

# SECRETS OF THE SPIRIT

by Ray C. Stedman

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## THE TOWEL WEARERS

by Ray C. Stedman

These next few weeks we will be studying the passage known as *The Upper Room Discourse* in the Gospel of John, Chapters 13 through 17. This passage takes us into the intimate thoughts of Jesus just before the crucifixion. Some have called this the holy of holies of Scripture. That is, if you think of Scripture as a temple, then this is the sanctuary, in which you come into the very presence of God himself. By means of his words to his disciples, we are permitted here to enter into the thinking and emotions of Jesus just before his own crucifixion. Within hours of this event the Lord was hanging upon a cross. In less than twenty-four hours he was dead and buried. These therefore constitute the last words of Jesus before his own death.

The passage begins, as you know, with a parable in action. Rather than a discourse or a message, it begins with the deeds of Jesus, the acts of Jesus, in the washing of the disciples' feet. And in that remarkable event, simple as it was, and yet strange in many ways, the Apostle John sees some very deep and remarkable meaning. There are two movements which John sees in this event, and he gathers them up in the preface to this account. John sees it first as the evidence and the demonstration of the unchanging love of Jesus for his disciples. He says,

**Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. {John 13:1 RSV}**

Please don't be confused, as some have been, by the opening words, "before the feast of the Passover." This has presented a problem to some who have struggled with the chronology of this event and have felt that these words date the feast of the Lord's supper as taking place before the feast of the Passover. That would be contrary to what the other Gospels record. But John is not linking this phrase with the subsequent event of the washing of the disciples' feet. He is referring back to the time when Jesus discovered that his hour had come.

Jesus discovered that information in an event recorded in the twelfth chapter -- the incident involving the

Greeks who came and asked to see him. When report was brought to Jesus that certain Gentiles were asking for him, this seemed to indicate to him that it was the signal for the beginning of the dramatic denouement of his ministry, that it was now drawing rapidly to an end. And it was then that Jesus knew that "his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father." In fact, in Chapter 12 John says as much. When Philip and Andrew told Jesus that the Greeks had come and wished to see him, he answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified," {John 12:23 RSV}. And all John is saying here is that, from that moment on, Jesus understood that the time had come, that the hour had struck, that he now was to make his exodus from the world by means of death and resurrection. He always had known what the events would be, but he did not know the time they would come. But now he knows.

And from that moment on he remains still considerate and compassionate and thoughtful about his own disciples. That struck John. He is amazed by the fact that Jesus is not thinking of himself even though he knows that this is the dramatic hour toward which he has been living. Rather, his thoughts are still upon his own disciples. He teaches them and manifests love and compassion and concern for them unto the end. So that is the first thing which John sees is wrapped up in this remarkable scene of the washing of the disciples' feet. Jesus is still teaching his disciples.

The second movement concerns Judas. John sees in the act of footwashing a demonstration of the truth which is in Jesus, of the remarkable passion which strips away all pretense and hypocrisy and reveals things exactly the way they are. And so, in Verse 2, he says, "And during supper..." Now the Passover has come, and Jesus is meeting with his disciples to eat the Passover meal together:

**And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. {John 13:2-4 RSV}**

In this dramatic act of washing his disciples' feet, Jesus stooping to wash the feet of Judas as well as those of the other disciples, John sees a manifestation of that honesty of God, that reality of God which exposes all hypocrisy, and by means of such revelation seeks to lay hold of the traitor's heart and show him what is happening to him. Jesus is moved to do this, John says, by an awareness of his own authority. All things were given into his hands by the Father; he knew that. He knew who he was, knew he had come from God, knew he was going to God. And, moved by this sense of his own identity and authority, he begins to expose, by direct words to him, what Judas was doing and where he was headed. All this John sees as intertwined together in this remarkable scene: The commitment of love which taught to the end, and the passion of truth which fought to the end for the deliverance of Judas.

Following this is the account of the footwashing itself. John tells us that Jesus rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel.

**Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. {John 13:5 RSV}**

There can be little doubt that here Jesus is deliberately working out a parable for the instruction of his disciples. He is dramatizing for them the truth of his own ministry, of his own redemptive mercy. He is showing them by this means what he had come into the world to do. You can trace the parallel in the events which John records:

First, Jesus "rose from supper," just as he had previously risen from his throne of glory.

Then he "laid aside his garments." Paul tells us that he laid aside his glory when he came into the world in the incarnate state. He laid aside the exercise of his own deity. He did not come to act as God; he came to act as man indwelt by God.

And he "girded himself with a towel," just as Paul also records that he "took the form of a servant," and "humbled himself and became obedient unto death," {Phil 2:7-8}. So here he humbles himself, taking the role

of a slave, girding himself with a towel.

"Then he poured water into a basin," just as in a few hours he was to pour out his own blood in death, the blood which would be for the cleansing of human defilement, of human guilt of every kind and source. So he pours water into the basin as a picture of that.

Then he "began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded," picturing the very act of applying the cleansing of his own blood to human lives. And if you skip to Verse 12 you have the end of the parable. "When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments," he "resumed his place," just as the writer of Hebrews records for us that "When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," {Heb 1:3 RSV}. Thus you have this remarkable, beautiful parable worked out for us, teaching us the meaning of his whole ministry.

In the events which immediately follow, Peter is brought into the picture. Moving around the circle of disciples, our Lord came at last to Peter, who refused to let him wash his feet:

**Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part [with] me." {John 13:8 RSV}**

I know that the Revised Standard Version uses the phrase, "in me," but I cannot understand why the translators have done that. The Greek text clearly and unmistakably says "with me." This is a very important distinction, as we will see in a moment. But in this incident of Peter's refusal to be washed by Jesus you have a remarkable picture of the sinful pride of human beings who reject the cleansing ministry of Jesus.

Here again you have a picture of the need which exists in humanity for the cleansing which Jesus offers. Peter's actions ostensibly were prompted by humility. You can see the incredulity on his face when Jesus approaches him, and he protests, "Lord, you'll never do this to me!" It sounds as though this is a humble statement, reflecting the fact that Peter is humiliated that Jesus should ever take such a low position as to wash his feet.

At first glance it does appear as though Peter's expostulation arises out of his own sense of inadequacy and unworthiness before Jesus. But when you look a bit closer you can see that it is really the expression of intense personal pride. Peter is offended by Jesus' actions, because he knew that if he were in the same place, if he were an instructor, a teacher, and a Lord, he would never consider stooping to wash someone's feet. This would be beneath him. So Peter is offended. This is a rebuke to his own self-sufficiency. He doesn't want Jesus to wash his feet. He would be quite content to wash Jesus' feet, but it is an affront to his own sense of independence that Jesus should ever do anything for him, just as, later on, Peter offers to lay down his life for Jesus; he doesn't want Jesus to lay down his life for him.

What a revelation this is of the sinful pride of our own hearts which oftentimes cloaks itself with a guise of humility, but in which we are really insisting upon our own self-dependence, self-sufficiency. We do not want to admit to anybody that we are in need of anything. That is what Peter is doing here. He doesn't want to admit to Jesus that he requires this cleansing. He doesn't want to acknowledge his need of being washed, and, especially, of letting Jesus do this menial act for him. It humiliates him. And so he stands as an example of the pride in our own hearts which resists the ministry of Jesus to us.

One of the remarkable things about the gospel is that it is always bringing us down to the lowest point. We must stand in utter humiliation and abjectness in order for God to minister to us. All human pride must be brought low before him, before we can receive what God wants to give us from his hand. And that is where we struggle, isn't it? We don't like that. We don't like to be delivered to a place where we ourselves have nothing to offer. We want to add something. Peter is such a clear picture of this.

Then when Jesus explains to him, "If I do not wash you, you can have no part with me," Peter immediately capitulates, and flops clear over to the other extreme:

**Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"**

**{John 13:9 RSV}**

"Lord, if that's the case, then by all means -- not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" In other words, he asked for a bath. Jesus had said earlier, "What I do now you don't understand." Peter proved in just a moment or two that he didn't understand what was happening. So Jesus corrects him again:

**Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over;" {John 13:10a RSV}**

And in those words he gives us a beautiful explanation of the process of salvation. It begins with a bath. That initial coming to Christ, in which we take the place of bankruptcy before him, coming without any vestige of our own righteousness to offer, and allowing him to cleanse us, is likened to a bath in which we are washed all over, completely, from head to foot. Jesus of course is alluding to a very common social practice in those days. It was the custom to take a bath before you went out to a meal. But in walking through the dirty streets of the city with sandals on, your feet would be defiled. And so when you arrived as a guest, a servant would wash your feet. But you would not need to repeat the bath.

So Jesus is saying, "When you first come to me, you are bathed, you are clean all over." This is what the Bible calls "justification by faith." It is a washing away of all the guilt, all the defilement, and all the evil and sin of the entire life -- past, present, and future. But as you walk through life, Jesus knows, there will be defilement contracted in the feet, in the walk, and that needs to be washed away. Thus he teaches us that not only do we need that initial never-to-be-repeated cleansing, which washes us as a bath; but we need also the many-times-repeated experience of forgiveness, of coming to Christ for the cleansing away of the defilement of our walk, and being forgiven again and again and again, over and over again. It is this which determines that we have a part with him.

In other words, the enjoyment of our relationship with Christ is lost when we are temporarily defiled by wrongdoing, by guilt and by sin, by attitudes which are wrong in our life. We lose the enjoyment of our relationship with him. His attitude toward us doesn't change, but our attitude toward him does. That is why we are taught all through the Scriptures, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," {1 Jn 1:9 KJV}. And the moment we do so we are renewed, i.e., that original cleansing is renewed to us, and we feel that cleansing once again -- the washing, the restoration, the renewing of our spirits, the lifting up of the vitality of our spiritual lives -- and we go on again, restored. Every believer has experienced this, but Jesus makes it clear to Peter.

And Peter's error is still being repeated today. There are those who, like him, refuse to have Jesus wash their feet. They are rejecting the indispensable requisite for enjoying their relationship with Christ. When people refuse to let Jesus wash their feet, as he said, they lose that sense of partnership with him.

On the other hand, there are those who, like Peter, feel that they need a bath all over again when they sin, that they have lost their salvation and that somehow they have to start all over in their Christian experience. Every now and then I run into people who are laboring under that delusion, who think that they need to be born, not only again, but again and again and again, as though the Holy Spirit had stuttered when he said, "regeneration," and had made it, "re-re-re-re-regeneration!" But Jesus teaches us by this whole process that only one bath is needed. This is reflected in the truth of baptism. You are baptized once, as the initial act. But the Lord's Supper reflects the washing of the feet, the need for the cleansing again and again through life from the defilement and the guilt of sin.

In the closing portion of this section of the passage, through Verse 20, our Lord explains what he has done, and you see here the example of Jesus standing contrast to that of Judas. Let's look first at Verses 12-17:

**When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his**

**master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." {John 13:12-17 RSV}**

In those words Jesus is explaining the meaning of what he is doing. He begins again with his own authority. "You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right. I am your teacher, I am your Lord -- your teacher, with the right to instruct you; your Lord, with the right to command you." He acknowledges his own claims before them, asserts that he has this right in their lives. But his argument is, "If I, then, with this acknowledged position of authority in your lives, have washed your feet, then you also are to wash one another's feet."

Now, what does he mean when he says that we ought to wash one another's feet? Some Christians have taken this very literally and have thought that our Lord was here instituting another sacrament, along with baptism and the Lord's Supper. And you will occasionally find groups of Christians who, very sincerely, have what they call "foot-washing services," when they wash one another's feet. I attended one of these services on one occasion, and I noted that those who came were very careful to wash their own feet beforehand. They would never have thought of coming with dirty feet to a footwashing service! But Jesus washed the dirty feet of his disciples, without any opportunity for preparation on their part. He took the role of the servant to that degree.

No, Jesus is not giving us another sacrament to follow here, not another mere ceremony to go through, which really is meaningless because it doesn't reflect what was originally in view. But what he means is that just as we need the cleansing and forgiveness of our Lord in order to maintain the sense of unity and refreshment of spirit in our Christian life, so we need to forgive one another, to extend to one another free forgiveness for guilt and for the injury that we may do to one another. We are to be, in the words of Paul, "tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, has forgiven us," {cf, Eph 4:32 KJV}. This is what Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer, isn't? "Forgive us our trespasses, even as we forgive those who have trespassed against us," {cf, Matt 6:12}. He is exhorting Christians to forgive each other, and his authority to do so is based upon his own example.

He knows that it is difficult, sometimes, to forgive, that the flesh within cries out for revenge. We want somebody to pay for what they have done to us. We want to extract some kind of return for the injury. And oftentimes we love the feeling of carrying a grudge, or of resisting the overtures of the other person. We like the feeling of telling them off, giving them a piece of our mind, ripping into them. But Jesus says that when we are doing that, we are doing what he would not do. We are asserting our prerogatives, we are demanding our rights, we are insisting upon the privilege and status that we feel we have before others. And we are forgetting that our Lord and Master humbled himself, though he was rightfully our Teacher and our Lord, rightfully the Lord of Glory, the One with every right to the worship of men. Nevertheless he laid it all aside, did not demand it, did not seek it, did not insist upon it, and washed the feet of his own disciples. And so he says that we must do the same for one another.

No Christian has any right to sit in self-righteous judgment upon another. We may bring them, as we are exhorted to do, under the searching light of the Word of God. We may, out of concern and compassion for their welfare, expose to them what they are doing, as Jesus does here with his disciples. But in no sense are we to do so with self-righteousness, with the suggestion that we would never do a thing like that. Nor are we to demand that they first apologize before we forgive, or that they in some way repay us, or straighten out what they have done, before we extend to them a free and open acceptance and forgiveness. So when we resist this kind of ministry, when we don't want to forgive, or we don't want somebody to come and seek to wash our feet with the Word, we are doing what Peter did, refusing to following the admonition of our Lord:

**Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.  
{John 13:16-17 RSV}**

I remember that Dr. H. A. Ironside pointed out, though, how wise it is, when you go to another to wash his feet, or when another comes to you to wash your feet, that concern be exercised as to the temperature of the water! Some go with boiling hot water. They are so angry, so upset, so distracted by what has happened, and so mad about it, that they come to the other person and say, "Here, stick your feet in here!" Nobody wants to have his feet washed with boiling hot water. Some go to the other extreme and come with ice water. They are

so righteously holier-than-thou, so remote from this whole dirty proposition, so above it all. They come with this frigid, freezing water and they want to wash your feet. Nobody will allow it under those conditions. And some, unfortunately, try to do it without water at all! They come and dry clean your feet; they scrape them free of their dirt. Have you ever had anyone do that to you? They come and give you a piece of their mind, just tear into you. What they say may be true, but there is no water of love at all, nothing to wash it gently away, only a rigid insistence upon scraping away the dirt and the skin along with it. But our Lord insists that we wash one another's feet in love. This is the manifestation that he loved his disciples, and he loved them to the end.

Notice the promised results: "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." That is, this is the secret of maintaining harmony among Christians, in a Christian family and in the larger family of the church.

A number of months ago a young man came to me from another church in this area. He was greatly distressed. He had found that one of the outstanding young laymen of the church, who had been appointed as a sponsor of the youth group of that church, was guilty of immorality with a young girl. This was threatening his marriage. And rumors of it had spread among the young people, so that the whole church was beginning to stir. It looked like a terrible disaster, a tragic occurrence that would split the church when it all came to light. This troubled young man asked me, "What should I do?" I said, "Well, you've been given guidelines in the Scriptures as to what to do. 'Go to your brother and tell him his fault, between you and him alone; if he shall hear you, you have gained your brother.'" (That is washing his feet.)

So he went back, and in a few weeks I got a letter from him. He said, "I took your advice. I went to him and simply told him what I knew. And I told him in love. I didn't try to destroy him. I didn't try to condemn him. I understood the pressures, the passions which moved him to this wrongdoing, and I loved him. But I told him what was happening in the congregation, and that what he had done was wrong. He acknowledged it, and together we went to the leaders of the church and laid the whole matter before them. The result has been that this man has voluntarily left his ministry for awhile, until all this is straightened out in his life. But he himself has been healed, and his marriage has been saved and restored. And the church has been strengthened by all this, rather than split." This is what Jesus means when he says, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

The last part of the paragraph presents the contrast provided by Judas. Jesus says,

**"I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen; it is that the scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me." {John 13:18-20 RSV}**

The contrast here is between the knowledge of Jesus, and the ignorant unbelief of Judas. Jesus knew what was happening. He walked in the light of the Scriptures. He knew from the Scriptures what the events of this last week would be. He knew from the Scriptures that one among those close to him would betray him, and he knew from the beginning which one it would be. But Judas didn't know that. Judas was ignorantly following the avarice and greed of his own heart, and he was resisting every effort Jesus made to reach him. Now he was on the very verge of that final act of rejection which would plunge him over the precipice into utter and complete disaster.

In the very next paragraph you see that described -- how he took the sop from Jesus' hand, and that was the final chance he had. When he did, Satan entered into him, and Judas was no longer his own master in any degree at all. But Jesus indicates that he understands what will happen. He says, "I'm telling you this before it happens, so when it does, you will know I am the one this Scripture describes. I am the one the Psalm is speaking about." Judas, on the other hand, was utterly ignorant. He didn't know what was happening to him, or how he had fallen into Satan's snare, and now was at the very brink of disaster. As you read this account, you can see how these two stand opposed one to another. Jesus sacrificed himself in order to save his disciples; Judas sacrificed Jesus in order to save himself. Those two philosophies dominate the world today.

In this final appeal, Jesus is directing a word to the holders of the two basic attitudes present, "Truly, truly, I

say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me." That is a word to the disciples, and to us, that when someone comes to us to wash our feet, to help us with some problem of sin or error in our life, we are to remember that this person is sent by Jesus. Therefore it is Jesus himself who is standing before us. It is he who is offering to wash our feet. And we are not to resent this kind of ministry on the part of others. We are not to say, "You have no right to come to me. This is my own private affair; you have nothing to do with it." But we are to remember that "He who receives any one whom I send," Jesus says, "receives me." Let us not, like Peter, fall into the error of rejecting the indispensable ministry of cleansing which Jesus offers.

The last word was addressed to Judas: "And he who receives me receives him who sent me." That is, he receives the Father himself, God the Father. And there is no other way to the Father but by Jesus. This is the truth Jesus declares again and again, and it is the great truth which Judas sought to circumvent. He tried to relate to God without accepting Jesus. He tried to live his life before God without relating at all to the ministry and the salvation offered by Jesus.

There are many like that today, who, like Judas, are stumbling blindly on, not realizing that they are facing the most important crisis of their life, and that only Jesus can bring them to God. Jesus said so himself in Chapter 14, just a page or two further on: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me," {John 14:6}. This was Jesus' last-ditch stand to reach Judas before it was too late, and he failed, as subsequent events will show. But the great truth he leaves before us is this: THERE IS NO OTHER WAY.

None other Lamb, none other Name,  
None other Hope in heaven or earth or sea,  
None other Hiding Place from guilt and shame,  
None beside Thee.

## Prayer

Our Father, there may be some among us who, having come to church many, many times, having mingled with the people of God, having sought to live as they do, have never yet come into that saving relationship with the Lord Jesus. Thus they have refused the bath of forgiveness, of justification, have refused to acknowledge their own need of cleansing, and have tried to cleanse themselves, to make their own lives right before you. Lord Jesus, we pray in this moment that you will deal with them just as you dealt with Judas, and will help them to see what they are doing. For those of us, Lord, who have come through the bath but who still need the ministry of others to us, help us to understand that it is you, Lord, who stand before us in our brother, in our sister, who comes to admonish us, to exhort us, to seek to correct us and to lead us back into paths of righteousness and peace. May we not reject this ministry, Lord, for in so doing we reject you, as Peter did, and we therefore have no sense of enjoyment in our lives. Heal our lives by this means we pray, Lord Jesus, in your name and for your sake, Amen.

Title: The Towel Wearers  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 13:1-20  
Message No: 1  
Catalog No: 3121  
Date: April 15, 1973

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## JUDAS AND PETER

by Ray C. Stedman

This morning we return to the *Upper Room Discourse*, found in the thirteenth through the seventeenth

chapters of John. We have only recently started looking at these last words of Jesus before the cross. Here in this thirteenth chapter we have a fascinating account of the understanding of Jesus of all the events which led to his death.

Remember how John opens this chapter, saying that Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of the world and to go to the Father. And he knew that the Father had given all things into his hands. All power in heaven and earth was placed in his hands. Therefore he was, in a sense, directing his own death. He was in charge of the events. Rather than being a helpless victim of events over which he had no control, he was himself determining them as they went along.

You remember how, in the Garden, when the soldiers came to get him, Jesus so spoke to them that they all fell backward upon the ground. You wonder, in reading that, just who was in charge. He gave orders to the soldiers to dismiss the rest of the apostles and let them go, and the soldiers obeyed. He was in command throughout all this amazing series of events.

Then, Jesus knew of the strife and pride among his disciples as he entered the room. He knew that they were quarreling among themselves as to who would be the greatest in his kingdom. This drew forth his remarkable teaching evidenced in the footwashing. He taught them the lessons of humility and of the need for cleansing from the sin of pride and hostility toward one another.

In the closing part of this chapter, beginning with Verse 21, we have three movements.

- First, you can see how Jesus knew and understood the hostility of Judas, which would lead to his betrayal of Jesus, and to the death of both Judas and Jesus -- one by suicide, one by crucifixion.
- Then, he knew the weakness of Peter. That comes in at the end of the chapter. He understood what Peter had within him, and that this would lead to his three-fold denial and his cursing.
- In between, you have a great but brief section in which it is evident that our Lord knew the principle of glory, the means by which glory is achieved -- the principle which Judas rejected. And he also understood the power of love, a principle of which Peter was ignorant. This would be the radical secret that he would loose upon the world.

So there is the outline of the section we will go through this morning.

Let's take first the incident of Judas and Jesus together, beginning with Verse 21:

**When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks. " So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give this morsel when I have dipped it." So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. {John 13:21-26 RSV}**

John sets this account against the background of the distress of Jesus. He said that when Jesus had spoken after the footwashing, and had recognized what Judas was, he was "troubled in spirit." The Greek word means that he was "deeply agitated," he was grieved, hurt. Going to the cross was not an easy thing for Jesus to do. If we think of him as being unmoved through this whole circumstance, of speaking with poise and an untroubled spirit, we are wrong, because Jesus was deeply disturbed at this point. It grieved him that he would face this perfidy and treachery in Judas. He had just quoted from the 41st Psalm the verse in which David had said, "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me," {Psa 41:9b RSV}. In the mind of Jesus this was what Judas was about to do. The phrase, "he has lifted his heel against me" is a word-picture of a companion who, without warning, for no reason, suddenly turns around, lifts his heel, and kicks you in the face. You can imagine how stunning that would be. Thus Jesus is greatly troubled as he anticipates this action of Judas, and he feels it with full force as an act of callous betrayal by one whom he had loved and trusted.



Now, Jesus knew that it was coming. This is made clear in many accounts. As far back as the sixth chapter of John we are told that Jesus said, "Have I not chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?" {cf, John 6:70}. He had known all along that one of his own disciples would betray him, because the Scriptures had said so. And he knew which one it was, yet nevertheless at this point, when Judas is actually on the verge of doing this, it hits with tremendous impact upon Jesus' heart, and he is grieved and hurt and distressed and troubled.

For he knew that the story of Judas was one of increasing greed. He had traced it. If you put together the many little references to Judas in the Scriptures you can see what was happening to this man. It begins to take shape. When he first joined the twelve he evidently was a sincere, dedicated follower. He had a good business head and a reputation for honesty. Therefore he was chosen to be the treasurer of the twelve. He was given charge of the money box. This indicated that the other disciples had confidence in him, and that he had a reputation for honesty. You never elect a treasurer who doesn't show some indication of being able to handle money properly. (I have always been surprised and disturbed that I have never been elected treasurer of anything!) But Judas was elected treasurer of the apostolic band.

