

SPRING 2019 HOME FELLOWSHIP GROUP STUDY

# THE HOUR HAS COME

JOHN 13-17 | THE FAREWELL DISCOURSE

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## LESSON ONE

# Introduction

Imagine if you knew the hour of your death was soon approaching. What would you say to your loved ones? What wisdom or parting words would you wish to convey? Undoubtedly they would be words of substance, words of meaning. You would set aside the trivial and deal with what is most important. Here in John 13-17 we meet Jesus in that hour. When He finishes these words, He will walk out of the room, go across the brook of Kidron, enter the Garden, and be arrested by His accusers. This is indeed His last hour.

But this hour comes as no surprise to Jesus. From the beginning, everything in His life was leading to this point. Jesus came with a clear purpose. He took on flesh to save sinners. John speaks of this purpose in chapter 1:9-13.

*"The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."*

Nevertheless, Jesus does not head toward His death casually. Jesus has traveled around Galilee for three years teaching and performing miracles for Jew and Gentile alike. He has offered grace and hope to the weary sinner. But here and now, before heading to His death, He leaves the crowd and speaks with His precious disciples.

What awaits them in the coming hours will be confusing and frightening. They will think all is lost. They will look upon Christ on the cross and think Rome has won. They will desert Christ in His "moment of weakness," assuming God has abandoned them. But what Jesus offers in this farewell discourse is a clear message of hope. Though they might not understand it now, the coming hours will be the glorious finale of the long-awaited promise. It will soon be finished. But before He goes, Christ needs them to hear a few last words.

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# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

What common themes jump out at you at first glance?

Thinking of the church, how is this section an encouragement for the body of Christ today?

Is there any section of the discourse that you find hard to understand?

## LESSON TWO

# John 13:1-30

Jesus begins His farewell address in the most humbling and altogether outrageous manner possible. He picks up a towel, water, and basin and washes His disciples' feet. Even though foot washing has become a ceremonial event for the church to symbolize humility and service, at that moment in history it did not carry the same sense of love felt today. This was an incredibly humbling action for Jesus. Only slaves were permitted to wash the feet of another person. In fact, if you were a Jew you could not allow another Jew, even if they were a slave, to wash your feet. It was too demeaning even for a slave. The lowest of the low washes the feet of another person. Nothing is more humiliating than to scrub the bottom of another's foot. The disciples, and especially Peter, couldn't comprehend the thought of their Leader humbling Himself to this extent; however, we know that something is coming in Jesus' life that will outdo even this act of humiliation.

The act of foot washing is a symbol of what is to come. It is most definitely

beneath Jesus to wash the feet of a sinner, but so is taking on flesh. Nevertheless, this is why Christ came. The hour has come for His purpose to be accomplished. But before Jesus went to the cross, He desired for His disciples to experience for themselves what is about to happen. I wonder if the apostle Paul was thinking of this scene, in addition to the cross, when he wrote Philippians 2:5-11. In many respects we see from the disciples

the shock of Christ's humiliation clearer in this scene than we do at Calvary.

**The act of foot washing is a symbol of what is to come.**

We can also see Christ's role as Priest clearly presented in this moment. The only way we can be clean is if Jesus cleanses us. But honestly, everything inside of me agrees with Peter. I want to cleanse myself. I don't want to admit that I am dirty; and if I am, I'll take care of it myself. Jesus is foreshadowing what

is going to happen on the Cross. It is only through His blood that we can be cleansed from our sins. Why does Jesus not permit anyone else to take the job of foot washing? For the simple fact that unless Jesus washes us we cannot be clean. No person can stand in His place. He is our everlasting Priest and perfect sacrifice.

As we're studying through Jesus' farewell discourse, keep in mind Ezekiel 36:25-27. It's fascinating how these sections of scripture follow the same pattern of thought. As we move forward we'll get to the other details listed in that passage, but notice that they both begin with the concept of cleansing. Everything that follows with the disciples is due to us being cleansed by the blood of Christ. Without His sacrifice, we are left hopeless. Without His sacrifice, we cannot be His "little children."

Do you think Jesus washed the feet of Judas? The passage certainly makes it seem that way. The "son of destruction," which Judas will soon be referred to as, experienced this ceremony with the rest of Jesus' disciples. Jesus could have reversed the actions, sending Judas away and then washing His disciples' feet. But He did not. Judas saw the

clear picture of Christ's love and grace and was unmoved. He departs the room with a resolve to betray Jesus. The hour of the cross is quickly arriving!

### Consider the words of R. C. Sproul:

The stage was fully set. Satan had prepared Judas for his role as Jesus' betrayer. Meanwhile, Jesus was aware of who He was, the incarnate Son of God, and of what He was about to do. In this context, Jesus rose from the table and took off His garments. In the modern context, it would be as if a man took off his suit coat, his tie, T-shirt, and his trousers. Then Jesus put on a loincloth. In short, he assumed the garb of a slave...

Liberal theologians of the nineteenth century and the "death of God" theologians of the twentieth century looked at this passage and said it referred to Christ stripping Himself of His deity when He came to earth, setting aside His divine attributes. The great Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield opposed that view on the basis that God is immutable, so Jesus could not have laid aside His deity when He became incarnate. It was not His *deity* but His *dignity* that Jesus laid aside. He emptied Himself of the glory that He enjoyed with His Father from all eternity. He laid aside His prerogatives as the second person of the Trinity. For the sake of His people, He descended from glory to lay down His life.<sup>1</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

What does it look like if you're trying to cleanse yourself from your sins?

How should we apply the illustration of Christ washing His disciples' feet.? Are we called to simply mimic His actions by following the code: "What would Jesus do?" Consider Philippians 2:1-11 in your discussion.

Why are we not as offended as the disciples when we see Jesus washing feet? Is it due to a lack of cultural understanding of that time? Or have we misunderstood what He's actually doing in that moment?

