

THE DISCIPLES IN THE WORLD

John 17:13-21

John 17:13-21 NAS:

¹³ *"But now I come to You (God)¹; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.*

¹⁴ *"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

¹⁵ *"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the **evil one.***

¹⁶ *"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

¹⁷ *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

¹⁸ *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

¹⁹ *"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

²⁰ *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;*

²¹ ***that they may all be one;** even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

A news release appeared not too long ago announcing that the World Council of Churches had suggested that leading scholars of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam be appointed to the teaching staffs of Christian universities and colleges, and that an appeal be made to Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic universities to develop programs in Christian studies to be taught by professors from Christian universities and colleges. Their reasoning for suggesting such action was based on the council's belief that divine truth is so rich and many-sided that only small amounts of truth are found in each faith. Therefore, it was their conclusion that if an individual became knowledgeable in all the world's belief systems, they would then discover more truth about God.

This was the kind of world that Jesus' apostles would find themselves in and Jesus wanted them to be protected from that kind of foolish false teaching. So He prayed to His Father for their protection as they served Him while in the world. And guess what? That is the same kind of world we live in today and we need the same protection the apostles needed. We are glad we can be confident that Jesus is still praying to the Father to protect

¹ Parentheses added.

His servants as they serve Him in this world. So let us take a closer look at exactly what Jesus was asking for the apostles who would soon be without Jesus' physical presence.

John 17:13 NAS:

¹³ *"But now I come to You (God)²; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.*

The world keeps looking for happiness, seeking it in all the wrong places. But happiness is fleeting. What people really crave, but do not always realize it, is joy. Joy comes from deep down and is more lasting than superficial happiness.

Jesus begins this section by revealing just how much He loves not only His apostles but also all those who in the future will come to faith as a result of their teaching which will be guided by the Holy Spirit representing both God the Father and Christ. Jesus came so that our lives might be filled with the same kind of joy He had in being one with the Father. I would imagine that after Jesus rose from His grave the apostles began putting two and two together and they realized the meaning of many of the things Jesus told them during their time together which they had not previously understood. They undoubtedly felt joy in knowing that Jesus had conquered death, overcome Satan, and brought eternal life to all believers. And I believe that Jesus felt joy in knowing that He had provided those things for people who would have otherwise been lost and condemned to an eternal Hell. That, by the way, is another truth which the world refuses to acknowledge. They do not want to accept the fact that there is a Hell, and so they don't. Such people are going to be in for the biggest shock of their lives one second after they die.

John 17:14 NAS:

¹⁴ *"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.*

The Word of God creates many problems for people who want to do things their own way. In fact, we would go so far as to say that the **Bible is counterculture**. What do you think the reaction of the television and studio audience might be if you were to be a guest on *The Tonight Show* and when asked a question by Jay Leno, you pulled out your Bible and read from chapter one of Isaiah in response? How about if you did the same thing in an interview with Barbara Walters on *The View*? Or perhaps you appeared before a congressional committee investigating same-sex-marriage and out came your Bible once again? You would be ridiculed, insulted, and possibly even threatened with physical violence.

Just a few days ago, the news showed the picture of a van that is driving around the country. The humanists are sponsoring it. The sign on the van reads: "Why believe in a god? Why not be good for goodness sake?" My response is that without God, there is no goodness.

² Parentheses added.

You see it runs counter to the culture you live in to imply that there is a God and that He is in control of everything that occurs in this world. It is counter to the culture to suggest that a person cannot provide for his or her own salvation and eternal life in Heaven. People do not want salvation to be a gift. They want it to be based on something they can do to earn it. They do not want to be indebted or have to depend on someone like Christ to provide it for them. The world would rather try to solve the global warming problem and determine how man was created and evolved rather than depend on God to have done it all. The real problem with the world, however, is that the most serious form of pollution exists in the heart.

As believers follow and share Jesus Christ together, all the things they once held to be of value before their faith in Christ, and all those things they believed they needed in order for people to respect them, no longer control them.

1 John 2:15-17 NAS:

¹⁵ *Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*

¹⁶ *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.*

¹⁷ *The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever.*

The faith and trust shown in the Lord by a believer makes the values held by the world to be nothing more than garbage.

