

Glory of Love vs The Selfishness of Competition

#0101

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—February 13, 1976

Our text is John 17:3, and if you say we used that last Friday night, I'll say that you have a good memory. That's fine. There are some kinds of food that I like more than once in a year. What do you say? This text is one of them.

As I told you last week, Inspiration tells us that this 17th chapter of John comprehends more than any other chapter in the New Testament.

“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” John 17:3.

Life eternal is what? To know God. You see, Jesus is thinking of life not merely in the dimension of length. He's thinking of its breadth, its depth, its height. I'd rather live one day knowing God than live a hundred years the way the people of this world have to live without hope and without God, wouldn't you? But thank God, if we get to know Him, we're going to keep having that experience more and more through eternal ages. Praise His wonderful name!

“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” *Ibid.*

To know God is life eternal. Now, tonight we are going to put with that 1 John 4:8. I think you know that one by heart:

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” 1 John 4:8.

All right, now notice the connection between this and our opening text. The opening text said:

“And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God...” John 17:3.

“He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” 1 John 4:8.

Then the more we love, the more we know God and praise His name; the more we know Him, the more we love Him. As *Desire of Ages*, page 22, says, “To know God is to love Him...” So let's put this all together. It's life eternal to know Him. The one

who doesn't love doesn't know Him, so the one who *does* love *does* know Him. And *if* we know Him, we *love* Him. So the *more* we know Him, the more we love Him. The more we love Him, the more we know Him.

You see, there are some things that can be learned only by experience. You can't know the taste of any food by reading a book about it. Whether it's peaches or strawberries or watermelons or bean roast, you have to taste something in order to understand. And so it is with love. But it is not enough in knowing love to *receive* love; we must *give* love. True, we must receive it before we can give it, but if all we do is receive it, we never know and understand the reality of love. We never know love in all its dimensions. That's why the apostle says, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

So I repeat: we do not know love merely by *receiving* love. Think of a disobedient, rebellious, uncooperative child on whom the parents have lavished love year after year after year. Does that child know love? Apparently not. What's the matter? Well, love has been shown to him, but he has not experienced the giving of love back, either to his parents or to others. So he doesn't understand love.

How is it with you, my friends? Do you know the love of God? Do you understand not only the fact, the truth, that God loves you, but have you felt that love flowing through you so that you love Him in return and love others for His sake?

What is love anyway? I used to ask my little girl, "Do you know what love is?" "Yes," she said, "L-O-V-E." Well, that's right, isn't it? L-O-V-E.

I was thinking about it this week. Love is like the wind. It is known by its manifestations. Jesus used that illustration of the wind, you remember, talking to Nicodemus about the work of the Holy Spirit on the heart:

"...The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" Romans 5:5.

So let us think of *detecting* love, *recognizing* love, *understanding* love, sensing the *presence* of love, as we see its manifestations. When we say, looking at some experience, "I saw love in action," what we saw was the action; we didn't see the love. The love is in the heart of God, and the love is in the heart of man. Up here in the forebrain, the frontal lobes, that's where the love is. But you can't see it. But thank God, you can see the *manifestations* of it. For example, love *gives*. God so loved the world that He gave. It wasn't some cast-off clothing. It wasn't something that He could get along without. He gave His best, His dearest. In fact, He poured out all Heaven in one gift. Love is like that. Love gives. Love serves. Love *delights* to serve. Jesus says in Luke 22:27: "...I am among you as He that serveth." He demonstrated that as He washed His disciples' feet just before giving them the sacrament. But His *whole life* was a life of service. From His earliest years, we are told that He lived to bless others. (See *Desire of Ages*, page 70.)

Yes, love delights to serve. I suppose there is no better illustration of that in human experience than the love of a mother. It's interesting how a mother will go out of her way to serve the members of her family, do more than could be expected. In fact, sometimes Mother has to be cautioned that she doesn't lap up all those blessings herself. She is to share them with others. To serve is a privilege, isn't it? It's a blessing.

In this, we enter into the experience of God. God loves, He gives; God loves, He serves. Love not only gives and serves, it sacrifices. So Jesus said in Matthew 20:28, speaking of Himself, that He "...came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many." He crowned a life of service with a death of sacrifice. That's love in action to the limit; beyond any limit. He gave until there was nothing more to give.

This is what is represented when we speak of the blood of Jesus. He gave His lifeblood. The life is in the blood. He sacrificed Himself. It was His choice to do this because He loved.