When he had joined, he evidently had seen in Jesus the chance to fulfill his dream. Judas believed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah who would deliver Israel from its bondage and make it the head of the nations of the earth. He believed that world government would flow from Jerusalem. There were all the great passages of the Old Testament which spoke of this. And Judas, like other Jews, had read all the wonderful passages of glory, but had ignored those which dealt with the suffering Messiah. So he joined the band with the anticipation that he would be in the inner circle. And as you put the story together you can see that he began to think of himself in these terms.

But when Jesus began to speak about the cross, and when Judas saw him offending the leaders of the Jews, and he saw the growing opposition of the Pharisees toward Jesus, Judas knew that his dream was fading, and he became inwardly resentful and bitter against Jesus. Finally he took matters into his own hands. John tells us in the previous chapter, in Verse 6, that Judas had begun to steal money out of the money box. In the story of Mary, who wiped Jesus' feet with the ointment, John says, beginning with Verse 4,

**But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was to betray him), said, "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" This he said, not that he cared for the poor but because he was a thief, and as he had the money box he used to take what was put into it. {John 12:4-6 RSV}**

So for some time Judas had been stealing out of the treasury. What for? Well, as you put the story together, it is evident that he had contracted to buy a piece of property, evidently a parcel nearby Jerusalem, in a fine location, which he thought would be a good spot to build on when the kingdom came. He had purchased it for himself. He was, in other words, feathering his own nest, utilizing the opportunity of being treasurer of the band to take the money for this purpose. As the hatred of Jesus by the Jews grew, and Judas saw that the time was approaching when an inevitable climax must ensue, he grew impatient. Lacking thirty pieces of silver to complete his purchase, he went to the high priest and made a deal with him to betray Jesus for the money needed to purchase the property. Later, when the money was brought back by Judas and flung at their feet, the priests took it and went out and finished the payment, bought the property, and called it the Field of Blood, because it was there that Judas had hanged himself.

Jesus knew that it was covetousness, avarice, greed, hunger for worldly enjoyment that was motivating Judas. And yet Jesus was grieved and hurt, because he knew that the callous selfishness of Judas had come about only by his repeated rejection of Jesus' love. You can't read the story of these two men without seeing how consistently Jesus tried to reach Judas. Even here at the last supper it is apparent.

One sign of it is the table arrangements which John records here. Most of us are familiar with Leonardo da Vinci's painting, *The Last Supper*, and we think that is the way it was -- all of them sitting on one side of a long table. It is almost certain that this is not what they did, because the custom of the Jews was not to sit at table. They didn't use chairs as we do. The Jews, like the Romans, ate while half-reclining on couches which were around the table. The table was very likely U-shaped. Down at the center of the narrow end sat Jesus, as the host, half-reclining on his left side on his couch, so that his right hand would be free to eat with. On the

adjoining couch to the right was John the Apostle. He always refers to himself as "that disciple whom Jesus loved." As he tells us here, he was sitting close to the breast of Jesus. His head would have been right at Jesus' chest-level because of the arrangement of the couches. And on the other side, the left side of Jesus, which, incidentally, was the place of honor, was Judas. And Jesus' head would have been at Judas' breast, as John's head was at Jesus'. This arrangement made it possible for these to carry on an intimate conversation, unheard by the others. Only that table arrangement explains what happened here at the last supper.

This gesture of giving the place of honor to Judas was Jesus' last attempt to try to reach this man's heart. Another mark of honor which Jesus bestowed was the giving of this little morsel. It was a custom of the Jews to do this, to break off a piece of bread or a bit of meat, dip it in juice, and hand it to a favored guest -- much as we propose a toast in someone's honor at a banquet today. Jesus took the bread and dipped it in the gravy and gave it to Judas in the presence of all the disciples. Only John heard Jesus say that this would mark the betrayer. So, when Jesus gave this morsel to Judas he was honoring him in the presence of the other disciples.

And yet never once in all the time that Judas had been with Jesus is there any record that he ever relented and allowed Jesus to love him. He never opened up, never admitted what he was thinking. He never responded to Jesus' love in the least degree, but increasingly he kept up a false front, a phony facade. Now at last, despite all the efforts of Jesus to reach him, he has "lifted up his heel" against him and kicked him right in the face. So we come to the last note of this tragic sequence, showing the increasing grip of evil on Judas, beginning with Verse 27:

**Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now no one at the table knew why he had said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the feast"; or, that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night. {John 13:27-30 RSV}**

You remember that the chapter began with satanic influence upon Judas. In Verse 2 John says, "And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him," {John 13:2 RSV}. There you see that Judas' greed had given the devil an opportunity. When we resist God's love and follow a determined march toward evil, it gives the devil opportunity. And he had the opportunity to implant thoughts in Judas' heart which would take deep root immediately. So he had already put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus; the deal had been arranged.

But Judas still had a chance to retreat. Jesus would never have tried to reach him had he not still had an opportunity to recover at this point. When Jesus gave him the morsel, and Judas took it and ate it without a word or a sign of repentance or remorse, he passed the point of no return.

Pilots tell us that as they fly over the ocean they reach a point where it is just as far to return as it is to the other side. This is the point of no return.

This is one of the most tragic scenes in all of history -- to see a man, while he is still alive, deliberately reject truth to the extent that he goes beyond any hope of recovery. At this point Satan entered into him, and now you have satanic possession. Judas is no longer in control of his own will. He can no longer make any decision to resist evil. He is in the grip of death.

This is what we might call Judas' Gethsemane. Right after this event Jesus leaves the Upper Room and goes with his disciples into the Garden. There he withdraws a bit, and prays alone. This is his last chance to turn back before the cross. You remember that he prays, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," but he adds, as always, "nevertheless, not my will but thine be done," {cf, Luke 22:42}. And though he sweated great drops of blood in the agony of that moment, we read that, at the end of it, angels came and strengthened him. His resolve was unbroken. Similarly, here is Judas at the point of no return. It is his last chance to turn back, but he doesn't take it. And when he makes that decision, Satan comes and strengthens him, so that he cannot turn back.

So Jesus commands him, now that there is no further hope of recovery, "What you are going to do, do

quickly!" And the final word of John is, "he immediately went out; and it was night." John very likely is thinking in the same terms as the words he later would write in his first epistle: "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light..." -- if we walk out where our lives are open, where we don't try to hide anything, where our sin and our failure and our weakness is all there before God, but we don't try to justify it or to hide it, but we expose it -- "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, ... the blood of Jesus, God's Son, cleanses us from all sin," {cf, 1 Jn 1:7}. But if we turn from the light, turn our backs on Jesus and walk away, determined to do our own will, we walk into darkness, into night. And it is Jude, one of the brothers of Jesus, who later records that there are those who are like "wandering stars, for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved forever," {Jude 1:13 RSV}.

So Judas leaves, and Jesus now turns to his disciples. And he shares with them great truth that he was unable to share while the traitor was present:

**When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of man is glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." {John 13:31-35 RSV}**

Here in this brief passage is the key to the rest of the chapters of this discourse. Chapters 14 through 17 all flow out of these words here. Jesus states an old principle, and gives a new commandment. The old principle is in these words: "Now is the Son of man glorified, and in him God is glorified; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once." Notice the stress on glory. This is the secret of glory, the principle by which we achieve glory. Glory is the recognition of who you really are. This is something we all long for. We are all striving for glory. We want to be recognized; we want people to know us. We long to be seen, to become the center of attention. We all want people to think highly of us. This is what Jesus is talking about. The secret of attaining this, he says, is to give yourself up, to lose yourself. He is looking ahead to the cross. The cross became a certainty the minute Judas left the room, and Jesus says, "Now [in view of this cross] is the Son of man glorified..."

Notice three manifestations of glory stated in this sentence:

First, Jesus is glorified in the cross. The cross is now so certain that in the rest of this passage he speaks of it as though it is already accomplished. And in the cross the inner character of Jesus becomes visible. Remember that in the opening of this Gospel, John says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father," {John 1:14 RSV}. All that grace and truth becomes visible in the cross. As you look at the cross, and at all the circumstances of the events surrounding it, you see the reality of Jesus' humanity. There is the agony in the Garden of Gethsemane -- that strange, mysterious agony of spirit when Jesus was so troubled, so distressed, so upset and grieved, that he sweat great drops of blood and cried out in terrible, anguished cries to his Father. There you see the humanity of Jesus. And his cries from the cross -- of thirst, of pain, of being forsaken -- all of these tell us that he was one with us. Someone has written these very appropriate words:

It is well that we should think, sometimes, of the Upper Room, and of the Last Supper, and of his soul "exceeding sorrowful unto death;" of Gethsemane, the deep shadow of the olive trees, his loneliness, prayers, and disappointment with his disciples, his bloody sweat; the traitor's kiss, the binding, the blow in the face, the spitting, the buffeting, the mocking, the scourging, the crown of thorns, the smiting; the sorrowful way, and the burdensome cross, the exhaustion and collapse; the stripping, the impaling, the jeers of his foes, the flight of his friends; the hours on the cross, the darkness, his being forsaken of God; his thirst, and the end.

In that cross you can see how close to us Jesus came, how one with us he was. But also you see the serenity of his faith. How fearless he was before Pilate! He said to him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above," {John 19:11 RSV}. How fearless he was before Herod -- he stood silent, and would not answer him -- and before Caiaphas, the high priest! How he directed these events, as we have seen! He was master of the circumstances. There on the cross you see the compassion of his love. He forgave

the revolutionary beside him, and prayed for his enemies. And previously, in Pilate's hall, he had looked at Peter with compassion when Peter had denied him. And you see the love and concern of his heart as he cared for his mother -- the last thing he did before he died -- committing her into the hands of John.

And there is that strange, unfathomable mystery of his work -- how he could be at once the sacrifice being offered, and the priest offering the blood before the Father? How he could be both the victim of man's sin, of man's hatred and cruelty and guilt and, at the same time, be the victor over all the forces of darkness and hell and death, over the principalities and powers whom he took and nailed to the cross? We never can fully understand it, but there is the glory of Jesus -- all hidden there in the cross of Christ.

And God was glorified in him. That is the second thing, he said. The cross not only reveals Jesus but it reveals the Father -- all the truth about the Father. The strange idea has arisen among Christians, I have found, that Jesus is the innocent sufferer, placating the wrath of a terribly angry God who is ready to smite humanity. But that is not the biblical view. The Bible says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world himself," {2 Cor 5:19 RSV}. You see in the cross the holiness and the justice of God. Isaiah says, "It pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he has put him to grief. He has made his soul an offering for sin," {cf, Isa 53:10}. There you see the power and the sovereignty of God. Peter, on the day of Pentecost, could say, "Jesus was delivered up [to be crucified] according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," {cf, Acts 2:23}. He was in charge of the events. There you see the mercy and the love and grace of the Father. As Paul writes to the Romans, "He who spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things?" {cf, Rom 8:32}.

And so, as Jesus says, he is glorified, the Father is glorified, and God will glorify him again, and will do it immediately. Here he is thinking of his resurrection and exaltation. Resurrection is never far behind death. Our Lord is declaring a great principle here. How do you achieve glory? How do you achieve the fulfillment you are wanting -- and quite properly so: God made us this way; it is not wrong to want to be noticed, to want to attain success, to want to achieve stature and status -- it is not wrong, but how do you go about it? The answer is: By dying. "If you save your life, you will lose it; if you lose your life for my sake," Jesus said, "you will save it," {cf, Matt 16:25}. And very close behind death is resurrection -- the exaltation of God. Peter puts it precisely in one of his epistles: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you," {cf, 1 Pet 5:6}.

That is difficult for the natural man, isn't it? We struggle with this -- I do, you do. We fight for the top place. We are filled with suspicion and guile toward one another. We could all be involved in a Watergate scandal. We all want to read each other's mail, to find out what is going on in other people's lives -- especially if they are in any sense our rivals. So how can you do this, how can you lose your life? What is the power which can make you be willing to throw it all away, apparently, to give it all up?

Well, that is why Jesus adds, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you..." That is the power which makes sacrifice possible. It can't be done on any other terms. It is not ambition -- that's not enough. It is love. The key is in the phrase, "as I have loved you." That is why Paul could write, "The love of Christ constrains us," {cf, 2 Cor 5:14}. That is the secret. That phrase is both the measure and the origin of our love. Our love for one another, Jesus says, is to be like his love for us. That is, we must love as he does, without condition, ready to forgive, honest and candid, open and accepting toward each other. That is the measure of it.

Then, it must originate from his love for us. As the Father loved the Son, and as he lived by that love, so we are to live by the love of Jesus available to us. We are to draw upon his loving acceptance of us in order to reach out in loving acceptance to someone else near us, whether they are lovely or not. That is the secret. Jesus himself says that this is the mark of true discipleship. "Do you want people to believe your message? They will when they see the mark. And this is the mark by which the world will know that you really are my disciples -- because you begin to reach out in love like this to each other. If you can't reach out like that in love, if you can't put another's need ahead of your own, and give up your own interests to minister to that need, then you are not my disciples," Jesus says, "you have no part with me." This is the mark.

Tom Skinner puts this into very contemporary but beautiful terms. He says,

It has always been the will of God to saturate the common clay of a man's humanity, and then to send that man in open display into a hostile world as a living testimony that it is possible for the invisible God to make himself visible in a man.

**"By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." {John 13:35}**

Now we will take just a quick look at the closing scene with Peter and Jesus:

**Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going? " Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow, till you have denied me three times." {John 13:36-38 RSV}**

Judas betrayed Jesus; Peter denied his Lord. What is the difference between these two men? What is the difference between betrayal and denial?

Jesus himself has already explained this for us in Verse 10 of this chapter. Remember that he said that Peter had already been bathed and needed only to wash his feet. Judas had never been bathed, had never opened up once for the cleansing of love, had never opened his life to Jesus. Peter had dirty feet but a clean heart; Judas had an evil heart of unbelief, though perhaps an outward walk of apparent morality. And that is the sort of man who will betray Jesus.

What Peter lacked was the understanding of love. Peter thought that he loved Jesus, and he did -- with all the human emotion of which he was capable. But he had not yet learned to walk by the love of Christ for him. He had not yet learned to find his identity, not in his efforts to try to be something in himself, but in the acceptance of Jesus for him. That is the secret. Jesus knew that. Peter, with the utmost dedication of his flesh, with complete consecration and sincerity of heart, could say to Jesus, "Lord, I know where you're going -- you're going into death. And I'll lay down my life with you." And Jesus understood that. He said, "Peter, thank you. But before the cock crows, before the morning breaks, you will have denied me three times."

Yet you remember that story at the close of John's Gospel, in which, after the resurrection, Jesus gathered with his disciples on the shore of Galilee. He had built a fire for them, and had laid some fish on to cook, and they had breakfast together. While they were eating, Jesus said to Peter, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter said, "Lord, you know I love you." Again he said, "Peter, do you love me?" "Lord, you know I love you." And once again, "Peter, do you love me?" And Peter said, "Lord, you know everything. You know that now that I love you." And it was then that Jesus said, "Peter, feed my sheep," {cf, John 21:15-17}. He commissioned him when Peter learned what love really is. When he learned how to draw upon the available love of Jesus for him to strengthen him in order to reach out in love for others, then Jesus sent him out with a worldwide commission to feed the sheep of God.

This is where John leaves us in this account -- helping us to see how thoroughly Jesus knows us, how thoroughly he understands us and sees all that is going on in our lives, and is ready to impart to us the great secret by which we can fulfill that impossible demand -- to give up in order to gain, to lose in order to win, to go down to defeat in order to arise as a victor. It is as we learn to love by the love of Jesus, and to draw upon him, that "... by this all men will know that you are my disciples."

## **Prayer**

Lord, teach us to love in this way. We know that the principle of life out of death can never be fulfilled in us until we have learned the new commandment -- to love one another as you have loved us. Teach us that, Lord. We stand, like Peter, uncertain, afraid, knowing how weak we are, knowing that our human love can never stand the pressure and the test, but knowing, Lord, that you are able to say to us, as you said to Peter, "You cannot follow me now; but afterward you will." In Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Judas and Peter  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 13:21-38  
Message No: 2  
Catalog No: 3122  
Date: April 29, 1973

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## THE CURE FOR TROUBLED HEARTS

by Ray C. Stedman

It is probably more than coincidental that Dr. Philip Caves, a heart surgeon, led us in prayer this morning, because this message is going to deal with heart trouble of a somewhat different nature, one which is more common even than heart disease, which has become one of the foremost killers in the world today. As we move into the Upper Room again, we find the Lord facing the troubled hearts of his disciples. This passage opens with his words to them:

**"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me." {John 14:1 RSV}**

As our Lord looked at these men, he knew what was going on in their minds and hearts, knew how disturbed and upset they were, and knew what was causing it. He knew the remedy for it, as well. Perhaps there are many among us here who are suffering from the same affliction as these disciples -- troubled hearts, fearful hearts, upset, disturbed, agitated hearts because of what was going on. Our Lord knew that these men were afraid -- afraid of what was coming. They were afraid of death, afraid that they, with him, were going to be executed by the Jews. They knew of the opposition which had developed against them in Jerusalem, the bitter hatred of the Pharisees, their determination to eliminate Jesus and all his disciples. They knew they were in danger, and so their hearts were deeply troubled as they gathered here with him.

But more than that physical danger to themselves, they were aware of his words about leaving them. This had struck terror into their hearts. They were afraid that even though they might survive, might escape death, they would have to go on living without him, and that was unbearable to them. They could bear to die with him; they could not bear to live or die without him. So as he gathers with them he says these words to them, "Let not your hearts be troubled."

Some weeks ago, when I was experiencing a period of this kind of "heart trouble" myself -- distress of heart -- I thought of these words, and they came home to me with tremendously new significance. I saw something in that simple phrase, "Let not your hearts be troubled," which I had never seen before. What impressed me were the words, "Let not." They mean that these disciples could do something about their problem. They held in their own hands the key to their release from heart trouble. It was possible for them either to let it happen, or not to let it happen. Our Lord is saying this to all of us. There is a way out of heart difficulty -- this distress and fear concerning both death and life -- and our Lord goes on to give the answer to them.

The remedy for heart trouble is contained in the two phrases which follow: "believe in God, believe also in me." "Let not your hearts be troubled." How? Why, "Believe in God" -- God who is still in control, who knows what he is doing, who is capable of exercising infinite wisdom, infinite power, and infinite love -- and, "believe also in me," Jesus said, who is the means by which all that wisdom and resource and power of God is made available to you. That is the secret. We are going to see, as we go on in this account, how our Lord strove to impress anew upon these disciples' hearts the fact that something was hidden in the remarkable relationship between him and his Father: "Believe in God, believe also in me." For between the Father and the Son there is a relationship which is so important, so foundational, so fundamental, that everything else will grow out of it. The rest of the chapter is built around this great secret.

Based upon this relationship our Lord promises to end their fears by coming to them again. Their basic fear

was that he was going to leave them, and that they would have to face death, and life, without him. His reassuring word is, "I am not going to leave you, I am coming to you again." You find this developed in the rest of the chapter. Let me outline the structure of it for you. You will understand this chapter much better if you realize two facts.

- First, the Lord is going to come again in person to end their fear of death, so that death need hold no terror for them (as it need hold none for us). This assurance he gives them in the promise contained in Verse 3, at which we will look in just a moment.
- Second, he is going to come again by the Spirit to end their fear of life. He promises to be with them in all the difficulties and problems of their life -- in a living relationship based upon his relationship with the Father. That is stated flatly in Verse 18, "I will not leave you desolate [i.e., orphans]; I will come to you."

Both of these comings are made possible by that strange relationship which our Lord had with his Father, and which led him to say to these disciples, "Believe in God, believe also in me."

Now, the answer to fear is faith. The next time you are afraid, reach out for a promise of God, and lay hold of it by the power of Jesus, and your fear will vanish. There is no other answer to fear but that. Anything else will permit the fear to come back again and again. But the promise of God remains steady and sure, and the availability of the resources of Jesus to lay hold of it is the way of deliverance.

So let's look at Jesus' promise to come to end the fear of death, found in Verses 2-3:

**"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." {John 14:2-3 RSV}**

Our Lord is looking on into the future with his disciples. Here he unveils the nature of the future beyond death, beyond this life. What happens beyond that? I don't think there is one of us who hasn't, at one time or another, sensed the fear which lies in the unknown, beyond death. We have all felt that strange solemnity of spirit which comes when you confront the fact of death, the fact that we are all someday going to die, and that our loved ones will die. Life here must end, and what lies beyond? This is what our Lord is facing here with his disciples.

He reassures them with four revelations about that life:

First, he states that what happens is going to be within the Father's house. Of course, he is talking to them as believers. They belong to him, and on that basis he assures them, "In my Father's house are many rooms." What do you think he means by "my Father's house"? This is the only time that phrase is employed in the New Testament. Therefore it is very difficult to say exactly what this means by trying to compare it with other passages -- until you go to the Old Testament. There you see that some of the prophets clearly indicate that God dwells in the universe. The whole universe is the Father's house. God, speaking through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, says,

**"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool;  
what is the house which you would build for me," {Isa 66:1b RSV}**

**"and what is the place of my rest?  
All these things my hand has made,  
and so all these things are mine," {Isa 66:1d-2a RSV}**

Our Lord on many occasions had been out with his disciples under the brilliant sky at night. And as they looked up into the heavens and saw the stars and galaxies whirling in space, he must have reminded them many times that this was the Father's house. Oftentimes I am asked, "Does the Bible say anything about whether there is life on other planets?" And the answer is, "No, it doesn't specifically say that." But hidden in this reference there is a suggestion, I believe, that this is the case. What Jesus says here is, "In my Father's

house are many abiding places." It should not be translated "mansions," as it is in the King James Version. That is an interpretation which is not very accurate. It is not even "rooms," as we have it here in the Revised Standard Version. It is, literally, "places to live." "In my Father's house are many places to live." Earth is one; we live here. This is our address. But God has other addresses elsewhere. What is happening in these other places out in the vast universe around us? It is hard to say. But Jesus assures us that there is an abundance of places to live, plenty of them. Therefore there is room in the Father's house.

Second, he assures us that this is a certain revelation. I like the rendering of the King James Version here. It is more in line with what the Greek is saying: "if it were not so, I would have told you," {John 14:2b KJV}. That verse has been a comfort to me many times. Oftentimes people say to me, "You know, Jesus said many things which were simply an accommodation to the way people thought in his day. He didn't try to correct everything, but instead he reflected their errors." I think this verse stands as a clear refutation of that argument. Jesus said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." That is, "I have come to correct the thinking of men, to set right their delusions, to reveal the ways in which they have been wrong, to straighten out the twisted, distorted ideas among men" -- "If it were not so, I would have told you."

Third, he says, "I go to prepare a place for you." Now, I don't know, fully, what that means. I don't think anyone does. But it indicates that there is a need for preparation of some sort. I am impressed with what the Apostle Paul tells us -- that the creation, including not only this planet and this solar system but the entire universe in all its vast complexity, is in the grip of a remorseless law, which science calls "the second law of thermodynamics," the law of entropy, the law of decay, or as Paul calls it in Romans 8, the law of "futility." Creation is in the grip of futility -- it is running down, its energy is being transposed into a form in which it is no longer available. It is like a great clock, once wound up, which is gradually running down. And Paul suggests in Romans 8 that this process will be reversed one of these days, that the Lord Jesus, as Lord of the universe, will reverse this law of thermodynamics and change it, so that the universe will no longer be running down but will become a new heaven and a new earth, built on entirely different principles. Perhaps that is what Jesus has in mind when he says to the disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." At any rate, it was necessary for him to do this. He came to prepare them for heaven; he left to prepare heaven for them.

This takes us on, fourth, into the specific promise of his coming again. "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Notice the elements of that promise:

First of all, it is a certain coming. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again..." Did he go? Yes, history is unanimous. The record shows that he went away. The tomb is empty. There is no grave of Jesus Christ anywhere on earth. He has gone away. And if he goes away, he says, just as certainly he will come again. Do you remember how the angels underscored that fact in the account of the ascension in the opening chapter of Acts? The disciples were gazing up into heaven as Jesus was ascending, and when he disappeared from sight, hidden by a cloud, suddenly two men were standing there. They said to them, "Why do you stand gazing up into the sky? This same Jesus will so come in like manner as you have seen him go," {cf, Acts 2:11}. This is an amplification of Jesus' promise here: "If I go away, I will come again." Everywhere in Scripture this coming again of Jesus Christ is referred to as the hope of the world.

