

September 3rd, 2017

THE HOLY WARS OF CHRISTENDOM

John 17:14-16

June 10th, 1552, five young Frenchmen who had just finished their theological instruction in Switzerland were returning to their own country to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. Upon their return they were arrested and imprisoned. Over the course of their year long imprisonment, John Calvin wrote to them several letters. In his last letter before their martyrdom, he wrote

“the King has...refused all the requests made...so that nothing further is to be looked for from that quarter...since it pleases him to employ you to the death in maintaining his quarrel, he will strengthen your hands in the fight, and will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain... he hath [granted]¹ you this privilege...that the noise of [your bonds have] been everywhere spread abroad...so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby...For my part, I have no doubt, if it please this kind Father to take you unto himself, that he has preserved you [this far]², in order that your long-continued imprisonment might serve...for the better awakening of those whom he has determined to edify by your end. For let enemies do their utmost, they never shall never be able to bury out of sight that light which God has made to shine in you...And seeing that he employs your life in so worthy a cause as is the witness of the Gospel, doubt not that it must be precious to him...³However, be the Son of God glorified by our shame...let us be content with this sure testimony, that though we are persecuted and blamed we trust in the living God...My brethren...I pray our good Lord to have you in his holy protection, to

¹ original—“vouchsafed”

² original—“hitherto”

³ In the same letter, Calvin says “That God should have appointed you his Son’s martyrs, is a token to you of superabounding grace.” (see fn 5 for source)

strengthen you more and more by his power, to make you feel what care he takes of your salvation.”⁴

Days later, these five young men singing psalms and reciting holy Scripture, were led to their execution. History records

“...having arrived at the place of their death, they cheerfully mounted on the heap of wood, the two youngest first...the last who went up was Martial Alba [the eldest]...[he] kissed the other four who were already bound, saying to each of the, *Adieu, adieu, my brother*. The fire was kindled; the voice of the five confessors was heard, still exhorting one another in the midst of the flames: *Courage, my brothers; courage*. These were the last audible words of the five valiant champions and martyrs of the Lord.”⁵

They were burned at the stake. *And* what Jesus prayed in **v.16** came true: God kept them from the evil one. That’s the tension you must feel in this text or Jesus’ prayer will not affect you. Satanic forces pressed these five young men to be burned at the stake, and yet our kind Father kept them from the evil one.

And the same is true for the disciples themselves.⁶ They were all kept from the evil one *and yet* killed by the evil one. Scripture tells us that Herod ordered James' death by the sword—probably beheading (**Acts 12:2**). And then church tradition speaks of the death of the other disciples: Peter was crucified upside down in Rome. Jesus prophesied his death in **John 21:18**. Matthew died by the sword in Ethiopia. John was boiled in oil, only to miraculously recover and then sent to the mines on the island of Patmos. Bartholomew was flayed to death by a whip in Armenia. Andrew was crucified. Thomas was run through with a spear in India. Mathias was stoned and

⁴ John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters*, Ed. by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, *Vol. 5, Letters, Part 2, 1545-1553*, Ed. by Jules Bonnet, Trans. by David Constable, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, Reprint 1983), pg. 404-408

⁵ *ibid*, pg. 404-405

⁶ Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/apostles-die.html> accessed September 2, 2017

beheaded. And the Apostle Paul was tortured and beheaded by Caesar Nero in 67 a.d.

There is an incredible tension here. ‘Jesus, you prayed that your precious lambs would be kept from the evil one and yet all of them (save John) were died violent deaths.’ Perhaps this tension is amplified if we read John’s own words in **1 John 5:18** “We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not *touch* him.” John taught the church that Satan can’t touch you, *yet* all of his brother disciples were killed by Satan’s instruments.⁷ What’s going on here?

If you don’t feel that tension you will not appreciate the remedy that Jesus brings. What is your greatest danger? Or perhaps a more pointed question: What if your worst fears came true?⁸ Jesus prays this prayer, to remind you what your worst fear should be. Many of you have dislocated fears. These accounts of martyrdom aren’t even on your radar, because you are consumed with dislocated fears. Fear over your job, your bank account, your relationships, your health. As one author said “We tend to have too little fear for the things most dangerous to our souls, and too much fear over things far less dangerous.”⁹ Hurricanes can relocate the fears of a nation. Martyrdom can help relocate the fears of an individual. I have no doubt that these disciples held this prayer to be most precious when they were gasping their last breath. ‘Satan you may take this body, but you cannot have my soul. I will not fear you. Jesus Christ prayed for me that I would be kept from you. And my Father will answer.’

