11), and once as “Righteous Father” (25). We will want to examine the modified titles for their relevance to the sections in which they fall.

The hour is come.--This is the final reference in John to the Savior's “hour.” He acknowledges the Father's control and sovereign schedule, and aligns himself with it.

Glorify thy son.--The Lord begins with a request for glory. We have defined “glory” by relating it to “honor” and “virtue,” as the sphere of recognition expands.

- “Virtue” is some good characteristic of a person. A person might be virtuous, without the knowledge of anyone else.
- “Honor” is the high opinion that we have of a virtuous person. Honor requires that someone else recognize your virtue. But, like virtue, it can be private. You might privately esteem someone without saying anything to anyone.
- “Glory” is the public manifestation of that virtue, the publicity that enables others to honor the virtuous person.

Rev 4:11 illustrates the sequence:

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive

- glory <publication of the virtue>
- and honour <the internal respect that people have for the virtue>
- and power <the underlying virtue>

Rev 5:12 shows the sequence in reverse order:

Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive

- power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength <virtues, good qualities>
- and honor <recognition of these virtues by others>
- and glory and blessing <the public manifestation of the virtues>

Now apply these distinctions to the verse at hand.

- The *virtue* in hand is the Son's relation to the Father, as the succeeding verses will make clear.
- The disciples already recognize him as the Father's messenger (16:30). They *honor* him.
- But Jesus wants more than this: he wants all men to recognize his role, and he asks the Father to provide the public display of his virtue, his *glory*.

that thy Son also may glorify thee.--Now he gives the Father a motive for this request. He does not desire glory for his own sake, but in order that he might in turn publicize the Father. This has been his objective all along, but he has been hindered by the cool reception that he has received from most of the people. Now, if he is glorified, they will have to listen to him.

Paul develops a very similar theme in 1 Cor 15:24-28.

24 Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. 25 For he [the Lord Jesus] must reign [in his glorified condition], till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death. 27 For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under *him*, *it is* manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 28 And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him [delivering up the kingdom to the Father], that God may be all in all.

Throughout all eternity, the objective of the Son is to glorify the Father. Every blessing that the Son receives, every element of prestige that the Father gives him, is turned to this end. Oh, that it might be so with the blessings that God gives us—that our sole objective in desiring them is to use them to glorify the Father.

2 as thou hast.--The conjunction “as” compares what follows to what goes before. But what is its scope?

- How much of what goes before is the basis of the comparison?
 - Just “that thy Son also may glorify thee”?
 - Just the initial clause, “Glorify thy son”? That would make “that thy Son...” a parenthetical clause, and we would expect it to be marked in some way (typically by being less than a finite verb, per Hollenbach's constraints).

- Both of the clauses joined by “that,” “Glorify thy son, that thy Son may glorify thee”? We call such a structure, a “motive paragraph,” because it gives an action plus the motive for the action. It's important for us to realize that it forms a linguistic unit.
- How much of what follows is being compared?
 - Just “thou hast given him power over all flesh”?
 - Just the first clause, “that he should give eternal life”? (Again, this would make “thou hast given him power” a parenthetical clause, and there is no mark of this.)
 - Both clauses, taken as a unit? Note that they are joined by “that,” just as the two clauses were in v. 1, so they also form a motive paragraph.

The option of skipping a clause in either direction is unlikely, because none of the clauses is marked as parenthetical. So we are left with two options:

1. Only the two immediately adjacent clauses are involved. “Thy son may glorify thee, as thou hast given him power over all flesh.” This would be comparing the Son's glorification of the Father with the Father's grant of power to the Son, and the point is obscure.
2. The Lord's purpose is to compare the two motive paragraphs.

This latter seems much more meaningful. Note the similarities between them.

- Both are motive paragraphs, connecting two statements with the conjunction “that.”
- In both cases, the motivated action is a grant by the Father to the Son.
- In both cases, the motive is something that the Son does with what the Father gives him.

These similarities seem conclusive that the Lord is comparing the paragraphs as a whole. Having seen that, we should note an important *difference* between the two paragraphs: the first one is asking for a blessing in the future, while the second describes something that happened in the past.

thou hast given him power [authority] over all flesh.--This grant is represented as having taken place in the past. Indeed, the Lord during his earthly ministry referred to the authority that the Father had already given him:

5:22 the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

Matt 11:27 All things are delivered unto me of my Father:

In fact, this grant of authority goes back much, much farther. It derives ultimately from God's charge to Adam in Gen 1:28 to

have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Ps 8:6 recalls

Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all *things* under his feet:

Heb 2:8,9 notes,

we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus ...

The last Adam came into the world with the authority over nature that the first Adam despised, and demonstrated it through his miracles. Here's an interesting thought—our Lord's ability to command the wind and waves doesn't prove his deity, so much as it does his unsullied humanity!

Since the Lord had “authority over all flesh” even during his earthly ministry, what did the resurrection add? The expression “all authority” is the same as in Matt 28:18, when the Lord charges his disciples after his resurrection:

All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth.

But note the addition, “in heaven.” Here he claims to have been given “authority over all flesh”; at his resurrection that authority is extended from earth to “heaven.” This conforms with Paul's teaching in Eph 1:20-22,

[God] raised [Jesus] from the dead, and set *him* at his own right hand in the heavenly *places*, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church,

At his incarnation he had the Adam's restored authority “over all flesh,” but at the resurrection he became “head of all principality and power” as well (Col 2:10).

Now we understand the Father's grant to him in the past, which is parallel to the grant of glory that he is requesting in v. 1. We observed that the parallel implied by “as” at the start of v. 2 extends to the second half of the two motive paragraphs as well. In v. 1, the Lord requests future glory so that he might glorify the Father. What motive does he ascribe to the Father's past grant of authority? Why did the Father send him into the world with authority “over all flesh”?

that he should give eternal life.--The purpose of his incarnation was to give eternal life. This is a prominent theme in John; the phrase appears 16x, 13 of them on the lips of our Lord. 24 of the 38 references in the NT are in the gospels, 17 by the Lord.

Let's probe the conjunction “that” in more detail. How does the Son's “authority over all flesh” enable him to “give eternal life”?

Matthew (7:29) and Mark (1:22) see the Lord's authority as a critical distinction between him and the Jewish scribes. “He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” He could speak of men's need and of the answer to that need, not in elaborate theological speculation, but directly and forcefully. In particular, in John, the Lord claims authority

- to execute judgment, 5:27, thus warning people of their need of salvation;
- to lay down his life and take it up again, 10:18, thus providing the salvation that they need.

The Father did not give him authority over all flesh simply to gratify his own lust, but as a tool to an end, to condemn sinners and offer them salvation. We begin to see the parallel with v.1. “Glorify me now so that I can glorify you; just as previously, you gave me authority so that I could give eternal life.”

The next two clauses answer possible objections about his work in “giv[ing] eternal life.”

to as many as thou hast given him.--Some might criticize the Savior's stewardship of the authority that the Father gave him. If it was indeed “over all flesh,” why did so few respond? The Lord here indicates that the Father's purpose was not that he should save all, but that he should save those whom

the Father had given him. The teaching is consistent with what he had earlier given in chapter 6:

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him:

65 no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

His words here are even closer to 10:26-37,

26 But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. 27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: 28 And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. 29 My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand.

Here is encouragement for us in our ministry. Our job is not to save all, but it is to use all the authority and ability that God has given us to seek those whom he has set apart for himself.

3 And this is life eternal.--A second question that might arise is how giving eternal life contributes to glorifying the Father, which is necessary if the parallel between the first motive paragraph and the second one is to be sustained. The Lord anticipates this question by explaining what “eternal life” really is.

that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.--This is hardly what we think of as a definition of eternal life. “Eternal life” ought to mean something like “living forever.”

Indeed, those with eternal life do live forever. But the value of that blessed state is not summed up in its duration. Indeed, those who are suffering may prefer death to life. In Rev 9:6, John anticipates that in the time of the fifth trumpet,

in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

Compare Job's comment (3:20-22),

Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; 21 Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; 22 Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?

An endless life is only desirable if it contains good experiences. And here the Lord focuses in on the central experience of eternal life, something of which we shall never tire and that will endlessly fascinate us: the knowledge of God, as he has revealed himself in his son. Cf. Phil 3:10.

