

An Exposition of
John
Seventeen



Martin Luther

MARTIN LUTHER'S
EXPOSITION OF
JOHN SEVENTEEN



Dr Henry Cole
Translator

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JOHN SEVENTEEN

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

HENRY COLE

Edited by Henry Sant

Gospel Standard Trust Publications

2019

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ISBN: 978-1-911466-13-0

Gospel Standard Trust Publications
12(b) Roundwood Lane,
Harpenden,
Hertfordshire,
AL5 3BZ

Publisher's Note: The Gospel Standard Trust issues this book with the hope that it might be spiritually profitable. Although we only issue books we feel set forth a Scriptural standard, there will be differences in opinion and interpretation, and the most gracious of men still have to say, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." We trust our readers will prayerfully "prove all things" and "hold fast that which is good", whilst bearing in meekness with any imperfections.

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FOREWORD

In all the divinely inspired writings of the Apostle John we see him as the great champion of the doctrine of the Person of Christ. Therefore, among other profound truths, he states distinctly the fact of Christ's eternal Sonship, speaking of him as "... the Son of the Father, in truth and love" (2 John 3). And John solemnly spells out the consequence of the denial of this doctrine, "Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: but he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also" (1 John 2:23). Clearly, if there is no eternal Son, there can be no eternal Father.

The doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ has marked out the Gospel Standard Strict and Particular Baptists as a distinct connexion of churches. In the middle of the nineteenth century this truth was assailed by certain Strict Baptists, and it was J C Philpot, the editor of the *Gospel Standard* magazine, who, discerning the pernicious nature of this error, in 1861 wrote in defence of the orthodox doctrine in *The True, Proper, and Eternal Sonship of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-Begotten Son of God*. It is therefore no surprise that this truth is clearly delineated in Article 5 of the Thirty Five Gospel Standard Articles of Faith, in the following expression concerning Christ, "... we believe that ... he existed from all eternity as the eternal Son of God." Philpot himself speaks of four different ways in which Christ's eternal generation has been denied. Some would place his Sonship in the incarnation, others in his resurrection from the dead, and others in his exaltation at the right hand of the

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Father. A fourth group would speak of Christ being the Son of God by office in the covenant of grace.

With regards to the glory of the eternal Sonship, Luther writes:

They shall see this glory, that they may know that I am the Son; not as sent into the world, and born of a virgin, but as thine only Son whom thou hast loved from the foundation of the world. That is that I am equally with thee the one God, and begotten from everlasting." For God could not love him more, than by giving him an equal and eternal divinity. All these things are now preached and believed, but they are still seen through a glass darkly, and do not shine forth in all their splendour. Therefore they are diligently to be declared and set forth by the Word (as Christ himself had hitherto done), until the veil be taken away, and we behold them openly, and face to face.

In his Exposition of John 17 Luther sees clearly, and states pointedly, all those great truths concerning the Person of Christ that stand forth in this remarkable prayer. And, because the sovereignty of divine grace was so burnt into his soul, the Protestant Reformer always deals with doctrine in a thoroughly experimental manner. However at the outset he acknowledges his inability sufficiently to set forth the power and virtue of Christ's prayer, saying "... the more simple the words are in which it is clothed, in the more, deep, rich, and full mysteries does it abound..." Among these mysteries is that of the Deity of Christ, which Luther calls "... the sum and substance of the New Testament." Furthermore in reference to this 17th chapter of John, Luther declares, "For I know not, that the sum of the whole Christian doctrine is

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so copiously and fully handled, and asserted in such powerful words, in any other place.” To Luther, Christ’s high priestly prayer is evidently the Holy of Holies of the Word of God.

From the above it will be gathered that, although a short work, the subject matter dealt with in this exposition is vitally important. It is that of the Son’s co-equal and co-eternal Deity with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the doctrine of the Trinity. In fact throughout John 17 Christ prays to the Father in terms of the eternal counsels of the Godhead, the inter-trinitarian covenant of redemption.

The exposition is taken from Volume 2 of *The Select Works of Martin Luther*. Four volumes of Luther’s works, translated by Henry Cole, were published in 1827. He declares that the principle he strictly adhered to in translation was “to give faithfully the mind of Luther, conveying, as far as in him lay, the Reformer’s faith and spirit and religion; and retaining also as much of his peculiar mode and cast of expression as could possibly be transferred from the idiom of one language into that of another.” Therefor our policy in editing has been to ensure that no change is made to the sense as given in Dr Cole’s version, but at the same time to break up the long sentences, and in general to open up the punctuation in line with modern English usage.

