

John 17:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.

Analysis

I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world—Jesus explicitly rejects escapist spirituality. The Greek οὐκ ἐρωτῶ ἵνα ἄρῃς (ouk erōtō hina arēs, 'I do not ask that you take away') shows Christ's disciples must remain embedded in fallen society as redemptive agents. This contradicts both monastic withdrawal and rapture-obsessed theology that minimizes earthly faithfulness.

But that thou shouldest keep them from the evil—The phrase ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ (ek tou ponērou) can mean 'from the evil one' (personal Satan) or 'from evil' (moral corruption). Both are likely intended. Τηρέω (tēreō, 'to keep, guard, preserve') appears throughout John 17 (vv. 11, 12, 15) emphasizing divine protection, not removal. Christ prays for preserved holiness within worldly engagement—the balance Paul later calls being 'in the world but not of it' (cf. Romans 12:2).

Historical Context

Spoken hours before His crucifixion in the Upper Room, this prayer reveals Jesus's concern for His post-ascension church. The disciples faced intense pressure to either assimilate into pagan culture or isolate in sectarian communities (like the Essenes at Qumran). Jesus charts a third way: sanctified presence.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Where are you tempted toward either cultural assimilation or Christian isolationism rather than sanctified engagement?
2. How does Christ's prayer for your protection 'from evil' while remaining 'in the world' shape your understanding of holiness?

Interlinear Text

οὐκ ἔρωτῶ ἵνα ἄρῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ κόσμου
not **I pray** **that** **thou shouldst take** **them** **from** ^{G3588} **the world**
G3756 G2065 G2443 G142 G846 G1537 G2889

ἀλλ' ἵνα τηρήσῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ
but **that** **thou shouldst keep** **them** **from** ^{G3588} **the evil**
G235 G2443 G5083 G846 G1537 G4190

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 121:7 (Evil): The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.

1 John 5:18 (Evil): We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 (Evil): But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

Galatians 1:4 (Evil): Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

1 Chronicles 4:10 (Evil): And Jabez called on the God of Israel, saying, Oh that thou wouldest bless me indeed, and enlarge my coast, and that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil, that it may not grieve me! And God granted him that which he requested.

Matthew 6:13 (Evil): And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Luke 11:4 (Evil): And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

Psalms 30:9 (Parallel theme): What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?

2 Timothy 4:8 (Parallel theme): Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Isaiah 57:1 (Evil): The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come.