

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

"...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end"(John 13:1.)

The Communing Savior

The Believer's Relationship to One Another

John 15:12-17

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.

How many of you know someone famous? Anyone? I don't mean that you just know about someone famous, I mean you know and met someone famous? For most of us, we live fairly content lives only knowing about famous people. Perhaps there are people we might like to know and be able to call them "friend." I know that I would find it exciting to call John MacArthur a "friend" – someone whom I could call and talk about life, about the Lord and any number of things. There is any number of people that we might think it exciting to call "friend."

Just last month I took my family over to Tulsa to see a Christian concert. While there, I noticed one of the men getting things set up looked awfully familiar and my family and I were trying to place the face. Well, it turned out to be Josh Bentley, who was fairly well known in these parts for being one of the main personalities over at our local Christian radio station, KLRC. I have spoken with Josh on a half a dozen or so occasions, a very amiable fellow, but by no means a "friend". However, as I was staring intently at him, he stared intently back at me and we realized that while he was out of place, now working in Tulsa, and I was out of place, not from Tulsa, that we knew each other. Josh made me feel like a friend, introducing us to some of this co-workers and even with his busy schedule, trying to get things ready for a concert, Josh took 15 or 20 minutes to ask about life back over in NW Arkansas. So, maybe Josh is not "famous" but he is certainly one who made me feel like a "friend" if even for a few moments.

But let me ask you this, what if someone you considered famous, perhaps John MacArthur, or Kirk Cameron, or Sean Hannity, or whoever it is you might think of as famous, called you out from a crowd and said to you and everyone around you, "This is my friend?" Would that be special? Would that be exciting?

Having already read our text, let's take this thought to the next level. What would it be like if Jesus showed up in our church today, looked you straight in the eye and said, "Hello friend." And as He made His way to you, He stands you up and puts His arm around you and says, "You are my friend and I am so joyful that we share this friendship together?" Would that be amazing? Would that be a memorable experience? Of course it would. And from our text we find Jesus giving to His disciples the very basis upon which Jesus declares friendship with others? Did you catch that as we read it? What is the basis of friendship with Jesus according to the words of Jesus as found in our text? We might immediately look to verse 12 and say that the basis of this friendship is keeping His commandment. He even repeats this idea down in verse 17. But just what act of obedience is that best reflects our friendship with Jesus? Yes, we see it there at the

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end of verses 12 and 17, that basis being our love for one another. *The basis of our friendship with Jesus is revealed most practically and vividly in how well we rightly love one another.* How is that for a most revealing thought?

To put this another way, how we love one another is the demonstrable means by which we can measure and know we are abiding, remaining, living, dwelling, staying in Jesus and His love. And as most of well knows, it is only thing to profess that we abide in Jesus and abide in His love and yet quite another thing to practice this abiding. And so, according to the testimony of our Lord Jesus, I submit to you that the most tangible and real means we have of knowing that we are friends of Jesus and are abiding in Him and His love is when we rightly love one another. And from our text, I would like to examine three points by which, if we practice such things, result in rightly loving one another and thus fulfill the command of Jesus, revealing ourselves to be the friends of Jesus. Therefore, in order to rightly fulfill the command of Jesus to "love one another" we must...

I. Consider the Priority to Love (15:12)

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

For those of you that like simply, straightforward formulas, then you ought to really appreciate this first point, that we ought to consider the priority of love. Jesus presents an easy to remember equation that goes as follows:

My commandment = that you love one another

Let us take note of a couple of things here. First, notice that Jesus calls this **"My commandment"** – its His; it is coming from the Rabbi, the Teacher, the Son of God. Jesus is speaking and out of love for His disciples, He instructs and commands them to love one another. Notice that it is in the singular. This is not just one of many commandments in a long list of commandments, but rather this one commandment serves as the most important, the command of highest priority. Beloved, Jesus has commanded the disciples already to "abide" in Him and to "abide or continually stay" in His love. This commandment is not an additional one that is added to those previous, but rather this command is the summation, it is the realization of all the other commands rolled into one. This is why we must consider it a priority...whatever this commandment is; it stands at the top of the other commands already given. If then we wish to obey Jesus Christ, then it is by the fulfilling of this commandment that we will know we are in fact being obedient. This command is of greatest priority and the command is stated so simply, so elegantly "that you love, you "agapao" one another." Remember that our basic definition of love is this, "seeking the highest good of another regardless of the cost." This is to be our priority. This is to be our pursuit. But let us notice something else and that is the standard of this love.

