

ESV STUDY BIBLE NOTES

JOHN 17

17:1–26 In his final prayer, Jesus gives an account of his earthly mission to the Father who sent him. He prays, first for himself (vv. 1–5), then for his disciples (vv. 6–19), and finally for later believers (vv. 20–26).

17:1 Jesus **lifted up his eyes to heaven**, striking a customary posture in prayer (cf. Ps. 123:1; Mark 7:34; Luke 18:13). **the hour has come**. See notes on John 2:4; 7:30. The opening petition **glorify your Son** implies a claim to deity, since the OT affirms that God will not give his glory to another (e.g., Isa. 42:8; 48:11; on Jesus as the sent Son, see also John 3:16–18). As usual in John, God is glorified particularly through the cross of Christ.

17:2–3 **Eternal life** comes from knowing God and Jesus the sent Son (cf. 1:4; 5:26; 20:31). Knowing God is not confined to intellectual knowledge but entails living in fellowship with him. **That they know you** implies an intimate relationship that involves actually knowing God as a person. That God is the **only true God** is affirmed supremely in Deut. 6:4 (cf. John 5:44; 1 John 5:20). Jesus, in turn, is the “one-of-a-kind” Son sent by the Father (cf. John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18) and the only way to him (14:6).

17:2 The Father’s granting of **authority over all flesh** to Jesus (cf. 5:27) marks the start of a new era (cf. Isa. 9:6–7; Dan. 7:13–14; see also Matt. 11:27; 28:18). “All flesh” means the whole human race.

17:5 Jesus again claims that he existed **before the world existed** (or “before the world was”; cf. 1:1, 14; 3:13; 6:62; 8:58; 16:28; 17:24). This implies that the material universe is not eternal but was brought into being by God. Before that, nothing material existed. But God existed eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and here Jesus speaks of a sharing of glory between the Father and the Son prior to creation, implying that there was mutual giving of honor in the interpersonal relationships of the Trinity from all eternity.

17:6 Jesus’ revelation of God’s **name** entails making known the Father in his whole person, both his works and words (cf. 1:18; 8:19, 27; 10:38; 12:45; 14:9–11).

17:9 **Those whom you have given me** are those who have believed or who would come to believe in Christ (see vv. 2, 6, 12; also 6:37, 39; 10:29).

17:11 **I am no longer in the world**. See note on 16:28. **keep them**. Jesus asks that those who have been specially given to him will be kept to the end (i.e., preserved

from denying Christ). And since it is Jesus who intercedes for his disciples, his petition will most certainly be answered. The word “holy” in **Holy Father** echoes the assertion of God’s awesome purity as described in Lev. 11:44 (cf. Ps. 71:22; 111:9; Isa. 6:3); this is the only time in the NT that this form of address is used with reference to the first person of the Godhead. **that they may be one, even as we are one.** Jesus shows the kind of profound unity that should be the norm among genuine believers. As the following verses indicate (through John 17:26), this is to be a reflection of the unity that has existed eternally between the Father and the Son (v. 11), namely, the unity of a common mind and purpose, an unqualified mutual love, and a sustained comprehensive togetherness in mission, as revealed in the Father-Son relationship characterized by Jesus’ own ministry. Such unity is the result of Jesus’ active work of “keeping” (vv. 12, 15) and “guarding” (v. 12); it results in believers being filled with joy (v. 13; see also 3:29; 15:11; 16:24; 1 John 1:4); it is rooted in the truth of God’s word (John 17:14, 17, 20); it involves “sanctification,” that is, in the sense of consecration to serve (vv. 17, 19); it becomes a witness to the world so that “the world may believe” (v. 21); it is for the revelation of God’s glory (v. 24); and it results in the experience of the indwelling love of God and the presence of Christ (v. 26). The kind of unity that is central to Jesus’ high priestly prayer is not organizational but is an all-encompassing relational reality that binds believers together with each other and with their Lord—a unity that can be achieved only through the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although individual Christians, and the church in general, tend to fall short of the fullness of unity that the Lord intends, whenever such unity is even partially realized (never at the expense of truth or holiness; v. 17) the result will always be deep joy (v. 13), a persuasive witness to the world (vv. 21, 23), and a display of God’s glory (v. 22).

17:12 name. See note on 5:43. **fulfilled.** Even Judas’s betrayal took place in fulfillment of Scripture. The antecedent passage is primarily Ps. 41:9 (applied to Jesus in John 13:18; cf. note). Other Scriptures fulfilled through Judas are Ps. 69:25 and 109:8 (both are cited in Acts 1:20).

17:14 your word. Not the OT Scriptures, but Jesus’ own teachings, and more broadly, the whole of his life, which is the revelation of himself as the Word of God (1:1, 14). **the world has hated them.** See note on 15:19.