Yes, love finds its pleasure in blessing and serving and giving to others. So love cannot rejoice in the *loss* of another. It cannot rejoice in the *failure* of another. It cannot laugh in glee when somebody misses, fails, falls.

Turn to Proverbs 24:17. Here is an interesting little verse tucked away here in the wisdom of 3,000 years ago:

"Rejoice not..."

Now, when is it that you are not to rejoice?

"...when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth" Proverbs 24:17.

I wonder how that would work in a football game, or in a basketball game, or a baseball game. I wonder how it would work in competition in business, or social life, of in school work. I wonder how it would work in a spelling match.

What's the first word? Rejoice. And what is the second word? Not. And when is it that you are not to rejoice? When your enemy falls. Well, listen, dear ones, if you are not to rejoice when your *enemy* falls, what about when your *friend* falls? Is that the time to rejoice? Oh, no. You see, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said do what? Love your enemies, that is, *even* your enemies.

The first great commandment is to love God with what? All your heart. And the second is like unto it, namely, "Love your neighbor as yourself." And your neighbor, Jesus shows, is anybody you can help, anybody you can benefit.

Love, I repeat, is a wonderful, wonderful thing. And we know it by its manifestations. How much love do we have? Pure love? Love never seeks to succeed at the cost of the failure of somebody else. Love never tries to *win* by causing somebody else to *lose*.

“Ah,” somebody says, “Brother Frazee, isn’t that getting rather narrow?” Well, yes. In fact, Jesus says, “...Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth to life...” (Matthew 7:14). It’s a narrow gate, but it leads to broad fields, as broad as the universe.

Come now, friends, when you and I get to Heaven, do you think there is going to be a race down the golden streets to see which one will be the first one to get a piece of fruit from the Tree of Life and when we get there, there will be only one piece, and the one that got there first gets it, and the rest of us stand there with our mouths drooling and wishing we had been a little faster? Can you picture anything like that in Heaven? I can’t.

Some people have discovered the secret of having Heaven ahead of time, for let me tell you, one of the greatest things that makes Heaven *Heaven* is this principle of love. Looking far back into the eternity of the past, we see a time when every creature in the universe knew what love in action is. But, strange to say, and there is no explanation for it, there was one being in the universe who conceived the idea that the way to really be happy was to upgrade himself by downgrading somebody else. His name? Lucifer. That is, that *used* to be his name. What’s his name now? Satan, the Devil, the adversary.

And this thing that we are looking at tonight is at the heart of the whole problem. Do you know that Satan came at last to be so deceived with his own selfish ideas that he even doubted the existence of pure, true, unselfish love? And for thousands of years now, the Devil has not been able to believe that God is really unselfishly loving His creatures. He has put forth the idea that what is called ‘the love of God’ is merely a skillful way of getting people to do what He says, that He has selfish motives. Which do you believe?

Ah friends, the cross demonstrates the utter unselfishness of the love of God. The cross reveals that God’s love is without one single drop of selfishness. It’s pure, unadulterated love, love that will give everything that others may share, love that will empty itself that others may know the fullness of fellowship and joy. Oh friends, I want more and more of that love, what do you say? I want more and more of that love.

Somebody sent me a newspaper clipping. It was a dispatch from West Germany. An 11-year-old West German schoolboy committed suicide here Monday after being on the losing side in a local soccer match. The boy, blamed by teammates for the defeat, ran from the field after the match and hanged himself in a nearby barn.

You know, some people think you get away from the evils of competition by having teams. But when you pit one team against another, when you line up nine men or eleven men, or however many on one side, and an equal number on the other, you still have what? Competition, rivalry, strife.

And whether it is one *individual* losing or a whole *team* losing, the only way in competition and rivalry that anybody can win is for somebody to what? Lose. And this poor boy, his side lost, and the other boys on the team blamed him, and so he committed suicide.

Well, it isn't confined to Germany. Here is one from California. This one wasn't dealing with a soccer field. It was dealing with the mathematics classroom:

“Alone in his home, 15-year-old Fred, a high school student, worried over a geometry problem today. For hours he worked. Then he gave up, got a pistol, and fired a bullet into his brain. On the table was an open geometry book, and beside it a note: ‘I cannot keep up with my geometry class. This is the best way out. I am sorry.’ His is the second school-boy suicide in this city within two months. In March, Robert, 14, killed himself over a failure to keep pace with his fellow students at the high school.”

