

If I were to ask you, “What is the biggest problem with the Church today?” How would you answer?

I will tell you my answer: The problem is that the church is little different from the world.

In entertainment, in our measure of success, in chasing after celebrities, in our obsession with power,

In our self-centeredness, in our rebelliousness, in our immorality, in our market driven covetousness...

In all these things, we are little different from the world.

And when Christians are little different from the world, the world looks at us and thinks, “They’re no different.”

Do you know that Jesus Christ prays that you be set apart for Him in the world?

This should not surprise the reader of the Bible.

From beginning to end the Bible lays out the argument: God’s people are supposed to be different.

We are not supposed to be like the unbelieving peoples around us.

We are not to intermarry with them.

We are not to act like them.

We are not to worship their gods.

Jesus is not here inventing anything new when it comes to following the Lord.

He is only clarifying the teaching and praying for us that the Father would help us keep it.

Instantly, this is hard. It is a hard teaching.

Why? Well, you have only to observe people, in school, at work, on the internet, everywhere.

We do not like to be seen as different. We want to be included. We want people to like us. We like likes.

We want approval. We want affirmation.

We want to fit in and not look odd.

Oh, sure, we will, at times, present ourselves as different, rebels, edgy, unique, special, extraordinary.

But even this is an effort stand out, to be like something that people will admire and praise.

When I was in High School, I had a snarky friend who formed a “no friends club.” Many of us joined.

We don’t like being different.

There is an important word that appears three times in our passage this morning.

Once in verse 17, twice in verse 19. The word is sanctify or sanctified (past tense).

The ESV translates it “consecrate” in verse 19. I don’t know why. It is the same word.

What does it mean to be sanctified?

Literally it means to be made holy. But what does “holy” mean.

Holy means to be set apart for something.

“Sanctified” means to be made set apart, or to be set apart.

It means to be special, different.

In this context it means to be set apart for God, to be special, different for God.

And this word really does represent the impact of the entire passage. Look at it with me.

vs. 6 “gave Me out of the world.” = selected, picked out, a special gift from the Father to the Son.

I am not my own.

vss. 11-12 “keep them in Your name” = protected in the Name of the Lord. We bear His name.

vs. 13 “may have My joy” = not as the world gives... **John 14:27**

vss. 14, 16 “not of this world” = we still live here, for a while, but this place is not our home.

Our citizenship is elsewhere, in heaven. **John 18:36**

vs. 15 “keep them from the evil one” = protected from Satan. We see the deception and lure of evil.

vss. 17, 19 “sanctify them in the truth” = Where does the world find truth? Human judgment.

Where do we find truth? In ourselves? No. In the Word of the Lord.

vs. 18 “I also have sent them into the world.” = We have a mission that is not the world’s mission.

Our mission in this world is determined by Christ; it is His mission.

So, we are set apart, different, not for difference’s sake (to be a rebel, defined by what we are opposed to)

Nor are we set apart just for image or appearance, just trying to LOOK different (thought we will).

We are different in who we are, in all the most important ways.

We are different from the world system (culture, values, hopes, dreams, the use of power and money).

We are sanctified, set apart, different from the world... special for God and His purposes.

We are different in ownership.

We are different in name (identity).

We are different in where we find our home.

We are different in where we find our joy.

We are different in our relationship to evil.

We are different in where we find truth.

We are different in our mission.

In this prayer, Jesus prays for us to be different for His sake.

How do I know He is praying for us? Consider at the outset verse 20.

I. "Father, keep them from the evil in the world."

John 17:13-15

The request from Jesus to the Father shows up in verse 15, but the request has a context.

Jesus is praying. He is praying "these things... in the world" for a purpose, multiple purposes:

In verse 13 we see that Jesus is praying this "so that we would have His joy fulfilled in us."

Christ's joy in full measure! And true joy is not dependent upon circumstance.

First, Joy is intimately related to a mature knowledge of God's Word. **John 15:10-11, Psalm 119:14**

Second, Joy is dependent on an accurate view of God's sovereignty. **Philippians 1:12-20**

Third, joy is interrelated with peace and contentment. **Philippians 4:4-7**

In verse 14 we see that He is praying for those to whom He has given His word, the Scriptures.

