

John (Part 21)

John 13:15-14:6 Jesus' New Commandment : Love Others More Than Self

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 17-Mar-87; Sermon #BS-JO21

When we left off the last time, we were in John 13:15. I want to begin in verse 16 and flip back to Philippians 2, because I just want to say a few words regarding something that I said the last time.

John 13:15-17 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, 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.

I mentioned, as kind of an introduction to chapter 13, that if there was any part of the book of John that revealed the mind of our God any better, I do not know what it is. It certainly shows His approach to life, and you might say, the basis for everything that He does. It has its basis in humility.

That is what makes Philippians 2 so very important to us as a guide to what our attitude ought to be toward one another as we go through this life. If we do have our minds the way that Philippians 2 says, we are going to grow, there is just no doubt about it. The subject here is unity, and what it will take to promote it, to cause it to grow. Paul tells us in Philippians 2:2 that being of one accord, of one mind, requires that this be done:

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

We are going to get to a principle regarding Christian life just a little bit later, that I know that I had not understood as clearly as I understand now, and that is, what this new commandment that Christ gave to us is. What do you think it is?

He says, "You should love one another." But it says way back in Leviticus that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, so what is new about what Christ said? Christ does not lie, and if He says that what He was saying is new, it must be new.

Philippians 2:3-5 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,...

John 13 shows you that mind working, in a very clear way. There is a word-picture there that just cannot be misunderstood. Whoever would have thought God would be wiping the feet of His creation? Wiping the feet of His betrayer? That is almost unthinkable.

Normally, you would think of God in tremendous glory. You think of Him as being wise, beyond understanding; being intelligent beyond our capabilities—we cannot even imagine it. We can think of God as having power, we can think of Him as destroying His enemies, blasting people into submission. We can think of Him bringing things into existence. Yet, the very basis of what He is, is illustrated in John 13. It is His approach to life: He is a servant.

He shows that He is perfectly capable of carrying out the meanest of responsibilities, and doing it in a good attitude. He does not conceitedly think of Himself as so great that this is above Him, or beneath Him. If it is needed, He will do it. It is interesting that He did not delegate it. He did not come in and say, “John, you take care of that,” or, “Peter, why did you not do that?” It needed to be done, it was a good vehicle for teaching a lesson, and He took it and went with it.

Philippians 2:6 ... who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,...

It means that He did not clutch at it, He did not grasp it to His bosom as though He was afraid it was going to get away from Him. He did not hang onto it with a desperation like we would tend to do. By nature, we tend to want to hang on to our possessions. I am not saying that is totally wrong, but when you consider giving up being God—that is a pretty big sacrifice.

Philippians 2:7 ... but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

The verb there, translated “made,”—“He *made* Himself”—is literally the verb in the Greek that means *to pour*. He poured Himself out.

You know what happens if you have a vessel, like a milk carton that if filled with milk.

When you pour something out, something displaces the milk that is pouring out. In the case of milk, it is air that displaces the milk.

In the case of God, when He poured Himself out, He poured out His divinity, His deity. What came into the gap was humanity. Maybe that is too literal of a description, but in a sense, that is exactly what occurred. How that occurred, I do not know. I do not know the mechanics of it, I only know that that is what Paul said occurred—"He poured Himself out"—and of course, something came into the form, taking the form of a servant.

The word for *form* is *morphe* in the Greek, and it means "the essential being." The Greeks have two words that are translated into the English *form*. One is *morphe*, and the other is *schema*. *Schema* simply means the "outward appearance." Paul is not talking about the outward appearance here, he is talking about the essential being. So He poured out the essential being, and what became what we saw, what man saw, was humanity. He really was a man, that is what Paul is saying. It was not fake in any way. God was poured out of Him, and coming in the likeness of men.

Philippians 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

When Jesus said, beginning in John 13:15, "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you," I hope you see it in its broader application. He of course means that we should wash one another's feet. But He is far more interested in its much more broader application, that we should take on ourselves the form a servant, that we should pour ourselves out, and be what He was, that is, a servant. That was His approach to life. We should help one another, and serve one another, and look out for one another's interest. It can be monetarily, it can be in the form of encouragement, it can be in the form of services that are performed, it can be in the form of well-speaking of, or refraining from gossiping about somebody. There are all kinds of ways that we can serve one another in humility.