Philippians 3:7-9 NLT:

⁷ *I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them **worthless** because of what Christ has done.*

⁸ *Yes, everything else is **worthless** when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as **garbage**, so that I could gain Christ*

⁹ *and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith.*

Therefore the world hates it when the pure Word of God exposes the world's foolish values.

John 3:20-21 NLT:

²⁰ *All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed.*

²¹ *But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that*

they are doing what God wants.”

Now moving back to John, we continue with:

John 17:15 NAS:

¹⁵ *"I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.*

God's plan was **not** to remove the apostles from danger and opposition (take them out of the world) but to preserve them in the midst of conflict. Though Jesus would soon be taken out of the world, His followers are to remain in it. Like Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 1-2; 4-6) and the saints in Caesar's household (Philippians 4:22), God intends for His followers to be witnesses to truth in the midst of satanic lies. Believers are in the world to teach God's truth. Satan, the evil one (Matthew 5:37; 1 John 5:19), as head of the world system, seeks to do everything possible to destroy believers (cf. Revelation 2:10; 12:10) but God's plan will win out. Christians must not take themselves out of the world but remain in meaningful contact with it, trusting in God's protection while they speak of the truth that God has taught them.³

God receives glory by keeping you and me in the world. One day He will take all of His living faithful out of the world when He Raptures the Church. At just the right time, God will take these people up to Heaven within the blink of an eye, bringing glory to Himself. But for the time being, God receives glory by keeping you and me in the world as His ambassadors, teachers, and preachers until the day we die and He calls us home to be with Him. Even now, however, many believers look forward to being free from the cares of this world and being with Christ in Heaven. Such a desire is more intense during times of persecution when believers are being imprisoned, tortured, and murdered. We cannot speak for you, but as for us, we look forward to the Rapture when we will all be taken home to be with Jesus. Listen to what Paul said:⁴

Philippians 1:20-24 NLT:

²⁰ *For I fully expect and hope that I will never be ashamed, but that I will continue to be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past. And I trust that my life will bring honor to Christ, whether I live or die.*

²¹ *For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.*

²² *But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better.*

²³ *I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.*

²⁴ *But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.*

³ Robert Jamieson, A.R. Fausset, David Brown, *A Commentary: Critical, Experimental, and Practical on the Old and New Testaments*, (Toledo, OH: Jerome B. Names & Co., 1884), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, under: "JOHN"

⁴ Ibid.

The apostles needed to be protected from the influence of evil as they witnessed. Otherwise their witness would have ceased to be pure. The reference in the last part of John 17:15 is to the evil one himself who would be against Christ's followers. (Matthew 6:13; 1 Peter 5:8).

It is important to emphasize here that Jesus does not pray that we should be taken out of the world. God gets glory by keeping you and me in the world today. We think of the Rapture as wonderful, and it will be. We think of the Rapture as bringing glory to God, and it will. But let us understand one thing: God gets glory by keeping you and me in the world. God gets the glory to the degree that you and I obey Him and let Him shine out through us.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could really learn this lesson? We cry and whimper because things are hard down here. Sure they are. Jesus said they would be hard, "*but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world*" (John 16:33). He also said in this same verse that in Him we can have peace.

We can get pretty weary of this world at times can we not? And the thought of being in Heaven with Jesus without a care or worry is rather appealing. However in John 17:15, Jesus prays that we should not be taken out of the world, but that we should be kept from the evil one, Satan. We ask you to stop and think about that for just a moment. Think about how tough life can be at times. Then think of how life might be if Jesus were not praying continuously to His Father that we be protected from the evil one. We have no way of knowing exactly how much despair we have been spared because of Jesus' prayers for us.⁵ That very knowledge can bring joy to our hearts.

John 17:16 NAS:

"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

As saved followers of Jesus, the disciples no longer lived their lives according to the lifestyles of the world that focused on evil, even though they lived in that world.

There is an old gospel song that we never hear anymore, which must have been inspired in part by this verse. It starts out,

"This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through;
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue."⁶

Truly, our values, lifestyle, and citizenship should be more compatible with heaven than with the secular culture around us. Yet, we must remember that we still exist in this culture so that we can witness to it and show God's glory in it.

John 17:17 NAS:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ "*This World Is Not My Home*" arranged by Albert E. Bromley, in *Youth Sings*, 1951.

