

LOVE'S POWER

by Ray C. Stedman

As we continue our study of the words of Jesus to his disciples in the Upper Room just before he went out to the cross, we find ourselves in a section where we have some "exceeding great and precious promises." I hope we will gain considerable insight into the problem of obedience -- especially what it is that motivates Christian obedience -- and will learn something of the riches of peace and joy which await the obedient heart.

In Verse 20 of John 14 the Lord Jesus has given to his disciples the radiant secret of the Christian life. He has said,

"In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." {John 14:20 RSV}

The day he speaks of is the day of the Spirit. It began on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit was poured out upon all flesh, as predicted by the prophet Joel. It has continued through the centuries since, and it will end on the day when, as Peter said,

**"the sun shall be turned into darkness
and the moon into blood,
before the day of the Lord comes,
the great and manifest day." {Acts 2:20 RSV}**

Between the Day of Pentecost and the Day of the Lord is the day, or age, of the Spirit.

This day is characterized by the indwelling of the Spirit within men and women everywhere -- all kinds of people -- producing the work of God in the human heart. "In that day," Jesus said, "you will know the great secret -- that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

That is the greatest truth in the whole Bible! There is no greater truth anywhere than the identity of spirit which every believer experiences with Jesus. We are made to be one life with him -- a mutual sharing of life together.

If you do not understand that this is what happened when you became a Christian, you will never become a very mature Christian. You will never be able to lay hold of all the riches that Christ has given to you. Yet look how simply it is put -- just seven monosyllables: "You in me, and I in you."

That is so simple even a child can grasp and understand it! Yet that is the fundamental secret of all Christian behavior. It is our basic identity. Jesus said that his basic identity was: "I in the Father, and the Father in me." And ours, he says, is: "You in me, and I in you."

In Verse 21 he goes on to speak about love and obedience:

"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me;" {John 14:21 RSV}

Notice carefully the connection between Verse 21 and what we have just looked at in Verse 20. Here in Verse 21 you have the proof of love: "He who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me," says Jesus. But notice that he does not reverse this, as many do who read this. They think he said that if you obey him you will thereby love him, that obeying his commandments is what creates love for him. I find a great many Christians who are trying to live on that basis. In fact, as I have traveled about, I have seen literally

hundreds and thousands of Christians who exhibit in their lives a very mechanical obedience which they think will create love for Christ.

But that is, instead, the recipe for legalism. To read this, "Obey me, and you will love me," produces a mechanical, sterile, dry, dusty Christianity with no warmth or joy or glory. But what Jesus says is, "If you love me, you will obey me." It is easy to do, not difficult. Look at Verse 15, where he says this very plainly: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Notice, it is not, "If you love me, you will have to keep my commandments." No, no. It is cause and effect: "If you love me, the result is that you will keep my commandments." That is the secret of all proper behavior in the Christian experience, and we need very carefully to make that clear. The proof of our love is obedience. That is how we demonstrate that we already love him.

Now, if it takes love to obey, what produces love? That is really the question, isn't it? That is the issue. If you see a Christian disobeying Christ, or you yourself are tempted to disobey, what is it that will turn you around and make you obey? It is love. Well, how do you produce love? What will make you love him? This is what ties together Verses 20 and 21. It is that basic secret of our identity which creates love -- the Spirit in us, releasing to us the love of Jesus, awakens love from us in return.

Remember how John puts it in his first letter: "We love, because he first loved us," {1 Jn 4:19 RSV}. Remembering this awakens love. Or, as Paul puts it in Romans 5, "the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us," {Rom 5:5 KJV}.

Therefore the way to produce love is to remember who you are, to whom you belong, and who he is -- his death, his resurrection, and his unity with you, his present indwelling life. You cannot remind yourself of that without having something happen to you, without experiencing a renewed sense of his love and of gratitude to him for who he is and what he has done in your life. And when that love begins to flow, then you are being motivated to obey.

Has it occurred to you that much of the mythology of the ancient world was based upon Christian truth, that fables and fairy tales are, in a sense, garbled and distorted versions of Christian fact? Some of our modern fables are the same: For instance, you remember Clark Kent, that mild-mannered newspaper reporter, of whom no one ever expected anything out of the ordinary. But whenever there was a sudden demand for action far beyond the ability of mortal men, he always stepped into the nearest phone booth (fortunately one was always handy), stripped off his conservative business suit, and emerged complete with bulging muscles and spectacular costume as Superman -- able to do what otherwise he could not do.

That is exactly what the Word of God is teaching us, although perhaps you had not seen it in those terms before! We are to retire to the "phone booth" of our identity with Christ, to remind ourselves of who we are, to whom we belong, and who is within us, and immediately we find love and motivation and power available to us. We are able to do what otherwise we could not do. This is what our Lord is teaching his disciples at this moment: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." When we love him, when we retreat to that place, and love is made known in our hearts by the Spirit, obedience becomes much easier.

