

# † 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 Praying Savior – John 17**

### **The Lessons from Jesus' Prayer – John 17:1-26**

#### **Seven Characteristics of the Church: Love (John 17:25-26)**

***O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.***

We come this morning to the final two verses of the high priestly prayer of Jesus; this prayer in which Jesus both speaks to the Father, giving honor, praise and petition to the Father for the remaining work to be accomplished as He prepares for the cross, but He also speaks before the disciples, teaching them about God, about His plans and purposes.

And beginning back in verse 13 we began to outline seven markers; seven characteristics of the church that Jesus prays for; that these might be evident among His followers. Jesus has prayed for joy, that His people would be marked by a delight to bring glory to God (17:13). He has prayed for His people to be holy, to be set apart and committed to God's purposes (17:14-16). He prayed that they might be a people of truth, governed, living according to the directives of God's Word (17:17). He prayed that they would be a people of mission, being sent into the world to declare God's Word (17:18-21). The followers of Jesus are also to express unity, even as the Father and the Son are one, that Christians be one in purpose and intent (17:22-23). And last week, we saw that the followers of Jesus are to be a people of hope, a people who know and live in light of the promises of God (17:24). Jesus promises that if He goes, He will come back again so that all who believe in Him might be where He is. This is our hope; Jesus is coming again for us.

This brings us to the final marker; the final characteristic of the church that Jesus includes in this prayer. The final marker is that of love. Jesus intends for His people to be a people of love. We find this expressed at the end of verse 26, ***“so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them...”*** In these verses then we find Jesus defining for us what is love; or what love is like. Jesus did not give here an exhaustive definition for love. If we were to go through the Scriptures and devise a definition for love, it would mostly likely be far more detailed than what Jesus presents here. For rather than an exhaustive definition, Jesus gives to us a practical definition for love, one that can easily and readily be applied to our lives. So, I for one am grateful for the simplicity presented to us here as we seek to know how to express the love of God.

One final observation before we look at our text and that is this; that Jesus does not petition the Father here that love might be made evident among and in His people. We do not see Jesus saying as He did in verse 24, “Father, My desire; My determination and request...is for My people to be hopeful.” Rather, Jesus simply makes a statement of fact. Jesus declares the truth, that His people will be a people who know and express the love of God. The followers of Jesus *will* express and experience the love with which the Father loved the Son. So, how can this come to pass? How is it that the church might express the love of God? I believe our text offers us three keys to unlocking how we express the love of God. We will take them one at a time.

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## I. To express the love of God we must know God (17:25a)

“O righteous Father....”

As we look at the first three words of our text I would ask you to be struck with the fact that Jesus is telling His disciples and us something we need to know about God. He is giving very specific and special revelation about God. Jesus calls Him “righteous Father.” This is not the first time Jesus has used the word Father or even a qualifier with the word “Father.” This prayer begins in verse one with Jesus simply using the word “Father” expressing His own intimacy with God. Later, in verse 11, Jesus calls God “Holy Father” in order to set God apart from anything impure or unholy. And here then in verse 25, Jesus again uses a qualifier, He gives insight into the nature and quality of God by calling Him “righteous Father.” This is the testimony of Jesus concerning God; that He is both righteous and Father.

A casual glance at this phrase might cause us to miss some important insights. Upon consideration, these two words “righteous” and “Father” are almost seemingly contradictory. They have some conflicting agendas that we need to wrestle with. For any Jew, and the first hearers of this prayer were Jews, the term “righteous” was rich and powerful, particularly in reference to God. In both the Old and New Testaments, the word “righteous” speaks of that which is right; absolutely right; without any wrong; without any injustice. With reference to God, the word “righteous” would remind anyone familiar with the Scriptures that God is perfectly right and His ways are absolutely correct. There is no variation, no shifting, nothing shady about God and His ways. “Righteous” speaks to us of God’s standards. Because God is righteous, He sets the standards, He sets the rules. He is the Creator who knows how we are meant to live and anyone who chooses to live otherwise actually lives in death. If we choose not to play by His rules we lose the game. Because He makes the rules, He is also the Judge and rightfully condemns all who break His rules. The word “righteous” in reference to God speaks of His unbending practice of justice toward all who violate His standards.

