

**John 17:13-26**  
**December 14, 2025**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

We are currently in Chapter 17, and what we see is Jesus praying over His disciples and praying for future believers. And one theme that appears is “unity.” Jesus prayed for “complete unity” for His believers, just as He and the Father are one. Jesus would not have prayed that unless He believed it was possible. So here’s the question:

Q: What do you think this “complete unity” looks like in the body of Christ? [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Jesus 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 Cor. 12:13) and our spiritual unity is to be manifest in the way we live. The unity Christ desires for His church is the same kind of unity the Son has with the Father.

I opened this morning with just one theme! But there are others to explore in this passage: Having the full measure of joy within us, or the tension of living in the world, but not being of the world, or sanctification...I hope you’re up for it! Let’s begin.

**BOOK:**

<sup>13</sup>“I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. <sup>14</sup>I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. <sup>15</sup>My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. <sup>16</sup>They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. <sup>17</sup>Sanctify (set apart for sacred use) them by the truth; your word is truth. <sup>18</sup>As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. <sup>19</sup>For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

**Jesus Prays for All Believers**

<sup>20</sup>“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup>that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. <sup>22</sup>I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: <sup>23</sup>I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. <sup>24</sup>“Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. <sup>25</sup>“Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. <sup>26</sup>I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

### **Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What stood out to you? What questions do you have? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about man? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you learn about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

### **LOOK:**

There is every reason why believers should love one another and live in unity. We trust the same Savior and share the same glory. We will one day enjoy the same heaven! We belong to the same Father and seek to do the same work, witnessing to a lost world that Jesus Christ alone saves from sin. We believe the same truth, even though we may have different views of minor doctrinal matters; and we follow the same example that Jesus set for His people, to live a holy life. Yes, believers do have their differences; but we have much more in common, and this should encourage us to love one another and promote true spiritual unity.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 370-372)*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

### **We Have His Word (John 17:13–19)**

“I have given them Thy Word” (John 17:14 and see v. 8). The Word of God is the gift of God to us. The Father gave the words to His Son (John 17:8), and the Son gave them to His disciples who, in turn, have passed them along to us as they were inspired by the Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21). The Word is divine in origin, a precious gift from heaven. We must never take God’s Word for granted, for those who are overcomers know the Word and how to use it in daily life.

How does the Word of God enable us to overcome the world? To begin with, *it gives us joy* (John 17:13); and this inward joy gives us the strength to overcome (Neh. 8:10). We commonly think of Jesus Christ as “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3), and indeed He was; but He was also a person of deep abiding joy. John 17:13 is the very heart of this prayer, *and its theme is joy!* Jesus had referred to His joy already (John 15:11) and had explained that joy comes by transformation and not substitution (John 16:20–22). Joy also comes from answered prayer (John

16:23–24). Now He made it clear that joy comes from the Word also. The believer does not find his joy in the world but in the Word. Like John the Baptist, we should rejoice greatly when we hear the Bridegroom’s voice! (John 3:29)

We must never picture Jesus going around with a long face and a melancholy disposition. He was a man of joy and He revealed that joy to others. His joy was not the fleeting levity of a sinful world but the abiding enjoyment of the Father and the Word. He did not depend on outward circumstances but on inward spiritual resources that were hidden from the world. This is the kind of joy He wants us to have, and we can have it through His Word. “Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16). “I have rejoiced in the way of Thy testimonies, as much as in all riches” (Ps. 119:14). “I rejoice at Thy word, as one that findeth great spoil” (Ps. 119:162).

The Word not only imparts the joy of the Lord, but it also *assures us of His love* (John 17:14). The world hates us, but we are able to confront this hatred with God’s own love, a love imparted to us by the Spirit through the Word. The world hates us because we do not belong to its system (John 15:18–19) and will not be conformed to its practices and standards (Rom. 12:2). The Word reveals to us what the world is really like; the Word exposes the world’s deceptions and dangerous devices.

The world competes for the Father’s love (1 John 2:15–17), but the Word of God enables us to enjoy the Father’s love. One of the first steps toward a worldly life is the neglect of the Word of God. D.L. Moody wrote in the front of his Bible, “This book will keep you from sin or sin will keep you from this book.” Just as the pillar of fire was darkness to the Egyptians but light to Israel, so God’s Word is our light in this dark world, but the world cannot understand the things of God (Ex. 14:20; 1 Cor. 2:12–16).

The Word of God not only brings us God’s joy and love, but it also imparts God’s power for holy living (John 17:15–17). The burden of our Lord’s prayer in John 17:6–12 was *security*, but here it is *sanctity*, practical holy living to the glory of God. We are *in* the world but not *of* the world, and we must not live *like* the world. Sometimes we think it would be easier if we were “out of the world,” but this is not true. Wherever we go, we take our own sinful self with us, and the powers of darkness will follow us. I have met people who have gone into “spiritual isolation” in order to become more holy, only to discover that it does not always work.