A doctor can assess the strength of your physical life by listening to your heartbeat, taking your temperature, and doing some tests on your blood. Here is a clue to the strength of our eternal life: how is our knowledge of the Father?

- Do we speak often to him, or is prayer a burden?
- Do we hear his word speaking to us when we read the Bible, or do the words just go by on the page?
- Do we find it refreshing to meditate on his character, or does that bore us?
- Do we rejoice in his sovereign rule over all things, or do we find it offensive?

The essence of eternal life is knowing the Father. We were “alienated” from him “in [our] minds by

wicked works” (Col 1:21), the “iniquities” that “separated between” us and our God (Isa 59:2). Jesus has borne our sins, not just to deliver us from punishment, but to enable us to know the Father. Let's take full advantage of that privilege.

Let's return once more to the parallel between the two motive paragraphs.

- Question: why did the Father give the Son “authority over all flesh”?
- Answer: that he might give eternal life, that is, the knowledge of the Father, to men.

That is, the purpose of the Father's past exaltation of his Son was to enable his Son to glorify him, to lead people to acknowledge God. Given the Savior's faithfulness in that past ministry of glorifying God, he now comes to the Father and asks that the process be repeated. “Once again, glorify me, so that, once again, I can glorify you.”

We know that the Father did hear the Son's prayer. The Father recognized his past faithfulness, and so raised him to even greater glory. Paul picks up this theme in Phil 2:5-11. Because the Savior was “obedient unto death,” “wherefore God also hath highly exalted him.”

And the same principle applies in our service to the Lord. The Father says to us, as to his Son,

Matt 25:21, 23 Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

So far, we have seen that the first two verses are a request for future glory from the Father, based on a claim to have stewarded faithfully the authority that the Father gave the Son in the past. With this in mind, review vv. 4-5.

- Verse 4, like 2-3, recalls how the Savior has glorified the Father in the past.
- Verse 5, like 1, repeats the request for future glory.

Thus the entire paragraph, vv. 1-5, is a chiasm. This structural integrity supports our identification of the section with one of the three main themes of the URD.

In the first half of the chiasm, both elements contain the actions of both the Father and the Son. Now, working out, in the past the focus is on what the Son has done, and in the future on what the Father will do.

4 I have glorified thee on the earth.--This makes explicit what we have already concluded from vv. 2-3, that his work in giving eternal life to people is a process of glorifying the Father by increasing the audience of those who worship him.

I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.--More generally, this is how we glorify the Father—by finishing his work. This is what he set out to do (4:34, “my meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work”), and his final words on the tree declared his victory (19:30, “it is finished”).

Gill: “he speaks of it as done, because the time was come to finish it, and he was sure of the accomplishment of it.”

5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me.--He repeats the request with which he opened, and then goes on to amplify it spatially and temporally.

with thine own self.--Spatially, it is to be contrasted with “on the earth” in v. 4. This glory is to be enjoyed “with the Father,” in his presence, according to the terms of Psa 110:1, “sit thou at my right

hand.”

with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.--Temporally, it is contrasted with the time of his earthly sojourn. This is a glory that he enjoyed, with the Father, before creation. This verse is critical not only for showing the eternal nature of Christ and thus his deity, but also his distinction from the Father.

In summary, 17:1-5 look like this:

	vv. 1-3	vv. 4-5
Future: Father's Action	1 Glorify thy son	5 Glorify me
Future: Motive	That thy son may glorify thee	
Past: Father's Action	2 Thou has given him authority over all flesh	... that thou gavest me to do
Past: Motive	That he should give eternal life	4 I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work ...

6-19, Believers in the World: Sanctify

Three important concepts characterize this section: the challenge we face, our main resource for meeting it, and what God will do for us.

- Our challenge is the world, the systematic creation ruled by Satan. The term “world” *kosmos* appears 19x in John 17, more than in any other chapter in any of John's writings; more than half of the verses in the chapter mention it. And this paragraph predominates: the word appears 14x in 13vv, on average more than once per verse, introducing the second main theme.
- Our resource is the Father's revelation to us. The terms “thy name,” “word,” and “truth” are also common, appearing 11x in this section out of 13 in the entire chapter, which in turn has the most occurrences of any chapter in the book.
- God's role is to keep us (preserve us) and sanctify us (set us apart).

To understand the structure, we make three observations.

First, this section alternates between statements about his past ministry to the disciples and petitions that the Father would keep and sanctify them. Each of the four statements motivates the need for the Father to care for them in the Savior's absence. The general tone of the section is that the Son, recognizing the world's opposition and the threat posed by his departure, has given us the revelation of the Father, and is now committing us to the Father's care. There is an anticipation here of his care for his mother in committing her to John's care (19:26-27).

Statement	Request
6-11a, I have gathered those whom you gave me	
	11b, keep them together (“that they may be one”) in your name
12-14, I have protected them from the world's hatred.	
	15, Protect them from the evil one
16, They are not of the world (cf. 14)	
	17, Sanctify them in thy truth
18-19, I have sent them into the world	

Second, correspondences around the central item (v. 15) reveal a chiasm.

- 16 repeats the end of 12-14 almost verbatim.
- The requests in 11b and 17 both mention God's revelation (“in thy name,” “in thy truth”) as the mechanism of caring for the believers.
- The reference in v.10 to how the Lord is glorified in us anticipates the mission on which he sends us in 18.
- Also, our response to the word in 6-8 corresponds to our sanctification through truth in 19.

In this case, 15 becomes the central theme of the paragraph: the Lord asks the Father to protect his followers from the evil one, through his revelation, so that they might make him known throughout the world. Thus this second thematic section of the prayer, like the first (1-5), has structural as well as conceptual integrity, as a chiasm.

Third, note three differences between the first panel and the second.

1. The verb describing the Lord's work toward us changes between the panels. In the first panel it is “keep,” describing a somewhat defensive posture, in which we are protected from a hostile world. In the second panel it becomes “sanctify,” “set apart,” indicating that we have a mission to carry out.
2. Correlated with this is the presence in both statements of the first panel, but not in the second, of the Lord's announcement, “I come to thee” (vv. 11, 13). The meaning is not that Jesus comes to the Father in prayer, but that he is leaving the world to go unto the Father, as he has often told the disciples (14:12, 28; 16:17), and they will no longer have his immediate help.
3. The statements in the second panel of the chiasm are much shorter than those in the first panel, providing a summary as the Lord closes his last major discourse. Summaries like this are extremely valuable, since they help us to discern what the main theme is in the corresponding longer section.

6-11, Statement: The Preparation and Role of the Believers

A peek ahead to the summary in 18-19 tells us that he sends us, sanctified, into the world. Compare 10:36, where he describes himself as “him whom the Father hath sanctified and sent into the world.” Thus we expect to learn something here of how he prepares us and what our work is to be, as members of his body, imitators of our Lord, carrying out his work in the world.

6-8, Their Preparation by what Jesus Does

Corresponding to the summary of their sanctification in v. 19, the fuller statement in 6-8 takes the form of an alternation between what he has done to them and their response.

6 I have manifested thy name unto the men	8 For I have given unto them the words
which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me;	which thou gavest me;
and they have kept thy word. 7 Now they have known that all things ... are of thee. whatsoever thou hast given me	and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

Let's consider the matching elements together. As we do, we'll hear numerous echoes of the Lord's teaching about the shepherd and the sheep in ch. 10.

The Son's Revelation to Us

The first pair of elements both concern how Jesus has revealed the Father to us.

6 I have manifested thy name .--One is reminded of Moses' experience in Exod 33:18-19. Moses desired to see God's glory. God mercifully spared him that consuming vision, which would have destroyed him, but instead promised to “proclaim the name of the Lord before” him. In the sequel, God described his character as compassionate keeper of covenants and stern judge of sin (Exod 34:6-7).

In Hebrew thought, a person's name is far more than an identifier. It is an expression of their nature. Recall the importance attached to Adam's naming of the animals, and how God renamed Sarah and Abraham in consequence of his covenant with them. The Psalmist prophesied that the Messiah would “declare thy name unto my brethren” (Psa 22:22), and as the climax approached, the Lord prayed, “Father, glorify thy name” (12:28). His work in manifesting the Father's name is thus his declaration of all that God is, according to the promise in 1:18, “the only begotten son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.”

