

A Case for Christ-Lent 2010 **Jesus as Love Redefined**

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

A Case for Christ-Lent 2010: Jesus as Love Redefined

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: John 3:16-21; John 15:9-17; John 13:1-17; John 4

Introduction

When contemporary culture talks about love, we can't assume that the same idea is in mind every time. Consider the ways we use the term:

- 1) I love a good steak.
- 2) We love to do things together.
- 3) Don't you just love it when people say they always do the right thing?
- 4) I love my dog.
- 5) I love my wife.
- 6) I love my kids.
- 7) I love my job.
- 8) You must love yourself, or you can't love other people.
- 9) I love getting up early in the morning to see the sunrise.
- 10) Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.
- 11) For God so loved the world...

Feel free to add a few more of your own! A person unfamiliar with our language might wonder what all of these statements have in common.

The world of the Bible had its own words for love, and at times faced the problem we do of always using them consistently. One unique appropriation of the biblical terms is God's love for His people and for His world. In turn, a great deal is said about loving God and doing so faithfully. By contrast, failing to love God led to serious substitutes for love, and these generally fell under the idea of idolatry. It is generally assumed that God made His world because of love. Human existence crowned the love-achievements of God's creation, and reflected the inner truth that God Himself is Love. He didn't make just one creature called "man," but chose to express the rich idea of relationship by creating humans as male and female.

Love is not the quality of a solitary being. Yet at times, we try to live our lives precisely in that way, supposing that we know best who we are and what we are suppose to become. Biblical culture saw the individual as innately a part of the whole community, and, indeed, defined one person in light of the others. Students of society refer to this as a *dyadic* understanding. In the West, we prize rugged individualism, and practice forms of egoism which makes the self the chief value. God's answer to this imperfect understanding is His love.

But if love starts with God, our ability to experience it depends on our knowledge of Him. At this very point, Jesus declared that our knowledge of God is wholly inadequate, and that was one of the reasons why he had come into the world. Using the metaphor of a shepherd caring for his sheep, Jesus said:

¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep (John 10:14-15).

A genuine knowledge of the Father, combined with an authentic knowledge of Jesus, leads to the supreme act of selflessness: "I lay down my life for the sheep." However, the lack of this knowledge of God led to

substantial distortions in the thinking of Jesus' contemporaries. His critics hounded him every time he claimed that God was his Father. His rejoinder was direct and no doubt uncomfortable to them"

¹⁹ They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also" (John 8:19).

All of which explained the direction Jesus' life would eventually take, all the way to the cross. It seems appropriate, then, at this point in our Lenten series to reflect on **the central place that love has in our understanding of God and of His Son**. We must be armed with the awareness of how love has undergone a distortion in our culture, and carefully use the language of the Bible instead. More specifically, we want to point out how Jesus himself significantly transformed our understanding of love, even from the popular views held by his fellow Jews. Our choice of texts comes from the Gospel of John, from the hand of a writer sometimes called "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

In his *The Problem of Pain*, C.S. Lewis remarked: "Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness." Had the mission of Jesus simply been to bring kindness into the world, he would have remained a mere footnote in history. Lewis continued: "Love may forgive all infirmities and love still in spite of them: but Love cannot cease to will their removal." Further, "God will look to every soul like its first love because He is its first love." If we learn anything at all about the person of Jesus, it is his resolute determination to rid the world of all that disfigures the good creation of God.

If we seem to overlay the love factor, the reason lies with Jesus himself who put human flesh on God's love, and accepted the rough and tumble calling which encountered sickness and healed it; confronted demons and banished them; uncovered hypocrisy and exposed it; was tempted by sin and overcame it; faced death and defeated it. He embodied love, not only talked about it; expressed love, not only felt it; practiced love, not only taught it. Having received a form of love he proceeded to transform it — redefined it.

Once more, we listen to Lewis:

"God has paid us the intolerable compliment of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense."

The Hebrew Understanding of Love

Jewish writer, Ahuva Bloomfield, makes some interesting observations about the most common word for love in the Hebrew language.

Love in Hebrew is *'āhābāh*, which is made up of three basic Hebrew letters, *ahb*. These three letters actually are broken down into two parts: a two letter base or root, *hb*, and the first letter, *'a*, which is a modifier. The meaning of the two letter base is "to give". The letter "aleph," which precedes these two letters comes to modify the meaning of the base word, "give". The meaning of *'āhābāh*, is "I give" and also "love".

We now see the connection between the two words, "I give" and "love". Love is giving. Now only is love giving, but the actual process of giving develops the very connection between the giver and the receiver. The more giving that one does, the greater is the connection.

The process of giving is a vehicle through which the giver through his act of giving is able to, through a physical gift (or even a verbal comment), give of himself to another. This act of giving something is not merely helping another. For sure, giving is helping another, but it is much more than that. Giving is a method that enables us to make a connection to another. When we give to another, that which we give to him/her, could have been utilize to further our own self. Instead, we choose to take this object, which could have been utilized for our own needs and instead, use it for someone else.

Giving is a condition that creates and sustains love. Without giving, there is no connection that is sustaining.

The true relationships that are meaningful in our lives are those in which mutual giving takes place. The giving may be physical, emotional, intellectual or a combination. But without giving from ourselves, no relationship can be enduring.

That is the secret of love that is revealed to us by the Hebrew language. This is the secret that is invested in the language by the Creator.¹

If we compare the various translations of the Hebrew Bible into English, eleven different words are rendered as "love." As Bloomfield suggests, *'āhābāh* tops the list as the *usual* word. By my count, this word and its variants (noun, verb, adjective) appear some 216 times in 202 verses under 70 forms. But like our English "love," its range of meaning is immense. One scholar notes:

There is little variation in the basic meaning of this verb. The intensity of the meaning ranges from God's infinite affection for his people to the carnal appetites of a lazy glutton.²

Our interest lies with God's love for His people which appears throughout the Old Testament.

1. God loved the founding fathers of Israel (Deuteronomy 4:37; 2 Samuel 12:24; Proverbs 3:12; 15:9; Psalm 146:8; Nehemiah 13:26).
2. God loved Israel, His people:

⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:7-8).

² Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, ³ the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you (Jeremiah 31:2-3)

Less clear, is the form of God's love *for the world*. We might argue cogently that by remaining faithful to His creation, by sustaining life and maintaining the course of nature, God demonstrated His *steadfast love* for all He had made.

This introduces a second word for love in the Hebrew Bible, namely *hesed*. It is the most variously rendered word. Some examples of its precise use include:

- All the ways of the LORD are **loving** and faithful" (Psalm 25:10).
- Let them give thanks to the LORD for his **unfailing love** Psalm 107:8.
- The refrain throughout Psalm 136 is: *His love endures forever*.

God's *hesed* pertains to His covenant-commitment to His people, often translated by the word "loving-kindness." Because God has this attribute:

1. He redeems the people from their enemies (Genesis 19:19; 39:21).
2. Preserves from death (Psalm 6:4; 86:13) (Note: In these texts, the word *sheol* is the Hebrew idea of death or the grave).
3. Gives salvation (Psalm 109:26; 119:41).
4. Redeems from sin (Psalm 25:7; 51:1)
5. Keeps His covenants (Micah 7:20; Deuteronomy 7:9-12; 2 Samuel 7:15.)

When the Old Testament writers further describe *hesed*, they use the following modifiers:

1. Abundant (Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 103:8).
2. Great in extent (Numbers 14:19; Psalm 145:8-9; Deuteronomy 5:10, which says that *hesed* extends to 1000 generations; Psalm 57:10, great as the heavens; Psalm 33:5, the earth is full of it).
3. Everlasting (Jeremiah 33:11; Psalm 100:5).

¹ From the online *Jewish Magazine* (www.jewishmag.com/20mag/hebrew/hebrew.htm).

² Robert L. Alden, "'āhab," *Theological Word Book of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, Moody Press, p.14 (hereafter, *TWOT*).

4. Good (Psalm 69:16; 109:21; 63:3, better than life).

Often used in the plural, *hesed* provides evidence of the historic displays of God's love to His people (Genesis 32:11; Isaiah 63:7). Used in this way, we often find the translation "mercies." These are especially shown to David (Isaiah 55:3), but can apply to things in general (Lamentations 3:22; Psalm 17:7; 107:43).

From these examples, a picture of God's love emerges from the pages of the Old Testament. It is portrayed as His *steadfast* love, marked by *commitment* and *responsiveness* to those in need. God *chooses* to love, and does not wait to be asked. *Hesed* is the loving *initiative of God*, his grace which *goes before* and seeks the lost, the sinner, and the hopeless. Above all, it speaks of His determination to restore His creation, starting with Israel.

In his *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament*,³ Norman Snaith draws a distinction between God's *hesed* and His *'āhābāh*.