Therefore the key to motivation is never to threaten, but to appeal. This is why Paul writes to Christians, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies ..." {Rom 12:1a KJV}. There is a place for fear as a motive in the Christian life, usually in terms of preventing us from doing what we ought not to do. When you are tempted to do something you know is wrong, fear comes in, and properly so -- fear of God's just reprisal, of the consequence, of your actions, fear of hurting others and of being hurt yourself, fear of having to stand before the searching eyes of God, knowing that he sees the utmost secrets of your life. Fear then keeps you from doing what is wrong. But when you are asked to do something which is right, what motivates you then? Love. Love for Jesus.

Have you noticed how many times in the Scriptures appeals are made to us to do what our flesh rebels at doing? To submit to authority, for instance: I come to a stop sign, and I'm in a hurry. The sign says STOP, and I don't want to stop; I want to keep going. But to stop is part of my Christian life, because that is obedience to the authorities. Wives are to submit to their husbands, and they don't want to -- especially in these days when

a twisted form of liberation is being proclaimed. Some think the word *submit* is a dirty word, not realizing that it is a Christian word which applies to everybody -- men, women, and children alike. Husbands are asked to submit to Christ and to his word, and they don't want to do that. Servants are asked to submit to their masters, to yield them glad obedience. When somebody asks you to do something you know you ought to do, but you don't want to do it -- your flesh wants to refuse, to say, "Hang it on you ear! Who do you think you are, telling me what to do?" -- what will motivate you to want to do it?

Have you ever noticed how many times in these passages you find a little phrase like "for the Lord's sake," or "out of reverence for Christ," or "as unto the Lord"? Why is this? Well, in such cases, there is usually no fear of consequences to motivate you; it is out of love for Jesus that you are to do it. "For the Lord's sake" submit yourselves one to another -- wives unto husbands, husbands unto wives, children unto parents. "For the Lord's sake" do this -- because you love him.

I have never been able to understand how a person could claim to be a Christian and yet deliberately disobey, knowing that he is being disobedient, and refuse to follow the Lord. That is the name of the game -- obedience -- following the Lord, doing what he says. The proof of our love, therefore, is our obedience. When we obey we are demonstrating our love for the Lord. There are two elements of proof, our Lord says:

"He who [1] has my commandments and [2] keeps them," {John 14:21a RSV}

To have his commandments means to be exposed to his word and to know it. His words tell us what life is like, and what we are to do. To have them means not only to own a Bible but to read it, to study it, to learn it, to teach it, to know what he says.

I cannot understand Christians who think they can live a Christian life without ever reading their Bibles. It is impossible. Our memories do not retain and maintain what we need to know. We are built in such a way that we need refreshment and reminder -- again and again.

With a team of men I have returned from a series of meetings in the northwestern states. In city after city, as we talked to pastors and laymen from scores of churches, we began, as some would say, to "do a slow burn." We became angrier and angrier because we were also meeting young people from all over the region who were crying out for someone to teach them the Word of God -- teaching they were not finding in the churches of that area. Toward the end of the week we had a breakfast meeting with a group of pastors and laymen. We were setting forth some of the essentials necessary to health in the church -- among them the teaching of the Word of God. At the end of the meeting our host, a Canadian businessman who had traveled with us faithfully all week, suddenly could stand it no longer. He stood up and said to these pastors,

"Look, I'm not an American; I'm a Canadian. I have two sons who have been seeking for some Bible teaching for a long time. They have been spiritually hungry and have gone from church to church in this city searching for a place where the Word of God is expounded from the pulpit -- and have found none. Finally they have drifted into wrongful, hurtful practices because they could find no one who would expound the Scriptures to them."

His voice broke, and he could hardly control himself as he poured out his heart to these pastors. He said,

"Why, why will you not teach the Word of God to people?"

It was a moving plea. But that is what Jesus means.

Can we not apply that to our own hearts and say,

- "Why will we not read his word?"
- "Why will we not spend some time in knowing what he says?"

The second element of proof is that he who has Jesus' commandments keeps them. He follows them, commits himself to obey what the Lord has said, to do what he asks. "He who has my commandments and keeps them,

he it is who loves me." If you want to convince Jesus Christ that you love him, don't make a show of singing it, or of professing it, and telling him about it -- just obey him, that's all, just do what he asks. He will know that your obedience cannot come except out of a heart moved by love for him.