Henry Sant
Committee Member, Gospel Standard Trust

September 2018

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THE PREFACE OF MARTIN LUTHER TO THE READER

These my homilies concerning the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, which St. John has delivered down to us in his seventeenth chapter, I not only saw with pleasure printed and brought forth into public, but myself requested my particular friend, M. Caspar Cruciger, to undertake the labour of collecting them and reducing them into a regular form (for I had not time and leisure to do it myself) that he might put them into the hands of others. For I was fully persuaded that this crumb and this cup of cold water would be useful and acceptable unto godly Christians who hunger and thirst after righteousness; whom alone I desire to serve in these labours. But as to those full and over-wise spirits who loathe my writings, they have more than enough already, and do not want my help. Whom in this labour of mine I do not study to gratify one jot. Excepting it be that they might have something new, to furnish them with an occasion for exhibiting some flaming specimen of their own great teaching abilities. But these homilies I commend to be read by all the beloved members of Christ, commending myself to their prayers. The grace of God be with us!

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EXPOSITION OF JOHN SEVENTEEN

VERSE 1

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee, &c.

Among all the works of our Lord Jesus Christ we ought to have a desire to know what state of body, or what gestures he used, when he prayed and spoke with his dearest Father. For in other respects many particulars are committed to writing and handed down to memory. How he preached when he addressed the people, and how he wrought his signs and miracles; but very few particulars concerning the manner in which he prayed. But this very manner is here described in many words, which he made use of in praying to the Father for his disciples, and which he left them, as it were, for a memorial; which nevertheless are not regarded by them. Whereas if the same did not stand recorded in writing, we should perhaps be ready to go in search for them even to the ends of the world, if it were possible without weariness. For this prayer is fervent, and proceeding from the inmost soul. Wherein he opens and wholly discloses to us the secret recesses of his own heart, and the will of the Father most sweetly inclined towards us. The words of this very prayer, however, are such that if heard in our ears without the Spirit sound like childish nothings, and as having neither power nor savour, nor being worthy of mention. For reason and

human wisdom accounts all those things that are not sounded forth in grand and great expressions, and that do not with their grandeur rivet the minds of all with admiration, as nothing at all. But if we could but see and duly conceive of the authority and greatness of the Man here praying, and the majesty of him who is prayed to, together with the importance of the things prayed for, we should not look upon them as so trifling and worthless, but should find in the plain proofs of felt experience how much power and consolation these simple words contain.

For Christ is here himself a diligent observer of his own rule, which he has delivered to us concerning our prayers, that there is no necessity for using long and pompous words, but that simple words coming forth from the heart are the most effectual. Therefore let no one be offended at this prayer, nor let him through sleepy unconcern negligently disregard it, nor pass it by without heed, as containing words that are useless, or commonly spoken by men. For it may appear to any one that he could make a much better prayer; whereas, if he were to attempt it he would soon feel that the matter, the words, and the manner would fail him.

But the sum and cause of this introductory head is to show that a good prayer ought to follow a good sermon or discourse. That is, that after the Word is sown among the people, we are to groan and humbly beg of God that the Word heard might be effectual, and might bring forth fruit. For when Christ had discharged his office, and had consoled and refreshed his disciples with a long sermon, and had taken his leave of them, it remained for him to pray both for his disciples and for all Christians. In order that he might in all things fulfil his office as our high and only Priest, and might

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leave nothing unfinished that was necessary for their confirmation and support; since he was to leave them in the world behind him. And hence I have ever sedulously testified how necessary Christian prayer is, without which faith cannot subsist and endure.

For those who teach, or hear, or know the Word, and yet pray not, sufficiently declare that they are yet secure and presumptuous. And are as though they needed not divine grace, and see not their necessities and perils, but think that all their affairs shall be established, and that they have enough and an abundance of all that they want. And then it comes to pass that the devil creeps on them slyly and overturns them before they are aware. It is for this reason that Christ by his own example, in his office of teaching and prayer, instructs us to take heed that the Word be not preached without fruits. But what power and virtue there is in this prayer I fear I shall never be able sufficiently to set forth. For the more simple the words are in which it is clothed, in the more deep, rich, and full mysteries does it abound; so that no one can fully enter into its contents.