## LESSON THREE

# John 13:31-38

In this passage, we again see Jesus talking with His disciples during this last supper. Judas has just left the building to go betray Jesus, leaving the rest alone with their Master. In a few short hours, He will be in the hands of His accusers heading towards Calvary. It is now time for Jesus to speak openly about what lies before Him and His followers. Judas was the last barrier to the impending "hour." The time has come for Jesus to speak of His coming glory. But consider what this moment of "glory" will look like. It's easy to assume that glory means bright light, magnificent splendor, or some awesome display of power. But the "glory" displayed here looks far different. Glorification in the Gospels has always taken a different form than what is first expected. Carson says, "Even in the Prologue, the glorification of the incarnate Word occurs not in a spectacular display of blinding light but in the matrix of human existence (John 1:14). Now, bringing to a climax a theme developed throughout this Gospel, the Evangelist makes it clear that the supreme

moment of divine self-disclosure, the greatest moment of displayed glory, was in the shame of the cross.”<sup>2</sup>

Can you imagine what the disciples thought was about to happen? What they assumed this moment of Glory was going to look like? They had just experienced the Triumphal Entry in John 12:9-19. It would seem that the tides have turned and Jesus is now rising in popularity. I'm sure they had visions of grandeur—far from the realities they would soon be experiencing on Calvary. But Christ was speaking about a far greater glory. He would soon be accomplishing the very reason He came to earth—reconciliation. Looking back on this moment in history, the writer of Hebrews pens the glorious words of Hebrews 8:1-13. Christ has glorified God by accomplishing all that was required of the first Adam and reconciled to Himself this fallen world.

Consider also how Jesus addresses His disciples as “little children,” and how this term draws in the ideas of reconciliation and adoption. Now that they are part of the family of God, Jesus gives His “children” a clear command. This command is horizontal in nature: “love one another.” But this command is only possible due to their change in vertical relationship with God.

The simplicity of this command is shocking and surprisingly complex. It's simple enough for a young child to easily memorize and recite the words, but profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice. “Love one another; just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another,” is very straightforward. Standing opposed to the complexity of the Law, this new (simple) commandment is broad enough to encompass its complexity, yet specific enough to encapsulate the Law.

It's rather sad that Jesus has to command us to love. It should be innate in humanity because we are made in the image of God. And, as 1 John 4:7-8 declares, “God is love.” But Jesus knows He must begin at the beginning and tell us how we should respond to the love we receive from Him. This command hits at the heart of the gospel.

Carson writes,

It is not just that the standard is Christ and his love; more, it is a command designed to reflect the relationship of love that exists between the Father and the Son, designed to bring about amongst the members of the nascent messianic community the kind of unity that characterizes Jesus and his Father. The new command is therefore not only the obligation of the new covenant community to respond to the God who has loved them and redeemed them by the oblation of his Son, and their response to his gracious election which constituted them his people, it is a privilege which, rightly lived out, proclaims the true God before a watching world. <sup>3</sup>

It's also clear that the disciples did not understand what Jesus was talking about at this moment. Peter was concerned more about where Jesus was going without him. He glossed past this life-changing command and went straight to an "I'm never leaving" speech. But Jesus reassures Peter that his faithfulness will not last. In the end, even the most devoted disciple will be found inadequate. As we read in the Gospel account, the

**...this new (simple) commandment is broad enough to encompass its complexity, yet specific enough to encapsulate the Law.**

good intentions in the Upper Room disappear once they reach a dark garden filled with a hostile mob. I'm just glad that His offering of love is not dependent on our offering of love. If that were the case, we'd all be lost.

## Consider the words of Calvin:

*A new commandment I give you.* To the consolation he adds an exhortation, *that they should love one another*; as if he had said, "Yet while I am absent from you in body, testify, by mutual love, that I have not taught you in vain; let this be your constant study, your chief meditation." Why does he call it *a new commandment*? All are not agreed on this point. There are some who suppose the reason to be, that, while the injunction formerly contained in the Law about brotherly love was literal and external, Christ wrote it anew by his Spirit on the hearts of believers. Thus, according to them, the Law is *new*, because he publishes it in a *new* manner, that it may have full vigor. But that is, in my opinion, far-fetched, and at variance with Christ's meaning. The exposition given by others is, that, though the Law directs us to the exercise of *love*, still, because in it the doctrine of brotherly love is encumbered by many ceremonies and appendages, it is not so clearly exhibited; but, on the other hand, that perfection in *love* is laid down in the Gospel without any shadows. For my own part, though I do not absolutely reject this interpretation, I consider what Christ said to be more simple; for we know that laws are more carefully observed at the commencement, but they gradually slip out of the remembrance of men, till at length they become obsolete. In order to impress more deeply, therefore, on the minds of his disciples the doctrine of brotherly love, Christ recommends it on the ground of novelty; as if he had said, "I wish you continually to remember this commandment, as if it had been a law but lately made." <sup>4</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

Looking ahead to all the topics Jesus will cover (His death, glory, the Holy Spirit, persecution), why do you think Jesus first gave the command to “love one another”?

Jesus said, “just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” What example did Jesus set for how we are to love one another? How can we misuse Jesus as an example?

What does the fulfillment of this commandment look like today in our church?

What does the fulfillment of this commandment look like in our Home Fellowship Group?

## LESSON FOUR

# John 14:1-14

The twelve disciples have been following Jesus for three years. They crossed the Sea of Galilee many times, traveled in Jewish and Gentile territory, cities and wilderness, boats and grain fields. Everywhere Jesus went, they followed. Now, suddenly, they are told Jesus is going someplace they can't yet go. It's surprising to say the least. I would dare say even downright frightening. I'm sure they were thinking, "We've gone everywhere else with you, don't leave us stranded now."

But we know Jesus is talking about His death and ascension into heaven. He is heading for the agony of the cross, a moment that is understandably frightening (Jesus has already said He is troubled in heart (12:27) and spirit (13:21), and we know from the gospel of Matthew (26:36-46) that Jesus will soon be in the garden and will declare His "soul is very sorrowful, even to death"). Jesus is now offering comfort to those around Him. His appeal is simple: "Believe in God; believe also in me." He is reminding His "little children" to trust in the work and timing of the Lord.

Jesus knows exactly what is going to happen. Now put yourself in the disciples' shoes and consider what they are about to go through. Their world is about to be turned on its head. Christ will die, rise again three days later, and finally ascend into heaven leaving His children alone ... or so they think.

The Upper Room discourse is preparing the disciples for what is about to happen. They will soon doubt everything they have been through. They will reconsider whether Jesus was just a good teacher, or even a crazy man. Whether He was the Son of God or just another false prophet. The unexplainable is about to happen. Jesus will die. In these last hours before the cross, Jesus is reminding them to hold fast to their confession, to what they have seen and know to be true, and to remember who Jesus is—"I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

The battle of the Christian life is to keep the faith. Not that you must remain faithful. But literally to keep believing that Christ is sufficient. There is so much in this world that causes us to doubt. So many times we wonder whether we're good enough to stand before the Lord. The prince of darkness is willing to use anything to get us to doubt whether we believe in the right thing. Jesus' appeal to His disciples still stands true today—keep trusting in God.