And our Lord further reveals that it will be a personal return. He himself will come again. He isn't going to send an angel, nor anyone else; he personally will return. And it will involve a departure of the saints, of his own, to be with him. "I will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also." In the coming in the Spirit, which Jesus mentions in Verse 18, he comes to the believer, and the believer receives him to himself. But in this verse it is the other way around. He comes to the believers and takes them to be with him. Thus there is a clear distinction between these two comings of Christ. This is the coming which Paul must have been thinking of when he wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica:

**For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. {1 Th 4:16-17 RSV}**



Paul's words echo the words of Jesus here: "I will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." What an answer that is, not only to the problems of history, but also to the personal fear of a believer facing death! Because other passages make clear that this event, which is yet to break into history -- the return of Jesus for his own -- is the very event which every believer experiences when he dies. When we step out of time and into eternity we step into the coming of Jesus for his own. This, then, is the hope, and the experience, of everyone who dies as a member of the body of Jesus Christ. What an answer this is to the fear of death!

There was an editorial column on the church page of the *Palo Alto Times* last night which took Christians to task for the inconsistent way they treat death. So many Christians seem to echo the fear and pessimism and despair of the world when they think of death as a somber, gloomy occasion. This editorial brought out the fact that it ought to be a time of triumph, and of joy, because a believer has gone home to be with the Lord.

I remember listening years ago to a radio broadcast of the Bible Study Hour, when Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, was the speaker. I'll never forget his telling of the occasion when his first wife had died. He, with his children, had been to the funeral service for her. As he was driving his motherless children home, they were naturally overcome with grief at the parting. Dr. Barnhouse said that he was trying to think of some word of comfort that he could give them. Just then a huge moving van passed them. As it passed, the shadow of the truck swept over the car. And as the truck pulled on in front of them, an inspiration came to Dr. Barnhouse. He said, "Children, would you rather be run over by a truck, or by its shadow?" The children said, "Well, of course, Dad, we'd much rather be run over by the shadow! That can't hurt us at all." Dr. Barnhouse said, "Did you know that two thousand years ago the truck of death ran over the Lord Jesus ... in order that only its shadow might run over us?" And he went on to explain how David had said in the 23rd Psalm,

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. {Psa 23:4a KJV}**

This is the promise which every believer has from the lips of Jesus himself: "I will come again and will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

Then he goes on in the remaining verses to show us the way, the way to the Father, the way in which all this will be accomplished. And it all relates to that remarkable word with which he began: "Believe in God, believe also in me." He says to them, in Verses 4-7,

**"And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him."  
{John 14:4-7 RSV}**

Here is the way to the Father at death, or the way to the Father in the midst of life, for the secret of both is found in this passage. I believe that Jesus deliberately made this statement to these disciples in order to bring to their knowledge something which they hadn't realized. He said to them, "You know the way where I am going." And Thomas, dear old "honest Thomas" -- we should never call him "doubting Thomas"; he was simply "honest Thomas," too honest to say that he knew something which he didn't realize that he knew -- Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" But Jesus had said that they did know. And the truth is, they did! They knew him. But they didn't know that they knew.

Do you remember those distinctions we used to make between the four classes in school?

- Freshmen, we were told, are those who know not, and know not that they know not.
- Sophomores are those, having advanced a little, who know not, but know that they know not.
- Juniors, on the other hand, are those who know, and know not that they know. And
- Seniors are supposed to be those who know, and know that they know.

On that basis, Thomas and the other disciples here are classified as juniors in the school of faith. They know, but they don't know that they know. And Jesus is making clear to them that they know the way. Thomas shook his head, "No, Lord, we don't know the way. We don't even know where you're going." And Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. That's what I meant, Thomas. You know me; therefore you know the way. For I am the way."

Here is this unique and most remarkable claim of Jesus. How it reveals the grandeur of his character and being! There is the inclusiveness of this statement -- it all relates to the Father. "I am the way to the Father," he says. If you come to know Jesus, he will bring you to God. As Peter puts it, "He will bring you to the knowledge of the Father." And I want to testify that when I began my Christian life, as a boy, many years ago now, my awareness of the One with whom I was dealing was that of the Lord Jesus. He filled my horizon. I remember how I loved the hymns which sang of the cross and of the work of Christ, and I loved to think about him as the Savior, the One who redeems. But as I have lived as a Christian, gradually the Father has come into focus. More and more my thoughts are drawn to the Fatherhood of God, and I revel in the glory of that relationship, in the closeness of my sonship with the Father.

This is what Jesus says. He is the way to the Father. He brings you to the Father. You know the Father through him, for he is also the truth about the Father -- as Paul puts it, "The truth as it is in Jesus," {cf, Eph 4:21}. All the knowledge of God which we human beings hunger for is revealed in the words of Jesus about the Father. He unveils the Father's heart, what kind of a Father he is -- his power and his wisdom and his love. He is the life of the Father. That is a most amazing claim! The Father has given all life into his hands, that he may give it to whomsoever he will. This is Jesus' claim recorded in the fifth chapter of John. Only those who come to the Father by the Son can receive life. Matthew 11 tells us, "no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him," {cf, Matt 11:27}. This meets fully the need of man. He is the way, in order that the will of man may choose it; he is the truth, in order that the mind may comprehend it; he is the life, in order that the heart of man can experience it. Thus to know Christ involves the whole man and leads to the full expression and experience of the fullness of God.

But note also the exclusiveness of his claim: "No one comes to the Father, but by me." Every now and then I run into somebody who will say, "You Christians are so bigoted, so narrow. Why do you insist that Jesus is the only way by which you can come to God? Other religions have their ways; other religions are striving to know the same God, and other religions are more tolerant; but you Christians are so narrow!" And I have to say, "That is true; we are narrow. At that point Jesus himself was narrow, and we dare not go beyond what he said, because truth itself is narrow."

And there are certain illustrations that I use which help to indicate how narrow truth can be. Have you ever thought how narrow the telephone company is? If you want to call somebody up, the phone company insists that you use a certain series of numbers in exactly the proper sequence, and it leaves absolutely no room for you to play around. It is utterly narrow-minded at that point!

Truth is that way. Jesus is the fulfillment of his own word: "There is a narrow way which leads unto life, and few there be who find it," {cf, Matt 7:13-14}.

Others may teach about God. They may say that they teach the truth and seek the life. But only Jesus says, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life."

Jesus' words in Verse 7, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also," do not mean that these disciples didn't know him. He is simply saying, "To know me is to know my Father; henceforth you know him and have seen him." That statement caused Philip to break out in an unpremeditated cry,

**"Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves."**

**{John 14:8-11 RSV}**

In this paragraph our Lord is dealing with the secret of his own being. In some ways this is the most profound revelation that we have in the entire New Testament of the nature of the Lord in his relationship with the Father. And it is absolutely fundamental. This is what he meant when he said to his disciples at the beginning of this chapter, "Believe in God, believe also in me." That is, "Understand there is a unique relationship which is the secret of my life, and which will be the secret of your life, too. You must understand that I have not come here simply to demonstrate how God works, how God looks, how God acts; I have come to demonstrate how a man acts who is in right relationship with God, who is filled with God. The Father dwells in me, and he does the works. I do them, but I do them by a secret relationship in which, though I perform them -- my mind thinks, my hands work, and my body acts -- it nevertheless is really the Father who is doing all this through me. I live in him; he lives in me."

"And if you want proof of this," he says to Philip, "look at two things: my words, and my works. My words prove that I am in the Father. I could never say what I say if I were not in the Father, for what I say is truth, it is reality, it is the way things are. And my works prove that the Father is in me. A man could never do what I do, but God can. And you must understand this, Philip. Otherwise you will have no understanding of the secret of your own life." For, in Verse 20, he is going to go on to say (though we won't look at this today), "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." That is, "The relationship which I have with the Father is the pattern which I will have with you. Just as I live by means of the Father at work in me, so you will live by means of me at work in you. I will come to you, I will live in you, I will work through you. And you can face every problem of life on that basis. I will be adequate to handle anything that comes your way, on that basis. Whatever life throws at you of fear, of upset, of discouragement, of disappointment -- whatever its nature may be -- you can handle it in the same way that I have handled life: You in me, and I in you, as the Father is in me, and I am in him."

This, then, is the key relationship in all this passage. We are going to stop here. There is much more that our Lord went on to say which relates to the handling of the difficulties of life, but it all grows out of his wonderful explanation to them, in answer to the cry of Philip, that they might know the secret of his being: "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me; just as I will be in you, and you will be in me."

**Prayer**

Our Father, we thank you for this tremendous reassurance to us as we face the unknown. As we face death, as we face life, we have these marvelous words of Jesus to rest upon. "Let not your hearts be troubled. I will come again. I will come again at death; I will come again in life." And in all ways, Lord, his presence will be with us. We thank you for that. Help us to live on this basis today, in this present 20th century hour, and to demonstrate the quality of life that he lived. We ask in his name, Amen.

Title: The Cure for Troubled Hearts  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 14:1-11  
Message No: 3  
Catalog No: 3123  
Date: May 6, 1973

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**THE OTHER COMFORTER**

**by Ray C. Stedman**

Jesus' relationship with his Father would be called, in modern terms, his basic identity. I don't suppose there is any more basic problem in human life than the need to discover who you are, to discover your identity. We

hear a great deal these days about an identity crisis, and the need to find oneself. This reflects a tremendously important psychological fact. It is important to know who you are.

A friend was telling me recently that as he has grown older he has come to see how important it is to him to find out more about his father, to know and to understand him. You cannot really know who you are and what causes you to act the way you do without some knowledge of your heritage and the family from which you come. Many times the solution to your problems will lie in that discovery and you will come to understand yourself.

This is because who you are determines what you do. If what you do doesn't grow out of who you are, then you are living a fraud, a false life. You are putting up a front, a facade which is not real. You may think that you are getting away with it, but you're not! Somebody sees through that front, sees that it is false. This is a problem with our world, isn't it? It is true that we pass through identity crises, that we don't know who we are. And that is why Jesus is unveiling his identity to his disciples.

Jesus knows who he is, and he says it to the disciples again and again. As we have seen, everything he says and does grows out of a basic identity with his Father. He says: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me?" (John 14:10 {RSV}). That is the key. "My Father and I are together always. He works in me, and I depend on him. That is the secret of life." Then again in Verse 11 he says: "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me:" {John 14:11 RSV}. This is the great truth which needs to be apprehended, the revelation of our Lord's own secret of identity.

It will help us to pick up the train of his logic if we move on to Verses 18-20 and then return to the intervening verses. Jesus says to his disciples:

**"I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me, because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." {John 14:18-20 RSV}**

That is the secret of our identity as believers. The most fundamental fact of our life as Christians is there: You in me, and I in you.

Jesus says that he is not going to leave them as orphans. These men are frightened. They know that he is going away. They remember the intimations he has given that it will be by violence, by being taken and beaten and ultimately crucified. And they are fearful -- not only for him but for themselves. But now he reassures them, "I'm not going to leave you orphans, I'm not going to abandon you. I will come to you."

Obviously he is not talking here about his second coming. His reference to that is in Verse 3 where he has said that he will come again and take them to himself. At his second coming, John tells us, "every eye shall see him" (Rev 1:7 {KJV}). But here is a way of coming which the world will not see, but in which the disciples will not only see him but live by him: "Because I live, you will live also."

I take that to be more than merely a reference to his resurrection, and the promise of our resurrection some day. It is really a reference to his coming by the Spirit, the result of which will be "you in me, and I in you." And that is to be the secret of our lives, as his relationship with the Father was the secret of his life. Earlier, Jesus has told his disciples: "As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me," (John 6:57 {RSV}).

Notice how he develops this idea, he uses a phrase which he will use repeatedly throughout this discourse: "In that day." In what day? In the day when he comes again to them in this remarkable and unique way by which they know him and live by him, but which the world cannot see. He is speaking of a new day about to begin, a fresh dawn beyond the night of crucifixion and death, beginning at his resurrection, but continuing on. And it will be characterized by new knowledge on their part: "you will know [the Greek word means *know by experience*] that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you." This day, unquestionably then, is the day of the Spirit's coming, when they will be given a new identity.

I find Christians all over this country who do not understand this truth about their new life in Christ. The truth from which they get their identity is this fact, that Jesus is in them, and lives in them. It is to this fact that they should return whenever there are pressures and problems and difficulties and heartaches and troubles and demands made upon them, because it is from this fact that the secret of life will flow to them. That is why Jesus places it so centrally in this passage.

As we now know, the day of the Spirit began on the Day of Pentecost, when suddenly the Spirit of God was poured out upon these believers, and they became changed men. And that day is still with us. It began two thousand years ago and it hasn't ended yet. In fact, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and bracketed its extremes -- the events which would mark the beginning and the end of the day of the Spirit. It begins with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, as prophesied by the Prophet Joel. Peter quotes that prophecy. He says, "but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel" {Acts 2:16 RSV}, this pouring out of the Spirit upon men. And it ends, he says, when: "The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes," {Acts 2:20 RSV}. (See Acts 2:16-20 and Joel 2:28-32).

But in between is the age of the Spirit, the day of the Spirit.

As we work back through this passage, we can see that four tremendous characteristics of the Holy Spirit are outlined for us in Jesus' words:

**"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither seen him nor known him, you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." {John 14:15-18 RSV}**

First, the One who is coming would be another Counselor. The word translated "Counselor" is *parakletos*. It means "one who is called alongside of," one who will be your companion, your strengthener, your guide. In the King James Version it is translated "Comforter" -- One who is with you to strengthen you, to fortify you. And this Spirit will be another Comforter. Another than whom? Who was the first Comforter? It was Jesus himself. Jesus had been their Counselor, their Comforter, their Strengthener. He was the One who had guarded them and kept them and empowered them and taught them. Now there would be another who would come, another of the same kind.

Later on in this discourse, Jesus says: "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you," (John 16:4b {RSV}). They didn't need to know these things then. But now, as he is going away, he tells them that he has provided another Counselor who will strengthen them and minister to them. So the primary mark of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is that he does with us what Jesus did with his own disciples -- he strengthens us.

The second characteristic is that he would be the Spirit of truth. What does that mean? Truth, of course, is reality. Truth is what exists, what really is there.

The Spirit of God has come into our lives to lead us to understand what is there. There are many illusions in life, things that we think are true but which aren't true at all, principles upon which we act, expecting certain results, which don't appear. But the Spirit of truth has come to help us to understand life as it really is, to dispel these illusions and strip off all the falseness. He is the unending foe of every pretense, of every fraud, and of every bit of phoniness.

As Jesus says a little later on, he will also reveal the secrets of God, the hidden facts about life that we desperately need to know in order to live. Paul develops that idea strongly in First Corinthians, where he tells us of the hidden wisdom, "the deep things of God" {1 Cor 2:10b KJV}, which are so necessary, but which eye has not seen nor ear heard, and which God has prepared for those who love him (see 1 Cor 2:9). These are made known to us, he says, by the Spirit.

The third characteristic, Jesus says, is that the world cannot receive him. The "world" means all those who are what we would call secularists or humanists, those who try to look at life without making any provision for

God or for God's operation; who think of life as consisting merely of what can be observed and learned and acted on; and who think they don't really need God in order to live. Our world is being rapidly secularized. Education is losing its Christian perspective and is taking on a wholly secular point of view. Those who hold that viewpoint, Jesus says, cannot know the deep wisdom of God, cannot find the secrets of life. That is why, if we are restricted to following completely secular philosophies, we will repeat the same mistakes over and over again, generation after generation.

It is by the revelation of the truth as it is in Jesus, disseminated through the church, that the world is given light in the midst of its darkness. And if the church is not preaching the truth which is in the Scriptures, but, rather, is ignoring it, then the world is in unrelieved darkness and has no way out. That is why life gets worse and worse throughout the generations; why secular ideas and philosophies govern but cannot solve our problems. The world cannot receive the Spirit of truth because it does not believe him, Jesus says. It doesn't see him or know him. It doesn't believe that a spiritual kingdom exists, and thus cannot know the great secrets of life.

The fourth characteristic, Jesus says, is that the Spirit would operate from within the believer: "You know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you." The primary reference here undoubtedly is to his disciples. Jesus could never say that of us, nor of anyone after the Day of Pentecost. We don't have to go through a process in which the Spirit first is with us and then is in us. But these men did. At this point in their experience Jesus had been with them, and thus the Spirit of God was with them, because Jesus was filled with the Spirit. Everything he did was by means of the Holy Spirit who was in him, but with them. But now Jesus is going away, and when he goes he will send the Spirit. And the Spirit will come to be in them. Everything they do, then, they can do by the power of the Spirit living in them.

All this is introduced to us by a very startling statement with which our Lord caught the attention of the disciples, Verse 12:

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it." {John 14:12-14 RSV}**

That is one of the most startling promises in the Scriptures, and many have puzzled over it. There are three things we need to notice in this passage:

The first is the reason he gives for these greater works. It is because I go to the Father. What does he mean? Well, when he goes to the Father, he will send the Spirit. He says later: "if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you" (John 16:7b {RSV}). He is referring again here to the coming of the Spirit. As the Spirit of God comes into human hearts and dwells in them, these things will happen -- by means of the Spirit. The Spirit, of course, is releasing to us the life of Jesus, so that it is still Jesus who is doing these things.

We need to understand that. Some people read this passage and think that we ordinary human mortals, living here in the 20th century, are somehow going to be so capable, so well developed, so intellectually astute, that we can actually do greater things than the Son of God himself did when he was here in the flesh. That isn't what he says. He is telling us that he will do greater things through us, as the risen Lord, dwelling in us by means of the Spirit, than he did when he was here in the days of his flesh. And, in either case, it is he who is doing it.

Some time ago I attended a public breakfast meeting designed to emphasize the spiritual values of life. It was one of those times when God seemed to come down and meet each one of us. Even though there were hundreds of non-Christians present, there was still a deep sense of God's presence. At the close of the meeting, I heard two men discussing it on their way out. One said, "Well, God must have been very pleased with this meeting." The other said, "Yes, he probably was -- he did it!" That captures exactly what Jesus means here. He is going to do it because he goes to the Father and by that means sends the Spirit.

The result will be that he who believes in me will also do the works that I do. Unquestionably this refers to the miracles that he performed. But what does this mean? Can Christians do miracles like Jesus did -- raise the

dead, heal the sick, open the eyes of the blind, still the storm, multiply the loaves and fishes -- all these great signs? The answer is, "Yes." If you read the record of church history you learn that there have been occasional manifestations of miracles of this nature. These are well documented and cannot be denied. And this same kind of power, by God's hand, is still at work among us from time to time.

But the focus of this passage is not on these physical miracles. Jesus drives on immediately to say: And greater works than these will you do. Now, what are they? Obviously they can't be greater miracles, because there are no miracles greater than his. Can you think of anything greater than opening the eyes of those born blind, or speaking a word and enabling a lame man to walk, or delivering the oppressed, or raising the dead? Can there be any greater miracles than those? Of course not. Then what are these greater works? The only answer that makes any sense at all is that they are greater in their significance and importance. In other words, they are spiritual accomplishments, rather than physical. Anything done to the spirit of man is far more significant than something done to the body. That is what Jesus is speaking of.

As you read the account of his ministry, notice that although the crowds followed him when he did those amazing wonders, and entire cities would turn out to hear his message, yet when you come to the end of his life -- when he is facing the cross -- where are all the crowds who heard him? Where are the hundreds whom he must have healed? They are gone. Only a handful are found at the foot of the cross. By every human reckoning the ministry of Jesus was a total failure. His miracles did not change people; they merely touched the surface of their lives.

But later on in this account Jesus says to his disciples: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide [your fruit will remain]" (John 15:16a {RSV}). Isn't it interesting that the ones whom Jesus healed would not stand with him through the test of the cross, but that when these disciples went out and preached in the power of the Spirit they won converts by the thousands, all across the length and breadth of the Roman Empire. And when the testing came, these men and women -- won by the preaching of these disciples -- were willing to face lions, to endure torture, to be pulled apart on the rack, to be bound up in skin bags and thrown into the sea, to be burned as living torches, to be mangled and mashed and twisted and torn apart, rather than to deny Jesus? "Your fruit will remain."

Those are greater miracles, aren't they? Anything done to the spirit of man is permanent; that which is done to the flesh is merely temporary. All those whom Jesus healed or raised from the dead died again; there is no record of it, but Lazarus must have died again, even though Jesus raised him from the dead. They all died. So, what is done to the spirit of man is far greater, and this is what Jesus means by "greater works."

Finally, we come to his method, which is that of prayer. How will these things happen? He adds immediately:

**"Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it." (John 14:13-14 {RSV})**

That is an amazing promise! We often read that without careful thought of the context, and we are seized by the tremendous possibilities of that word anything. And shallow, superficial Christians, their passions aroused, leap up, and say, "Oh boy! What a promise! I can have that new Cadillac I've always wanted." But James reminds us: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions," (Jas 4:3 {RSV}).

No, that isn't what it means. You see, there is a limitation to this promise and a very important one. It is obvious that it couldn't be taken in an unlimited sense, because it would be contradictory. What if somebody prays for rain because his crops need it, and somebody else prays for sunshine so that he can put a new roof on his house -- whose prayer is answered? I remember hearing my dear friend, Dr. Howard Hendricks, tell of the time when he was a young man, before he was married. He was aware that certain mothers had set their caps for him on behalf of their daughters. One mother even said to him one day, "Howard, I just want you to know that I'm praying that you'll be my son-in-law." Dr. Hendricks always stops at that point in the story, and says very solemnly, "Have you ever thanked God for unanswered prayer?"

What does it mean, then? Surely the words of Jesus are not without meaning. What is the limitation here? If

you examine it you find only one, "Ask anything whatsoever in my name and it shall be done." What does that mean, "in my name"? Somehow again, in a superficial approach to these ideas of Scripture, some think they have fulfilled this when they tack on at the end of a prayer, "This we ask in Jesus' name" -- as a kind of magic formula, like rubbing Aladdin's lamp so that the "genie" of God will suddenly appear and do all that we ask!

Now, I have no objection to people adding those words. I do it myself. But there are many prayers with those words tacked onto the end which are not prayed in Jesus' name at all. To add those words does not make it a prayer in Jesus' name. God is not impressed with this kind of trivia. I think of our Lord's teaching about prayer in the Sermon on the Mount where he says, "Don't pray like the hypocrites do, thinking that you impress God with your endless repetition," (see Matt 6:5-7). Prayer is not magic.

What, then, does "in Jesus' name" mean? I've been given some difficult and painful lessons on what this means! I think God teaches us through our experiences, as we go on through life, to give us deeper and deeper insight into what these phrases mean. I had thought that praying in Jesus' name meant praying for the things he wants accomplished, the ends he wishes to achieve, the desires which he says are his will. And it does mean that; that is not wrong. But I thought you could pray to prevent certain things, and to attain others, and that we had an ability somehow to control the process by which these things come to pass. I have learned that this is not the case. I prayed for weeks, with all my heart, that something wouldn't happen, but one day it did happen, in spite of my prayer.

So what do you do with your prayer in a case like that? And what do you do with the promise? I learned that "in Jesus' name" means to pray in his place. That is the way we use the phrase, isn't it? If someone acts in the name of the president, it is as though he is standing in the president's place. If you give someone the power to act in your name, for that purpose it is as though you yourself were acting. When you sign your name on a check, that check is acting on your behalf, as though it were you. To pray in Jesus' name means to stand in Jesus' place. And where was Jesus standing when he said these words? Facing the cross. Facing the collapse of all the hope that his kingdom had raised in the hearts of his disciples. Facing the end, the apparent collapse and failure of all of his work and all of his program.