8 I have given unto them the words .--Our Lord's life was a continuous revelation of the Father, but he was not satisfied with being a godly example. His revelation of the Father was accomplished verbally, through words.

People today sometimes have the notion that a nonverbal testimony is sufficient. We should seek to show the Lord through our lives, and Peter does promise godly women that if their husbands refuse to hear their words, their lives can still have an effect (1 Pet 3:1). But that presumes that the word has been offered and refused.

Our God is a linguistic being. His first recorded act is to speak the world into existence. Throughout history, he has dealt with his people verbally, by speaking to them. When his Son came to reveal him, that revelation was expressed verbally. And when we, as our Lord's ambassadors, go to those around us, we carry those words.

The Father's Gifts to his Son

The next pair of corresponding elements describe how the Father equipped the Son for his mission on earth.

- When Abraham sent his servant to get a wife for Isaac, the servant took of his master's wealth to enable him to carry out the task (Gen 24:10).
- When Jacob sent his sons back to Egypt to recover Simeon, he equipped them for their mission (Gen 43:11-12).
- When Jesse sent David to check up on his brothers in the Philistine wars, he gave him what he needed (1 Sam 17:17-18).

So the Father has equipped the Son for his mission. He has given him a group of people to redeem, and the verbal message that will reveal the Father to them.

6 the men which thou gavest me out of the world.--Recall the qualification in v.2, "as many as thou hast given him." Here we learn more about this special group. The Lord goes on to amplify this statement:

thine they were.--This clause amplifies "thou." God can give them because he owns them. Of course, he owns all men by virtue of creation. But in both the OT and the NT he delights to single out a subset of the world's population and call them "my people."

This dynamic is set forth in its most basic form in Deut 7.

6 For thou *art* an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that *are* upon the face of the earth. 7 The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye *were* the fewest of all people: 8 But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

God chooses his people, not because of any attribute on their part, but out of his own inscrutable love. This is the people for whom the Father sent the Son. This limited focus of the Son's work is evident in his charge to the twelve to "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into *any* city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6 But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5-6), and in his statement to the Canaanite woman, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 15:24). In John, he makes clear, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold" (10:16), opening the door for the Gentiles. But it is still a select group, in the strictest sense of the word—a group that has been selected by God for his peculiar people.

thou gavest them me.--This clause amplifies "thou gavest them me." It differs from the summary clause in putting "me" in the emphatic position. "You placed them in my charge, gave me responsibility for them." Recall 10:29, "My Father, which gave them me."

We should also notice the closing phrase of the statement, "out of the world." In placing us under the son's care, the Father has separated us from the world. Recall the imagery of the shepherd separating out his sheep in 10:2,3.

the shepherd of the sheep. 3 ... the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

This separation and distinction from the world plays a central role in the rest of this section.

The Father's gift of a flock to his son must have been a great encouragement to our Lord. He mentions it four times in the first panel of this section (vv. 6, 9, 11, 12), and elsewhere (2, 24) in the prayer as well. No matter how much opposition he faced, his ministry was not in vain. The Father had given him a people. The rest of the world would resist his message, but this people would respond. Paul takes similar encouragement in 2 Tim 2:10,

Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

This should also be our encouragement in our testimony. Our job is not to convert everybody. But it is to care for those who are the Father's, and whom he has given to us for our care. We are not fishing in a bucket. There is a special group out there whom it is our task to seek, and who will respond when they hear the message.

8 the words which thou gavest me.--The Father has not only given the Son a people, he has also given him a message, which is the main tool that he used in his ministry.

By these words he will discern his people from the world: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (10:17).

These words bring life to his people: "the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life" (6:63).

However much others may reject his teaching, his people cling to his words: "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (6:68).

These words grant them access to the Father in prayer: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (15:7).

Again, there is encouragement here for us. Just as God has given us a group to reach, he has also given us the tools to reach them. Our job is not to think up clever arguments and winsome sermons. It is to hold forth the Word that God has given to us.

The Believer's Response

The last section recognized the existence of a special group of people, those whom the Father had given to the Son. They are marked as different. The Lord Jesus has already pointed out that this difference is marked by their response to revelation, in 10:26-27.

26 ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. 27 My sheep **hear my voice**, and I know them, and they follow me.

Now he describes this response to God's word in several different ways.

they have kept thy word.--The idiom is quite unusual. "Keep" *t8rew* means to "guard, protect."

- The guests in 2:10 suggest that the host has done this for the good wine.
- In 12:7, the Lord says that Mary had done this for the ointment she poured on him.
- In 17:11, 12, 15, this is what the Son and the Father do to us.

But John's most common use for the term is for what godly people do to God's word or commandments (12x). It means more than just to obey his word. It implies that we value it, treasure it, and protect it.

It's only used once in the Greek OT, in 1 Sam 15:11, to describe what Saul did *not* do, and why he lost the kingdom. He treasured the best of Amalek's cattle over God's own commandment. He preserved the king and the cattle, and in the process lost God's precious word of appointment to the kingship.

Here is a vivid image for us. If we treasure other things more than the word of God, we will lose that word—and the other things as well. “He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul,” Psa 106:15.

7 Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee.--They treasure his words because they appreciate their source. They recognize Jesus' authority as sent by the Father.

My dad gave my brother some old ledgers that he thought were from our mother's side of the family. We've been studying them with great interest, because of the possible link to our family. But it seems increasingly likely that they are something he picked up at an auction somewhere, and don't really have a family link. In this case, they will be of much less value to us. Just so, wise words from earthly teachers are a dime a dozen; the ones we want are those that come from the Father.

8 they have received them.--On the other side of the alternation, parallel with keeping his words, he recalls that they have received them. He contrasts them with the people anticipated in 12:48 who do not receive his words (the only other place in the Greek Bible that talks about receiving one's *r8mata*). As there, the importance of receiving his words is tied to their source with the Father.

These are the only two places in the Gk Bible that talk about receiving one's *r8mata*, but in Matt 13:20 = Mark 4:16 the Lord tells of those who, when they hear his *logoi*, receive them with joy. Clearly receiving one's words is more than just hearing them. It involves welcoming them enthusiastically into the heart.

- The imagery of “keeping” in v. 6 presents God's word as a treasure that we are to value.
- The imagery of “receiving” in v. 8 presents the Savior's words as guests that we welcome enthusiastically.

and have known surely that I came out from thee.--As in vv. 6-7, their response to the word shows their attitude toward the person. They welcomed his words, and that led them to him.

and they have believed that thou didst send me.--He in turn leads them back to the Father. Note the sequence:

- They receive his words.
- These words lead them to recognize his divine authority (Father secondary, “from thee”).
- Finally, they believe that the Father sent him (Father primary, “thou didst send”)

9-11, Their Role

The summary in vv. 18-19 describes not only their sanctification but also their mission in the world. This is a clue to the main focus of vv. 9-11, “I am glorified in them.”

9 I pray for them.--Up to this point the Lord has been describing his disciples. Now he turns to making petition for them. This summary has two main words, which the Lord amplifies in the rest of this paragraph. First he amplifies the object of his prayer (“them”), then he turns to the motive for the prayer itself (“I pray”).

I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me.--Once again, we see the Lord's focus on his own people. Introduced by the logical conjunction "for," he gives three reasons that they, rather than the world, are the object of his prayer.

for they are thine.--His first reason is that these are the people whom the Father has chosen for his peculiar possession. In v. 6 he recalled, "thine they were," and now it is still the case that "they are thine." He prays for those who are of special interest to the Father.

10 And all mine are thine, and thine are mine.--His second motive for singling them out is the shared interest that he and the Father have in them. He of all people should pray for them, because "thine are mine." He should pray to the Father rather than going anywhere else, because "mine are thine."

and I am glorified in them.--His third motive for singling them out is that they are the channel through which he is glorified. The verb is in the perfect tense, indicating an accomplished act. To what does it refer?