Jesus’ prayer shows that we are in a holy war. Dear believer, you belong to a holy war. And the only way that you will make it, whether you die on your

⁷ **Matthew 10:28** “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” **Luke 21:16-17** You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers[c] and relatives and friends, and *some of you they will put to death.* You will be hated by all for my name's sake. *But not a hair of your head will perish.*

⁸ Source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-if-my-worst-fears-come-true?> accessed September 2, 2017

⁹ *ibid*

death bed, or in a horrible car accident, or at the hands of enemies, is because Jesus prayed for you.

The Big Idea...

The Christian's life is a holy war, and your survival rests entirely on Christ

- ☆ The Holy War Against the World
- ☆ The Holy War Against Satan

I. The Holy War Against the World

Please look with me at v.14 “I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” There are two reasons that Jesus prays for why the world would hate the disciples. The first is because Jesus has gave them His word. The second is because they are not of this world.

1. The world hates us because we've received God's Word

Jesus says at the beginning of v.14 “I have given them your word...” In v.6 Jesus connect the word to the disciples' salvation. I don't think Jesus' emphasis here is to reiterate *that truth*, but rather to point to the fact that the disciples were given the word *in order to proclaim it to the world*. Martin Luther once said that our faith is supposed to be a *profane faith*.¹⁰ Profane literally

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, *St. Andrew's Expository Commentary: John*, (Orlando, FL.: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2009), pg. 325-326

means “out in front of the temple.”¹¹ What he meant is that our faith is not to be confined to holy huddles. Yes God loves the gathering of the saints.¹² But He gave us His Word to bear witness to the excellency of His Son.¹³

It’s this proclamation of the gospel that infuriates the world. Preaching the Word turns the world upside down. In Acts 17, the Jews became furious at Paul and Silas’ preaching. They attacked the house where he was staying. v.6 says “And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also,” Preaching turns the world upside down.

But preaching also brings death. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 2:14-16** “Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and *through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere*. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, *to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.*” Christians smell like death to the world. I’ve never smelled a dead body.¹⁴ But those who have say that it can cause involuntary uncontrollable vomiting. One lady said she snorted soap in order to get the smell out of her nostrils. Insurance companies will total a car that somebody died in because the smell is so bad. God made dead bodies to smell horrible to teach us how the perishing experience the preaching of the gospel.

The preached Word lays out the most important and most offense truths that the human heart could ever hear.

¹¹ Source: http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=profane accessed September 2, 2016

¹² **Psalm 87:1-3** “On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the Lord loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God. *Selah*”

¹³ Jesus said “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (**Acts 1:8**)

¹⁴ Source: <https://thoughtcatalog.com/lorenzo-jensen-iii/2017/01/20-people-describe-the-smell-of-a-dead-body/> accessed September 2, 2017

That all human beings owe God their absolute and unquestioned obedience and worship every moment of their existence (1 Cor. 10:31).

That all human beings have rebelled and have refused to do so. This is called sin (Rom. 3:23).

That the wages for this sin is death—conscious eternal judgment in hell (Rom. 6:23).

That upon death all will stand before the judgment of God where He will irrevocably determine every person's destiny for everlasting ages (Heb. 9:27).

That nobody can please God's holy standard through anything that they have done, are doing, or promise to do in the future in order to earn salvation. (Eph. 2:8-9).

That only the death of the Son of God and His resurrection will be accepted as payment for sinners. Only through repenting of sin, and trusting in Christ alone can anyone ever be saved. (John 14:6)

In that sound, those who are perishing smell their own death.¹⁵ And they hate those who carry that message.¹⁶

2. The world hates us because we don't belong to it

But there is a second reason the world hates us. Jesus prays at the end of v.14 “the world has hated them *because* they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” Jesus had already taught them this back in **John 15:19** “*If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*” Believers do

¹⁵ We were out on Wednesday night sharing the gospel and I handed this lady a tract, and she took a look at it and screeched and let go of it like it had ebola on it.