But he knew that beyond the cross lay the resurrection, and that there could never be that new beginning if there were not first an end of all which the others saw and hoped for. I think that if these disciples were praying for anything, and I'm sure they were, they were praying that somehow he would be spared, that somehow he would not have to go to the cross. They were praying to prevent it. But Jesus knew that it had to be. And to pray in Jesus' name means that you accept the process of God, the process by which he brings matters, often, to utter collapse, so that the very thing you don't want to ever happen, happens. But that is not the end of the story! Beyond it is a resurrection. Beyond it is a new beginning, a beginning of such different quality that the mind moves into an ecstasy of joy in contemplating it. That is what it means to pray in Jesus' name.

That is why, when we pray, it often seems as though God waits until the very last moment to answer our prayer. That is why he doesn't stop the process long before the heartache and pain comes, but allows it to go on into death -- and out of the death comes resurrection. And to pray in Jesus' name means that you consent to that process, and that you are aware that prayer is not merely a shield, a guard, to prevent things from happening. Sometimes it is, but not always. Prayer is also a commitment to undergo the end and the collapse and the failure. But that is never the end of the story. It is by this means that the greater works shall be accomplished. It is only out of death that life comes.

This is what God teaches us through the Scriptures. This is why one day he had to say to Abraham, "Take your son Isaac, your only son, your beloved son, and offer him up as a sacrifice." And Abraham had to go through with it. It was only as the knife was poised in his hand, ready to plunge into the breast of his son, that God stopped him, (see Gen 22:1-12). The book of Hebrews says that Abraham received his son back as though it were a resurrection -- out of death comes life (cf, Heb 11:19). That is what it means to pray in Jesus' name. It may mean, therefore, the collapse of all that you hoped for. But out of that collapse, out of the tears, out of the heartbreak, God will bring new life.

## **Prayer**



Our Father, we take some of these things of yours so shallowly, at times. We pray so glibly, and without understanding. But we thank you that you teach us, Lord, again and again through life, that you are never going to deviate from your process. As Jesus taught us, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." May we gladly consent to that process, Lord, in order that we may see the greater works which the world has not seen before -- "greater works than these" -- because, Lord Jesus, you have gone to the Father. We thank you in your name. Amen.

Title: The other Comforter  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 14:12-20  
Message No: 4  
Catalog No: 3124  
Date: May 13, 1973

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## 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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## **GOD'S VINEYARD**

**by Ray C. Stedman**

At the close of Chapter 14 our Lord said to his disciples, "Rise, let us go hence." So from this point on we properly should no longer call this passage of Scripture *the Upper Room Discourse*. The remainder, Chapters 15 through 17, occurred as they were walking on their way to the Garden of Gethsemene. The traditional site of the Upper Room in Jerusalem is on the western side of the Old City, on the slopes of Mount Zion. Some of you may have been there and seen it. If indeed this is the location, they then took their way down across the Tyropoeon Valley, which separated the Temple from the rest of the city, around the wall skirting the Temple area, down into the Kidron Valley, across the brook, and then up the slope of the Mount of

Olives to the garden.

On the way they undoubtedly passed through the vineyards which surrounded the city. It is almost certain that Jesus stopped in the midst of a vineyard, took a vine, and used it as a means of illustrating to his disciples the great secret he had been seeking to impart to them in his whole discourse there in the Upper Room, the most fundamental and basic secret of Christian life -- the secret which lay at the heart of his own experience and ministry, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me" {cf, John 14:10}, and now the secret of their lives by the Spirit when he would come, "You in me, and I in you," {John 14:20b RSV}. He said,

**"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." {John 15:1-2 RSV}**

His beautiful analogy has helped a great many Christians to understand the relationship God wants them to know. In that unique way which was his, our Lord took what lay at hand and made it unfold spiritual truth.

When he said, "I am the true vine," he did not mean, "true in contrast with something false, fake, counterfeit," but rather "real, genuine, as opposed to the mere copy or symbol." As he held this vine and its branches in his hand, he indicated that this was the copy. He was the true vine. He was the vine from which true life is received.

And he included in that vine not only the branches but the stem and root. The whole plant was the vine. By this he meant to illustrate the wonderful truth that when we are united with Christ we are one with him, we are identified with him. Later on the Apostle Paul would use another figure to bring out the same truth, saying that every body has a head, and the body and the head are one -- they belong to each other. So the vine includes the branches, and Jesus says, "I am that vine; you are the branches."

The purpose of this vine, obviously, is to bring forth fruit. A vineyard is planted not for ornamentation, but to produce grapes, to bear fruit. This is the point our Lord makes in the story. All through this account his emphasis is upon the fruit. So the question arises at this point, "What does this fruit stand for in our life?" He is the vine, we are the branches. The fruit is borne by the branches produced by the vine. What is that fruit?

I am always amazed to find people who read this as though the fruit were others won to Christ. How that can be deduced from this parable is difficult to understand, because there is nothing in it which suggests that at all. But many are troubled by those who claim that, unless a Christian is constantly winning others to Christ, he is a fruitless Christian. I want to reassure you that this is not the case. Fruit, here, is that which is produced by the vine and is the natural outflow of the life of the vine. Though it is wonderful when one has the privilege of leading many to Christ, and any of us perhaps can do this on one occasion or another, it is no indication of fruitlessness if you never have had this experience. The fruit here is not others won to Christ.

If we use the basic principle of understanding Scripture, which is common to all of Scripture -- letting Scripture interpret itself -- there is no doubt as to what this fruit is. The figure of the vine is used many times in the Scriptures. These disciples, familiar with the Old Testament, would immediately think of several places where it was used.

- One is in Isaiah 5: "For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house [the nation] of Israel," {Isa 5:7a}.
- And in the 80th Psalm, the Psalmist says that God "brought a vine out of Egypt" and planted it in a good land, {cf, Psa 80:8}. Israel was that vine.
- As Isaiah tells us, God cleared out the rocks in his vineyard and hedged it about. He built a tower; he protected the vineyard and cared for it, {cf, Isa 5:2}. He did everything possible to cause it to produce grapes. But when he came into his vineyard and looked for grapes, he found wild grapes instead sour, tasteless grapes.

Isaiah tells us what that represents in Verse 7:



**For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts  
is the house of Israel,  
and the men of Judah  
are his pleasant planting;  
and he looked for justice,  
but behold, bloodshed;  
for righteousness,  
but behold, a cry! {Isa 5:7 RSV}**

God came looking for justice and righteousness; instead he found oppression, cruelty, exploitation, and indifference to the needs of others. So it is evident from that parable that the fruit which God expects of the vine is moral character, or as we have it in the New Testament, the fruit of the Spirit -- the fruit which the Spirit produces. The life which is in the vine produces fruit which Paul describes in Galatians 5 as: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control. The fruit, in other words, is Christ-likeness. And our Lord is indicating that the very purpose of the vine is to produce such fruit.

We Christians are God's great vineyard. The Father is the vinedresser. He is responsible to see that the purpose of the vine is fulfilled. And, as Jesus goes on to point out, he has a two-fold work:

First,

**"Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away;" {John 15:2a RSV}**

That is, he cuts it off, he eliminates it from the life of the vine. We will see more of what that means as we go on in this account.

Second,

**"and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." {John 15:2b RSV}**

He is teaching us here that right in the midst of the circumstances of life there can be more likeness to Christ, more of the moral character of Jesus, more fruit.

I struggled for a while with this word *prunes* because in the Greek it is really "cleanses." It seemed to me a far cry from cleansing away debris to pruning back the branches -- until I learned that, in the usual practice of viticulture (i.e., the care of vines), the branches are pruned back each year in order to cleanse them. That is, a vine produces certain shoots (called "sucker" shoots) which start to grow where the branch joins the stem. If allowed to continue to grow, they would dissipate the life of the vine through so many branches that the vine would produce little or no fruit but would produce leaves instead. So every vinedresser knows it is important to prune away these little sucker shoots in order that the vine may produce more fruit. And since they grow right where the branch joins the stem, creating a tight cluster where dirt, leaves, and other debris collect, the pruning is therefore a cleansing process. This is what our Lord has in view.

The Father's work is to find a branch which is beginning to bear fruit, beginning to produce the likeness of Christ, and to cut it back, trim off the shoots, so that it may bear more fruit. You can see what a beautiful analogy this is to the Christian experience, for in our lives we have that within us which produces the fruit of the Spirit. We do not have to work at it. We do not have to agonize and struggle to produce these qualities or characteristics; they are brought about naturally by the vine. Did you ever see a bunch of grapes struggling to hang onto the vine, trying to grow larger? How difficult that would be! No, it simply stays in the vine and lets the life of the vine produce the fruit.

Yet when this starts, the Father must trim off the unfruitful branches. Those are the ones which arise out of our evil nature, our fallen Adamic nature, which produces in us those characteristics which are different than the fruit of the Spirit -- resentment, anger, bitterness, selfishness, egocentricity, love of praise -- these qualities which tend to arise within us so frequently. The Father is at work to cut them off, to prune them back. What is the instrument he uses? Jesus tells us in Verse 3:

**"You are already made clean [pruned] by the word which I have spoken to you." {John 15:3 RSV}**

Here in remarkable imagery he captures the work which goes on in our lives as the Father employs the circumstances in which we are found, the situations of our lives, to make us heed and hear the Word which corrects and changes. I am sure you have all had the experience of being confronted with a word of Scripture and learning from it that something you had been doing all your life, and which you thought was right, was actually wrong. Perhaps you were manifesting or defending some attitude. Your whole family had done it; it had been a family characteristic. Therefore, you thought it was right. But you learned from the Word that it was wrong. Perhaps for a while you paid no attention to that Word, as many of us don't, and went on blithely exhibiting this characteristic even though it hurt you and hurt others -- until some circumstance occurred by which the Father put you in such a place that you had to listen to the Word. The hurt was too severe. You suddenly were confronted with what you were doing to yourself and to others -- you felt it and heard it and saw it. That is the Father's pruning knife cutting off the sucker shoots of the old life within us, so that we might produce more of the Christlikeness, the fruit of the Spirit. This is the work of the Father.

He not only does this, but he does it repeatedly. Notice that Jesus says here to the disciples, "You are already made clean." That is, "This pruning has gone on in your life already." But that was not the end of it; there was to be more as they went on. In a vineyard the vines are pruned not just once in their lifetimes; the process is repeated every spring. There is a pruning time, a pruning season.

Are you going through a pruning season right now? Is God using the sharp knife of circumstances to cut off the "sucker shoot" of an old habit or attitude in your life, confronting you with that word of truth which corrects and cleanses, causing you to see it and feel it and hear it and give heed to it? Well, that is the work of the Father, and it is done in order that you might bear more fruit, be more like Jesus in your reactions -- in your home, in your shop, in your recreation, wherever you may be with people -- that you may be like Christ.

In Verses 4 and 5 our Lord goes on to set forth, in the most helpful way I know of in all of Scripture, what might be called the law of fruitfulness: "Abide in me, and I in you." There he is, back on the subject of that basic relationship which is already established by the coming of the Holy Spirit into an individual's life: "You in me, and I in you." Now he adds this note of responsibility -- there is something which you must do. The relationship is not merely to be recognized; it is to be acted upon:

**"Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." {John 15:4-5 RSV}**

This is an extremely helpful passage! Notice that our Lord divides it into two sections. There is an activity which is to be done, and a passivity which is to be acknowledged -- an active voice and a passive voice. We are to abide in him (that is active, something we do), and we are to let him abide in us (that is passive, something we allow him to do). Both these relationships are absolutely essential, not one as opposed to the other but both together.

When our Lord says "Abide in me," he is talking about the will, about the choices, the decisions we make. We must decide to do things which expose ourselves to him and keep ourselves in contact with him. This is what it means to abide in him. We have been placed into Christ by the Holy Spirit. Now we must choose to maintain that relationship by the decisions we make, i.e., decisions to expose ourselves to his Word in order to learn about him, and to relate to him in prayer wherein we converse with him, and to relate to other believers in body-life experiences, i.e., bearing one another's burdens and confessing our faults and sharing in fellowship with one another, wherein we learn about and see Christ in one another. All of this is designed to relate to him -- "Abide in me." If we do that we are fulfilling this active, necessary decision of the will to obey his Word, to do what he says, and to stay in touch with him.

This is what Bible study and prayer are all about. They are not mere mechanical practices which every

Christian ought to do in order to stay "in" with the crowd, or to maintain his "membership card," or to get "brownie points" with God! No, they are means by which we know him. If you open your Bible and begin to read it without the conscious expectation that it is going to tell you something about him, you will read in vain. If you try to pray as though it were some exercise in which you chalk off fifteen minutes' worth, mechanically going through a list like the turning of a prayer wheel, it is a valueless experience. But if you pray because you are talking with One whom you love and want to know more of, sharing with him out of the fullness of your heart, then prayer becomes a beautiful and marvelous experience. One of the delights of life is to spend time in that kind of prayer. If in relating to others you merely get together and have coffee and talk about the weather, you will find it useless. But if you share where you are spiritually, what your struggles are, what you are going through, and if you bear one another's burdens and love each other in the Lord, it becomes a delightful, marvelous, strengthening experience. Christ then becomes real to you. That is abiding in him.

But that is only part of it. Jesus says, "Abide in me, and I in you." There is also the other side -- "Let me abide in you." What is that? Well, that has to do with empowerment, enablement. You see, you can make choices but you cannot fulfill them. And though you are responsible to make the decisions and make the choices, you are not responsible for the power to carry them out. There you are to depend on him, to let him abide in you. You are to rest upon his ability to see you through, to work it out. As you venture out on that basis you expect him to support you and to carry you through.

Both of these are absolutely essential, and our Lord develops this fact. He says, first, "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me." That is, "If you do not abide in me, you will be fruitless." Making decisions and then trying to do the whole thing yourself, as though the whole responsibility rests upon you, is going to produce a fruitless Christian life -- intense activity, but no results. On the other hand, he says, "He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." That is, it will be fruitlessness again. If you try to make all the choices and carry all the responsibility yourself, you will lead a fruitless life. On the other hand, if you let him take all the responsibility and you make no choices at all, if you depend on him to do everything including making the choices, you will also have a fruitless life. "Without me you can do nothing."

Both of these are necessary in the Christian experience. We must make choices, we must determine to expose ourselves to him, we must seek his face in the Word and in prayer and in fellowship with others. And then we must rest on him, count on him to see us through, to supply that enabling power which makes us able to love and forgive and rejoice and give thanks, even when everything is going wrong. When we do, we are abiding in him and letting him abide in us. Without both of those, fruitlessness is the result.

You see, you can do many things without depending on Christ. He does not mean that without him you remain just an immobile blob. You can operate your business without Christ. You can make it run well. You can raise your family without Christ. You can even pastor a church without Christ. But if you try, you find that there will be no fruit, no Christlikeness, no manifestation of that beautiful character which arrests the attention of others. Instead there will be a shabby sham, a phony imitation of the real thing, which will drive people away from Christ and will produce nothing but a dull, mechanical religiosity which is piousness without God.

Our Lord goes on now to point out the consequence of not abiding in him:

**"If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned." {John 15:6 RSV}**

Here is the case our Lord mentioned earlier when he said, of one aspect of the Father's work, "every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away." Here is the process in which the branch is cut off, and then it withers -- grows dry and dull and dead. And many a churchgoer is in that state. They may have been members of churches for years, but there is no life evident at all. Eventually these branches are to be gathered and burned. I believe this is a reference to other such Scripture passages which say that the angels will be sent out to gather out all which offends in God's kingdom and cast it into the eternal fire where it will be burned.

Judas was a paramount example of this. He was with the Lord -- spent three and a half years with him. He even shared in the experience of ministry with the other disciples. He exercised the power of God by

performing miracles. But there was no life in him. He did not abide in Christ, and Christ did not abide in him. As a result he was cut off, and he withered. The withering process was very short in his case. He committed suicide within a few days, and he was burned -- eternally lost. This is a picture of those church members who, despite attending church, never have any manifestation of truth, never have any sign in their lives of that quality of love and forgiveness and understanding and compassion which is born of the Holy Spirit, but are rigid and narrow and hard and harsh and condemning and difficult -- even though they say and do the "right" thing.

On the other hand, our Lord gives us the results of fruitbearing -- four beautiful manifestations.

First,

**"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you [this is the way we let him abide in us -- by his word], ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you." {John 15:7 RSV}**

Answered prayer is one of the first signs of a fruitful life. It is not part of the fruit itself; it is the result of a life which increasingly is becoming Christlike. The result will be, "Ask what you will..."

St. Augustine once gathered up this very truth in a beautiful way:

"Love God, and do as you please."

That frightens some people. All they hear is, "Do as you please." But it must be preceded by that vital phrase, "Love God." When you love God, then all that you do is touched and controlled by love, and love is the fulfilling of the Law. So you can do what you please when you love God. And if you are truly loving him, you can ask whatever you will. This is the glory of Christian liberty. Prayers are answered, growing out of that relationship of an obedient and a dependent heart -- leaving the process and timing to God. You cannot tell him when to answer your prayers. You cannot tell him how to answer your prayers. But he will answer your prayers when they grow out of this relationship.

Secondly, there is the demonstration of discipleship, Verse 8:

**"By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples." {John 15:8 RSV}**

God is glorified when his people manifest fruit, i.e., Christlikeness. You do not even have to do a thing to manifest that. You can be flat on your back in bed, sick, but manifesting a Christ-like spirit, and you are glorifying God by that experience. It is not activity which glorifies God; it is character, it is what you are, and the way you react to a situation. Do you want to be known as a disciple of Jesus? Do you want to be recognized as one who follows Jesus? Well then, manifest fruit in your life by abiding in him, and he in you. This is the way that manifestation of discipleship is accomplished.

A friend of mine passed through Palo Alto this week on his way to Colorado to participate in a very unusual ranch. This ranch is owned and operated by a mutual friend and is designed as a guest-ranch for wealthy and affluent people. The man who owns it has a heart of concern for what he calls "the up-and-outers" -- those who are over-privileged, who have all too much of everything, yet to whom very few are witnessing, telling them of life in Christ. So he has designed this ranch for that purpose. People come and spend a lot of money, staying a week or so at a time. There are no Bible studies, no meetings; it is a very low-key approach.

What the owner does is to go throughout the country and interview young people for the crew to work on this ranch. He will interview perhaps 300 young people and from them select only 30. He asks them only three questions:

- First, "Do you love work?" because they are going to have to work sometimes from seven in the morning until ten or eleven at night. He wants them to love their work.
- Then, "Do you love people, do you like to be with people and relate to them?" They must satisfy him

that they love people.

- The third question is, "Do you love Jesus?"

If they can assure him that they love work, love people, and love Jesus, then they have a tremendous opportunity to work at that ranch.

When the guests arrive the crew simply relates to them and gives them the time of their lives. By the third evening the guests are all asking, "Where did you ever get this tremendous crew of young people? What a fantastic group they are!" And on the third evening the owner of the ranch sits down and says, "Many of you have been asking about our crew. Let me tell you why they are the way they are." And he tells them about the three questions he asked:

- Do you love work;
- Do you love people;
- Do you love Jesus?

He says, "Now, it may seem strange to you that I should ask that last question. But I have learned that the only young people who can ever stand up to this grueling demand, and can meet it with an unvarying spirit of joy and gladness, with the kind of attitude that has so impressed you, are those who have learned to love Jesus."

From then on there are still no meetings, but invariably every week there are those guests who come and say, "I want to know more about this." And there are conversions after conversions throughout the remainder of the week -- because of young people who manifest by their lives that they are Jesus' disciples. They prove to be his disciples.

The third result is the deeper experience of Christ's love:

**"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." {John 15:9-10 RSV}**

Remember that earlier in the passage our Lord had said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments," {John 14:15 RSV}. And from that we saw that obedience grows out of love. It is the love of Jesus for us, "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit" {Rom 5:5 KJV}, which awakens our love toward him in response. When our hearts are moved by love it is easy to obey his word, for we obey the one we love. He adds here the ingredient that when we obey his word, keep his commandments, we will abide in his love. It becomes a continuing sense and experience of his love for us. So it is a complete cycle which keeps producing deeper and deeper experiences of love.

All of us have learned, one way or another, that love demands a response if it is to grow. If you love somebody, and reach out toward them, you can go only so far unless they respond to that love. If they respond just a little, then your love can reach out further, can deepen and grow. But if they remain unresponsive over the weeks and months and years, love finally is limited to that initial step of reaching out to them. But where love is responded to, it grows deeper and richer and truer, and eventually becomes a glorious experience. If you are not feeling the depth of love you would like to experience, one of the reasons may be that you are not responding to the love which is already reaching out to you. That is why the New Testament says: Open your hearts, widen your hearts, be responsive -- love back. When you do that, then love grows into this deepening, quickening experience.

Then the last result of fruitbearing -- the fullness of joy, Verse 11,

**"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." {John 15:11 RSV}**

His joy, the joy that was always there at the bottom of his heart, that gladness of relationship with his Father, is now to be our experience. Joy, that sense of gladness of relationship with him, will increase as we go.

I love the saying, "Joy is the flag which flies over the castle of the heart when the King is in residence." That is what joy is -- this sense of our unity with Jesus, the sense of his power, his adequacy, his ability to handle the problems which are thrust upon us. Let all that be present in the heart, and the face will light up with joy!

That is what Jesus is talking about. "Abide in me, and I in you," and you will be fruitful -- without realizing it -- manifesting the characteristics of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, the quality of life which is like Jesus. When that happens, there will come these additional benefits:

- Answered prayer,
- A glorifying of the Father through the demonstration of discipleship,
- A deepening of the experience of love, and joy made full.

What a wonderful relationship our Lord taught us here by this lesson of the vine!

## **Prayer**

Our Father, as you have been walking through your vineyard this morning, you have been looking at various vines growing here. On some, Lord, you see sucker shoots which need to be pruned away. We thank you for your faithfulness in being at work to do that. On others you see luscious, tempting, delicious fruit which gladdens and delights your heart, glorifies you, and we thank you for that. We know that your work with us is to the end that we may produce more fruit, that all of us here in this vineyard will be so fruit-laden, that it will be a fruitful place which will make the world around us drool with desire to learn the secret of such fruit. We thank you for these possibilities which we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray in his name, Amen.

Title: God's Vineyard  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 15:1-11  
Message No: 6  
Catalog No: 3126  
Date: June 10, 1973

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## **LOVE AND HATE**

**by Ray C. Stedman**

In our study we are now looking at the words our Lord spoke to his disciples as they left the Upper Room and made their way across the Kidron valley and through the hillside vineyards into the shadows of Gethsemene's garden. In Chapter 15 we have his assessment of the three major priorities of life. All of us are concerned about priorities, about what comes first, what to do next, etc., and this passage sets forth, in order, the basic, fundamental priorities of life.

First, above all else, in Verses 1 through 11 of Chapter 15 you have the Christian's relationship to the Lord. That is of supreme importance. If this area is hurting in your life, stop everything else you are doing and get it straightened out! Because if you go on in that condition you are going to hurt not only yourself but others as well. It is so important that you maintain this relationship, which our Lord puts in the simple words, "Abide in me, and I in you" {John 15:4a} -- that basic, fundamental identity of the believer. "Abide in me, stay in me, and let me stay in you"; everything else will flow from that.

The second and third priorities of life are found in the remainder of the chapter and the first four verses of Chapter 16. The second is our relationship to other believers. That is expressed in the words, "Love one another." The third is the relationship we have to the world outside -- a world which hates and persecutes, and

yet toward which the attitude of the Christian is to be, as we shall see, one of patient witness. Regarding our relationship to other believers Jesus said,

**"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another." {John 15:12-17 RSV}**

Notice that this paragraph begins and ends with the command of Jesus, "I command you to love one another." The fact that this is put in the imperative mode means it is not an option in our life. It is not something we do if we feel like it. It is not an occasional action on our part. It is to be a deliberate response to another person whom we know to be in the family of God, regardless of how we feel toward that person.

Many people struggle at this point. They say, "How can you command love? Love is a feeling, and if you don't love somebody you can't help it. How can anyone command another to love someone he doesn't love, or to stop loving someone he does? Love is our master; we do not master it." Those who speak in this way reveal a very serious misconception of love. Unfortunately we are victims of Hollywood in this respect. We think of love as a feeling we have of affection toward another, sometimes a very sentimental, romantic feeling.