Jesus sets the standard for this love in a most dramatic way saying that disciples of His are to love one another, ***"just as I have loved you."*** In the same fashion, in the same manner, with the same passion and intensity that Jesus has revealed His love for us, we are to likewise love one another. Do you remember that term "just as" from last week? In John 15:9 Jesus had said, ***"Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you."*** May I remind you that we examined this love as being a permanent, professing, plenteous, personal, protecting and pre-

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eminent love? We examine how the Father manifested this love to the Son and then examined how the Son manifested such love to His own disciples. And now, "just as" such love was revealed to us, we are called to so love one another. Such a love is not to be seen as optional or even occasional for the Greek text actually reads, "you keep on loving one another just as I have forever revealed my love for you."

Beloved, that is a high standard. In fact it is the highest standard. In fact the standard here is so high that we are reminded that apart from being in Christ and Christ being in us, we have no hope of fulfilling this command. Neither myself, nor Christ is calling anyone of you here to love one another by yourself. You cannot muster enough compassion, or enough devotion or even enough determination to love at this level. Such a love cannot be done alone; it cannot be done without God and it cannot be produced naturally. Before you can love others like this, you must first be found in Jesus; you must first recognize you need of Jesus; confessing yourself to be a sinner who naturally does not want to abide in Jesus and does not naturally want to obey Jesus and who, because of such things, because he lives in such conflict with God, deserves God's wrath rather than His love. Once such things are confessed and a person calls upon the name of Jesus for salvation, such a heart is transformed, it is changed; it takes delight in the Word of God; it finds pleasure in the commandments of Christ; and it begins to express its love for God and for Jesus by making the children of God the object of all spiritual affection. For here is the truth, you cannot rightly be loving Jesus Christ if you are not seeking to love the brethren even as Jesus Christ loves the brethren. How is that for a standard? How is that for a priority to be considered? We must ask ourselves, "Do I love the brethren even as Jesus has loved me?" But how is this even possible? Of course we will never fully love as Jesus loved us on this side of glory, but there is joy in pursuing it nonetheless. Therefore, in order to rightly fulfill the command of Jesus to "love one another" we must not only consider the priority of the commandment to love, but we must secondly...

II. Carry out the Principles of Love (15:13-14)

13 Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are My friends if you do what I command you.

In verses 13-14 we have some basic principles by which we can determine the genuineness of our love for one another. The question is simply this, do we see in our lives these principles of love being carried out. For once again Jesus makes a very simple equation for us to follow saying:

Greater love = that one lay down his life for his friends

If we were to try to answer the question, "How does this love Jesus speaks of reveal itself; what does it look like?" we find some answers here in these verses. There are at least three I would have you take note of, asking yourself, "Do I carry out these principles in my life, in my expression of loving the brethren?"

1. Love gives willingly

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

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Notice that Jesus says, ***"that one lays down"***... there is to be a willing determination in true godly love. We know that Jesus is speaking first and foremost of the example He would provide. And we know that Jesus freely and willingly gave Himself to be our Savior. God the Father did not in glory coerce Jesus to be the Savior. Jesus did not come begrudgingly to this earth. In John 10:14-18 we read some familiar words of Jesus that speak of His willingness to express such love. Read along with me:

14 I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, 15 even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. 17 For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father.

No one took the life of Jesus but He willingly, by His own authority gave His life and therefore expressed His love. And this then becomes the first principle by which we might judge the validity of our love for others, asking the question: Am I doing what I am doing willingly? This is the test of whether such a love is really Christlike. Am I willingly offering the pursuit of the highest good of another or am I doing it begrudgingly? Do I find myself saying or thinking that no one appreciates me around here? Perhaps we think something like, "Why do I even bother when no one seems to care?"