In contrast to this, Jesus speaks of God also as “Father”. Now, for a Jew at the time of Jesus, to refer to God as the Father of the nation of Israel would be acceptable. But what really burned the religious leaders of Jesus’ day was that He constantly referred to God as His Father, in very specific and intimate terms. He would say things like found in John 3:35 and John 5:20 saying, “...**the Father love the Son...**” Jesus presented the Father in terms of affection, gentleness, tenderness and acceptance. Again, seemingly in stark contrast to the idea behind righteous. So how do we reconcile these two ideas of “righteous” – perfect, unbending, attention to full justice; and of “Father” – loving, tender, forgiving, and accepting?

Here beloved is the gospel. Here we find the very purpose for Jesus going to the cross. For Jesus is the reconciler. He is the one who makes peace for us before God. For if we are ever to express and experience the love of God, we must be made righteous and be brought into a condition in which we can be adopted, made sons of God so that we can call Him Father. How did Jesus do this?

You will sometimes hear preachers speak of the active and passive obedience of Jesus. When we speak of the active obedience of Jesus, we mean the very life that Jesus lived on this earth. Jesus became a man and dwelt among men. Jesus was tempted in every way as we are, yet He never sinned. He actively lived a perfect life; a righteous life. This allowed Him to be the perfect sacrifice because He was shown to be without spot or blemish. How do we know Jesus

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never sinned? Well, we have the testimony of Scripture. In Romans 1:4 we are told that Jesus was declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. You see, if Jesus had committed just one sin, then God would not have raised Him from the dead. The Son of God is God and God does not sin. In 1 John 2:1, Jesus is referred to “**Jesus Christ, the righteous.**” Why is this important? Because, in the righteousness and wisdom of God, He promised that all who would believe and trust in the perfect life of Christ, believing that Christ alone by His life and death merited the title “righteous” – that these would be granted His righteousness. The righteous life of Christ would be imputed or transferred to those who believe so that as God looks at them, He does not see their unrighteousness and their imperfections, but rather He sees the righteousness of His Son, Jesus Christ. **Dr. Robert L. Reymond defines the active obedience of Christ as:** “Christ’s full obedience to all the prescriptions of the divine law...[making] available a perfect righteousness before the law that is imputed or reckoned to those who put their trust in him. So, when God looks upon those who believe in His Son, He sees them as having lived the perfect life of Christ. We read this in 1 Corinthians 1:30, “**But by His [God’s] doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption...**” We have this because of the active obedience of Christ.

The passive obedience of Christ is found in His death on the cross when He became the substitute for sinners. **Dr. Robert L. Reymond defines the passive obedience of Christ as:** “[Christ’s] willing obedience in bearing all the sanctions imposed by that law against his people because of their transgression...[being] the ground of God’s justification of sinners (Rom. 5:9), by which divine act they are pardoned...” So, when Jesus used the word “righteous” with reference to God, it would have reminded the disciples and it reminds us of how unrighteous we are apart from Christ. For the Lord, the Righteous Judge has said in Ezekiel 18:3, “**the soul who sins will die.**” The soul who violates any part of My standards and My ways will be condemned to death. And the problem we have is stated in Romans 3:23, “**for all have sinned (each of us has turned to our own ways in opposition to God’s ways) and fall short of the glory of God.**” Because of Christ active obedience, His perfect keeping of the standards or righteous of God, He could by His passive obedience become the substitute, the sin sacrifice for all who believe. We read this in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “**He [God] made Him [Jesus] who knew no sin to be sin [our sin sacrifice, our substitute] on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**”

And having become the righteousness of God in Jesus, God can now be that tender, loving, forgiving Father. Because of what Jesus accomplished on the cross, we can say with Jesus, “Father, Holy Father, Righteous Father” and know that in Jesus our sin is forgiven, that we have been made right and have been adopted as sons. I believe C.S. Lewis said, “*The Son of God became the Son of Man so that the sons of men might become the sons of God.*” If we are to express the love of God we must know God. We must know Him as righteous and as holy. We must know ourselves to be unrighteous and unholy apart from the imputed merits of Jesus in our lives that comes only as we believe. We need to know these truths and other like truths about God who is our “righteous Father.” This implies a seeking and a digging into the source of all such truth, the Word of God. To express the love of God, we must know God. Do you know Him?

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## II. To express the love of God we must know God intimately (17:25b-26a)

“...although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known...”