John 13:15-17 For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant [that is you and me] is not greater than his master [Christ]; nor is he who is sent [Christ] greater than he who sent him [the Father]. If you know these things, blessed [happy] are you if you do them.

He is promising us that there will be a benefit that comes from being this way: we will be happy. We will have blessings. This word *happy* is exactly the same word that is used in Matthew 5, where we have the Beatitudes. "Blessed are the poor in spirit." That word *blessed* in Matthew 5 is translated *happy* in John 13:17. "Blessed are you if you do them."

John 13:18-20 "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me.' Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

This quote in verse 18 is taken from Psalm 41:9. David had apparently been going through some sort of a trial, and he recorded this:

Psalm 41:9 Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me.

I do not know exactly what David was going through. Jesus quoted from that, because it certainly applied to the situation that He was experiencing right at that time.

In Psalm 55:12, David is probably talking about Ahithophel, who was one of his counselors and who became his betrayer, switching over to Absalom when Absalom rebelled.

Psalm 55:12-14 For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; then I could hide from him. But it was you, a man my equal, my companion and my acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in the throng.

To a Middle Easterner, to take a piece of bread and eat with a person, in the way that was done here, was a sign of loyalty. You can see what is occurring here. What we see, beginning in John 13:18, is a final appeal to Judas, because Jesus knew who it was that was going to betray him. Jesus was giving him every opportunity to change his mind, giving him every chance to repent, every chance to back out of what he was about to

do.

You can see God's mind working here. He did not attack Judas, but He kept trying to do acts of kindness towards Judas. He is showing you God's approach to change someone's mind, to change your enemy's mind. You do not punch him in the nose. Jesus is following His own advice to do good to those who persecute you and spitefully use you, to love your enemy. Here He is, offering him an opportunity to be loyal, and accept the food that He was offering to him from His own table. We know that Judas took the food, and he still was disloyal.

There is another lesson here, as well. Based on this example, we cannot always expect that what we do, even though we follow God's advice, is always going to work. What God is concerned with is not so much that it works for you, but that you do what He says to do.

Let me clarify that. What God tells us to do will absolutely work. The question is, when?

We are dealing in terms of time that are far beyond just today and tomorrow, and the end of the week, and the end of the month, and the end of the year. We are dealing with time in terms of the second resurrection. We are responsible for doing the right thing, looking far beyond the grave, beyond the millennium, to the second resurrection. So when that person comes up out of the ground, in the second resurrection, they will *know!* The witness will have been made to them, and they will be our friend.

Please do not go around getting discouraged, because you do what God says, and it does not work right now. It will work! Please understand that God is dealing with people in terms of the second resurrection, as well. Because it "did not work" here, Jesus did not get all flustered and upset. He did what God commanded to do, and that was to do good to His enemy, and "heap coals of fire on his head." That is what He did.

The term "to lift one's heel" means the same as our saying today, "kicking a man when he is down."

There is one more thing: Judas was successful in hiding his betrayal from the other disciples. No one knew, except him and Jesus. Judas was a dissembler. Do you know what a dissembler is? It is a word that we do not use in English very frequently anymore. A dissembler is a person who hides deceit. He is a person who appears to be a friend on the outside, but all the while, he is working to bring down your reputation, to hurt you, to destroy. That is a dissembler. Judas was good at it, because nobody knew about it except Christ.

The interesting thing about it is that Christ did not appeal to the disciples to help Him. He kept it quiet, as well. He did not reveal Judas' plans to anybody. He kept it between the two of them. That is kind of interesting, because normally, we always look around for sympathizers. If there is a problem that we are having, maybe with somebody else in the congregation or some other member of the family, we hurry up and tell our side of the story so that we get to them first and prejudice their minds, so they will be on our side.

But Jesus did not do that. Love covers sin. He kept it between Judas and Himself. We are going to see that the disciples were totally unaware of what was going on.

John 13:19 Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am He [that I am what I claim to be].