¹⁶ As Jesus told his brothers in **John 7:7** “The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify about it that its works are evil.”

not have to meet any condition for the world to hate them. God met that condition for you when He chose you for salvation.¹⁷

The greatest division in humanity is not between black or white, Republican or Democrat, American or Chinese, male or female. The greatest division is between those who belong to Jesus Christ and everyone else. How you relate to Jesus Christ *determines* everything else about you. Dear believer, when Jesus called you out of the world He sealed you irrevocably with the love of the Father. But that also means that you have been sealed irrevocably with the hatred of the world.¹⁸

II. The Holy War Against Satan

Please look with me at v.15, Jesus prays “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” We see an immediate correction to what many might conclude from what He prayed in v.14. ‘The world hates us, therefore we should avoid the world.’ Jesus prays the opposite!¹⁹ “*I do not ask you that you take them out of the world.*”

¹⁷ When Jesus Christ caused you to be born again, He fundamentally changed everything about you. The world loves the darkness (**John 3:19**), but you are of the light (**Matt. 5:14**). The world has the devil as their father (**John 8:44**), but you are a child of the Most High God (**John 1:12**). The world is going from bad to worse (**2 Tim. 3:13**); but it grieves you when you sin (**Romans 7:24**). The world sees religion as utter foolishness (**Psalms 14:1**); but you see Christ as your treasure and long to be with Him (**Phil. 1:21**).

¹⁸ You will not be able to make the world like you. By the word “world” here I mean the system that is in rebellion against God. The world that opposes God is not a physical thing. It is a spiritual, doctrinal thing. We don’t wrestle against flesh and blood (physical things), but against principalities and powers (spiritual and doctrinal things).

¹⁹ Paul is very careful to hold the line with this same truth when he instructs the church at Corinth to stop associating with the immoral man. He says in **1 Corinthians 5:9-10** “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.”

“In the world, but not of the world”

That popular phrase “We are to be in the world but not of the world” can be too reductionistic. That phrase often comes to mean, that we must exist *in* this world—locationally; but we must not be a participant *of* the world. Period. Of course we must not participate in the world’s rebellion. That would be sinful. But are we reducing this phrase to mean that our mission is *merely* negative? As if our mission is *mainly* about *not* being stained by the world’s rebellion? As one author sarcastically remarked: “Rats, we’re frustratingly stuck in this ole world, but let’s marshal our best energies to *not* be of it.”²⁰ No our mission is not *merely* negative. So why does Jesus pray this: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world.”? I see three reasons.

1st reason: We remain in the world for the sake of salvation

Look at v.18 “As you sent me into the world, *so I have sent them into the world.*” Jesus left his disciples in the world—He leaves us in the world—for the sake of proclaiming the gospel to the lost. Jesus already told the disciples this in **John 15:27** “*you also will bear witness.*” Paul shows the necessity of gospel proclamation in **Romans 10:13-14** “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” Believer, Jesus has left you in this world, in spite of the holy war that you face, because He has other sheep that He loves and He wants to save. He is going to use the church’s witness to bring this about. The salvation of His people is the stated reason²¹ why Christ hasn’t returned to the earth yet **2 Peter 3:9** says “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise [*to return to the earth*] as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”

²⁰ Source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-s-revise-the-popular-phrase-in-but-not-of> accessed September 2, 2017

²¹ I do not pretend to say this is the only reason.

That's the first reason Jesus doesn't pray for God to take the disciples—and us—out of the world, because He has other sheep that he is saving.²²

2nd reason: We remain in the world for the sake God's glory

In v.1-5 Jesus repeatedly said that the the glory of the Father was *why* He was sent into the world. v.4 “I *glorified* you on earth, having accomplished *the work* that you gave me to do.” The disciples were sent for the same reason, which is why Jesus says in v.18 “As you sent me into the world, [*to bring you glory*] so I have sent them into the world [*to do the same*].” The ultimate and highest reason that you exist on planet earth is so that you would make God's glory known and treasured. That's why you're here. **Matthew 5:16** “Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and *give glory to your Father* who is in heaven.” That's how Calvin encouraged those four young prisoners who were burned at the stake. He wrote

“[God] will not suffer a single drop of your blood to be spent in vain...he hath [granted]²³ you this privilege...that the noise of [your bonds have] been everywhere spread abroad...so that the name of our Lord be magnified thereby.”²⁴

That's the second reason Jesus doesn't pray for God to take the disciples—and us—out of the world, because the Father intends to be glorified through your life on planet earth.

