

“I Said; The Conveyor of Comfort”

John 17:13–21

¹³“But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁵I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. ²⁰I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; ²¹that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” [NASB]

HOPE
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I. Hearing

Another temptation ministers face, is to teach theology classes when they are leading public prayer. Unintentionally perhaps, we make a subtle shift in the middle of a prayer to stating doctrines more to benefit the congregation than to adore God. Suddenly we’re thinking more about what the congregation does or does not know, than about the essence or works of the Lord.

Perhaps you’d be amazed to find out that ministers even try to do this to each other during Presbytery meetings! Take comfort, then, that Jesus never did this in His prayer meetings. Don’t get me wrong... *plenty* of doctrine is unveiled in Jesus’ prayers. This prayer in ch17 is no exception. We must look for doctrine in His prayers. But we must marvel that whenever Jesus prayed, Jesus prayed. He is speaking to His Father, and asking that His Father’s will be done. He is aware of the disciples and He is comforting them with this prayer. But He is speaking to His Father, not to the disciples.

Nevertheless, it so happens that it is the Father’s will to give comfort to Jesus’ disciples including you and me. In this portion of the Lord’s prayer we discern that God’s Word brings us three aspects of spiritual comfort: joyful comfort, sanctifying comfort, and glorifying comfort.

A. *God’s Word brings joyful comfort (13-14)*

The first is joyful comfort. ¹³“But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves. ¹⁴I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” In v8 Jesus said, “for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me.” Jesus spoke God’s word to the disciples.

God’s word declared God’s will for your salvation. God’s word declared that God gave you to His Son Jesus from all eternity, and that God sent His Son into the world to give Himself for you. Jesus then said that He has given you into His Father’s safekeeping (v11). The joy of a man and a woman giving themselves to one another in marriage is an image of the joy Jesus wants you to have in receiving Him given to you. John the Baptist tasted this when he said, ^{Jn3.29}“He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. So this joy of mine has been made full.”

Jesus is a giver. He gives joy as He gives love. ^{15.11}“These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” Jesus is a giver. He gives as you ask. ^{16.24}“Until now you have asked for nothing in My name; ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be made full.” Jesus is a giver. He gives joy. Full joy. Holding nothing back. Joy that overcomes the reality that the world may hate you just because you receive God’s Word.

And yet, a huge part of the joy comes because Jesus is also a Receiver. He *listens* to you as no one else listens. Joyful comfort is Jesus receiving you as you are, and giving Himself to you as He is. Joyful comfort.

B. *God’s Word brings sanctifying comfort (15-19)*

The second is *sanctifying comfort*. ¹⁵“I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. ¹⁷Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. ¹⁸As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.”

The same Word that brings joyful comfort also brings sanctifying comfort. You may sometimes find yourself saying, “Why, oh *why* didn’t Jesus just ask God to take me out of this world?!” That would seem to make sense. Wasn’t He the one, after all, who made you “not of the world”? You and I were thoroughly of the world before Jesus came along and invaded our souls and united us to Him in all of His “not of the world”-ness.

It is true that God *intended* and chose us from all eternity to be made “not of the world.” It is true that we become “not of the world” *virtually* when Jesus died, rose from the dead, and ascended out of the world. But it became true *actually*, when by His Spirit He invaded us in all our “of the world”-ness and caused us to believe and trust His Word that He had made us *not of the world*. Now we are of heaven. So why doesn’t He just put us *in* heaven? Because then we’d miss out on the sanctifying comfort.

Sanctifying comfort is the comfort we receive when we believe His Word that though the world hates us, God loves us. Sanctifying comfort is the comfort we receive when, pressed hard on every side by the evil one, we believe His Word that God keeps us.

Sanctifying comfort is the comfort we receive when despite everything the world tells us, we believe His Word that God forgives us. Sanctifying comfort is the comfort we receive when although we think we must be crushed into humble subjection to purge our corruption, we believe God’s Word that *Jesus* in our place was crushed in humble subjection to purge our corruption. Sanctifying comfort is the comfort we receive when we feel very alone in the world, and yet believe God’s Word that the Son of God, eternally one with His Father and Holy Spirit, experienced in our place the reality that a forsaken One is the loneliest number that will ever, ever be.

