

I. Thy Word is Truth in Biblical Perspective  
*The Supremacy and Sufficiency of God's Word*  
“What Does the Son of God Say about the Word of God? – ‘It Is the Truth’”

John 17:17

Dr. Harry L. Reeder III

January 11, 2015 – Morning Sermon

John 17 is what we'll focus on for this study and it contains our theme verse for the year which is John 17:17. We will look at John 17:17 in its context in this study and this is the start of our ministry theme for the year – thy Word is Truth, the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word. I plan to do a morning series of ‘What does the Son of God say about the Word of God, it is the Truth.’ What does Jesus Himself say about His Word? This is going to those “red letters/words” in the Bible to see what He says about all the letters/words in the Bible. I've selected ten statements of Jesus on ministry about what He says about His Word. On Sunday nights we'll be looking at timeless truth for timely topics. There are three books I have recommended as extra reading for this series and the first is by Kevin DeYoung, titled Taking God at His Word. Then I have a ‘Thy Word is Truth’ 201 book by RC Sproul titled Knowing Scripture. The reason I put this as 201 is because RC likes to throw in Latin words. Then the third is ‘Thy Word is Truth’ 801 which is a compendium of debates, sermons, confessions and creeds that have maintained our high view of Scripture for 2,000 years which is titled Thy Word is Still Truth. This is a very thick book but by the compilation of what is in it I have labeled it 801. Let's not look at God's Word. It's the truth.

John 17:1-5 says [1] *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, [2] since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. [3] And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. [4] I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. [5] And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.*

The grass withers, the flower fades, the Word of God abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His word be preached for you.

I love to use the catechism as part of our confession. I know you immediately recognize the first question which says ‘what is the chief end of man’. The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That is in our Westminster Confession but it's amazing how many evangelical Christians love that. A number of years ago I was listening to an interview with Jerry Falwell, who is now with the Lord, and the interviewer asked him to sum up this Christianity very quickly in one sentence and he said “Sure, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” I thought ‘Timeout Jerry that's ours, you just borrowed that and what is a Baptist doing saying that?’ Seriously, all believers, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalians, all evangelical believers from the various ministry structures that they work from have all gone to this because it is such a marvelous summation.

Why did God make you? Why did God save you? Why does God sustain you in the creation redemption Providence? The Bible is clear and it is for His glory and your joy. Notice that it does not say what are the chief ends of man to glorify and enjoy for

they have worded it very carefully because it is what is the chief end, singular, of man and that is to glorify and enjoy. Those aren't two ends for they are two sides of one coin. In your relationship with Him is that the more you enjoy Him the more you'll glorify Him and in your responsibility to glorify Him the more you'll enjoy Him. They just feed each other.

Here's the question. As a man, a husband, a father, a grandfather, a pastor, a citizen, in a job, how do I glorify God and enjoy Him? Let's go to the second question which is not as familiar as the first one, but it is equally important, crucial and powerful. The only rule that God has given us as to how we can glorify Him and enjoy Him, is His Word. That is the Word of God, the truth, its supremacy and sufficiency. It stands supreme over everything. It stands sufficient to equip us which is why the Apostle Paul says in II Timothy 3:16-17, *[16] All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be complete, **equipped** for every good work.* God's Word is sufficient to equip me as a man, a husband, a father, a grandfather, in my vocation, my citizenship, in friendships, relationships and evangelism, etc. It is fully sufficient to equip me how I can glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

Why? It is because it is the truth. It doesn't contain the truth. It is the truth. It doesn't become truth when you encounter it. It is the truth. It is the truth that our God has given to us. Every decision in your life will be governed and shaped by something, either the wisdom of this world which is chaos and death or God's Word which is truth and the truth is what sets you free. It is the truth that brings life. So this year our leadership has decided on 'Thy Word is Truth' as our ministry theme for this year. Our ministry verse is John 17:17 which says *[17] Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth* and I'll get to that more in a minute. The theme is 'Thy Word is Truth – the supremacy and sufficiency of Scripture.' I won't be going to every passage that Jesus talks about His Word but I have selected ten important passages where Jesus Himself tells us how to view His Word. What does the Son of God say about the Word of God?

So let's start by looking at the first statement that Jesus says. He says in John 17:17, *[17] Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.* Thy Word He has given to us and that's what the Bible is. It is not man's word about God but it's God's Word to man. He says this in the context of John 17 so let's look at this context a bit closer. John 17 is found in the Gospel of John and we use this Gospel for mature Christians and baby Christians. It is such an absolutely, marvelous Gospel that is arranged in a very unique way unlike the other synoptic or chronological Gospels. It is arranged somewhat differently topically and here is a brief outline of it.