My dear friends, what a shame it is, whether on the athletic field, in the classroom, in the home, or in the church, we ever put anybody in a place where the way for him to win is for somebody else to lose, and where we teach him to compare his attainments to others, feel proud if he is better than others, and feel discouraged and depressed and rejected if he's not as good as others.

But there are those who think this is the way to get things done. Here is an ad from one of our big periodicals in this country of America:

“Understand rivalry, and you understand America. Rivalry is dad forgetting his stiff back to grow the best tomatoes in town. Rivalry is mom's determination to make a better cake than Mrs. Brown. From county fairs to quiz programs, from baseball games to business, rivalry is in America's blood, a thrill and a challenge. We have outdistanced the world because we like to outdistance each other.”

And may I say, dear friends, there is quite a bit of truth in that. I mean, there is quite a bit of accuracy in this statement about what it produces. Can rivalry and competition get things done? Certainly, certainly. Someone was telling me about an extreme example of how to use it to get things done. A number of years ago, in one of the state penitentiaries some miles from here, the warden in charge found ways to advantage himself by hiring out some of the prisoners to cut cane in the sugarcane patches. And his method was very simple. See whether you think it would produce results. He lined up all the prisoners across one side of the cane field, gave each one of them a row of cane to cut and each one a knife, and said, “The last man to finish his row gets a flogging.” That is a prize in reverse, isn't it? Do you suppose he got some cane cut?

Now, most of us don't do it that way. We would rather exalt the *victor*—give a prize to the *winner*—than give a flogging prize to the loser.

Counsels on Sabbath School Work, page 182. Here the prophet to the remnant says:

“We should not seek to imitate Sunday schools, nor keep up the interest by offering prizes. The offering of rewards will create rivalry, envy, and jealousy; and some who are the most diligent and worthy, will receive little credit.

“...Try none of these methods in your Sabbath schools; but let the superintendent and teachers make every effort to have life and interest in their schools. What a blessing it would be if all would teach as Jesus taught! ...In your teaching be as near like him as possible” *Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, page 182.

Oh, I want to learn the methods of Christ in the home, in the school, in the church, every place to be like Jesus. And He is love, and love delights to give. Love delights to serve. Love seeks even to sacrifice that others may know the joy and the peace of life. Oh, that God may anoint our eyes that we may discern the difference between love and selfishness.

And my dear friends, do you think selfishness is any better when it is harnessed up to pull a Christian wagon? Do you think rivalry and competition are sanctified when they are used to raise money for the church, or to see how much better we can do than some other Sabbath school, or some other church, or some other company, or some other institution? Oh no. As I have told you before, it's like using fermented wine in the sacramental cup. And God is not in it, my friends. God wants to purge out the old leaven. He wants to give us the fresh new wine found in the cluster. There is a blessing in it, this blessing of love—unfermented love, love that rejoices when others win, when others succeed.

And what rest and peace this brings. Think of it in life, friends. I don't have to fight for a place in the sun. My Heavenly Father knows where He wants me. And if my name is Joseph and I'm in the dungeon under false accusation, if God wants me to be prime minister, can He get me there? Oh yes, He can get me there. And I can trust Him, and meanwhile, I can be loving my fellow prisoners enough to minister to them, sharing their sorrows, and helping to solve their problems. Do you see? Joseph was the same loving friend whether he was in the dungeon or on the throne. God is looking for young people like Joseph today who have learned the joy of service, who are not seeking to fight their way up, treading on the bodies of their less skillful or less ambitious peers, rising at the expense of others. Oh no! God is looking for workers who, like Jesus of Nazareth, will be content to toil in the carpenter shop all through the teens and twenties if God so appoints, waiting the hour of call to the public ministry and then continuing a life of sacrificial service.

Over 30 years ago, a young woman came to this campus and enrolled as a student with us. She had been an honor student in a large state university. All her life, she had been an A-student, and her family looked to her to keep up the reputation of the family. It had driven her and driven her, and she had driven herself until she was a bundle of nerves. When she learned these beautiful principles—that God had not called men to rivalry and competition, He had called them to loving service, not to comparison with others—oh, what relief it brought to her! What release! I saw her just a few weeks ago, and for 30 years, that flame of love has burned in her heart and brought joy to her soul and through her to many others. Ah friends, the law of God—the law of love—is the law of liberty. Thank God, we are not in a race with anybody in this world to outdistance them on any point, on any matter. We are rather seeking to hold out the helping hand, and it is in unselfishness ministry that true happiness is found. Do you know why? That's the way we were made. We were made in God's image, and God is like that. It's the Devil that has perverted things. Never think that we can have more success in God's work by borrowing the tools of Satan. Not a bit of it.