¹⁷ *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*

Just as Jesus did not belong to the satanic world system ("*I am not of it,*" verse 14), so believers do not. They belong to the heavenly kingdom (Colossians 1:13) because of their new births (John 3:3). Jesus had prayed for protection for His disciples (17:11). Now another request for them was for their sanctification. Sanctify means "*set apart for special use.*" A believer is to be separated from the world's sin, its values, and its goals. The way to do this is by knowing God's truth, the truth is told to us by the Word, which is both personal and propositional. As the message about Jesus was heard, believed, and understood, the disciples' hearts and minds were captured. This change in their thinking resulted in changes in their living. The same is true of believers today. As they put God's Word into practice in their lives, they are sanctified, set apart for God, and changed in their living in order to honor God (cf. 15:3). God's message set the apostles apart from the world so that they would do His will, not Satan's.

We can serve Jesus only if we come to understand our Bibles from cover to cover, and then cooperate with the Holy Spirit to make the necessary changes in our lives. Then and only then can we live in accord with what the Bible teaches and commands.

John 17:18-19 NAS:

¹⁸ *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*

¹⁹ *"For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.*

Jesus is the model for every believer. He was in the world but He was not of the world (verses 14b, 16b). He was sent into the world on a mission by His Father. So believers are sent into the world on a mission by the Son. And that mission is to make the Father known (cf. 20:21). Each Christian should view himself as a missionary whose task is to communicate God's truth to others. The purpose of the death of Christ is to dedicate or separate believers to God and His program.

We have been sent out into the world to tell others about the truth we know regarding Jesus Christ. He sets Himself apart to be identified with us, and we ought to be identified with Him in this world.

To be sent into the world by Christ as the Father sent him is the highest privilege that anyone can be given.

John 17:20-21 NAS:

²⁰ *"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;*

²¹ *that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.*

Jesus also had you and me in mind when He prayed this prayer. So that even today, a couple thousand years later, we can be confident that He is praying before the Father for you and me.

This prayer was answered by the formation of the Church. Believers have the ability to be one with fellow believers as well as with Christ because the Church was created to be one body. Believers are one in Christ, for the Church is one body with Christ as its head. The minute any sinner trusts Christ they become part of the body of Christ. If believers would make that union obvious to the world, the world would be more impressed with Christ. Too often the world sees believers hating each other, which may well be one of the reasons they will not accept Christ.⁷

“That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they may be one in us” (verse 21). The indwelling Spirit of the Father and the Son is the one perfect bond of union. It unites all believers among themselves. Then this unity goes even higher and unites us with the Father and the Son.

Certainly, you have at some point met someone for the first time, perhaps a Christian from another country or culture. But you immediately sensed a kinship, a oneness, with that person. The Holy Spirit within you and the Holy Spirit within the other person binds you together. It unites you. That is an illustration of the principle in this verse. Unfortunately, this union is not readily apparent among Christ followers. The multiplicity of denominations and nit picking about certain practices or lesser points of doctrine that so frequently occurs does not show God’s glory to the world.

Admittedly, the divided church is in many ways a scandal. The cure, however, is not a single worldwide church. Jesus was not praying for the unity of a single worldwide church. Instead, He was praying for a unity of love, a unity of obedience to God and His Word, and a united commitment to His will.

All believers belong to the **one** body of Christ (1 Corinthians. 12:13) and their spiritual unity is to be made evident in the way they live. The unity Christ desires for His church is the same kind of unity the Son has with the Father. The Father did His works through the Son and the Son always did what pleased the Father (John 5:30; 8:29). This spiritual unity is to be patterned in the Church. Without union with Jesus and the Father (*“they . . . in Us”*), Christians can do nothing (John 15:5). The goal of Christians’ lives should be to do the Father’s will.

What is God talking to you about today? Is there friction between yourself and another Christian? If so, then it is important to go to that person and work things out. Do you find yourself critical of how other believers worship? If it is not an essential doctrinal issue then we are to acknowledge that different Christians may worship in different ways but it is the same God they are serving (1 Corinthians 12:4-6; Philippians 1:18).

⁷ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, ed., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1990), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 1112-1113.

If we would all be obedient and do things God's way, that joy and unity that Christ prayed to the Father for us would be so obvious and magnificent that it would be overwhelming. We would probably see a huge turning to Christ in this world.

Let us each examine our life and, with the Holy Spirit's help, live as God calls us to live.