Jesus had a three year public ministry and John 1 through 3 gives us the first week, day by day of His public ministry. John 12 through the end of the book gives you the last week of His public ministry. So the majority of the Gospel of John focuses on His first and last week of His public ministry but John 4 through 11 gives us encounters that Jesus had with various people that you can learn from as He interacts with them. We are in John 17 which is part of that last week of His public ministry and what is happening in John 17 actually began in John 12. In John 12 Jesus reached Bethany and rested on the Sabbath. He was anointed by Mary and as He left He came in for the triumphal entry and much of it focuses on when He calls them together to focus on the

very last Passover which becomes the first Lord's Supper of the New Covenant. As He does this He takes a towel and washes their feet and teaches them about leadership.

Then He goes into a sermon that we call the Upper Room Discourse. There are basically six of Jesus' sermons that are recorded to some degree of distillation. Of those six, five are found in the book of Matthew, and one is found in the Gospel of John. That is the Upper Room Discourse as it begins after the washing of the feet in John 13 and goes all the way through John 16. When I preach I pray before and after I preach, I sandwich it with prayer because without God's presence and power we cannot profit from His Word. So we take the time to look into His Word, praying as we enter it and then He prayed when He concluded His discourse. His prayer is in John 17 and now we'll look a little closer at His prayer.

John 17:1a says [1a] *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven...* and then He began to pray. Here is a little insight here. There are multiple postures appropriate in prayer. Appropriate ways to pray are, bended knee, laying yourself out (prostrate) in prayer, to look up, to close your eyes and the posture follows the direction of the prayer appropriately. Here Jesus is calling upon the Lord to do something as He is about to finish the work at the cross.

John 17:1b says [1b] *(Jesus) said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you.* So He comes to the hour and He finishes the discourse with prayer, praying for what is about to happen at the cross. We call the Lord's Prayer that which is found in Matthew 6 and Luke 11 where the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray and starts out "Our Father who art in Heaven..." but I would love to go back and call that the Disciples prayer because this is where Jesus gives them the pattern for prayer. If you go through that Lord's Prayer and see the pattern He gives you can match it up with what Jesus prays in John 17. You will find all the elements in Jesus' prayer that are found in the Lord's Prayer (the Disciples Prayer).

John 17 is what I would call the Lord's Prayer. In fact I'd call it the Lord's Messiah Prayer or the Lord's Anointed Prayer. The reason I would do this is because He is praying as the Christ, as the Messiah. Back in the Advent Season one of the titles we talked about was Jesus as Christ, meaning Messiah, the Anointed One. There were three offices in the Old Testament pointing to Jesus that was coming – Prophet, Priest and King. The Prophet is through which God gives us His Word. The Priest is the intercession for His people and King was the ruling over His people. Now comes Jesus who is The Prophet, The Priest and The King and all three of those come out in this prayer from John 17.

In this prayer Jesus says "I have given them Your Word" which shows He is the Prophet. Then He says "You have given Me authority over all humanity" which shows He is the King. Then He gives praise like the same shape prayer the High Priest was to pray on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. So He prays as the Prophet, the King with all authority and the prayer itself is shaped as the High Priestly prayer. You can begin to unfold this if you go back and look in the Old Testament particularly Leviticus.

There were three things the High Priest did on the Day of Atonement when he prayed. Number one, he prayed for himself. Jesus first prays for Himself. Some say it's selfish to pray for yourself but Jesus prayed for Himself. Jesus prays to the Father "Lord, glorify the Son with the glory that We had before." Two, the High Priest would then pray for his family. Who is your family? You don't choose your family. God gives

you your family. Who was the family of Jesus? It was the disciples. So He begins to pray for the disciples whom You've given Me. I have kept them and not lost one, except the one that was to be lost in fulfillment of Scripture, Judas.

The third step in intercessory prayer of the High Priest was for God's covenant people. God's so gracious that He gives us things to remind us. The High Priest had a special made vestment designed by God to remind him that he was to pray for God's people. On that vestment were twelve stones representing the twelve tribes and this would remind him to pray for God's people. Jesus not only prays for His family but also prays for those who are going to believe through the Word of His family and that's you and me. God's system also has redundancies. Not only did the priest have twelve jewels across the breastplate but he had two big ones, one on each shoulder and each of those had six tribes on each of those.