First of all, when the Evangelist says, "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said," he gives an honour to the using of external gestures in prayer. Whereby he stops the mouths of fanatical praters, who affirm that these external things are of no moment. But in this place you plainly perceive that Christ himself not only prayed with his mouth for his disciples to hear him, but used certain gestures, which persons in prayer are wont to use. Of whom some pray with bended knees, some fall on their face to the ground, some stand and lift up their eyes to heaven: and these three forms or manners of praying are all exemplified

in the Scripture. For how King David fell on the earth and prayed for his son seven days is recorded in 2 Sam. 12. And Christ himself prayed both on his knees and on the earth in the garden. And Peter with many others cast themselves down at the feet of the Lord. Again, Luke 18 speaks of standing.

But it matters not much whether we stand, or bend our knees, or fall on the ground: for they are external forms that are neither rejected, nor commanded as being necessary to be observed. And there are many other forms of the same kind, such as lifting up the head and eyes to heaven, folding the hands, and striking the breast, &c. which indeed are not to be condemned since Christ approved of them. Therefore Paul in writing to the Ephesians speaks of his prayer thus, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Chap. 3:14). And to Timothy, "I will therefore, that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands,"&c. (1 Tim. 2:8). Although I should not think it wrong if a person prayed unto God even while picking up sticks, if it were but from the heart.

This however is most certainly true that if there be only an acting like a stage-player, consisting of murmuring and vociferation, just as we have hitherto stood in the churches, day and night counting the grains of rosaries (as they call it), turning over the leaves, and howling in the choir like wolves, that is certainly no prayer at all. For such prayers as these are without the heart and the soul, nor does anyone who prays in this manner ever once think of asking or obtaining anything from God. But where these gestures are used in praying, speaking, singing, or reading, with a view to rouse the spirit that it might feel a pleasure and devotion in praying, then

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they are good and useful. For it is to this end that the Psalms are appointed to be sung and read daily among Christians, that by the Word heard or used bodily, the devotion may be raised to speak forth or sigh in prayer.

Moreover, we have not a few examples of this way of praying, and of these external incitements in the Scripture, as that of the prophet Elisha (2 Kings 3). Whose custom it was, as we read, when he found that he was not sufficiently devout, ready, and alive, that he caused a minstrel to be sent to him, at the sound of whose harp he was revived and roused to prophesy. How powerful others are in the Spirit, I for my part cannot tell, but as for myself, when I am without the Word, or do not remember it, or am not speaking from it, I find Christ nowhere, see him nowhere, and have lost all my devotion and spiritual mind too. But as soon as ever I propose to myself any one of the Psalms, or any sentence of the Scripture, then by its light my heart is quickened, and immediately another mind and another feeling are begotten in me. And I know that everyone experiences the same in himself daily.

And the cause of this is that which we all find in ourselves, that our ideas and thoughts are so slippery and unstable, that although we begin to offer up any serious prayer or enter upon any meditation concerning God, without the Word and the Scripture, we generally find that before we can look around us our mind has run away from our first thought above six hundred miles. Let anyone try this if he will, and then tell me how long he can remain fixed in one thought. Or choose out any one hour of your life, and promise to tell me all your thoughts during that hour. I will be bound to venture any pledge, that you will be ashamed of

yourself, and will be afraid to speak out those things which have happened unto you, and that men would think you worse than a mad dog while uttering the whole, and such as should be bound in chains. And this has often been my experience even when engaged in the best of meditations, so shattered and depraved a thing is the human heart, that it is evident that no water or wind is so moveable and unstable.

I may as well give an example of this. It is read concerning St. Bernard, who continually experienced this, that at a certain time he complained to a particular friend of the difficulty that he found in praying rightly, and that he could not say the Lord's Prayer once over without wandering thoughts. Which thing filled his friend with the greatest wonder, who thought it to be a matter of no such trouble and difficulty. St. Bernard began to say, that he would offer as a pledge a highbred horse if he would make the trial, and would agree to tell him the truth of the result. His friend refused not the offer, hoping that he should without difficulty accomplish the matter. Therefore he begins to pray, "Our Father," &c. but, before he had got through the first petition a thought came into his mind, "But, if I win the horse I shall have the bridle and saddle along with him!" And in a short time he found himself wandered away so widely that he was obliged to leave off on a sudden, and declare that St. Bernard had gained his point, and was right.

And in a word, if you are able to repeat the Lord's Prayer without any wandering thoughts, then I will judge you a perfect master in this matter. I for my part cannot do it: nay, I am truly glad if the interrupting thoughts even go away as they came.

