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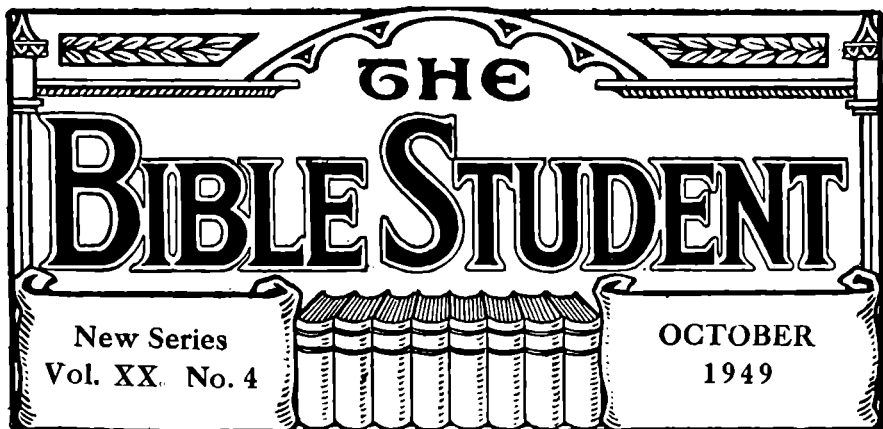
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"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE DUAL TITLES OF JESUS CHRIST	145
CHRIST IN THE FOUR GOSPELS	152
THE SECOND ADVENT	157
THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE LORD'S PRAYER	163
NOTES ON HEBREWS	170
THE INSPIRATION OF THE BIBLE	178
THE WITNESS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TO THE OLD TESTAMENT	186

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN THE LORD'S PRAYER

Recorded in John 17

BY W. WILCOX

Prayer ever has purpose behind it. A desire to receive something, or to achieve something, leads to our asking God that He might give the desired gift, or aid in the achievement of the desired end.

This is no less true of men than it was of our Lord, for, while He was ever the Son, He was also truly man, and as man made His requests to the Father for the accomplishment of some definite objective in granting His requests. But His purpose was ever loftier in conception than what we could give expression to, since, being Son, He knew what was within the Father's will to grant. In John's Gospel, chapter seventeen, we can trace something of this great purpose of our Lord as He prays for the disciples whom He was to leave so soon! He prays for a seven-fold bestowment—viz. that,

1. *The Knowledge of God* may be theirs to whom He gives eternal life (v. 3). (a) Eternal Life is His to give, and the authority to give this to those who believe on Him has been granted Him by the Father (v. 2). It is of interest to note that He regards the Father as the ultimate Source of all things, from Whom He derives the authority to give it. This relation between the Father and Himself is ever maintained for He declares that He gave them the words He had received of His Father, and that He did the works of His Father. Should we not similarly be ready always to speak both of our spiritual and physical activities as alone possible to us by reason of what we receive of God? Too often we yield to the temptation of regarding what we do as the result of our own ability and wisdom. Let us learn from the attitude of the Son to the Father.

(b) Eternal Life is life possessing that quality which belongs to the Life of God. We must not regard the term "eternal" as merely "unending duration". Eternal Life properly only belongs to God, for He "only hath immortality", so that when eternal life is given to believers they become, as Peter says, "partakers of the Divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4). As recipients of the life of God, they become something different from what they were by nature; the life of God flows through them and produces effects and

tends to ends, proper to the new life imparted. The old life had its limitations for it belonged to the sphere of the terrestrial and not to that of the heavenly. It could not comprehend God: if there were any reaching out after the supreme God, then such efforts seemed only to reach to gods, every separate force of nature encountered having assigned to it a presiding deity. Hence to the natural man there are "gods many", but to the "new" man, to whom has been imparted life eternal, there is but *one* God, the *only* God, Creator and re-creator, unique and incomparable, known and enjoyed, since, through life, spiritual life, *the* life given him of God, he has the capacity for knowing God, for going on to know, for knowing in the depth of a growing experience, and an increasing fellowship.