We will get back to this when we look at verses 16-19.

In verse 14 we see that He is praying for those that the world hates.

Why does the world hate them? Because they are different, like Jesus.

In verse 15 we see that Jesus is not asking the Father to take us out of the world.

His prayer is not for us to be released from difficulties, pain, whatever is going on in the world.

Now in this context, for what is Jesus praying?

You can see it clearly in verse 15, "I ask You to keep them from the evil."

Most translations here read, "from the evil one." This is because evil here is a noun with a definite article.

Often that means that we are speaking of a definite thing or a person, but not always.

We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil." In Greek there is again the definite article.

Thus the NIV translates it, "Deliver us from the evil one." That's fine.

But both here in John 17 and in the Lord's prayer I think we are speaking of something broader.

Jesus is asking that we be kept from all the evil in the world, including the evil one, Satan.

In order to be set apart for God in this world, you and I need to be kept from evil.

This is why we pray in the Lord's prayer, "Deliver us from evil."

This is why Jesus is praying for us, "Father, keep them from evil."

Do you need to be kept from evil? I think so. I certainly do.

Maybe now more than ever it is obvious that the world, the Devil and his demons, and my own flesh...

All these are working hard to pull me away from Jesus.

And it often begins with the unimportant things, the little lies, the small sins.

I have seen many good seemingly Christian man and women fall pray to the evil that lurks in this world.

I've seen men get pulled into pornography, so it becomes an addiction. They can't get away.

I've seen women wanting attention become so sucked into social media that it wrecks their family.

I've seen bright young boys become so enamored with video games that a promising career is destroyed.

I've seen young ladies with bright futures get pulled into relationships with guys who ruin them.

Satan and His demons will present you with temptations of greed, lust, pride, anger, envy.

The evil will look innocent at first. Sin would not be tempting if it didn't look attractive.

But when you fall to the temptation, you can't get the demonic claws out. They don't want to let go.

We need help, you and me. We need God to keep us from evil.

II. “Father, sanctify them in the word that is the truth.”

John 17:16-19

We find Jesus’ next request in verse 17, but again, the request has a context.

Jesus is praying for those who are not of the world just as He is not of this world. (vs. 16)

Here Jesus prays, “Sanctify them in the truth.” (vs. 17)

And, in case we are wondering just what He means, “Your Word is truth.”

He is praying that you and I be set apart from the world in/with/by His Word, the Scriptures.

How does this work?

Well, how does the world system get its truth?

You find the arbiters of truth writing books, teaching at universities, experts on TV.

Everyone around us bows to these learned experts, psychologists, scientists, pollsters, professors.

Some people think that truth is what most people think and believe, as if truth is democratic.

Do we vote on truth? When my candidate is elected, does that make me right?

I found it sadly revealing when the Supreme Court in 2015 legalized gay marriage, public opinion changed.

People in the US actually thought that the decision of the Supreme Court made it right.

Sure, their decision made gay marriage legal. But the Supreme Court’s decision is not morally decisive.

Only God and what He says has that sort of authority.

What seems to be the measure of truth in this world? It comes down to this: human reason and opinion.

What else do we have? This world places human reason over the Bible itself.

But you and I are not this way. We are to be set apart.

We see the utter foolishness of testing the Bible’s reliability with human thoughts.

Sure, we understand that God has given us reason and intellect to study and understand what He says.

But our reason is not designed to decide whether what He says is true or not.

If the Bible is really from God, the Bible ought to be the foundation and measure of our thoughts.

Psalm 119:1-7, 9, 105, 130

2 Tim. 3:16-4:5

James 1:18-25

1 Peter 2:2-3

2 Peter 1:19-21

And the world will not appreciate this at all. **Revelation 6:9**

And the Bible sets our agenda in this world, and our agenda is vastly different from the world.

Consider verses 18-19.

Do you see, in the same manner that Jesus was sent into the world, He sends us.

How was it that Christ was sent into the world? And why?

Right away we realize that we are going to have to conduct ourselves differently, because Jesus did.

He was sent in humility, not in glory, not in privilege, not exercising ultimate cosmic power.