So Jesus begins His High Priestly prayer for His people and He asks five things in this prayer. The five things aren't mentioned numerically but they are woven in continually. He will say one and come back to it later. He weaves together five requests. See if you can pick them out while I read His prayer. Let's pick up in verse 6.

John 17:6-26 says [6] *"I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. (The mark of God's people is that they have kept His Word.) [7] Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. [8] For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. [9] I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. [10] All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. [11] And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. [12] While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. [13] But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. [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. [15] I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. [16] They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. [17] Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. [18] As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. [19] And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

[20] *"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, [21] that they may all be one, just 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 have sent me. (The fruit of the unity of God's people is an instrument for effective evangelism.) [22] The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, [23] I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. [24] Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. [25] O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and*

*these know that you have sent me. [26] I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."*

So here is a High Priestly prayer. He prays for Himself. What does He pray for? He prays for glory, the glory of His God that it will again be shown with clarity upon Him who humbled Himself to go to the cross for us. Two He prays for those whom the Lord has given Him, these disciples. Three, He begins to pray for those who are going to be His people whom the Lord has given Him and they will believe through the Word that brought these disciples. As these disciples finish that Word in your Bible, that Word will go throughout all the world and these people will be brought from all of humanity to Himself. What does He pray for them? He prays five things. This deserves more attention but I'll just basically enumerate them.

Number one, is that Jesus prays that they will be preserved. Three times He says, 'Keep them.' When He prays this He also prays for the three things to keep them from. One is to keep them from the world. The world will want to intimidate them and infiltrate them. The world will want to redefine their message, manner, mission, and methods. Father, keep them from the world. He is not asking for them to be taken out of the world. Leave them in the world because they have a job to do but while they are here get the world out of them. Secondly, keep them from evil (sin). Thirdly, keep them from the Evil One. Preserve Your people.

Number two is that He wants them unified. I want their unification that they would come together. Notice that He doesn't go into some organizational structure. He goes to a unity that is modeled with the Trinity. Then secondly, a unity that is built upon we are in Him and He is in us. Thirdly, it is a unity that is invigorated by not committees but love. He wants them to love one another the way You have loved Him and I have loved You. You and I have loved them and that, that would draw them together.

Thirdly, He prays for their sanctification, their holiness and that they would be set apart. When the Bible talks about sanctification it means two things. One, is that we will hate sin and love obedience to Christ. We don't do that to be saved. We do that because we love our Savior whose obedience saves us. The primary meaning of holy is one of a kind so the second part of holiness is unique. As the church sense its marginalization in our culture we think if we'll get their message and call it Christianity we will actually get them or if we live like them they will actually feel more comfortable becoming us. Jesus says that He wants them to be different. I'm not talking about peculiar or odd. I want them to be different. I don't want them to be owned by the world. I want them to be owned by Me. How do we define their difference? It is by the Truth, the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word.

I want to borrow from Webster's dictionary here. Webster says that supremacy is that which is of ultimate, final authority. What is the ultimate, final authority from our Savior to us as to how we live and believe? What is our only rule? It is the truth of God's Word. It is supreme. It is to shape us and direct us. Our beliefs about marriage should be from God's Word. What do you believe about divorce? Go to God's Word. What do we believe about baptism? Go to God's Word. What do we believe about evangelism or friendship? Go to God's Word. It is not only the final authority but it is a sufficient authority. All that I need for life and practice is there in God's Word. It stands supreme and sufficient so sanctify them in the truth.

Satan is going to tempt them to disbelieve. He did it in the Garden of Eden. Satan said to Eve, "Did God really say..." He questioned God's Word. Then he said God was a liar. Jesus says that God speaks the truth and the truth brings life. The lie brings death so I don't want to go to the world to define my marriage or how to deal with difficulties in my marriage. I don't want to go to the world to define parenting or how you do your work. What is vocation or calling? I want to go to God's Word which I believe is the truth and that makes it sufficient and supreme. Webster's definition of sufficient is everything needed to equip us for the valid needs and responsibilities in life. God's Word makes us adequate and equipped for every good work. Sanctify them and set them apart in the truth.

Number four Jesus prays for their joy. I want their joy. I want them to have the joy of the Lord. I don't want the world's joy. I want the Bible's defined joy in their life. I want them to have the joy of salvation and the joy of the Lord. Their joy may be made full.