Such questions come to us, do they not? But when they come, let us be aware that it may indicate that we are not loving as willingly as we are called by Jesus to love. It can be terribly frustrating to feel as if you are carrying one end of the log and nine other people are carrying the other end; but the point here is that love, if it from God, is given willingly. Remember 2 Corinthians 9:7 – God loves a what?... a cheerful, willing giver.

By saying love gives willingly, let me also point out that such a willingness implies activity rather than passivity. Love is active, not passive. In 1 Corinthians 13 we learn that love is patient and kind. Love is an active expression. Love willingly and purposes sets out to do something positive. Sometimes we think love is expressed so long as we didn't do something; because I didn't hurt someone. We might think that so long as we don't bother someone, we are loving them. That is not the kind of love Jesus is calling us to here. Love is seeking, it is pursuing, it is hunting for the highest good of another. A passive love is not truly love at all? Is there passivity in your love for the brethren today? Can it be said of you that you are actively engaged in expressing love for the brethren? This is the way in which Jesus says a person may know themselves to be abiding in Christ.

2. Love gives generously

In addition to love giving willingly, love also gives generously or fully. In our text Jesus says ***"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life..."*** Again, if we see Jesus as the prime example here, we know that the giving of His life is truly the giving of real life. God spared no expense in pour out the blood of His most precious Son, Jesus Christ so that those

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

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who believe might receive the most generous gift ever given to humanity, eternal life through Jesus. Earlier in this gospel, in John 6:35 and 37, Jesus said,

I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst...All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.

There is a great generosity in the love expressed to us in Jesus Christ that not only gives, but continues to give, over and over, completely satisfying the believer. This is how we are called to love...generously. Can it be said of your love that you satisfy those who come to you; that you give...not the minimum, but all that you can to encourage and edify others. This giving is not about money...I know many a generous persons express such generosity by means other than simply money. It is a generous person who makes you feel like you are the only one in the room when you are speaking to him. It is the generous person who takes the time to be an encouragement when it is well known that she herself is busy. Does this describe your love of the brethren? But there is one more way in which we might see how love gives...

3. Love gives sacrificially

Taking in the fullness of verse 13 again we read, ***"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends"*** The way this is constructed in the Greek reads in such a way as to demonstrate the substitutionary and sacrificial nature of true love saying, ***"that on lay down his life in the place or of in the stead of his friends."*** Let me just say it this way...true love; honestly loving the brethren, according to this verse (and many others like it) cost something. True love will always cost something. And so, if your expression of love does not cost you something, then it is not a true expression of love. Too often we "love" someone simply in order to get something back from him or her. If you were to take the time to examine you love for the brethren, what would you see? Would you see that you were doing just enough to get by and to receive the "kickbacks" or benefits that person offers? Would you see that you were putting on some kind of show for others to see? Would you see in your love an undue preoccupation with self and self-interests? Or would you see the fruits of giving yourself to the benefit of others so that others succeed, so that others grow, so that others belong?

True love costs something. Love is not a wage or salary...if you work this many hours then I will love. Consider that the love of God for the world cost Him the fellowship and blood of His own beloved Son. Did the love of God cost something? Consider that the love of Jesus for His own cost Him fellowship with the Father, undue suffering and His own life. And now, just as Jesus has loved us, let us consider that the love of believers for one another will and must cost something, time, resources, even self.

Let me take you quickly through some of 1 and 2 John where we see this teaching of Jesus in the Upper Room Discourse summarized. We read in 1 John 2:3-6:

3 By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

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truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

Verse three begins with keeping the commandments. When we keep the commandments, we know then the love of God according to verse 5. And in verse 6, this love of God means we are abiding and walking in Him, that we are abiding in love. According to verse 6, the one who says he abides in Jesus "ought" to willingly walk, just as Jesus did and love just as Jesus did. And then over in 1 John 3:16 we read this:

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

This sounds an awful lot like, ***"Great love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."*** Beloved, the greatest expression of our obedience to Jesus, of our love for Jesus is practicing and perfecting the love of Jesus with one another. In fact, it is the only way by which we can measure our love for Christ and for God. Let us look at 1 John 4:7-8 and 11-12...

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love...11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.