1. With regard to *hesed*, there must be a *covenant* binding God with His partners. The reach of this covenant-love depends on the terms of the covenant. After studying a variety of roots and comparative terms in languages related to Hebrew, Snaith settles on "keenness" and "eagerness" as the likely base meaning of this Hebrew word. As applied to the relationship between God and His people, it comes to mean the "persistent, determined, steadfast love of God, which transcends every other love by its nature and depth."⁴ God's love is, in this regards, *stubborn* in best sense of the word. "Determined faithfulness to a covenant" clearly sets this expression apart.
 - a. The term is connected to other nouns: *'emeth* and *'emunah* which mean "fidelity, firmness and truth, trustworthiness"; *berīth* which means "covenant"; *tsedaqah* and *mishpat* which pertain to "righteousness"; *raḥamīm* which has to do with "compassion."
 - b. Some "recognized tie" must lie at the basis of this kind of love. It is not indiscriminate favor, but rather the firm adherence to covenant.
2. In the case of *'āhābāh*, this is God's *choosing-love* (Snaith calls this "election-love") which must come prior to covenant-love. The whole idea that God would make a covenant with someone at all depends on His choosing-love. Three main ideas are present in the Old Testament use of the term:
 - a. God's love for Israel is an unconditional love (Amos 3:2).
 - b. God's love is a sovereign love, flowing from His role as King (Leviticus 20:2ff; 2 Kings 23:10; Jeremiah 32:35; Amos 5:26).
 - c. God's love is distinctive because it does more than is required
3. A third word appears in the Old Testament with a somewhat different connotation. It is *hen*. This term does not require a covenant. It stands for "kindness, mercy, forbearance, favor." We have here the attitude of a superior to an inferior. This comes closest to the idea of "unmerited favor," that supreme graciousness and condescension of the part of the giver, who is the superior. Nothing *obligates* the giver to show *hen* toward the beneficiaries. Rather, the focus is on generosity. The receiver makes no claim on his benefactor.

Love in the Greek-Roman World

The Greek words commonly translated as "love" include:

1. *Eros* - the basis for our English word "erotic." Eros was the Greek god of love, and embodied the sensual, sexual, and impulsive. Plato defined this love as aspiring for and delighting in the value of its object; loving that which is lovable. This Greek word is not found in New Testament.
2. *Philia* - found in our English words philosophy, philanthropy, philology, bibliophile, Philadelphia, Philip, etc. The Greeks used it of the love one has for friend, spouse, and children. The New Testament uses it accordingly (Matthew 10:37; Luke 12:4; 14:12; John. 11:3, 36).
3. *Storgē* – considered as "familial love," that form of natural affection involving one's "kindred." It carries the idea of "cherish." "It is described as the most natural, emotive, and widely diffused of loves:

³ Shocken Books, 1964, pp. 94-142.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 99.

natural in that it is present without coercion; emotive because it is the result of fondness due to familiarity; and most widely diffused because it pays the least attention to those characteristics deemed "valuable" or worthy of love and, as a result, is able to transcend most discriminating factors."⁵

3. *Agapē* - is seldom used in secular Greek literature. When used, it referred to *selective desire* for something or someone. The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible (Septuagint, LXX) used the word over 300 times to refer to God's selective and exclusive love for Israelite people. This is the predominant word for love in the New Testament (over 250 occurrences). With the coming of Jesus, the idea was invested with new meaning. The writers chose a word which lacked a strong, definite idea and filled it with fresh significance.

If we explore some key representative Biblical references employing agape, the following texts help outline the general meaning as it is used in the New Testament:

"Love your enemies" (Matthew 5:43,44).
"Great commandment...love God..." (Matthew 22:36-40).
"God so loved the world He gave His only Son" (John 3:16).
"New commandment...love one another.." (John 13:34; 15:12).
"Love with which You loved Me may be in them" (John 17:26).
"Love of God poured out within our hearts" (Romans 5:5).
"Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).
"The greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:1-13).
"The love of Christ controls us" (II Corinthians 5:14).
"Faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6).
"Fruit of the Spirit is love..." (Galatians 5:22).
"Everyone who loves is born of God" (I John 4:7).

The character of God consists in the single statement: "God is love" (I John 4:8, 16). God doesn't just *have* love as one of His many attributes, He *is Love* essentially. Of this *agapē*-style love as it is applied to God, we can say that it is: absolute and independent, unneccesitated, immutable and uncompromising, personal, relational, fundamental to the triune God, self-giving, other-oriented, desires the best for all others, and the best *is* Himself.

Comprehensively, this love is: The all-encompassing expression of God's character
"Summed up in 'you shall love your neighbor'" (Romans 13:9).
"The whole law summed up in 'love your neighbor'" (Galatians 5:14).
"The royal law which says ... 'you shall love your neighbor'" (James 2:8).

Objectively, God's love is expressed by His grace (Ephesians 2:4, 5); this grace is realized in Jesus Christ (John 1:17; 3:16; Titus 3:4); expressed in redemption (Romans 5:8; Galatians 2:20; I John 4:10; Revelation 1:5).

Subjectively, God's character of love to be expressed in the behavior of human beings; requires the regenerative presence of God's character ("love may be in them, as in Me" John 17:26; "love of God shed in our hearts" Romans 5:5; "the fruit of the Spirit is love" Galatians 5:22; "everyone who loves is born of God" I John 4:7). Only God can express His character of love. *Agapē*-style love is not: a virtue, value, ideal, or moral principle; a mere feeling, sentiment, impulse, or passion; romance, benevolence, or amicability; a psychological predisposition, physical genetics, or social habit. Such love is expressed only as derived from God: *ek theos*. Love is the spiritual character of God in the Christian and is commanded of the Christian (John 13:34; 15:12; Ephesians 5:2). We have freedom in the receptivity of His character, and, for us, God is the dynamic of His own demands.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Four_Loves.

As the New Testament describes *agapē*-style love, certain practical features express this God-based essence. Love is not defined by the act, but by the character of God within the act. Love precludes hypocrisy and play-acting. Love is unselfish; not based on self-need or want. Love is not conditioned on reciprocity or calculation of repayment. Love doesn't care who gets the credit. Love is active; not merely passive or theoretical; love doesn't loiter. Love believes, trusts and expects God to overcome all things. Love is directed toward people, not things, ideas, doctrines, or principles. Love of neighbor desires them to have everything you have, and more. Love precludes resentment, covetousness, and judging another. Love seeks to commend, not condemn. Love is not conditioned on the lovability or action of the recipient. Love is not fickle; it is unchanging and limitless. Love precludes despair at the loss or absence of the person loved. Love precludes favoritism and aversion. Love does not engage in comparison. Love is not possessive, seeking to own or control another person. Love does not find its identity or life in the one loved. Love is the antidote to fear and paranoia (I John 4:18). Love seeks the highest good of the other, with no thought of benefit to oneself. Love involves self-denial, self-renunciation, personal sacrifice, humility. Love is willing to suffer slights, hurts, and abuse. Love builds others up, nurtures, edifies; it is constructive, not destructive. Love seeks to avoid grieving or offending another (Romans 13:10; 14:15).

Love of one's enemy removes his relation of power (Matthew 5:40). Love precludes partiality, preference, distinction, exclusivism; it is universal and equal. Love does not take the situation into one's hand to resolve the problem. Love does not preclude confrontation, opposition and discipline (Hebrew 12:6); it is not always capitulatory or soft ("tough love") (cf. Matthew 10:34; Luke 12:49). Love cannot be coerced or obliged by law or moral principle and program. Love is not retaliatory (Romans 12:17); it turns the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). Love does not dictate performance standards or expectations to others. Love prompts one to take the initiative to be the first to act (Matthew 7:12). Love dissolves the emotional blocks which keep us from sensitivity to others. Love does not demand its personal rights. Love excludes suspicion and mistrust. Love allows one to be free to be human as God intended human beings to be.

Jesus "So Loved": God's Message of Love (John 3:16-21)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God."

The lead character of the drama fleshed out in John 3 is the Pharisee ruler, Nicodemus, whose late-night conversation with Jesus becomes the subject of John's discussion of the New Birth (refer to *Background Notes*, March 14/15, 2009 for a complete exegesis of this material). What defined his character seemed to lie in his connection to the more moderate wing of the Pharisee party, a reputation he shared with Gamaliel, the teacher of Saint Paul. Like many, he longed for change, but not at the expense of human lives. His counterparts among the followers of Shammai were not so well-heeled. They wanted change at all costs, and applied strict rules of performance on those who would represent God to the world.

From Jesus, Nicodemus hears about a new kind of life, one that comes from God who "begets" and enables the "birth" of a new kind of human being. Sceptically, the Pharisee is not so sure he agrees with Jesus, imagining that human nature is far too inflexible to undergo the sort of transformation Jesus promises. He hears Jesus talk about the almost intangible quality of the wind and how God's Spirit works in exactly the same way in human lives. Nicodemus is, to be sure, baffled to believe in God's love for the world, and he shows it by asking the question, "How can these things be?" (3:9). In response, Jesus sets out several key ideas;

1. The New Birth is something that must happen to people who are "from below" and "of the flesh."
2. The New Birth is something that must happen "from above" if people are to rise above "the flesh" and become persons of the Spirit.