But love, as Jesus employs it here, is far different. We can be sure of one thing: He would never command us to do what is impossible for us to do. The secret, of course, is that we are to love, he says, "as I have loved you." This kind of love is to arise out of the same kind of relationship that he had with the Father and that made it possible for him to love us. In this same manner, and from the same source, we are to love one another with the same quality of love. He loved us because God is love, and he was indwelt by the Father. He was in the Father, and the Father in him. As he yielded to that relationship, love flowed out. It could not help it -- God is love. We are to love one another because we are in the Son, and the Son in us. Since God is love, as we yield to that relationship to the Son, love flows from us. And it will have the qualities that his love had.

He goes on to define for us three aspects of love which mark the quality of his love for us, and which we also are to show to one another:

The first is given in the words, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Love lays down its life for another. We all know how fully Jesus himself exemplified this. He laid down his life for us. This, he said, is the greatest love that anyone can demonstrate toward his friends. Some have said, "Wouldn't it be a greater love to love your enemies?" In his letter to the Romans, Paul tells us that God's love was of such quality that he loved us even when we were enemies. It is true, that is a greater kind of love. But here our Lord is talking about what you can do for your friends. You can show no greater love for your friends than to lay down your life for them.

Obviously this means more than simply dying physically for them. If it meant only that, there would be very few of us who could or would ever fulfill this, largely because we would lack the opportunity to do so. And of course one could do so only once! But our Lord is commanding us to do this repeatedly. So he means by this that we are to give ourselves up for one another. That is what laying down our life means -- giving something of ourselves to another. When you go out of your way to meet a friend's need, when you are willing to spend time with someone who is a Christian just because he is a Christian, not necessarily because you are drawn to him, and you are willing to go out of your way and to give yourself up for him, you are laying down your life, a part of it at least, for that person. This is what Jesus had in mind. We are to lay down our lives, to love one another in that sense.

Just this morning I ran across a study one of our interns has made on the words *one another* in the New Testament. It was so pertinent that I would like to share it with you. It gathers up, both negatively and positively, all the teaching of the New Testament on our relationship one to another in the family of God.

Negatively the New Testament says,

Don't challenge one another.  
Don't complain against one another.  
Don't devour one another.  
Don't envy one another.  
Don't judge one another.  
Don't lie to one another.  
Don't speak against one another.

And positively it says,

Accept one another.  
Admonish one another.  
Bear one another's burdens.  
Bear with one another.  
Build up one another.  
Care for one another.  
Comfort one another.  
Confess your sins to one another.  
Encourage one another.  
Fellowship with one another.  
Forgive one another.  
Greet one another.  
Honor one another.  
Be hospitable toward each other.  
Humble yourself toward one another.  
Be kind to one another.  
Love one another.  
Be members one of another.  
Pray for one another.  
Be at peace with one another.  
Have the same mind toward one another.  
Seek after that which is good for one another.  
Serve one another.  
Show forbearance to one another.  
Stimulate one another.  
Be subject to one another.  
Teach one another.  
Be tenderhearted one toward another.

What a full range of relationships our Lord has caught up in this command that we are to love one another, even to the extent of laying down our lives -- giving up our own comforts -- for one another!

The second mark of his kind of love is that it shares its secrets:

**"No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." {John 15:15 RSV}**

This is a remarkable statement. In the sense that he shares with them his life and the secrets of his innermost heart, they have become his friends. Now, this is not the only relationship believers have with the Lord. They remain his servants, and a little later he refers to them as such: "The servant is not greater than his master," {John 15:20b RSV}. But in this sense we are friends of Jesus.

What do you do with a friend? The first mark of friendship is sharing. You tell him secrets and share



opportunities with him. If you get a hot tip on the stock market you call your friend up -- so he can buy first and see if it's any good! If you run into a bargain at a department store you share the news with a friend. If you have an opportunity to enjoy some unusual experience you call up your friend. Friendship is always marked by the sharing of intimacy.

Our Lord says that he has shared the secrets of his life with his disciples -- and with us. He tells them what the Father had told him about life, about death, about hell, about heaven, about relationships one with another, about history, about the world. He poured it all out, told them what he had known, what he had learned from the Father. This is the mark and characteristic of love.

In other words, he is talking about what here at PBC we have learned to call "body life." We are to love one another in the same way Jesus loved us. As he told his disciples what he had learned, so we are to share with one another what we have learned -- our struggles, our fears, our hopes, our experiences, all that God has taught us by what we have gone through. If church is nothing more than a crowd of people coming together and listening to a speaker then it is no different from a convention or a conference on some secular theme. What makes it different is that we share our lives with one another. There is the unfolding of secrets, the bearing of burdens, telling of one another's needs, touching of one another's lives. This is what it means to love one another.

Some time ago I culled this from a church bulletin:

You ever feel like a frog? Frogs feel slow, low, ugly, puffy, drooped, pooped. I know -- one told me. The frog feeling comes when you want to be bright but feel dumb, when you want to share but are selfish, when you want to be thankful but feel resentment, when you want to be great but are small, when you want to care but are indifferent. Yes, at one time or another each of us has found himself on a lily pad, floating down the great river of life. Frightened and disgusted, we're too froggish to budge.

Once upon a time there was a frog, only he really wasn't a frog -- he was a prince who looked and felt like a frog. A wicked witch had cast a spell on him. Only the kiss of a beautiful maiden could save him. But since when do cute chicks kiss frogs? So there he sat, unloved prince in frog form. But miracles happen. One day a beautiful maiden gathered him up and gave him a great big smack. Crash! Boom! Zap! There he was, a handsome prince. And you know the rest -- they lived happily ever after.

So what is the task of the church? Kissing frogs, of course!

That is what Jesus is saying to us, isn't it? "Love one another."

The last element of this love is defined as the bearing of fruit in one another's lives through prayer:

**"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." {John 15:16 RSV}**

As you put this all together you see that the mark of love he is talking about is the bearing of fruit by means of prayer. The context is still the example of love which he set. This is what he did -- he prayed for his own. He will pray for them again, as recorded in the seventeenth chapter, and thus bear fruit in their lives. The fruit in view here is, as we have seen all along, Christlikeness. It is the character of Jesus, the compassion, the gentleness, the tenderness, the forgiving quality, the courage, the strength, the beauty, the grace of his life. This is what we are to bear, not only in our own lives but in one another's lives, by means of prayer. As we pray for one another we help each other bear the fruit of Christlikeness.

This is why the epistles remind us to pray for all saints, to make supplication for one another, to pray for one another. This is the means by which we love one another. And this is our Lord's command. We are not to treat each other with disdain or with separation but are to reach out in this way toward one another.

At a Christian gathering the other day I heard someone, speaking of another, say, "I can't stand that person, and I don't want anything to do with her!" That is a violation of our Lord's command to love one another.

Love means to give yourself for another, to give of your life and strength and time for another. Love means to share with and teach one another what you have learned. And love means to pray for one another. John tells us that "if any man says, 'I love God,' but hates his brother, he is a liar," {1 Jn 4:20 RSV}. If we love God, we are also to love one another. This is the great command which makes the difference between the church, as a community of those who love each other, and the world around us, which essentially neglects and is indifferent to one another. This is what makes the Christian witness, as we will see a little later.

In the next section our Lord goes on to point out the priority and the relationship of the Christian with regard to the world around him. He begins with the attitude of the world toward the Christian:

**"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." {John 15:18-19 RSV}**

It is remarkable that our Lord moves quickly from his words about love for one another to this word about the hatred of the world toward the Christian. The world, as our Lord is using the term, refers to secular society. It is not humanity. Humanity does not hate the church; it is the world which hates the church, and the Lord of the church. The world is organized society, without God, but with its own morals and standards and value systems. It is what we ordinarily call "the system," and it is what hates the believer and wants nothing to do with him.

The world, as our Lord says, both hates and loves. It loves what conforms to it; it hates what differs with it. We have all experienced this. We know that even in small, nonreligious matters the world can hate anything which does not conform to it. I read the other day that the man who invented the umbrella was pelted with rotten eggs and vegetables and stones when he first tried it out on a public street. No one else had one, you see. So the world loves to destroy that which does not fit its pattern.

This is why the Scriptures urge us to not be conformed to the world around us: Do not let the world squeeze you into its own mold -- for it desperately dislikes anything which differs with it, and will try to change it. If we do conform to the world, if the church is worldly (and this does not mean doing certain things so much as it means having certain attitudes), if the church trusts in its own power and seeks for prestige and status, and acts as though God does not add anything to it, then the world loves the church. It will pat it on the back and praise it and exalt it. But it dislikes and hates and stands against any church which is true to its Lord.

Our Lord points out that not only will the world hate, but it will persecute the church:

**"Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than His master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also." {John 15:20 RSV}**

Not only does the world hate the believer, but it also actively acts to get rid of Christian faith, Christian teaching, and even Christians. This has been demonstrated all through history. It may surprise some of you to know that, among all the twenty centuries since our Lord was here, the century which has seen more outright, vicious, violent persecution of Christians is not the 1st but the 20th. More Christians are being hated and destroyed, their goods and homes confiscated, their persons attacked and mistreated, in this century than in any other century. We think immediately of those in Russia and other Communist countries. Communism always hates Christianity, and those who stand for it and are committed teachers of it are always first on the list for destruction whenever a Communist government takes over.

Nevertheless, Jesus says, some will receive: "If they kept my word, they will keep yours also." This is the encouragement to the witness of the church -- that not all will hate, not all will persecute. Some will receive, some will believe, some will give heed and respond, as they did with Jesus. From these words we can understand that the church need never expect to win the masses of people to Christ. Jesus didn't. Even the tremendous witness he gave to the nation in his day did not win the majority to himself. The witness of the church will have the same effect.

Our Lord goes on to give us the reasons for the world's attitude. He sets out the first in Verse 21:

**"But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me." {John 15:21 RSV}**

The first reason for the attitude of hatred and persecution is that of ignorance. The world does not know God. It does not understand him. It thinks of him in a way which is distorted and twisted. It thinks of him as an arbitrary ruler, a huge judge or policeman -- if it thinks of him at all. It does not know his compassion, his forgiveness, his tenderness, his patience, his willingness to work with the slightest response. So the world, in ignorance, persecutes God. Jesus describes this very ignorance in Verse 2 of Chapter 16:

**"They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God." {John 16:2 RSV}**

That is how blind they are. They actually think that in doing this they are worshipping God, for that is what the words "offering service" mean. They think they are worshipping God by persecuting and killing Christians. This was true during the early days of Christian persecution, during the days of the Inquisition, and it is still true today in many many ways and forms. Of course, there is no greater example than Saul of Tarsus, that brilliant young Pharisee who was burning with threats and hatred in his heart toward the early Christians. He persecuted them and thought he was actually serving God, pleasing God in this way. Later on when he became Paul the apostle he tells us, "I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief," {1 Tim 1:13 KJV}.

We Christians need constantly to bear in mind how ignorant the world is. It does not know truth. It thinks it does. It talks as though it knew great and startling truth. But when it comes right down to a confrontation with the truth as it is in Jesus, the world is abysmally ignorant and does not understand itself or life or anything about it. That is why it persecutes.

But there is a second reason, and Jesus goes on to point out the deliberate rejection which persists even when ignorance has been taken care of:

**"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin. He who hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.'" {John 15:22-25 RSV}**

Now ignorance has been met; the light has come. As John says in the early part of his gospel, "This is the judgment, that light has come into the world, and men still loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil," {cf, John 3:19}. Knowing the truth, they rejected it. This is further evidence of the enmity of the world. Jesus came and spoke words of truth; he came and did deeds of love. What he said revealed the way things really are, took away the veils and illusions, and revealed truth, reality. What he did revealed the love of the Father, the kindness, the compassion, the healing ability, the qualities of God. But as people saw his works and heard his words, as we know, they rejected them, and this resulted in increasing hatred and violence, culminating at last in the crucifixion, in their nailing him to a cross. And, as he said, there is no excuse: "They hated him without a cause."

What is to be the attitude of the Christian to this kind of a world in which we still live? Our Lord's answer is found in Verses 26-27:

**"But when the Counselor [the Comforter, the Strengtheners] comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning." {John 15:26-27 RSV}**

Obviously the primary reference here is to the apostles themselves, for they were with him from the beginning, but it also applies to us. He says, "When the Spirit of God has come, you will bear witness to this world." The world is not to be left in its hopeless rejection of Christ -- even though it has resisted and rejected truth when it

knew it to be truth.

We have all been part of this, haven't we? Every one of us has done this. Still, God does not abandon us. Isn't that amazing? Even when he would be fully justified in turning his back and walking away and leaving us all to our own consequences, he does not do so. He continues to bear a witness before the world.

So the Christian is not to retaliate, not to resent the hatred and persecution of the world, not to be vindictive and to return evil for evil. Rather, we are exhorted to return good for evil. Nor are we to retire from the world, to withdraw from it and build a Christian ghetto in which to hide ourselves, and then to throw tracts across the chasm! Rather, we are to move into the world, live in its midst just as Jesus did, and bear witness to the truth even though it is often rejected. We are to do this for the sake of those who will receive, who will believe, will accept the Word. We are to bear witness in the midst of the world.

This witness is two-fold. Primarily it is the witness of the Holy Spirit. He does what no man can do. The Spirit of God opens hearts, removes blindness, opens minds to understand. He bears witness that a word is true, gives it a ring of authenticity, so that power in witnessing rests with the Spirit, not with us. But we are to bear witness too. As Jesus indicates here, we are to bear witness as the apostles did -- as to what they saw and heard, what they themselves experienced. That is where every Christian stands. Just before his ascension Jesus said, "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses of me," {Acts 1:8a RSV}. We are all to be witnesses of

- What Jesus has been to us,
- What we have experienced,
- What has happened in our lives,
- What he has done for us.

And the Holy Spirit will witness with that, using those words, simple as they may be, to open minds and to break through hard hearts, to pierce and break down barriers, and to open people up to the Word. Thus the business of the church is to witness before a hating world.

Our Lord closes this section with his reason for teaching along this line, Chapter 16:

**"I have said all this to you to keep you from falling away. They will put you out of the synagogues; indeed, the hour is coming when whoever kills you will think he is offering service to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father, nor me. But I have said these things to you, that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you of them."** {John 16:1-4a RSV}

He does not want his disciples to be taken by surprise. If we run into mistreatment, if our witness is rejected, if we are persecuted or hated or ostracized, or treated with disdain or scorn by the world, we are to understand that this was predicted. It is part of the course, a natural event. It is not, therefore, to be surprising. Peter tells us that, remember? "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you," {1 Pet 4:12 RSV}. It is not strange, it is part of the process. "A man's foes will even be those of his own household," {Matt 10:36 RSV}. They will be your enemies, they will bear false witness against you. They will turn against you, sometimes when you least expect it.

"But," Jesus says, "do not be surprised. This is the enmity we are up against, the warfare in which we are engaged. Do not be surprised, but remember that I told you in advance because you are my friends, and I keep no secrets from you." He brings us again to the remembrance of the intimacy of relationship we have with him, and of the fact that we are to witness on the basis of the power which we are provided by abiding in him, and are to support that witness by the manifestation of a spirit of loving acceptance toward one another which tenderly cares for one another, shares with one another, prays for one another. Thus the world is confronted with a testimony it cannot gainsay, a character it cannot deny, which will either turn men in bitterness against God, or draw them by the Spirit to him.

This is the work of the church today. May God help us as we seek to fulfill it in this 20th century hour!

## Prayer

Father, how many times have we sung those words, "Faith of our fathers, holy faith; we will be true to Thee till death." Lord, we pray that you will keep us in the midst of this unbelieving, rejecting world, and will help us to rejoice as we have the privilege of bearing witness to a crucified Savior. Let us do, Lord, as Jesus himself told us to do: "Rejoice and give thanks when men revile you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake." Lord, we ask that you will strengthen us and help us to reach out in love, one toward another, and to the weary world around us in their blindness and ignorance, so that we may bear witness of Jesus Christ, our true and loving Lord. We ask in his name, Amen.

Title: Love and Hate  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 15:12 - 16:4  
Message No: 7  
Catalog No: 3127  
Date: June 17, 1973

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## THE MESSAGE OF THE SPIRIT

by Ray C. Stedman

You who have been following through this series of messages know that as our Lord spoke to his disciples in the Upper Room, and on the way to the Garden, there were two great themes which occupied his heart. The first was to reveal to them the secrets of his own life, the great principles which enabled him to function as he did, to act in the unforgettable way which was his. The secret, he said, was his relationship to the Father. The Father was in him, and he was in the Father. The second great theme he was seeking to impress upon these disciples was the relationship they would need in order to handle life after he had left them. It would be the coming Holy Spirit who would make available to them the same principle of life by which he himself had lived. Then it would be the Son in them, and they in him. This was to be the secret of their life. So, much of this passage deals with the ministry and message of the Holy Spirit.

This is the theme we will be looking at particularly this morning. Our passage opens with a new paragraph, beginning in the middle of Verse 4, Chapter 16, as indicated by the Revised Standard Version. After our Lord has revealed the hostility of the world which the disciples would face after he left them, the persecution and judgment and death they would be up against, he now says to them,

**"I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." {John 16:4b-7 RSV}**

This passage opens with a manifestation of the need of the Spirit of God. It is revealed to us in the condition of these disciples. Our Lord has indicated to them that there were certain things he did not say to them from the beginning. He did not tell them of the hostility of the world. He did not tell them about the tremendous opposition and persecution they would face. Nor did he tell them how to meet it. And he says why: "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you." There he indicates our need as human beings to be kept and supported and strengthened. He was keeping these disciples himself. Since he was there, they had no need to know all that he was keeping them from, or how it was done. "But now," he says, "I'm

going away. Now you'll need to understand what has been happening."

There he reveals to us the basic need of our humanity: to be kept. This is what the Scriptures teach us about ourselves -- that we are basically born to be dependent on something or someone else to keep us. We are not able to handle life by ourselves. No one is. The Big Lie, which has been circulated since the fall of man, is that man is independent, that he does not need anything, that he can be self-sufficient. He can run his own life, make his own decisions, and is able to handle everything himself. How widespread that notion is! You see it reflected everywhere -- especially among youth, who are confident that they know how to handle life. Nothing is going to trap them, or trick them, or deceive them. They are able to handle whatever comes. How delusive that is! Our Lord indicates here that these disciples had been able to exist only because he was with them and kept them.

And now, as he leaves, they are occupied not with what he has told them but with themselves. Because Jesus says, "I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?'" it is evident that our Lord expects these men to question him. He is attempting to arouse their curiosity. He is saying to them, "Why don't you ask me some questions? Aren't you interested in what is going to happen, what the result of my going away is going to be?" Instead, all they can think of is what it might mean to them. They are occupied with themselves, just as we are, and can see only their own little world. And so, as he says, "Sorrow has filled your hearts." Instead of curiosity, and the consequent knowledge they could have, and even the excitement about what is going to happen, sorrow has filled their hearts and they are occupied with themselves. What a revelation this is of what we are! We need someone to keep us. Now, that Someone who keeps us today is the Holy Spirit, as our Lord goes on to indicate:

**"Nevertheless I tell you the truth. it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you, but if I go, I will send him to you."  
{John 16:7 RSV}**

I know that you have often felt, as I have, that these disciples had a great advantage over us. To sit and listen to Jesus, to hear his words, to see his face, to see how he acted, to be with him in the midst of his miracles, to walk with him and listen to him and watch him -- what an advantage they had! How many of us have felt, "Oh, if only we could have been there, if only we could have seen what these disciples saw!" Yet Jesus is telling them very frankly and very plainly and very truthfully, "Look, it is going to be better for you when I leave. It will be better for you when I go away, for when I go away the Strengthener will come." I like that translation of the word. It is the Strengthener, the One who meets our needs from within, who is coming to us. That is what these disciples needed, and what we need.

I know it is hard for us to believe that it would be better for Jesus' disciples when he had gone. But have you ever noticed in reading through the Gospels that when Jesus finished the *Sermon on the Mount*, or even this *Upper Room Discourse*, or any of his great messages which the disciples heard, that they ever went away with their faces aglow, their minds understanding, their hearts committed, and ready to work? Instead the record tells us that every time he talked to them he puzzled them. They were perplexed, they couldn't figure him out, and they went away arguing about what he had to say. They were full of questions, and they disputed among themselves as to who was going to fulfill these things, vying with each other for first place. But you discover that after the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came, when they gathered together and heard the words of the Lord they went away tremendously strengthened and encouraged, ready to face life with radiant faces and joy in their hearts. That is what the Spirit does. It was indeed to their advantage, and to ours, that Jesus was not with them. Suppose he were here in the world today, right now, July 15, 1973. Where would he be? Well, probably somewhere in Texas! But certainly not in Palo Alto! And how would you ever get to see him? Yet by means of the Spirit we have access to him, as these disciples never had.

Now our Lord goes on to point out the ministry of the Spirit, the way he would work when he came. This is one of the most helpful passages in Scripture to enable us to understand the workings of the Holy Spirit in our day, in our generation. He says to them, Verses 8-11,

**"And when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment [The ministry of the Spirit to the world is to convince them of these three things]:**

**of sin, because they do not believe in me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more, of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."**  
{John 16:8-11 RSV}

I wonder if there is any verse of Scripture more frequently misread than that one. It is very commonly quoted, and most of us read it as though the Holy Spirit is going to come into the world and work directly upon the hearts of unbelievers, those who are not Christians, and convict them, or convince them, of these three things: sin, righteousness, and judgment. But if you read it in that way you have not read this verse correctly. That is not what he is saying. I want to read it again, together with the preceding verse, and emphasize a key word. And I want to take that same word and insert it in a place in Verse 8 where it does not occur but where the context makes clear it belongs. I think then you will see what I mean. Jesus says,

**"Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes to you, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment:"** {John 16:7-8 RCS Version}

You see, the Holy Spirit is not coming to the world; he is coming *to you*, to the church, to the Christian. And when he comes to the Christian, this will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. That is what he is saying. In fact, back in Chapter 14, Jesus had said specifically to these disciples that when the Spirit of truth would come, the world would not be able to receive him. It does not receive him -- it cannot receive him -- because it neither sees him nor knows him. Therefore he does not come to the world; he comes to us. But when he comes to us and operates in us as he intends, he will have this three-fold effect upon the world.

What effect? There are three things the world ought to see when it looks at the church. If it does not see these three things, then the church is not a Spirit-filled church. It is not operating in the way it is intended. You can bring that down to the individual as well. There are three things the world ought to see when it looks at you, as a Christian. If it does not see these three things, then you are not filled with the Spirit. You are not being led by, and operating by means of, the Spirit of God, as the Lord intended for you to do.

The first thing the world ought to see when it looks at us is that the issue of life is Jesus. It ought to be convicted of sin, "because they believe not on him." I am convinced that if the church had not reflected Jesus, and spoken of him, the world would soon have forgotten him. In fact, by now he would have become some dim name in history, for the world desperately wants to forget that Jesus ever came and lived among us. It desperately wants to relegate his name and all his teachings to the farthest reaches of ancient history and to forget about him. If you do not believe that, just listen to the teachers of today. They tell you that undoubtedly Jesus was a great man, but he lived in the far distant past. What he said has no relevancy to our day and so we need not be concerned about him. What is the church for? It is to bring Jesus consistently before the world. It is no accident that the great spiritual awakening of our day, in which the Spirit has been moving in great power, has been labeled "the Jesus Movement." That is what the church ought to be doing constantly talking about Jesus.

When I travel around the country I visit many different churches. And so many times I find that the thing most emphasized by the church in its attempts to reach out to the world is the church! The church presents the program of the church, and what the church will do, and offers the church to society. The early Christians never wasted their time in that. They never talked about the church; they talked about the Lord. The church doesn't save anybody. The church doesn't help anybody. It is the Lord who does it. He redeems, he changes, he revolutionizes, he forgives, he restores, he heals -- not the church! When the church is Spirit-filled it talks about Jesus. And when the world hears that, then it is finally convinced that its most basic and fundamental sin is not the evil things it does but the fact that it does not believe in Jesus.

