

John 17: 20-26  
One Book, Many Opinions Part 4

This morning's message is the last of four that are meant to guide us in discerning the difference between Biblical truth and popular opinion. I pray they will be helpful in concluding that the Bible that is in our homes, our pews and on our phones is both trustworthy and true. The Scriptures are a divine gift that are completely sufficient to equip us to serve and walk with Jesus. They do not contain the word of God; they are the word of God. God also had a divine and wise plan to preserve those words for future generations. It would make no sense to have the writers of Scripture carefully and accurately record God's inspired words and not see fit to preserve them for future generations. There are no legitimate reasons to doubt that the scholarly translations of the Bible we have today are truthful and accurate expressions of the original manuscripts.

There are many other convincing reasons for followers of Jesus to have complete faith and unflinching trust in the Bible. Some of the most compelling are found in the Gospel of John, and we will finish this series by looking at one of the best. It is found in Jesus' prayer to God the Father before His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. Isn't it a blessing that we can know exactly how Jesus prayed? It is one thing to pray like Jesus taught His disciples to pray, but quite another to see and hear one of the most precious and personal conversations Jesus had with His Father. It takes up the entire 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel, and much like Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, it gives us great insight into the intimate and intricate relationship of God the Father and God the Son. It also speaks to the authority and inspiration of Scripture. It is divinely rich, filled with truth and grace, and it deserves much more than a few minutes of time in a Sunday morning sermon. If all goes as planned, we will revisit this powerful chapter in a three- part sermon series later this summer.

Today we will look at just a small portion of His passionate prayer of love. **It is humbling to consider that just a few hours before Jesus was crucified, folks like you and I were on His mind.** Yes, He prayed for Himself first. How could He not? **As we learned last week, we must care for our own soul before we can care for the souls of others.** Bearing the sins of millions required prayer that we cannot even begin to imagine. Yet even as He prayed for strength and for God's glory to be known through His death and resurrection, the church was on His mind.

## 17:20

The “these only” refers to His early disciples, the ones who followed Him for three years and learned at His side or those who had a personal encounter with Jesus, like the apostle Paul. **Earlier Jesus had asked God that they would be sanctified, which means set apart, in truth.**

## 17:17

Jesus prayed that His disciples would be distinctly set apart from the world by the truth, the word of God.

The “those who will believe in me” is a reference to people like you and I, those that became disciples even though they never physically saw or heard Jesus speak. Only God knows the number.

“Through their word” is a clear reference to the first-person testimonies of the early disciples, declarations which were carefully recorded and preserved in a book we now call the Bible. Jesus’ prayer was that the early disciples and the later disciples would be altogether one, just as Jesus and the Father are One. His prayer was for the church to be unified, and for the church to be sanctified, to become a unique people set apart and divided from the world by the truth. Is dying request was for holiness in the church.

## 17: 22-23

He prayed that we would be set apart from the world and in unity with each other, in unity with Him, in unity with His Father, and in unity with the truth, the Scriptures, the revealed word of God. **Jesus prayed that we would become a holy people, a sanctified church, so *that* the world will know that God sent Him into the world so *that* people might know that God loves them.** What does that kind of church look like?

**The sanctified church embraces the entire truth of the Scriptures**, it is a church that believes and obeys all the words of Jesus. It is a church that feeds the poor, clothes the naked, seeks the lost, and loves others like Jesus loves us no matter what they look like, where they come from or what they have done or haven't done. It is a church that forgives those who have wronged them, puts the needs of others ahead of its own, it is a church that would rather serve than be served. It is a church that desires and longs to know the truth, the whole truth, and become completely like the truth, so that the world can know the truth, the One we call Jesus.

A church that is not sanctified may also have unity, but in a much different way. It is one shallowly rooted in Scripture, a church that chooses to believe certain pieces and parts of it. It is self-centered, more concerned with the saved than the lost. It loves itself more than the unloved and maybe even loves itself more than it loves Jesus. It believes its best days were in the past or else hold grudges and dwells on the sins of the past while refusing to forgive those who may have caused harm. A church without sanctification is not really a church, but a group of individuals unified in an unholy desire to have their own way and further a particular agenda. That is not the church, but the world.

By its very nature, this holy book we call the Bible, a divine gift from God meant to unify and sanctify us, will cause great division. Division is nothing new. We need only turn to its pages to see that the problem lies not with the gift or the giver. Throughout the Scriptures there is a recurring pattern of obedience and disobedience among God's people, a theme of the horrible effects of sin being overcome by the beauty of God's redemptive grace.

One thing is certain, and that is when we believe it to be true, **the Bible helps us to become a holy people**, people set apart and sent into the world to show others how to love like Jesus loves. That is not mere human opinion but God's Gospel truth. However, **much prayer and study are required if we are to discern the difference between the two**. Nothing is more worthy of our time. As fallen people we may not agree on how to interpret everything God has revealed to us throughout those pages, but there is much in plain sight we must agree on for the sake of the lost.

Though he was not one of the Biblical prophets John Wesley was a devoted man of God and a prolific writer of truth. I leave you this morning with some words he wrote as he realized he was nearing the end of his earthly life: "I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. A few months hence, I am no more seen, I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing: the way to heaven. God himself has condescended to teach the way; He has written it down in a book. O give me that book- at any price give me that book"! Praise God, He has, He does and He will continue to give it to His people. Like Jesus, it is a gift of love. The only question is will we choose to accept it? I pray we will. Amen