One thinks first of all of their preaching and healing during his earthly ministry. Interestingly, the synoptics all recall the sending of the twelve (Matt 10:1; Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1,2, cf. 10:1), but John says almost nothing about their ministry. They are receivers, not givers, in John, except for

- 4:2 (where the disciples are baptizing under the Lord's direction)
- 6:11 (where the disciples distribute the bread and fishes to the people)
- 12:12-13 (the people at large at the triumphal entry)

If the reference is to their preaching, this reference may reveal John's knowledge of the synoptics. Or it may refer to their reception of him, when all others rejected him, as in 6:66-69.

Matthew Henry: "Those shall have an interest in Christ's intercession in and by whom he is glorified."

If he took such care for those who glorified him during his earthly ministry, we should be eager to serve him in this way in our age.

Now that he has amplified the objects of his prayer ("them" in 9a), he moves to the reason for the prayer itself ("I pray"), in a simple chiasm. The outer members describe his departure:

11 And now I am no more in the world, ... and I come to thee.--First negatively, then positively, he anticipates his return to the Father. This in itself would pose no problem, except for what he states in the center:

but these are in the world.--If they could come with him, there would be no problem, but they will remain in the world, without his immediate protection and instruction, and thus he prays for them.

11b, Petition

Keep.--Here is the heart of the petition, and the focus of vv. 11-17. They are being left in a hostile world. The savior can no longer be with them personally, so he commends them to the care and protection of God.

- Do we fear death or illness? The Father will keep us from harm as long as he has work for us to do.
- Do we fear our own spiritual weakness? The Father will keep us from falling (Jude 24).

The rest of the elements in this verse modify the verb, presenting its objects, its subject, its place, and its motive.

those whom thou hast given me.--Here are the *objects* of his keeping. His protection is not offered to all people, but to his own particular possession whom he has entrusted to his Son.

11b Holy Father.--The *subject* who is to do the keeping is described by a title that embodies an instructive tension.

- The title “holy” for God must call to mind Isa 6:3, which emphasizes the glory and exaltation of God and the fear (v.5) that mortals must feel in his presence. Here we learn of his *ability* to preserve us. Consider how his holiness and fearfulness are associated:
 - Ex 15:11 Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? ... glorious in **holiness, fearful** in praises, doing wonders?
 - Ps 99:3 Let them praise thy great and **terrible** name; *for it is holy*.
 - Ps 111:9 **holy** and reverend [**terrible**] is his name.
- The title “Father” bespeaks his love and special care, and teaches us of his *willingness* to preserve us. The Son here petitions the Father on the grounds of their intimate relationship.

Matthew Henry: “Those cannot but be safe whom the almighty God keeps, and he cannot but keep those whom the Son of his love commits to him.”

This is the only place in Scripture where the name “Holy Father” appears. As we have seen, it captures the essence of God's uniqueness, the combination of his separate power and his intimate love. It is sad that some who claim the name of Christ would dare to apply it to a man, the Roman Pope. Were there nothing else to warn us of the distortions of the Roman system, the casual use of this title for a creature ought to give us great pause.

through thine own name.--Literally, “in thine own name.” The meaning of the phrase is interpreted in many different ways. Matthew Henry lists three: for the sake of his honor, in faithfulness to him, by means of his power. How can we interpret such a phrase?

The analysis in this case is instructive. It passes through three steps.

First, we need to recognize that verbs often form semantic units with certain prepositions. Though a preposition may have many different meanings, it is likely to have a specific meaning with a specific verb. With verbs of keeping (*t8rew* as here, or *fulassw*), *en* usually indicates the place in which one is guarded or protected, like Peter kept in prison (Acts 12:5), or our inheritance kept in heaven (1 Pet 1:4), or someone being kept in the road (Exod 23:20), or David protecting Nabal's possessions in the wilderness (1 Sam 25:21). This lexical observation encourages us to understand God's name here as a place. Thus this phrase describes the *place* in which God keeps his people

Second, we ask if there is any precedent for God's name being considered a place. That concept immediately leads us to Prov 18:10,

The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.

The Lord is here recalling Solomon's metaphor. “Father, keep your people securely in the strong tower that Solomon recognized, which is your name.”

But what does that mean? The third step is to recall from our discussion of v. 6 that a reference in

Scripture to God's name in Scripture is often meant to remind us of his character. To say that God's name is a tower is the same as saying that God, in the character represented by his name, is a tower, or refuge, and that is a very common idiom, particularly in the Psalms.

Deut 33:27 The eternal God *is thy* refuge,

Psa 9:9 The LORD also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble.

Psa 18:2 The LORD *is* my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, *and* my high tower.

Psa 32:7 Thou *art* my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble;

Psa 46:1 God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Psa 48:3 God is known in her palaces for a refuge.

Psa 62:8 God *is* a refuge for us.

Psa 91:2 I will say of the LORD, *He is* my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.

Nah 1:7 The LORD *is* good, a strong hold in the day of trouble;

So Jesus here prays that the Lord will protect his people by being their place of refuge, by exhibiting the characteristics represented by his name. And what name is in view? Most likely, the very one by which he here addresses him: "Holy Father," the God who is at once fearfully powerful and faithfully compassionate toward his people.

that they may be one, as we are.--Finally, here is the *motive* for the request that God would keep his people.

The unity of the believers has a section all its own in the prayer, vv. 20-26 (vv. 21, 22, 23), corresponding to the third main theme of the URD, the love among members of the body. We will defer our study of the concept until we reach that section. But its introduction here shows a logical relationship among the themes. The believers cannot enjoy the union that the Savior intends for them unless they are protected from the world.

This is a striking claim. In our era, there are many voices calling for unity across those diverse in beliefs and convictions—unity within the world. This clause shows that this desire will be frustrated. The world is characterized by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, all centered on exalting the individual at the expense of others (1 John 2:16). True unity, unity comparable to that of the Father and the Son, can only be achieved by those who have been delivered from this self-centered system.

12-14, Statement: They are not of the world.

As in 6-19, we can take our cue to the interpretation of this section by the summary in the second panel of the chiasm, v. 16. The passage builds toward the summary statement in v. 14.

The section begins with an alternation in 12-13, comparing the Lord's past care of the believers with the preparation he is making for them in the future.

Past	Future
12 While I was with them in the world,	13 And now come I to thee ;
I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept , and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition;	and these things I speak in the world,
that the scripture might be fulfilled .	that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.

12 While I was with them in the world ... 13 And now come I to thee.--This contrast makes clear the shift that is about to take place. He was “with them in the world,” but now he is coming “to thee” in heaven.

I kept them in thy name ... and these things I speak in the world.--These two temporal phases require different kinds of care. Both of them are instances of revelation, the great resource emphasized throughout this chapter for us in our confrontation with the world. Compare this pairing with the pairing of vv. 6, 8 that we noted in the previous statement section. In both cases the Father's name and the Son's speech are in focus.

- “thy name”: While he was with them, he himself (emphatic “I”) did what he has just asked the Father to do in his absence. He kept them in the Father's name, focused their attention on the Father and his characteristics, encouraged them to call on him and trust in him. He always effaced himself and emphasized the Father as the central feature. Compare the sequence of subjects in the clauses in v. 8: “they received,” “I came out,” “thou has sent.” This sequence is an example of how he persistently led them to the Father, leading them to the strong tower of refuge.
- “these things”: Now that he is leaving, he is speaking while he is still with them. His speech is to the Father, not to them, but he intends them (and us) to overhear his prayer.

Before going on to the third pair, we note his expansion of his claim to have kept his disciples.

those that thou gavest me I have kept.--It is perhaps significant that he changes the verb. This verb emphasizes the process of guarding, while the verb at the beginning of the verse emphasizes the results of security. He carried out the process for all of his apostles, but of course one did not enjoy the resulting security, as he goes on to point out.

and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition.--He refers here to Judas, whose departure was recorded in 13:18-30.

The title “son of perdition” is an example of a common Hebrew idiom. To say that someone is the son of some characteristic is simply to say that the characteristic is true of them. To say that you are thirty years old in Hebrew, you say, “I am a son of 30 years.” “Perdition” is the noun form of the immediately preceding verb “lost.” Judas is described as “the son of lostness,” one whose coming destruction is completely in keeping with his nature. Compare the description of the ungodly in 2 Pet 2:12,

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption;

So the Lord is saying, “None is lost, except the one whose very nature it is to be lost.”