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I have mentioned these things that we may not pass by this text negligently, as the fanatical spirits do. But may rather learn how much those external words and gestures serve and profit, as tending to assist in collecting the thoughts of the heart that are scattered and dispersed, that it might not slip away and be taken with other things, and that we might not stray from our proper thoughts and wander out of the way. Even as we take hold of a tree or a wall with our hands to support ourselves from falling. And this is where our fanatical spirits fail. They think that all is then excellently well with them when they are wrapped up in their sublime and spiritual thoughts; but they see not that they are without the Word, and wandering entirely out of the way. Therefore beware of such high-flying thoughts, and be assured within yourself, that nothing can be transacted with God without the external Word and prayer. Nevertheless a right distinction is to be made; that is, that the prayer be not altogether external, wherein nothing else but the work itself is sought after, and where it is believed that if the prayer be only said or read, it is an excellent prayer, although the heart may not have once felt what the mouth was speaking, or have thought what was going on. But prayer must so be offered up, that the heart may begin, and then the words follow, accompanied with suitable gestures. And in a word, the prayer that comes forth from the heart is good and effectual, with whatever gestures it may be accompanied.

Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son.

Here we see the virtues of the prayer. First, there are in this prayer three principal things: and especially that which is of the greatest importance in prayer, that we give thanks unto God. And that with an honouring thanksgiving we extol

and enumerate the blessings he has already bestowed upon us, as Christ does here, recounting those things which the Father had given him and bestowed upon him. Whose example we ought also to imitate at this day, and say, "O Almighty and dearest Father, thou hast given unto us thy precious and holy Gospel; wherein thou hast abundantly poured upon us unspeakable grace." Then are to be introduced prayers and a mention of our necessity, "Grant therefore, O dearest Father, such a portion of grace that we may hold fast the Gospel which thou hast thus communicated unto us, and may abide therein." And then we are to remember others in our prayers, "That he would condescend to give his help to all."

In this way every prayer is to be offered up, even where it is on account of temporal necessities, and with this exercise of the graces. Also with confession, whereby we may confess that all the blessings which we enjoy are God's. For which cause also we ought to pray that he would preserve and increase them both unto ourselves and others. This is the way of rightly entering upon prayer, and of making a proper access and approach whereby to gain the favour of God that he might willingly and freely hear us. And an example of the same kind you will meet with also in another place where he highly extols and preaches the Father, and speaks forth a great sermon in the midst of his prayer as it were; as in Matt. 11 towards the end.

And thus he here begins, "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee." These words are in appearance so trifling and simple that, in the judgment of human ears, they do not seem to be worth a straw. But who can by searching find out unto the full the weight of the matter contained in

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them, and the solemnity with which they were uttered by Christ? The meaning of them is briefly this: "I entreat thee, O Father, to glorify me." But not content with this he adds, "that I also may glorify thee."

To "glorify" signifies to praise, to extol, and to magnify and make of great fame; that his name and fame may become everywhere renowned, and may be spoken of and honoured by all. But in this expression he shows in what a situation he is now placed, and with what a necessity he is now urged to put up this prayer. "The hour (as he would say) is now approaching, and is at hand in which I am to suffer, and to die a death the most ignominious of all deaths. By which all my renown, the splendour of my life and name, and my dignity, will be obscured and darkened." For Christ had now done great things, had preached with great authority, had wrought most miraculous signs, and had given a splendid proof of his excellency, so that he in just right deserved to be praised, honoured, and adored by all. Whereas he meets with just the contrary: and instead of having honour and glory shown and given unto him, he is loaded with ignominy and disgrace. For he is compelled to hang on the cross, to die between two thieves as the worst and most abandoned of malefactors that ever the earth produced, and to be treated with greater ignominy and turpitude than any criminal was ever treated.

For the most part the world has that feeling of humanity, that when even the most depraved and desperate ruffians and murderers are led to punishment, there is no one who does not pity their state, grieve for their misery, and feel sorrow for them. But Christ the Saviour of the world is the only one who is destined to see his death a matter of

gratification and joy to all. Nor were the Jews, even when they had had all their hearts' desire in putting him brutally to death, satisfied after all. And in a word, there was no one engaged in the scene, who did not think that the highest and most acceptable service would be done unto God, and the world reduced to safety and tranquillity, if this man were killed and taken out of the way. For they considered him to be the most pernicious and poisonous worm that ever was upon the face of the earth, and worthy to suffer every bitterness, affliction, and plague. And this was indeed thrusting that ever worthy, glorious, and great Man into darkness. Thus was Christ, the light and salvation of the whole world, to be received and honoured by the world! He was excommunicated and thrust out of the world like the worst of devils! And so it is even to this day. The Jews still go on to fill up the measure of their fathers: for they would rather bear any kind of bitterness, yea, even all the devils together than hear the name of Christ and of his mother Mary mentioned.