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## Consider the words of J. C. Ryle:

We have, first, in this passage a precious remedy against an old disease. That disease is trouble of heart. That remedy is faith.

Heart-trouble is the commonest thing in the world. No rank, or class, or condition is exempt from it. No bars, or bolts, or locks can keep it out. Partly from inward causes and partly from outward causes—partly from the body and partly from the mind—partly from what we love and partly from what we fear, the journey of life is full of trouble. Even the best of Christians have many bitter cups to drink between grace and glory. Even the holiest saints find the world a valley of tears.

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only sure medicine for troubled hearts. To believe more thoroughly, trust more entirely, rest more unreservedly, lay hold more firmly, lean back more completely—this is the prescription which our Master urges on the attention of all His disciples. No doubt the members of that little band which sat round the table at the last supper, had believed already. They had proved the reality of their faith by giving up everything for Christ's sake. Yet what does their Lord say to them here? Once more He presses on them the old lesson, the lesson with which they first began—"Believe! Believe more! Believe on Me!" (Isaiah. 26:3.)

Never let us forget that there are degrees in faith, and that there is a wide difference between weak and strong believers. The weakest faith is enough to give a man a saving interest in Christ, and ought not to be despised, but it will not give a man such inward comfort as a strong faith. Vagueness and dimness of perception are the defect of weak believers. They do not see clearly what they believe and why they believe. In such cases more faith is the one thing needed. Like Peter on the water, they need to look more steadily at Jesus, and less at the waves and wind. Is it not written, "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You"? (Isaiah. 26:3.)<sup>5</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

Why do we so struggle to trust in Christ's timing?

How can we look at the cross and have our faith, trust, and hope strengthened?

What causes you to lose hope and doubt God's faithfulness? How can the Body of Christ help when we doubt God's faithfulness and timing?

How do we practically deny our confession: Christ is "the way, and the truth, and the life"?

## LESSON FIVE

# John 14:15-31

Think back to the last section in the discourse. Jesus shared several details that caught the disciples by surprise. First, Jesus is leaving them. His time on this earth is quickly coming to an end. Second, Jesus proclaims that they will soon “do the works that I do” (12:12). And third, Jesus emphatically declares, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word” (14:23). Imagine the surprise and confusion these statements brought. “How can this be” was undoubtedly their main question. “This does not make any sense.” In those last two statements, Jesus refers to a power and ability they had never experienced before. In their minds, something didn’t add up.

It was now time for Jesus to reveal the third member of the Godhead to His disciples. The Holy Spirit will soon come and be the “Helper” for the Children of God. Also, remember, we have a better understanding today of what Jesus was talking about. We get to see the full story

revealed in Scripture. We know that the day of Pentecost, in Acts 2, is right around the corner. The third member of the Godhead will come and indwell the children of God and be made "visible." But for the disciples in the Upper Room, they are left trusting that this Helper will be sufficient.

The word "Helper" can also be translated "Advocate," which I believe illuminates what Jesus is saying in this passage. The children of God need help, support, care and encouragement in this difficult life. As we journey through the wilderness of this life, we need someone strengthening our souls. Just as Jesus has walked with the people, the Holy Spirit now indwells every believer to comfort our souls. Jesus declares, I will give you ANOTHER Helper. "Just as I was, so He will be." I'm not leaving you alone—He will be with you.

**Just as Jesus has walked with the people, the Holy Spirit now indwells every believer to comfort our souls.**

The Holy Spirit has been referred to as "the forgotten God" and this description is often true. It would seem in any good cessationist-leaning church, that the Holy Spirit has been pushed to the side (cessationism is the doctrine that spiritual gifts such as speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing ceased with the apostolic age). His work is done and now He is an ancient relic of times past. We clearly have a biased view of the Godhead. We spend much time reading on the attributes of God the Father, studying the life and works of God the Son, but when it comes to the Holy

Spirit we almost dismiss His presence altogether. From this passage and many others, Jesus clearly desires us to know that we are not alone. God is still here and working in our lives, albeit in a different form. Jesus left this Helper because He knew we would desperately need Him. Let's not neglect to acknowledge His presence.

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### **Consider the words of Calvin:**

Here it will be proper to point out the titles which the Scripture bestows on the Spirit, when it treats of the commencement and entire renewal of our salvation. First, he is called the "Spirit of adoption," because he is witness to us of the free favor with which God the Father embraced us in his well-beloved and only-begotten Son, so as to become our Fathers and give us boldness of access to him; nays he dictates the very words, so that we can boldly cry, "Abba, Father." For the same reason, he is said to have "sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts," because, as pilgrims in the world, and persons in a manner dead, he so quickens us from above as to assure us that our salvation is safe in the keeping of a faithful God. Hence, also, the Spirit is said to be "life because of righteousness." But since it is his secret irrigation that makes us bud forth and produce the fruits of righteousness, he is repeatedly described as water. Thus in Isaiah "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." Again, "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon

the dry ground." Corresponding to this are the words of our Savior, to which I lately referred, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." Sometimes, indeed, he receives this name from his energy in cleansing and purifying, as in Ezekiel, where the Lord promises, "Then will I sprinkle you with clean water, and ye shall be clean." As those sprinkled with the Spirit are restored to the full vigor of life, he hence obtains the names of "Oil" and "Unction." On the other hand, as he is constantly employed in subduing and destroying the vices of our concupiscence, and inflaming our hearts with the love of God and piety, he hence receives the name of Fire. In fine, he is described to us as a Fountain, whence all heavenly riches flow to us; or as the Hand by which God exerts his power, because by his divine inspiration he so breathes divine life into us, that we are no longer acted upon by ourselves, but ruled by his motion and agency, so that everything good in us is the fruit of his grace, while our own endowments without him are mere darkness of mind and perverseness of heart. Already, indeed, it has been clearly shown, that until our minds are intent on the Spirit, Christ is in a manner unemployed, because we view him coldly without us, and so at a distance from us. Now we know that he is of no avail save only to those to whom he is a head and the first-born among the brethren, to those, in fine, who are clothed with him. To this union alone it is owing that in regard to us, the Savior has not come in vain. To this is to be referred that sacred marriage, by which we become bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh, and so one with him, (Eph. 5:30), for it is by the Spirit alone that he unites himself to us. By the same grace and energy of the Spirit we become his members, so that he keeps us under him, and we in our turn possess him.<sup>6</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

It would seem that many Christians are afraid to acknowledge the active work of the Holy Spirit. Why do you think this is the case?