²² As Calvin wrote to the five prisoners at Lyons “For my part, I have no doubt, if it please this kind Father to take you unto himself, that he has preserved you [this far], in order that your long-continued imprisonment might serve...for the better awakening of those whom he has determined to edify by your end.” (see fn 24 for source)

²³ original—“vouchsafed”

²⁴ John Calvin, *Selected Works of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters*, Ed. by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, *Vol. 5, Letters, Part 2, 1545-1553*, Ed. by Jules Bonnet, Trans. by David Constable, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, Reprint 1983), pg. 406

3rd reason: We remain in the world for the sake of our souls

In this prayer, Jesus is supremely concerned that we see and enjoy and treasure His glory. Look what He says in v.24 “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, *to see my glory*” Jesus is praying something for our sakes here. Jesus is asking the question “what will make my people most happy?” And His answer is: to see Me. But He doesn’t take us home right away. Why? Because staying until our appointed time maximizes our sight of Him. David Brainerd, the great missionary to the Indians in the 18th century saw this. Listen to what he said

“God designs that those whom he sanctifies in part here, and intends for immortal glory, shall tarry a while in this present evil world, so that their own experience of temptations...may teach them how great the deliverance is, which God has wrought for them, that they may be swallowed up in thankfulness and admiration to eternity.”²⁵

The apostle Paul understood this truth. As he sat in chained in prison in Rome, he told the Philippian church “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” But he reasoned “If I am to live in the flesh, that means *fruitful labor* for me” (Phil. 1:22)

That’s the third reason Jesus doesn’t pray for God to take the disciples—and us—out of the world, because He wants our joy *in Him* to be full.²⁶

The most dangerous place to exist

Let’s now look at the last part of v.15 “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, *but that you keep them from the evil one.*” As I was finishing my

²⁵ quoted in Jonathan Edwards’ *The Work of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009) pg. 440

²⁶ When Calvin wrote the prisoners at Lyons, he pointed to God’s disposal of them as their greatest advantage: “That God should have appointed you his Son’s martyrs, is a token to you of superabounding grace.” And it is this truth that we should acknowledge at all times. Whether God decides to take me today or tomorrow or 50 years from now, He is working in me a far greater glory, and a far greater sight of His Son than I could wish for myself. (see fn 24 for source)

message last night, I saw an article from *Desiring God* and it claimed that the most dangerous place to raise a kid is...America. Typical preachers right? Always hyperbolizing. Always exaggerating to make their point. But is it hyperbole? Dear congregation, it so easy to pass right on by the last part of v.15 as we sit in our air conditioned homes, with our smart phones in hand, our refrigerators full of food, our Netflix queue ready to spin out the next 20 episodes of the latest trendy show and not realize that we might very well be walking into the cage of a roaring lion.

When Jesus prayed in v.15 “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, *but that you keep them from the evil one,*” who do you think He was praying for? Only for the persecuted Christians? I would argue that prosperous Christians such as you are in more danger from the evil one that persecuted Christians are, because persecuted Christians at least know they are in danger. Dear congregation, if you are not in danger, than what does Jesus’ prayer even mean for you? It means nothing. ‘Father please keep them from the evil one, but don’t worry about the Christians in Boise, ID because they are not in danger.’

Satan will use persecution or possessions to separate you from Christ

Please turn with me to Mark 4. In Mark 4, Jesus gives the parable of the sower. What I want us to see here is that Satan will use persecution or possessions to separate you from Christ. In this parable, the seed is the Word of God, and the soil is the different types of hearts that it lands on. First notice how Satan will use persecution. Look at v.17 “And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.” Where does that persecution come from? Ultimately Satan. So we look at our brothers and sisters in North Korea or Sudan and say “Oh man they live in such dangerous places. Oh God help them endure it.”

We think they are the ones in danger, and we are the ones that are safe. But Jesus won't allow that interpretation. Look at **v.18** "And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but *the cares of the world* and *the deceitfulness of riches* and *the desires for other things* enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful." Do you see? If you are a Christian, you only live in one of two places: amongst the rocky ground of deadly persecution, or amongst the thorns of deceitful possessions. There is no third option.

'But pastor the thorny ground isn't for people *in the church*, that happens to people outside of the church.' Dear congregation, Judas was in the inner circle of the church. His location didn't make him safe. His greed for earthly things sent him to hell. Ananias and Sapphira were *in the church*, and their desire for wealth and comfort and reputation caused them to be put to death on the spot. And Satan was at the center of both of these defections. **John 13:2** tells us that Satan had put betrayal in Judas' heart, and **Acts 5:3** tells us that Satan had filled Ananias' heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.²⁷ Satan doesn't need persecution to drive people from the church, some of his best work is simply in using possessions.²⁸

Satan is the great enemy of our souls

Dear congregation, if you don't feel that truth, you are in grave danger. Jesus prayed this prayer for all the church. He prays in **v.20** "I do not ask for these only, but also *for those who will believe in me through their word*," You need to be *kept* from the evil one.²⁹

²⁷ At one point he played the part of Satan. Jesus said to him "Get behind me Satan" (Matthew 16:23.) Likewise, Jesus told him that Satan desired to sift him like wheat (Luke 22:31-32)

²⁸ Satan will use guns or "glory" to separate you from Christ. He will use the hatred of the world or your happiness of stuff to make Christ look unattractive.