True sanctification (being set apart for God) comes through the ministry of the Word of God. “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3). When you were saved, you were set apart for God. As you grow in your faith, you are more and more experiencing sanctification. You love sin less and you love God more. You want to serve Him and be a blessing to others. All of this comes through the Word.

God’s truth has been given to us in three “editions”: His Word is truth (John 17:17); His Son is the truth (John 14:6); and His Spirit is the truth (1 John 5:6). We need all three if we are to experience true sanctification, a sanctification that touches every part of our inner person. With the mind, we *learn* God’s truth through the Word. With the heart, we *love* God’s truth, His Son.

With the will, we yield to the Spirit and *live* God's truth day by day. It takes all three for a balanced experience of sanctification.

It is not enough merely to study the Bible and learn a great deal of doctrinal truth. We must also love Jesus Christ more as we learn all that He is and all He has done for us. Learning and loving should lead to living, allowing the Spirit of God to enable us to obey His Word. This is how we glorify Him in this present evil world.

The Word gives us joy, love, and power to live a holy life. It also gives us what we need to serve Him as witnesses in this world (John 17:18–19). Sanctification is not for the purpose of selfish enjoyment or boasting; it is so that we might represent Christ in this world and win others to Him. Jesus set Himself apart for us, and now He has set us apart for Him. The Father sent Him into the world, and now He sends us into the world. We are people “under orders” and we had better obey! Jesus is now “set apart” in heaven, praying for us, that our witness will bear fruit as many repent of their sins and turn to the Lord.

How can we be overcome by the world when we have the Word of God to enlighten us, enable us, and encourage us?

### **We Share His Glory (John 17:20–26)**

Here our Lord focuses our attention on the future. He begins to pray for us who live today, for the whole church throughout all ages. He has already prayed about security and sanctity; now the burden of His prayer is *unity*. He is concerned that His people experience a spiritual unity that is like the oneness of the Father and the Son. Christians may belong to different fellowships, but they all belong to the Lord and to each other.

The disciples had often exhibited a spirit of selfishness, competition, and disunity; and this must have broken the Savior's heart. I wonder how He feels when He sees the condition of the church today! The Puritan preacher Thomas Brooks wrote: “Discord and division become no Christian. For wolves to worry the lambs is no wonder, but for one lamb to worry another, this is unnatural and monstrous.”

What is the basis for true Christian unity? The person and work of Jesus Christ and His glory (John 17:2–5). He has already given His glory to us, and He promises that we will further experience that glory when we get to heaven! All true believers have God's glory within, no matter what they may look like on the outside. Christian harmony is not based on the externals of the flesh but the internals and eternal of the Spirit in the inner person. We must look beyond the elements of our first birth—race, color, abilities, etc.—and build our fellowship on the essentials of our new birth.

We already possess His glory within (John 17:22, and note Rom. 8:29), and one day we shall behold His glory in heaven (John 17:24). As we grow in the Lord, the glory within begins to grow and to reveal itself in what we say and do and the way we say and do it. People do not see us and glorify us; they see the Lord and glorify Him (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:19–20).

One of the things that most impresses the world is the way Christians love each other and live together in harmony. It is this witness that our Lord wants in the world “that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me” (John 17:21). The lost world cannot see God, but they can see Christians; and what they see in us is what they will believe about God. If they see love and unity, they will believe that God is love. If they see hatred and division, they will reject the message of the Gospel.

Jesus has assured us that some will believe because of our witness (John 17:20), but we must make sure that our witness is true and loving. Some Christians are prosecuting attorneys and judges instead of faithful witnesses, and this only turns lost sinners away from the Savior.

There is every reason why believers should love one another and live in unity. We trust the same Savior and share the same glory. We will one day enjoy the same heaven! We belong to the same Father and seek to do the same work, witnessing to a lost world that Jesus Christ alone saves from sin. We believe the same truth, even though we may have different views of minor doctrinal matters; and we follow the same example that Jesus set for His people, to live a holy life. Yes, believers do have their differences; but we have much more in common, and this should encourage us to love one another and promote true spiritual unity.

I have often used John 17:24 as a text for funeral meditations. How do we know that Christians go to heaven? Because of the price that Jesus paid (1 Thes. 5:9–10), and the promise that Jesus made (John 14:1–6), and the prayer that Jesus prayed (John 17:24). The Father always answers His Son’s prayers, so we know that believers who die do go to heaven to behold the glory of God.