Many people feel as if they are fighting “the fight of the Christian life” alone. How can the Body of Christ offer us all comfort in this difficult life?

## LESSON SIX

# John 15:1-17

The relationship between the Father and the Son is frequently set forth in the Upper Room discourse as the paradigm for the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. We now see an analogy of a vine and branches to describe in greater detail our current relationship with Christ. Anyone in Christ has been grafted into His spiritual vine. The Father, as the divine Gardener, accomplishes the grafting. Christ, by His Word, cleanses us in order for us to be united with Him, and believers are commanded to abide in His vine.

Unfortunately the exhortation to "abide" has been frequently misunderstood. Often it is promoted as a mystical, almost indefinable, experience. In our attempts to describe what abiding with Christ means, we tend to make it sound like a necessary action for believers to fulfill our salvation. We hear "abide" and translate it "work hard to stay in Christ." But is that even possible? If it's up to us, can we work hard enough to stay in Christ? I'm afraid not!

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I'm afraid not!**

We are in the vine only through the actions of Christ. What He started, He promises to finish. He not only initiates the Christian life, but He has given us the Holy Spirit as the Sanctifier, Convictor, and Helper to ensure our preservation. Abiding in Christ is a continuous dependence on the vine. A constant reliance upon Him. It's remembering that life only comes from Christ, and living and believing

accordingly. Sinclair Ferguson offers a helpful summation:

In a nutshell, abiding in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections. In other words, our relationship to Christ is intimately connected to what we do with our Bibles! Then, of course, as Christ's Word dwells in us and the Spirit fills us, we will begin to pray in a way consistent with the will of God and discover the truth of our Lord's often misapplied promise: "You will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:7b).<sup>7</sup>

Another concept that is closely connected to this reality is union with Christ. Union with Christ is one of the central theological principles of the Christian faith. In fact, John Murray calls it "the central truth of the whole doctrine of salvation."<sup>8</sup> It can be seen all over the New Testament, although we often quickly gloss over the text. Its presence is typically indicated by the word "in." Now while this preposition is very simple, as Philip Ryken will explain, the implications are life changing.

Believers often are said to be in Christ: "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17). Sometimes this phrase passes by so rapidly that we may hardly notice, as in Paul's opening address to "the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi" (Phil. 1:1). But even such passing expressions are grounded in the deep spiritual truth of our faith-union with Jesus Christ. The reason we are called "saints in Christ" is because our true

and ultimate identity is found in Him: "you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).<sup>9</sup>

Paul in Galatians 2:20 speaks to this mysterious reality: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." In Christ my life is no longer my own.

**The best way for a plant to grow and mature is to cut away the disease or dead material. What looks like destruction is actually life-giving.**

Consider for a moment the horticultural action of pruning. The best way for a plant to grow and mature is to cut away the disease or dead material. What looks like destruction is actually life-giving. Now compare that with what we read in the passage. The divine Vinedresser loves us enough to cut away anything that is dead or diseased. Not for the purpose of total destruction, but so we can "bear much fruit." Amy Carmichael describes this picture well:

What prodigal waste it appears to be, to see scattered on the floor the bright green leaves and the bare stems bleeding in a hundred places, from the sharp steel, but with a tried and trusted husbandman, there is not a random stroke in it all, nothing cut away which it would not have been lost to keep and gain to lose.<sup>10</sup>

How sweet it is for believers to remember that every action, regardless of the momentary pain of a cut, has at the end a simple desire from the Lord "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

Jesus also offers a surprising twist in this section. The Master no longer calls us servants. Our status has been changed to "friend." What a declaration! "You are my friends." I'm

reminded of Proverbs 18:24, "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." There is something special about a true friend. They stay by your side regardless of circumstances. They are not there just to personally gain, but love out of true affection. They serve regardless if it's reciprocated. True friends are most clearly seen at the most inopportune moments, when a personal tragedy or failure has occurred. In those moments a true friend stands by our side in spite of the potential backlash. And bringing it back to the vine, a true friend always has your best interests in mind, even if it means they must "cut" in order for you to see the error of your ways.

### **Consider the words of Sinclair Ferguson:**

The Pruning Knife: Finally, we are called, as part of the abiding process, to submit to the pruning knife of God in the providences by which He cuts away all disloyalty and sometimes all that is unimportant, in order that we might remain in Christ all the more wholeheartedly.

In the horticultural world, pruning generally is done with a view to long-term fruitfulness. So with believers—the Father prunes the branches of the true vine in order that they may yield more fruit. Of course, there often seems to be an apparent randomness in His cutting, but there is never a wasted stroke—every cut is necessary for us to "bear more fruit" (John 15:2). In Christ, we are safe under the Father's pruning knife.

If we need any more encouragement to remain in Christ, we can find it in the reason Jesus gives for this teaching: "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).

Did Jesus mean that He said these things so that His disciples—and we with them—might receive joy from Him? Or did He mean that we will give Him joy?

Both, surely! For not only are we united to Him—He has determined that His joy and ours are now inseparable!<sup>11</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

We are so quick to assume that any bad thing happening to us is a curse from the Lord, or that He turned His back on us. Does this section of scripture make you rethink how you view discipline from the Lord?

If someone were to ask you what “abiding in Christ” looked like, what would you say? On that same note, what does “resting in Christ” look like?

Discuss the implication of Galatians 2:20 as a group. How does (or should) this declaration change how we live?

Do you view the Lord as a friend? Do you think the Lord is on your side? How can the Gospel offer hope that we have a friend in Christ?

## LESSON SEVEN

# John 15:18-27

We shouldn't be surprised when persecution comes. We are grafted into the "Vine," and when the vine is attacked the branches feel the effects. The world hated Christ, so they will also hate the children of Christ. This is nothing new in John's gospel. Jesus has been open about the offensiveness of His presence from the beginning. All the way back in John 3:19-21, we were informed about this hostility:

*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.*

The apostle Peter also reminds his readers of this reality:

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13)*

The reality of persecution is visible throughout church history. In this moment Christ is warning them what is to come. It is a gut check moment for the disciples—it's actually going to get worse.

