

JESUS' HEART FOR THE CHURCH John 17:10-19

There is a group of pastors meeting every Tuesday to discuss the book *UnChristian...* The church has an image problem- today's younger generations see Christians as not just boring, but as actually immoral. There were chapters on mistreatment of homosexuals, religious right political agendas, and manipulative evangelistic tactics- it's unsettling for some of us pastors to hear. But for anyone who's been paying attention to the culture, this is probably not huge news.

We in the church are not doing a great job of loving each other and loving our neighbors. So, what do we do about that? One solution is to deny it- 'The church is fine, the problem is Hollywood (or Washington, or San Francisco...).' Another solution is to give up. Raise the white flag, and throw in with the world- "It was a good try, but doing church is just too hard." Another solution: Set up 'church that's not like church,' and to define yourself in opposition to, and in criticism of, all the other churches. But the last solution is this: Call one another to a deep repentance and to a recovery of what God intended for the church.

I think the third option is best- and I want to call us to repent. To confess what we've personally done to unnecessarily offend people and ways we've personally failed to love well; but also to corporately repent for the church and on behalf of others (which sounds crazy to individualistic Americans, but is actually a very biblical concept). But after confession, what? How do we do better?

I've quoted Mike Bickel (International House of Prayer Pastor) before, "*You will never love God more by trying harder. Gritting your teeth and making promises is not what makes your heart awake in love. The way that you become a lover of God is not by trying harder- it is by learning to enjoy Him more... Your passion for Jesus will increase to the measure that you study and encounter Jesus' passion for you... We see His emotions of fiery desire for us, and this is what awakens emotions of fiery desire back to Him.*"

We need to recover God's heart for us. We've forgotten how much Jesus loves His people and how much Jesus loves the lost- and how lost we were before He saved us. We're going to see 3 things about Jesus' heart in this prayer- Who He loves, What He does in His love, and How He does it.

Who Jesus loves- those who need protection

In verse 12, Jesus tells us that He is specifically talking about those the Father has given Him. The New Testament uses different words: my sheep, the elect, the saints. These are all terms for the Church.

Now, from whom does the Church need protection? Verse 15 tells us, the evil one. Interestingly, the best translation of the end of the Lord's Prayer is probably 'deliver us from the evil one.' We are to pray for protection from the evil one. Why? What can he do to us?

Peter speaks of the devil as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. But we don't see him like that. It seems too fantastic. Now in some places- Africa and the Philippines, for instance- they get this. Spiritual warfare is very real, and evil forces manifest themselves in a real way.

But there is a more subtle, and more effective, way we get devoured in America- consumerism. I've heard consumerism defined as 'More of what I want is best.' It's what defines many of our lives. It's what keeps us in high-paying jobs that we hate. It's what drives people to fight over the last toys on the aisle in our desperate rush to celebrate baby Jesus with as many presents as possible.

This material worship is the essence of self-centeredness- and if the evil one can get our attention on ourselves and off God, he's halfway to destroying any faith that may have formed. This is also what often keeps us in the Church from loving each other- we're too busy with our toys and too isolated in our homes to get involved in someone else's life.

Now, let's answer an objection here from a spiritual skeptic: 'The weakest people go to church. All the really strong and successful people I know don't need it.'

Answer: You're right (at least about the first part), and Jesus said this Himself, "It's not the healthy who need a doctor, it's the sick." There's a real sense in which we can say "Jesus is for losers." And if you think you're righteous in and of yourself, you won't see a need for the church. Until you come to see yourself as a needy person who can't please God, you'll never really know Jesus.

God's love protects me from the evil one. But it doesn't leave me alone- God isn't just out fighting the battles and ignoring me (like some silent warrior father).

What Jesus does in His love- He disciplines us

Jesus prays in verse 17, "Sanctify them in the truth." Do you know what the word 'sanctify' means? To make holy, to make clean, to equip for battle. The term we use here at Grace is 'disciple,' as in 'Would you disciple me?'

There's a sense in the Bible in which this is both a reality for us and an ongoing experiment. When you came to Christ, you were completely forgiven, and clothed in the righteousness of Christ- you are holy before God. But at the same time we can call ourselves saints, we also know we're sinners. We're still a work in progress.

God's work of sanctifying us is an ongoing work. It's like OSU Basketball (or whatever team you've rooted for your whole life- for me, the Pittsburgh Steelers). OSU is the best team- for you. No matter what coaches, players are there- no matter the record, they're still going to be your favorite team. But that doesn't mean that they can just rest secure knowing that they have fans. Every year they have to work to be the best for you, in fact it's part of what motivates them to do so well.

But even that analogy is limited- because we're bandwagon fans. But God is not- He's infinitely pleased and delighted with us. But He continues to work with us and on us- for our good.

Do you know what that tells me? We need to learn some patience. You've heard the cliché, "Be patient with me, God's not done with me yet." This is true. And it is something that makes forgiveness a little easier: that church person really hurt my feelings; I'm not excusing them, but I know that they're still growing and so I can forgive them. And if it's the other way around and I hurt them, I hope they'll forgive me.

This is also something we need to learn with churches. We're so conditioned in America to be consumers that many of us jump from church to church to find the perfect church. Now, I'm not saying you should settle on the first church you visit when you move, but once you've found a church where you can get on board with the mission, stay

on! If you're constantly looking to jump ship every time people don't meet your expectations you are grieving the Holy Spirit and you're on a fool's errand. Because every church you go to is in process- they haven't reached maturity, God's not done making them holy.

I'm so thankful for the people who have been with us since the early days of Grace, back to 2003. There are people here this morning who were there for our earliest Bible Studies- and the dozen or so who've been coming faithfully for the last 5 years since we started worship. I've failed every 1 of these people at different times, and our church may not have all the bells and whistles we might have hoped by now. But God is sanctifying us in the truth. We're all disciples. And I'm excited where we'll be in another 5 years. I hope you'll stay for the long run; it's a marathon, not a sprint.

How Jesus shows His love- through a relationship

This is not a dry formula- 'follow these 10 steps and chart the results.' This is about having a defender who's also intimately involved in what happens to us. It's much like a marriage.

"[Soren Kierkegaard tells a story] about a king who fell in love with a peasant girl. The king knew that it was next to impossible for him to marry the girl. Kings never married peasants. But this king was so powerful that he knew he could marry the girl and get away with it. But another thought occurred to him. If he married the peasant girl and stayed king, there would always be something missing in their relationship. The girl would always admire the king, but she could never really love him. The gap between them would be too great. She would always be conscious of the fact that he was royalty and she was merely a lowly peasant. So the king decided on another plan. He decided that he would resign his kingship and become a lowly peasant himself. Then he would offer his love to her as one lowly peasant to another. The king realized, of course, that if he did this, the situation could backfire. He could lose not only his kingship but the girl as well. She might reject him, especially if she thought him foolish for doing what he did." - (summarized by Father Fr. Luigi Mahto)

In this High Priestly Prayer, Jesus tells His Father, "For their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth." In other words, He was saying, 'I set myself apart for your service- I give up my life and rights, for the sake of my Beloved.'

Even though the church is often an exercise in missing the point and sinning, Jesus gave up everything for her. Jesus loves His church this much, will you?

Some of the resources I used for this John series were *The Farewell Prayer and Final Discourse of Jesus* by D.A. Carson and *Volume 4 of The Gospel of John* by J.M. Boice, as well as various other resources, including Tim Keller's book *The Reason for God*. As usual, the reader should assume that little, if any, of this material is truly original.