Sanctifying comfort is the comfort we receive when we believe Jesus’ prayer that He set Himself apart as the only One who could and did suffer in our place the eternal anguish of guilt for our sins against God. United to Him in being not of the world, then, we are not surprised by the bitterness of the world against us. In fact such bitterness can confirm our “not of the world”-ness, since the world loves its own.

Sanctifying comfort is Jesus giving Himself to you, and that being so much better than *anyone* else given himself or herself to you. Sanctifying comfort.

C. God’s Word brings glorifying comfort (20-21)

And the third is *glorifying comfort*.²⁰“I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.”

Glorifying comfort. The kind of glorifying that Jesus asks the Father to do in this prayer, as we have already seen, is putting the honor and praise back where it belongs. As for us, we usually prefer to have the honor and praise directed to us. This preference of ours doesn’t just magically and completely change when Jesus first invades our soul with His Spirit. We like adoration, and what more perfect scheme for gaining adoration, than to suddenly become Mr or Miss Super-Believer?

What better scheme for gaining adoration than suddenly to rise above all the problems and troubles of the world; to become independent and aloof from the world? What simpler scheme for gaining adoration than to convince yourself and everyone else that you have all the answers now? That’s a pretty comfortable pedestal to be on... right up to the point where you realize that most of your answers are hollow and won’t even support your own spirit when all your friends start tuning out and turning off.

Jesus prays now for all those who will believe in *HIM* through our word. God’s Word comforts us when it places the glory and honor and praise where it belongs: on Him. Not on us. God’s Word does not give you or me all the answers. God’s Word gives you and me Jesus. And it is Jesus we are to comfort others with.

Jesus prays that you and I might be one in Him... not in you or in me. Jesus prays that the world may believe that God sent *Him*, not that God sent you or me. Yes, God send us, but not with the message that God sent us. God sends us with the message that God sent Jesus. Seems simple... but it is even simpler for us to start helping people think that God sent *us*. That is a terribly heavy burden and brings no comfort. All comfort comes by the Word, which places all glory and honor upon Christ who came to save sinful men and women and children.

Glorifying comfort is Jesus giving Himself—and His Body, the Church—to you; and that being so much better than your being the hero. Glorifying comfort.

D. Doctrine

We do receive doctrine through Jesus’ prayer to His Father. And the doctrine from this part of His prayer is simply this: *All spiritual comfort comes by way of God’s Word.*

II. Examining

Simple, right? Yes... simple to hear. Not so simple to live. It’s a good thing Jesus prays for this, or we’d be in a pretty tough spot. Tell me, how willing are you to receive all your spiritual comfort through His Word? Is His Word the first place you turn when you are feeling blue? Is His Word the certain solution when you feel like nobody is listening to you? Is His Word the surest place of relief when you feel like He’s not talking to you today?

Isn’t it simpler to work harder and longer... and tell yourself you’ll get back to reading *next* week when things settle down a bit? And along the way, you can treat yourself to the reward of telling people how overloaded you are... but you’re getting through.

Isn’t it simpler to find some strong, influential cause in this world to give your thought, time, and money to? Some charitable work, perhaps, that will make you feel like you are really having an impact?

Isn’t it simpler to find something in the world to latch onto that makes you feel strong, some identity or talent or skill, perhaps, by which you can justify your existence and be acceptable?

III. Investigating

Ahh, but all spiritual comfort comes by way of God’s Word. While they are running around in your head, let’s investigate how the Lord Jesus answered these same questions. I think the way He answered these questions, informs the structure and very content of this part of the Lord’s prayer which we have read today.

A. Word more comfortable than bread

All spiritual comfort comes by way of God’s Word. Isn’t it simpler to work harder and longer, to provide comfort for yourself? Here is how Jesus was asked that question: ^{Lk4.3}“If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.” Jesus was very, very hungry after eating nothing in the wilderness for 40 days. Wouldn’t it have been simpler for Him just to work a hard little miracle and get some quick-rising bread? His answer? ^{Mt4.4}“It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’”

For Jesus, the Word of God was more comforting than bread gained by a little harder work. Thus He prays here, saying that He did not give us joy by promising worldly, physical comfort, but by speaking to us in the world. He gives us joy and comfort by giving us the Word of God.

No amount of comfortable furniture, comfortable weather, or comfortable health will ever diminish the searing pain of being hated by the world. But knowing that Jesus strapped to Himself all the hatred of the world against Him and against you, and carried it up onto the cross to secure God’s infinite *love* for you... now *that* comfort will carry you through life in this world.