Verse 19, taken in context with what I just told you about Jesus keeping things to Himself, is another indication of Jesus' acceptance of God's will. He was not a man who was trapped in a corner. He was choosing to lay down His life. He was not backed into a position where He could not get out it. I think you understand that, that all the way to the end—He told Pilate, "Do you think that I could not call for my Father to send 12 legions of angels?" The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. He chooses to do it. He could have run, but He did not. He chose to face up to the enemy, and to go in that direction. So He submitted to the will of God in choosing that course.

John 13:20 is an assurance to you and to me, as well as to them. Christ's representatives, when they would be sent out, would not go "clothed with their own glory," but they would also be clothed with the glory and the dignity and the honor of the Kingdom of God, as well. They would be ambassadors from Him. As such, like an ambassador from one nation to another, he does not go just with his own name, but he goes with the name of his nation as well, and everything that that nation stands for. He speaks for his nation. And so it would be with Christ's representatives as well. Anybody who would listen to them is in reality listening to the Kingdom of God, the very Kingdom that they are representing. If a person would receive what they said, it was the same as receiving Jesus Christ and His Father.

John 13:21-30 When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." Then the disciples looked at one another, perplexed about whom He spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask who it was

of whom He spoke. Then, leaning back on Jesus' breast, he said to Him, "Lord, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, "What you do, do quickly." But no one at the table knew for what reason He said this to him. For some thought, because Judas had the money box, that Jesus had said to him, "Buy those things we need for the feast," or that he should give something to the poor. Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

I mentioned before that Judas was a good actor, and all were deceived but Christ. In verse 21, Christ very clearly showed His distress at what was taking place. That is what it means, "When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit." It is a euphemism for saying that He was distressed, He was visibly distressed. He was very human, and He did not like the thought of what He was going to have to go through, and what these men were going to be put through as a result of Judas' betrayal. Being able to understand the scriptures the way He did, and recognizing what was confronting Him, He was concerned about it.

In verse 23, it says something that is sometimes incomprehensible to you and me. How in the world could the disciple Jesus loved lean on His breast? Did he walk over to Him and plunk his head down?

It was not quite like that. We see Leonardo da Vinci's picture of The Last Supper, and all of these men sitting at a long table. We assume that the one on the one side of Jesus must have been John, and that he plunked his head down while he was sitting there.

Maybe this will make it more understandable to you. First of all, they were not sitting at a table. There were tables in those days, but they did not eat from them. They put lamps on them, vases, things like that, but they did not sit down and eat at them. What they had was a block of something or other, probably wood, and there is every indication that what was normally done in a banquet type situation, is that it was a low, U-shaped table. It was probably no more than 15 or 18 inches from the ground. My research has shown that it was probably a solid block of wood or marble or something like that.

They did not sit down, but rather, they leaned back on pillows. The custom was for everyone to lean on his left elbow, leaving the right hand free to eat with, to dip into usually a common bowl. At the top of the U would be Christ, because He was the host.

To Him went the highest position of honor. The next highest position of honor was on the left. The next highest after that was on the right. The reason for that was this: if you were reclining at the table, on your left elbow, the chances are that you could most comfortably speak to the person who was on your left. So the position of honor, next to the host, was on the left.

It says that John was leaning on Jesus' bosom. That indicates, without a doubt, that John must have been on Jesus' right. That is the only way that he could have been in a position, where he could turn his face, and it would have been in Jesus' chest.

That is what occurred. John could turn to Jesus and speak to Him, if he wanted to, without anybody else even being aware of what he said. He could have whispered. They would have been that close.

By the same token, who then had to be on Jesus left? It had to be Judas, because it shows right in the context that Jesus spoke to Judas, and the others were unaware of what He was saying. To them, it was nothing more than a mumble. They could not distinctly hear what was being said by Jesus to Judas.

If Judas had been across the table, Jesus would have had to have projected His voice in such a way that all would have distinctly heard what He said. But if Judas was on Jesus' left, and Jesus was in Judas' bosom, then all He had to do was turn His face and His lips would have been in Judas' ear. That is exactly the way that it was.

The place where Judas was sitting, reclining, was at the highest place of honor, to the left of the host. Undoubtedly, Jesus made sure of that arrangement, so that He would have the opportunity to spend those last moments giving Judas every opportunity to repent from the scheme that he had devised with the priests.