But why is this the case? What is so offensive about Christ? Christians often wonder and even try to downplay the offensiveness of Christ and the church. But is it possible to completely remove the offense? Imagine someone walks into your room in the middle of the night and turns on a very bright light. Think how you would respond. If you're like me, you emphatically demand the light to be shut off. And probably not in the gentlest of tones either. You are accustomed to the darkness and desire it to stay that way. This world is in darkness and wants it to stay that way. But now that the "true light" (John 1:9-18) has come, this light has upset everyone's comfortable existence in darkness. John writes more about this in 1:9-18:

*The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,*

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*who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John bore witness about him, and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks before me, because he was before me.'") For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*

The light is offensive because it exposes the darkness. The world's natural reaction is to try to extinguish the light. Jesus is warning His children about what is coming. The world will try everything in its power to kill the light. They won't stop until it's out. No matter how hard we try, hatred for the light will always be present in this dark world.

The offensiveness of Christ's children is also based upon the position that believers formerly held. We were once allies and partners of darkness. Christ chose us out of the world and adopted us and indwelt us with His Light. As former rebels of darkness, we are not likely to prove popular with those who persist in the rebellion against the light. As Carson writes, "Christ's followers will be hated by the same world. Partly because they are associated with the one who is supremely hated, and partly because, as they increase in the intimacy, love, obedience and fruitfulness depicted in the preceding verses, they will have the same effect on the world as their Master. They, too, will appear alien."<sup>12</sup>

This passage also opens up an interesting question: How should we be offensive to the world? To phrase it another way, what if we're never offensive to the world? Often

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believers expend a lot of energy trying to blend into the darkness in hopes of cloaking their transformation. But is that even possible? Few of us really like to stand out. And even fewer like to go against the crowd. How should we handle the difficult position of being "in the world but not of the world"? Notice that Jesus didn't really offer any "tips" here. He just didn't want them to be caught off-guard, warning them to buckle up for what's ahead.

### **Consider the words of R. C. Sproul:**

Nowadays there are all kinds of methods employed to attract new people into the church: big tent revival meetings, charismatic guest speakers, contemporary music bands, and even coffee bars. But the early church grew without any of these things, even in the midst of persecution.

Wherever you find God's people, you will find persecution to some degree. That should be of no surprise since Jesus already told us that it would happen. He also promised that blessedness would be pronounced on those who suffered for Him. Does the promise of blessedness apply to all suffering from all persecution? <sup>13</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

In what way is Christ's light offensive? What should the world find offensive in Christians and what should they not? How have you seen Christians going out of their way to be offensive?

Have you ever personally experienced persecution? If so, in what ways?

What does living "in the world but not of the world" mean, practically speaking? Does, or should, this description change based upon the region/culture you live in?

## LESSON EIGHT

# John 16:1-15

Jesus makes His reason for sharing these troubling words clear: I don't want you to be caught off-guard, or worse, doubt the power of God because of the persecution that is coming. Think about the book of Acts, and especially Saul/Paul's life. He is the living example of these words. At first he persecuted the church in order to "service God." Then, once the Lord redeemed his soul, he underwent the same persecution that he had once organized. But this persecution did not stop with the early church. There is a clear and present thread throughout church history of people, societies and governments trying to eliminate the message of Christ. At some times the persecution is "soft" and limited while at others it's extreme and widespread. But if we search hard enough we can always find the prince of darkness trying to undermine the message of Grace.

The first question of the Heidelberg Catechism comes to mind when reading this section of Scripture. It asks, "What is your only comfort in life and death?" The following answer closely echoes this section of John:

*That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from all the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father not a hair can fall from my head; indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by his Holy Spirit he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for him.*

**The Spirit will be with them working in their life and in the lives of those they come in contact with.**

With the absence of Jesus, the disciples will soon be looking for comfort, hope and understanding. Jesus reminds them once again they will not be alone. A Helper is coming. They will not be powerless and hopeless. The Spirit will be with them working in their life and in the lives of those they come in contact with.

But Jesus also adds another layer to the role of the Holy Spirit. Previously in chapter 14, Jesus emphasized the Spirit's work assuring believers of their Gospel hope. But now, we see the Spirit is also working to convict the world of sin and unrighteousness. We are not serving and working without support. In fact, without the Lord's convicting and transforming power, we are working in vain. We can rest knowing that the Holy Spirit is present and active as we wait for Christ's return.

## Consider the words of R. C. Sproul:

I have to tell you frankly that I am not certain what this passage means. That uncertainty frustrates me, because this passage is so crucial to this discussion. But Jesus' words here haven't stumped only me; biblical scholars have struggled with this statement for centuries. What was Jesus saying?

There are two main views that war against each other when it comes to interpreting this passage. The first holds that Jesus was talking about certain events that would follow from His resurrection...

The second main interpretation of this passage, which is the one I favor, holds that Jesus was referring to the work of the Holy Spirit in His ministry of applying the work of Christ to people in the world who sin without any real contrition. What drives the behavior of the world is morality of the world. The word morality comes from the concept of the mores of a social group, their behavioral patterns, and morality describes how people behave, what they do, their societal conventions, and so on. People aren't concerned about doing what is objectively right. Instead, that which is deemed to be right is whatever is acceptable to the culture. As far as these people are concerned, it doesn't matter what God says.

All of us, even the most pious Christians among us, are overwhelmingly influenced by the cultural customs and convictions of the societies in which we live. It starts in school, where popularity means "being with it," that is, being in line with the morality of the society, even if that morality includes things of which God does not approve. That's what our innate struggle with sin is all about. We listen every day to the voices of the culture around us that tell us what's politically correct and what isn't, what is socially acceptable and what isn't. Then, for a few minutes on Sunday morning, we

hear the law of God. We know they don't match up, but unless or until the Holy Spirit takes the law and pierces our souls with that and convicts us of sin, we don't really pay attention to it.

Real conversion is an experience of repentance and forgiveness before God. It is not merely praying a prayer, joining a Christian church, or receiving a sacrament. It is being brought to our knees by the conviction of God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit then convinces us of what true righteousness is and shows us we do not have it, so that we understand we need an alien [righteous], a righteousness that is not our own. The spirit exposes us; He strips us of our self-righteousness. He shows us the utter inadequacy of our own behavior to satisfy the demands of God and drives us to that redemption that was accomplished by Jesus. Then He brings us to a state of judgment. The Spirit forces us to face what societal convictions would have us avoid.<sup>14</sup>

## Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

How is the presence of the Holy Spirit a comfort?

In moments of evangelism it's easy to think it's all up to us to change a person's heart. How does our evangelism work with the understanding that the Holy Spirit is active in this world?

Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come." How does the Spirit operate in everyday life? What is the normative work of the Spirit?