It is surely not coincidental that in 2 Thes 2:3 Paul uses these very words in apposition to “the man of sin” to describe the Antichrist. “Man of sin” emphasizes his rebellion against God, which Paul details in vv. 4, 9-10. “Son of perdition” emphasizes his destiny, which Paul detail in vv. 8, 10-12. Even as he sketches the terrifying arrogance of the Antichrist, Paul by using this phrase reminds us that his doom is as certain as was Judas's.

that the scripture might be fulfilled ... that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.--The repetition of “fulfilled” reinforces our sense of the parallelism between 12 and 13; recognizing that parallelism will in turn help us to interpret the first instance of “fulfilled.”

Virtually all commentators assume that the scripture in mind is Psa 41:9, cited already of Judas in 13:18, or perhaps Psa 109:8, which Peter quoted to explain Judas' fate in Acts 1:16, 20. This may well be the case. But there is another possibility.

- The parallelism shows us that the main point of 12b is not Judas' fall, but the Lord's keeping of his own. Judas is mentioned only as an exception; the point in both 12b and 13b is the Lord's provision for his own by revelation (“in thy name,” “these things I speak”).
- It is to this provision that the fulfillment mentioned in 13c refers. There is no qualifying phrase there.
- So perhaps the fulfillment refers, not to the phrase “but the son of perdition,” but to the clause, “none of them is lost.” As far as I can find, only John Gill recognizes this possibility. There are many OT scriptures that promise the coming ministry of the Messiah to protect and deliver God's people. In particular, in the LXX, Isa 11:9 states the active form of this promise in a messianic context, “they will not be able to destroy anyone upon my holy mountain.”

Now consider the second fulfillment. His care for them fulfills not only the Father's OT prophecies, but his own joy—not only the expression of the Father's purpose, but also his personal delight. The verse echoes 15:11,

These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full.

When we studied that verse, we saw that his joy, as well as his love and his peace, are first of all the emotions that he feels, and then that we enjoy through him. His words preparing them for his departure had as their first purpose ensuring his joy, that they would be secure against falling. John was following his Master's example when he wrote, “I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth” (3 John 4).

He does not just say, “that my joy may be fulfilled in them,” but “that they may have my joy fulfilled in them.” It is our privilege to recognize that his joy depends on our security, that he cares for us not just out of a sense of duty to his Father, but because that's really, really what he wants to do.

So the Lord's care for his people fulfills two things: the Father's promises, and his own joy. Anyone who would harm us spiritually must oppose the Father's sovereign will and the Son's good pleasure. “He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of his eye” (Zech 2:8).

14 I have given them thy word.--This is a summary of 12-13. Both the declaration of God's name in 12b, and the teaching preparatory to his departure in 13b, are the Father's word. “I do nothing of myself, but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (8:38).

and the world hath hated them.--In contrast to the Son's faithful care, keeping his disciples during his earthly ministry and preparing them for his departure, stands the attitude of the world in which he is leaving them. It hates them, which generates the need for his keeping and preparation in the first place. The logical relation between this statement and the previous one is unmarked grammatically, but clear semantically. He has kept and prepared them *because* of the world's hatred. And that hatred in turn has a cause, presented in the next couplet.

because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.--Here is the heart of the matter, the fundamental reason that we need the protection for which the Lord prays in this chapter. We are no longer "of the world." He came into the world as a stranger and pilgrim, on a mission from the Father, and is now returning home. Though the world was "his own" by right of creation, those inhabiting it rejected him. Now we, by following him, adopt his pilgrim status. Our citizenship is in heaven, as his is. Those who reject him will also reject us.

15, Petition

Now the Lord offers the second of his three petitions, this one at the structural center of the prayer.

15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world.--This would seem to be the logical solution to the problem. But his work here is not finished, and it is his pleasure that we should carry it out for him. This is the point that we saw in vv. 6-8 ("I am glorified in them"), to be revisited at the end of this section in 18-19 ("I have sent them into the world"). To glorify him in the world, we must live in it.

but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.--"The evil" is probably to be understood personally, "the evil one," as in 1 John 2:13-14; 3:12; 5:18-19. The same phrase is used in the Lord's Prayer (6:13), where we are taught to seek this protection directly from the Father. The world's opposition is headed up by a personality, Satan.

16, Statement

As we work our way out from the center of the chiasm, this section is a summary of 12-14, a near repetition of v. 14. In Greek, the phrase "of the world" comes after each of the verbs in 14, but before each of them in v. 16. Purely structurally, this shift reinforces the turn of the chiasm. In addition, information placed before the verb tends to be emphasized. In v. 14, he first focuses the Father's attention on the disciples and himself, and then asserts that this group is not of the world. Now he begins by identifying a category, those who are "of the world," and then excluding himself and the disciples from it.

17, Petition

The name/word parallel with v. 11b recalls the same parallel between 6 and 8, and between 12 and 13.

17 Sanctify them.--With this petition, an important change takes place in the action he is requesting of the Father. Up until this point, the dominant word has been "keep." He has asked the Father to keep them (11, 15), and has spoken of his own work keeping them during his earthly ministry (v. 12). Now he asks the Father to "sanctify" them, to set them apart.

- Keeping represents the believers as passive. The focus is on protecting them from the world's

attacks.

- Sanctifying more directly involves a change in the believers. It implies preparing them for the ministry they will carry out in the world.

You can “keep” somebody by building a wall around them, without changing them at all, but to “sanctify” someone you must change them.

through thy truth.--Literally, “in thy truth,” the same construction as v. 11 uses with God's name. There we took it as locative because of its prevailing use with the verb “to keep.” A survey of its use with “sanctify” shows that it is often used instrumentally (Ex 29:33; Isa 10:17 (LXX); Ezek 44:19; Rom 15:16; see notes). For example,

Rom 15:16, “that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by [*en*] the Holy Ghost.”

This is the most straightforward way to understand it here. God's truth is the means by which we are sanctified. The meaning is not only lexically attested, but semantically concordant with the rest of Scripture. Compare

- 8:32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
- 15:3 Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.
- Ps 19:7 The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. 8 The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
- Ps 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? by taking heed thereto according to thy word.
- Ps 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.
- Ps 119:104 Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way.
- Eph 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
- James 1:21 Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.
- 1 Pet 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

God's word is alive and active. As we expose ourselves to it, it changes the way we think. Paul gives us the process in 2 Tim 3:16-17,

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

- “Doctrine” is our systematic exposure to the Word.
- “Reproof” is pointing out of sin.
- “Correction” is showing us the alternative way of behavior.
- “Instruction” means that Scripture inculcates its principles in a variety of ways, including not

only explicit commands but also examples both positive and negative.

This is a very important theme, as we can see by its repetition in v. 19.

thy word is truth.--It is worth noting that our sanctification is ascribed not first of all to God's word, but to his truth, and then to his word because his word is the vehicle for that truth. The Bible is not a fetish or a good-luck charm. It does not sanctify those who study it but do not receive it as an expression of the mind of God.

At the same time, this statement is notable because it claims, not that God's word is true, but that it is truth. It is not subject to some other standard of truth, but it is the truth against which all other claims are to be measured.

- The Savior prays, “Father, sanctify them through thy truth.”
- Some might ask, “Where can we find that truth?”
- He clarifies, “God's Word is truth.”

Two other things are called “truth” in John—the Lord himself (14:6, and the HS (1 John 5:6). God has revealed his truth to us through two channels: his Son (of whom the Spirit is the continuing presence) and the Bible. There is a third channel of revelation, the created world (Psa 19), but nowhere is it ever said to be truth. Today, to the contrary, it is the only witness that most people will accept.

18-19, Statement: The Response and Role of the Believers

v. 18 recalls the role of the believers in representing the Lord in the world in 9-11, while 19 recalls the effect of the Word in their lives, previously detailed in 6-8.

18, Their Role, cf. 9-11

18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.--This verse is superficially almost the same as 20:21, yet here the sending is described as already done. Compare also 4:38, “I sent you to reap,” probably referring to their baptizing work in 4:2.

There is an important distinction, though the linguistic markers are too technical to discuss here—see the note.