This brings us to our second point with is simply an expansion upon the first. If we are to express the love of God, we must know God...(adding one word)...intimately. While the theme of verses 25-26 is clearly centered around love; love is not the key word. It should be obvious what the key word in our text is. It is the word “known.” Jesus uses the word “known” five times in these two verses. The first three in verse 25 are the same verb while the two usages in verse 26 is a verb that comes from the verb in verse 25. Some of you have heard this word before, the word “ginosko”. It is the verb “to know” and as is often the case, its use here is meant to convey the idea of perceiving, of fully realizing, of understanding something completely. It means to know something by experience, repeated experience. In short, this verb is to know something intimately. Jesus uses this verb and its variation to set up an important contrast between the world, Himself and His followers. Let us consider this phrase by phrase.

If we are to express the love of God, we must know God intimately. Now, look at what Jesus says first about the world in verse 25, **“although the world has not known You...”** The world, those who do not believe, have no intimate, practical knowledge of God. Sure, many might know some facts about God. They might even know that God is righteous and that He is a Father, but they do not come to know or realize this on a personal or intimate level.

The world does not know or understand the ways of God. In fact, the world does everything it can to ignore or even deny the ways of God. God who created them, who understands what is best for them, who has provided everything necessary for them to truly live have seen the life and ways of God not as life, but rather has bondage. In Psalm 2, the nations cry out, **“Let us tear off their fetters and cast their chords from us.”** Because the world is not intimate with God and does not know God, they see God as a killjoy to life; as limiting life, rather than as the giver of life. And as Romans 1 so aptly declares, they **“exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator...” (Romans 1:25).** And so, God gave them over, Romans 1 tells us to worship themselves, to worship sex, power, wealth; those thing that will not bring them life and not allow them to ever experience the intimacy of God.

In contrast to the worlds’ not knowing, not being intimate with God, notice what Jesus next said about Himself, **“...yet I have known You...”** In contrast to the world’s ignorance of God, Jesus said, “I have known...I have been fully intimate with You.” Who has ever been as intimate with God the Father as Jesus? Both in eternity past as well as while He walked the face of the earth. No one has ever been as fully intimate and has fully known God and His ways like Jesus. We learn of this from John 1:1, **“In the beginning was the Word [Jesus], and the Word [Jesus] was with [face to face in intimate relationship] God, and the Word was God.** How intimate was Jesus with the Father as He was on the earth? Repeated we find Jesus saying things like that found in John 5:20-21, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing; and the Father will show Him greater works than**

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**these, so that you will marvel.”** Jesus knew all things that the Father was doing. That is intimacy.

Let me describe this intimacy this way. I have often used the analogy of God's decree to save sinners as the result of a divine counsel where God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit determined both who and how to save sinners. Sometimes we can picture it as a great deliberation as the three members of the Godhead hash out all the details. Yet the more accurate truth is that God the Father decreed salvation and instantaneously the Son and the Spirit were in agreement. There was no wondering if this was the best way, or who would perform what role in salvation. It was not like the Holy Spirit argued whether or not He could be the Redeemer. They are all so intimately knowing of each other that the will of the Father is the will of the Son and of the Spirit. And all of this is done with the utmost of affection, adoration and attention to bring glory to the Godhead. This is intimacy. This is how well known the Father is to the Son.

But then Jesus moves on, bring another facet into this contrast with the world. The world has not known God intimately, but the Son has; and now, moving on in the text, **“and these have known that You sent Me.”** The “these” in the text refers back to all believers, all those who come to believe in Jesus because of the preaching of Apostles (17:20). Jesus says that these, My followers, have come to be intimate with You. To be sure, the followers of Jesus are not as intimate with the Father as Jesus, but they are becoming increasingly intimate; knowing the most important truth, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Those who are intimate with God know that God is holy and righteous. They know that they are not holy and righteous and unless God intervene, they deserve to die. But they also know that God sent His Son to save all who would believe. They have become intimate enough with God to know why Jesus came and that Jesus came for them.

I was reading through Psalm 139 and one of the verses stuck me as it relates to this. David wrote in verse 3, **“You [God] scrutinize my path [the righteous Judge] and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways.”** David understands this universal truth, that God knows us intimately. Even before there is a word on our tongue, God knows it. Before we even know ourselves what action we will take, God knows it. We know this to be true of God, but beloved, our desire ought to be, as best we can, to make the reverse true, that we might become intimately acquainted with God; to know His thoughts and ways. To be sure, it will never be to the same extent as God is intimate with us, but Jesus prays and said that His people are intimately acquainted with their need of salvation and of who God is and what God is like. In fact, in verse 26, He promises to keep the revelation of God going by saying, **“...and I have made Your name known to them [God's character] and will make it known [continue to reveal the knowledge of God to that the people of God might intimately know Him].**

Can you imagine being so intimate with God. What a joy! What a privilege! And Jesus has continued to reveal God to us in the most intimate of ways by means of His Word. To express the love of God we must know God intimately. We must know His promises, know His commandments, and know our need of salvation by means of His Son.