The love of Jesus for us was willing, generous and sacrificial. Our love for one another is to mimic this and be likewise willing, generous and sacrificial. Let us strive to love one another all the more and carry out these principles of love. For only as we do this can verse 14 be true of us, ***"You are My friends if you do what I command you."*** And what is the command...that we would love one another as Christ has loved us.

III. Confirm the Product of Love (15:15-17)

15 No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. 17 This I command you, that you love one another.

Let us quickly then consider the last point. In order to rightly fulfill the command of Jesus to ***"love one another"*** we must not only consider the priority of the commandment to love, and carry out the principles of love, but we must all confirm the product of love. The realities of this love being in us must produce some tangible results. Let me say this...love is the root of all good and godly fruit. Without this supernatural, willing, generous, sacrificial love, there will be no true spiritual fruit borne in our lives. (Example of an artichoke heart – all the leaves are connected)

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

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But just what is it then that confirms for us that our love is producing the "right" things? I find in these final verses three confirmations we can seek to validate our love for one another as being genuine.

1. Are you instructed by Jesus?

First, are you instructed by Jesus? Notice in verse 15 that we are no longer in the position of slaves who do not know what the master is doing, but rather we are friends, beloved, to whom Jesus makes this extraordinary promise, that He will make known to His friends "all things that [He] has heard from [His] Father..." How about it, are you being instructed by Jesus? Are you an informed follower of Jesus Christ? Do you believe that in Jesus Christ you are perfect and complete, lacking in nothing?

Jesus holds nothing back from His followers. Indeed everything you need for life and godliness is found in Him? No, Jesus holds nothing back...the problem is that we may not be sitting at Jesus feet, willing to receive what it is He has for us. Sometimes His instruction brings conviction of sin, reminding us of the reality of sin in our lives...but we cannot love the brethren rightly if sin is not confessed and repented of. Sometimes His instruction brings great insight and joy into our understanding of life or of God. But we cannot love the brethren rightly if we are not sharing those truths with one another.

2. Are you chosen by Jesus?

Second, are you chosen by Jesus? Beginning in verse 16 we are reminded of the truth that it is Jesus who does the choosing. Jesus says here that He chooses by Himself, for Himself. He has chosen His own not only for eternal life, but in the meantime to be doing three things...going, bearing and abiding. Notice that Jesus appointed three things. First, to go...or more literally to keep on going. We are appointed to be going for the kingdom, to be proclaiming the good news that Jesus Christ is man's only savior. Do you keep on going for Jesus?

Second, we are to "bear fruit" or more literally to keep on bearing fruit...there is to be continual evidence of our growth in Jesus Christ, those manifestations of His working in us, manifestations that include the fruit of the Spirit...that love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control are more and more the reality of our lives. Do you keep on bearing fruit for Jesus?

Finally, we are appointed to bear fruit that would remain. The word for "remain" here is the same word found ten times in verses 4-10...the word abide. The appointment here is to keep on bearing abiding fruit, fruit that is meaningful, fruit that glorifies God, fruit that is beneficial to other believers, thus demonstrating your love for them. Does your fruit keep on remaining? Remaining or abiding in what...in love; love for one another, love for Jesus and love for God.

3. Are you obeying Jesus?

This I command you, that you love one another.

The final confirmation we are called to can be asked in the form of the question, "Are you obeying Jesus." Jesus ends this section of teaching by stating for the third time the need to heed the command to love one another. Perhaps you are tired of hearing it yourself. Love one another; love one another; love one another.

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

"...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end"(John 13:1.)

John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

John 15:12

This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

John 15:17

This I command you, that you love one another.

Why this three-fold call to love one another? Remember what the disciples were doing just before Jesus gives them this sermon. In Luke 22:24, these men were disputing amongst themselves about who was to be the greatest among them. They were exhibiting jealousy, envy and pride. We see a lot of ourselves in the disciples, do we not? We must not grow weary in hearing the repeated call to love one another but rather constantly be willingly, generously and sacrificially giving ourselves to increasing displays of abiding in the love of Jesus, by loving one another as He has loved us.

This will take effort. This will take thought. This will cost you something. But there is no greater joy to be had than to obey Jesus Christ and if that were not enough, there is a great joy in loving others even as Jesus has loved us. Let us pursue such love with all heart and all diligence to the glory of God.

Soli Deo Gloria

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