The second thing they are to be convinced of is righteousness, Jesus says, "because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more." That is, when the world looks at the church it ought to see a different way of life, a different standard of behavior. What it once saw in Jesus it is now to see in the church. And this is what convinces the world there are absolutes in life. Secular writers and philosophers will tell you that there are no

absolutes, no standards. Whatever anyone wants to do is right for him to do. There is nothing inherently right or wrong; it is only good or bad in terms of how it affects an individual. We are deluged today by "situational ethics," the idea that the situation alone determines whether a thing is right or wrong. And the world will believe that until it sees in the church a standard of behavior which makes it realize that some things are always helpful, but that others always blast and ruin, that there is clear-cut righteousness and there is absolute evil.

Last Sunday night during the Body Life service there was some wonderful sharing, a wonderful openness, and a sense of the Lord's presence at work manifesting itself in our love and concern for one another. I met a man afterward who was standing on the platform looking out over the congregation as people were talking and sharing and visiting and praying. He shook his head and said, "I don't understand this. I don't get it. I can't get over it. All these young people -- what do they want to come here for? I don't understand." I said, "It's because here they can hear the truth. And there is one thing young people want more than anything else -- truth, honesty, reality, the way things are. Here they can hear it, and it is truth about Jesus." He said, "Well, maybe so, I'll say one thing: these are the most beautiful young people I've ever seen."

That is what the world ought to see when it looks at the church: beauty. It is what the Old Testament calls "the beauty of holiness." When the Word of God is fulfilled, and the Lord Jesus is reigning in an individual's life, and that person is obedient to the Lord and to his word, there is a beauty about that life which captures attention. It is righteousness, the beauty of holiness, and it captivates others. They understand there is a difference, and they want to be like that.

The third thing the world is to see as it looks at the church is judgment, "because the ruler of this world is judged." That is, as they look at the church they ought to see that there is coming a head-on clash between the philosophy of the world and the philosophy of Jesus Christ, and that the one who is going to win is Jesus. All that the world lives by will ultimately be demolished, destroyed. A judgment is coming. And the sign of it to the world is that the power of Satan is already broken in the lives they are observing. Here are people who live by different standards. They follow a different system of morals. They know how to love, how to reach out. They no longer are tied up in themselves, bound up within, tortured by tensions and fears. This is not seen perfectly in any one of us, but the world sees it beginning and growing and happening, and it shows them that the power of evil is broken, that the prince of this world is judged, that this is the goal toward which history is moving. This is what the world is to see when it looks at the church. But it is only when the church is living this way that the world can see it. If they don't see it, it is because we are denying the reality of that judgment.

Our Lord moves on, in Verses 12 through 15, to how the Spirit himself will work in the believer, with each of us. This is an extremely helpful passage. Jesus says,

**"I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." {John 16:12-15 RSV}**

There is the teaching of the Spirit to each believer. The primary fulfillment of this, of course, was to these disciples themselves. It was the process by which the rest of the Scriptures were given. As this was fulfilled in these apostles' lives, they were led by the Spirit to speak the truth which is recorded here in the pages of the New Testament -- the Gospels, the Epistles, and the book of the Revelation. Some even see this division in the words of Verse 13:

- "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth;" would be Gospels,
- "he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak," would be the Epistles, and
- "he will declare to you the things that are to come," would be the book of Revelation.

Whether you see it that way or not is up to you. But I would like to look at this passage as I think the Lord meant it to be taken. Here we understand the process by which the Spirit himself is going to teach us:



First Jesus emphasizes the prerequisite to learning. He says to these disciples, "I have yet many things to say to you." Why didn't he say them? What was hindering him? The answer, of course, as he says, is that they couldn't bear them then. It would have been laying too heavy a load on them. It would have been a demand greater than they could fulfill, and so he refused to lay it on them. What was it they were lacking? They lacked the understanding of the resource upon which to draw. They did not know how to handle these demands, how to satisfy these requirements, and so Jesus would not tell them these things until they had the power by which to respond.

That is a very important consideration. Today there are many conferences and seminars and meetings being held in which great biblical truth is being set before people. But they are not always being told how to respond to it. The only response they know is to summon up their natural commitment and their natural strength and to try to do the best they can to fulfill it. When that happens it always destroys people without their knowing why, because what they are told to do is right, but they don't know how to respond to it correctly. It is important for us to understand that you have to know how to respond by faith and trust in the One who dwells within you, before you ever learn of the demand which the truth of God makes upon you. That is the prerequisite to learning.

Then Jesus goes on into the process, and the three divisions he gives are most helpful. "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth." The word he uses for *guide* means "conduct," like a tour guide, a tour conductor. I was recently in Hawaii and visited the city of refuge, the ancient site where the Hawaiian kings had erected a city which, like the biblical cities of refuge, was a place where those who accidentally killed someone, or violated a taboo, could run from the revengeful relatives or the avenging justice. Once they had attained the shelter of the city of refuge they were safe from harm. Our guide took us around this site and explained point by point what each feature meant. That is what this word refers to here. The Holy Spirit will be like a tour guide. He will take you through the truth of the Word and the truth about life, and he will patiently and gradually explain to you what it is all about. Your level of understanding will rise as you go. In other words, the work of the Spirit is going to be a gradual unfolding of truth in every individual's life. It is not going to be one big display in which you get it all in a six-week course. Rather, it is a gradual unfolding as you move through life, and a deepening level of understanding as you penetrate into truth until it begins to make sense.

The second aspect, Jesus says, is that "he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak." What does he mean there? He means that the Spirit of God is never going to give you isolated truth. He will not come out with some startling, brand new, absolutely different revelation which nobody has ever heard of before! He will never do that. Every now and then we hear of some preacher who says, "God has spoken to me and has revealed to me this brilliant new idea. Nobody has ever taught it before. If you want to know the secret you've got to come to me!" That is exactly what Jesus says will not happen. The Spirit of God will never speak that way. He will speak only what he hears. The Spirit, as God, is always hearing what God forever is saying to men. Therefore, what he says is always integrated truth, always in line with what God has already said. It is in line with what he has already spoken. It will never differ from what he has said in the past, but will fit into the context of life as God has revealed it.

The third division is, "he will declare to you the things that are to come." Unquestionably this refers to the passages in our New Testament which predict our Lord's return and what will happen at the end of history to lead up to it -- when the kingdoms of the earth will rise up and band together in enmity against the Lord, when persecution and violence and tribulation will break out upon the earth, when the man of sin will arise and rule with worldwide authority to put down all men and institutions which represent God, and to exalt man as god in God's place. But it also means that the Spirit of God is going to be presenting truth in such a way -- by means of the revelation of the Word and a gradual elevating of our understanding of it -- that it will point to the consequences which lie ahead. It is *consequential truth*, i.e., it will open your eyes to where you are going. It will help your understanding of life to see what the results are going to be. Therefore the work of the Spirit is constantly to be making us aware of what lies ahead.

All of this is what the Spirit of God will be doing when he comes into the life of a believer. Our Lord ends with the point, the aim, of the teaching of the Spirit: "He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and

declare it to you."

Sometimes when you listen to Bible teachers today you get the idea that there is to be a kind of Jesus-oriented Bible teaching with which we begin the Christian life, but that as we grow a bit and mature we are to move on to Spirit-oriented truth, to recognize that the sign of maturity is to be concerned no longer with Jesus but with Spirit. Nothing could be further from the truth! The work of the Spirit is to glorify Jesus. The Spirit-filled life is the life in which Jesus is central. And the one who matures is the one who grows deeper in his understanding of Jesus. "For the Spirit will not speak of himself," Jesus said, "but he will take what is mine and reveal it unto you."

How vast is this range of teaching? Well, Jesus tells us. "All that the Father has is mine. The Spirit is going to take the things of mine and reveal them unto you, and all that the Father has is mine. Therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you."

A young man asked me the other day, "Is it right for a Christian to study secular subjects which have nothing to do with the Bible?" My answer was, "Paul tells us in First Corinthians 3, 'All things are yours, and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's.' And in Colossians 2, Paul says of Jesus Christ, 'In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.' As you investigate any realm of science or knowledge or truth, if you do so in reliance upon the indwelling life of Jesus and the teaching of the Spirit of God, he will open that branch of truth to you. More and more you will begin to understand and see the things God has hidden there."

Remember the story of George Washington Carver, that brilliant scientist who founded the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He was born a slave but he managed to get an education as a scientist. He said, on one occasion, that the hunger of his heart was to discover the secrets of the universe. "But," he said, "God said to me, 'George, that's too big for you. I've got something more your size. You take a peanut and work on that.'" And so he began to investigate what God has hidden in a peanut. He found over 330 different products which could be made from the peanut, revolutionized the technology of his day, and became a tremendous leader among the American people. But he always remained a simple, Bible-believing, humble servant of God who relied upon God to open his mind to truth, in whatever field it lay. "All things are yours. All the power of God is yours." That is what Jesus means. "All that the Father has is mine, and it will be made available to you through the Spirit."

For millenia the Colorado River has been grinding its way down through the Grand Canyon, on through Arizona, and on its way to the Gulf of California. For centuries men lived and died alongside that river -- starved to death, froze to death, shivered, sat in darkness -- all for lack of power. Yet there was one of the most powerful rivers in America flowing by. But its power was unavailable -- until one day some men built Hoover Dam. They erected this tremendous dam at great sacrifice of money, and even of life, but for the first time the power of the river was made available to man.

That is something like what happened at Calvary. All the power of God was there, flowing around man, but unavailable -- until the cross of Jesus Christ. At the cross, at enormous sacrifice, the power of God was released to man. Yet it was still too much.

As you drive across the Mojave Desert between Arizona and Los Angeles you see the great transmission towers which bring the power of Hoover Dam into the Los Angeles basin. Every one of them bears a warning sign: Danger, High Voltage. Energy is streaming through that wire at hundreds of thousands of volts. But how can you use a hundred thousand volts? It is too much. So a system of transformers has been installed which breaks it down until it comes out at levels we can use -- 110 volts, 220 volts -- whatever it takes. By this means all the power generated at Hoover Dam is now available for people to use in Southern California. Something like that is what is in view here.

I like to read Jesus' statement this way:

It is better for you that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Transformer will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he, the Transformer, comes, he will make available to you all the limitless forces which lie in me. He will take what is mine, and give it to you in quantities that you can handle, just

right for your situation. For back of him lies all the limitless power of God.

That is what he is teaching us. That is what the world is waiting to see in our lives -- power, coming not in some spectacular flash which startles and scares everybody, but released in useful quantity. That's what I need. I'm like these disciples -- a brother to them. I cannot bear the full revelation of the love and grace of Jesus Christ. I need to have it broken down to my size. But it is there, ready for me to take, ready for me to use in my situation.

That is available to each of us.

- So that the world, looking at us, can see the sin of not believing in Jesus. He is the issue.
- So that they can see the righteous conduct which God alone can produce in a life.
- So that they can know that God is still in control of history, that all of history is trending toward a one great event which lies yet in the future.
- So that they can see in us that quality of life which makes life worth the living.

That is what the Spirit of God is come to do.

**He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. {John 16:14 RSV}**

## **Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we thank you for the truth of these words. How much evidence we have right here in this room that these words are true, that this is what you are doing today -- to the end that the world in its blindness and darkness may see you, Lord of Life, Lord of Glory, the One in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, the key and secret to life itself, and that they may come to you and receive life at your hand. We thank you for that life, and for the power given to us by the Holy Spirit. Help us to walk in these ways. In his name, Amen.

Title: The Message of the Spirit  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 16:4-15  
Message No: 8  
Catalog No: 3128  
Date: July 15, 1973

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## **THE ABIDING PRINCIPLES**

**by Ray C. Stedman**

We return once again to our study of the time our Lord spent with his disciples just before the cross, as he is teaching them marvelous and precious truths. In this passage we have seen some tremendous concepts which he has brought out for their understanding, and for ours as well. He has told them that a replacement for himself was coming to them -- the Holy Spirit. Another Comforter, another Strengtheners was on the way. And when he came he would no longer merely be with them but he would be within them. Their strength would no longer come from without, as when Jesus was their Comforter, but would come from within.

Thus he marked the prominent characteristic of the day of the Spirit, in which we live. He told them that the primary work of the Spirit would be to take the life of Jesus and release it to these believers. This is the great and marvelous truth which the Scriptures seek to set before us. There is probably no greater truth in all the Bible than this one. For, when the Spirit would come to release Jesus' life within them, they would then live by him, as he lived by means of the Father. This is the fantastic secret which makes possible the fulfillment of

the high demands of Christian living. A Christian lives by the same principle as Jesus did. As he lived by means of the Father, in dependence and trust in him, moment by moment, so we are to live by means of the Son, in dependence and trust in him.

And he told them that when this happened, the Spirit would guide them into all truth, would gradually unfold to them the facts about life, the reality of existence, and would enable them to love one another -- thus fulfilling the qualification which is so necessary as the mark of Christians -- and to bear much fruit and thus glorify the Father, to be Christ-like in every situation, and to endure the world's hatred and resist the opposition and persecution which would come. All of this has been covered so far in this discourse.

While he had been speaking they had left the Upper Room and, passing through the vineyards on the slopes of Mount Zion, our Lord and his disciples have come around the city walls into the very shadow of the Temple. As this talk is coming to a close, they are about to cross over the Kidron Valley and make their way up the Mount of Olives into the darkness of Gethsemane's garden. At this point our Lord resumes a conversational style in his address to them.

It interests me to watch Jesus with his disciples and to observe his method of teaching. Sometimes he spoke rather formally and at some length, as in the Sermon on the Mount. But here he intersperses these periods of formal teaching with opportunities for questions and discussion. He is so anxious to clear up their fears that he now gives them an opportunity to break in with questions. Verse 16 introduces this section:

**"A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me." Some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he means." Jesus knew that they wanted to ask him; so he said to them, "Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant by saying, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'? Truly, truly, I say to you [that mark of great significance in the words of Jesus], you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy. When a woman is in travail she has sorrow, because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world. So you have sorrow now, but I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you." {John 16:16-22 RSV}**

Notice that the concern of the disciples here is on how long this absence is going to last. Jesus had said, "A little while, and you will see me no more," and his disciples had immediately picked up that phrase, "a little while." Their hearts clutched with fear, they said to themselves, "How long does he mean?" Their attention is on that, and also on his words, "because I go to the Father." They said, "Why does this have to happen? What does he mean, 'because I go to the Father'?" You can see that the focus of their concern is on "When?" and "Why?"

If you and I had been there, that is exactly what we would have asked! We are always concerned about how long a trial is going to last, and about, "Why we have to go through that, anyway?" Are these not the questions we inevitably ask whenever we have trouble -- "Why?" and "How long?" But you notice that when Jesus answers the troubled disciples he ignores the whole matter of time. He repeats the questions, so they know he heard what they asked, but he never answers their questions directly. His answer stresses the process, and the result which is certain to follow. In other words, Jesus isn't concerned with the "Why?" and "How long?" but with the "How?" and the "What?" He makes clear to them that a period of sorrow is inevitable. He cannot spare them, cannot save them from it. There will be a time when they will weep and lament and be in sorrow, and when the world around will be rejoicing. "But," he says, "your sorrow will be turned into joy." How long it takes is not significant; the inevitable result is the important thing.

That is a very important lesson to learn. I've been saying to the Lord, "How long, how long do I have to go through this?" And the Lord's emphasis is strictly upon what is coming at the end, the joy which is certain. To illustrate this, our Lord used the beautiful figure of childbirth. A mother goes through a time of sorrow when her child is being born, but later she experiences a time of joy when the baby is delivered.

This morning we had a dedication of children. I don't know if you could see them plainly from where you were sitting, but, when their babies were being dedicated, the faces of the mothers were a picture of joy. They were "turned on" with the gladness of that moment. What was causing the joy? The baby. Yet a few weeks ago those same mothers were in anguish and pain, and their faces pictured that anguish. And what was causing the pain? The baby. In other words, the same thing which caused the sorrow would later be the cause of the joy.

That is different from what we usually think. Most of us assume that our sorrow is going to be replaced by joy. But the promise of Jesus is that the very thing which caused the sorrow is also going to be the cause of the joy. That is a revelation of one of the great principles which mark authentic Christianity, one of the ways by which our Lord works in our life. He takes the very thing which causes us heartache and sorrow, and turns it into a cause of joy. That is most remarkable!

And God doesn't care how long it takes. We do, but he doesn't. He is anxious only for the increase of joy. And that joy will come from within. It will not be due to the circumstances. As Jesus has made clear all along, it will be due to the presence of the Holy Spirit within.

Recently I read an account of the life of Dr. R. A. Torrey, one of the great Bible teachers of a past generation and founder of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. Dr. and Mrs. Torrey went through a time of great heartache when their twelve-year-old daughter was killed accidentally. The funeral was held on a gloomy, miserable, rainy day -- dismal and melancholy. They stood around this forlorn little grave and watched as the body of their little girl was put away. As they turned away, Mrs. Torrey said, "I'm so glad Elisabeth is with the Lord, and not in that box." But even knowing this to be true, yet their hearts were broken.

Dr. Torrey said that the next day, as he was walking down the street, the whole thing broke over him anew -- the loneliness of the years ahead without her presence, the heartbreak of an empty house, and all the other implications of her death. He was so burdened by this that he looked to the Lord for help. And I want to share his words with you. He said,

And just then this fountain, the Holy Spirit, that I had in my heart, broke forth with such power as I think I had never experienced before, and it was the most joyful moment I had ever known in my life! Oh, how wonderful is the joy of the Holy Ghost! It is an unspeakably glorious thing to have your joy not in things about you, not even in your most dearly loved friends, but to have within you a fountain ever springing up, springing up, springing up, always springing up three hundred and sixty-five days in every year, springing up under all circumstances unto everlasting life!

That is what Jesus is talking about here. The alchemy of the Spirit is to take the thing which causes pain and to transmute it until it causes joy. It will take some time. It is a process. There will be sorrow and tears and lamenting. But eventually it will turn into joy. "Your sorrow will turn into joy."

Now, what releases this joy? Well, Jesus tells us. For the third time in this discourse he repeats the promise of answered prayer:

**"In that day you will ask nothing of me [you will ask me no questions]. Truly, truly, I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, he will give it to you in my name. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." {John 16:23-24 RSV}**

The process which leads to that kind of joy is a trustful prayer, a resting upon God to answer your need. This is why our Lord has underscored this for the third time. The key, of course, is the phrase, *in my name*: "Ask ... in my name." We have examined this in an earlier study, so I will merely review it briefly now. "In my name" means at least three things. It is not tacking on at the end of your prayers, "This I ask in Jesus' name." This does not necessarily make it a prayer in Jesus' name. You can ask exactly contrary to Jesus' name and add those words, and it becomes nothing but a pat formula which is meaningless.

"In my name" means, first, asking in line with our Lord's objectives. To ask in anyone's name means to ask

as though you were that person. This means we are to ask for what Jesus would want, what he is after, and not for our own desires. Prayer is not a means by which you get God to do what you want. It never is that. Prayer is a means by which God does through you what he wants, and it is a very necessary part of the process that you pray. James tells us, "You have not because you ask not," {Jas 4:2b RSV}. Prayer is an integral part of that process. We must ask. But James also says, "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to consume it on your passions" {Jas 4:3 RSV}, your own desires. Rather, it is to be for the objective God has in your life.

Now, that permits a vast range of prayer! There are many things God wants you to have, and you have every right to ask. This covers material things as well as spiritual blessings. Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread" {Matt 6:11, Luke 11:3}, and there is nothing wrong with that. There is nothing wrong with asking for other material needs. Some people get the idea that prayer is just for spiritual blessings, but that is not so. But what you ask must further the objectives God has in mind.

Second, to pray "in Jesus' name" means an acceptance of the process by which God works, and which Jesus relied upon. That process, as we know, is the cross and the resurrection -- i.e., a cross which represents the end, the hopelessness of everything else, and a resurrection beyond it, beyond what could possibly be anticipated by men. That is the way God works. He is a God of resurrection!

That is why God often pushes us to the very limit before our prayers are answered. We cry out, "Lord, why don't you answer? If you would just step in now you could stop all this tragedy which is occurring!" But God sometimes doesn't stop tragedy. He is a master of brinkmanship. He pushes you right to the brink, sometimes over the brink, in order that out of what appears to be an absolutely hopeless condition, from man's point of view, he may restore the whole thing.

This is the kind of God you are dealing with. You can expect him to act this way because this is what he says he will do: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord," {Isa 55:8}. And Peter reminds us, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to try you, as though something strange were happening to you," {cf, 1 Pet 4:12}. No, no; this is God's way of working. If he pushes you to the brink, don't be surprised, for resurrection lies beyond.

The third element of praying "in Jesus' name" is to pray in dependence upon his performance, upon his activity. It is Jesus who will do these things. He says so! "Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son," {John 14:13 RSV}. It is not done by our scurrying around trying to arrange things and work them out for ourselves. It is done by our reliance upon him to carry it through in his own unique way.

Therefore, to ask "in Jesus' name" is to consent to those three elements of prayer. That is the way joy is brought to the full, the way sorrow is turned into joy.

In the next section, here, our Lord underscores another great principle by which the Christian life is to be lived, beginning with Verse 25:

**"I have said this to you in figures; the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures but tell you plainly of the Father. In that day you will ask in my name; and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; for the Father himself loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from the Father. I came from the Father and have come into the world; again, I am leaving the world and going to the Father." {John 16:25-28 RSV}**

Up to this point in the disciples' lives, they had been very much aware of this marvelous, unique relationship which Jesus had with his Father. They had noted that he had a dependence upon the Father, a trust of the Father, and a fellowship and communion with the Father which they knew nothing about. They had relied upon Jesus to obtain for them privilege and favor with the Father. "But now," Jesus says, "that must end. You are no longer to look upon yourselves as separated from the Father, nor to think that I have a special link with him which you cannot know. This is now brought to an end, for the Father himself loves you directly, just as

he loves me."

And notice why -- not because you behaved, but because you believed. That is so important! I find very many Christians who really feel that God owes them something because they have behaved well, have tried to do what he says. They feel that if they live a good, clean, moral life, God therefore owes them some special treatment. I am tempted this way myself, as I am sure you are. When trouble strikes, I have heard people say, "Why should this happen to me? How come God sent this to me? What have I done to deserve this?" Most of us are ready to cry out and to tell God, "It's not fair, Lord! Here I've been working for you and helping you out, and this is the way you treat me! It's not fair!" But, you see, it isn't on the basis that you behave that God loves you; he loves you because you believe. You believe in Jesus, and, on that basis, his love is manifested as a Father's love -- directly to you. We used to sing in Sunday school,

Near, so very near to God, nearer I could not be;  
For in the Person of His Son, I'm just as near as He.  
Dear, so very dear to God, dearer I could not be;  
The love with which He loved His Son, such is His love for me.

This is what Jesus wants us to know. We have a direct relationship with the Father, and his love is toward us, is as it was toward Jesus. He loves us!

The past few weeks I've had the joy of having my eleven-year-old daughter travel with me, and Laurie and I have spent a lot of time together. We have studied and prayed and read together, and played together, and just had a great time! I seized the occasion to teach her how to get up in the morning. Do you fathers ever teach your children how to get up in the morning? Not only to get up, but how to get up? There is a three-fold technique in getting up:

- First, we stretch. That gets the body going.
- Then, smile. That puts the soul in the right attitude, so that we don't start the day grumbling.
- And then say, "God loves me," because that sets the spirit right.

You are reminding yourself of your identity in that way, and -- body, soul, and spirit -- you are starting the day right. Stretch, smile, and say, "God loves me." That is what Jesus is saying here.

The second great source of security in the Christian life is this remarkable love which the Father has for us as individuals. The Father loves us!

The last division, beginning at Verse 29, stresses a third word:

**His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure! Now we know that you know all things, and need none to question you; by this we believe that you came from God." Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, every man to his home, and will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." {John 16:29-33 RSV}**

Notice that the security of these disciples rested on the ability they thought they had to understand what he was saying to them. They wanted to know, and then they thought they would feel at peace. "Now we know," they said, "now we understand." Jesus had been speaking to them in figures -- the vine and the branches, the washing of the feet, the woman in childbirth, etc. -- these illuminating figures. "But now you're speaking to us plainly. Now we know and understand that you are indeed from God." They felt a sense of security because they *understood* that.

