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## The True Lord's Prayer

John 17:1

**Intro:** In several places in his writings, John Calvin, the great theologian and prominent figure of the Reformation, refers to God's revelation of Himself to us in His Word as baby talk, the kind of communication a loving mother might use to speak to an infant child. What he means by this is that any communication to us from God must be in the most simplest and basic form, at least from God's point of view. His thoughts are not our thoughts; His ways are not our ways. Thus, if God wants to communicate with us, He must stoop to the level of baby talk if we are going to be able to understand Him. If the Bible is to be of any use to us, it must be a rudimentary revelation.

If this is the case with us, then what must the level of communication be like between the members of the Godhead? If God must communicate to us in what constitutes baby talk for Him; how deep, profound and utterly unfathomable must be the conversations between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Are we correct in this speculation? On the one hand, how much conversation can there be between eternal beings that are each omniscient? How much could they have to say that really needs to be said? On the other hand, the Bible records several such conversations between God the Father and God the Son. In fact, we have now come to what is the purest and most extensive example in all the Bible of direct, verbal communication between 2 members of the Godhead. Yet still, it is delivered and recorded for us in some of the most comprehensible phrases and words.

If we are to deal with this section properly, I think it is only proper that we read this prayer in its entirety. The Bible is filled with great prayers- Solomon's prayer in [1 Kings 8](#) is impressive; as is Abraham's in [Genesis 18](#) and Moses' in [Ex 32](#); but this prayer is by far the greatest prayer ever prayed on earth and the greatest prayer recorded anywhere in Scripture. Many of us know what its like to listen to a true man of woman of God deep in prayer: there's something holy and awesome about it. Far beyond that is this prayer Jesus prayed to His Father; the only long, continuous prayer of Jesus recorded in the Gospels.

The sentences in this prayer are simple but the ideas are very deep, moving and meaningful – not just for the disciples that heard the prayer but also for the disciples that read and study it. The utter simplicity of the prayer is clear evidence that the difficulty we often have in understanding God's truth is not in the complexity of the truth or the language in which it's delivered (algorithms,

German philosophy) but in our own ignorance, sin and spiritual laziness.

Genuine prayer oftentimes reveals a person's innermost being – what's down in the well comes up in the bucket! **Ch17** is a unique opportunity for us to get a glimpse of the nature and heart of Jesus Christ. Coming, as it does, in the shadow of the cross, many people consider this prayer to be rather gloomy – it is not! In fact, it is being uttered by One who has just announced that He has overcome the world (**16:33**) and it begins with this conviction. Jesus is looking forward to the cross with an attitude of hope and joy, not despondency. This prayer marks the end of His earthly ministry but it looks forward to the ongoing work that would now be the responsibility of His current disciples as well as those who would later believe on Him through their ministry. Jesus prays for them all!

Having said that, we should understand that this prayer has 3 parts: Jesus' prayer for Himself (**1-5**), His prayer for the 11 (**6-19**) and His prayer for all who will follow them in faith in the future (**20-26**). The shortest part is Christ's prayer for Himself. He prays at length for His disciples and for us as members of His body (the church). The prayer has five main requests, one for Himself and four for us. The second and third parts provide a list of 6 distinctive marks of the church: joy, holiness, truth, mission, unity, and love. We will look at each as they appear in the prayer.

Our reading of **ch17** should reveal that this is the true Lord's Prayer. The prayer that begins, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name . . ." (**Mt 6:9-13**), should actually be considered The Disciples' Prayer. The one here in **ch17** is Jesus' prayer. It has properly been designated as His High Priestly Prayer, because He intercedes for us here as our High Priest before His Father's throne. Of course, as we have seen, many of the same concerns found in the Lord's Prayer (**Mt 6**) are also found here: prayer is repeatedly directed to the Father; there's recognition of and concern for God's name; there's concern for the work of the kingdom of God; there's concern for keeping from evil.