3. The "We" refers to Jesus in relationship to his Father, persons who are "from above."
4. Jesus, though "from above," has come down "below," in order that he might make understandable to those who are "from below" the things which are "from above."
5. Even though Jesus puts his message in terms of things "from below" (or as 3:12 puts it, "earthly things," like the blowing of the wind and human birth), a certain resistance to his message persists.
6. Jesus concedes that he cannot speak about things "from above" (or as 3:12 puts it, "heavenly things," like being born again) as long as Nicodemus (and his colleagues) fail to *accept* the testimony of Jesus and his Father.

To bridge the obvious chasm between "above" and "below" will require someone who has been "above" but is now "below." Who would leave heaven (3:13) and venture into the risky world of human beings on earth? What sort of person allows himself to be "lifted up like a snake on a pole" so that "everyone" might be given opportunity to "believe in him" and thereby have eternal life (3:14-15)? Herein lies the great puzzle drawn on the face of Nicodemus as he listens to Jesus. Stark contrasts span 3:1-15, including old birth and new, darkness and light, unbelief and belief.

All of these contrasts invite us to an even deeper truth, one which John reserves for this point in the passage, and summarizes in 3:16-18, beginning with the much loved words, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Here is the real answer to Nicodemus' probing question, "How can these things be?" **The golden thread which binds together the promise of New Birth "from above" and the distressing life "from below," is the unfailing love of God for His world.** If Nicodemus wants to "see" the kingdom of God and then "enter" it, he must open his heart to God's love. True, he must listen attentively to the words of Jesus and read the meaning beyond the signs. He must accept the "testimony" of the Father and the Son who has come down "from heaven." He must fasten his eyes on the Son of Man, "lifted up" on the cross one day, the remedy for his sins. But he must do more than that. He must "receive" God's love as a freely offered gift, flowing from the gracious heart of the covenant God. Only in that way, "can these things be" for Nicodemus--and for the world.

Had you asked Nicodemus about the mysterious "Son of Man" alluded to by Jesus, he would no doubt have offered an interpretation of the coming Messiah which included **judgment on the pagans and salvation for Israel**. As we have already noted, to Nicodemus' more radical colleagues among the Pharisees, Messiah would come to put things right--for Israel--having defeated all of their enemies "round about!" Romans, tax collectors, harlots and other sinners would be eliminated, and righteous Israel, along with her precious institutions, would remain as the chosen people of God. But the point of John 3:16 is that God so loved *the world*, and the writer leaves no doubt what he means when he uses the Greek word *kosmos*: that would include all of the people Pharisees would very much like to exclude from their table fellowship! If Nicodemus found it hard to accept that God could change Jewish people through New Birth, what hope remained for the rest of the world?!

That is why John 3:17 follows in our text. God's purpose in sending His Son into the world was not to "judge the world" (Greek: *krinē ton kosmon*) but to save it. Most translators, grasping the sense of the word "judge" in this context, rightly use the word "condemn," even though the word for "judge" can mean simply "to render a verdict, make a judgment." Usually when Jewish people thought about the "coming of the Son of Man," they understood it in terms of "coming in judgment," to mete out justice on the wicked. Of course, the "judge" has a dual role. He must make sure that the wrongs are uncovered, properly dealt with and penalties applied. But he also must exonerate those who are not guilty and give remediation to those who have been ill-used and have brought their cases before his tribunal. "The Son of God comes," Jesus makes clear, "so that the world might be 'put to rights.'" Such is the nature of God's love. Within the being of God there is no contradiction between His love and justice. It is, in fact, the love of God working through His justice which gives the Son to the world. Salvation flows from God's justice-through-love and also from His love-through-justice. On the cross, sin is judged and sinners forgiven. On the cross God's Son dies, but rises again. Yes, there is sin, but there is

also forgiveness. Yes, there is death, but there is also resurrection life. That's how love, working through justice, operates for the restoration of God's good creation.

But how do we make sense out of God's judgment on sinners? Does God not pass judgment on those who sin? Does the provision of God's Son nullify any other concept of justice? That question seems to lie behind what the writer tells us next in 3:18:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Nicodemus had his own ideas about sin and judgment, being the good Pharisee that he was. Sin assumed a concrete and specific form and was tied to some 613 commandments which claimed to distill the essence of Torah for Israel: "Do these and you will live." By contrast, Jesus has just told his conversation partner, "Look to me and live." What happens to Jesus determines what happens to us, John is telling his readers. To "believe" means a great deal more than holding the right opinion about Jesus or having all of one's theological "ducks in a row." When Nicodemus tried to fit the idea of New Birth into his own lexicon of meaning as a Pharisee, nothing seemed to fit, and all he could say was, "How can these things be?" If, however, you grasp the nettle in a different way, the barbs don't pierce your hands at all, but instead they appeal to your heart where the love of God gives His Son for your salvation. The word "believe", in John's Gospel, from the Greek word *pisteuō*, is virtually equivalent to "receive" (Greek: *labanō*) as illustrated by this central text:

12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:12-13).

The encounter of Jesus with Nicodemus and all that Jesus told him become fitting interpretations of this passage. Here we find that "believe" means "receive," marvelously woven with the idea of "the right" to "become" "children of God." This is what it means for Jesus to "judge favorably:" he comes ready to receive those who respond to God's love and confer on them this new legal standing which John expresses through the Greek word *exousia*, translated as "right," but might well be rendered as "authority." Moreover, we "become" something that we were not before, and that is God's "children," the fruit of the New Birth. Finally, we are told this "birth" is not "of flesh" or "man's will" but "of God," an equivalent statement of Jesus' words, "born from above," not "from flesh" but "from Spirit."

The offshoot of this understanding appears in 3:18 where the verdict "guilty" is rendered, not by some arbitrary application of Torah commandments (the so-called "613"), but the choice of those who refuse to return God's love with an attitude of trust. Some are "condemned already," John tells us, "from the sheer fact of their unbelief." Not "to believe" means to not "to receive" (see John 1:11). It means to "refuse" and stubbornly resist what God has done in Christ for the world. Once Christ came, died and rose again, the whole structure of God's judicial system underwent a radical transformation. Persons stand ultimately condemned, not on the basis of their many "sins", but on the grounds of **refusing the gracious gift of God through Jesus Christ**. In the coming of Jesus, God was willing to bear the burden of human sin, suffering its penalty, dying in our stead. Yes, God "gave" in the deepest and most loving sense when He sent Jesus, His Son in this way. Faith, by contrast, is the loving response of hearts that become open to the love of God as seen in the mercy of the cross.

Baffling? Likely it certainly was to Nicodemus who probably expected a more "legal" answer to his questions. What he encounters in Jesus is something far more powerful than a sophisticated argument: he discovers the loving heart of God turned toward the world in its deepest need. Salvation is, in the final analysis, about love--*agapē*-style love which seeks the good of the other before it asks anything for itself in return; that which offers remedy before seeing human righteousness; one who dies for sinners, even though he is God in the flesh. At this point in John's account, we arrive at 3:19 which seems to explore more thoroughly the various implications of all that has been said thus far. Its opening words in the Greek are: *hautē de estin hē krisis*, literally, "so then, this is the judgment..." How do we judge all of this? What sort of judgment does this imply? How does all of this get sorted out? These questions presuppose everything John has told the reader up to this point in the text.

They press beyond Nicodemus' original question--"How can these things be?"--by examining what God's notion of justice actually looks like.

Nicodemus was accustomed to making all sorts of judgments about Torah and how it applied to human lives. The Pharisees felt that Israel needed to tighten its moral belts and become a thoroughly holy people so that God would judge them favorably and bring them back from exile. "This is the judgment," John continues:

The light has come into the world
And human beings loved darkness more than the light,
Because their actions were evil.
For everyone who does wicked things hates the light
And does not come to the light,
Lest his deeds should be exposed. (3:19-20)

The crucial question, he argues, is not *intellectual*, but *moral*. The sun may shine brightly, but the criminal intent on robbing the store will find dark places to hide his intentions. Why? He loves to steal! What do we love? That is the "heart question." St. Augustine wrote about what he called "disordered love," the sort of love that brings chaos and wreckage in its wake.⁶ Our hearts are already seduced by the love of other things, such as power, material things and the affection of other people. "Lust of the flesh" involves love for anything that is, in Augustine's words, *unworthy* of our love. But God woos his alienated creation by the supreme act of love: He gives His one and only Son, attracting to Himself like a magnet all the sins of the world, doing battle with the world, the flesh and the Devil on the cross. "Amazing love, how can it be that Thou my God should die for me?" Charles Wesley wonders aloud, pondering the love of God for him.