- Here, the Lord refers to the fact of his incarnation, and to their similar position as aliens in a hostile world.
- In 20:21, the focus is more on the mission that he received from the Father, and how he is passing it on to them.

We will say more about 20:21 in due time. Here, “sent me” is the aorist of *apostellw*, which in John, applied to the Father's sending of the Son, always refers to the fact of the incarnation.

The point here is the same as v. 11, their remaining in the world.

19, Our Response, cf. 6-8

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself.--What does the Lord mean by “sanctify”? The verb means “to set apart,” “to make holy.” He already had been sanctified by the Father for his earthly mission

(10:36), but this is something that he is doing himself, and doing presently.

The collocation of “for their sakes” helps us understand his meaning. This is the only place in the Greek Bible where one individual's sanctification is said to be for the sake of someone else. However, it can be understood as the merger of two other usages.

1. “For the sake of” is commonly used to describe the beneficiary of a sacrifice. 1 Cor 5:7, “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us,” also Acts 21:26; Eph 5:2; Heb 9:7; Ezra 6:17; 2 Macc 1:26; 1 Esd 6:30.
2. The OT sometimes speaks of “sanctifying” an offering, Exod 13:2 “sanctify unto me all the firstborn,” Deut 15:19.

Thus the Lord is saying that he is setting himself apart, dedicating himself, as a sacrifice for the sake of his people.

that they also might be sanctified.--Here is their response. He is sanctified as a sacrifice, so that they might be sanctified, as priests (Exod 40:13; Lev 8:30; 2 Chr 5:11) and prophets (Jer 1:5) were in the OT. His sacrifice sets them apart for the service anticipated in v. 18.

In his last request to the Father, he prayed that the Father would sanctify them. Now he announces that he is sacrificing himself so that they might be sanctified. We need to understand the “that.” His sacrifice is a prerequisite for the Father's work of sanctification in our lives. Unredeemed sinners cannot become holy by their own efforts. Their destiny is God's wrath, not his special favor. For us to be set apart for our role as his ambassadors, he must first redeem us.

There is a second prerequisite for our sanctification, set forth in the next phrase.

through the truth.--Modern translations (NIV, NET) prefer to translate this as “truly sanctified.” By itself, the expression *en al8qeia* can indeed mean “truly.” But in this context, it is better to take it as a reference to God's revelation, for three reasons.

1. “Truth” *al8qeia* is one of a series of references to God's revelation throughout this paragraph. In v. 17, it occurs twice in this sense, with the verb “sanctify” and the same preposition (“sanctify them in thy word”), and it seems likely that the Lord carries that sense over to the present verse.
2. The chiasmic structure makes a parallel appropriate to the words of God in vv. 6,8.
3. Paul picks up the sequence in Eph 5:25-26: Christ's sacrifice leads to our sanctification, a process that involves God's revelation:

John 17:19	Eph 5:25-26
And for their sakes I sanctify myself,	25 Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
that they also might be sanctified	26 That he might sanctify
through the truth <i>en al8qeia</i>	and cleanse it with the washing of water by the <i>word en r8ma</i> ,

As so often, the AV translators show themselves more sensitive to the text than our modern versions. What, then, does the phrase mean?

It seems best to understand the preposition as instrumental, as our translators do, and render it “through” or “by.” See additional note for detail.

God's word, his truth, is an instrument with which he sanctifies us, sets us apart. The Psalmist knew this:

Psalm 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.

All of Psalm 1 recounts the positive impact of meditating in the law of God day and night. Cf. also Prov 2:10-11,

When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; 11 Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee:

Psa 37:31 says of the righteous,

The law of his God *is* in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.

And Paul exhorts the Colossians (3:16),

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

If you want to be holy, set apart to God's work, you must immerse yourself in the Word of God. It is possible to know the Bible without being holy, but it is not possible to be holy without knowing the Bible. In the second panel of his prayer for believers in a hostile world, our Lord twice describes our sanctification, once as a request to his Father (v. 17) and once as a result of what he does for us (here), and both times it depends on his word.

20-26, Unity and Love: Love

We have reached the end of the chiasm of vv. 6-19, and now enter the third section of the prayer. As the first section picked up the URD theme of the Son's return to the Father, and the second section the theme of the world's opposition, the third returns to the theme with which the discourse began in 13:1-17, the love and unity among the believers. "Love" appears five times in John 17, and all five occurrences are in this section.

The section is punctuated with three vocatives to his "Father," vv. 21, 24, and 25. These increase in prominence, from a subsidiary position in 21, to a lead position in 24, and then amplified as "righteous Father" in 25. Each of these marks a paragraph with a distinctive thrust.

There are two requests, one in 20-22 and the other in 24. It makes sense to interpret the verses following each of these as motive for the request, which we will do. This is not explicit as it is in vv. 1-2, but it fits and is consistent with the explicit pattern of motivation with which the chapter began.

20-23, Unite them in witness, because that's what I did

The first four verses are another very close alternation, as we have seen previously in 1-5, 6-8, and 12-14. As in 1-5 and 12-14, the two panels differ in time, but this time the future comes first (marked by the reference to future believers in v.20), and then the past (marked by the perfect tense in v. 22).

Request for the Future	Statement about the Past
20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;	22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;
21 That they all may be one;	that they may be one,
as thou , Father, art in me , and I in thee ,	even as we are one: 23 I in them , and thou in me ,
that they also may be one in us:	that they may be made perfect in one;
that the world may believe that thou hast sent me .	and that the world may know that thou hast sent me , and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

In turn, these two panels are modeled on the request in 11b:

Ref	11	21	22
Motivated proposition	keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me	20 pray I ... for them also which shall believe on me through their word;	22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them;
Unity Statement	that they may be one,	21 That they all may be one;	that they may be one, even as we are one: that they may be made perfect in one;
Comparison to Father & Son	as <i>we are</i> .	as thou, Father, <i>art</i> in me, and I in thee,	23 I in them, and thou in me,
Subsequent purpose		that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.	and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

20-21, First Request: Make the believers one with each other

20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.—The Lord’s immediate focus throughout the URD has been on his original disciples. Perhaps the clearest instance of this was 15:27, “ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.” Now he expands his attention to the subsequent generations of believers.

This request grows directly out of the previous section. He is leaving the disciples in the world in order to bear witness, and now he anticipates that some will believe as a result of their labor. He does not pray that some will believe. This he takes as given--“them which shall believe.” The grain of wheat that falls into the ground must bring forth much fruit (12:24). But he wants more from his followers than just their faith. He wants their unity.

21 That [ina] they all may be one.--The particle “that” is ambiguous.¹ It may reflect the content of a request, but in context, it is more likely to reflect the purpose. Compare 11b, “Keep them ... that [purpose] they may be one.” Now he extends the scope of that same prayer. The request for protection that leads to unity is not for the original eleven alone, but for subsequent generations. “Father, don’t just keep the eleven from the world. Keep all of those who believe on me, from the world. I desire this so that they may be one.”

¹ The recording claims that “that” *ina* can only be purpose, but compare v. 24. In general, with verbs of request, *ina* is commonly used to denote content: to ask in order that something be done is tantamount to requesting that action. Still, the parallel with 11b and the contrast between the eleven and new converts makes the telic force of the particle particularly suitable here.

He now goes on to expound two features of the oneness that he desires for them.

as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.--The first feature of this oneness is horizontal, among the believers. Here is the standard for their unity, the same as in 11b, “that they may be one, as we are.”

The comparison is striking. Our Lord has devoted much effort throughout the gospel to expounding the relation between himself and the Father—their oneness of purpose, the fellowship between them, his submission to the Father, the Father's delight in him. It is his desire that we should experience this same oneness.

