

## Introduction

John 17 is part of the record of how the apostle John remembers the Lord Jesus. He remembers by the enabling of the Holy Spirit (Jn. 14.26) and He causes us to remember who Jesus is by giving us an account of what Jesus said and what He did. In this passage, we have a special glimpse at what Jesus said to the Father; it is special because He spoke these words in the very shadow of the cross. As I read 17.9-11c, consider how these verses direct us to Jesus as our covenantally faithful mediator.

**I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.**

We can hang our reflections on two hooks today: first, Jesus is the mediator of the Father's elect people (v. 9, up to the words "for they are yours"), and second, Jesus is the covenantally faithful mediator of the Father's elect people (9-11, beginning with "for they are yours" and continuing to the middle of v. 11).

### 1A. Jesus is the mediator of the Father's elect people (v. 9abc)

To many people who read the Bible as outsiders to its heartbeat, the thought that the Lord would be discriminating in any way is a strange thought, enigmatic if not repulsive, bland if not bitter. They see John 17 through earthly and man-centered sunglasses. It is difficult for them to conceive of loving discrimination, let alone, of just discrimination. Nonetheless, this marvelous text with all its uniqueness plainly asserts with decided emphasis that Jesus is discriminating in His prayers, that is, He tells us in unmistakable terms that He does not pray for all people. Instead, He prays for the Father's elect people only.

Our Lord uses the "not-but" way of speaking to put His teaching out in the bright light of day. There is nothing dark, shadowy, or uncertain about it. Jesus is the mediator of an elect people, the people the Father chose and gave to our Lord so that He would give them life in fellowship with God. Accordingly, let us consider the "not" part of His praying first, then we can better see what the contrast "but" means (*it is not this, but it is that*). We can call this the negative side of His mediation and the positive side of His mediation.

#### 1B. The negative side of His mediation

He says, **I am not praying for the world** (17.9). In a word, this means that Jesus did not go to the cross as a sacrifice for the sins of every human being. This is a controversial point for many people so we need to support it. Some comments on the meaning of prayer, the notion of world, and the implication of the negative are pieces of the puzzle that give us the full picture.

##### 1) Meaning of "pray for"

We might think that praying for someone means to make petitions to God for that person's benefit. That is true, but it is not the whole truth. In this context, it means to intercede on behalf of through sacrifice; the intercession includes prayer and sacrifice; prayerful sacrifice, literal self-sacrificing prayer. It helps to think in terms of intercession, which has two aspects: one aspect is offering up sacrifice to God in prayer (offering up sacrifice prayerfully); the other aspect is offering up petitions to God in prayer (offering up petitions prayerfully). Consider why this is the case.

##### a) Context here of the hour that has come defines this prayer

In the beginning of His prayer, Jesus spoke of this unique hour that is the hour of His death on the cross (**Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you**, 17.1). As He clearly indicated earlier in John, the grain of wheat must die as the way to much fruit (cf. Jn. 12.23-24). He offers Himself to the hour in prayer, offering Himself as the sacrifice.

##### b) Bond of intercession with a sin offering in Isaiah 53 defines this prayer

We are surely on safe ground to get perspective on John 17 from Isaiah 53 since both passages deal with the saving death of Christ. Consequently, the last verse is particularly helpful in defining prayer as priestly offering of sacrifice. **Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors** (53.12). The “offering” He makes for sin (Isa. 53.10) involves the pouring out of His soul in death, bearing the sin of many, and making intercession for transgressors.

Therefore, “to pray for” means that Jesus presented Himself to God as an offering for sin by giving Himself over to death. Thus, “praying for” is priestly intercession. It refers to the death of Christ (His dying for sinners) because His prayer is a priestly offering.

2) Notion of “world” helps us explain the negative side of the Lord’s mediation

As we shall see, the use of the word *world* in this chapter challenges our understanding in a number of ways. Nevertheless, for the moment, it should cause us no problems to define world as the fallen human family steeped in sin and bound for just judgment (cf. Jn. 3.19; 16.8-11).

3) Implication of the negative

Now let us assemble the puzzle thus far. Jesus teaches that He does not go to the cross offering Himself as the sacrifice *par excellence* for the fallen world, for the sons of Adam and Eve in the fall and thus as the corrupt, sinful, unbelieving, rebellious, willful, and God-hating world. In short, He tells us that He does not offer Himself in death “for,” He does not “die for” the fallen world steeped in sin and bound for judgment.