In verse 24 it says "Simon Peter therefore motioned to him." Now we get a little bit of an idea where Peter must have been. He was in a position where he could look at John. He must have been in a position where he could signal him, he motioned to him. Maybe he formed some words with his lips, which meant, "What did He say? Find out what He said, who is the betrayer?" John knew what Peter was trying to get across. In verse 25, "leaning back on Jesus' breast," it means without moving his position, he just leaned back a little further, and was able to whisper right in Jesus' ear, "Lord, who is it?"

John 13:26 Jesus answered, "It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it." ...

Having the host feed you was an honor. He was doing this directly, it was “love’s last appeal,” when he gave Judas that sop. He was giving him a last opportunity to show his loyalty to Christ.

Apparently, Judas took it. After the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Judas’ mind was made up. It was on with everything, and Jesus said, “Be quick with your errand. What you do, do quickly.” It indicates that Jesus was right against Judas, because no one at the table knew for what reason. Nothing was real clear to them, they did not know what was going on. They were not aware of the betrayal. The words were somewhat muffled. So we see in verse 29 the conclusion that they came to, which of course was wrong.

Verse 30 has an interesting thing in it:

John 13:30 Having received the piece of bread, he then went out immediately. And it was night.

As the King James says, “And it was dark.” John did not have to say that, that it was dark. It is just a little thing added, that you might get a little bit more of a picture. Judas went from the light of being in the presence of Christ, to the darkness of the world. Undoubtedly, the room that they were in was lighted, and it must have just struck John as an ironic thing, as he thought about it. There was some symbolism there. He went from the light of God’s presence to the darkness of the world.

It was not totally dark outside, because it was Passover, and the moon was almost full. By comparison to the kind of light that they had in the room with Christ, it was a dark scene. There is a very poignant lesson there for you and for me.

John 13:31-32 So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately.”

With Judas gone, the die is cast, and Jesus is irrevocably committed to what is occurring. There was a certain relief in that, because now everything was set, everything was in place. I feel that Jesus felt a sense of relief. The ball is rolling, and everything is going on. Now, the crucifixion is a certainty.

What about all of this “glory” that He is talking about? What is it? The glory is in His sacrifice and what it is going to produce for God’s kingdom.

“To glorify” means to honor, to distinguish, to give praise to, to give fame to. The sacrifice, the crucifixion, was going to bring glory, because it was going to produce for God’s kingdom.

It says that “God is glorified.” In what way? He is glorified in the obedience of Christ. It brings honor to Him, it brings fame to Him. God gave His only begotten Son, but that could only be true if Christ followed through with His obedience. Because of what is going to be produced as a result of that sacrifice, God is going to receive fame and honor and glory. He is going to be distinguished, because of His sacrifice.

It is similar to a parent making sacrifices for his children. Maybe they sacrifice time and money, in order to give their children piano lessons, violin lessons, singing lessons, skating lessons. The son or daughter does very well. Does that not bring honor and glory to the parents? Certainly it does. “Wow, that is my boy out there!”

That is what God is talking about there. He is talking about the obedience of Christ. God made the sacrifice: He gave His Son up. His Son committed Himself to this program, and then He brings fame and honor and glory to the Father, in His obedience.

The greatest glory that anyone can receive is to be loved. That really distinguishes you, out from all others. When somebody gives their love to you.

We love Him because He first loved us. He gave His love to us, and we in turn respond by loving Him. That glorifies Him. We are giving fame and a good name to, and honor, and distinguishing, the Father, by giving Him our love. We single Him out for our most intense and complete devotion.

On the other hand, God is going to glorify the Son through the resurrection—and that He did. Included in that is everything that follows, including being crowned as King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; being High Priest, and giving Him rulership—actual, practical rulership over the earth. Those things would follow the glorification that would come at the resurrection.

John 13:33-35 “Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come,’ so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

In verse 33, He is assuring them that although physically separated—they were going to be separated by His death, by His going to heaven, going to the Father—they would still be joined to Him spiritually *if* they loved one another the way that He loved them. There is the condition, and that same condition still holds true today, for you and me. We are joined to Him spiritually, if we love one another the way that He loves us.

We of course cannot reach the intensity of the ideal that He set, but He does intend that we do the very best that we can.