“But,” somebody says, “Brother Frazee, isn't life a fight? Isn't life a game? Isn't life a race?” I will tell you, friends, the only fight I'm in is the fight with the Devil. That isn't any mimic battle. That's a real fight. But there are two things about this I want you to notice. First, the only reason I'm fighting the Devil is because he is fighting God. And second, there is no question about the outcome. There is no risk. I don't have to wait in uncertainty to see who is going to win in this war. I'm enlisted in a war against war, a struggle against strife. I'm enlisted in a battle which is to end all rivalry, all competition in this universe. This can happen only as Satan, the author of rivalry and competition and strife and debate and war, comes to his end. God would reclaim him if that were possible. But long ago, in a mystery that even eternity can never explain, he deliberately chose to turn away from this beautiful, glorious love and plunge into this selfishness, this desire to advantage himself at the expense of others.

Oh friends, I thank God we can be on the winning side with Jesus! But we wrestle not against flesh and blood. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal. We are not out to spear men or to use the sword. We are not out to use the weapons of the Devil in word or act. The weapons of God's warfare are the weapons of love. To know God is to love Him. His character must be manifested in contrast to the character of Satan. This is one reason that Jesus allowed Himself to be bound, beaten, scourged, and crucified. This was Satan going to the utmost limit in his philosophy of grinding down his opposition. He sought to blot out Jesus Christ. But in so doing, he revealed the hideousness, the heinousness, the wickedness of his own heart and his own methods so that the universe has turned against him, friends. Where do you stand? Do you want to go with him? Just a little way? Oh, let's not go an inch with him, friends! If love is the real answer, let's go all the way with love, what do you say? And let us ask God to purge out from our hearts the slightest bit of selfishness.

“Ah, but,” somebody says, “Brother Frazee, do you think you will really get anything done with that?” Well, Paul said the love of Christ what? Constraineth us (2

Corinthians 5:14). And what does 'constrain' mean? It makes me do things. Ah friends, there is a motive which will cause men to do more than all the appeal to fill their stomachs with dainties or to fill their pockets with gold. There is a motive, the appeal to which will lead men not only to give time and give money but give *themselves* if necessary to die. What is it? It's love. It is love. Has that motive been aroused in your heart? Has that appeal found an echo in your soul? Thank God! Decision day is still with us. I wonder if there is somebody here tonight to whom the Holy Spirit has witnessed, some arrow from the Lord's quiver has found its mark in your heart.

I wonder if there is somebody that says, "Brother Frazee, tonight I see that there has been something in my life, in my educational experience, or in my business experience, or my recreation and amusements, or in the home—something that has had this motive of selfishness—and by God's grace, I'm putting my life in the hand of Jesus tonight to purge me from every bit of anything that is not true pure love." If there is somebody that God has spoken to about this point, and you would like to let Jesus know that you are responding to what God has spoken to your heart about, I wish you would just stand where you are. I'd like to pray for you.

Will you all kneel with me?

Heavenly Father, can it be really true that You are willing to fix these hearts and minds of ours so we will be thinking of others all the time and hunting ways to lift people up instead of pushing them down? Can it be that You will give us the love of Thine own dear heart so that we rejoice to give, to serve, and even to sacrifice, that others may share the joy and the blessings of life?

Oh Lord, the world is so full of strife—selfishness gone to seed. On every continent, men are shooting one another, stabbing one another, hurting one another, and in more refined and more cultured ways, they are causing people to lose heart as well as to lose life. God forgive us. And oh, I pray that Thou wilt purge from our souls every bit of this longing to be first, this desire to push our way into position in church or in institution or in business or anywhere else. Give us the joy that comes to be like Jesus, to be as one that serves, to fill the place of Thine appointment with thanksgiving, rather being a doorkeeper in the house of God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.

Lord, Thou hast seen these many responses. Fill each heart to overflowing with the joy and the relaxation and the rest and peace that comes through full surrender, full acceptance of Thy righteousness, Thy love. Bless us as we continue in fellowship, for Jesus' sake, amen.

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