This God is therefore to the believer the *true* God, genuinely real to him, and altogether removed from the false gods accepted by the natural man. He is to be known together with His Son, Jesus Christ, and that in His character as "the Sent One"—sent to reveal the Father, sent to bring many sons unto glory, sent to accomplish the work given Him to do. As Westcott beautifully puts it: "In such a connection 'knowledge' expresses the apprehension of the truth by the whole nature of man. It is not an acquaintance with facts as external, nor an intellectual conviction of their reality, but an appropriation of them (so to speak) as an influencing power into the very being of him who knows them".

Such knowledge would include an understanding of (a) *the Communion* that exists between the Father and the Son—a communion in the glory of the eternal even before that glory was expressed in the acts and results of creative activity—a communion both eternal and uninterrupted, holy and unspotted. (b) *The Communication* that was ever possible between them—the words of the Father being given to the Son, and so communicated to the disciple. This constant interchange of thought and of word was characteristic of their intimate fellowship and is revealed as such in these chapters of John's Gospel; no word or thought of the One unknown to the Other, or at variance with the Other. (c) *The Commission* of the Father to the Son—to come forth—there could be no change in that inner relationship which had existed through eternity save by their own volition, the One willing to send and the Other willing to come forth. ,

Something of these great matters may be known by those who have come to know Him, and in them there may be a

realization of that intimate relation to which He has called them also, for they may enter into communion with Him, be vehicles of His divine communication to men, and be commissioned to do His work in the sphere to which He may send them.

2. *The Unity of Believers* may be realized (v. 11). Progress of thought and progress of purpose are here manifest—those who have come to know Him will realize this unity in Him. This may be done in four ways as found in this part of the prayer:—(a) As *kept* by the Father they would be one. He has just spoken of the fact that they are remaining in the world and proceeds to pray that they may be kept, guarded, separated from the world. In their realization of that true separation from the world, and their real separation unto Him there would be a consciousness of their oneness. In the failure of God's children to remain in that path of separation lies the secret of much of the disunity among believers to-day. The commonality of the walk alone with Him, the communion with only those things which will be in association with His Presence, the constancy of aim to be well-pleasing in His sight alone will weld together into a spiritual unity which will find expression in an outward harmony of all those who humbly so desire to follow Him.

(b) As those who *in His Name* find this keeping power made effectual to them. The Name provides a sphere into which they have come, a power with which they are associated, and a grace by which they have been endowed. Within that sphere the sweetness and influence of that Name are everywhere apparent and pervade the whole life of the believer in every one of its aspects. So that everywhere the keeping influence of the Name is felt.

The Name thus exerts a power, a power to keep from straying, as also a power to protect from the evil forces which contend for control over the believer's life. The early Apostles, therefore, made much of the Name, and we may well do the same.

By that Name a grace falls upon those associated with it—a grace to speak as He spake, to do as He did, and to walk as He walked. In the prayer, the Name is that of the Father, but the Name of the Lord Jesus is so closely linked with that of the Father Whom He came to reveal that we almost unconsciously pass over from the one to the other. Yet it is well to maintain the distinctions of Scripture and so to rightly divide the Word of Truth.

(c) As those who are the *Gift of the Father* to the Son. As

God's gift to the Son we shall not wish to be anything else but a complete whole, a unity, a body undivided. Within the body thus given there will be a harmony of will, a singleness of purpose, a desire to be well-pleasing to Him, such as will tend to that unity for which the Saviour prays. It is when the keeping power of the Father, the fulness of association with His Name, and the glory of being His gift are realized that this unity is maintained.

This is seen (*d*) where the *Oneness of the Lord Jesus with His Father* is made the ideal of that oneness in the corporate body of believers. A oneness not dependent upon external bonds, nor only of adherence to some externally imposed credal statement, however orthodox or complete, but a unity of essence, a unity in communication, a unity in purpose, such as are found in that unity with the Father and the Son.

3. *Joy Fulfilled* (v. 13). Again our Lord states this as the purpose before Him. In other connections He has shewn His desire to be that His disciples might have His joy fulfilled in them. Here He states it in a two-fold connection, (*a*) He is returning to the Father; the work for which He came was nearing completion. Obedience to every behest of His Father means unsullied joy in prospect of His near return to the Father's side. But what of those whom He leaves behind, He has a special relation and obligation to them, for they had left all to follow Him, and now they were to be tested to the utmost. They would see Him Whom they had looked upon as Messiah crucified as a felon and taken from their midst. Sorrow would be added to sorrow, and yet He speaks of joy, that deep lasting satisfaction of the innermost being of the spirit, unconditioned by external circumstance, but conditioned only by the capacity to enjoy. How could such joy be their's?