## LESSON NINE

# John 16:16-33

It's common to hear Christians say "When I see the Lord I'm going to ask him such and such." It would seem we are each compiling a personal list of requests and questions for the Lord: "Why did this person die, why did I have this consistent struggle in my life, why did my family fall apart, why did my church fall apart? Why sin? Why sovereignty? Why destruction? Why loss? Why am I lacking (fill in the blank)?" The lists of questions can be endless. We live a hard life. We're surrounded by disappointments and injustices. These questions haunt us, but no matter how hard we search, we cannot see a clear answer. There are so many parts of life we want to see changed or justified. It's only reasonable to desire an explanation in The End.

**The Lord is not trying to cloak the struggle that is before His children. He is very clear that pain and struggle are coming, but so is glory.**

But notice what Jesus says in this first part of our section: "In that day you will ask nothing of me." Can you imagine that feeling? As intense as our pain, struggle, and even frustration is here and now, at the moment we see the Lord, all of that will simply drift away. It's not that God won't allow the questions, it is that when we see glory we're going to understand that it was worth it. Consider the illustration of childbirth. As painful as the experience of labor pains are, I've been told, the joy of holding your newborn baby in the end makes it worth it. The Lord is not trying to cloak the struggle that is before His children. He is very clear that pain and struggle are coming, but so is glory.

While this dichotomy between present struggle and future glory is seen throughout Scripture, I have personally found much encouragement from Paul in 2 Corinthians 4. The whole chapter is reassuring to read, but consider how Paul ends the section:

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the*

*things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (4:16-18)*

Christ desires us to be propelled through this life by the hope of Christ's return and glory of heaven.

Also notice that Christ encourages the disciples to ask the Lord for help here and now. Again, He's not leaving us alone. We have a Helper who will be serving and supporting Christ's followers. The Holy Spirit hears our cries and responds with comfort and action. Romans 8 is another great explanation of how the Holy Spirit comforts us during the "sufferings of this present time." Paul states in Romans 8:26-27, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." Just because we are not with Christ in bodily form, our access to the Father is no less. The Spirit is here encouraging and supporting believers as we wait for the Lord's return.

**Just because we are not with Christ in bodily form, our access to the Father is no less. The Spirit is here encouraging and supporting believers as we wait for the Lord's return.**

## Consider the words of Paul David Tripp:

You see, we're all homesick, but many of us don't know we're homesick because we're too busy giving ourselves to the impossible task of turning where we are into home, and many more of us don't know we're homesick because we simply don't know what home is like. Whether we know it or not, we long for home:

- Every sad moment in marriage is a longing for home.
- Every moment of hurt and concern as a parent is a longing for home.
- Every cry in the midst of loneliness is a longing for home.
- Every complaint in a moment of physical pain is a longing for home.
- Every loss of physical or mental vitality is a longing for home.
- Every frustration with corrupt government is a longing for home.
- Every urban fear in the dark of night is a longing for home.
- Every "if only" that interrupts our sleep is a longing for home.
- Every loss of a friend or family member is a longing for home.
- Every discouragement at the loss of a job is a longing for home.
- Every sadness at the failure of a pastor is a longing for home.
- Every disappointment with ourselves is a longing for home.
- Every frustration with a lost opportunity is a longing for home.

Every day we hit our heads against the reality that this is not our home—that it is, in fact, a far cry from what we long for home to be. <sup>15</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

Do you consider the realities of Heaven? How can or should heaven be an encouragement to Christians during our present existence?

Do you feel alone? How are the Holy Spirit and the Body of Christ support for believers as we traverse this sinful world?

With there being so many parts of life that we want to see changed or justified, how do the Holy Spirit and the Church help believers deal with life's frustrations now?

## LESSON TEN

# John 17:1-5

For the purpose of this study we are going to look at the High Priestly Prayer in three parts. Jesus prays for Himself (17:1-5), His disciples (17:6-19), and finally for the church (17:20-26). While it's always hard to make divisions to any prayer, it's clear that Jesus has three very specific themes in His prayer to God.

Read all of chapter 17, but this lesson focuses on 17:1-5.

The "Hour" had finally come. It was time for Jesus to accomplish His divine task. It is important to notice that a consistent theme throughout John is Jesus telling His followers "my hour has not yet come." Jesus was conscious of a very specific timeline. His "hour" or "the time" are a constant refrain throughout the gospel story. Jesus was waiting for something specific, but it's clear that

His disciples didn't understand what that was. However, Jesus did. From the beginning Jesus had a clear objective and clear timing. Consider Philippians 2:5-11.

*Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Here in Philippians, Paul described for us Christ's objective and timing after the fact. But in John 17, Christ is praying to the Father that the Hour has come. What had been planned out from the "foundation of the world" (Eph. 1) was now ready to be fulfilled in Christ. This points to the explicit purpose of Christ's coming to earth. Everything led up to this moment. Without His death, His ability to offer salvation would be lost. A Sacrifice was needed. And whether or not the disciples understood it at this point, everything in Jesus' life led up to the moment when He became our sacrifice.

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## Jesus has always been God. When He took on flesh He did not cease to be divine.

The main request in this section seems odd. Jesus is requesting that His glory be restored. It could appear that He was, at one point, no longer glorious, or "less than" God. But Jesus has always been God. When He took on flesh He did not cease to be divine. Rather, the "emptying" that took place with His descension to earth is soon to be reversed with His ascension. Consider what R.C. Sproul writes,

Jesus put aside the eternal glory that He had with the Father and made Himself of no reputation by taking on the form of a man and becoming a slave, obedient even unto death. There was no emptying of any divine attributes, but an emptying of prerogatives, an emptying of status, of exaltation, of glory, for the sake of redemption and for the sake of the ultimate glory of the Father. For these purposes, our Lord put aside His own glory for a season.<sup>16</sup>

Glory is coming soon, but it is coming in a very counterintuitive manner. Jesus will soon finish His prayer, walk out of the Upper Room, travel across the valley to the Mount of Olives and suffer betrayal and arrest. He is within hours of His death. He is praying for glory because He understands the cross is right around the corner. But Jesus does not view the cross as weakness or defeat. Quite the opposite! Jesus knows that through His sacrifice, He and God are glorified. D.A. Carson describes it best:

The petition asks the Father to reverse the self-emptying entailed in his incarnation and to restore him to the splendor that he shared with the Father before the world began. The cross and Jesus' ascension/exaltation are thus inseparable. The hideous profanity of Golgotha means nothing less than the Son's glorification. That Jesus should pray that the Father might glorify the Son is therefore also a moving expression of this willingness to obey the Father even unto death. <sup>17</sup>

The "Work" of Jesus' life is accomplished through His death. He came in order to die. We can only be "in Christ" through His death. But, there is something inside of us that wants to undervalue, or maybe altogether silence, the cross. It's easy to emphasize many parts of Jesus' life: His love, grace, feeling, mercy, care, power, etc. But it can be hard to view Jesus as ultimately a sacrificial Savior. As 1 Corinthians 1 declares, the world looks at that message as "foolish." But we know that it is the "power of God." We must look at everything in Jesus' life through that lens: the manger in light of the cross, His baptism in light of the cross, His miracles in light of the cross, His perfect life in light of the cross.

