

WHAT IS CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR YOU?

17 ⁶I revealed your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; they were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that whatever you have given me comes from you. ⁸The words you gave me I have given them, they received them and know for certain that I have come forth from you, and they believed that you sent me. ⁹I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰All that is mine is yours, and all that is yours is mine; and I am glorified in them.

¹¹I will no longer remain in the world; they are in the world, but I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name—[the name] you gave me—so that they may be one just as we [are one]. ¹²While I was with them, I kept them in your name that you gave me. I guarded them, and not one of them perished, except the son of perdition, so that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³Now I am coming to you; but I ask these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have within them the fullness of my joy. ¹⁴I have given them your word and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. ¹⁵I am not asking that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world.

¹⁷Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. ¹⁹For their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be truly sanctified.

²⁰I am not only praying for these men, but also for those who believe in me through their word. ²¹[My prayer is] that they may all be one—just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us; so that the world may believe that you sent me. ²²The glory that you gave me I have given them; so that they may be one, just as we are one—²³I in them and you in me. May they be brought into perfect unity; so that the world may know that you sent me and [that you] love them just as you loved me.

²⁴Father, I desire that those whom you have given me may also be with me where I am, so that they may see my glory—[the glory] you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. ²⁵O righteous Father, the world did not know you, but I knew you; and these men knew that you sent me. ²⁶I made your name known to them, and I will make it known; so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I may be in them. (Jn. 17:6-26)

Introduction

There are some days when you wonder if you can carry on in your Christian life—you encounter what seems to be overwhelming spiritual opposition, more than you can bear. You find yourself thinking, “I can’t stand any more of the ridicule, the peer pressure, the ostracism, the loneliness, the pain.”

There are many days when you wonder if you will ever make any progress in your Christian life—your sins seem to cling to you like fly paper, and it seems to be impossible to set them aside. You find yourself thinking, “I lost my temper again! I

enjoyed exchanging juicy gossip again! I entertained lustful thoughts again! Will I ever change?"

Yes, there are some days when you wonder if you can carry on in your Christian life; and there are many days when you wonder if you will ever make any progress in your Christian life.

Our Lord knew that His disciples—both those original disciples as well as all of His disciples throughout the ages—would face especially hard times and frustrating times. That is why He uttered this prayer to His Father in an audible manner—He did so for our sake, so that we might be aware of His concern for the well being of His church, and of each individual believer who is a part of His church.

Jesus knew that in a little while, (less than a day,) He would be back in His Father's presence; note verse 13, "*Now I am coming to you.*" But despite the fact that in so short a time He will be in the Father's immediate presence, Jesus feels compelled to speak these words of intercession **now**, while He is still in the world, and to speak these words of intercession audibly in the hearing of His disciples.

Why does our Lord do so? One reason is so that we, His disciples, may know of His concern for us and the content of the intercession He makes on our behalf. Our Lord makes known to us the prayer He offers to the Father in order that we may be assured of His concern for His church, and for each one of us personally as members of His church.

I. Be Assured that Christ is Praying for Your Preservation

In verse 11a our Lord states the reason for the request He is about to make: "*I will no longer remain in the world; they are in the world, but I am coming to you.*" In a very short time Jesus will no longer be in the world, no longer physically present to guide and keep those whom the Father has entrusted to Him, those whom He dearly loves. But His disciples shall continue to remain in the world; in the world that hates Christ and those who belong to Him, as Jesus forewarned His disciples: "*If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. ¹⁹If you belonged to the world, the world would love its own; but because you do not belong to the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you*" (Jn. 15:18-19.) Although He was about to return to the Father, His disciples shall continue to remain in the world; in the world that is under the control of the evil one, as the Apostle John indicates: "*We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one*" (1 Jn. 5:19.)

Now follows Christ's request: "*Holy Father, keep them in your name—[the name] you gave me—so that they may be one just as we [are one]*" (vs. 11c.) God the Father sent Christ into the world to reveal His Name—i.e.; present a full revelation of Himself, as the Apostle John declares at the very outset of his gospel: "*No man has seen God at any time; the one and only Son, who is in the bosom of the*

Father, he has made him known" (Jn. 1:18.) That revelation of the Father is communicated not only by our Lord's teaching, but by His own person as the eternal Son of God; He declares to His disciples, "*He who has seen me, has seen the Father*" (Jn. 14:9.) By the grace of God, the disciples have received this revelation; they have come to know God and His Son, Jesus Christ, as our Lord testifies later in His prayer:

I revealed your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; they were yours and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷Now they know that whatever you have given me comes from you. ⁸The words you gave me I have given them, they received them and know for certain that I have come forth from you, and they believed that you sent me. (Jn. 17:6-8)

Now it is our Lord's request that the Father will keep His disciples in this saving relationship: "*Holy Father, keep them in your name—[the name] you gave me—so that they may be one just as we [are one].*" Our Lord's request is that there be a unity, a cohesiveness, among His disciples; a unity like that which exists between God the Father and God the Son. Furthermore, He is asking that the Father will insure this unity by keeping His disciples in that spiritual relationship they have with the Father through their faith in Jesus Christ His Son. Note 1 John 1:3, where the Apostle John speaks of this spiritual fellowship and unity: "*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.*"

Jesus' request is made in the light of His testimony recorded in Matthew 26:31. On the evening of the Last Supper, Jesus declared to His disciples, "*This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written, I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.*" Again, in John 16:32, He warned His disciples, "*Listen, the hour is coming, in fact it has come, when you shall be scattered, each one to his own home, and shall forsake me.*" There had been contemporary, pseudo-messianic movements that had ended in fragmentation and had come to nothing:

... a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ... addressed them, Men of Israel, ... ³⁶Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. (Acts 5:34-37)

Jesus is now requesting His Father to protect His disciples so that the same thing will not happen to them. We might paraphrase His request as follows: "Father, those whom You have given Me are about to be shaken and scattered. But, Father, please see to it that this scattering does not result in apostasy. Father,

cause the relationship they have with Us to be preserved—cause that relationship to bind them to Yourself and to one another.”

In verse 12 Jesus testifies that during the days of His earthly ministry He kept His disciples in that relationship with God and with one another. He guarded His disciples from the devil. Consequently, not one of them perished, (except Judas, the one who was appointed to perdition.) Now it is our Lord’s prayer that the Father would continue to carry on the work that Christ Himself performed during the time of His earthly ministry; and that the Father would do this *“so that they may have within them the fullness of my joy.”* Jesus is intensely concerned that His Father should guard His disciples during this perilous time of trial—this time of His violent departure from them—so that they may participate with Him in the joy of His resurrection reunion. As verses 20-21 indicate, Jesus’ prayer extends to us as well: His prayer is that the Father shall preserve all of His disciples during this present New Testament period of trial so that we may all participate in the joy of Christ our Savior on the last great resurrection day.

According to verse 14, the urgency of Christ’s prayer is further intensified by the fact that His disciples must live in a world that is hostile to them, and in a world to which they no longer belong. As the Apostle Paul expresses it: *“far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I [have been crucified] to the world”* (Gal. 6:14.)

Note that although Christ our Savior is fully aware of the world’s enmity against His disciples and our own alienation from the world, He does not request the Father to remove us from the world: *“I am not asking that you would take them out of the world, but that you would keep them from the evil one”* (vs. 15.) We are to serve as salt and light to the world.

Our Lord’s request is that His Father would keep His disciples *“from the evil one.”* This does not mean that we will be exempt from all the devil’s attacks; but it does mean that our soul will be preserved in the midst of those attacks and we will be restored at the conclusion of those attacks. Consider the case of Peter. Peter deserted his Lord when he found himself exposed to demonic attack. When the officers of the Sanhedrin put Jesus under arrest, *“all the disciples deserted him and fled”* (Matt. 26:56.) Peter denied his Lord. When he was identified as being one of Jesus’ disciples, three times he denied it: *“He denied it ... with an oath, I do not know the man!”* (Matt. 26:76.) Peter’s denial was followed by godly sorrow: *“Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken, ‘Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times’. And he went outside and wept bitterly”* (Matt. 26:75.) Following His resurrection, Jesus sought Peter out and restored him. The disciples testified, *“The LORD has risen and has appeared to Simon”* (Lk. 24:34.) Following his restoration, and by means of the Holy Spirit, Peter exhibited renewed commitment to Christ, testifying before the Sanhedrin concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: *“Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers and*

elders of the people! ... ¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:8,12.)

By the Holy Spirit, and from his own experience, Peter gives this assurance to each one who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ:

“... after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will personally restore you, support you, strengthen you, and establish you. ¹¹To him belongs the dominion forever. Amen” (1 Pet. 5:10-11.)