I mentioned earlier what was new about this commandment, “a new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.” What He is saying is very similar to what He did in the Sermon on the Mount. “You have heard it was said of old time, that you shall do this, but I say unto you...” So He taught them about murder, and how it was murder to hate your brother. He talked about committing adultery, and He said that if you think to do that, you have broken the commandment already.

In Leviticus 19, it says that “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So what is the “new commandment?”

You shall love your neighbor *more* than yourself. The way that He loved us.

That is not an easy thing to do. He loved us to the extent that He gave His life, and He gave His life not at one time, on the Passover day, but He gave His life from the time that He gave up being God. It was poured out, and became a human being. His entire life was a sacrifice for man’s benefit, that God’s purpose could be fulfilled.

We cannot come anywhere near that, because our lives have already been lived, to a very great extent, and they have been damaged by sin, and all of the things that we have learned wrongly from this world. But He does expect us to repent, to turn around, and begin to lay down our lives for one another, with all that is within us.

What is past is past, and it cannot be undone, but we can grow toward the future. That is what He is concerned about, and that is why God expects us to do what is right, regardless of whether it works. Whether it works is not the problem right now; the problem is to get us behaving like God does. He will take care of those other problems later, in the second resurrection.

We have to learn to lay down our lives, and there is no better place to do this than in the home. We have a place where we can practice it every single day. A husband for his wife and family, a wife for her husband and family. Divorce would be a thing of the past,

if we would love our neighbors more than we love ourselves, right within our home. The fights within the family would begin to diminish, because the fruit of God's way would begin to be produced.

All of this ties right back into the beginning of John 13, where we see that the keystone of God's character, of His whole personality, is humility. It is pride that holds us back from really laying down our lives for one another. Where Jesus was willing to do the most menial thing—there are things that we feel are beneath us, even within the family.

So the new commandment is to love one another "as I have loved you." That is going above and beyond the requirements of the Law, which merely say to love your neighbor as yourself.

When the disciples asked that their faith be increased, and Jesus said to go above and beyond what is a person's mere duty, can you see how faith would be increased? It would be increased because you would see it working! And you would have confidence, you would have assurance, that everything that God said was right. Our lives would change, and we would know that God is a reality, that He is involved with us.

John 13:35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

How did Christ love—first seeking His own happiness or sense of well-being?

We are willing to love if we can get something from it, love in return, a smile, whatever it might be—praise, honor. But Christ loved selflessly.

Another way would be sacrificially. In this sense, His love had no limit. To Him, love was not meant to give Him happiness. It was meant to give others happiness. He sacrificed Himself, that others might have that sense of well-being.

He also loved His disciples, understandingly. This is one that we have difficulty with. I know that you have heard ministers say, in regard to Ephesians 5, that the wife is supposed to submit to her husband as unto Christ, and the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the church. So we always say, "I could love him if he was Christ." Or, "I could love her if she was the church." In effect, what we are saying is, "I can submit to that person if he was not so filled full of flaws. If he was perfect, I could submit to him." And the same way with the husband, he can come back the other way.

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Christ did not put that into His equation. He saw His disciples with all of their flaws. He understood their weaknesses and their idiosyncrasies. He was “open eyed” about all of their flaws, but He never became disillusioned. He loved them in spite of what they were. Do not misunderstand, His love was not blind. He saw them with all of their flaws.

If He saw Judas’ betrayal coming, when Judas hid it so cunningly from everybody else, and nobody saw it, but Jesus saw it—do you think He did not see the flaws in those other men as well? He understood their weaknesses, but He still loved them anyway.

A fourth way: He loved them with forgiveness, as well. You can see this: Peter denied Him, every one of them forsook Him. You can see when we get into John 14, they never understood Him. Even when He went over things again and again and explained to them more clearly, they still did not get it. In the end, every one of them became a coward, and He still forgave them.

That will give you some sort of an idea of how He loved.

This love is not a love that can be legislated. It is a love that has to be given. It is a love that involves attitudes that spring forth from what we will call the person’s heart, not the pump, but his innermost being, from his mind. That has to be a love that is given to us, because we do not have it naturally.

Romans 8:3-4 For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Christ did what He did in order that we might have the opportunity to live as He lived, and that we might turn from the things that have produced death to the things that produce life—and what produces life is love. That love is something that is given us by His spirit. So He sacrificed Himself in order that we might have the opportunity to have this love given to us, so that we could give it to others.