### **Consider what the writer of Hebrews has to say about the story of redemption in light of the Cross:**

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer,

sanctify for the purification of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant. For where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Therefore, not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment of the law had been declared by Moses to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God commanded for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

Thus, it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with

sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices, there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,

“Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body have you prepared for me;  
in burnt offerings and sin offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God,  
as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

It seems that in recent years, while Christians may joyfully talk about Christ's love, they may neglect to talk about the cross. Why is the cross an offensive topic to this world?

Christ knew that the cross was coming (consider His prayer in the garden). And while He knew that He would die at the hands of sinners, what gave Him the most anguish is what came from the hand of the Father. What was happening between Christ and God on the cross? Are there any implications that can encourage us today?

Hebrews says that Jesus "is the mediator of a new covenant." What has changed for us due to this New Covenant? What is different in relation to the Old Covenant?

## LESSON ELEVEN

# John 17:6-19

Throughout the Upper Room Discourse, we see the sweet and intimate connection between Christ and us. Those who are saved did not blindly stumble into their redemption. It wasn't luck, skill, or merit that allowed us to see and savor Christ. Rather, we were given to Christ for the exclusive purpose of redemption. Christ addresses this reality again in His prayer: "Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word." There is much wrapped up in this statement. We could focus on predestination or election. We could make a case for the Reformed doctrine of limited atonement. But I believe the best doctrine that captures the tone in this section is the doctrine of adoption.

To understand your salvation, you must see yourself as an orphan.

This needs to be our perspective because Christ sees us that way. We were “sons of disobedience,” “children of wrath,” and “dead in [our] trespasses and sins.” Before Christ conquered death we were in slavery to sin and death, powerless to do anything about it. But Christ came with the explicit purpose of freeing us from that bondage. As the first section of the prayer states, He took on flesh in order to die. Paul sums up our adoption well in Galatians 4:4-7, “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the Law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Our adoption in Christ greatly impacts our relationship with God. Consider the following truths:

- Our adoption gives us the privilege to call God Father. (John 1:12, Matt. 6:9-13)
- Our adoption gives us power over sin. (1 Cor. 15:56-57, Rom. 6:1-14)

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But Christ came  
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bondage.**

- Our adoption frees us from bondage and gives us a heavenly inheritance. (Eph. 1:3-6)
- Because of our adoption we are given the Holy Spirit as our helper. (Rom. 8:15-16)
- Our adoption is not dependent upon any of our works. (Gal. 3:23-26)
- Our adoption gives us hope of Christ's return. (1 John 3:1-3)

As Christ continues in His prayer, He asks the Lord for something very specific: "Holy Father, keep them in your name." The idea of "keeping" is nothing new. The priestly blessing of the Old Testament began with the words: "The Lord

bless you and keep you" (Num. 6:24). We are kept not just for today but also for eternity. In Christ there is never a time when we're not "kept." While He was on the earth, Jesus kept His children. But now, that responsibility is held in the hand of the Father and administered through the work of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of assurance, or perseverance of the saints, needs to be a constant reminder for believers. Those who are "in the world but not of the world" need to be reminded that Christ is holding them secure. It's natural to doubt the goodness and grace of God when you continually find yourself in the presence of sin. Here, in Christ's last hours, we are reminded that Christ is holding us fast.

**While He was on the earth, Jesus kept His children. But now, that responsibility is held in the hand of the Father and administered through the work of the Holy Spirit.**

## Consider the words of Burk Parsons:

Whether we want to admit it, we all struggle to overcome the world (John 16:33; 1 John 5:4), and we all struggle to enjoy the glorious freedoms we have in Christ (John 8:32). Many of our struggles exist because we do not fully understand that just as our salvation is a gift from God, so our perseverance is a gift from God. In our salvation, God blesses us with assurance through his gift of perseverance (2 Thessalonians 3:5). However, many Christians lack full assurance of their salvation because their understanding of assurance is founded on the constantly changing emotions of their hearts rather than on the eternal Word of God...

As Christians, we have not been left to our own devices "to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery," nor have we been left to figure out for ourselves all that God requires of us. We have been blessed with the wisdom and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ, for in him "are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). What is more, in his sovereign wisdom God provided us with his Word; by his sovereign grace he provided us with minds to comprehend the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in his Word; and as a loving Father, he provided us with hearts to love and obey his Word. We are a people who are identified as God's people because we are a people who are identified by his Word. We have been called to hide the Word in our hearts so that we might not sin against the Lord (Psalm 119:11), and we have been told to allow "the word of Christ [to] dwell in [us] richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in [our] hearts to God" (Colossians 3:16). The Word of God is not only true and it does not merely contain truth, it is truth; that is to say, it defines truth (John 17:17).<sup>18</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

Throughout this discourse, Jesus has pointed to His Word. Even here He prays “I have given them your word” and “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.” As believers, what should our relationship to the Word look like?

How does the doctrine of adoption impact our daily life in Christ?

Do you feel secure in Christ? Do you feel safe? How can we grow in our rest and assurance in the Lord? How can we help others around us who struggle to rest in Christ?

## LESSON TWELVE

# John 17:20-26

In the last section of Jesus' prayer, He turns his attention to us, those who would be brought to faith through the life and ministry of the disciples. How sweet is it to think that we were in the Lord's mind that night in the Upper Room. He knew His coming death would not only impact those disciples sitting with Him, but also the host of followers who would come after.

Notice that Jesus points our hope to The End. With the same goal that He has pointed His disciples towards along the way, Jesus reminds us to keep our eyes focused on heaven, to live our life looking forward to being in His presence. Jesus asks the Father, "I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am." Jesus desired not only that we be in Him but that we are with Him. There is no better place to be than with Christ. That is where His disciples wanted to be. This is why His disciples were so distraught thinking that Christ was

leaving them. This is why the Helper is so important, because He is our comfort in spite of the distance. Jesus' central prayer for us is that we also live with that same desire.

