

2. After offering up two petitions for Himself, Jesus turned His attention to His apostles. He prayed on their behalf, but also in their hearing for the sake of their instruction and encouragement. And the burden of His intercession was His concern for their well-being and fruitfulness once He'd returned to His Father. Jesus had "kept" them while He was in the world; now He looked to His Father to continue that work in His absence (17:6-19).
 - a. Jesus began by identifying His apostles as men given to Him by His Father; they had been the Father's and He gave them to the Son (17:6). Many associate this with the idea of *election*: The apostles belonged to God because He'd chosen them for Himself. Jesus likely had this in mind, but the context points toward their "election" in a different sense than its usual conception. His focus in the discourse was the significance and implications of the coming events for His apostles and their role going forward. He would continue this instruction after His resurrection, teaching them about the "kingdom of God" He'd inaugurated and their mission to bear its fruit in the world through their witness in the power and leading of the Spirit (cf. 14:25-26, 15:1-8, 26-27, 16:1-15 with Acts 1:1-8). In this way they'd come to realize that they, the Twelve, were to be the foundation for God's restored "Israel" built on Messiah, the cornerstone (cf. Isaiah 49:1-7 with Matthew 16:13-18; Acts 1:15-26; Galatians 6:14-16; Ephesians 2:11-22).

The nation of Israel was God's "elect son" (Exodus 4:21-23; Deuteronomy 4:25-38, 7:6-12), chosen in Abraham to be the instrument for bringing His blessing to all mankind (Genesis 12:1-3, 22:18). Israel's election was for the sake of the world; it would find its ultimate truth in the Messiah, Yahweh's elect Son, and through Him in the world of men "chosen in Him" (Galatians 3; Ephesians 1:3-6). Being Abraham's true Seed, Jesus is also the Last Adam – the progenitor of a new human race as the "first fruits" of God's new creation. And He was going to produce this vast Abrahamic progeny (Genesis 17:1-7) by the Spirit-empowered witness of His new "Israel" having its foundation in His twelve apostles.

This, then, is the context for interpreting Jesus' statement. His apostles were His Father's in the sense that they were *Israelites*: children of Abraham and members of His covenant household. They belonged to Israel's God according to His oath to Abraham, "I will be their God and they will be my people." They had been the Father's, but now He was giving them to the Son – *not in the sense of giving them up, but as consummating their relation to Him*. The apostles had been the Father's possession as Abraham's descendants; now they were going to become His in truth by becoming authentic sons of Abraham through union with Abraham's true Son – the "seed" to whom the covenant and its promises pertained and in whom both were now becoming "yes and amen."

The Father gave these men to His Son and He, in turn, gave them a true sight of their God: "*I manifested your name to them... and they have kept your word.*" (God's "name" refers to the truth of His person, mind and will.) And Jesus manifested God's "name" to them by disclosing *Himself* as the incarnate Word and Yahweh's true sanctuary (cf. Deuteronomy 12:1-5, 16:1-11; Psalm 74:1-7).

His statement also shows that manifesting the Father's *name* is conveying His *word*, and Jesus gave the Father's words to His apostles by His own words and works. He is the manifest truth of the Father – Israel's God – and the apostles had "kept this word" by believing in Him. And not "believing in Him" in some arbitrary or speculative way, but embracing Him as Yahweh's Messiah, sent by Him into the world to accomplish His purposes (17:7-8; cf. 5:19, 7:16). All that Jesus said and did served to communicate the truths His Father entrusted to Him and these men had come to embrace those "words" by embracing *Him* as true – as the Messiah God had revealed and promised in all His Scripture (5:37-39).

Jesus prefaced His petitions this way, not for His Father's sake, but for the sake of His audience. These truths were the foundation for His petitions and the apostles wouldn't be able to understand what He was asking without them. He desired that His Father would "keep" them in view His departure, but in a certain respect. In particular, the focus of this "keeping" was His Father's relationship with them in and through Him. And Jesus described that relationship in terms of the Father "giving" them to Him, but such that they would henceforth belong to both Father and Son in truth (17:9-10). Moreover, the context points to the *Spirit* as the means of this transaction: The Father gives men to the Son by sending the Spirit to join them to Him. And belonging to the Son in this way, they enjoy a new relationship with the Father. To be "in the Son" is to be "in the Father" (14:23, 17:11, 20-23) and to know the Son by union with Him is to know the Father by the same union. *By giving men to His Son, the Father was giving them to Himself; He was making them sons indeed – sons who know Him even as the Son knows Him.*

- b. This relational dynamic between Father, Son, Spirit and men is the framework for understanding Jesus' petitions for His apostles (and ultimately all disciples; v. 20). It also explains His distinction between these men His father had given Him and the "world" and His petition for the one and not the other (17:9). It's easy to conclude from this that Jesus has no concern for the world of men beyond His "elect" and many have cited this verse accordingly. But this view oversimplifies a complex subject and obscures John's message of God's love for the world (3:16) and Jesus' mission to give life to the world (6:33, 51) and save it (3:17, 12:47). Even more, it introduces an emphasis that is foreign to this context. Throughout the discourse Jesus has used the term "world" to denote the human realm as it exists under the sway of Satan – the pattern of humanness which He'd exposed and condemned and would supplant as the True Man (cf. 14:16-31, 15:16-25, 16:8-20, 33). The "world" here concerns the alienated and cursed human *order* rather than human beings viewed personally; it designates the kingdom of the great adversary which opposes God and His truth and which Jesus came to overthrow and destroy. The "world" is thus the "kingdom" which stands in antithesis to God's new-creational kingdom; it is the "former order" which Jesus was putting to death in Himself so as to inaugurate the "new order" of the new creation. *This is the reason Jesus didn't pray for the "world," while at the same time commissioning His apostles – who were no longer "of the world" – to carry His testimony into the "world" toward His goal of giving life to the "world."*

Jesus was sending His apostles into the world just as His Father had sent Him (17:18) – not to reform the world, but to confront it with its condemnation. Jesus’ presence in the world as True Man exposed and condemned the falseness of the human race. It revealed the true nature of the human plight and so also its remedy: The answer for the world is renewal, not reformation; people need to become truly human by dying to human existence as they know it and being enlivened to a new and true way of being human. Jesus’ life had confronted men with this truth and now His death and resurrection were going to make it a reality.