The relation between the Father and the Son is one of the secret things that belong to the Lord our God (Deut 29:29). At the very outset, John reminds us that the Word is both distinct from God (“the Word was with God”) and yet himself God (“the Word was God”). The errors of liberalism and Jehovah's Witnesses in our day tend to lead us to emphasize that “the Word was God,” but we must not lose the distinction between the Father and the Son. Both are God, yet they are distinct and work in relation to one another. So as believers, we have an essential unity, and yet are distinct from one another. The Lord desires that our cooperation and mutual dependence should be as close as that which he enjoyed with his Father.

that they also may be one in us.--The second feature of the unity that he desires is vertical, their unity “in us.” He is probably drawing here on the ideas from ch. 15, in which he taught the disciples of the need to abide in him. Every social group seeks for the first, the horizontal, unity. But our Lord desires that his people, so united to one another, should continually abide in him. In fact, 1 John 1:3 argues that the real essence of our unity with one another is our union with the Father and his Son:

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

The double unity expounded in these verses is yet another example of how the sayings of Christ preserved in John anticipate the teachings of Paul. In Eph 2, Paul outlines

- the twofold alienation of the Gentiles from the Jews and from God (vv. 11-12),
- the twofold unification that Christ accomplished (vv.15-16),
- and the twofold result that we are now “fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (v. 19).

that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.--Deep, true love among people is anomalous from the world's perspective. That is why we must be protected from the world in order to love. The world's tendencies are all to selfishness and self-fulfillment. So when the world sees us loving one another in the name of Christ, it will be forced to give credence to the message we bear.

22-23, Motive for First Request: I did the same for them while I was with them.

Compare the logic in his request in v. 1, based on what he had already done in v. 2, or his request to the Father to keep them in v. 11, followed by the claim that he had kept them in 12ff. The prevailing logic of the prayer is to ask the Father to continue to care for them after his departure, in the same way and in the same areas as he has cared for them during his earthly ministry.

22 And the glory which thou gavest me.--What glory is this? Here are all the occurrences of the noun

“glory” in John that refer to our Lord. These references make three points about his glory.

First and foremost, it was a gift from the Father.

1:14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld **his glory**, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

8:54 Jesus answered, If I honour myself, **my honour** is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: [“honor” here is *doxa* “glory”]

17:24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold **my glory**, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

Recall from 1:14 that “only begotten” is a term indicating love. This reference and 17:24 agree that the reason the Father has glorified the son is that the Father loves him. It is natural and healthy for a father who loves his children to exalt and glorify them, and that is what the Heavenly Father has done with the Son.

1:14 gives us further insight. “Full of grace and truth” is probably to be understood as amplifying “glory.” (See Robertson pp. 275-276 on the apparent grammatical anomaly.) If so, the verse recalls Exod 33:18, where Moses asked to see God's glory, and in return was given a proclamation of the name of the Lord, including his nature as “merciful and **gracious**, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and **truth**,” 34:6. The Father showed his love for the Son by manifesting his own gracious and truthful character through him.

Second, this glory that the Father gave the Son existed before his incarnation. 17:24, which we considered under the first characteristic, applies here as well. Other references in John confirm this, which is an important evidence that the relation between the Father and the Son did not begin at our Lord's birth.

12:41 These things said Esaias, when he saw **his glory**, and spake of him.

17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with **the glory which I had** with thee before the world was.

The third characteristic of our Lord's glory is that it is exhibited in his miracles.

2:11 This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth **his glory**; and his disciples believed on him.

11:4 When Jesus heard *that*, he said, This sickness is not unto death, but for the **glory** of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby.

Our initial impulse is to understand the glory of his miracles as analogous to a magician's aura—the exhibition of power that stimulates awe and wonder in the observers. But in the light of what we have learned from 1:14, perhaps we should reconsider. His miracles are gifts to needy men, thus manifestations of his **grace**. And they show the creative power of his word, analogous to the power of God's word in Genesis 1, which we have often considered as the ultimate in **truth**—if the world doesn't conform to what he says, the world must change to fit.

Thus our Savior's glory is the manifestation through him of his Father's character, given him as a gift of love from the Father, and exhibited particularly in his gracious and powerful miracles.

I have given them.--This is striking. We can understand that the Father has bestowed his character

upon the Son. But what does the Son mean in saying that he has bestowed this upon us?

The simple answer is that he means that he has *manifested* this glory to them. But the parallel between “thou has given me” and “I have given them” makes this unsatisfying. The Father did not simply manifest his glory to the Son. According to 1:14, he conveyed it to the Son, and the Son now says that he has conveyed it to us.

John 14:12 may hold the answer.

He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do

His glory was made visible through his miracles. When we do greater works than he did, we show forth his glory. In authorizing them to perform miracles, he has given them his glory. Note, by the way, how central our *works* are to this gift of glory. We can only manifest it through what we do.

Now he describes three motives that led to this gift.

that they may be one.--The first motive is their unity. In 17:11, he asked the Father to protect them from the world's lust and selfishness so that they could become one. This verse is the positive counterpart. As they come to exhibit grace and truth through their works, they will draw closer to one another.

even as we are one.--As in vv. 11, 21, the model for our unity is the unity of the Father and the Son. But the explanation of this now takes a significant step forward.

23 I in them, and thou in me.--In 21, the model was the *reciprocal* indwelling of the Father and the Son. Here, it is the *transmissional* indwelling. The Father dwells in the Son, and the Son dwells in the believers. The Father gives his glory to the Son, and the Son in turn gives it to the believers. Our unity is not just *like* the unity of the Father and the Son. It is *derived* from that unity, a version of it.

that they may be made perfect in one.--Now the Lord describes his second motive for giving us his glory. There are counterfeit unities that the world can produce. Think of the selfless dedication of young people to the ideals of various causes, such as environmentalism or socialism. Such is not our unity. It is characterized not just by oneness, but by perfection, by maturity. Again, Paul provides the best commentary on our Lord's prayer, in Eph 4:12-13. The gifted men equip the saints to do the work of ministry and to edify the body of Christ, so that believers together achieve the threefold unity of v. 13, central to which is “a perfect man.” As we manifest godly grace and truth, not only do we become one, but our unity reflects the nature of Christ.

and that the world may know that thou hast sent me.--Here is the third motive for giving us his glory. It is very similar to the motive for his request to the Father in v. 21: a testimony to the world that the Father has indeed sent the son. But his past grant to us only enables the world to “know.” The Father's continued care of the believers will enable the world to “believe.” The earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus by itself attracted the notice of the world, but thoroughgoing change will require the Father's care, beginning with the gift of the Spirit.

and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.--In 21 the consciousness on the part of the world that he desired was simply that the Father had sent him. Now he wants the world to receive a further message: those who manifest his glory are beloved of the Father. Again, we see the transmissional emphasis here. We saw that he gave his glory to his Son because he loved him (1:14; 17:24). If we receive his glory, that shows that he loves us too, and that may stimulate unbelievers to jealousy (cf. Rom 11:11)

and thus lead them to repentance and faith.

24-26, Bring them home, because they are already part of the family

His first request was that the Father would unite the believers during their time on earth. Now he looks beyond that horizon.

24, Second Request: Bring them to be with me

24 Father, I will.--This marks the verse as a request, parallel to v. 20. More strikingly, it leads us to contrast this prayer with that recorded by the synoptics in the garden of Gethsemane. The theme there was, “not what I will, but what thou wilt” (Mark 14:36 and parallels). Here just the opposite is the case: he boldly tells the Father what he wants, and expects to receive it.

From the synoptics, the prayer of agony took place in the garden, and immediately precedes the Lord's arrest, while 18:1 shows that this prayer took place before they reached the garden. Thus this prayer must have preceded that one chronologically. But logically, the prayer of agony precedes this one. He is able to make the bold requests that he makes here, because he has been completely subject to the Father there. Phil 2 makes clear that it is because he “humbled himself and became obedient” that “God has highly exalted him.” Having resolved upon “not what I will” with respect to his humiliation, he can now say “I will” with respect to his exaltation.

The whole argument of this prayer is based on what he has already done. Note the frequent statements, “I have xxx”: 4, 6, 8, 12, 14, 22, 25, 26.

they ... whom thou hast given me.--This is his favorite title for the believers in this chapter (vv. 9, 11, 24), based on his teaching in 6:39 “all that the Father giveth me shall come to me” and 10:29 “my Father, which gave them me.”

be with me where I am.--His requests so far have been that the Father would prepare them for the time of separation. Now he looks beyond this time to a reunion.

...my glory which thou hast given me.--Gill: “not the simple abstract glory of his deity; which, as it was not given to him, is not to be seen by them; but his glory as Mediator,” the glory that he requested in vv. 1-5 in view of his success in his mission. In the MT, the verb is aorist, not (like the previous occurrence in this verse) perfect. This is probably a gnomic aorist, describing the fact of the gift, without making a specific time reference. He has asked the Father for this glory, and he is confident that the gift is his, “my glory that you are giving me because I asked for it.”