"This is what deserves a guilty verdict," John's Gospel explains in 3:18, that human beings should "love darkness rather than light," yielding to the pleasure of their own evil actions. What? Love darkness when the love of God shines so brightly from the cross? Ah, writes John, "That is the greatest condemnation, for love like that to be spurned for mere trifles, the baubles of human selfishness." Unbelief, then, is the spurning of God's love for the sake of a lesser love. Indeed, John tells us, it is the hatred of the light which would expose its evil deeds. Like the first human pair, sin drives us into hiding and allures us to fashion fig leaf aprons to conceal our sense of guilt and shame. Human history bears ample witness to the great philosophies which sew such fig leaves, mounting grand arguments, denying the love of God, and justifying the love of lesser things. The protest, "I don't want to change," consistently precedes, "I will not believe," and in turn suggests a more insidious denial, "I will not be loved by God." Accepting God's love means risk and also brings responsibility. Allow myself to be loved by God? What might that mean? What obligations will it incur? The vulnerability of the human heart, holding fast to its selfishness, responding to God's love, brings fear. Letting God love us through His Son inevitably transforms us. Will we allow God to love us?

But not all is lost. Those who will follow the truth wherever it leads will one day stumble to the foot of the cross and give humble acknowledgement that any good they have done flows from the love of God which has gone before them. "We love because He first loved us," writes John later in his life (1 John 4:19). This week's text which celebrates in its final verses the baffling love of God, concludes this way:

But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been carried out in God" (John 3:21).

"Doing what is true," as our British friends say, "There's the rub." Still, it's hard to imagine the human heart showing that sort of reliability. Doesn't the Old Testament caution about the heart, that it is "deceitful above all things and desperately sick" (Jeremiah 17:9)? Didn't John tell us in 2:23-25 that Jesus didn't trust himself to anyone because he knew what was in the human heart? How can anyone possible "do what is true," and thus set himself on the path to the light? If God did nothing, human beings would never "do what is true." God

⁶ Augustine writes about this in his *Confession*, particularly in Book 2. He also addresses love and its disordered form in *The Writings Against the Manicheans*, chapter 8.

takes the first step necessarily since humans cannot. That is why we hold so firmly to "the grace which goes before,"⁷ the loving initiative of the God who "first loved us."

Of Vines and Branches: Teaching on Love (John 15:9-17)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.

The Intimacy of Love (15:9)

Unless God is more than a *solitary* person, He could not be essentially *love*. Yet, John's writings affirm, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). That is why the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is not just a theological nicety but a joyful proclamation about the true nature of a relational God. Much is said about "the love of God" in the Johannine materials. From the Gospel of John we have these important texts:

The Father **loves** the Son and has given all things into his hand (3:35).

For the Father **loves** the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel (5:20)

For this reason the Father **loves** me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again (10:17).

I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I **love** the Father (14:31).

As the Father has **loved** me, so have I **loved** you. Abide in my **love** (15:9).

I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his **love** (15:10).

I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you **loved** me (17:23).

Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you **loved** me before the foundation of the world (17:24).

I made known to them your [the Father's] name, and I will continue to make it known, that the **love** with which you have **loved** me may be in them, and I in them (17:26).

Most of this material appears within the Last Discourse section (14-17), with an especially intimate conversation between Jesus and his Father in John 17. *The overwhelming emphasis is on the Father loving the Son.* What Jesus deeply seeks from his Father is that the "name" of God would be so clearly "known" that the "love" of God might be transferred into the lives of the disciples (17:26). The reason for this desire is summed up with the telling words: "so that the world may know that I love the Father" (14:31) and "so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them as you loved me" (17:23). God is love, Jesus tells his followers, but love is never solitary, instead it reaches out to another, in this case the human race that He has created and for whose redemption He has sent His Son into the world. God wants His love to be visible in the loving unity of Jesus' followers: **"that the world may know." The love of God made known through the community of Jesus becomes the most powerful form of witness to the world, for through this love God is revealed to the world.**

The letters of *John* reinforce this message. One text is particularly germane:

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us (1 John 4:12).

God becomes visible when His love lives and grows in us. Comparing this text with an earlier one in John's Gospel (1:18), we discover that Jesus, the Word, by his coming in human form, **made visible the God who was unseen.** By thoughtful parallel, 1 John 4:12 is saying that **we** also express in human form the unseen love of God. Our lives as followers of Jesus, living in community, are to be revealers of God's love, and by this, in

⁷ Or as our theological tradition calls it, "prevenient grace."

Jesus' words, "shall all know you are my disciples" (13:34-35). Cultivating a community of God's love is the principal task of John's first letter. You are encouraged to read and study these passages which provide helpful insight for doing so (1 John 2:5, 10, 15; 3:1, 10-11, 14, 16-18, 23; 4:7-12, 16-21; 5:1-3).

The Invitation of Obedience (15:10)

Jesus, in 15:10, proceeds to connect *love* with *obedience*. A few remarks are in order about the meaning of the Greek word *agapē* used for "love" through these passages. As we have already noted at the beginning of this study, the Greek term was not particularly popular before it was taken up by the Christian message. Words like *philos* or *eros* were of greater significance. The New Testament's preference for *agapē* seems to derive from the obscurity of its meaning in classical usage. The Bible takes up a word with marginal content and fills it with new meaning. *Agapē* bears the weight of God's love for His Son, the Son's love for Him, and, together, their love for the world. Moreover, the disciples of Jesus are summoned to embody afresh God's love for each other and thereby witness the love of God to the world.

At the heart of *agapē*-style love is the notion of *choice* and the role of the *human will*. Classical Greek actually defined *agapē* in this way. Stanley Grenz, in his book *The Moral Quest*⁸, points out that the verb form *agapaō* meant "to prefer, to set one aim or good above another, to esteem one person more highly than another." Love, in this sense, goes beyond emotion and is something unsought and far from inevitable. It is a principle by which we deliberately live.

Eros is a general love of the world seeking satisfaction wherever it can. *Agapan* is a love that makes distinctions, choosing and keeping its object. *Eros* is determined by a more or less indefinite impulsion towards its object. *Agapan* is a free and decisive act determined by its subject. *Eros* in its highest sense is used of the upward impulsion of man, of his love for the divine. *Agapan* relates for the most part to the love of God, to the love of the higher lifting up the lower, elevating the lower above others. *Eros* seeks in others the fulfillment of its own life's hunger. *Agapan* must often be translated "to show love"; it is a giving, active love on the other's behalf.⁹

We should not be surprised, then, to hear Jesus tell his disciples that love is shown by **obedience to his commands**. Such requirements are not grievous or burdensome but grow from the love of Jesus for his disciples, and they in response for him. Obedience to the *entolē* (command) means doing what Jesus wants, fulfilling the will of God in the world. We obey, not out of legalistic constraint or intimidation, but out of grateful love for the gracious action of God toward us in Jesus. Love *invites obedience*. This is the moral dimension of love and it is sorely needed in the world. When God sent His Son to become the redeemer of the world, as the innocent dying on behalf of the guilty, He demonstrated the essence of *agapē*-love. This was God's invitation to a moral revolution, one which would replace the rigid rules of legalism and the licentious riots of paganism.

The great gift of the witnessing community to the world is seen in its obedient love to God and to each other, the living evidence that such morality is possible. The missionary task becomes the moral one, and the followers of Jesus are invited to lead the way.

The Infusion of Joy (15:11)

The passage, 15:7-17, has the form of a chiasm, a literary technique whereby a set of ideas are presented, climaxing at a center point, followed by a re-tracing of those ideas, in reverse order. We now reach the pivotal crux of the chiasm, expressed in Jesus' words (15:11):

These things I have spoken to you,
that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be full.

⁸ Stanley J. Grenz, *The Moral Quest: Foundations of Christian Ethics*, Intervarsity Press, 2000, pp.280ff.

⁹ Ethelbert Stauffer, *Ibid.*, p. 281.

They express the *purpose* for this collection of sayings, as introduced by the Greek conjunction *hina*, "in order that," followed by the subjunctive mood. The words of Jesus, the "cleansing" agents of the fruit-bearing branches, have been *definitively* spoken, and *John* uses the perfect tense to say this. The words of Jesus bring the "joy" of Jesus. From a biblical perspective, joy is celebrating our confidence in God's hopeful future. Joy is God's perspective on things experienced as an attitude of heart and mind. The prospect of bearing fruit, much fruit, and more fruit grows from the joy which Jesus gives. **Rejoicing in the prospect of the harvest** is one of *John's* themes and was stated succinctly in John 4:36 where sower and harvester rejoice together. Harvest festivals were always occasion for rejoicing in ancient Israel¹⁰. No doubt Jesus contemplates the spiritual equivalent of the grape harvest which began some fifty days after Pentecost. In God's salvation plan, the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost would be followed by a fruitful harvest of many Jewish lives who responded to the message of the disciples' preaching. It was the mark of the first respondents to this preaching that they celebrated "with glad hearts" (Acts 2:46), a pattern repeated in the later chapters of the book of *Acts* as the Gospel continued to bear fruit (8:8; 12:14; 13:52; 15:3).

In the same way, John would say things like this in his letters:

And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:4).

Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete (2 John 1:12).