Fifthly, He ends with praying for glory, just like He started. I want them to be with Me in glory. He prays for our glorification that we'll be glorified. He prays for our preservation, our unification, our sanctification, our joy and our exaltation. I will not lose one but they will all be with Me in all of eternity. That is what Jesus prays and underlying the whole statement is His clear statement about this Word in your hands, the Bible. It's the truth. Sanctify them in Your Word. Thy Word is truth.

First let me give you some takeaways that aren't takeaways technically. Did you know that Jesus is ever praying for you, He ever lives to pray for you? Do you know what He is praying? Sure you do because I just read it. This is what He is praying for you. When we talk about the church's mission we always end up in Matthew 28 which tells us to make disciples in all the nations. Do you want to know what Jesus' vision is for the Christian and the church? I just read it for you – preserved, to be one (unified), sanctified, exulting in the joy of the Lord, ready to meet Me in eternity to be with Me. *[30b] Those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* (Romans 8:30)

In Jesus' comment about the Word I want to say this. Here is your takeaway. The supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word as truth is affirmed in this our Lord's Prayer, this High Priestly prayer in John 17 and it's affirmed directly for you in three ways. The first way is that it is inexplicably consistent. Thy Word is truth. The Bible is not man's word about God but it's God's Word to man. We don't have multiple truths. There are many implications and applications in God's Word in all of the arenas of life's responsibilities but the Bible is not a compendium of truths. It's the truth. It is singular and consistent. Even John 17:17 is simply a quote from II Samuel 7:28 and Psalm 119:161.

Here is the Bible with 40 plus human authors, inspired by the Holy Spirit with Prophets in the Old Testament and Apostles in the New Testament and put together over 1600 hundred years and it stands with no contradiction and no inconsistency because it has one singular message. That is the glory of the Triune God, revealed in the preeminence of Christ as our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Every passage, text and page is pointing right there consistently. It is inexplicable if this is merely a human document but it stands absolutely consistent throughout all of its pages so much so that any difficult passage you have, the best way is to go to a much simpler passage because

whatever the difficulty is it can't contradict the simple passage. It stands inexplicably consistent throughout all of our life and for all of our life. It is God's Word as the truth, supreme and sufficient because it is the Truth from God.

The way we say it negatively is this – the Bible is inerrant, without error. We say it negatively also this way – the Bible is infallible, without failure. It is absolutely trustworthy. How do we say it positively? We say it the way Jesus said it. It's the truth. That is why there is no error. That's why it is infallible. It's the truth. By the way, all truth is not in the Bible. God reveals truth in creation and in providence. The Bible is supreme and sufficient to deal with all truth. All truth is not in the Bible but everything that is in the Bible is true and all that is true and all the Bible that is true is sufficient and supreme to settle all of my decisions in life, in every arena of life.

The second way is that it is absolutely essential. I'm not going to ask you to raise your hand if you're a Christian, raise your heart. If you're a Christian today I know that you didn't become one without God's Word. You are saved by faith and faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ. If you're a Christian today and you're growing you can't grow without this Word. Sanctify them in the truth. Your Word is truth. It is absolutely essential. You can't be a Christian or grow as a Christian without the supremacy and sufficiency of God's Word. I can't serve Christ in my life by intuition or by the wisdom of the world. I have to know God's Word. We have to know the Word of God.

Why is it that we have so many things that are greater priorities to us than the reading, study and hearing of God's Word? If God's Word is supreme, sufficient and absolutely essential to become a Christian and to grow as a Christian and to define every area and responsibility of my life, then why are there things that have greater affection and allegiance? I'm not saying they shouldn't have any affection or allegiance but why do they outrank God's Word as supreme in my life?

The third way is that it is reliably definitive. It defines how to do marriage, live your life, to make decisions in life, the sacraments of the church and defines worship. What is worship? True worshippers will worship Him in Spirit and truth – that's God's Word. We don't get together and say 'what do most people want in a worship service?' We can always go to God's Word. What does God's Word say He wants in a worship service so that everything that takes place in that worship service is commanded by God that we worship in truth. God's Word gives us what we need to know. What pleases God? God defines worship in His Word. He doesn't tell how long this or where to put that and all the arrangements of it but He tells us the elements of it. His Word is reliably definitive for worship, witness, marriage, relationships, friendships, family development and everything. How do I handle all the issues of life? God's Word is sufficient and supreme and sovereign in its declarations in my life.