And it fares the same with our Gospel. For there is no devil, no pest, no destruction, against which the Pope and his sects, together with all our enemies, are so much enraged as against our Gospel and doctrine. These must be condemned, execrated, devoted to the furies, and excommunicated: so that nothing is to be esteemed more infamous, ignominious, and detestable than Christ and the Gospel. This is what Christ says, "the hour is come," or, the hour is at hand. For he prays with such a feeling, and so urgently, as though he were now hanging on the cross, and wished to say, "I am now in the midst of ignominy and death, and lie buried in the deepest darkness. Now the time is come for thy delivering me, that thou mightest exalt me and raise me to honours,

now that the light of my glory is so utterly darkened, and the world tramples me under their feet, and all hate and spurn me so that I have no help or counsel whatever, but thy caring for me and undertaking my cause. For, that I may escape from the jaws of death and from the power of the devil, who is the prince of darkness, an eternal, omnipotent, and divine power must be put forth.”

And how was this glorification accomplished? Surely when the Father raised him again from the dead, laid the devil at his feet, and made him King and Lord over all creatures. And when he ordained all these things to be spread abroad and proclaimed by the Gospel, to the intent that they might be openly shown to the whole world. And even as this once took place at the feast of the passover, so will it be preached unto the end of time, that it might be known unto our children and our children’s children throughout all generations.

That thy Son also may glorify thee.

Here in this particular expression in the exercise of his graces, “thy Son,” he at once discloses himself. Wherein he confesses and glories that he is the Son of God, and has all things from the Father; which same particular he shortly after unfolds in more full expressions. He is the Son of God from everlasting, in the same majesty, power, and honour: but now in the world he is in exile, in infirmity, in death, in ignominy, as though deserted by his Father and by all men. The world plies all its powers, efforts, endeavours, and labour, and the devil directs all his arts and devices to bring him to nothing, and that no remembrance of him might remain. As it is said in the Psalm, “When shall he die, and his name perish?” thinking that all was at an end with him when

he hung on the cross and was dying. And therefore it is that he thus prays, "I know, O Father, that I came into the world by thy mission, and that therefore thou wilt not suffer thy Son to remain buried in his darkness. Wherefore be thou pleased to glorify me, not that I might thereby please myself, but do it for thine own honour and glory."

For he was for that end sent into the world that he might proclaim the praise and glory of the Father far and wide with the loudest voice. And hence he alone is that Man by whose preaching the Father is to be known and honoured. If he therefore had not been honoured, the dignity and glory of the Father also would have been obscured and extinguished. Nay would have remained buried with him in disgrace and ignominy (for whatever the Son suffers, the same also must the Father bear and suffer); and from this the world would have taken an occasion to revile and accuse. "Lo! where is now this God, and his Father in whom he gloried with so much boasting! How excellently has he upheld him!" Therefore, that there might be no place for such reviling and blaspheming, the strength and power of the Father were to be displayed in glorifying his Son. And the Son was to be made manifest in so much honour that the whole world, with all their prepared ignominy and disgrace, should be compelled to fall down at his feet and adore him!

And at length the Father is glorified by the Son. That is, he is made known and preached as being able to bring help in infirmity, in death, in ignominy; and out of them to bring strength, life, honour, and glory. Which then began to be done when Christ arose from the dead unto his glory, and ascended into heaven, and sent down his Holy Spirit; and which still continues to be done by his permitting his Gospel

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to be preached far and wide as long as the world shall stand. For this is the office of the Holy Spirit, to manifest by the preaching of the Gospel how great and unspeakable things God has done for us through Christ. That he has delivered us from sin, death, and the power of the devil, and has received us into his grace and protection, and wholly given himself unto us!

And such a glorifying or magnifying were just as necessary for the Father, as for our Lord Jesus Christ himself. For if we consider the Father, we shall see that he was as deeply immersed in darkness and hidden from the world, with respect to the glory and honour of his name as Christ himself was when hanging upon the cross. For what was the state of things at that time in the world? All was full of impious and blasphemous idolatries; so much so that there were some who worshipped the sun and the moon, and even fishes and birds. And the most holy name of the Divine Majesty had to endure seeing adoration paid to his creatures, but none to himself. Nay, the Jews even, who were called the people of God, practised their idolatries under his name by trusting in their own works and righteousness.