(*b*) He speaks these things in the world . . . "these things", the things which belong originally to heaven, but are now revealed as He speaks; "these things" which show the possibility of a holy intimacy between man and God; "these things" which show that, whatever the outer circumstance, the soul can rise to fellowship with the Father, and there find undiluted joy.

(*c*) "My Joy fulfilled in them," literally, "the joy that is Mine," i.e. that joy of undimmed fellowship with the Father, of holy and intimate love and of coming and abiding in His immediate Presence. That joy was not to be His only, but to be shared

by them, to be fulfilled in them. This joyous state was not to be a merely ideal condition, but a conditioning reality of every situation whereinto they might be called to enter. It is a similar expression to that which He used in ch. 14:27. "My peace I give unto you", i.e. "the peace that is Mine". These holy states of peace and joy which existed in the oneness of the Divine Persons were also to exist in the disciples for whom He now prayed "that they might be one, as we"—one in their unity with the Father and therefore one in their unity with each other.

In fellowship with the Son we have fellowship with the Father. His fellowship with the Father is one of joy; His joy will therefore be fulfilled in us as we hold unrestricted and unrestrained fellowship with the Father through Him. Such fellowship is only possible as we live in such ways as are consonant with His holy character. May we so live, and so experience this fulness of joy!

4. *Sanctification* (v. 19). The purpose mentioned here is "that they themselves may be consecrated in truth". We cannot do better than follow Milligan and Moulton in their *Commentary* on the Gospel of John, they say: "The word here rendered 'consecrate' is constantly used in the Greek Translation of the Old Testament to express the entire dedication and consecration both of persons and of things to God. In this sense, but with deeper meaning of inward and spiritual consecration, we find it here. . . . To be consecrated is therefore to be separated from the world, to be dedicated as a holy thing to God. . . . This is to be done '*in the truth*',—in that sphere of the truth which is the sphere of the Father and of the Son; in living communion with, and appropriation of, the truth, so that the truth shall be that in which their whole being is moulded and consecrated."

Following on with their comments we find four suggestions as to their purpose. (a) That their consecration might be the exact counterpart of His own. This is brought out in the words, "*that they also*": As He gave Himself with undeviating devotion to the fulfilment of the Father's will and in order to do so had to remain separate from much that was in the world of His time, so the disciples should give themselves to unselfish and complete devotion to the accomplishment of His purpose through them, even though the doing of such will need a life of separation from much that is in the world.

(b) That such consecration might be a free, independent act

on their part, devoting themselves in faith to the task assigned them. No arbitrary act of an external power is to compel them to such a devotion; it can only be the act of unqualified freedom on the part of those seeking to devote themselves to His service.

(c) That it might be in truth . . . not "the truth", here, as in v. 17, but "in truth", i.e., "in conformity with the real, the essential, the everlasting". It was to be a genuine act with no mental or other reservations. God desires genuine worship, not that which is only outward, or merely partial, or temporary. He moves along the plane of the spiritual, of that which is complete, of that which is eternal.

(d) That it might be a completed act, not a process, but completed at once. It is a definite handing over of the life with all its possibilities to God, the effect of which will continue and will colour every thought and activity of life.

This is an "end" for which our Lord prayed. We may well pause and ask ourselves if we are seeing this end achieved in our lives, or, whether we are by active pursuit or neglect of duty hindering its accomplishment.

5. *The World Believing in the Divine Mission (Vs. 21, 22).*

Here is purpose in a threefold sense: "That they all may be one . . . that they also may be one in Us . . . that the world may believe." This deeply spiritual unity of those who believe in Him is realized in their full fellowship with the Father and the Son, and this will in turn, be known by those in the world. They will thus come to believe that Jesus is the Sent one of God. It is in this complete harmony between the Persons of the Godhead that Jesus sees the illustration of what He deems the ideal state of believers to be. A free independent movement of each individual member and yet a unified harmonious state because of identity of spiritual life. "Made partakers of the Divine Nature"; this is spiritual; this is fulness; this is real eternal life.