At this point let me challenge your thinking for a moment. Do you truly long to know God better? Is it your hearts desire to know Him more; and to know Him intimately? Then what is keeping you from that pursuit? What are the excuses you use to justify picking up only scraps

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and morsels from a bountifully filled table of delicacies of which there is no end? Do you settle for a spiritual "slim fast" when you've been called to partake of the King's table? I love the challenge offered by Charles Spurgeon:

*"Make a point, whenever you receive a promise from God, to get all you can out of it. If you carry out that rule, it is wonderful what you will gain. Some go on the principle of getting as little as possible out of God's word. Such a plan may be wise with a man's word, but God's word is to be understood at the maximum, for he will do exceedingly abundantly above what you ask or even think."*

### III. To express the love of God we must know the love of God (John 17:26b)

*"...so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."*

I keep saying to you that to express the love of God we must know God and we must know Him intimately. I have purposely avoided giving a definition of the love of God until we found ourselves considering the last point. I worked long and hard on the title of this last point. It is quite profound, so let's consider it. To express the love of God, we must know the love of God.

I have often defined love for you in this pulpit. A few of my more favorite definitions of love include the following, *"Love is a one-way, unconditional commitment of the will that seeks the highest good of another regardless of the cost."* And here's another, *"Love is an enduring commitment of the will to care about and benefit another person by righteous, truthful, and compassionate thoughts, words and actions."* These are fundamentally good and sound definitions. The truth of the matter is we could delve much deeper and never exhaust the meaning of love. But Jesus keeps things really simple for us here in our text. The way He defines love for us is straight-forward. After making these statements about who God is and knowing versus not knowing God, He gives us the reason why this knowing is so important by saying, ***"so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."***

So how does Jesus define love here? If we take verses 25-26 together, we must conclude that love is this – it is knowing God and being known by Him. Love is being intimate with God and God being intimate with you. To express the love of God we must know the love of God. Do you know God? Are you intimate with God? Is it your desire to be with God and increasing in your love and affection for Him?

Remember that Jesus is not making a petition here. He is not asking the Father to make the disciples express love. Rather, He simply states the truth that His people will be a people who know and express the love with which the Father loved the Son; that these would know and be intimate with such love.

I don't know if we can begin to fathom the depths of this statement. We have already noted that the Father loves the Son, but now Jesus states that the same level of love with which the Father loved the Son would be found "in them." The phrase "in them" implies both their own personal experience, the idea is that God's love is "within" them; as well as their outwardly expressed corporate experience, the idea that God's love is expressed "among" them.

What does it mean to experience the same love with which the Father loved the Son? It means to be known by God and to know God. Jesus says in effect, The same manner in which You have expressed Your affection, adoration, zealous devotion, care, goodness and all Your

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kindness toward Me, this same love, this same affection with which You love Me will be in them, evident among them, experienced with the intensity, the intimacy, and the wonder of the love You express toward Me. I just said this, but this is to be our experience personally as well as our expression corporately. How is it that such a great love could be manifest in and expressed among us? Because Jesus says, **“and I in them.”** Because Jesus dwells in us by faith, we have the assurance of the love of God, for where Christ dwells, there dwells the love of God. Have you experienced this love of God? Does Christ dwell in you? How can you know? Because when Christ dwells in you, you will have an increasing love for God as well as an increasing desire to express the love of God, this intimate knowledge of God with others, both your brothers and sisters in Christ as well as to an unbelieving world.

So, if we are to express the love of God as Jesus says His people will, we must know God, which I believe is a call to be in the Word, get to know God and His will more and more thoroughly. Then we must come to know God intimately. We need to take those facts and truths that we read about God and about ourselves and apply them to our lives. I might know how to turn on a car and drive. I can read how to do it. I can have all the facts, but unless I apply that knowledge and get in the car, turn it on and drive, I will never become intimate with driving. If we never seek to apply the things we read and hear about God from His word, we will never become intimate with Him. And finally, if we are to express the love of God as Jesus says His people will, we must know the love of God, we must not only define love in terms of knowing God and being known by God, but we must seek to live in that love with the same intensity and commitments Jesus did to the glory of God.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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