John 13:36-38 Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.” Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.” Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.

We have already seen the beginnings of the betrayal of Judas. We are beginning now to see the betrayal of Peter. It is not called a betrayal, it is called a denial. What was the difference between what Judas did and what Peter did? Was what Judas did worse than what Peter did? What was the difference between the two of them?

Judas' betrayal was cunning and deliberate. It was something that was planned, it was deceitfully concealed and plotted, and then carried out in cold blood. He was given every opportunity to repent. Every appeal was made to him by God in the flesh, and he coldly rejected it, even after declaring his loyalty by accepting the sop.

On the other hand, Peter certainly denied Him, and he denied Him three times. But he did not plan to do it. He did not deliberately carry out this affront. What he did came as a result of passionate weakness, of blustery pride, thinking more of himself than was actually there.

There was a big difference between the two. Peter was swept away by his weakness, with things that he never meant to do. You can see that so clearly, Peter is speaking right from his heart: "I will follow you to the end." Peter did not yet realize how weak he was. His intention was right, his heart was in the right place.

It is mighty good that God judges us according to our heart, because if He judged us according to what we did all the time, we would all be dead. There would be no hope, no future.

In Samuel, we see David in the flesh. In Psalms, we see David's heart. There is a big difference between the two. David wanted to do the right thing, and most of the time, he did the right thing. But every once in a while, he did not do the right things, and the same way with Peter. Peter denied Christ, but it was never anything that was deliberate. It was just something that sprung out of him because of his weakness.

This fits very well with Romans 7. Peter willed to do the right thing, but his flesh carried him in the wrong direction. He wanted to be loyal, he wanted to do the right thing, he wanted to support Christ. But when "push came to shove," the human nature, the sin, came out.

John 14:1-3 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

This was said immediately on the heels of what He just said to Peter, that he would deny Him. There was no doubt that these men were beginning to understand that He was very serious about going to His death. Their whole world was just about ready to cave in. They were still pretty carnal, and I am sure that they had hopes and dreams of worldly glory and power, and wealth and riches, and deference and honor and everything that went with it. At that time, that was the Jew’s common conception of the Messiah. They believed that He was the Messiah, and here He is, talking about His death, so their earthly dominion and all of that glory was just about ready to crumble.

Jesus Himself, just a little bit earlier, was visibly distressed by what He was about to face. The betrayal of Judas was thrown in there, and now these men are beginning to catch the vision, and their world was crumbling. So it is now time to give them some encouragement, and help them to understand that everything was not over yet.

In John 14:1, He is assuring them that eventually all of us will be able to follow where He is going. Of course, the Protestant churches and the Catholic church as well immediately think of going off to heaven. But I do not think that Jesus was thinking about that at all, He was thinking about the Kingdom of God, not heaven. Certainly, He was going to heaven, with the Father, but He was more concerned about where eventually they would be. He is encouraging them, and they were not going to heaven, they were going to be in the Kingdom of God. Eventually all of us are going to be able to follow where He is going.

He follows that up with an illustration in John 14:2: “In My Father’s house...” In His dynasty, in His family, are many mansions, or places of abode, or positions of responsibility. “...If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” He is assuring them that He is going for the purpose of making sure that they go to the same place that He goes. So He is leaving so that He can make it possible so that they can follow Him permanently.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself...” The “I will come again” shows very clearly that in verse 1, He is not thinking about going to heaven, or them going to heaven, but rather that they would be where He is, and He is going to be on earth, because He is going to come and receive them. He is going to come to the earth and receive them, and that shows a time element as well, as to when

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

they would be reunited with them. It would be in the resurrection. "...That where I am, there you may be also."

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

Romans 8:32 is really reassuring, and if you believe in God, this is a verse that is very difficult not to be reassured by:

Romans 8:31-32 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?

Is God trying to lose us, or does He want us in His Kingdom? Is He going to waste the gift of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ paying the penalty for our sins, and then blow it by not giving us whatever we need to make it into the Kingdom of God? No, He is going to give us everything that we possibly need.

Why do we doubt? Why do we fear? Because we are human. But can we grow towards this end? Can we put our life on the line, as far as God is concerned, in our daily life? Can we trust Him, that He is going to follow through with the things that He says that He will give us, in order to ensure that we will be in His Kingdom? That is encouraging to me, and I hope that you are encouraged by it as well.