²⁹ Peter knew this probably better than any of the disciples. He said in his epistle in **1 Peter 5:8** "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

Satan is all over the pages of the New Testament.³⁰ He knows exactly how to tempt your exact personality because He has seen it for thousands of years.³¹ If your struggle is with lust, He will tempt you like he tempted with self control like he did the Corinthians in **1 Cor. 7:5**. If your struggle is harshness, he will tempt you to unforgiveness like he did with the church in **2 Cor. 2:10-11**. He will tempt you by inflicting a thorn in your flesh like he did Paul in **2 Cor. 12:7**. He will tempt you by hindering fellowship with the local church like he did in **1 Thess. 2:18**. He will tempt you by disguising himself as an angel of light, whispering that you are doing right when you are participating in evil (**2 Cor. 11:14**) He will accuse you and tempt you to despair (**Rev. 12:10**) He will tempt you to legalistic asceticism (**1 Tim. 4:1-3**) He has a temptation for every disposition and every proclivity. As one author wrote “We are opposed by a living, intelligent, resourceful and cunning enemy who can outlive the oldest Christian, outwork the busiest, outfight the strongest and outwit the wisest.”³²

“Father, keep them from the evil one.”

Dear congregation, Satan hates you with every fiber of his being. And if you are a believer, he hates you even more because you love Jesus Christ. And you have been engaged in a holy war from the very moment you first believed. If you are not protected from Satan, you will not make it. Your bank account will gain you nothing. Your health insurance, life insurance, 401k, children’s college fund, all mean nothing in your struggle against Satan. All it takes is one Hurricane Harvey to swallow up everything that you possess. Where is your victory? It’s in Jesus’ prayer: “Father...keep them from the evil one.” Your survival does not depend on you. He doesn’t say “Father...keep them from the evil one if they prove good enough. Keep them from the evil one if they pray

³⁰ 1 John 5:19 “We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

³¹ Great help in this section by Joel Beeke’s Joel Beeke’s *Striving Against Satan: Knowing The Enemy—His Weakness, His Strategy, His Defeat*, (Wales, UK.,: Bryntirion Press), pg.26

³² *ibid*, pg. 13

enough, or do enough good works, or love their neighbor enough, or if they tithe enough.” No. “Father keep them from the evil one, because they are mine. You gave them to me.” Beloved, you are kept by God because Christ shed His blood for you. You are kept because of His work, not yours. You are kept because of His righteousness, not yours. You are kept because of His love towards you, not your love towards Him. In short you are kept, because you are completely incapable of keeping yourself.

Application

Our Doctrine: The sacrifices of Satan are a strong spirit³³

I imagine someone could hear the end of this message and say “Well if God is the one who keeps me and I can’t keep myself, then I don’t need anyone or anything in order to live a truly Christian and godly life.”³⁴ That would be a huge mistake. Because when you have been born again, you have been grafted into the body of Jesus Christ—the church. You have not been saved to be so that you could continue to live independently of the body. Some of you are living in a way right now that communicates that you don’t need the church. As if a hand could disconnect itself from the arm and think that it could flourish on its own. What happens to limbs when they are amputated from the body? They putrefy. They rot. Being in Christ, means *just that*. It means being united to Him, and all of His members. It means living a dependent life not an independent life. Satan loves it when Christians think they are strong and brave and independent. The sacrifices of Satan are a strong spirit; a strong and self-

³³ For a list of specific strategies to find against Satan, see Joel Beeke’s *Striving Against Satan: Knowing The Enemy—His Weakness, His Strategy, His Defeat*, (Wales, UK.: Bryntirion Press), pg. 39-40 & chapters 7-8

³⁴ Ian Hamilton from his message *Solus Christus* preached at PRTS annual conference on August 26, 2017

sufficient heart Satan never despises.³⁵ Dear congregation, your weakness is not your primary enemy. Your primary enemy is thinking that you are strong. This is why many Christians are so sickly in their spiritual life. Ian Hamilton has said that

“..they fail to join themselves personally, actively, visibly, existentially to the visible body of Jesus Christ. They live as practical disembodied limbs and it shows.”³⁶

One of Satan’s greatest attacks on you is to convince you that you are strong enough on your own. That you don’t need anybody. What does the way you live in relation to the church communicate to others? Because it shows. “I’ll take my medicine on Sunday, but I’m strong enough to amputate myself the rest of the time?” Or “I can’t imagine being apart from the body. It’s Christ body. I need her.”

