

The Doctrines of Grace

As they appear in the High Priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17

The prayer of the Lord Jesus in John 17 is the most amazing piece of sacred literature the world has ever known. One can read it a thousand times and see fresh revelation every time. It is possible to draw up articles on many subjects based upon this prayer alone, so full is the information in it. If the Calvinistic Doctrines of Grace are true, then they should appear in this prayer which concerns the salvation and perseverance of the Lord's disciples. And this is the case; the chapter is infused with Reformed concepts. It is helpful to point some of these out; this chapter of the Bible alone destroys Arminian theology.

Total Depravity

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. Jn 17:4

The work of salvation is finished. All that was necessary in establishing a righteousness by which man could stand holy before God was completed by Jesus in his earthly life. By fulfilling all the Law perfectly, he established human righteousness. In justification this righteousness is imputed (reckoned) to us, while our sins were imputed to him. In his death he paid the penalty for our sin; by his life we were made righteous, so that God can both accept us as holy and adopt us into his family.

Thus there is no additional work to do in gaining salvation since Christ did it all. It was necessary for him to do it all since man can do no good of any kind, either in righteousness or anything of spiritual value before God (see Rm 3 and Eph 2:1). Even man's good works are sin (Ps 14:1; Prov 15:8-9, 21:4; Isa 64:6).

The Arminian claim is that man must accept the Gospel by his own free will, choose to serve Christ, believe of his own volition and repent. All these are human works that contribute to salvation. Arminians deny that God enables and empowers man to do these things.¹ But if additional works are required before a man can be saved, then Christ did not do all that was necessary for salvation; he did not finish the work; salvation is not of the Lord. Christ, in this passage (and in Jn 19:28, 30), denies the basis of Arminian salvation.

Rm 10:4 explains that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to those who believe. This means that works of the law to establish righteousness were finalised in him. Men cannot fulfil God's moral law but Christ fulfils it for them; in regeneration God gives his elect grace to obey and believe the Gospel by his Spirit because of Christ. Arminian repenting, willing, accepting and believing are works of law because they come before regeneration (according to Arminians). Paul explains in Rm 10:3 that this is law-works, 'they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not

¹ Some 'Evangelical Arminians', such as Wesleyans, claim that there is a prevenient grace (not saving grace) available to everyone which enables them to believe, which they must then utilise and choose to believe the Gospel or ignore and reject Christ. There is not an ounce of scriptural support for a vague, universal grace to all in scripture. In fact it denies central truths about God's decrees, such as reprobation. God does not give grace and blessing to those he has decreed to condemnation.

submitted to the righteousness of God'. Arminian believing and repenting is trying to do a righteous, spiritual work in the strength of human nature. But God tells us that faith and repentance are gifts given to the elect alone (Jn 6:29; Acts 14:27, 18:27; Eph 2:8-9; Acts 5:31; Rm 2:4; 2 Tim 2:25).

This verse in John establishes the truth of human depravity and inability. Christ finishes the work of salvation for those God has chosen; there is nothing for them to do to achieve salvation except react to the grace God gives them.

Unconditional election

You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. Jn 17:2

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Jn 17:16

I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. Jn 17:6

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Jn 17:14

O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare *it*, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. Jn 17:25-26

John 17 is one of the key passages that establish the truth of sovereign election; that is the choosing of the elect in eternity. Only those elected by God before time and placed into Christ will be saved (Eph 1:4-5). Here we see that God, unequivocally, only gives eternal life to as many people as he gave to Christ to be his brethren/bride/church/body. God gave Christ a people in eternity and only these receive eternal life (verse 2).

These people, the elect, are not of this world but were always considered separate in God's eyes, even though they were lost in sins until they repented (verse 16). It is to these people alone that Christ manifests the name, or character, of the Father – beginning with the disciples of the Lord (verse 6). It is to these people alone that Christ gives God's word (verse 14). To be saved one must hear the word of God. All men are blind and deaf to this; they cannot see, understand or hear it (Matt 13:13-15). But to the elect, the Spirit (acting on Christ's word) opens their eyes and ears (Matt 13:16). As a result they are saved and thus know God (v25-26). They understand about God's character and that Christ was sent from heaven to be our redeemer. It is also these alone that are loved by God (v26); reprobate humanity is hated by God (Ps 5:5-6, 11:5).