John 14:2-3 "...I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself;..."

In Hebrews 6:20, there is a word that is used that is important in regard to this verse, important in regard to what we just talked about.

Hebrews 6:20 ... where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

It is the word *forerunner*. In the Greek that is the word *prodromos*. That word is used in Greek literature to indicate a number of things that have to do with anything that precedes something else. In the case of an army, it is the reconnaissance troops that go

out, and they precede the main body of the troops. The reconnaissance troops go out and make sure that the way is safe. They prepare the way, seeing where the enemy is. They make sure that the roads are passable, that they are not all mined. Maybe they spot enemy gun emplacements. That is the *prodromos*'s job. They reconnoiter, they scout. They go out before and prepare the way for the rest of the troops that are going to follow.

It is also used in the sense of a pilot. It is not a pilot who flies an airplane, but rather, a pilot that guides a ship into a harbor. Oftentimes, harbors have shallow places, or there are rocks, and the pilot knows how to guide the ships around the rocks. The captain of the ship that is coming in is not familiar with the harbor, so he might run into the rocks, but the *prodromos* guides him through the channel so that they are able to arrive safely in port.

That is what He is talking about here in John 14. He is leaving so that He can make it possible for us to follow. He is the forerunner, He is the reconnoiterer, He is the reconnaissance troops, He is the pilot that is going on before to enable us, to ensure, that we will be in the Kingdom of God. That is His job now as High Priest.

He guides His church; He is its Head. He is responsible to the Father for each of its individual members. Remember what He said in John 17, which we will get to, He said to the Father, "I have not lost any of them, except the son of perdition." In Philippians 1:6, He said that what God has begun, He is able also to finish. When you put that together with Romans 8:32, that shows that the Father is willing to go to any extent. He has given the greatest gift He already can give, in the life of God the Creator, so that the sins could be paid. Is He going to withhold anything from us?

We are the only ones who can block our way into the Kingdom of God. We can refuse to believe. We can harden our heart. We can rebel. We can do things like that. We can refuse to give up on a sin, we can refuse to submit. But as long as we are yielding to Him, though we have troubles, and though we have times that we slip and fall, as long as that attitude is right and we keep picking ourselves up and going on, and enduring, He is going to make sure that we get there. There is no doubt, there ought to be no discouragement.

John 14:4-6 "And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Let me paraphrase what Thomas said in verse 5. He did not get what Jesus said in verses 1 through 3. That is obvious, and it is probable that none of the others got it really clear either. What Thomas said was, "Look. If one does not know the final destination, how can one know which road to take?" That was his response to verse 4: "And where I go you know, and the way you know."

Thomas did not know. And then comes probably one of the classic statements in all of the Bible: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

It is entirely possible that Thomas's question had material aspects to it. By that I mean that he still had in his mind visions of an earthly kingdom, of dominion, of power, over the Jewish state, over the Romans, over the Greeks, and everybody else. Jesus' answer makes it very clear that what Jesus was speaking of, "the way," does not have spatial and material significance at all. His kingdom is not of this world.

But the disciples did not yet get that. They were going to get it, they were going to understand it. And it is something that we are wrestling with all the time, too. I think that might be one of the reasons why we get discouraged when we try to do God's way, and it does not seem to work. We think that there should be an immediate response. If we do something God's way, then immediately there should be a reward or a blessing.

I said earlier that the important thing is not that something happens immediately, but rather that we do what God says. Even Jesus, when He appealed to Judas, Judas' mind did not change. Here was the most powerful, spiritually-minded person that has ever lived on earth, but He could not change Judas' mind.

The disciples were not getting it, that Jesus' way of life has nothing to do with space and material. It has to do with the Kingdom of God, it has to do with becoming like God. Just because God's way does not appear to work does not mean that it has not worked, because time, to God, is not the same as time to us.

We have got to learn that. That is why death does not have the same meaning to a truly converted, spiritually-minded person as it does to somebody who is material in their thinking. The spiritually-minded person understands that death is not the end. Space and material things have no effect on it. Three days later, Jesus was alive, and He passed right through the rock. It is hard to get our minds converted to that way of thinking.