This is so like us! We think that God has to explain what we're going through, and that then we'll feel secure. Our peace wants to rest upon a certain knowledge of what is happening. But our Lord is very careful here to point out that this kind of peace is very insecure indeed. "Within an hour you will be running like a bunch of frightened sheep. You say you know who I am. You say you understand that I came from God and that I

know all things. Do you know that within an hour's time you will be so confused and so uncertain of what is happening you will run away and leave me alone? Rather than trusting me to work things out, you'll forsake me and not want to be identified with me. And yet I'll not be alone. My security won't be threatened in that hour, for the Father is with me. And I say this to you in order that you might know the kind of peace I have. It is not based on what happens, or even on my understanding of what happens, but upon a trust in the One who controls what happens. I say this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you're going to have nothing but trouble -- trouble at work, trouble at school, trouble in your home, trouble in your family. You'll have nothing but trouble, because that is the way this world is. But be of good cheer. I am in control of the world. I have overcome the world."

Isn't that an encouraging word? I want you to know that these words have meant a great deal to me in these past few months and years. I've been going through a time of great personal stress, times of deep sorrow, times of great pressure, times of uncertainty and lack of understanding, not knowing what God is working out, perceiving him to be working in ways which I have thought were utterly wrong, thinking he had no business doing things like this to me. And I've had to rest back upon these tremendous revelations of his word, and upon these marvelous summary words -- love, joy, peace. They are the fruit of the Spirit, aren't they?

His joy, despite circumstances, sorrow turned into joy. His love, the Father's own love, the Father's tender care, lovingly apportioning to each day that which he wants for you. Just last week in Colorado Springs, I so enjoyed hearing again the words of that old song, Day By Day. I had forgotten the words, and they hit with new and fresh power:

Day by day, and with each passing moment,  
Strength I find to meet my trials here.  
Trusting in a Father's wise bestowment,  
I've no cause to worry or to fear.  
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure,  
Gives unto each day what He deems best,  
Lovingly, it's part of pain and pleasure,  
Mingling toil with peace and rest.

That is the work of the Father. And then this last word -- peace. "You can have my peace," Jesus says, "my sense of security, which rests not in the circumstances, not in the understanding of the circumstances which we so crave, but in a confidence that the One who is guiding the circumstances knows what he is doing. That is where peace comes from.

There he leaves his disciples, and us, with these words, and begins to pray. We will look at that prayer in studies to come. But he ends this discourse with these great, abiding words:

Joy, Love, Peace.

## **Prayer**

Our Father, we thank you for your love for us. We thank you that you are our Father, and that you love us directly, as Jesus said; that we are precious to you, as he was precious to you; that your eye is ever upon us, as it was upon him; and that you are ever alert to our cry, always aware of our need. But we know that just as he passed through times of great pressure, times of disappointment, times of betrayal, times of heartbreak and sorrow, agony and lack of understanding, so we, too, Lord, must pass through them. But we are upheld, knowing that your promise is, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy." We thank you for that peace which passes understanding, which we do not know how to explain, but which is there as we trust a Father's hand, a Father's heart, to guide us through. We pray for any among us who are undergoing great pressure today, that you will sustain them and strengthen them by these words, and lead them out into that broad and wide place unto which you go. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.



Title: The Abiding Principles  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 16:16-33  
Message No: 9  
Catalog No: 3129  
Date: August 12, 1973

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## THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF JESUS

by Ray C. Stedman

We have reached the climax in our studies of the *Upper Room Discourse* as we look today at the prayer with which our Lord concludes. It is probably one of the most profound passages in all the New Testament. It has been called "the holy of holies of Scripture," and volumes have been written about this one chapter alone. Our Lord and his disciples had left the Upper Room and were making their way down the Tyropoeon Valley, which separated the Temple from the rest of the city, to the edge of the Kidron Valley, where they were about to cross over into the shadows of Gethsemane's garden. It was here that our Lord began his prayer. It is evident that he prayed aloud in order that the disciples might hear what he had to say to the Father. After they had entered the Garden he withdrew from the disciples and went off by himself and prayed in private to the Father. But here his prayer is public, so that we might hear his communion.

The prayer falls into three general divisions, which we will take in three separate messages, as we attempt to get as much as we can from the depths of this prayer, although, as John R. Stott says so eloquently, "The best we can do is but to paddle in its shallows." Our Lord prayed for three things:

- First, he prayed for himself, that he might be glorified (Verses 1-8);
- Then he prayed for his disciples, that they might be sanctified (Verses 9-19); and
- Then he prayed for the whole church down through the ages, including us here this morning, that it might be unified (Verses 20-26).

The introduction to the prayer is given in the first two verses:

**When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee, since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him." {John 17:1-2 RSV}**

The first request of Jesus is that he might be glorified.

"Well," you say, "isn't that a selfish request?" If we prayed it, yes, it would be. If we prayed that we'd be exalted or magnified or glorified in order that the world might see how important we were, it would indeed be a selfish request. But you notice that our Lord immediately adds, "that the Son may glorify thee." So the ultimate end of his request for glory is that the Father may be glorified.

This is always the ultimate purpose for all existence: that it might glorify God. Your life has no value except as it glorifies God. As we have seen earlier in this discourse, to glorify someone, means to manifest or display their hidden virtue or wisdom or power or beauty, to bring out that which is hidden away in them. And here our Lord is asking that he be glorified, i.e., that things hidden in him -- resources and wisdom and beauty which were rightfully his -- might now be made manifest, in order that he in turn might manifest the beauty and the glory and the order and the wisdom of the Father. If you read this, you can see that the major work of all three Persons in the Godhead -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- is to display the mutual glory of one another.

Our Lord now tells us why he needs this additional glory. The Father had already glorified him, and would glorify him again in his death. But the Lord, evidently, is looking on beyond the cross. And he needs additional glory for the reason he gives in Verse 2: "since thou hast given him power over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom thou hast given him." That is why he needs it -- in order to fulfill the additional work which was given him -- that of giving eternal life to all whom God had called.

There is something very significant here. Our Lord is pointing out that, in his resurrection and ascension, he will have, and does have, power over all flesh. That means he is in charge of all things. As he himself said just before he ascended to the Father, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me," {Matt 28:18b RSV}. The writer of Hebrews says that the Son upholds the universe by the word of his power {cf, Heb 1:3}. So here it is evident Jesus is aware that he is Lord over all the universe.

Jesus is Lord, whether men know it or not. That means he controls all the events of history -- and all the ordinary events of our circumstances, our everyday lives. I have to believe that he allowed me to slip from a ladder yesterday and injure my foot because of some value he knew the experience would have for me. And I do believe that. I believe that all events are ordered by the Lord. He uses even the animosity and the hatred of Satan against our race in order to accomplish his purposes and his will.

Yesterday Bob Larson and Dick Hillis gave us a very illuminating and helpful study on China -- what China is doing these days, where it is going, so far as anyone can tell, and what China is like today. Some of us were startled a bit when Bob read from Isaiah's prophecy (44:24 - 45:6) the words of God concerning Cyrus, the pagan king of Persia, whom he would raise up. He describes in detail how he would use him to put down nations and overthrow thrones and overpower kingdoms, though Cyrus did not know him personally. Bob drew a very vivid parallel between Cyrus and Mao Tse-Tung, illustrating the fact that God is using Mao in China and in the world to accomplish his purpose.

This is what our Lord means when he says here that he has power over all flesh, over all the nations -- power to regulate their affairs, power to raise them up and put them down, power to shut doors so that a nation can be closed off from hearing the gospel in order to sharpen its desire for it, while other nations are allowed to be open to hear the gospel. All the events of history, all the events reported in our newspapers -- including Watergate -- have been allowed by the Lord as he regulates and runs the affairs of earth, in order, as he says here, to give eternal life to all those whom God has given him.

In other words, the focal point of all human history is right here. Every event finds its significance only as it contributes in one way or another to the great task God has come into the world to do: to give eternal life to men and women. By virtue of the power he has to regulate the affairs of human history, he gives eternal life to those whom the Father calls and brings to the Son. Now, that is the Christian world view, and I think we need continually to bear it in mind these days -- Jesus is Lord. This is not merely looking forward to a day when he will come again and reign as Lord; he already reigns as Lord over all the affairs of earth, and he is bringing them to the culmination which the Scriptures describe. Here he is aware of that fact, and, in order to do this, he says, he needs additional glory.

Notice what eternal life is. Have you ever tried to define it? You say you were given eternal life. What do you mean? That you are going to be living in heaven forever? That is a phase of it, but that is not really what it is. What does it mean to have eternal life? Jesus defines it for us:

**"And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou has sent." {John 17:3 RSV}**

Eternal life is the ability, the right, to know God in an ever-expanding, ever-increasing way, to understand and fellowship with, and be in close contact with this mighty Being who upholds all things by the word of his power, and with Jesus Christ, who is the only way by which men can know God. That is eternal life -- the knowledge of a Person.

This really shouldn't be surprising to us. After all, this is the way many things in life are. For example, many of you are married, some for many years. What is marriage? Is it just two people living together in a house,

sharing the same salary, raising children, washing dishes and making beds, and expressing a little sex? Is that all that marriage is? No, no. Marriage is the knowledge of a person. That is what makes marriage rich and full. It isn't just living together; it is knowing each other, and coming more and more to know one another.

That is why many marriages grow stale. This process ceases, and people do not continue learning more and more of what is in another person. So many couples come to me who think that they have arrived, that they have found out all there is to know about each other, and so their marriage appears to them dull and boring. But they haven't arrived. The knowledge of a person is an infinite undertaking. What makes human life rich is the discovery of what is in one another, who we are, and the sharing of it. And what makes eternal life worth the living is the discovery of God, the knowledge of him.

And this is the great gift which only Jesus Christ can give. Notice how exclusive is his claim. It is Jesus who says, "No man can come to the Father but by me," {cf, John 14:6}. Those of us who are Christians must never give that doctrine up. We must never be willing to put any other approach to God on the level of Jesus Christ. We must never say that any person other than Jesus can lead men to God. For Jesus himself says that this is the case. It is he who points out that, of all men who have ever appeared on earth, only he has the power to give the knowledge of God, and of himself, to human beings. This is what the gift of eternal life consists of.

Notice how God works within the Godhead. There is amazing reciprocity of action here. The Father gives the Son power over all flesh. Then he calls out of humanity those whom he wants. Then he brings them to the Son, and the Son gives them the right to know God and the right to know Himself. There is an interplay of activity back and forth. Did you ever think of yourself as called by the Father? I think many of us are so caught up with our human experience of Christ that we forget God must call us before we even can come to him. As Jesus himself put it in John 6, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him," {John 6:44 RSV}. These desires we have to find out what life is all about, this hunger for forgiveness which awakens within us, our longing for fulfillment, the desire to have questions about the future answered, all of these are part of the drawing of the Father, by the Spirit -- bringing us to the place where Jesus alone can give us gifts of eternal life. Have you come to that place?

Now Jesus specifies the nature of the glory which he requires to complete this work:

**"I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do [we will look at that in a moment]; and now, Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made." {John 17:4-5 RSV}**

Jesus is praying that he might resume now the full manifestations of deity. He had laid them aside when he came into the world, taking upon himself the limitations of humanity. I think it is so helpful for us to realize that when our Lord was here he did not go around showing people how God behaved; he showed them how man behaved -- man indwelt by God, as God intended man to be. And all that you see in Jesus, during the days of his flesh, is a perfect humanity. His deity was hidden. He didn't give it up -- you can't give up what you are -- but he laid aside the exercise of it. Now he is asking that the Father will restore to him that expression of deity which was properly his before the world was made. By this he is praying for the resurrection and the ascension to follow -- that the Father would raise him from the dead in glory, and then later cause him to ascend to heaven to be with him as he was before the world was made. He needs this in order to perform the work of giving eternal life to all those whom the Father would bring to him out of every succeeding generation. It is as God that he gives us eternal life.

There is a tremendous lesson here about prayer. Was it not already God's program that if the Son were crucified he would be raised from the dead and ascend into the heavens? Yet when the hour comes Jesus asks the Father to do this. He prays for this glory which was already promised to him. This helps us a great deal in understanding prayer.

Many people say to me, "Why should I pray? God has already programmed my life. He knows what I'm going to do and what's going to happen to me, so why should I ask him to do anything? It's all going to happen anyway." That position totally ignores the revelation of the Scriptures that prayer is a part of the

process by which God brings to pass what he has already proposed to do. James tells us, "You have not because you ask not," {cf, Jas 4:2b KJV}. If you do not ask, it will not happen, because it breaks the link by which God proposes to bring it about. Therefore prayer is vital, and our Lord gives us this example. He prays for that which was already promised him. Prayer is always based upon the promises of God.

Let us look now at these words, "I glorified thee on earth," for here we see the basis of his request for additional glory. Our Lord says, "I glorified thee on earth, having accomplished the work which thou gavest me to do." Having arrived at the cross, he had finished one work; now another is about to begin. And for that additional work he needs this additional glory, this return to his original status as the Son of God. But the reason he can ask for it now is that he had finished the work which God had given him to do.

In the next few verses we have a wonderful look at Jesus' own evaluation of what he had accomplished. What was this work which God gave him to do, which he had now finished, and finished with satisfaction, so that he could ask for more glory to accomplish the further work which lay before him? He tells us what it is:

**"I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word." {John 17:6 RSV}**

That is one part of it. Now he gives another, in Verse 7:

**"Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee; for I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me." {John 17:7-8 RSV}**

The work he came to do was two-fold: "I manifested thy name to the men whom thou gave me," and "I have given them thy words." And in saying that he says, "I have accomplished the work which you gave me to do." There have been many books written about the life of Christ, and they are filled with commentary on the amazing things Jesus did -- the multitudes which followed him, the miracles he performed, the crowds to which he witnessed, the healings, the compassionate words he uttered. But Jesus is saying here that all of that was designed to reach eleven men. And having reached them he says, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." Isn't that amazing?

He says, first, "I manifested thy name to them." What does that mean? A name always stands for resources. Your name stands for everything that you are and have.

When Elaine Smith, of Great Falls, Montana, became my wife, she took my name, and she literally took me for all I had! It wasn't much. I had saved up \$100 for our honeymoon. We spent it within the first three days -- and we had to cash her bonds to get home! Even today when I sign a check, the entire Stedman fortune -- all \$200 of it -- is laid on the line!

When Jesus said he had manifested the name of the Father, he was saying that he had revealed to these men the resources in God by which he lived. His attitude and his actions told the story. The way he reacted, the serenity of spirit he displayed, the calmness with which he faced crises, the compassion with which he dealt with the weak, the tenderness, the love in everything he did and said -- they saw at last that the secret was that he was drawing on the Father. "As I live by means of the Father, so you shall live by means of me." They learned that great secret.

And the result was, as Jesus said, "They have kept thy word."

Doesn't that reveal something about us? Why is it that though we have the Word of God so abundantly, yet we often find ourselves not keeping it? The only answer is that we become victims of a paralysis of the will. We lose our motivation. We become listless and lethargic and dull. Why? Because we have failed to grasp the resources available to us. The way to keep the Word of God is to draw upon the life of God, now made available to us in the Son, as the Father's life was available to him, and by which he lived. The first great task he came to accomplish was to show these men how he lived, by what means he acted.

The second was: "I have given them the words which thou gavest me, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from thee; and they have believed that thou didst send me."

These convincing words are what he came to give these disciples. He came to teach eleven men a wholly different way of life, a totally, radically different approach to living. Read the words of Jesus and you can see this. Take the words of the *Sermon on the Mount*. Those opening words reveal an entirely different approach to life than anything the world knows: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed, blessed are the persecuted. Blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the merciful, and the peacemakers -- for theirs is a resource which the world knows nothing about. The kingdom of God, and all its resources, are available to them," {cf, Matt 5:3-10}.

So he had described all this, and these disciples had caught on -- finally! The amazing thing is that they had just barely caught on -- just before these words were uttered. If you look at Chapter 16, Verse 29, you can see this:

**His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure! Now we know that you know all things, and need none to question you; by this we believe that you came from God." {John 16:29-30 RSV}**

And Jesus heaved a big sigh of relief and said, "Now I've finished the work which you gave me to do. Now they know. My words at last have convinced them!"

Isn't this amazing? This was the work he came to do -- to convince eleven men. He wasn't worried about the multitudes who left him and went back. He didn't care how many he had healed who would no longer acknowledge his name. He was interested only in these eleven Galilean peasants. This was all he had to show for his work. But he said, "That's enough. They know two great things:

- "They know how I live, and
- "They've heard my words.

"They have described what that life is like, and that is all they need to know. When the Spirit comes and makes all this real to them, that will change the world!"

And he is satisfied now to go back, in order that he might work through these men as the Father worked through him. So here is the great program of God. Jesus now says, "Father, I've finished that work. Now give me the glory I had with you before the world was -- so that, as God the Son, upholding all things by the word of my power, running every event of human life and working out the entire program from beginning to end, I might work through these to whom I have given eternal life, and through all who shall later believe on me through their word, in order that the great work which you have designed for men -- that a great company of people from all ages and tribes and generations and tongues, shall receive the knowledge of you: the gift of eternal life."

And God granted that request. Jesus was raised from the dead, and he ascended into the heavens in order that he might fulfill this work. I believe this is what is meant in Hebrews 5:7:

**In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. {Heb 5:7 RSV}**

Thus we have the great work of redemption going on throughout the world since that day. Isn't this an amazing program that God has? He works through incarnation -- life implanted into people. And that life, lived by them, in their circumstances, is what will change the world.

I hope we never forget this, as we see it manifested in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, we count it a great privilege to bow the knee to you and proclaim you as Lord, to the glory of God the Father, even in this day of rejection, when much of the earth scorns your claims and men turn their backs upon your righteous law and refuse to heed your gracious word of invitation. Yet we thank you, Lord Jesus, that as we gather here this morning, we've been drawn by the Father, drawn by the Spirit to you. You have given to us the gift of eternal life -- "that we may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." We thank you for this, Father, and ask your blessing upon us. May we be faithful to that word and to that life which is within us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: The Accomplishments of Jesus  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 17:1-8  
Message No: 10  
Catalog No: 3130  
Date: August 19, 1973

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## KEPT

by Ray C. Stedman

As our Lord closed the *Upper Room Discourse*, he prayed for three things:

- He prayed for himself, that he might be glorified in order that he might accomplish the work which lay yet before him -- giving eternal life to those whom the Father would give him throughout all the ages yet to come. While he was on earth he accomplished the work of giving eternal life to those the Father had given him then; but to reach around the world and through the ages he needed the restoration of his powers of deity -- his resurrection, ascension, and glorification.
- Then he prayed for his disciples, the eleven men gathered there with him who were the fruit of his ministry. We will look at that in this study.
- The closing section of his prayer is for all those who would believe on the basis of their testimony as this gospel was to be preached throughout the church age -- and thus it includes us.

Verses 9 and 10 of Chapter 17 introduces our Lord's prayer for the eleven disciples. This section too is not only for them but, since they are representative of us, it is for us as well.

**"I am praying for them; I am not praying for the world but for those whom thou hast given me, for they are thine; all mine are thine, and thine are mine, and I am glorified in them." {John 17:9-10 RSV}**

Here you see the reason for our Lord's prayer for these eleven men, a reason which grows out of his great, heartfelt love and concern for them. He prayed for them for the same reason that we pray for each other -- because there is a love and a concern for one another. Our Lord loved these men, and not only them, but all who, like them, would believe on his name.

He tells us three reasons why he loved them and was concerned for them.

First, because they are "those whom thou hast given me." That is, they were the gift of the Father to the Son. All of us have something we have been given by someone whom we love. We treasure that gift -- not only because of its intrinsic value but because it comes from someone who means much to us. Jesus, looking at these men, guarded them and loved them and was concerned for them because they represented the Father's choice for him.

Here is a revelation of how God works in human lives. We have already seen something of it previously in

this prayer. In all the universe, Jesus is the only one who has authority to give eternal life, i.e., the right to know God, this mighty, amazing, marvelous, attractive, magnificent being who flung the worlds into existence and who designed us in all our human complexity. He is the one whom to know is to gain the greatest blessing in life. And the only one who has the right to give us that knowledge is Jesus. But Jesus says that the Father has a part in this, too. He draws certain ones to him. God is at work throughout our lives drawing us to him by various means. If you have a hunger for goodness, that is the drawing of the Father. If you have a passion for truth and honesty, that is the drawing of the Father. If you love the words of Jesus and are attracted by who he is and what he says, that is the drawing of the Father, moving in you to bring you to Christ that you might commit yourself to him.

And these men had been drawn in that way. Isn't it amazing that out of all the multitudes that followed Jesus throughout his three years of ministry, these are all that are left? Of the thousands who followed him from city to city, these eleven men are all who remain. But that is enough. It is to these that he now commits the ministry which he himself has had. So they are dear to him because they are given to him by the Father.

And then he says that they are dear because "all mine are thine, and thine are mine." That is, not only had the Father given them to him, but now they were his, they belonged to him. And so his concern reaches out to them because they are his property, his ownership.

Written across the front of this auditorium are words which I read frequently because I think they capture one of the greatest truths in Christian faith: "You are not your own; you are bought with a price." You do not belong to yourself if you are a Christian; you belong to God. You haven't the right to run your life; he has. You haven't the right to make your own program and plans; he has: "You are bought with a price."

These men were bought with that price and belonged to him, and so they are dear to him.

The third reason is, "I am glorified in them." They were choice men because in them Jesus saw the means by which all the glory which is his due would be manifested. Just as a coach is glorified by the ability of the athletes he has trained, or a teacher by the achievements of the scholars who learn from him, so Jesus is to be glorified by these men. They would be the way by which the world would know who he is. That is what history has proven, isn't it. We have the Bible because of these eleven men. We read of Jesus because of them. He has been glorified before the whole world by these eleven men. So they were infinitely precious and dear to him, and thus he prays for them.

Now, what did he pray? Notice that he prayed three things for them. He didn't pray for the world because none of these things could be true of the world. He prayed for the world later, on his cross: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," {Luke 23:34}. But here he is praying for these men.

First:

**"Holy Father, keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one." {John 17:11b RSV}**

His first request is that they will be kept in unity.

The second is found in Verse 15:

**"I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one." {John 17:15 RSV}**

His second request is that they be kept from destruction.

The third request is found in Verse 17:

**"Sanctify them in the truth;" {John 17:a RSV}**

These are the three things he prayed for these men who were dear to him:

- Keep them in unity;
- Keep them from destruction by the evil one; and
- Sanctify them by your truth.

Now let's look at them in more detail and in context.

Verses 11 through 13a:

**"And now I am no more in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to thee. Holy Father [notice that -- Holy Father], keep them in thy name, which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. While I was with them, I kept them in thy name, which thou hast given me; I have guarded them, and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to thee;" {John 17:11-13a RSV}**

It is because of this change of guardianship that Jesus prays for these men. "I am not any longer in the world, Father, I am coming to you; so you must keep them. For I have kept them while I was with them." He makes that clear. He kept them by the same resource which he now asks the Father to keep them by: "I kept them in thy name." That stands for all the resources and power and wisdom and glory of God, available to man. "I kept them by that resource. And now you keep them, Father, by the same resource."

This was not easy to do. Read the record of the Gospels and you will see that these men did not get along very well. They were easily divided, threatened with schism many times. He prays that they may be kept one, kept in unity, "for," he says, "I kept them that way." The record shows that this was a very difficult task to accomplish. They were fighting and quarreling with one another, in competition with each other, always striving to get ahead of one another and to put each other down.

- Remember how James and John laid hold of their mother to ask a special favor of Jesus before the others could get their word in.
- Remember how, on one occasion, Jesus said that they must forgive one another even seventy times seven, and how the disciples all turned as one man and looked at Peter; then they turned to the Lord and said, "Lord, increase our faith!"
- And remember how Peter and John were at odds with one another throughout the whole course of the apostolic training period. You find them in rivalry until the Day of Pentecost. When the Spirit of God came, this made friends of Peter and John, and they worked together from then on. Wherever you see one you see the other from that time on. The enmity of Peter and John was ended by the coming of the Spirit.