And the same is going on at this day. For every one forms to himself a God according to his own imaginations, under various kinds of a false worship of God, and each under a form of godliness. Not to mention those open and atrocious blasphemies against God with which the world is wholly filled. Therefore, there is the greatest need to pray that the Father may be glorified. That is, that he may be known by the preaching of the Gospel, and be thereby honoured as he desires and ought to be honoured. That all erroneous doctrines and false worship of God, together with all human

traditions and dreams, may cease and be abolished. And that the Gospel alone may prevail and shine.

From this view of things you may see how the heart of the Lord Christ burns, and with what ardent feelings of his inmost soul he utters this prayer. It grieves him that the most holy name of God should be obscured in such darkness, and that the whole world should lie in unbelief and blindness of mind. And so deeply does he grieve that he desires speedy death, and to endure every kind of insult and ignominy so that the honour of the Father's name might be vindicated, and his glory brought forth to the light.

But as I have already observed, the Father cannot be glorified unless the Son be first glorified. That is, unless the Holy Spirit first come and preach the gospel without which no one can know the Father. For before that he can only be preached and known as a rewarder and dealer in good works, and as one who is to look upon us according to our religion and holiness. But this is to praise not the Father, but ourselves and our own merits. Whereas, when Christ desires to be glorified by the Father, and to glorify the Father in return it is that men, leaving all confidence in themselves, should glory only in his grace and benefits.

Such words as these, therefore, does Christ speak for our sakes, to strengthen our faith against the greatest offence that can be opposed to the Gospel in the world. For it brings no small grief to Christians that they hear and see the name of God blasphemed and insulted on every side. While he himself also permits his Christians to be oppressed by persecutions and driven to every extremity, and so carries himself as though he could not bring them any help, or would not, in order that the world might fiercely triumph

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over them and shout the song of victory. Hence it is that Christ not only prays for himself, but that he might be glorified in all and by all that believe in him, and that he might glorify the Father. Who, being gained over and softened by this prayer, still now and then displays the same power in Christians which he openly manifested in Christ himself. To the intent, that as he was glorified by him, so also he might be glorified by us.

Therefore although we may suffer many afflictions, and may die for his Word's sake, yet through this ignominy of death, this turpitude, and this bitterness, we shall pass away into eternal glory. On the other hand our enemies, although they now rule and lord it over all things, shall at last be cast down from on high, and shall ignominiously go away into eternal disgrace. And this has been abundantly fulfilled in the most evident examples; and the same has been testified by experience down from the times of the apostles in many martyrs. And John Huss also was most ignominiously condemned in the council of Constance, and put to death. Yet he has obtained these honours; the Word which he taught has openly come forth and now shines throughout the world, condemning and shaming Popery with all its honours, pomp, and riches.

And the same also shall come upon all our enraged enemies who wish to suppress the gospel and to extirpate Christians, a great part of whom they have already burnt and murdered. For kings and potentates much more powerful and fierce than they are have come to destruction, and have been hurled headlong to perdition for the Gospel's sake, which they would not endure. In a comparison with whom, all the princes of this day would appear but as the common

beggars of the street. How often was the Roman empire terribly laid waste, plundered, harassed, and overthrown, at the times when it thought itself the most powerful and most secure, while it knew not how to cease from blaspheming and raging, and venting its fury against Christians, and from shedding their blood? And all those tyrants and persecutors to a man fell by a base and ignominious death. So that now nothing is more disgustful, impure, detestable, and contemptible, than the sound of their names. Whereas the names of the holy martyrs shine and are held in honour. And why? This prayer is heard, and has weight and power with God, breaking in pieces all the rage and power of the whole world. And in a word, as this glorifying or magnifying began, the same power and effects does it still show forth in Christendom, through the influence and efficacy of this prayer.

This also is to be observed from this passage that Christ hereby declares of himself, that he alone is that Man through whom the Father is to be glorified. By this he wishes to take from the Jews, his people, who had the law and the worship of God, their glory, and their boasting in their own righteousness. That they might know that neither of these things contain that whereby the Father can be glorified, or whereby any one can attain unto the knowledge of grace, and unto that righteousness which will avail before God. For if the glorifying and knowledge of God could have been known and revealed by the law, there would have been no need of the coming, the preaching, the suffering, and the death of Christ, much less would they have been necessary that he might glorify the Father. And by this same saying he also benefits us; that we might learn in what way God must be sought and apprehended by us, if we would do it aright,

and how we are to hold communication with him. For to glorify the Father (as I have already observed) is to know and to apprehend who he is, and how his will is inclined towards us. Unto this knowledge no one can attain or arrive, but through Christ. For he will manifest himself nowhere but through and in him, so as for us to discover his heart and will. In Christ we see nothing but ineffable love, and inexhaustible grace. And on the contrary, out of him, nothing but wrath and indignation, or that in which there is no mercy. And to sum up the whole in a few words, whoever seeks God, or desires to serve him, otherwise than in Christ, that man will not find God, nor serve the true God!