Such an object lesson of the divinely possible should convince the world of the divine appointment of Him by whose mission this came to be. And so the divine purpose is achieved by ever widening the circle of divine blessing.

It is a highly spiritual condition which is thus envisaged by our Lord; a condition in which there is no lowering of the standard, no coming down to the level of the world, and no accommodation offered to the world by which it might be hoped that the world might come to Christ, but a condition which,

ever rising to the level of that unity in spirit which is found in the Father and the Son, will kindle desires after godliness in the hearts of those who are of the world.

In what measure are we, as believers, helping to bring about a fulfilment of the purpose in this petition of our Lord? If we are so doing then we are being "perfected into one", as verse 23 puts it—a complete state, a realization of the full achievement in believers of that which Jesus came to accomplish, and therefore, a movement towards that full knowledge by the world of His divine mission and of the divine love.

6. *Beholding His Glory* (v. 24). Here is a twofold request—"that they may be with Me where I am", and "that they may behold My Glory". Previously He had prayed that they should not be taken out of the world, but that they might be kept while living in the world. But now He moves to the ultimate completion of all the great saving process, that those who believe in Him should be brought into the fulness of eternal fellowship with Him in His immediate presence and the beholding and sharing of His glory. As Westcott finely points out, "Each of these two issues contains an element not contained in the corresponding gifts already described. Presence with Christ, as involving personal fellowship with Him in the sphere of His glorified being, is more than union effected by His Presence with the Church. And the contemplation of His glory, in its whole extent, by those lifted beyond the limits of time, is more than the possession of that glory according to the measure of present human powers."

It is that perfect glory of our Lord as Son of God, yet also Son of Man, the spiritual glory of perfect union with the Father, that glory of the divine energies of the love of the Father ever going out to the Son and finding unalloyed response of love in Him. This glory is to be beheld, and therefore shared in, by the "sons whom He is bringing to glory", for theirs is also to be a perfect union with Him and with the Father, and theirs is also to be a forthcoming and outgoing of perfect love in the immediate Presence of God.

7. *Love Realized* (v. 26). The thought of God's love to Him is now carried over to His love to them. As the love of God to Him was "pure, undimmed, undisturbed by the presence of sin and sorrow" so would His love be *to* them, *around* them as the sphere in which the eternal life would be loved, *within* them as to the constant abiding realization of satisfaction in the fulness of God made available for them.

Thus the Lord brings to completion the full purpose of that for which He prays; His people *with* Him, His love *in* them, His glory shared *by* them,—an eternal fellowship of reciprocated love, of undimmed harmony, of complete fulness.

NOTES ON HEBREWS

BY W. E. VINE, M.A. (Lond.)

Chap. 5: 1-10 (Cont.)

NOTES

Verse 8.—*though He was a Son*,—or rather “Son though He was,” not “a Son,” as if He was one of many, nor “the Son,” for the absence of the article lays stress upon the quality of the relationship and not on the special Personality. As Son (unique indeed in this relationship), He was possessed of infinite dignity and glory (see 1:1-3 and John 1:14). His Sonship was unoriginated, but He became man, and His humanity is what is being now dwelt upon. The writer is not speaking of the mere fact of His relationship, he is still referring—as in every place in this Epistle where the Sonship of Christ is mentioned—to the sublime, unique, eternal dignity of His relationship as the uncreated, only-begotten Son of God. There is a connexion with the quotation in verse 5.

yet learned obedience—He passed through the experience of obedience, not that He grew in the experience as if He was at any time less obedient than subsequently. He did not *learn* to obey. His experience was that of undeviating fulfilment of the Father’s will. The article before the noun, not to be expressed, suggests the idea of completeness. *Hupakoē*, obedience, is properly submissive hearing (*hupo*, under, *akoē*, hearing). The teaching is parallel to that of Phil. 2:6, R.V., though there are points of distinction. Here in Heb. 5 the teaching is that, notwithstanding all that He continued to be in virtue of His Sonship in Godhead, He learned obedience.

by the things which He suffered;—He voluntarily passed through all the sufferings which His obedience involved. He learned obedience in the sense that this experience in the days of His flesh was new to him. He had come to do the Father’s will, and this was His delight, albeit that it meant all that was conveyed in the title “Man of sorrows” and all the sufferings and agony of the Cross.