We can round off the implication of the negative by drawing it together with the positive. The positive indicates that He does die on the cross as a priestly sacrifice for *some* fallen sinners, as we shall see. So here, we can finalize by saying that Jesus does not die on the cross for all sinners. His atonement is not universal. In scope, the death of Christ is not “for” or “on behalf of” all people in the fallen world. However, it does take in some; to that astounding truth, we now turn for discussion of the positive side of His mediation.

2B. The positive side of His mediation

If Jesus does not pray for the world (if He does not offer His life on the cross for the world), but He does pray for some people, then we should want to pin down the positive side of His mediation more closely.

Here in John 17.1-3, He tells us that this hour of His death secures the fruit of eternal life for the people the Father gave to Him. **Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, <sup>2</sup>since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. <sup>3</sup>And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.** To pray for, or make intercession for someone is to die on the cross for him to make it certain that he receives a saving knowledge of God in order to possess eternal life. For short, to pray for people means to intercede savingly for them by offering a sacrifice for them.

Moreover, Jesus prays for His church (the new covenant people) represented by the apostles as the nucleus of the church, as the church in nuclear form. We have to conclude that Jesus prays in this dual way (for His church represented in His disciples; for *all* disciples represented in *the* disciples) because of the overlap between praying for the apostles (for them) as people God gave to Jesus and praying for all believers down through the ages (for us) as people God gave to Jesus. Thus, “I pray for them” as given ones (17.9) primarily refers to the apostles, but not exclusively, because the “given ones” include all who will come to faith through the apostolic witness. Those who will believe (17.20) are also people God gave to Christ (17.24, **Father, I desire that they also [those who will believe], whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory**). They are also people for whom Jesus prays this high priestly prayer (17.20, I... **ask...also for those who will believe in me through their word**). He intercedes for both, for His church.

By negative-positive contrast, Jesus is extremely clear in revealing the fact that He is the mediator of the Father’s chosen people exclusively.

2A. Jesus is the covenantally faithful mediator of the Father’s elect (v. 9d-11abc)

Why is He discriminating in His prayers? Why is Jesus the mediator of the Father's elect and not for other equally fallen sinners in the human family? This is a fair question and it cries out for a solid answer. Pointedly, the answer is that He prays in accord with the covenant He has with the Father. He is obedient and He keeps covenant (He is covenantally faithful) even in His prayers, and especially in this prayer of high priestly offering. Because of His covenant faithfulness, He prays for the Father's elect people. He makes this clear for us to hear and know by John's remembering.

...for they are yours. <sup>10</sup>All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. <sup>11</sup>And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you (17.9d-11abc).

The word "for" (v. 9) shows that Jesus is explaining why He prays only for the church represented by the apostles. He gives three reasons: the mutuality of covenant ownership, the glory of covenant execution, and the love of covenant fulfillment.

#### 1B. The mutuality of covenant ownership (17.9d-10a)

Thus, even though the Father gave His elect people to Christ, our Lord makes sure we know that they still belong to the Father (**for they are yours**, 9d). The Father can give them to Christ while they remain His because of the mutuality of the covenant relationship, which exists between the Lord Jesus and the Father, as He says, **All mine are yours, and yours are mine** (10a). Clearly, whatever belongs to Christ belongs to the Father and whatever belongs to the Father belongs to Christ. We have here a little glimpse into the eternal covenant of redemption. This is the *pactum salutis*, which is the pact of salvation because the primary reference in what belongs to each member of the trinity is to persons. All the people that belong to Jesus by God's gift in the covenant agreement from times eternal are the same people that belong to God by His electing love, as Jesus stated earlier in the prayer (**Yours they were, and you gave them to me** 17.6). An extraordinary ownership binds the people of God to the Father and the Son. Accordingly, the Father planned the redemption that Christ secured and the Spirit applies. Each member of the trinity participates in the planning, securing, and applying, but they have distinct roles to fill per the covenant agreement that binds the elect to God forever. Hence, by praying exclusively for the elect, Jesus is being a covenantally faithful mediator. These thoughts bring us to another reason as to why Jesus prays distinctively and exclusively for the Father's elect people.