Still, there is one major difference in this prayer from the example of prayer Jesus gave in **Mt 6**. Here, Jesus doesn't pray exactly as He instructed the disciples to pray because the petition He offers in **ch17** is clearly not the prayer of an inferior to a superior. Throughout the prayer, the co-equality of Jesus and the Father is constantly revealed. The 2 are of 1 mind – of the same mind. When Jesus prays, He's not attempting to bend the Father's will to His will; He's merely giving voice to the eternal purposes of the Godhead.

Thus, when we say that in the first part of His prayer, Jesus prays for Himself,

this is not a prayer “for” Himself in the way we usually understand this to mean. Since His ultimate glorification will be seen on the cross, His initial prayer for Himself is not necessarily a request for His own benefit but rather a prayer that the Father’s will might be done in Him. If we say the first part of the prayer is Jesus’ prayer for Himself, we must at least be clear that there’s absolutely no self-seeking in it. In fact, this prayer should be to us something like the burning bush was to Moses, for it’s here that we hear God speaking. We should also remove our shoes and humble ourselves; for we’re now on holy ground.

**1-5-** Let’s consider the 1<sup>st</sup> of the Lord’s petitions to the Father. It’s found in these 5 verses. There are several topics addressed in this passage and we will deal with them in turn but today, we must focus our attention on what Jesus is actually asking for from the Father. His first prayer is that the Father would “glorify” Him, as a result of which Jesus would in turn “glorify” the Father (**1b**). Upon reading this though, we are immediately faced with a problem because there are very few words in biblical vocabulary that are more misunderstood than the word “glory.” What’s worse, even a perfectly correct definition (once you find it) doesn’t always do justice to the passage you’re studying.

Despite the fact that there are currently over 171,000 words in common use in the English language with almost another 10,000 derivative words added to that; English is found to be a very poor language when compared to ancient Greek and Hebrew. This lack is most glaring and regularly seen in the English translations of the Bible. English has only 1 word for love. You can say, “I love hot fudge sundaes” and “I love my spouse.” Both uses of the word love are grammatically correct but one would hope that your love for your spouse would far surpass your love for an unhealthy, yet extremely tasty dessert! Ancient Greek, on the other hand has at least 4 different words for love that precisely identify both the object and the intensity of the type of love being discussed.

The word glory has a similar dilemma, which is the basis for our current difficulty for in these first 5 verses, we’re told 4 apparently conflicting things about the glory of Jesus. 1<sup>st</sup>, we see that Jesus possessed a certain type glory with God before the incarnation. 2<sup>nd</sup>, this glory was God’s glory. 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jesus obviously didn’t have this glory during His incarnation because He prays here that this original glory might be restored to Him. And yet, at the same time, (4<sup>th</sup>) there’s a sense in which He did possess this glory while on earth because He revealed it to others by finishing the work God had given Him to do. 1 example of this aspect of His glory is seen in **ch2** where it says His changing water into wine was the beginning of those miracles that revealed His glory and caused His disciples to believe “on Him.”

How can this be? How can Jesus have possessed God's glory, then renounced it (set it aside) but still possessed it even during the time He was supposed to have set it aside? What does the phrase the glory of God even mean? We must resolve this problem if we ever hope to understand this first petition of Jesus. The answer is found in the way "glory" was used in ancient Greek and Hebrew literature.

In ancient Greek, the word for glory was *doxa*, based on the ancient verb *dokeo*, which meant to seem, to appear, or to have an opinion. The noun thus meant an opinion or, more precisely, what one thinks. This meaning survives in our English words *orthodox* and *paradox*, which mean, loosely, a straight (right) opinion and a contrary (conflicting) opinion. Some time later, the noun *doxa* (opinion) began to refer to not just any opinion, but a good opinion. Eventually, it came to refer to that which merits a good opinion. During these stages the word could have correctly been translated as praise, honor, good standing, reputation or renown. When used of a king or of a divine being, it obviously meant the ultimate in praise or renown, as when we read [Ps 24: 8, 10](#).