In John 17:25–26, there are no petitions. Jesus simply reported to His Father about the ministry in the world, and He made several declarations that are important to us. He declared that the world does not know the Father, but that we believers know Him because the Son has revealed the Father to us. The world certainly has many opportunities to get to know the Father, but it prefers to go on in blindness and hardness of heart. Our task as Christians is to bear witness to the lost world and share God’s saving message.

He also declares the importance of truth and love in the church. Believers know God’s name (nature) and even share in that divine nature. Jesus makes it clear that *truth* and *love* must go together (see Eph. 4:15). It has well been said that truth without love is brutality, but love without truth is hypocrisy. The mind grows by taking in truth, but the heart grows by giving out in love. Knowledge alone can lead to pride (1 Cor. 8:1), and love alone can lead to wrong decisions (see Phil. 1:9–10). Christian love must not be blind!

As you review this prayer, you see the spiritual priorities that were in the Savior’s heart: the glory of God; the sanctity of God’s people; the unity of the church; the ministry of sharing the Gospel with a lost world. We today would be wise to focus on these same priorities. One day, each of us will have to give an account of his or her ministry. It is a solemn thought that we shall stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ and give our “final report.”

I trust that we will be able to say, “I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do” (John 17:4).

**Blum, E. A. (1985). *John*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 332-334) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

17:13. The words of comfort spoken by Jesus (**I say these things**) to His disciples were of great benefit to them. Following His Passion, **they** would recall His words and experience **the full measure of His joy**. Joy came to them because they knew from His words that He had conquered the evil one and brought eternal life to them.

17:14. Jesus’ intercession for the disciples continued with a reminder of (a) their value and (b) their coming danger. They were valuable because they had received the Word of God: **I have given them Your Word** (cf. “I gave them the words You gave Me,” v. 8). They were in danger because the satanic **world** system **hated them**. It hated them because **they are not** a part of it. As believers share Jesus Christ, “Everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes, and the boasting of what he has and does” (1 John 2:16) loses its attractiveness. A believer’s commitment shows the world’s values to be trash or dung (cf. Phil. 3:8). Therefore, **the world** hates the exposure of its sham values (cf. John 3:20).

17:15. God’s plan was **not** to remove the disciples 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 (v. 11), His followers are to remain in it. Like Daniel in Babylon (Dan. 1–2; 4–6) and the saints in Caesar’s household (Phil. 4:22), God intends for His followers to be witnesses to truth in the midst of satanic falsehood. Satan, **the evil one** (cf. Matt. 5:37; 1 John 5:19), as head of the world system, seeks to do everything possible to destroy believers (cf. Rev. 2:10; 12:10) but God’s plan will prevail. Christians must not take themselves out of the world but remain in meaningful contact with it, trusting in God’s protection while they witness for Jesus.

17:16–17. Just as Jesus did not belong to the satanic world system (**I am not of it**; cf. v. 14), so believers do not. They belong to the heavenly kingdom (Col. 1:13) because of their new births (cf. John 3:3). Jesus had prayed for protection for His disciples (17:11). Now His second petition for them was for their sanctification. **Sanctify** means “set apart for special use.” A believer is to be distinct from the world’s sin, its values, and its goals.

The means of this sanctifying work is God’s **truth**. **The truth** is communicated in 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 appropriate God’s Word to 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.

17:18. Jesus is the model for every believer. He was in the world, but He was not of the world (vv. 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, to make the Father known (cf. 20:21). Inasmuch as Jesus' prayer for the disciples was not limited to the immediate apostles (cf. 17:20), this passage is similar to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Each Christian should view himself as a missionary whose task is to communicate God's truth to others.

17:19. For the benefit of the disciples, Jesus sanctified Himself. In what sense did Jesus need to **sanctify** Himself? Was He not already set apart to God and distinct from the world? Yes, but *this* sanctification refers to His being separated and dedicated to His *death*. And the purpose of His death was **that they too may be truly sanctified**. The words "truly sanctified" are literally "sanctified in truth." This probably means that God's truth is the means of sanctification (cf. comments on v. 17). The purpose of the death of Christ is to dedicate or separate believers to God and His program.

### 3. Jesus' intercession for future believers (17:20–26).

17:20. The final portion of Jesus' **prayer** (vv. 20–26) was for future believers who would come to Him **through** the **message** of the apostles. In the Church Age all Christians have come to Christ directly or indirectly through the apostles' witness. Jesus knew His mission would succeed. He would die and be raised, He would send forth the Spirit, the apostles would preach, people would be converted, and the church would be formed. As each high priest of Israel bore the names of the tribes before the presence of God in the tabernacle and the temple (cf. Ex. 28:9–12, 21–29), so now Jesus, the great High Priest, carried future believers into the holy presence of His heavenly Father (cf. Heb. 4:14–5:12; 7:24–8:2).