So our Lord prays for them here that they may be kept in this way. His was a difficult task: He had to rebuke them, and reprove them, and correct them, spend nights in prayer for them. But he kept them by the name and authority of the Father from all attacks upon their unity, so that even now, in the shadow of the cross, they are eleven men still together. "Not one is lost," he said, "except the son of perdition."

Judas never was a member of that band, in one sense, he never was part of the apostolic unity. Some think that he was fated, was compelled to be lost, that he never had a chance. But this is not the case. It was not his fate to be lost; it was his destiny. There is a difference between fate and destiny. Fate is what you are compelled to do, what you cannot help; destiny is what you find possible if you make the right choices. We speak of "men of destiny." What do we mean? We mean that they made the right choices in their life so that all the possibility of their lives was fulfilled. But there are men and women and children who miss their destiny because of the choices they make. And Judas was one. Therefore, Jesus calls him "the son of perdition," who never made the right choices, and so was lost.

But these other men who began with the right choice were never lost; he kept them unto the end. Now the positions of Jesus and the Father are about to be reversed. While he was in the flesh, Jesus kept them by the



Father's name. Now he asks that the Father keep them in the Son's name, the name which the Father had given him. Thus Jesus commits them to the mercy of the Father through the days to come.

Beginning with Verse 13b, he prays his second request -- that they may be kept from the evil one:

**"and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world." {John 17:13b-16 RSV}**

In this section our Lord indicated the great realm of controversy between himself and Satan, the realm in which Satan finds his activity manifested -- the world. Throughout this whole discourse you find two communities in view: the world, secular society, organized in its antipathy against God, seeking to build any contact with and dependence upon God; and the church, the body of Christ, God's family.

Every spirit of independence which says, "You've got what it takes in yourself," is a worldly spirit, and therefore is satanic. Every spirit which says, "You can shape your own life and make your own future," is a worldly spirit. Every spirit which says, "Things of comfort and enjoyment in this life are of far more importance than spiritual values and relationships with people," is a worldly spirit, a satanic element.

The Lord knew that there would be this conflict. He called a group out of the world -- not to be separate from it (as we will see), but to be a different group. God always sees humanity divided into these two divisions. Sometimes they are called two kingdoms -- the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Sometimes they are regarded symbolically as two cities -- Jerusalem and Babylon. But, in any case, there are always these two.

The world is Satan's realm. He is the god of this world, the ruler of it. He is the one whom people blindly and ignorantly worship when they worship money and fame and power and pleasure, and all these attractions of the world. Jesus, knowing the danger of the world, prays for these disciples. And he points out the reason why the world hates them. "These things I speak in the world," he says, "that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves." Here are men who have learned a source of joy which the world does not know how to produce. And this always bothers the world. It longs to control everything.

Have you ever noticed how men are unhappy unless they can control every force at work in their lives? This is the philosophy of the world. This is why men desperately try to subdue nature and to conquer the universe. We have men out in space right now, desperately trying to exert human control over all the forces of life. The world is frightened and threatened by any source of joy or happiness or peace which it does not itself provide. That is why these men were hated, because they had a source of inner joy and strength which the world could not explain.

You find a good example of this in Paul's letter to the Philippians. In Chapter 1 he says,

**Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you stand firm in one spirit, and with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, and not frightened in anything by your opponents. {Phil 1:27-28a RSV}**

There are men and women who have learned to stand up against persecution and mockery and ostracism, and not to be frightened or put down, but to be filled with steadiness and joy. Paul goes on to say,

**This is a clear omen to them of their destruction [the world is frightened by this kind of a resilient spirit], but of your salvation, and that from God. {Phil 1:28b RSV}**

And so the world hates Christians because they have a source of life the world cannot explain. Satan tries to destroy it, tries to ruin people's happiness, ruin marriages, ruin lives, ruin homes, ruin health -- anything! The devil is a murderer and his aim is to blast, to damage, to destroy in any way he can, through the deceitfulness of the allurements and illusions of the world.

Jesus, knowing this, prayed for these men. Notice what he prayed -- two very important things:

He said, "I do not pray that you would take them out of the world." Isn't that amazing? I remember Dr. Louis Sperry Chafer, my dear professor at Dallas Theological Seminary (president and founder of that school), saying that as a young preacher he had had great controversies with those who held the Arminian persuasion, i.e., that once you were saved you could be lost again. He would say to them, "If I believed as you do, I would erect a chopping block beside every altar. And as soon as anybody got saved, I'd pass them over and chop their heads off. It would be worth it, rather than seeing them lost again once they had become part of Christ!"

In effect, that is what we do when we say to new believers, "Look, you are a Christian, so get out of the world. Don't have anything to do with it. Get clear away from it. Avoid any contact with it, and don't ever get mixed up in it as long as you live." Now, it may be necessary at times for a young Christian to get away from the world for awhile. But not to be removed from it! It is a violation of our Lord's prayer when we take ourselves out of the world and build ourselves a wholly Christian life "from the womb to the tomb," with Christian friends and Christian contacts, and never go any place non-Christians go but simply isolate ourselves. There are many places and many churches like that today. The result is that the world is left without light -- to fall into decay and darkness, with no help, no help at all.

But, on the other hand, our Lord was aware that these men needed to be kept from the evil one. So he prayed that they should be kept from the evil one, from contamination by the world and all its deadly delusions. It is so easy to conform to the world, to identify with it, to seek its values and to measure your life by its standards.

What a deadly thing that is! Our Lord is calling here for men and women who, like himself, can live in the midst of the world -- right up to the hilt -- friends of sinners and tax collectors and publicans and prostitutes -- and yet not become contaminated by its life, but be, instead, a source of release to those around.

How do you live that way, walking a tightrope between falling off on the side of isolation or that of conformity to the world? Jesus' answer is in his last request:

**"Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself [sanctify myself -- same word in Greek], that they also may be consecrated [sanctified] in truth." {John 17:17-19 RSV}**

I don't know what you think sanctification is. All too often we think of it as kind of a religious de-worming process -- you go through it once and you're "sanctified," and nothing can ever touch you again. But that is false on the face of it. Scripture doesn't teach that, and neither does experience. Sanctification is a simple word which means to be set apart unto a certain purpose, to be put to an intended use.

When I selected my necktie this morning from a number of other ties, I sanctified it. When you selected the seat in which you are sitting, you sanctified that seat; you put it to its intended use. When you tear off a piece of paper to write a note, you sanctify that piece of paper to the use for which you intend. That is all it means.

And when God called these men, and called you and me, to be Christians, he set us apart for the use for which we were intended -- not to be our own, but to be his instruments, and to walk in conformity with his ways.

What is it which accomplishes this? Jesus tells us: It is the Word, the truth, the truth about life. The world lives in a continual shimmering illusion, a dream world. The world lives by things which are not true at all, but which it thinks are true, by values and standards which are worthless and meaningless but which they exalt very highly. Jesus said, "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." That is how the world lives. And how can we live in that kind of a world, touch it, and hear it, have it pouring into our ears and exposed to our eyes day and night, and not be conformed to its image and squeezed into its mold?

The answer is, we must know the truth. We must know the world and life the way God sees it, the way it

really is. We must know it so clearly and strongly that even while we're listening to these alluring lies we can brand them as lies and know that they are wrong, even while we feel the flesh within us rise up and urge us to get involved with it and participate in it and not be different, we can say by the Spirit of God, "No, I've given my life to Jesus. Jesus is my authority. And he is my strength. By his grace and power I'll stand in the midst of this world."

"Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth." But if your Bible is closed, if you are not growing in the knowledge of the Word of God, it is only a question of time before the world will move in and take you over. You will lose all the joy and vitality of your Christian experience.

Jesus lived this way himself. "As thou didst send me into the world, so I have sent them into the world." The same way. "And for their sake I have sanctified myself" -- in order that they might have an example of what it means to be sanctified, to live by the truth of God in the midst of a lying world, a sick and dying world.

This is his prayer for his disciples.

I hope every one of us is asking the Lord Jesus to pray for us this same way, to keep us in unity, so that nothing may break up our fellowship, our membership one with another, and to keep us from the contamination of the world around us, the lies of the evil one who would destroy us.

"Sanctify us by thy truth." The Word is the truth.

## **Prayer**

Our Father, our Holy Father, we pray as Jesus prayed that you will indeed do these three things in our lives. And if there are any among us who have not yet made this initial commitment to you, we pray that even now they will say, "Lord Jesus, let the world go its way; but I will be with you. I give myself to you." Then, Father, we ask you to keep us in unity, keep us from the evil one, keep us by thy truth, and help open our minds and hearts to this truth, so that we may glorify you. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

Title: Kept  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 17:9-19  
Message No: 11  
Catalog No: 3131  
Date: August 26, 1973

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## **ONE BODY**

**by Ray C. Stedman**

Today we complete our studies of the *Upper Room Discourse*, as we look together at the great prayer with which Jesus concluded his message, particularly as it relates to the whole church down through the ages. In the greatest summit meeting ever held, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are looking down through the intervening ages, laying out the plan and the program by which a world would be reached. The closing part of Jesus' prayer has to do with the church, from Pentecost until his coming again -- every believer who ever lived and ever will live. This is made clear in the words of Jesus in Verse 20:

**"I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word."  
{John 17:20 RSV}**

That gathers up all believers here this morning, as well as believers all over the world, who have come to Christ through the word of the apostles. Notice how our Lord indicates here the great fact which has been true

throughout the ages -- that there is one holy, catholic church. In the Apostles' Creed, recited every Sunday in many churches, is the phrase, "I believe in ... the holy catholic church ..." Many Protestants have squirmed at that phrase, not realizing that the word *catholic* merely means universal -- one universal, world-wide, holy church -- not two or three, or three hundred fifty, which is the approximate number of denominations in the United States today, but one church. Our Lord recognizes this in his prayer.

This is a church which stretches not only around the world but across the centuries. I do not know if you have ever thought about that, but it has always intrigued me to remember that I am a member of the same body to which the apostles belonged, and Martin Luther, John Wesley, David Livingstone, and all the other great saints of the past; that we are as much members one of another as you and I today are members one of another in Christ. The church is one body, one great, catholic church.

And it is entered, as Jesus indicates here, only by one means -- by faith in him -- "those who believe in me." It is so helpful to understand that. You do not join the church by signing a membership form, or by attending regularly, or by going through a baptism or a confirmation. These things have nothing to do with membership in the body of Christ. There is only one way -- by a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus himself. In these words Jesus indicates how available he will be throughout all the course of the church age.

Remember what he said at the close of Matthew's gospel: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" {Matt 28:19a RSV}, "and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age," {Matt 28:20b RSV}. It is this fact which makes possible that personal entrance into the church -- a born-again relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Notice that Jesus says this is based upon the apostolic witness -- "those who believe in me through their word." Many times I find people who attach little importance to the apostles and their writings -- especially the Apostle Paul. Many people are ready to reject Paul outright. In these days of "Women's Liberation," he is commonly regarded as the highest expression of a "male chauvinist pig" because of some of his statements about women. Evidently these statements are not clearly understood, for no one holds women in higher regard than Paul. Nevertheless, there are many who reject the Epistles. But it must be clearly understood, and Jesus underscores it at this point, that these apostles are his chosen messengers, his chosen means of expressing himself to a waiting world. And to reject their witness is to reject him. The only Jesus we know anything about is the Jesus of the apostles.

We are being presented today with many different Jesuses. There is the Jesus of *Jesus Christ Superstar* (how I wonder who you are!), and the Jesus of *Godspell*, and various other presentations -- the Jesus of the Mormons, the Jesus of the cults, the Jesus of humanism. It is no wonder that people are confused sometimes as to which is the real one. You want to ask, "Will the real Jesus please stand up?" That real Jesus is the Jesus presented by the apostolic writers. They knew him. They were chosen by him to be eyewitnesses who would convey to us the Jesus who really is. It is so important that we grasp this great fact. There is only one historic Jesus, and any deviation from the Jesus of the apostles is an impostor.

In this prayer which Jesus prays we have two great requests for the continuing church. One is found in Verse 21: "that they may all be one," and the other in Verse 24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory ..." One is a prayer for unity, the other is for vision, that the church may see something. This great prayer unquestionably has been and is being answered all through the centuries of the Christian era. And we will see how it is being answered today.

Let's go back now to this request for unity and see what Jesus says in connection with it:

**"I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me." {John 17:20-23 RSV}**

Three times Jesus prays for the unity of the church. Note the gradual stages of growth:

- In verse 21 he prays, "that they may all be one";
- In verse 22, "that they may be one even as we are one"; and
- In verse 23, "that they may become perfectly one."

What is this unity? We hear a great deal these days about the unity of Christians. There is an effort which has been going on for some time now to bring about a union of believers, to unite them in one great worldwide church under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, or some similar organization. We are told that this will at last be the answer to this prayer of Jesus. But I find it impossible to accept that explanation. I do not believe that the church has to wait twenty centuries before the prayer of Jesus is answered, or that the World Council of Churches will accomplish what the Holy Spirit (seemingly) has been unable to do. I believe that the Holy Spirit has been answering this prayer from the very beginning, and when we understand the nature of the unity for which Jesus prayed we will see that the prayer is indeed being answered and has been all along.

What is the nature of that unity? Several things here in this passage give us a clue.

The first is in Verse 21 -- "that they may all be one." What does this "all" mean? If you look back in Verse 20 you will see that he prays, "not ... for these only." Who are "these"? The apostles, the eleven for whom he has been praying in the previous section. He continues, "but also for those" who are to believe in him through the apostolic witness -- the great body of Christians around the world and through the centuries. "These" and "those," he now says, are all to be joined together, "that they may all be one." In other words, the unity of the church is a unity with the apostles. We are to be made one with them. And since the primary task of the apostles was to give us the truth about Jesus, this unity is that of shared truth -- one faith delivered unto the saints, one record about Christ, one set of beliefs about Jesus given by the apostles. Thus the first basis of unity in the body of Christ is the unity of shared truth. We belong to one another.

Ron Ritchie and I were in Bellingham, Washington last May, and were invited to participate in a television panel on the subject of the church. The other two members of the panel were local ministers from the same denomination, a rather liturgically-oriented denomination. These men were disturbed by some of the things we shared about our Body Life services here. I don't think they cared much for the freedom of them, the openness, the absence of formula, the unstructured order, for they said, "We much prefer a more ordered service. We like to go back and feel that we have a tie with the Reformation church. When we go through the Order of Service, we know that we are doing it exactly as the Christians did in the days of the Reformation. This gives us a sense of security, for it ties us in to the ancient church." I leaned forward and said, "My dear brother, I could not agree with you more. I think it is very important that we be tied to the ancient church. But, you see, we don't stop with the Reformation; we go clear back to the days of the apostles, and are tied in with the early Christians who spread the gospel throughout the world in the 1st century."

This is what Jesus is saying. We are to be tied to the apostles. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, upon their witness to the historic Jesus. Our Lord goes on to say,

**"that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one."  
{John 17:21-22 RSV}**

Here is a different aspect of unity, based upon a glory which the Lord himself will give to the church, just as the Father had given it to him. What is this glory? Have you learned to ask yourself questions like this in your Bible study, and thus discovered the excitement of finding the clues which the Holy Spirit has given? Jesus speaks here of the glory which the Father had given him, which he gave to the church. What is that glory? You only have to look back to Verse 6 to find it: "I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world"; and to Verse 8: "I have given them the words which thou gavest me" -- the name and the words of God -- in other words, the power by which the Lord Jesus acted. He acted always in the Father's name, by the resources of the Father, and according to the directions, the words, of the Father.

Here then is the second level of unity -- not only shared truth, but shared power. The church is one when it operates from the same resource and by the same direction -- by the name and the words of God. This is the glory of the church.

Have you noticed that wherever the church begins to adopt the same means of operating as the world around, it immediately loses its distinctiveness and its power? As soon as we begin to try to accomplish things by organizational techniques, by mobilizing human resources, and by raising funds -- as though money were the only thing which could accomplish what is needed -- the church immediately becomes nothing more than another worldly organization trying to make its impress upon society. But when the church remembers that it has a unique power which is absolutely different than anything else -- the power of the living God in its midst, the name of God -- and that it has the Word of God to direct it, there is a glory in the church which no other organization can possibly rival. It is entirely different. This is what Jesus prays for, that this kind of glory will be visible.

Then the third aspect of unity, Verse 23: "I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one." That is the glory of a shared life. Jesus in us, the Father in him, and thus, in the remarkable words of Peter, we are made "partakers of the divine nature," {2 Pet 1:4}.

Do you believe that? Do you ever think of yourself as linked with the life of God -- so much so that you cannot be known or understood apart from that life? One of the reasons why we Christians are so weak is that we will not really believe these magnificent claims about us which Scripture sets forth. We always think they apply to someone else, to Paul and David and Abraham maybe, but not to us.

But God insists that we are the very ones whom he is talking about, that Jesus is in us, and God the Father is in the Son, and thus the Trinity indwells us by the Spirit, and we are linked with the life of God. The understanding of that is what produces unity among believers. Here is what Jesus is praying -- that we may understand the sharing of truth, the sharing of power, and the sharing of life, and that thus the church may be one.

What is the purpose of this unity? It is a strange kind of unity. What is it all about, and why does it exist? Twice our Lord tells us -- once in Verse 21: "so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me," and again in Verse 23: "so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me." First, that the world may believe something; and, second, that the world may know something:

First, that the world may believe that Jesus has come from God. When the church begins to demonstrate the unity of faith, the unity of shared truth, of shared power, shared life, the world is hit by an inescapable impression that Jesus is Lord, that he indeed holds the key to history and to reality, that he is indeed the revelation of the invisible God.

Now, the world may not accept this. That is another problem. But the purpose of the witness is not to convince everybody, but to give them a basis upon which they may decide. I think it is very important that we understand that the world is not necessarily going to be convinced. Many will be, thank God. Many will understand when they see that Jesus is Lord, and accept him. As Paul said, referring to himself, he was a savor of life unto life to some, and of death unto death to others; but in any case, God was glorified {cf, 2 Cor 2:14-16}. Here our Lord reflects that same idea. Evangelism, you see, is really intended to give everybody a chance to make an intelligent choice as to whether to accept or reject Jesus. It is to present before the world a unity so beautiful that the world will believe that Jesus is Lord. And, further, that they will know that Christians are loved by God as much as Jesus is loved by God. That is an amazing testimony, isn't it? But that is what constitutes the reason for our witness before the world. As John R. Stott has so ably put it,

Our motive must be concern for the glory of God; not the glory of the church or our own glory. Our message must be the gospel of God as given by Christ in his apostles, not the traditions of men or our own opinions. Our manpower must be the whole church of God, every member of it, not a privileged few who want to retain evangelism as their prerogative. And our dynamic must be the Spirit of God, not the power of human personality, organization, or eloquence. Without these priorities we shall be silent when we ought to be vocal.

So I think our Lord's emphasis on unity here is a tremendously helpful guide to our understanding of the process of evangelism and of witness before a waiting world.

In the last section of Jesus' prayer we have a request for the vision of the church:

**"Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them."**  
{John 17:24-26 RSV}

Jesus closes his prayer with a great, heartfelt expression of his desire that we may be with him in glory, that all who believe in his name, from the beginning of Pentecost until the end of time, may be with him in his glory. What a magnificent basis for our hope of heaven! And yet, as this makes so clear, heaven is made heaven only because we are with Christ. This is the hope of every believer, that one day we will be with him. As Paul said, "To depart and be with Christ is far better," {cf, 2 Cor 5:8-9}. And in many places Scripture brings that hope before us. The joy of the Christian is that in heaven we behold the glory of Jesus, the face of Jesus, the manifestation of all the glory which is in him.

I never tire of reading about some of the troubles and tribulations of the church in the past. One of my favorite periods is that of the old Scottish Covenanters, who stood strongly against the persecution involved in the Church of England's attempt to stamp out the evangelical faith in Scotland. Among them was that dear old Scottish leader, Samuel Rutherford. He was a gracious, godly man, and a great witness to the love of Jesus Christ. But he was placed in prison for his testimony, and while on his deathbed he was summoned by the king of England to appear in London to answer charges of heresy. Samuel Rutherford sent back a message: "Go and tell your master that I've a summons from a higher Court. And ere this message reaches him, I'll be where few kings or great folk ever come." Someone has gathered together Samuel Rutherford's letters from prison, in which he speaks of the joy of Jesus as he is with him there in that prison cell. Some of his words have been put into a song, one of my favorite hymns, which speaks of that glory which is to come:

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks;  
The summer morn I've sighed for, the fair, sweet morn awakes;  
Dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand,  
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

O Christ, He is the fountain, the deep sweet well of love!  
The streams on earth I've tasted, more deep I'll drink above;  
There to an ocean fullness His mercy doth expand,  
And glory, glory dwelleth in Immanuel's land.

It is a great hope! In the Scriptures we are not told a lot about heaven -- just enough to make us want to be there, not enough to make us take our own life to get there. But the hope set forth for us is that we will be with Jesus to behold his glory in answer to this prayer. But we don't have to wait for heaven. There is a sense in which this prayer is being answered right now. I think our Lord intended it this way, for in the Spirit we are able, right now, to behold the glory of Jesus. And it is the vision of that glory, of who Jesus is, which changes us. Paul tells us that we are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places. And in Second Corinthians he says,

**And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. {2 Cor 3:18 RSV}**

So the more we see and behold the glory of Jesus, the more we are being made like him -- even though we may not be aware the change is taking place. Have you experienced that? What is this glory? Our Lord defines it for us, Verse 26: "I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known [I'll continue to make it known throughout the course of the history of the church], that the love with which thou hast loved me may be

in them, and I in them." The glory of Jesus is the glory of love -- the love of God for man. That is what grips our hearts and changes our lives and makes us different people, forgives our sins, lifts us up again, and encourages our hearts. It is the realization that God indeed loves us as he loved Jesus.

I remember the story of the little boy who entered a Sunday school contest in reciting Bible verses. This little boy happened to be a cripple, a hunchback, who could hardly walk across the stage to recite the verses he had memorized. As he started to hobble across the stage as best he could, with his terribly humped back, an older boy who had come in off the street thoughtlessly cried out, "Hey, cripple, take the pack off your back!" The little boy broke down in tears, and couldn't go on. A man came up out of the audience and stood beside him. He said, "I don't know what kind of a person would make fun of a little crippled boy, but I want to tell you who this boy is. He's my son, and he's got more courage than any of you! And I'm proud of him, because he is mine!" And he picked him up in his arms and walked off the stage.

I think of that story often when I read a verse like this which sets forth the love of God for us. We can understand how God could love Jesus -- who wouldn't love him? But it is difficult for us to believe what Jesus says here -- that we are to grasp the fact that in the manifestation of Jesus' life in us, God the Father loves us that same way. In all our hunchbacked, crippled, broken, beaten condition, he stands beside us and says, "I'm proud of him; he's mine!" And he picks us up and carries us on through life. That is the glory which Jesus says we are to behold -- the glory of the love of God for us as individuals.

This past week I was in Michigan at a conference, and I heard a group singing the hymn, *Near the Cross*. My thoughts flashed back to a day in a park in northern Minnesota when I was just a boy fourteen years of age. I had just come to know the Lord Jesus three months before, and the glory of his presence filled my heart. I remember sitting in that park, all alone, singing that song with tears running down my face:

Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
There a precious fountain  
Free to all -- a healing stream,  
Flows from Calvary's mountain.

In the cross, in the cross,  
Be my glory ever;  
Till my raptured soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.

That is what Jesus is saying to us here. There is a hope of glory in the future, and a present availability of that glory to us now, so that we may manifest a unity of love among ourselves which will cause a waiting world to know -- even though they might not want to admit it -- that Jesus is Lord, and that God loves us just as he loved his Son.

Title: One Body  
Series: Secrets of the Spirit  
Scripture: John 17:20-26  
Message No: 12  
Catalog No: 3132  
Date: September 2, 1973

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