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John 17:20-26 -- Prayer For Future Believers

Notes:

Vs. 20 - *I do not ask on behalf of these alone* -- Jesus expands the focus of His prayer. *but for those who believe in Me through their word* -- The NASB translation here sounds like a shift away from the disciples to future believers. Actually the Greek is inclusive, "rather also concerning the ones believing by means of their word into/unto Me". Jesus' thoughts do not move away from the apostles, but reaches beyond them to include the fruits of their ministry.

Vs. 21 - *that they may all be one* -- This is a purpose clause in Greek. "I am asking... in order that they might be one [thing]". As we saw in vs. 11, Jesus is praying for their essential unity, not just an organizational unity. The verb form indicates a future possibility (i.e., something that did not as yet exist, but would come to pass) that would be ongoing, "they might be (being)".

Sometimes it is interesting to think about what He didn't say, in order to understand more clearly the meaning of the word construction He chose to employ. Just by changing the form of the verb, He could have communicated the idea that they might come to be "one [thing]" at a point in time. The emphasis would have been on them coming to be "one (thing)" at that future possible moment. Or, He could have used another form that would indicate that He wanted the Father to make them "one" at a future possible moment and that they would remain "one [thing]" from that moment on. He did not choose to express His thought in either of these ways. Rather, He chose to say, "that they might be (being) one [thing]". The difference seems to be that they are to continue in the state of being one [thing]. This may possibly imply that they are to live out, or habitually express, this essential "oneness" that Jesus is talking about. The essential "oneness" is a given state, a starting point, that they are to continue to experience in an ongoing fashion, according to Jesus' prayer. The opposite of His request would be for them to come to be more than one essential thing, i.e., to be somehow fractured, mixed, or "other than" the one [thing] of Jesus' prayer.

even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You -- A comparative word picture that helps us to understand what He is talking about. The language of "You in Me, and I in You" sounds more like He is talking about some kind of "essential oneness", not just "teamwork" or "agreement". The way that Jesus and the Father experienced oneness was similar to how He prays that we might "be (being) one [thing]". Are we to be "in one another" in a similar way? Cf. Rom. 12:4,5; I Cor. 12:26,27. *that they also might be in Us* -- In English, this sounds like it is to be the completion of the previous phrase. In the Greek, it is a separate purpose clause, alongside of the first one in this verse. *that the world may believe that You did send Me* -- A third purpose clause. In other words, "I ask... (1.) in order that [they] all might be one [thing], just as You are in Me, and I in You; (2.) in order that also they might be in Us; and (3.) in order that the world might believe that You sent Me (at a point in time). The exact relation of these ideas to one another is not obviously clear. Are they three separate unrelated ideas, just listed next to each other? Are they meant to be fully progressive in nature, moving from one to another? How do they overlap or relate to each other? If they do, how does our (1.) being one [thing] (with intermingled life and identity in relationship to one another, like that of Jesus' own relation to the Father), and (2.) sharing intermingled life and identity with Jesus and the Father, relate to (3.) the world believing that God did send Jesus? The Lord does not expand on what He may have had in His mind. It is for us to ponder.

Vs. 22 - *And the glory which You have given Me I have given them* -- What "glory" is He talking about? In 1:14, we were told that the incarnate Word had glory, glory like a unique son of a father might have, a glory full of grace and truth. This glory, or radiance, made visible the character of the invisible God -- 1:18; 2:11; 7:16-18; 11:4,40. Cf. I Pet. 4:14. The verb, "I have given" communicates the idea that He has given them this glory and it remains theirs. It may refer to His intent, however, not necessarily to

what has happened in fact, yet. This is obviously evident in this case, since those who will believe through the preaching of the apostles (vs. 19) do not as yet exist as believers. *that they may be one, just as We are one* -- Another purpose clause. Jesus had transferred the glory which He had to them... in order to bring about this "one-thing-ness" among His followers, a "one-thing-ness" like Jesus and the Father experienced.

Vs. 23 - *I in them, and You in Me* -- What would it mean for Jesus to be in them? Looking back, we can see this fulfilled by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Rom. 8:9,10,15; Gal. 4:6; Matt. 28:18-20. What about the Father being in Jesus? Cf. Jn. 14:7-10. *that they may be perfected in unity* -- Another purpose clause. Jesus' and the Father's indwelling are to bring about the goal of "one-thing-ness". The verb, translated as "they may be perfected", is a combination of the verb "to be" (lit., "they might be [being]") with a participle that communicates an ongoing completed state, "having been perfected/matured/fully grown/completed/brought to fulfillment". This participle obviously implies some kind of a process that is brought to an end or fulfillment. The phrase "in unity" uses a different preposition, meaning "into, unto, towards", but the noun is the same, "one (thing)". Thus, it would be better translated, "in order that they might be having been completed/fully grown into one (thing)". *that the world may know that You did send Me, and did love them, even as You did love Me* -- Another purpose clause. The purpose of this process of building this "one-thing-ness" is that the world might then experientially know the reality of Christ's claims and the veracity of the Gospel message of God's love. Evidently, whatever this "one-thing-ness" might be, it ought to be visible enough that unbelievers will not only be able to see it, but will also be amazed enough by what they see to conclude that Jesus must have been the Son of God, sent from heaven to save humankind. This will verify God's love (agape) not only for Jesus, but for the human race, as well.

Vs. 24 - *Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am* -- There is a shift back to focus on the eleven disciples, "whom You have given to Me" (vs. 9). The "I desire" is followed by a purpose clause in Greek, "in order that where I am, also these might be with Me". *that they may behold My glory* -- Another purpose clause. They might be with Me "in order that they might behold My glory". The word for glory is the same throughout the chapter. *which You have given Me* -- The verb implies a glory granted and remaining in His possession. Evidently the disciples will not be able to see it fully in this life. Cf. Phil. 2:5-11; Ex. 33:17-23. *for you did love Me before the foundation of the world* -- Jesus had existed, and been in relationship with the Father, before the world was created.

Vs. 25 - *O righteous Father* -- God is just, equitable, fair, righteous in character and in His dealings with men. *although the world has not known You* -- "Although" is the NASB translators' choice for the word usually translated as "and, also, or even". The verb means that the world did not experientially or relationally know God. *yet I have known You* -- Jesus did have that experiential relationship with God, the basis of His works and words among us. Cf. Jn. 5:19,20,30; 8:54,55. *and these have known that You did send Me* -- 16:30-31; 17:7,8.

Vs. 26 - *and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known* -- Jesus had revealed to them the meaning of His name, Y'shua, the name which He said was the Father's and had also been given to Jesus (vs. 11). "Y'shua", the Hebrew form for "Jesus", means "Yahweh saves". Jesus had shown them the Father's heart to do just that, and will even more fully make it evident to them by the events of His death, resurrection, and by the ongoing teaching ministry of His Spirit. *that the love wherewith you did love Me may be in them, and I in them* -- A final purpose clause in this high priestly prayer. The purpose of the revelation of the Father's heart and character will be to bring about the possibility that the love of God might dwell inside the disciples (Rom. 5:5; I Jn. 4:7-21), and that Jesus Himself might dwell in them.