Reinforcing These Themes in 15:12-17

After John reaches the center point of his chiasmus (**H**) (the accent on "joy"), he proceeds to retrace the ideas Jesus presented, following the normal pattern:

A B C D E F G H G' F' E' D' C' B' A'

G': In 15:10 he called on his disciples to show love for Jesus by keeping his commands. Now he makes clear in 15:12-13 that loving each other is the primary fulfillment of that commandment.

F': Whereas in 15:9b Jesus declared his love for his disciples, in 15:14-15a he personalizes that affirmation by "calling them **friends**." The Greek word used here is *philo* used in its various grammatical forms. Its nuance in this context is explained by Jesus when he informs the disciples that their role is no longer merely as servants (Greek: *douloi*) who simply carry out their master's instructions. Instead, Jesus confers a companionship status on them, making them privy to his Father's work and purpose in the world. In a sense, while they are not counselors in the kingdom court, a position far above their pay grade, they are courtiers nonetheless with special insights afforded them by Jesus. This reminds us of Yahweh's words in Genesis 18:17, "Can I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ... For I have chosen him." Jesus reveals his covenant relationship to the disciples by using this sort of language. They would become "co-workers" in the vineyard of God, and, by addressing them in this way, he is seeking the *ownership of responsibility* by granting the *openness of revelation*. As the future will unfold for the disciples, they will not only be following the Jesus-script, they will be fully invested partners in working out the details of God's coming kingdom in the world.

E': We learned from 15:9a that the Father loves the Son. Earlier, Jesus described this love by saying:

The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand (John 3:35).

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel (John 5:20).

That is, the Father's love for Jesus involves "giving" and "revealing" what the He is "doing." This is participatory love, the love which freely shares its work with another, and invites another to contribute to what

¹⁰ Carey Ellen Walsh offers helpful insights on the range of this topic in her monograph, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel*. Harvard Semitic Monographs, No.60. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000. Pp. vii + 259.

one is doing. In a similar way, we learn from 15:15b that Jesus tells the disciple all that his Father tells him. The secrets are revealed in God's family where love reigns supreme. Christianity is not like Gnosticism which kept its truths for only the privileged elite, persons who arose to some higher order of knowledge. Such elitism lacks love, but is marked by conceited pride and vaunted privilege. "It shall not be so among you," Jesus would tell his followers.

D': The affirmation that the Twelve were Jesus' disciples appeared in 15:8b. Corresponding to and strengthening this fact are Jesus' further words in 15:16a, "I chose you and appointed you." The underlying Greek of the verbs in this statement reinforce the official nature of the disciples' calling by Jesus.

1. **"To choose"** derives from *eklegomai*, "to call out from." Jesus contrasts his *calling* with the *choosing* by the disciples themselves. They were his idea; they were not their own idea. Tempting though it might be to credit the followers of Jesus with taking the initiative for their work, admittedly they were an unlikely group, cobbled together from fishermen, tax collectors and zealots. To hear John's telling of it (1:19ff), not everybody was enamored of Jesus or his origins. No, the mission of the Christian community was not a human idea. It was God's idea, and Jesus picked precisely the people to bear witness and work. Time has proven him correct in his choice.

2. **"To appoint"** comes from a rather ordinary word, *tithēmi*, which basically means "to put, place, set" and applies to a range of ordinary objects which are picked up and put down. By extension, the word comes to mean "to appoint, assign or arrange." The present context implies that meaning. There are certainly stronger words for "appoint," but John prefers the ordinary one. Jesus is, after all, not appointing officers to his cabinet or elevating them to some high political office. No, he is putting them where he wants them to be. Paul selects a similar metaphor in 2 Timothy 2:20-21 when he speaks of God choosing "vessels" "useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work."

The work of bearing fruit (the results of witness) is appointed by Jesus himself, his idea, not ours. We respond to him obediently in our witness because he has chosen and appointed us, having called us his friends, fully vested participants in spreading the kingdom of God throughout the world.

C': In 15:8a (and throughout this passage) Jesus wanted his branches "to bear fruit, much fruit and more fruit." To this trilogy of fruitfulness, he now adds "lasting fruit," the fruit which "remains" (15:16b). Perhaps we might see this as an extension of Jesus invitation to "abide in me," with the further result that those who "abide in Jesus" have, in turn, "abiding fruit." In fact, the word "abide" and the word "remain" derive from the same Greek root, *menō*. The emphasis is on the persistent and lasting quality of the fruit in question. The goal is not just fruit--but lasting fruit, the kind which can reproduce.

B': In 15:7b we read how the disciples' life of prayer is affected by "abiding in the vine." Rather than asking for things in a self-serving fashion, the disciple who derives his life from Jesus prayers for the fulfillment of God's will in the world. The language used was a simple "ask and receive." When we come to 15:16c, Jesus adds to the invitation "ask" the words "the Father in my name." Because the disciples abide in the vine (Jesus), they are granted privileges with the Father. A certain level of intimacy develops between Father, Son and the disciples which transforms the nature of prayer.

A': At last we complete the cycle of the chiasmus, returning to the condition that the words of Jesus remain in them (15:7a). In what sense does this happen? We learn the answer in 15:17 where the command to love one another constitutes the way the words of Jesus abide in his disciples. This "abiding," then, is not a mystical or mysterious experience, but the real embodiment of God's love in the disciples love for each other. When Scripture speaks of *agapē*-love elsewhere, persistence and reliability distinguish it. Paul probably says it best: "Love *never ends*...So now faith, hope and love *abides*. But the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:8, 13). Love abides.

In John's letters we hear words of warning: "Love not the world" because "the world passes away and its lusts. But he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17). The disciple knows the difference between

love and lust, *agapē* and *epithumia*. Love is meant for persons not things. Love for things engenders lust, whereas love for persons fulfills the will of God.

The disciples of Jesus abide in him as branches in a vine, and thereby abide in love. The fruit which hangs from the branches is the life God offers to the world. Through faith, mission and witness the disciples of Jesus become the transforming fruit-bearers of God's new creation — the evidence of love redefined.

When Water Matters: Jesus Models Love (John 13:1-17)

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean." ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you understand what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Circumstances and Certainties (13:1-3)

All the Gospel accounts connect the last meal of Jesus with his disciples to the Passover; that is, with the Jewish celebration of *Pesah*. For John, Jesus was thinking about his coming date with destiny even before that last Passover took place, or, as he phrases it: "Before the Feast of Passover" (13:1). For the purpose of this study, our emphasis will be on John's particular slant on the evening we have come to call "The Last Supper".

We are faced with a stark contrast at the outset: (1) Jesus' deep and abiding love for disciples "even to the end" (Greek: *eis telos egapesen autous*). Some want to translate this "to the limit" or "to the full", while others prefer "to the very end", that is, to the end of his life by dying on the cross; (2) Judas' willing response to the promptings of the *diabolos*, "the devil" to betray ("hand over", *paradoi*) Jesus. John says this happened in Judas' "heart", his *kardia*, the center of his thought, feelings and choice. What we witness is the alignment of two battling forces, one motivated by the supreme love of God, while the other driven from the darkest places of the universe.

How is it that Jesus reaches such love-inspired devotion to his own disciples? The text tells us that Jesus "knew" with supreme confidence that his "hour" had arrived. The Greek word *eidos*, which means "to be aware" or "to come to know", is a participle in the perfect tense, implying a settled form of action: "he had come to know". Clearly, in passages we cited above, Jesus had deferred this "hour" on more than one occasion, until the precise moment, when he was fully aware that it had arrived. Certainly his destination had something to do with this certainty: he was going out of the world (*ek tou kosmou*) and going to the Father (*pros ton patera*), the place from which he came (see John 1:1-2, where similar language appears, namely, that the Word was "with God", and John uses the preposition *pros* to communicate this idea in that connection).

Leaving and returning to God sounds a great deal like coming out of exile and going back home. This would be, of course, appropriate language for a Passover setting. Thousands of Jewish people on that occasion were remembering how their ancestors had left Egypt and made their way toward what would one day be their home. On this occasion, Jesus, who has voluntarily shared in the exile of human beings by becoming one of them, prepares to make his "exodus", not only from the world, but from death and into resurrection life--the very life

of God Himself. The road back to God was not going to be an easy one; "the hour" was urgent, and the agony would be deep. Still, in spite of this, Jesus devotes himself to the well-being of his own, driven by *agape*-love "until the very end". And he is encouraged by His Father who has placed all things under his power (11:3).

We are accepting the conclusion that John is reporting the "Passover" meal also attested by the Synoptic Gospels. He uses the words *deipnou ginomenou*, "dinner having taken place" to reference the meal itself. We need to comment that John does not make specific reference to any elements of the Lord's Supper we normally associate with that event: identifying bread and wine as his body and blood, offering a blessing over them, and distributing them to the disciples. That being said, we also need to note that John often weaves such events into different settings, knowing that the reader already has some knowledge of one or more of the other Gospels. In the case of "body and blood", we have the story found in John 6 in the aftermath of Jesus' feeding of the five thousand. Part of that teaching (6:25-59) has to do with Jesus as "The Bread of Life". Near the end of this instruction, suddenly Jesus changes his tone and declares that "This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world" (6:51). Startled by this claim, many who hear Jesus question what he means, only making him more assured in what he was claiming. His words which follow sound a great deal like something he might have said during the Last Supper, and are, by all accounts, John's way of giving us that information. Consider:

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever" (John 6:53-58).