All of this is due to Christ’s prayer of intercession, as we learn from His testimony recorded in Luke 22:31-32, *“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you like wheat. ³²But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”*

As a Christian, be assured that Christ prays for your preservation; and be assured that His Father will honor His request:

... the LORD is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. (2 Thess. 3:3)

Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to those who are called, loved by God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ. (Jude 1)

II. Be Assured that Christ is Praying for Your Sanctification

In verse 17a our Lord prays that the Father would *“sanctify”* His disciples. His request is that His disciples would be separated from what is profane and unholy, that they would be set apart for God, and that they would be made to be like God in His moral purity and holiness. With regard to those original disciples, our Lord’s immediate purpose in making this request was that they might fulfill their calling to be His apostles, as He indicates in verse 18, *“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸Just as you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.”* But, as this request encompasses all His disciples, (note verses 20-21,) our Lord has in mind the broader purpose, namely, that we might be holy unto God: shining with the divine light of God in a world of moral darkness, reflecting the divine purity of God unto His glory, and being made suitable to dwell with God in the divine holiness of His immediate presence and kingdom.

According to verse 17b, the instrument by which Christ’s disciples are sanctified is *“the truth.”* As the Christian comes into contact with the truth, the truth has a sanctifying influence on him: convicting him and purging him of sin; transforming him into the likeness of Christ his Savior. When the Christian comes into contact with the truth his life is progressively brought into conformity with the truth. According to verse 17b, the embodiment of the truth

is the Word of God. It is the Word of God that is the revelation of the truth of God; and it is the Word of God that has a powerful, life-changing, sanctifying effect upon the lives of God's children as it is employed by the Holy Spirit. Note the Psalmist's testimony:

The law of Jehovah is perfect, reviving the soul; the statutes of Jehovah are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of Jehovah are right, giving joy to the heart; the commandment of Jehovah is radiant, giving light to the eyes. (Psl. 19:7-8)

Verse 19 indicates that the disciples' sanctification is inseparably related to Christ's own sanctification. Our Lord's assertion, "*I sanctify myself,*" is a reference to His complete devotion and consecration to God His Father, culminating in His death upon the cross of Calvary. Our Lord further asserts, "*for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be truly sanctified.*" It is by Christ's consecration to God, and by our union with Him through faith, that we become consecrated (or, sanctified,) to God. Note the Apostle Paul's testimony: "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal. 2:20.)

The teaching of Scripture on this subject may be expressed as follows: At the moment of your conversion, your heart becomes sanctified—it becomes dead to sin and alive to God by virtue of your union with the Lord Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection; you become an alien in this world and a citizen of the kingdom of God. Then, throughout the remainder of your earthly life, the Holy Spirit carries on in your life the process of sanctification; the painstaking task of bringing your behavior increasingly into conformity with your new heart and identity as one who has become holy to God.

This, then, is what Christ is praying for His church as expressed in verses 17-19. Those who believe in Christ have become consecrated to God through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by virtue of our union with Him in His death and resurrection. Now Christ is praying that God His Father will carry on in us the work of sanctification, so that at the end we will be fully sanctified, fully consecrated to God in body as well as soul.

As a Christian, be assured that Christ is praying for your sanctification; and be assured that God His Father will honor His prayer:

May God himself, the God of peace, fully sanctify you—may your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thess. 5:23-24)

III. Be Assured that Christ is Praying for Your Glorification

Our Lord's final request is that all those whom the Father has given Him—all those who come to Him and trust in Him—should be with Him in His Father's kingdom to behold His glory (verse 24.)

To be present with Christ in His Father's kingdom, beholding His glory, requires that we, too, be glorified—a process that is even now being carried on: *"we ... viewing the glory of the LORD, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory"* (2 Cor. 3:18.)

As a Christian, be assured that Christ prays for your glorification—that you may be with Him in glory, beholding His glory and sharing in that divine glory; and be assured that the Father will honor His prayer.

... those whom God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)

Note that in Romans 8:29-30 the whole process of salvation is presented in the past tense as an accomplished fact. This is so because God in His faithfulness is determined and certain to bring to a completion the good work He has begun in those whom He has brought to His Son Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Christian, even though there are some days when you wonder if you can carry on in your Christian life; and even though there may be many days when you wonder if you will ever make any progress in your Christian life; we may be assured that our Lord Jesus Christ is praying for us. He is praying for your preservation. He is praying for your sanctification. He is praying for your glorification. We may also be fully assured that God His Father shall most certainly honor His prayer and grant His requests—to God be the glory!