Limited atonement

I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Jn 17:9-10

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word. Jn 17:20

These two verses are also very important texts to undergird the Doctrines of Grace. Arminians claim that God loves everybody and that Christ died for all; this is why they have to emphasise that those who are not converted are lost because they did not choose Christ. Since not all get saved but some go to hell, and since Christ died for everyone, then the fault must be with man.

This pernicious doctrine is wrong at so many levels. Not least that it claims that Christ does a work which then fails in its objective; he dies for all but fails to save all. This is

impossible; God cannot fail in any of his purposes. Scripture teaches that Christ fully achieves his purpose of dying for the elect. Those God chose are the beneficiaries of the atonement. These verses in John prove this.

The people that Christ intercedes for are the same people that he died for. It is impossible that Christ should fail to intercede to secure the perseverance of those he died for. Thus Christ says, 'I pray for them, I do not pray for the world'. What could be more clear! Christ does not pray for everyone, but only for those that the Father gave him. This establishes the truth of limited atonement, or better 'particular redemption'. Christ's death was intended only for those God chose to be saved and for none other. He died for particular (specific, singled-out) people, not for all men. These chosen people are also prayed for by Christ to secure their full salvation.

Irresistible grace or effectual calling

For I have given to them the words which You have given Me; and they have received *them*, and have known surely that I came forth from You; and they have believed that You sent Me. Jn 17:8

The Lord continues that he gives God's words only to these particular people. The basis of being saved is receiving God's word in the heart so that a change occurs as it imparts grace by the work of the Spirit. 'Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God' (Rm 10:17). When a person receives the word of the Gospel in his heart, he is changed (regenerated) and conversion (faith and repentance) follows. This word is only given to the elect and none other. Sinful men cannot receive the word because they are deaf and blind to it, but Christ gives the word to the elect and opens their ears and eyes – this is the 'receiving' spoken of here. The immediate outcome of this reception of God's word is that they know that Christ was sent from God to be their Saviour, and then they believe the word.

Perseverance

Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We *are*. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Jn 17:11-12

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. Jn 17:15

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. Jn 17:24

How can we be certain that the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints is true? How can we know that God will keep us to the end and bring us to glory? We can be sure because the Lord himself prayed that we would be kept by the power and glory of God's attributes. The prayers of the Son are always answered in full, and here Jesus prays that his people would be kept safe through God's name. What more do we need?

If God called a people, chosen in Christ before time began; and then redeemed these people through the blood of his own Son; and then glorified these people by uniting them with Christ by the baptism of the Spirit, can it be conceivable that he would then lose them only to fall away? No, such a thing is impossible. Once a person has been placed in Christ by spiritual union, and brought into the family of God through justification and adoption, it is impossible for them to fall away. No one can snatch us from Jesus' hands (Jn 10:28). But this is only true of genuine believers, people who bear the fruit of salvation in their lives. There is no assurance for merely professing believers who ignore God's word and bear no spiritual fruit.

God's genuine people are called to glory, and though the world and Satan may be against them, God promises to keep them safe to the end. The path may be difficult and problems many, but the elect are secure through all adversity because of Jesus' intercession. This is a far cry from the teaching of Arminians that Christians can fall away and be forever lost if their faith does not continue.

God ensures the sanctification of his people

Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. Jn 17:17

And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. Jn 17:19

God sanctifies his people because the Lord Jesus asked him to; they are separated unto him in holiness. Men cannot sanctify themselves because they have no spiritual power to do so. When a sinner becomes a Christian through regeneration and conversion, God enables him to do his will. The Christian, being energised by the indwelling Holy Spirit, has power to achieve all God's will. This is made clear in several places, such as:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for *His* good pleasure. Phil 2:12-13

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them. Eph 2:10

Jesus sanctified himself to service to the Father and fulfilled all God's will. We are placed into Christ so that we also may be set apart for divine service. The works we do were planned in eternity so that God may be fully glorified in his people. By God's inner working in our lives we can do good works based upon proper motivations.