Foot-washing (13:4-17)

Preparation and Process (13:4-5)

Having provided that instruction in John 6, John sees no reason to repeat it in the context of the Passover meal, but instead determines to share other actions and words of Jesus not specifically found in the Synoptic accounts. And so we have a Passover setting for John 13, referenced by the words "after the meal", without any of the usual details. In their place, John places a remarkable account: the foot-washing by Jesus of his disciples. The Jewish rabbis placed foot-washing among the menial tasks which not even Jewish slaves should not be expected to do, based on a special reading of Leviticus 25:39. Only Gentile slaves were permitted to do that, as were wives and children! **What Jesus elected to do was paramount to being a Gentile slave.** When Jesus removed his outer garment and tied the towel around himself, he was exhibiting an act of humiliation, and was assuming the form of a slave (recall Paul's own words in Philippians 2:5-11 about Christ taking on the "form of a servant"). The Synoptic Gospels bear witness to foot-washing as appropriate for guests and travelers, whose feet were covered with dust from their journey (see Luke 7:44; Mark 1:7). Jesus taught that to be "master" one must be servant of all (see Mark 10:43-44). The Old Testament stressed foot-washing as ordinary hospitality (see Genesis 18:4; 19:2; 24:32). Among the priests, the washing of feet was required before performing sacred service in the Temple (see Exodus 30:19-21; 40:31). Washing the "saints' feet" is commended by Paul, in 1 Timothy 5:9-10, among the churches.

John goes to great pains to describe *how* Jesus actually performed the action: how he attired himself, that he poured out the water, washed the disciples' feet, dried them with the towel wrapped around him. No one could doubt the precise role Jesus intended to imitate by this conduct. There was also something strangely "holy" about his movements, as if he were, in fact, a priest, as well as a servant, performing with care and love a sacred task within the Temple. It was as if the very deed was priestly service, a water ritual, poured out in divine worship before God (see Exodus 30:20). Had he been a priest, he might well have washed his own feet, and certainly would have throughout his regular duties poured out water for ceremonial purifications. For this and other reasons, many scholars see the actions of Jesus as prefiguring in a larger sense, what he was about to do on the cross. In a way, the laying aside of his clothing paralleled his laying aside of the heavenly glory and the

surrounding himself with human flesh instead. Throughout his earthly life, he had adopted the servant's role, sharing in human need and suffering, offering forgiveness of sins, healing for the body, and food for the soul. All of this he performed at great cost to himself.

Before we examine the response of his disciples to this provocative and wholly unexpected action, we might well refer back to another incident which John gives us in his Gospel. In chapter 12, while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Lazarus (whom he raised from the dead), Lazarus' sister, Mary, took a pint of expensive perfume and poured it on Jesus' feet, wiping it with her hair. On that occasion, Judas Iscariot, in a hypocritical fashion, charged the Mary with "waste", to which Jesus responded, "Leave her alone. It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial..." (12:7). What is important to notice is the connection Jesus draws between the anointing of his "feet" and his coming death and burial. Coming so soon afterwards, chapter 13's account of the foot-washing strongly points in the same direction. What Jesus intended was to dramatize, in the first instance, his coming suffering and death, fulfilling what John told us in 13:1, "having loved his own, he loved them *to the very end*."

Peter: Questions and Answers (13:6-11)

How do the disciples respond? Peter, not known for his shyness, may well have spoken for the rest. In the Greek text, the words are strongly indicative of someone who is "spluttering" out his reaction: "Lord-you-my-wash-the-feet?" Astonished and puzzled, he blurts it out in a half-witted way. Of course, Peter had some practice with that sort of thing as witnessed in Mark 8:32-33 when he resisted the thought of Jesus going to the cross. Well-intentioned, and seemingly supportive of Jesus, he failed to grasp the larger picture. And so he similarly responds to the foot-washing.

Jesus, catching the spirit of Peter's bafflement, virtually tells him: "Look, Peter, there's no way you could possibly understand what I am doing now, so don't try. Wait until later, when things start falling into place, and then you will 'get it'." The Greek may be saying that an intellectual grasp of Jesus' actions is simply out of the question (*su ouk oidas arti*), using *oidas* to imply a mental activity alone. However, *meta tauta*, "after these things," *gnose*, "you will come to know," has the meaning of an "experiential understanding." Jesus will expand on this idea in the lengthy "discourses" he gives the disciples in chapters 14-16, especially as seen in the following passage:

"I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. 13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you" (John 16:12-14).

Once Jesus had actually gone through death, and then come out on the other side in resurrection, he would be in a position to send the Holy Spirit to "fill in the blanks", so to speak. Peter can only see the incongruence of having "his" Master washing "his" feet. Apparently Jesus' early teaching about servants and masters had been lost on Peter.

But trusting Jesus' words seemed farthest from Peter's thoughts. The "theology of the future" had little interest to a man who was fiercely proud and loyal all at the same time. Peter was simply unable to see anything beyond the absolute impropriety of a "master", a "rabbi," no less, washing his feet. He simply can't "allow it", and he won't let Jesus demean himself in this fashion. His words are "priceless": "You shall never wash my feet!" (13:8a). How close to an oath can you come in New Testament Greek? Pretty close! *Ou me nipses mou tous podas eis ton aiona*. When you combine *ou* with *me* you are doubling up on the negative so as to make it as strong as possible, approaching an oath. This is the language of obstinacy laced with outrage. We can only imagine Peter's reddened face, his slanted eyes, his clenched hands, and his raging tone. He cannot imagine *anything* in the future altering his present frame of mind. "Masters do not wash servant's feet: not then, not now, not ever!" In fact, Peter used the phrase *eis ton aiona* which elsewhere applies to something that never ends, but is "eternal" or "everlasting". "Never, never, never!" is the implied meaning.

We can only imagine the different trains of thought Jesus might have brought to bear on Peter's outburst. Perhaps he could have said, "Are you finished now?" Or, "Don't say 'never' to me!" What Jesus ends up saying is surprising in itself. Far from rejecting Peter for his insolence, he makes plain that he wants to "include" Peter all the more in his kingdom. He does this by using the phrase "no part in me", taken from the Greek word *meros* and referring to the Jewish notion of inheritance. Peter's failure to allow the foot-washing implies his refusal to accept the terms of Jesus' divine inheritance. Examples of this use can be seen in Luke 15:12; 22:29-30; Matthew 24:51; Revelation 20:6; 21:8; 22:19. Jesus will develop this idea further in two additional passages:

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:3).

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world (John 17:24).

To have a "part," a *meros* with Jesus, means being in the place provided by Jesus, namely, with him in his glory, the place God the Father gave him. For the average Jew in Jesus' day, such a place meant either a richer stake in the holy land or future life in the kingdom of God (see Old Testament texts: Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 12:12; 14:27).

Not to be outdone, Peter figures if washing his feet will garner him a place in the coming kingdom alongside Jesus, then washing his hands and head would have to count for even more. Still oblivious to the point Jesus wants to make, Peter looks for ways to reduce the humiliation of the "washing." He wants to include "head" and "hands," certainly more "honorable" parts of the human anatomy than the "feet." Was Peter attempting to elevate the form of cleansing so as to minimize the humiliation involved? If so, we have yet another parallel to the act of foot-washing and the coming suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. For the cross was the ultimate instrument of "shame" and "humiliation", so much so, that in the New Testament the writers spoke of the "scandal" or "stumbling block" of the cross (see Galatians 5:11; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Peter 2:7-8). The Jewish community was scandalized when one of its own was executed on a cross by the Romans. That is why, in all likelihood, the Jewish leadership resisted Pilate's placing of the placard ("Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews") over Jesus' cross. They could scarcely bear the humiliation of seeing one of their own in this sorry condition lifted up as if he were their "king". In a similar sense, Peter could not countenance having Jesus lower himself to the level of a Gentile slave. What the Jews wanted was someone to be their "leader", their "head and their hands", so to speak, not a convicted criminal.

Moreover, "head and hands" were more befitting the role of a proper priest, preparing himself and others for their sacred work. But Jesus has other ideas, and, in 13:10, changes the language of the conversation, introducing new vocabulary. Whereas the Greek word used thus far for foot "washing" has been *nīptō*, Jesus becomes more precise by using the word *louō* "to bathe". Peter seemed to be saying that if foot-washing means inheritance with Jesus, then the more washing, the bigger inheritance. Jesus now corrects this misunderstanding, as he did on other occasions when the disciples missed his point entirely. It is not the number of washings or their variety of modes that increases one's inheritance with Jesus. Only the washing of the feet is necessary since it represents Jesus' coming death. Judaism was rife with washing rituals, not all of them rooted in Torah. Jesus himself challenged the need to wash "the outside of the cup" when it was the inside which needed true cleansing (see Luke 11:38-41, among others). Repeated washings were part of Peter's surrounding religious culture, and it was easy for him to make this leap. However, as Jesus makes clear, the one who has been completely bathed (Greek: *leloumenos*, the perfect participle of the verb, implying action completed in the past with continuing results) does not have a need except that the feet be washed. This is a simple analogy drawn from daily life. In the Middle East, a person might completely bathe periodically, but the dusty roads and the open sandals required more frequent foot-washing. In our culture, the hands are most at risk of contamination, and we are encouraged to frequent hand washing to prevent sickness. We bathe once a day but wash out hands often. Similarly, Jesus and the disciples would practice foot-washing.