Let us look at thing about being "the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus had told them

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

this a couple of different times. One is in John 7:33, that He is the way, but they had not gotten it yet.

He used three words that a student of the Old Testament would have recognized.

Deuteronomy 5:32-33 “Therefore you shall be careful to do as the Lord your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left [he is talking about a way]. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you, that you may live and that it may be well with you, and that you may prolong your days in the land which you shall possess.”

Christ was talking about a way that was going to end up in the Kingdom of God. He is talking about a way of living.

Deuteronomy 31:29 “For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.”

Isaiah 30:21 Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,”...

Isaiah 35:8 A highway shall be there, and a road, and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for others. Whoever walks the road, although a fool, shall not go astray.

A way of life, a way of living. What Jesus said is, “Follow the way that I did, you cannot miss. You will arrive at the destination. I am the way.” In this case, He is not pointing to words. Isaiah and Moses were used of God to write things that had to do with a way of life. What Jesus is saying is, “I am the way. You follow the way that I did, you walk literally, you conduct your life the way that I did, and you will arrive at that destination.”

Let us look at the word *truth*.

Psalms 86:11 Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

heart to fear Your name.

Walking in truth is a way of life.

Psalm 119:30 I have chosen the way of truth;...

We are seeing that truth is a way, it is a road that a person can follow. In this case, we are talking about the truth of God.

In John 14, we need to consider how this applied to Christ. People can tell us truth. It can be mathematical truth: $2 + 2 = 4$. It can be truth about geography; we can say that the desert is to the east of us; or the mountains, to the west; or the ocean is to the west. That is a geographical truth. They can tell us botanical truths, or biological truths. They can tell us truth about an event.

We can be told truth. But Jesus embodied it. It was not merely a matter of Him telling truth, He *was* truth. There is a big difference between the two.

A person's character may not make much difference in regard to what he teaches, in most areas of life. Does a man's character affect a geometrical truth, a mathematical truth, a geographical truth, a scientific truth? The man might be an adulterer, but if tells you that $2 + 2 = 4$, his adultery does not affect that truth.

But what a person is, what his character is, does affect his teaching in moral areas. It makes all of the difference in the world.

If you know that a person is an adulterer, and he is teaching you about sexual chastity, you know that in the back of your mind you will say, "Now, come on." His words are not going to have the same impact on you as if he was a pure person himself.

What if a grasping and miserly person is telling you that you ought to be generous, and giving, and serving, and sacrificing? What if somebody that you know that is filled with pride comes along and tells you, you ought to be humble? It is bound to be ineffective, because we do judge, we do evaluate, the person who is teaching in moral areas.

Moral teaching cannot be conveyed merely by words. The person who is teaching it better be what he is teaching. He better be setting the example, or it is not going to have the same effect.

Nobody ever conveyed truth the way that Jesus Christ did. Jesus not only said, “I am telling you the truth,” He said, “I am truth.” What He meant was, everything about His life was absolutely true. There was not a shadow, not the slightest sliver of insincerity, of hypocrisy, of guile, deceit. Whenever you looked at Him, in whatever situation, you saw truth. It was not just what He said, you saw it in action. And Jesus is the only person who has ever lived who can make that statement, that “I am truth.”

The third thing He says is, “I am the life.”

Proverbs 6:23 For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light; reproofs of instruction are the way of life,...

Proverbs 10:17 He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, but he who refuses correction goes astray.

There is another verse similar to that in Psalm 16:11. Let us consider this: is this not what mankind is always searching for? What does He mean by life? We are all living, so He cannot be saying that we are searching for existence. What we are searching for is quality. What we are looking for is what makes life worth living.

That is what Jesus said He was: “I am life.” He says, “I am where that quality is.”

What He was saying is that what He is, and what He represents, is what life is all about.

Colossians 1:19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell,...

Colossians 2:8-10 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

Christ is what life is all about. The sum of this is, if we want to know the way to go, if we want to know what truth is, if we want to know what life is all about—we have to go to Christ. There is no one else who has ever lived who can show us those things. The way

John (Part 21) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

to the Kingdom of God, the truth that we need to have, and the way of life that will produce the fullness, the sense of well-being, the sense of accomplishment, the encouragement that we need—that is where it is.