Arminianism has no such comfort or power. It teaches that the works believers do are based upon their own strength and faith. It emphasises that people must become overcomers by their own efforts. Many even teach that there are various classes of Christian: overcomers and non-overcomers; perfectly sinless people and carnal; people who escape tribulation in an imaginary secret rapture and those who did not exercise enough faith and so undergo the tribulation, and so forth. Thus, if the works of faith are insufficient, Arminians can fall away and lose their salvation. This is a miserable, God-dishonouring religion.

Notice that the chief means God uses to establish and sanctify his people is the truth. Jesus explained that it is the truth which sets us free (Jn 8:32). Yet many Arminians have a poor regard for truth; very many are far more interested in subjective feelings and the false words of so-called prophets and apostles.

Jesus is the Word (*logos*) of God (Jn 1:1-17) and he is the Truth (Jn 14:6). He was full of truth because he is the Truth. He manifested God's word on earth because he is God's Word; the expression of the Father (Heb 1:1-3). The scriptures available to us today are the words of Christ in written form. They are a light to our path and a lamp for our feet (Ps 119:105). To know how to move forward we must have the light of God's word, revealed in Christ. The Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and life. No one who ignores the importance of scripture will be sanctified. A person who derides or downplays the Bible is not set apart for God. But those who uphold the authority of scripture and rely upon the Spirit to enlighten, reveal and apply the word to them will grow in their measure of sanctification to the end.

God unifies his people in Christ by the Spirit

... that they all may be one, as You, Father, *are* in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Jn 17:21-23

Finally, the Lord's people are united to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. The prayer of Christ, that the elect may all be one, was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit baptised all the elect, of all time, in Christ:

For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free -- and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. 1 Cor 12:13-14.

This once only (aorist tense) baptism of the Spirit made the individual members of the elect into the body of Christ; every believer is organically (spiritually) related to every other believer. This is often realised when we meet a Christian for the first time and feel this unity, a stronger union than exists amongst blood relatives.

Most Arminians do not believe that this prayer was fulfilled and thus spend much energy trying to effect a practical union through various methods. Usually this union is sought through minimising the doctrinal differences between Christian groups, and this results in a great diminishing of the word of God. Charismatic Arminians try to effect union by emphasising a shared (Charismatic) experience of the Spirit rather than truth. More liberal 'Christians' use organisational methods, rather like the UN tries to organisationally unite antagonistic nations.

However, the unity that God has already established to ensure the good fellowship of all true believers is based on truth, because it is founded in the life of Christ. The same Spirit who inspired the scriptures is the one who unites believers into Christ. The ground of union is Christ, and he is the Word. There is no Christian unity where the word is downplayed.

The effect of realising and believing in the unity of all believers is to understand that we are one with God and have an ambassadorial role in manifesting his glory. We will never reach the world outside with human methods and practical strategies; we reach out with the truth in an organic way through the local body of Christ; **'that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me'**. The world will believe when they see local Christians, who understand the truth of their unity with God in Christ, simply behaving as Christians. This means acting like Christ did on earth: doing good to all, living righteously, worshipping God truly, treating each other Biblically. In short, when Christians genuinely manifest the fruit of the Spirit ('love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.') they will draw people to God where sinners will understand that Christ was sent to earth to be a Saviour for all who believe. Those who manifest the fruit of the Spirit (the character of Christ) prove that they are being led by God (Gal 5:18, 22-23) and only those led by God will bear the fruit of winning souls.

Finally, note that Jesus has given us glory now, for surely his prayer was answered. Paul affirms this in Rm 8:30. The glory resting on Christians is also something that draws the elect in the world, **'And the glory which You gave Me I have given them ... that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me'**. Where believers live by these truths, even the very fellowship they share speaks to the world of Christ. The church does not need

evangelistic courses, gimmicks, advertising, crusades and special meetings to evangelise; it just needs to be a Biblical church.

Jesus tells us that this unity, this glory, this fellowship with God and each other proves to us that God loves us. Our assurance, based on faith in God's word, is amplified when we live in proper Biblical fellowship. Our comfort in divine assurance spurs us on to edify one another and exhort one another to love and good works (Heb 10:24).

Conclusion

I trust that we have seen together that the sovereignty of God in salvation and life is clearly manifested in Jesus' High Priestly prayer. The Doctrines of Grace are openly demonstrated and run throughout all Christ's petitions to the Father. We would do well to meditate on this prayer often.

May God be glorified in our considerations.

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