What is Jesus' point? He is saying to Peter: "What makes you clean, Peter? Is it not because I have washed your feet? If I washed your feet is not that enough? It's just like when you bathe occasionally, but wash your feet often. Isn't washing your feet sufficient on those occasions? How much more so with my washing your feet! This foot-washing (*niptō*) is as good as a bath (*louō*) because *I have done it!* Once I have washed you in this way, you don't need anything more. Like the man who at the moment he washes his feet, you are clean entirely (*katharos holos*, that is, "clean-in-the-whole")." Then notice how Jesus affirms the positive results of his "washing": "And (even so) you are *katharos*." Why were they clean? They are clean simply because Jesus washed them in the way he chose and on the terms he chose. If Jesus washes them, they are clean, without qualification. However, like Peter, they make take exception to the way they are made clean. They want to dictate the terms of the cleansing, the how and the what. To all of this Jesus responds, No, dear ones, you are clean because I have made you so. Later Jesus would teach them: "Now you are clean through the word I have spoken to you" (15:3)

To illustrate this point, the Old Testament has a similar story told about the Syrian Captain, Naaman, who was once a leper (read 2 Kings 5 for the full account). He was counseled to seek out Elisha, the prophet, for a cure. In turn Elisha commanded him to dip seven times in the muddy Jordan River, something Naaman initially refuse to do. His excuse is relevant to our present study: "Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage." (2 Kings 5:12). Later he came to his senses and agreed to follow the prophet's instructions, with the result that he became clean from his leprosy. Was Peter any different from Naaman, resisting the word of the Lord? When the Christ follower obeys his Lord and accepts his word, he too can be clean. This is Jesus' point.

A few additional comments on the foot-washing event are in order. Some Christians have adopted this ritual as part of their celebration of the Lord's Supper, and they see it as equally important as an ordinance of the Church. Other communions only practice it during the Thursday of holy week. Moreover, it's hard not to see connections between the washing and the idea of baptism. Scholars have debated this correlation, but we do have some New Testament parallels to "washing" or "bath" in such texts as Titus 3:5; 2 Corinthians 6:11; Ephesians 5:26; Hebrews 10:22, and you are encouraged to study these on your own. There are connections between the washing imagery and the cleansing by Jesus' blood in such places as Hebrews 9:22; 10:22; Titus 2:14 and 3:5. Whatever connection existed between the "washing" in John 13 and the rite of baptism must not blur the distinction between the "sign" and the "reality of the sign". Jesus made clear elsewhere that his coming death was a "baptism" to be shared by his disciples, and so it's easy to correlate baptism with the cross. Consider this important text from Mark's Gospel:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." (Mark 10:35-40).

There is great irony in this Mark account, and it has parallels in John 13. "Do for us whatever we ask" is a strange request from someone who has just called Jesus "Teacher"! When Jesus responds, he combines *both* the image of baptism *and* the image of the cup together, and these symbols plainly point to his coming death--an event which one day they must also share. In our text in John 13, Peter is pretty much asking for Jesus to do for him something *on his own terms*, whereas Jesus makes plain to him that it doesn't work that way! And so for the Christ follower both the washing and the cup point to the cross and its powerful effect on human life.

Raymond Brown summarizes:

The simplest explanation of the foot-washing, then, remains that Jesus performed this servile task to prophesy symbolically that he was about to be humiliated in death. Peter's questioning, provoked by the action, enabled Jesus to explain the salvific necessity of his death: it would bring men their heritage with and it would cleanse them of sin (p. 568).

Still, some are left unaffected, as we read on in the text. "...but not all." Those words round out the thought of 13:10, followed by John's own commentary in 13:11. Judas Iscariot was unchanged by the foot-washing. Whereas Peter protested, but then accepted Jesus' action, Judas, on the other hand, was already intent on betraying him, and refused to accept salvation on Jesus' terms. Recall in the earlier passage at the home of Lazarus, how Judas resisted Mary's love for Jesus, and criticized her "waste" of the perfume. Here, he is unaffected by Jesus' washing, and the text makes that plain with the words *ouchi pantes*: "not all". While it is true that the cross provides for the salvation of everyone, not everyone experiences the benefit of that provision. Judas had opened his heart to the devil, and refused the agenda of Jesus. He outwardly accepted the washing, but did not accept it in his heart. Many still do the same. Wanting the outward approval, they inwardly resist, their hearts filled with the "cares of this life".

Jesus: Questions and Answers (13:12-17)

We are struck by the contrast of 13:12. "When, therefore, he washed their feet", the text begins. Using the aorist form of the Greek word *nipō* (wash), John's account stresses the completion of the action. Some translations pick up on this with the words "When he finished washing...", a perfectly acceptable handling of this verb form in the context. There comes a point, John seems to be saying, when the reality of this symbol "is finished", and when it is, Jesus puts on his outer garment once again and takes his place. This seems to continue the imagery of the foot-washing action: Jesus, having completed the work of salvation, once more takes up the clothing of his pre-earthly glory, and sits down at the Father's side. These are themes he will develop more fully in chapters 14 and 17 to follow. Nor can we forget his words in John 10, spoken earlier:

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life-- only to take it up again. 18 No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father" (John 10:17-18).

Power to lay down his garments and wash the disciples' feet; power to lay down his life. Power to take up his garments when the washing is done; power to take up his life again in the resurrection. Could anything be more clear to the reader of John's Gospel?

What follows in 13:12-17 some scholars see as yet a second application of the foot-washing event. We would suggest that Jesus is simply working out the important implications embedded in his teaching about the cross, dramatized in the foot-washing. Jesus opens this part of the conversation with a question: "Do you understand what I have done for you (13:12b)?" The question alone is worth pondering in its own right! Might we not argue that the whole of one's life as a Christian is spent answering that question? Did not someone as committed to Jesus as Paul once write: "That I might know him..." (Philippians 3:10), and then go on to say that he had not yet completed this task, but made it his life's work to do so? By posing the question, Jesus throws down the challenge of being a disciple, namely, discovering the truth contained in the cross of Jesus. What does Jesus have in mind for the disciples on this occasion?

It is not enough, Jesus declares (13:13), to simply use words to frame a relationship with him; words like "Teacher" (*didaskolos*) and "Lord" (*kurios*). Nor does Jesus depreciate the disciples' use of such language to speak about him, for he then adds, "...and rightly so, for that is what I am." The Greek is instructive: *kalos legete, eimi gar*, literally, "well, you speak, I am indeed!" "Fine words, and true!" Jesus is saying. But they are, after all, "words", something you "call" me (Greek: *phoneite*, "make the sounds"). Religious language is both enlightening and seductive. The disciples who follow Jesus might speak "well", and use all the correct vocabulary, but Jesus seems to be ill at ease with his disciples' present spiritual life. Jesus now drives to the point of his question ("Do you understand?"). When he uses the Greek word *ginoskete*, John stresses the "experiential" meaning of this common word for "know", using the present tense of the verb. "Are you, right now, continuously experiencing the meaning of what I have done (*pepoika*, perfect tense, completed action, continuing results) to you?"

"Let me show you how", Jesus tells them. What follows are a series of rhetorical arguments, each building on the previous one, and offering insight into what Jesus did for them in the foot-washing.

1. (13:13-14). He argues from the greater to the lesser. "If it's true for me, 'The Lord and Teacher' (the Greek repeats the definite article before each noun) who washed your feet, how much more (implied by the sequence) you ought (*opheilete*, again in the present tense) to wash (present tense) each others' feet (*allelon...podas*)."
2. (13:15). He has given (*dedoka*, perfect tense, again, showing the completion of the action) them an example (Greek: *hupodeigma*). The Greek word is actually a bit stronger and has the force of "token" or "pattern". It comes from the verb form *hupodeiknumi* which means "to show by placing under or before the eyes; to show by words and arguments; to teach; to show by make known future things." Could these disciples soon forget the images, burned into their eyes, by Jesus' symbolic actions that night? Indeed, Jesus is telling them, let these actions become for you deeply etched patterns of conduct, shaping how you live.
3. (13:16). Jesus then uses one of his signature phrases: "Truly, Truly" (Greek: *amen, amen, lego humin*, "Amen, amen, I say to you..."). Here is **the language of solemn oath, testifying to the truth**. John's Gospel is full of such "oath" references on the lips of Jesus (see this long list: John 1:51; 3:3, 5, 11; 5:19, 24f; 6:26, 32, 47, 53; 8:34, 51, 58; 10:1, 7; 12:24; 13:16, 20f, 38; 14:12; 16:20, 23; 21:18). Repeating a word twice underscores the veracity of what follows, and makes the saying an authoritative teaching of Jesus in an exceptional way. Felix Just offers this helpful overview of this usage through the Bible:

In the Hebrew Bible, the word "Amen" connotes agreement, certainty, faithfulness. It was simply transliterated *amen* in Greek and thus also "amen" in most modern languages. It is used at the end of some psalms, curses, blessings, prayers, and prophecies to allow the hearers/readers to say, "So be it!" or "Yes, I agree!" (Deut 27:15-26; 1Kings 1:36; 1Chron 16:36; Neh 5:13; Ps 106:48; Jer 28:6). Sometimes it is repeated twice for emphasis (Num 5:22; Neh 8:6; Ps 41:13; 72:19; 89:52).