#### 2B. The glory of covenant execution (17.10b)

Jesus says, "**and I am glorified in them.**" In other words, when He petitions the hour of sacrifice, He does so in the language of glorification, as He did in 17.1: **Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.** Therefore, He prays for them *exclusively* because His death on their behalf is the way that He will receive glorification *according to the covenant stipulations*. Thus, the offering of His life in sacrifice is an expression of His covenant faithfulness. This sacrifice is the God-appointed way of glorification. The depth of humiliation is the backside of the height of glorification. He prays this way in faithfulness to the eternal covenant.

#### 3B. The love of covenant fulfillment

Love is part of the picture here. It comes in view when Jesus speaks of His return to the Father: **And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you** (17.11). The first phrase (I am no longer in the world) speaks of anticipation in a unique way. By these words, Jesus, in effect, leaps forward beyond His death and resurrection to His exaltation at the Father's right hand: "I have finished my work on earth, the sacrifice has been made, I am no longer on earth, I am on the heavenly throne as Sabbath king." In the light of that certainty, He says to the Father, **I am coming to you.** He expresses the absolute certainty of His glorification, but He mentions it in conjunction with the fact that His departure from the world means that His disciples are in the world without His presence among them physically and thus without His care of them directly (**but they are in the world, 17.11b**).

Pointedly, then, why does Jesus pray exclusively for His church (for all His disciples represented in the apostles)? He prays exclusively for them and all in the time between because

we must remain in the world until all the details of the covenant come to fulfillment. We must face tribulation in the world. He does not pray for the world but exclusively for us because the world opposes Him and us. His praying for us (by both sacrifice and petition) is an expression of loving concern for us in this state of things while He is away in body but present with us by the Spirit. Love is therefore right at the heart of our Lord's covenant faithfulness as our great high priest.

### Conclusion

Jesus is the mediator of the Father's elect and He is covenantally faithful in fulfilling His role as mediator. Of supreme importance is the fact that Jesus is faithful to the Father in His work as our mediator. Therefore, His faithfulness is covenant faithfulness. This fact shows us that the special relationship of love between the members of the triune God is what overflows in our salvation. He loves us; He loves us with an eternal love.

**To Him be all glory both now and forevermore, amen.**

What shall we then say to these things?

#### 1) I need Him

Without His faithful covenant mediation, I would still be lost in the world; I am undone; I am a willful sinner. I need the praying high priest who fulfilled the covenant of grace with perfect obedience, even in His prayers, to save sinners. O, Lord Jesus, I need you.

#### 2) I own Him

This is the further step of appropriation. Here you partake of His body and blood symbolically. Thus, you own Him as your very own; you commit yourself to live under His sovereign authority as your mediator, and you do so gladly because of His abounding love. Thus, in prayer you may say, O Lord Jesus, I cling to you in awe of the fact that you mediate in my behalf in bringing the eternal covenant of redemption to realization in history, in my personal history. O Lord, I commit myself gladly to you as my great high priest.

#### 3) I own His family

How can you love as Christ loves? How can you apply His covenantally faithful mediation to your life before Him? You can discriminate as He did by giving special priority to the people of God in your doing of good deeds:

**Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. <sup>3</sup>For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. <sup>4</sup>But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. <sup>5</sup>For each will have to bear his own load. <sup>6</sup>One who is taught the word must share all good things with the one who teaches. <sup>7</sup>Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. <sup>8</sup>For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. <sup>9</sup>And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. <sup>10</sup>So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith (Gal. 6:2-10).**

One way to do this is to pray for each other in intercessory prayer. Pray for one another in one another's love. Then show your love in loving kindness and joyful fellowship.

This too becomes a prayer in the very partaking and from deep within your hearts. You can each personalize this sense of family by the prayer: O Lord Jesus I own your family as my family; help me to love them as you love me, help me to love them in an edifying way in my prayers for them. Lord Jesus, cause me to be a blessing to my neighbor; cause me to do good to my neighbors however I can, whether they are near or far. Enable me to be a blessing especially to the household of faith, to my brothers and sisters in Christ.

With these reminders in our heads and these prayers in our hearts, let us eat and drink of the benefits the risen Lord secured for us in the supreme sacrifice of His body and blood as our covenantally faithful and loving mediator.