B. Word more comfortable than power

All spiritual comfort comes by way of God’s Word. Isn’t it simpler to find some strong, influential, even charitable cause in this world to give your thought, time, energy and money to? Isn’t it simpler to find some powerful endeavor to devote yourself to? Here is how Jesus was asked that question: ^{Lk4.6}“I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish.” ⁷Therefore if You worship before me, it shall all be Yours.”

All the kingdoms of the world were spread before Jesus’ eyes and the devil drove a pretty hard bargain. Just think of all the impact Jesus could have had. Think of all the cities He could have “changed for the Kingdom of God.” Wouldn’t it have been simpler for Him to appear strong? Jesus did not grasp after the appearance of strength. His answer? ^{Lk4.8}“It is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only.’”

For Jesus, the Word of God was more comforting than giving Himself to serving a powerful prince of the world. Thus He prays here, asking that *God* be our power, strength, and authority; that we be sanctified in God’s truth rather than the world’s. Thus He does *not* pray that God would remove us from the place of worldly weakness.

Instead, Jesus says that He will sanctify Himself—that He will set Himself apart by going to the cross in utter weakness to satisfy the powerful demands of the Law to punish our sins. He prays that the truth of God’s Word will comfort us more than all the power of the world. That Word is, that Jesus took all of your pollution, all of your corruption, all of your wicked willfulness upon Himself and nailed it to the cross in His weak body. Now *that* comfort will carry you through all your smallness and loneliness in this world.

C. Word more comfortable than adoration

All spiritual comfort comes by way of God’s Word. Isn’t it simpler to find something in the world, by which you can justify your existence and feel acceptable? Isn’t it simpler to find something that will attract people’s attention and adoration toward yourself? Satan led Jesus to Jerusalem and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, and asked that same question, saying, ^{Lk4.9}“If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down from here; ¹⁰for it is written, ‘He will command His angels concerning You to guard You,’ ¹¹and, ‘on their hands they will bear You up, so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.’”

Oh, how all the people would have marveled at Jesus. How they would have adored Him. Wouldn’t it have been simpler for Him to look like Superman? Or at least like an Olympic Half-Pipe gold medalist? Why, even the President might give Him a call on the telephone and invite Him to the White House! But His answer? ^{Lk4.12}“It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” For Jesus, the Word of God *rightly applied* was more comforting than attracting adoration to Himself.

And thus He prays here, not asking God to make us Christians into Olympic icons or movie stars or politicians that would attract attention and adoration to ourselves. He may mold some of us into Olympians or stars or politicians, but only that His gift in us might draw attention to the One in whom we live and move and have our being.

Jesus prays that we might find our comfort not in what we do or even in who we are, but only in Him whom the Father did send into the world. Jesus prays that we might find our comfort

in God’s Word that we are sharing; the Promise of eternal comfort in Christ’s embrace... the promise that pure and lasting comfort is found only in adoring the One who loved us by bearing our putrid sins and giving us His lovely righteousness and perfect obedience.

IV. Receiving

We do not answer these questions rightly, because our hearts lust after other comforts. Christ, however, did answer them rightly, for there is no lust in Him. This is why He could pray as He does in ch17 and be certain God would do all He asked. Then, on the cross, He would take all our lusts and wrong answers, and give to us all His purity and right answers.

All spiritual comfort comes by way of God’s Word. Will you receive it? Will you consider carefully the means by which you may be trying to find comfort for your soul? This comfort is very expensive, but it is free to you. It cost Jesus everything, but He offers it freely to you. All you need to do is read, listen, believe.

If you insist on seeking other comforts in the world to replace or displace the comfort that comes only through His Word, then you should know two things. One, God will help you out by making those comforts very, very disappointing. And He also will be pleased to make them very, very *uncomfortable*.

Two, part of Jesus’ great *discomfort* on the cross—and no small part—was paying the price for your heart’s and mine unwillingness to be content with the comfort He offers only by the Word of God. So when your alter-comforts leave you feeling sick and empty and full only of tears, it is only a sign of God’s infinite love for you. It is not God punishing you. Rather, God is moving you into a place of greater rest in the comfort available only through His Word. Let Him comfort you. He is very good at it.