Let me go back through the requests. How am I kept? Request number one from Jesus was keep them. How am I kept from the world, sin and the Evil One? The Bible tells me. How do we have unity of God's people? We are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Christ Himself, the cornerstone. I'm also told that every believer has the Holy Spirit so how do we have unity? If every believer has the Holy Spirit then how many Holy Spirits are here today? There is only one so I have unity of the Spirit, unity in the bond of love, and unity of our confessing truth together. God's Word defines our preservation, our unity, our sanctification, how to live my life under Christ and for Christ, my joy and not the world for it doesn't define joy. God's Word

defines my eternity and the greatest news about heaven is that I will be with Him in glory. I will be able to enjoy His glory in glory. Those are just the ones that are affirmed just in this text and it's His number one statement, thy Word is truth.

I'll close with this. God's Word stands as truth and therefore it stands supreme in life. So I would ask you, do you believe the Word of God as the truth is sufficient for your life? Do you believe it is supreme in your life in all the decisions? In one chapter the same challenge came to Jesus and is coming to you when you walk out into the world. When Jesus met Pilot, Pilot said "Are you the Son of God?" Jesus said "You have spoken the truth." Pilot looked at Him with a sneer and it's the same sneer the culture will give you, "What's truth?" Sixty plus percent of professing believers in professing Christian churches in North America do not believe in absolute objective truth. In our secular progressive culture, anyone that says you believe in objective truth there is mockery. It is the same mockery of Pilot.

What is truth is what Pilot said. Let me tell you what truth is. It is what Rome says it is. It is what the economy says it is. It is what our military would say it is. It is what our road system says it is. It's what I say it is. So when a professor stands and tries to dismiss the stand of a believer by attacking absolute truth and saying something like "There is no absolute truth" then the believer can respond by saying "Is that absolute? So how can you tell me there is no absolute truth absolutely?" Jesus says clearly that this is the truth. Do we believe it is supreme? Does it shape our life or does the world shape our life? The Bible says His people kept His Word because it's the truth.

There are three categories of professing Christians and Christian churches today. There are those who honestly say, out front, that they don't believe there is objective truth or that the Bible is truth but it's a good book. Moby Dick is a good book. The Bible is the Book. It's the truth. It stands supreme over our life as we follow Christ. It brought us to Christ and it shapes us to Christ but there is a whole group of Christians in churches today that say they don't believe that. So to them Christianity is a philosophy and the Bible is a good book but it's not the truth. So the world shapes them, their message, their lives and their churches. The culture shapes them.

The second category is those who say the Bible is the truth. I believe the Bible is supreme and sufficient because it is the truth. We not only confess it as truth but in humility we are asking God by His grace that that would shape our lives that we would be in the world and not of the world. We realize with humility we're not truth but the Bible is the truth and we want to know the truth and we want the truth to set us free. We want the Bible to shape us for the culture.

The third category are those who believe the Bible is true, inspired, inerrant and infallible and in the supremacy and sufficiency of it as truth and that's what they confess but then all of their decisions are shaped by the culture as they accommodate culture. Many times it's because we're fearful of holding the truth in that dorm room, in that class, in that place. We would rather have the applause of man rather than the mockery of men. God tells you the truth about creation, redemption and when He says I am the Way, the Truth and the Life and no man comes to the Father but through Me. So we don't get the applause unless the Holy Spirit moves upon them. All we get is the frowns. So many churches will confess the truth but get shaped by the culture out of the fear of men but by God's grace with humility and compassion. It need not be that way.



It wasn't that way 500 plus years ago when a monk stood with all the power of the state and all the ecclesiastical power of the church and his life in his balance said "Martin Luther, here I stand, my conscience is held captive to the Word of God. Here I stand, I can do no other." They told him what they will tell you which was you're going to be on the wrong side of history but that day he wanted to be on the right side of God and the truth. That rewrote history that humble embracing but with conviction proclaiming, 'thy Word is truth.' Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Dear friend if you're reading this today and God is moving in your heart to seek without any apology I tell you Jesus Christ is the truth. I am not the truth. Briarwood is not the truth but Jesus is truth. From His Word He has said that if you come to Me I will in no wise cast you out and He who believes in Me, truly, truly has eternal life. If you would like to pray with someone or talk with someone please contact us here at Briarwood at (205) 776-5200. We would love to share with you what it means to know Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life. Father, would You please guide us this year that we would be set apart by Your Word because it's the truth and increasingly may our lives reflect its supremacy and our confidence in its sufficiency, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.