Another key aspect of Jesus' prayer is unity for His children. He prays, "just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us." Throughout Jesus' earthly ministry, He was always connected to His Father. He would step away from His disciples in order to pray and commune with God. At times it surprised the disciples to see Christ's action. However, we now see that in the same way we are connected to Christ and the Father. We are not alone. We have a supernatural connection with the Father and our fellow Christians. We might not be physically connected, or speak the same language. We might live in a different culture, or promote opposing political views, but there is a spiritual communion between the Body of Christ.

Look at the byproduct from this communion that Jesus immediately points to—"so that the world may believe that you have sent me." Our communion with the Father and the Church is used as a witness for the Father's glory. Peter speaks of this miraculous communion and supernatural evangelism in 1 Peter 2:9-12:

*But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*

It is clear from Scripture that we are not meant to live our Christian life alone. When we are saved, we are grafted into the magnificent Body of Christ. It is there that Christ leads us, encourages us, and supports us. Once again, He is taking us back to the idea

of the Vine. Our life in Christ is inseparably connected to the organism of the Body of Christ. In Christ you are never alone!

Another important reality present here is Christ's role as Intercessor. Jesus is praying on our behalf here in the Upper Room. But He does not stop praying and interceding for us after His earthly ministry. D.A. Carson notes, "Christ's intercessory ministry is most explicitly set forth in Hebrews 7:25. On the basis of his once-for-all cross work, and his own everlasting resurrection life, Christ lives perpetually to intercede for us. This is frequently referred to as Christ's high priestly ministry."<sup>19</sup> Jesus has not taken His eyes off of us. He has not ceased being our advocate. As Hebrews states, "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." (7:25)

### **Consider the words of Sinclair Ferguson:**

The Day of Atonement, when the high priest entered into the Holy of Holies to intercede for the people, was the most solemn point of the whole year for Old Testament believers. What would he pray? Would his intercession be accepted? Would he emerge again alive—would the people hear the gentle sound of the bells on his garments again? Every Jew surely would have given anything to have been able to overhear the voice of the high priestly intercessor. But no one ever did.

By contrast, Christians know the subject of the true High Priest's prayer—their vision of His glory: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24). Jesus has already promised them His peace (14:27; 16:33) and His joy (15:11; 16:22). Now He completes the picture: He asks the Father that they may see His glory.

Notice the stark contrast between this petition and the one Jesus offers in Gethsemane. There He is crushed under the dark vision of the cup He is to drink; here He prays in the light of His finished work (17:4). There He prays in the shadow of His impending experience of God-forsakenness; here He prays in the light of the Father's eternal love for Him (17:24).

What we are privileged to overhear, then, is an echo of the eternal fellowship between the Father and the Son. The Father loves the Son and shares His eternal glory with Him.

Glory is virtually the physical manifestation of all the perfections of God's being—His goodness, truth, faithfulness, righteousness, holiness, and wisdom. The Father and Son lived in perfect enjoyment of that glory, in unending mutual love “before the foundation of the world” (17:24). Now, our eternal, divine Lord, who ever dwells by the side of the Father (John 1:18), wants more than anything else in the world that we should see Him in this effulgent glory.

Why?

First, Jesus thinks of us as a love-gift from His Father (17:24). At this sacred moment, Jesus uses the description of His disciples that means most to Him. Christians are they “whom You gave Me.” He has nothing He counts more precious. Therefore, He wants us to be with Him forever.

Second, Jesus knows the grief the disciples will feel during His agony in Gethsemane and the humiliation of the cross. Likewise, He knows the pain we feel when people trample His blood underfoot and seek to crucify Him again, subjecting Him to public disgrace (Heb. 10:29; 6:6). So He wants us to see Him as He really is: the Lord enthroned in glory.

Third, Jesus wants us to know that His prayers for our salvation will be heard and answered. Because He asks only for what His Father has promised to give Him, He knows that His Father will not refuse Him. <sup>20</sup>

# Questions

Read the passage and lesson together and discuss the following questions as a group:

In what way can we make our relationship with God more ceremonial in nature than simply communing with Him?

What does it mean that Christ is continually interceding for us?  
What comfort does this bring to our everyday life?

Considering the discourse as a whole, how has your perspective of Christ changed over the course of this study?

# End Notes

- 1 R. C. Sproul, *John*, (Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), 241-242.
- 2 D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990), 482.
- 3 Carson, *John*, 485.
- 4 John Calvin, *Commentary on John, Volume 2*, from the Calvin Translation Society online edition. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/comment3/comm\\_vol35/htm/iii.vi.htm](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/comment3/comm_vol35/htm/iii.vi.htm), section 34.
- 5 J.C. Ryle, "I Go To Prepare a Place for You - John 14:1-3," *Monergism.com*. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.monergism.com/i-go-prepare-place-you-john-141-3](http://www.monergism.com/i-go-prepare-place-you-john-141-3)
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- 7 Sinclair Ferguson, "What Does It Mean to Abide in Christ?" *Ligonier Ministries*. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-abide-christ/](http://www.ligonier.org/blog/what-does-it-mean-abide-christ/)
- 8 John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2015), 161.
- 9 Philip Ryken, "Union With Christ: A Matter of Spiritual Life and Death," *Ligonier Ministries*. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.ligonier.org/blog/union-christ-matter-spiritual-life-and-death/](http://www.ligonier.org/blog/union-christ-matter-spiritual-life-and-death/)

- 10 Amy Carmichael, from "The Gardner," May 30, 2002. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.angelfire.com/ky/islander/300502devot.html](http://www.angelfire.com/ky/islander/300502devot.html)
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- 13 R.C. Sproul, "The Persecuted Church," *Ligonier Ministries*. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.ligonier.org/learn/series/persecuted\\_church/cost-discipleship/](http://www.ligonier.org/learn/series/persecuted_church/cost-discipleship/)
- 14 Sproul, *John*, 301-302.
- 15 Paul David Tripp, "Foreword," in *Home* by Elyse Fitzpatrick, (Minnesota: Bethany House, 2016), 11-12.
- 16 Sproul, *John*, 314.
- 17 Carson, *John*, 554.
- 18 Burk Parsons, *Assured by God: Living in the Fullness of God's Grace*, (P&R Publishing, 2011), Kindle Edition, locations 90-94; 114-120.
- 19 Gavin Ortlund, "Jesus Ever Lives Above, for You to Intercede," *The Gospel Coalition*, September 23, 2014. Accessed January 15, 2019. [www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-ever-lives-above-you-intercede/](http://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-ever-lives-above-you-intercede/)
- 20 Ferguson, *In Christ Alone*, locations 479-496.



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