This passage introduces another aspect of the history of the word "glory" for it shows how the Bible applies the word in reference to God. In Scripture, the glory of God is clearly linked to His divine attributes (compare [Ps 19:1](#) w/ [Rom 1:18-20](#)). God can be called the King of Glory because He is perfect in all His attributes - love, truth, holiness, grace, power, knowledge, immutability, etc; meaning: He is truly glorious. In this way, God's glory consists of His intrinsic worth or character. Thus, everything that can actually and properly be known of God is an expression of His glory.

Now we can understand at least 1 use of the word glory in Jesus' petition. In [vs4](#) He's simply saying that through His earthly ministry, He had revealed the essential characteristics of the Father. In those times when the disciples beheld His glory ([2:11](#)), they were actually beholding (or perceiving) His character, which was the same as beholding the character of God the Father. It's another way of saying that, if we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father.

This only explains 1 use of the word. It explains the glory Jesus obviously retained during His earthly ministry. But what of the glory He had with the Father before the incarnation, which He set aside and which He prayed might be restored? If this glory refers to God's essential character, it means Jesus was less than God during His ministry on earth but, that's not right! What does the word glory mean in this instance?

The answer is found in the fact that there's another, entirely different meaning of

the word “glory” which had its origin in Hebrew thought, not Greek. A meaning that only later entered the Greek language as a result of contact between the 2 cultures; mainly when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek (Septuagint). In Jewish thought any outward manifestation of God’s presence always involved a display of light, radiance, or glory so brilliant that no man could approach it. This idea is seen in **Ps 104:1-2**. We have a classic example of this in Moses whose face glowed (transferred light) after he’d been in God’s presence on Mount Sinai. It glowed so much, the people asked him to cover his face with a veil that they would be shielded from the radiance. Light was also associated with the cloud of glory that overshadowed the tabernacle during the years of Israel’s wilderness wandering and it later filled Solomon’s temple **1 Kings 8:10-11**. This idea of the light of God’s glory is so important that it is found throughout the OT. Later, in other Jewish writings, a new word was used to more perfectly describe and embody this glory, Shekinah.

Now we know enough about the word “glory” to understand this first petition. Before His incarnation Jesus had possessed the glory of God in both these senses. He possessed the fullness of God’s attributes and character in the inward sense and He also possessed the fullness of God’s outward, visible glory. During His incarnation, Jesus laid the second of these glories aside; if He hadn’t, no one would’ve been able to approach Him. Yet, He retained God’s glory in the first sense and revealed it to His disciples, who received it by faith. Now at the end of His earthly ministry, on the verge of His crucifixion and resurrection, He prays that He might again enter into this visible glory.

Now, Jesus has been exalted. He’s been given that glory. Stephen saw it when he was martyred; John saw it and wrote about it in the Book of Revelation. Paul saw it as well. This fact should be a great encouragement for us today because it points to Jesus’ kingly rule. Our King of glory rules His church in righteousness and preserves His people.

One final thought – all of this is important because it concerns Jesus but it’s also important because it directly concerns every believer too because we will share in Christ’s glory. In a way, we share in it now - to the degree we embody Christ’s character, we possess His glory in the first of its two important senses. Isn’t this what Jesus means when He says, I am glorified in them (**10**) or the glory which You gave Me I have given them (**22**)? Besides, one day we will see His visible, outward glory, for Jesus goes on to pray concerning us and that glory, Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory (**24**).

What should this mean to us? If we will one day behold Christ’s outward glory

and if we are to be filled with His inward glory even now, let us make it the goal of our Christian life to not only bring Him glory but to show forth His glory. Of course, this is not something we can accomplish just by trying harder. No, it's a work that only God can do in our lives. So, let's pray that God will do it in us because it's just not something we're capable of doing ourselves.

The ultimate purpose of the Christian life is to show forth the glory of Christ and to seek the fullness of God's glory – not our own. 😊