And when, in Himself, He had put Adam’s race to death and inaugurated a new humanity, His disciples were to carry that “gospel” into the world. They, too, were to confront and condemn the world in its falseness, but with the “good news” that the Creator-God executed His death sentence against that falseness and inaugurated a new paradigm of humanness in the man, Jesus the Messiah, when He raised Him from the dead. They were to proclaim that the “world” as men know it has been judged and put to death; a “new order” of creational renewal and reconciliation has been inaugurated (Colossians 1:19-20) and all people are commanded to embrace the truth and enter into it (Acts 17:24-31). And they were to proclaim this message by *embodying* it: Jesus was commissioning His apostles as *witnesses* of His resurrection, but as *living proof* of it by virtue of sharing in it by His Spirit. This is how the Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment (16:8-11); this is what it means to testify to Jesus’ resurrection (cf. Acts 1:21-22, 2:22-40, 4:1-12; also 2 Corinthians 2:12-4:12, 5:11-21).

It was in view of this mission that Jesus offered up three petitions for His apostles – two regarding their *keeping* and a third regarding their *sanctity*.

- 1) Jesus’ first petition was that His Father would keep these men “*in His name*” (17:11). Again, the Father had given His “name” to the Son in the sense that the Son embodied Him and thus testified to Him in the world (1:14-18). In this way Jesus “manifested” the Father’s name to His apostles (17:6); beholding and experiencing Him, they beheld and experienced His Father. And Jesus had “kept” them in this “name” by His faithful testimony and protective care. His presence with them kept them from deception and apostasy (all except the one whose stumbling fulfilled the divine plan), but soon He’d be gone and they’d be left in the world without Him (17:12-13). They would need another “keeper,” and the Father was going to meet this need by sending them His Spirit – the Spirit in whom Jesus’ presence would continue with them forever (14:1-33).

Jesus’ plea for the Father’s “keeping” was His plea for the Spirit. The Spirit was to be their “keeper,” but, in this way, Jesus Himself would continue to keep them. Up until that time He’d done so through His bodily presence; now He’d keep them by His indwelling presence. And “kept in the Father’s name” by sharing in the Son, they’d become *one* even as the Son was one with the Father. In this way their joy would be made full.

- 2) The apostles needed to be “kept” because they were going to remain in the world after their Lord departed from it to return to the Father. But the issue behind their need wasn’t His departure as much as their commission: *He was leaving them in the world to testify of Him*. But they’d bear this testimony as embodying His life by His Spirit, and this meant that they’d enjoy the same reception from the world that He’d gotten (15:18-16:15).

The world under the sway of the “world ruler” had opposed Jesus and sought to destroy Him, His witness to the Father and His accomplishment of the Father’s will, and so it would be with His own. Fulfilling their commission depended upon the apostles being kept in the Father’s “name,” but also their preservation from “evil” (17:14-16). Anticipating the fruit of His cross, Jesus spoke of them as no longer “of the world” – no longer deriving their nature and manner of existence from the “world,” but from their union with Him. But this new reality would set them in *contradiction* with the world. Rather than being the wind in their sails, the principle of evil that drives the world was now going to press heavily against them. The realm in which they were once very much at home was soon to prove a hostile environment opposing them at every turn. Jesus understood this all too well, and so petitioned His Father to preserve them, not just from Satan, but from the *principle* of falseness, alienation and contrariety which drives the world he governs. But this “keeping” from evil wouldn’t mean their immunity from it any more than it had with their Lord. Jesus had faced the world’s opposition and very soon He’d know its full fury. But He was going to withstand it and even triumph through it and so He intended that it would be with them (17:15, cf. 16:33).

- 3) Jesus’ third petition overarched the other two. Still praying in the hearing of His apostles, He asked His Father to “*sanctify them in the truth*” (17:17). This has often been interpreted as a plea for their personal holiness through obedience to the divine will (God’s “word”). But Jesus’ petition concerned their *vocation*, not their personal sanctity; as His Father had sent Him, so He was sending them (17:18). They were going to be His witnesses in the world and His concern was that they be fully consecrated and equipped for that work. Their vocation was to testify to Him by manifesting His life and power, but that very manifestation was going to incur a hatred and hostility they’d never known (ref. again 15:26-16:15).

Jesus’ own coming had been a matter of vocation; He’d consecrated Himself to the work of testifying to the “truth” (18:37) – the truth of His Father’s design for the world and His faithfulness in accomplishing it. Jesus embodied this “truth” as the incarnate *word*: the perfect disclosure and explanation of the Father as the human embodiment of grace and truth. He’d consecrated Himself for the sake of His mission in conformity to the truth and now His “sanctity” was reaching its climax. Jesus was “sanctifying” Himself unto Calvary, but so that men might also be sanctified in the truth and bear His abundant fruit (15:1-17; cf. Isaiah 53-55).