Note the two gifts of the Father to the Son in this verse: a people to redeem, and glory in recognition of his diligence in redeeming them. These two are so closely related that he thinks it unseemly that he should enjoy the one in separation from the other. So he prays for the gift of the people to come where he enjoys the gift of the glory.

that they may behold my glory.--He wants them to see the glory that the Father has given him. I cannot help but recall my childhood, when the week after Christmas my friends and I would visit each other to see the wonderful gifts we had received. If we really enjoy something, we want others to see it and join in our joy. Our Savior wants us to rejoice with him in the great gift of glory that the Father is giving him.

This aspect of the Savior's prayer guards against an interpretation of the Savior's departure that might

otherwise arise. Throughout the gospel, he has repeated over and over his resolution to do the Father's will, to obey the Father, to glorify the Father. The Father gave him a people to redeem, and out of his dedication to the Father he redeems them, and expects to be rewarded. Now that he has accomplished that assignment, he is ready to move on to receive his prize. But what of those whom he has redeemed? Are they simply stepping-stones to his own advancement? Think of Lee Bollinger on his march from Dartmouth to Michigan and then to Columbia. He served the students of each institution in turn, but in the grander scheme of things he was always ready to leave them to reach the next plateau. The appearance he gave was that he cared for them only as tools to advance his own interests, and didn't hesitate to leave them for a better opportunity. Was this our Savior's attitude toward us?

This prayer shows that it was not. We are not incidental to his fulfillment, simply tools to enable him to please the Father. Rather, the glory that the Father has promised him would be empty without us there to enjoy it with him. He redeemed us not only out of obedience to the Father but also out of love to us, and now he wants us to be with him and with the Father. And to this end he boldly comes to the Father and says, "I will."

for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.--This specifies the reason for which the Father is giving him glory. As in v.5, the new grant of glory that he desires is rooted in the eternal relationship between the Father and the Son.

25-26, Motives for Second Request: their current relation with the Father and the Son

25 O righteous Father.--Only in this chapter does "father" appear in the vocative with an adjective. In v. 11 he is "Holy Father," and here he is "Righteous Father."

This is a sobering thought, that in asking the Father to bring us to heaven with him, he appeals not to the Father's mercy and grace, but to his righteousness. Matthew Henry captures this idea:

When he prayed that they might be sanctified, he called him *holy Father*; when he prays that they may be glorified, he calls him *righteous Father*; for it is a *crown of righteousness which the righteous Judge shall give* [2 Tim 4:8]. God's righteousness was engaged for the giving out of all that good which the Father had promised and the Son had purchased.

It is sobering, but also greatly comforting. Our acceptance before God is grounded, not in anything we might do, but in the righteous life and vicarious suffering of the Savior. A righteous God cannot fail to accept him—and to accept those who are in him. For God to exclude us would compromise his righteousness.

In the next three lines, he spells out three kinds of relationship that can exist between a person and the Righteous Father.

the world hath not known thee.--First, he reminds the Father of the wicked state of the world. His own people were once part of that world. In this condition, a "righteous Father" must exclude them.

but I have known thee.--At the other extreme is the righteous Son, who does know the Father, intimately. He is as worthy of entering the Father's presence as they are unworthy. This kind of person (and there has only ever been one) deserves access to the Righteous Father.

The contrast inherent in these two lines summarizes what we have seen before:

1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the

Father, he hath declared *him*.

7:28-29 he that sent me is true, whom ye know not. 29 But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.

So far, we have the world in its sinful ignorance of God, and our Lord knowing the Father directly. There is a third kind of relationship—neither immediate exclusion nor immediate access.

and these have known that thou hast sent me.--This is the ground on which he commends us to the Father's fellowship; this is how we have moved from exclusion to access. We have acknowledged that the Son came on the authority of the Father. Cf. v. 8.

This is the essence of believing in Jesus. The key element in our faith is not some detail of doctrine, whether of soteriology, or ecclesiology, or pneumatology, or eschatology. It is that the Father sent the Son. Compare John's summary in his first epistle,

4:14-15 And we have seen and do testify that **the Father sent the Son to be** the Saviour of the world. 15 Whosoever shall confess that **Jesus is the Son of God**, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

One might accept the words of Jesus as wise and lovely, without acknowledging him as the authoritative Son sent by the Father, and such faith will not gain us access to heaven. But once we accept this, all else follows, for if he is the envoy of the Father, we will naturally treasure his words, and obey his commands.

26 And I have declared unto them thy name.--Cf. v. 6, and recall our discussion there about the significance of the Father's name as the description of his character. When we recognize him as the Father's envoy, he in turn reveals the Father to us.

There is a deeper meaning here. Knowing someone's name gives us a certain measure of power over them, at the least to call upon them. Cf. Judg 13:18, where the angel refuses to tell Manoah his name, or Prov 30:4, where the writer challenges the reader about the name of the the creator and his son. Christ has given us this access that was so scarce before.

and will declare it.--This can only refer to his ministry toward us once we are with him in glory. Even there, the Son will interpret the Father to us. Gill: "more fully to them after his resurrection, during his forty days' stay with them, and upon his ascension, when he poured down his Spirit in such a plentiful and extraordinary manner upon them; and will declare it to others besides them in the Gentile world; and still more in the latter day glory, and to all believers more and more."

that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.--Here is his motive for revealing the Father to us: a twofold indwelling. The first grants us horizontal fellowship; the second, vertical. He thus returns here to the theme of v. 21.

the love wherewith thou hast loved me.--The scriptures tell us much of the love of God for us, but here we read of something different, the love of the Father for the Son. This love was declared at our Lord's baptism, when the voice from heaven declared him to be "my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased," Matt 3:17. God's love for us flows from his grace, without any merit on our part, but his love for his son is merited by the Son's perfect obedience:

John 10:17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again.

Thus it conveys "all things" to the son:

John 3:35 The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand.

It is the foundation of our acceptance:

Eph 1:6 [God] "hath made us accepted in the beloved."

This love, he says, can be "in us":

that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them.--What does it mean for God's love to be in us? Does it mean that we feel all warm and fuzzy? Does it refer to a special assurance of God's love toward us? If so, why the reference to God's love for Jesus rather than to his love for us?

John the evangelist has given us his own commentary on these words, in his first epistle.

1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels *of compassion* from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

1 John 4:12 If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

If God's love is in us, that means that we can love one another with it. This is the only real source of horizontal fellowship. As the Son reveals the Father to us, the love between them is kindled in our own hearts, and becomes the engine by which we are able to love one another.

Why is it the Father's love for the Son that drives our love for one another, rather than the Father's love for us? Our love for one another is to be a love among peers, not the condescending love of election, but the mutual love of those committed to one another. In the words of v. 21, "that they may be one ... as thou ... are in me, and I in thee."

But if the love between the Father and the Son is in the believers, they should have access to that realm in which the Father and the Son eternally love each other. "Every one that loveth is born of God," 1 John 4:7. They are part of the family, and belong with the family.

The revelation of God's name to us also produces a vertical fellowship:

and I in them.--He returns here to the promise of 14:23, that he and the Father would make their abode with the believer, a promise fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit, a promise picked up in v. 21, "that they also may be one in us."

Again, this is a motive for them to be in heaven. If he dwells in them, they should dwell with him.

Summary

Our Lord's prayer to his Father the night before his sacrifice had two elements. One, captured in the synoptics, was his submission to his Father in completing the work of redemption, "not what I will, but what thou wilt." John preserves the other, in which the Son says to the Father, "I will." Because he was obedient to death, God has delivered all things into his hands. Our Lord's intercession for us in heaven is grounded on this relation of merit, and here we have a glimpse of the work he continues to perform for us. Having earned the right to lay claim to all things, he makes three requests of the Father.

- First, he claims the glory that he has earned by his obedience.
- Then, he petitions the Father to defend his people from the world's attacks.
- Finally, he asks for them to be united with one another, and ultimately with him in glory, receiving the full benefits that he has purchased for them.