Our Doctrine: God keeps you from the worst evil

I want us to think very hard now about those 5 young Frenchmen who were burned at the stake. Or the disciples who all suffered excruciating and painful deaths. Or the Christians in Houston who have loved and trusted God but have lost everything. Or your story. Perhaps you have been the victim of horrible sexual abuse. Or you are so depressed that you are seriously considering suicide. Or disease has consumed your body. Or divorce has ruined your family such that you can’t even see the people you love. Or...or... or. The list goes on as many years as you have left to live.

Here’s the question, if as a believer, God didn’t spare those 5 young Frenchmen, or the disciples, or you from horrible evil from happening in your life, then how is Jesus’ prayer any good at all? When Jesus prays “Father, keep

³⁵ A parody of **Psalm 51:17** says that “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

³⁶ Ian Hamilton from his message *Solus Christus* preached at PRTS annual conference on August 26, 2017

them from the evil one” and you have tasted a train wreck of evil in your life, what good is that prayer?

I’ve had a similar question asked to me which is why I chose Psalm 121 as our call to worship. v.7 says “The LORD will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.” Really? The LORD will keep you from *all* evil? Yes. The LORD will keep you from all evil *that damns*. Dear congregation, if truly belong to Jesus Christ, then His blood cleanses you from sin. You no long stand under God’s holy and righteous wrath. Listen to how Paul puts it from Colossians 2:13-15

“And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having *forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt* that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, *nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities* and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”

No matter what you have faced, are facing, or will face in your life, you will never truly taste that evil that damns. You will never truly taste that evil that would destroy your soul. (Luke 21:16-19)

That’s why those five young Frenchmen climbed the heap of wood singing psalms and reciting Scripture. Were they scared. I’m sure of it. But their greatest fear would never be realized.

Dear believer, this prayer that Jesus prays does not mean that evil things won’t happen to you. It means that the most terrifying evil that you should fear most will never happen to you. Charles Spurgeon says it this way:

“It is impossible that any ill should happen to the man who is beloved of the Lord; the most crushing calamities can only shorten his journey and hasten him to his reward. Ill to him is not ill, but only good in a mysterious form. Possess enrich him, sickness is his medicine, reproach is his honor, death is his gain. No evil in the strict sense of the word can happen to him, for everything is overruled for good. Happy is he who is

in such a case. He is secure where others are in peril, he lives where others die.”³⁷

Church you will ultimately stand at the grave of Satan. You will stand at the grave of all evil that ever befell you. Your *worst* fears will never come true.

Our Delight: We are kept from Satan, for Christ

There is a way that you could believe the end of v.15 and still be missing the most precious truth of the verse. Jesus prays “[Father], keep them from the evil one.” So we are kept *from Satan*. But what are we kept *for*? Perhaps you will answer ‘we are kept for salvation.’ And that’s true. But what does that mean? Because often what happens in the hearts of evangelicals is that salvation comes to mean that you will not be condemned to hell but you will have everlasting life. Period. Beloved, that is not good news if that is all we are kept for.

There’s a repetition in our passage. At the end of v.14 Jesus prays “they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” And then again in v.16 “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.” Why does Jesus find this phrase so important to say it twice? Here’s my best shot. I believe He is speaking about identity. “Father my identity has never been in this world, it’s in you. If anyone has seen me, they have seen the Father (**John 14:9**) In the same way, those you have given me, are not to be identified with the world.” In other words, believer you are not *for* the world or *for* Satan. You *for* Christ.” You are kept *from* Satan. Why? Because you are being kept *for* Jesus Christ. **Jude 1** says “Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and *kept for Jesus Christ*.” Your everlasting portion is Christ. You are not being kept from the devil so that you can merely have endless existence. Endless existence is not the good news of the Bible. Christ is. And that is who you are being kept for. (**John 17:3**)

³⁷ Source: <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/your-executioner-may-laugh-you-to-scorn-for-quoting-psalm-91> accessed September 2, 2017 Also see <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-if-my-worst-fears-come-true?>