Therefore, I have continually protested and declared that whoever desires to walk safely must beware of all those high imaginations and contemplations, whereby we attempt to seek God in the divine majesty without any medium, and wish to search into his works, will, and counsel, and then run away with some very deep and especial revelations. Because by such we are not only deceived and seduced, but carried away and precipitated headlong into an abyss. And it is upon this account that all other doctrines and faith throughout the whole world are damnable, of what kind soever they may be, whether of Jews, Turks, monks, popes, bishops, and all the rest of them. Who serve God for the sake of obtaining grace, and wiping out their sins through some other medium than through Christ. That is to say through their own works, or their singular devotion and their spiritual thoughts. For it is irrevocably decreed of God that he will not be known nor found out of the one Mediator, Christ. Therefore, where Christ is not there the true God is not, nor the true worship of God. But of this we shall say more hereafter.

VERSE 2

As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.

In these words he embraces the second and third parts of his prayer: for he both gives thanks unto the Father, and shows what the Father had given him, as the reason why he extended his prayer over the whole world. For you plainly hear that he did not pray for himself that he might have all the glory to himself, but that he might benefit and serve us unto our attainment of eternal life. And it is on this account that he glories that power is given unto him of the Father over all flesh. That is, over all who are in the earth, the great, the mighty, the possessors of wealth, and the highest in honour. And that his design is, and that he is able, to honour his miserable followers who cleave unto him and who are loaded with shame and ignominy, so highly as to bring them to the enjoyment of an eternal and immortal life. "I have (saith he) all kings, and princes, and whatsoever liveth in the flesh, in my hand that I might have it in my power to deliver my Christians from sin, death, and all evils. Nor is anything wanting, except that this is not yet made manifest while I thus remain in this infirmity and ignominy; wherefore, I pray that thou wouldst glorify me, that I might be able to make this plain and openly manifest."

Here then centres all our hope, consolation, and trust, that we who believe in Christ and cleave to his Word, are his own, whom the Father gave unto him as his peculiar portion. And Christ has undertaken the care of us to defend and keep us. That how high soever the world may be above us in honour, in dignity, in glory, and in power, yet it might still be

compelled to remain in the powerful hand of Christ. That it might not be able to hurt us, and that the more determinately and deeply it may oppress us, he might with the greater display of power bring us forth into eternal life.

Therefore our hands should be lifted up without intermission, and God be unceasingly praised, and thanks be rendered unto him, that he has condescended to make us of that number of those who are his own. Since we know that we have his Word and for its sake suffer persecution and have the world our enemy. For he that is certain and persuaded of this, ought to entertain no doubt that he is of that flock for whom eternal life is prepared and ordained.

And finally, you may draw this inference and conclusion, that since it is the work and gift of Christ that we should be brought unto eternal life, it will certainly so be that the whole world with all their wisdom, power, dignity, and honours, will for our sakes fall into everlasting shame. And that our weakness and helplessness will be exalted to inestimable glory. And this Christ made abundantly manifest in his enemies when he arose from the deepest ignominy to the highest glory.

For he exposed all their glorying and boasting in their own righteousness and holiness (from their reliance on which they persecuted Christ) to everlasting shame and contempt. For since it is most certain that he alone is Lord of the heavenly kingdom and of eternal life, it follows without a doubt that the world who persecute both him and his Christians cannot attain unto it. Although they desire with a foolish presumption of mind to become partaker of it by great efforts, and by their own powers and works. And where Christ freely gives eternal life, there of necessity must

be eternal greatness and glory. And on the contrary, where Christ gives not eternal life, there can be nothing else but eternal shame, ignominy, and contempt. Therefore, knowing these things, let us suffer our enemies to blaspheme and revile as long as they can, since the rage and fury of their reviling will shortly come to an end. For neither thirty, nor forty, nor sixty years are to be compared to eternity, even as the twinkling of an eye is not to be compared to the whole of this life which we live upon earth.