The reward of love follows. Our Lord says,

**"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."
{John 14:21 RSV}**

Three things follow for those who love him -- not merely believe in him, notice, but love him and thus obey him:

First, they will be loved by the Father. Isn't it remarkable that though we begin our Christian life at the feet of Jesus -- we see him our Redeemer, our Savior -- it isn't very long before we are conscious of belonging to a family and being loved by a Father? One of the men who went with us on our trip is Ed Woodhall, who has an automobile body shop in Sunnyvale. He gave his testimony wherever we went. I was struck by his description of how empty his life once had been. Even though he was raised in a church and had known these Bible truths all his life, nevertheless his life was empty and unsatisfying -- a wreck. Then he began to understand this great, basic secret of identity -- "You in me, and I in you" -- and he began to live on that basis. But his problems were being solved, he told us, "because he had a loving heavenly Father who was at work to solve them." Being loved by the Father deals with our circumstances. It is the discipline of God which puts us into various circumstances in order to train us and to teach us. He gives us joyful and happy circumstances as well as difficult and demanding ones. That is the expression of the love of the Father.

The second part of the reward, Jesus says, is "I will love him," and that is something different. The Father loves us by meeting our needs. His love is that of supply and training, whereas the Lord Jesus loves us by inward release to our feelings, by the sense of his being and of his love. The love of Jesus has more to do with our feelings than does the Father's love. Paul prays for the Ephesians that "Christ may dwell in you hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love" {Eph 3:17 RSV}, that feeling of being accepted, of being important, of having worth as a human being, that sense of acceptance by the Lord Jesus himself as belonging to him -- the knowledge and understanding of that is the feeling he is speaking of here.

The third element of this reward of love is "I will manifest myself to him." That is, occasions and circumstances will arise in which Jesus will be very near, very real, very dear to you. Increasingly you will learn to know him, and to enter into the understanding of the being and character of the Son of God. This speaks to the hearts of all who are Christians. The one thing we want more than anything else is a deeper knowledge of Jesus. This he promises to those who love him and thus obey him: He will manifest himself to them. I can testify that there have been times in my own experience, particularly of recent days, when the Lord Jesus has been more real to me than any other person -- so real, it seemed, that I could touch him! This is the manifestation of his response to love from us.

Then Judas, one of the disciples, asked a question, out of which came a remarkable answer:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" {John 14:22 RSV}

The Jews understood that when the Messiah came he would manifest himself to the whole world. But Jesus said that he would manifest himself to these disciples in a way that the world could not perceive. Judas is curious about this and so he asks the question. The answer Jesus gives runs from Verse 23 through Verse 29. There are four elements in it by which Jesus describes how he is going to do this, how he will manifest himself to us.

First he repeats what he said before:

Jesus answered him, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love

him, and we will come to him [then he adds this:] and make our home with him." {John 14:23 RSV}

That is a beautiful phrase, isn't it? "Our home will be with him -- we will live together." That is, out of the experience of life in God's family will come the sense of the presence of Jesus. Probably all of us have had occasion to be away from home at a time, perhaps at Christmas, when we would love to have been home. Memory then brings to mind all the sweet and tender things, the little things which make home such a wonderful place to be. You begin to think of them -- and they are not the big things; they are little things.

I think this is what our Lord has in mind. In many little ways, in tender moments, in compassionate care, in ways of comforting us and touching us, as a family lives and shares life together, so this revelation of Jesus will come. The manifestation of him will grow out of family life together.

Then he gives us the negative side:

"He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me." {John 14:24 RSV}

There he puts his finger upon the secret of disobedience. If we are not following the Lord at some point, why is it? The answer is that, at that point, in that area, we do not love him. In other ways and places we do love him, but at that point we do not; we are denying him, and do not love him. If we do not love him we will not obey him, Jesus said. And what we are disobeying is the Word of God. We are disobeying the Father as well as the Son.

Then he goes on to the second element of manifestation, Verses 25 and 26:

"These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." {John 14:25-26 RSV}

Very clearly, the primary reference here is to the apostles themselves. This is the explanation of how we got the Gospels and the Epistles. It is true that they had memories of their time with Jesus, but that would have been a very faulty thing to rely upon -- if it were that alone. It is true that there were certain written accounts which were sometimes incorporated into the New Testament record. Luke, in particular, gathered some of them together and put them into his accounts. It is true that they passed stories along from one to another. But, primarily, what accounts for the Gospels and Epistles is the teaching of the Holy Spirit, the fact that when the Spirit came he brought to the apostles' memories all the things Jesus said and did, and he taught them from all of this. We can be grateful that we have the apostolic word undergirded by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, thus guaranteeing its accuracy. This is the promise of Jesus to that effect.

But there is also a secondary application here to our own hearts. Have you ever been taught by the Holy Spirit? Have you ever known a word of Scripture, perhaps for a long time, and then gone through some circumstance which caused that word to take on new, luminous meaning which it never had for you before?

I had an experience of this sort not long ago. I mentioned in our last study how the phrase "whatsoever you ask in my name" came alive to me in a new way. I began to see that it involves the cross and the resurrection, the process of death, and life out of death. I never had seen it quite that way before.