17:21. Jesus requested unity for future believers (cf. vv. 11, 22). This verse is a favorite of promoters of the present ecumenical movement. Admittedly the divided church is in many ways a scandal. The cure, however, is not institutional union. Jesus was not praying for the unity of a single, worldwide, ecumenical church in which doctrinal heresy would be maintained along with orthodoxy. 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. There are great differences between uniformity, union, and unity.

All believers belong to the **one** body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and their spiritual unity is to be manifest in the way they live. The unity Christ desires for His church is the same kind of unity the Son has with the Father: **just as You are in Me and I am in You** (cf. John 10:38; 17:11, 23). The Father did His works through the Son and the Son always did what pleased the Father (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 (15:5). The goal of their lives is to do the Father's will.

The disciples' union with Jesus as His body will result in people in **the world** believing in the Father: **that You have sent Me** (cf. 17:23).

17:22–23. **The glory** which Christ **gave** the church may refer to the glory of the Cross (cf. vv. 1–5). As the church received and pondered the significance of Jesus' atoning work, it would be united in God's purposes and redemptive plan. Again the union of Christians (**that they may be**

**one**) is likened to the unity the Son has with the Father (**as We are One**; cf. vv. 11, 21). This union is further linked by Christ's indwelling of believers (**I in them**).

The goal of the **unity** of believers with each other and with God is twofold: (a) that the world will believe in the Son's divine mission (**know that You sent Me**), and (b) that the world will sense that God's love for believers is deep, intimate, and lasting as is His love for His unique Son (cf. v. 26).

17:24. The communion and fellowship which disciples have with Jesus in this life will increase in eternity. The goal of a believer's salvation is future glorification which includes being with Jesus (cf. 14:3; Col. 3:4; 1 Thes. 4:17). Jesus' last testament and will (**I want, *thelō***) is that His disciples enter into (**see**) His **glory** (Heb. 2:10). This **glory** was what Jesus had from the **Father** and would again have (John 17:5). His testament was sealed by His death and resurrection. Since His will is identical to the Father's (4:34; 5:30; 6:38), it will certainly come to pass.

17:25–26. Jesus' prayer for believers ends with a call to the **Righteous Father**. The word translated "righteous" here does not occur often in John's Gospel (cf. 5:30; 7:24). Its significance here seems to be in Jesus' praise of the Father for His work of revelation (cf. Matt. 11:25–26). The Father is right (righteous) and the world is in the wrong (**the world does not know You**). Jesus has known, revealed (John 17:6), and glorified (v. 4) the Father, and so should Christians. The essence of God is love (1 John 4:8). Jesus made the Father and His love **known to** the world by His death. And the Father made known His love for the Son by raising Him to glory. Jesus' purpose in revealing the Father was that Christians would continue to grow in that love (**that the Father's love for the Son may be in them**) and to enjoy the personal presence of Jesus in their lives (**that I Myself may be in them**).

Jesus' petitions for believers are four: preservation (John 17:11), sanctification (v. 17), unity (vv. 11, 21–22), and participation in Jesus' glory (v. 24). This prayer is sure to be answered (cf. 11:42; 1 John 5:14).

**White, J. E. (1998). *John*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (pp. 485-486). Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

### **Praying for Disciples (17:13–19)**

Most of this portion of Jesus' prayer is devoted to the welfare of the disciples. Jesus prayed specifically for their protection in the area of unity (17:11), emphasizing again the importance of the unity of the body of Christ, the church. This is not organizational unity but interpersonal, relational unity. Jesus also prayed that they would be protected from the evil one, or Satan (17:15), who is more than active in the world and bitterly opposed to the things of God (1 John 5:19). Finally, Jesus prayed that God would sanctify them through the word of truth (17:17). Sanctification is the divine process whereby God molds us according to His holiness. It is the bringing to bear upon our lives the moral absolutes of the living God in such a way that they affect how we live and think. Sanctification and revelation are inextricably intertwined, for without God's revelatory word to our life the process of sanctification cannot begin.

### **Church's Unity (17:20–26)**

Here Jesus' prayer turns specifically to those who would come to believe through the disciples' message and testimony (17:20). Again, the theme is unity (17:21–23). Christians form the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13) and the household of faith (Eph. 2:19).

Some divisions and controversies are necessary and unavoidable. The purification of the church is as insistent a theme as the unity of the church. Jesus Himself said that He came not bearing peace but a sword. What He meant was that the truth of God can never be neutral, but it divides truth from that which is false by its very nature. Jesus' plea for unity has to do more with the petty controversies and bitter divisions that often plague relationships. The love that binds Christians together should overcome all such grievances, demonstrating to the world that the people of God are unique and unprecedented in their fellowship, drawing the nonbelieving world to faith in Christ.

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). John 17:13-26. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**

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