But observe what words John here uses, who has a particular manner of confirming this article above the rest of the Evangelists, that Christ is truly God equally with the Father. For these words, "As thou hast given him power over all flesh that he should give eternal life," &c. will not admit of the conclusion that he is only man. For such power, even of ruling over all flesh and of giving eternal life, can be given to no creature. A creature can receive and lay hold of eternal life, but to give eternal life unto others is the work and power of God alone. For the angels, although they enjoy immortality, yet cannot communicate the same to any other. When therefore Christ confesses that he has the power of giving eternal life unto his own, and that he has received the same from the Father, he indicates with sufficient clearness that he is of the same power and essence with the Father, though their persons are different. And that he might set this still more clearly, before our eyes, he adds,

VERSE 3

And this is life eternal that they might know thee the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

In these words, Christ shows what eternal life is, and what the nature of it is. For since he testifies that he has received the power to give eternal life, someone may ask in what eternal life consists, or how we can receive it? To this objecting inquiry, Christ, by a certain anticipation, gives an answer, and says, "Eternal life is thus, and my disciples shall receive it in this way, 'that they might know thee the one true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.'" This passage was powerfully brought forward by the fathers and teachers of old against the heresy of the Arians, who denied the divinity of Christ. And the passage is indeed beautiful and incontrovertible.

Every Christian, indeed, ought to give all diligence to read over the Gospel of St. John most carefully again and again, in order that he may rightly comprehend and understand it, and may arm and fortify himself with such mighty Scriptures, on account of the heresies that will come. For in every age, the Jews, the Turks, and the heretics, have fought against this article. And the same devil is beheld in many at this day; and (may God avert such an evil!) if he could find an opportunity and the power of breaking forth, he would burst forth directly with intolerable fury.

Therefore let him who would walk safely flee and avoid all those things which natural reason and human thoughts are accustomed to advance concerning this article. For there is no counsel or wisdom that can avail against the seducing

delusions of the devil, nor anything but our having a steady faith in the plain and simple words of the Scripture. Not at all relying upon our own thoughts and speculations; but saying, "Whatever Christ has said must be true, although it may be beyond the comprehension of me, or of any other mortal, how it can be true. He knows well what he himself is, and how to speak of himself." He that does not this stumbles and falls into errors and at last rushes headlong to perdition. For it is utterly impossible that human reason should apprehend even the least article of faith. Nor can any mortal have any right thought or sure knowledge of God whatever without the Word of God; and that even the Gentiles are compelled to confess. For they relate this particular of an excellent poet of theirs, named Simonides. On a certain day Hiero, tyrant of Syracuse, asked him what, or what kind of an object God was; or what opinion he held or received concerning God. Upon which he requested to have three days allowed him to consider of it. And when at the expiration of three days the tyrant asked him the same question, and he had to give the answer, he requested another three days to think upon it more deeply. When these three days had expired he repeated the same request again and again, until he could delay the answer no longer, nor find any farther means of evading it. And when Hiero wondering, asked him why he did so he said, "Because, the longer I consider it, the more deeply obscure the matter appears to me." From which example we derive this proof, that the farther and the more deeply human reason goes in the investigation of God, his works, his will, and his counsel, the farther it gets from the knowledge of them, until it comes at last to know nothing and to believe nothing of God at all. Of which kind of men not a few are found among the wise and

prudent in this day. And this ought to be the lot of all who, leaving the Word, follow the guidance of reason, and bring her first of all into their counsels on all articles of faith, that they might see how they agree with her.

Therefore, since we have here a text so powerful and so plain, we must take heed that we wilfully obscure it not by the blinded eyes of reason, nor wrest it, nor suffer it otherwise to be interpreted. For here you see the words are plain, and any one may comprehend and understand them. Christ gives to all that believe eternal life, but no one can give eternal life save God only. Therefore it must incontrovertibly follow that Christ is truly and naturally GOD.

And moreover, as he says that eternal life stands in our knowing him and the Father, it plainly follows that no one can attain unto eternal life without the knowledge of him. And therefore the knowledge by which both himself and the Father are known must be the same. And hence it must also follow that he is of the same essence and nature with the Father. That is, that he is equally God with, but of a different person from, the Father. These things are so clearly proved in this text that even reason herself cannot deny or gainsay them.

But the worst of all is here, that reason is not content with the words, but leaving them rashly runs into another direction. She refuses to believe at once that the words themselves are true, but wishes to search out and comprehend how they can be considered as true and possible. And when she cannot comprehend that, she leaves the words and forms out to herself new imaginations. And then wrests the words themselves according to her own