That is the teaching of the Holy Spirit. He takes the circumstances of life and uses them to cause these words to glow, to leap off the page, and burn themselves into our hearts in a new and fresh way which we have never seen before. And by that means Jesus manifests himself to us. We learn more of what he is like.

The third element is the heritage of peace which is ours, Verse 27:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." {John 14:27 RSV}

I wonder how many Christians have really come to understand the great fact that peace is our inheritance. Peace is what Jesus has left us. It is basic and fundamental and cannot be taken away from us by any circumstance. That is what he means by "I give not as the world gives."

How does the world give peace? If you were troubled, upset, and disturbed, and you went to a doctor who was not a Christian and asked him, "What can I do to gain peace," what would he tell you? "Take a trip. Go to Hawaii. Get away from it all." In other words, "Change your circumstances. Get to the place where nothing bothers you, where everything is peaceful around you. Then you can be at peace."

But Jesus says, "I give peace right in the midst of trouble, right in the midst of distress and turmoil and heartache and pressure. I can impart peace to your heart right there, and not as the world gives." Why? Because we can return to that basic relationship we have -- "You in me, and I in you." Out of that comes the guarantee that he is working out his purposes. He will bring us to the end of the trouble. He will still the storm and quiet the waves. We rest in the boat, content, knowing that "No water can swallow the ship, where lies the Master of ocean and earth and sky." That is peace.

"Peace I leave with you. [Therefore]," the Lord adds, "let not your hearts be troubled." That is addressed to you! It means you do not have to be upset and anxious, troubled and weary and worried. "Let not your hearts be troubled." How? By returning to that place of rest.

Return to the phone booth and rest there in the confidence that Superman is within and will work the situation out for you, and will do it through you. And he will! That is where your heart finds surcease from trouble.

The fourth element is his suggestion of the advantage we have over the apostles in the days of his flesh, Verses 28 and 29:

"You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe." {John 14:28-29 RSV}

When what takes place? Why, the coming of the Spirit. Jesus is going away -- in order that he might send the Spirit. He is going to the Father, leaving the place of his limitation, the circumstance in which the Father is greater than he. When he says, "The Father is greater than I," he is referring, of course, only to his self-imposed limitations in the days of his humiliation, when he was here as a man. Don't misunderstand that. The cults attempt to make this a theological teaching that the Son is always less than the Father. That is not so. The Son of God is equal with the Father, as Paul tells us very plainly in Philippians. But for the moment, in the days of his flesh, in this restricted sense, the Father was greater than he. But now he is returning to that status of equality in every sense with the Father, which was his before the incarnation, and he says, "You ought to rejoice, because I will send the Spirit. And I will be nearer to you than I am now."

These men did not believe that. We have trouble believing that. But they found it to be true. A little later on, in Chapter 16, Jesus says, "In that day you will ask nothing of me," {John 16:23 RSV}. That is, "In that day you will ask me no questions." I think his disciples must have shaken their heads, "We can't wait for that day to come! We've got so many questions to ask you!" But when the day of the Spirit came, it was true -- they asked him no questions. There was an inner revelation of Jesus which they had never known before in the days of his flesh. And he is saying this to us as well. "I will manifest myself to you. I will be closer to you in Palo Alto in the 20th century than I was with my disciples when I walked the hills of Galilee with them!"

The chapter closes on a rather sinister note, Verses 30 and 31:

"I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go hence." {John 14:30-31 RSV}

Do you see the parallel he is drawing between what he has just said to them and what he says of himself? He

says to us that if we love him we will obey him. If love is in our hearts it will always issue in an obedient, trustful walk. And now he says that he goes toward the bitterness and death of a cross. The ruler of this world is coming. He is going into an encounter with Satan -- a bitter death -- grapple in the darkness. But he did not have to go. "He has no power over me," said Jesus. But he goes because he loves the Father. Because he loved the Father, he obeyed him. Ahead lay Gethsemene's agony, the cruel scourge, the mocking soldiers, the taunting of the Jews, the blood and the pain and the death and hell of the cross. What drove him to it? It was because he loved the Father and he wanted to give the Father his heart's desire.

And what was that? "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life," {cf, John 3:16}. That is what the Father wanted. And in order to give it to him, the Son obeyed him and went into the darkness and death of the cross.

When we must face into something we do not want to do, and our flesh cries out, "No! I don't want to go!" we can find the strength to do it by remembering who we are, to whom we belong, and that we will give our Lord the desire of his heart if we submit to what he has asked us to do.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, we pray that we may learn this great lesson, may learn to submit to your loving choices for us, and that we may drink the cup which you have given us to drink -- for the Lord's sake, for his sake who loved us and gave himself for us. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Love's Power
Series: Secrets of the Spirit
Scripture: John 14:20-31
Message No: 5
Catalog No: 3125
Date: June 3, 1973

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