17:15 Even though God’s people in the midst of hardship may sometimes want to be taken **out of the world** (see Num. 11:15; 1 Kings 19:4; Jonah 4:3, 8), Jesus does **not ask** for that. The place of believers during this lifetime is not to withdraw from the world but to remain in the world and to influence it continually for good, as difficult as that may be. **keep them.** The central request of the prayer is repeated again (see

John 17:11). Jesus prays that his own will be guarded from the **evil one**, that is, Satan, who would attack them to destroy their lives and their ministries. But the Greek phrase *ek tou ponērou* can also mean “from evil” (see ESV footnote), since Greek nouns denoting abstract qualities often take a definite article, in which case it would be a prayer that their lives and ministries not be overcome by Satan or by any other kind of evil, and that they be kept from doing evil as well (see 1 John 5:19).

17:16 Those who believe in Christ **are not of the world**, meaning that they have an entirely different nature (see 3:3–8), including different heart desires, different fundamental goals, and ultimately a different God. The common saying that Christians are “in the world but not of the world” is not found exactly anywhere in Scripture, but the idea is true and is taken from 17:15–16.

17:17 Sanctify them. The sanctification of Christians is a lifelong process. It involves both a relational component (separation from participating in and being influenced by evil) and a moral component (growth in holiness or moral purity in attitudes, thoughts, and actions). This occurs **in the truth**, that is, as Christians believe, think, and live according to “the truth” in relation to God, themselves, and the world. This truth comprises the entire Bible, for Jesus says, **your word is truth**. The Greek word is surprisingly not an adjective (meaning “your word is *true*”) but a noun (*alētheia*, “truth”). This implies that God’s Word does not simply conform to some other external standard of “truth,” but that it is truth itself; that is, it embodies truth and it therefore is the standard of truth against which everything else must be tested and compared.

The High Priestly Prayer

The Father Gave the Son . . .

John 17

authority to give eternal life

v. 2

people out of this world

vv. 2, 6, 9, 24

work to accomplish

v. 4

words

v. 8

his name

vv. 11, 12

glory

vv. 22, 24

The Son Gives Believers . . . John 17

eternal life v. 2

the Father's word vv. 8, 14

manifestation of the Father's name vv. 6, 26

glory v. 22

The Son Asks the Father to . . . John 17

glorify him vv. 1, 5

keep believers in the Father's name v. 11

keep believers from the evil one v. 15

sanctify believers in the truth v. 17

make believers one v. 21

Jesus' Followers and the World John 17

they are sent into the world v. 18

they are in the world v. 11

they are not of the world v. 16

the world has hated them v. 14

their unity with each other and union with v. 21

God may cause the world to believe the

Father sent the Son

17:18 I have sent them into the world probably refers to the teaching that Jesus had just been giving to his disciples, teaching that assumed that they would remain in the world and minister to the world and bear fruit for the kingdom (see 13:16, 20, 35; 14:12–13, 26; 15:2, 5, 8, 16, 20, 27; 16:2, 8, 33), although Jesus would more formally declare that he is sending them in 20:21, and would repeat that commission at his ascension into heaven (Matt. 28:19–20; on the timing see also Acts 1:4, 8).

17:20–26 Jesus does not stop at praying for himself (vv. 1–5) and his disciples (vv. 6–19) but now prays for **those who will believe in me** in the future. Jesus’ concern is for his followers’ unity (vv. 21–23) and love (v. 26). The vision of a unified people of God has previously been expressed in 10:16 and 11:52. Believers’ unity results from being united in God (cf. 10:38; 14:10–11, 20, 23; 15:4–5). Once unified, they will be able to bear witness to the true identity of Jesus as the Sent One of God.

17:21 that they may all be one. Concerning the unity that Jesus prays for and that he intends for his own, see note on v. 11 (cf. v. 22). **In us** refers to spiritual union with God and also the personal fellowship resulting from that union.

17:22 Glory probably refers to the manifestation of the excellence of God’s entire character in Jesus’ life (see 1:14). Jesus has **given** this to all believers (see 17:20): his entire life revealed the glory of God and therefore he imparted it to his followers, and Christians now reflect God’s excellency in their own lives, in imitation of Christ.

17:23 The Father’s love for believers is comparable to his love for Jesus Christ.

17:24 The whole purpose of salvation is communicated in this verse. The foretaste of this is now, but the fullness of it lies beyond this present age. **See** represents the Greek word *theōreō*, “to observe with sustained attention,” and includes the idea of entering into and experiencing something. **You loved me before the foundation of the world** implies that love and interpersonal interaction among the members of the Trinity did not begin at any point in time but has existed eternally (cf. v. 5).

17:25 The OT teaches that God is **righteous** and just (e.g., Ps. 116:5; 119:137; Jer. 12:1). With Jesus’ betrayal and innocent suffering imminent, he affirms the righteousness of God his Father.

17:26 your name. See note on 5:43. The phrase **I in them** is filled with covenantal overtones (cf. 14:20; 17:23). After the giving of the law at Sinai, God came to dwell in the midst of Israel in the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34). As they moved toward the Promised

Land, God frequently assured his people that he was in their midst (Ex. 29:45–46; Deut. 7:21; 23:14).¹

¹ Crossway Bibles, [*The ESV Study Bible*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2058–2060.