He came as a servant, to serve.

And this is revolutionary, different, God’s set apart way. **Matthew 10:16**

He came and laid aside His divine prerogative. He came and He died. **Philippians 2:3-8**

And He was sent to save sinners from hell... so therefore are we.

The world system will say to you, “Be quiet. Don’t talk about Jesus, about sin. Don’t offend people.”

But we are not of the world, so we will not listen to that. We have a mission. It is Christ’s mission.

You might think that you are small, old, feeble, or untalented, but God has you here for a reason.

Jesus is here praying that you will be a witness.

He has sent you into the world, not to be like the world, but to be His humble witness.

Maybe it seems that you can do little.

But you can serve people and you can speak about Jesus. You can speak the word of truth.

And it was about people who did that that they said in Acts,

“The people who have turned the world upside down have come here also.”

In Hebrews, those who were different and trusted God are called, “Men of whom the world was not worthy.”

III. “Father, make them one so the world will know that You sent Me.” John 17:20-26

Now in verse 20 Jesus makes it clear that He is praying for all of us as well.

This transforms the entire prayer.

Jesus is not only praying for His disciples that are there in the upper room with Him.

He is praying for everyone who believes through their witness. And here we are reading this!

And we find His third request in verse 21.

“that they may all be one...” = that you and I (believers, disciples) would all be one.

What does this mean? For surely you and I are different people, and we are definitely more than one.

Is this some weird eastern melding of the minds? Are we to be assimilated into one being? No.

The Bible gives us detailed pictures of unity:

Ephesians 4:1-16

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

This is not conformity, at least not to one another, but unity.

So, we are to be one like a body is one, but with different parts, yet with no division.

This is why divisiveness in the body (the Church) is so serious, and so bad.

1 Corinthians 1:10-13 they are acting immaturely.

1 Corinthians 11:17-18 When they get together, they fight and quarrel and act selfishly.

In John 17:11 Jesus prays, “that they may be one even as We are one.”

Therefore, our unity is because of Jesus’ unity with His Father. It is like the unity of the Father and the Son.

So, what is this unity like? Jesus with His Father?

John 17:1-5 It is a unity of glory... they share their glory, undiminished.

John 17:2 It is a unity of authority.

John 17:6-7 It is a unity of possession... all that the Father has is Christ’s.

John 17:8 It is a unity of understanding... truth.

John 17:9-19 It is a unity of holiness, separation, differentness from the world.

This unity is supposed to result in our unity, you and I in the body of Christ, in His church, in this church.

John 17:21 How can you be “in Christ” and me be “in Christ” if you and I are at odds with each other?

It cannot be!

And look at the intended result!!! “That the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Do you know what is one of the most effective kinds of evangelism? **John 13:34-35**

What is it that breaks up unity among people who are genuine Christians?

Why do we fight when we essentially believe the same thing? Ought to be working toward the same goals?

It is often the sin of pride. We want our way. We do not want to admit that we were wrong.

We want people to think that we are right. We are seeking our own glory! This is the bottom line.

But this errant pursuit is so very needless...

because Jesus has promised us His own glory which is better than any glory I could get for myself.

John 17:22 His glory He has given to us. His glory? John 1:14-18 Sure, the world cannot see it... yet.

It is the nature of His glory to be hidden (in its fullness) until He returns. But it is no less glorious!

Your glory (in Him) is largely hidden now, but it will be revealed then. **Romans 8:16-25**

So, do not be deceived into seeking your own glory now, as if that will be worth anything.

John 17:23-24 It is clear that Jesus wants you and I to be one so that we can live in His love now.

And Jesus wants everyone in this world to see it.

And so that we will eventually live in His love (with Him) forever.

Did you know that Jesus prays this for you? This is what He wants. **John 17:25-26**

Did you know that if you are not loving your fellow believers, you cannot be living in Christ?

1 John 2:3-11, 3:14-18

Sure they are different than you are. Good. Would you want to go to a church where everyone was the same?

God gives us different personalities, gifts, passions, ways of doing things for our good and for His glory.

Learning to love one another is what Christian maturity looks like.

And if we love each other, we have to treat others like we love them. After all, Jesus loves you!