Similarly in the NT, "Amen" is used 28 times at the end of doxologies, blessings, and other prayers (Rom 1:25; 9:5; 11:36; 15:33; 16:27; 1Cor 14:16; 2Cor 1:20; Gal 1:5; 6:18; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:20; 1Thess 3:13; 1Tim 1:17; 6:16; 2Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1Peter 4:11; 5:11; 2Peter 3:18; Jude 1:25; Rev 1:6, 7; 3:14; 5:14; 7:12 [twice]; 19:4; 22:20). It is also used 101 times in the four Gospels. The only person who says "Amen" in the Gospels is **Jesus** himself (with the exception of the "shorter ending" of Mark--usually added just after 16:8); in Matt 25:12, 40, 45, the characters in the parables who use this expression clearly represent Jesus. Jesus uses the phrase, "Amen, I say to you...", at the **beginning** of his own statements, rather than in response to what someone else said; thus, it is not an expression of agreement, but a literary device for emphasizing what he says subsequently. In the **Synoptic Gospels**, this expression is used a total of fifty times by Jesus and the parabolic characters (13 in Mk; 31 in Mt; only 6 in Lk); it is translated "Verily I say unto you..." (KJV); "Truly, I say to you..." (RSV); "Truly, I tell you" (NRSV); etc. In the **Fourth Gospel**, the expression is used 25 times, again only by Jesus, but always with a **doubled** "Amen, Amen" for extra emphasis; this is like saying "Hear Ye, Hear Ye" - as used by royal messengers or town criers in medieval England. It is sometimes **translated** literally: "Verily, verily, I say unto you." (KJV); "Truly, truly, I say to you" (RSV); "Amen, Amen, I say to you..." (NAB); but other English Bibles render it more colloquially: "Very truly, I tell you" (NRSV); "I tell you the truth" (NIV), etc.

What follows Jesus' use of this authoritative formula? "A servant is not greater than his master (*kurios*, "lord"), neither an apostle (*apostolos*, that is, "one sent", "a messenger") greater than the one sending him." These words appear in Matthew 10:24-25 and Luke 6:40, in different contexts, but as part of Jesus' authoritative teaching. In the Matthew context, the words apply to the disciples who will be persecuted just as Jesus will be taken to the cross (Matthew 10:38 for the specific reference to the cross). Of course the disciples would have understand their role as *talmidim* ("students of a Rabbi") in relationship to Jesus in precisely this way. **Though they were not greater than Jesus, they could become like Jesus**, an accepted Rabbinic understanding of things. Indeed, the disciples are called to be "like Jesus", not "greater than Jesus". The messenger is not asked to "improve on the message", but to faithfully carry it to its destination. Don't we still say, "I'm just the messenger?" or "Don't kill the messenger"?!

4. (13:17). Jesus offers yet one more way to "understand" what he did to his disciples in the foot-washing. He promises a blessing: "If you know (*oidate*, even in an "intuitive sense") these things, blessed you are (*makarioi este*, this is the same word used in the beatitudes to describe God's favor in the life of His obedient people; the verb "to be" is in the present tense) if (*ean*, the conditional form of "if", implying that a person might *not*) you do them." On the surface, assuming the role of a Gentile slave and serving fellow

Christ followers might not strike the disciples as "blessed". Jesus acknowledges that the disciples might "know", in some intellectual way, that this instruction is, in fact, very, very true. They might even entertain fond thoughts about the future when, in the Messianic kingdom, such mutual service and humility might exist. Their prophets certainly taught them that the "lion would lie down with the lamb and a little child would lead them" (Isaiah 11:6). How much more for the followers of Jesus! But that's *then*, and this is *now*. To such thinking Jesus responds, "Dear disciples, there is a blessedness even now if you practice my words toward each other." Nor should we miss the connection with the Beatitude teaching: recall its insistence on being "poor in spirit", "meek", and "merciful" (Matthew 5). Laying aside the outer garment, wrapping with the servant's towel, and washing my brother's feet puts into practice all of those qualities. But more significantly, it comes with the moniker "blessed". The way of the cross is the way of the blessed. The life lived in the service to Jesus and his cross is a life lived for others in humble service for them.

We might pause here to get our bearings. These words are spoken in the context of the Last Supper, told in Johannine fashion without explicit reference to cup and bread, without words of consecration or direct Passover allusions. Yet, can we miss the spirit of the Eucharist in all that Jesus did, according to John? How do the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark and Luke) characterize the Supper? Consider:

1. Matthew (26:29), Mark (14:25) and Luke (22:16, 18) record Jesus' assurance that he would drink the cup "anew with you in my Father's kingdom". He speaks of his blood being "poured out" (Matthew 26:28; Mark 6:24; Luke 22:20).
2. Luke, however, incorporates material in his account of the Last Supper, which has the "look and feel" of John's version, especially as it pertains to the footwashing and its application to Christian servant hood. Notice the connections:
24 Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be **greatest**. 25 Jesus said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26 But you are not to be like that. Instead, the **greatest** among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27 For **who is greater**, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But **I am among you as one who serves**. 28 You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29 And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30 so that **you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom** and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:24-30).
3. Luke draws attention to the themes of "greater", "serve", and the idea of being "with Jesus" "at my table", and "in my kingdom". Remember John's rendition of the foot-washing sign: "unless I wash...you have no part in me." Luke makes plain what that means when he quotes Jesus, "I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me". Luke also makes extremely clear what it means to follow the "pattern" of Jesus, by standing "in my trials". "You are not to be like that", Jesus instructs his disciples, "by not following the ways of the 'Gentiles' in lording over others". John, of course, puts Jesus in the role of a Gentile "slave".

Concluding Thoughts

When the greater serves the less, we know that a redefinition of love has taken place. When the Lord washes the feet of his disciples, love is redefined. Indeed, the disciples had difficulty fitting those actions into their cultural molds. Peter wanted to remove the offence by opting for a full bath, when all that Jesus wanted to do for him was wash his feet. This new way of loving shattered Peter's sense of propriety. Soon enough, Peter would face greater challenges when the one he would deny three times would nevertheless die in his place on the cross. "Amazing love, how can it be..."

Earlier in Jesus' ministry, John tells the story of a deeply personal encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman (John 4:1-42). We have discussed this passage in detail elsewhere. However, as we conclude this week's study, a few fine points lend themselves to our topic. Take a few moments to read the passage in its entirety. During his conversation with the woman at the well, Jesus uncovers her love-filled past, one which left her with a deep human thirst not easily satisfied by a series of failed relationships with men. Seemingly

fed-up with marriage, she opts for a live-in arrangement, no doubt feeling burned by the disappointments of that institution. She probably expected Jesus to act the part of a self-righteous Jew, castigating her for her lawlessness and immoral life. Instead, Jesus persists in his commitment to her well-being, telling her about true worship, and, by treating her with respect, about true love.

She discovers that Jesus is a man unlike any other she has known as evidenced by his compassionate, though direct, handling of her affairs. He reveals to her the nature of God as He who wants worshippers in the Spirit — indeed, the One who *seeks* them out! By implication, Jesus tells her that she, too, can become such a worshipper, even though she is a Samaritan, and he is a Jew. When at last Jesus reveals himself as Messiah, the woman quickly returns to her village, where a crowd of townsfolk hear her tell them, “I have met a man who knows all about me — and, presumably, still accepts me.” She confesses her initial faith that this one is Messiah. No sooner does this happen than the whole town comes out to see Jesus.

Through this narrative, Jesus shows himself as the God who accepts others across sharp boundaries. “Jews have dealings with Samaritans” began the chapter, but it ends with the quintessential Jew broaching and building just such a relationship. Contravening all conventions, Jesus proves himself as love redefined — love “greater far than tongue tell...” In amazement, the woman at the well and her fellow Samaritans return to Jesus and prevail on him to remain two days. What other Jews saw as the outcasts and vagabonds of a discredit race, Jesus saw as the “fields white for harvest” (4:35), and all the disciples needed to do was “lift up their eyes” in order to see them.

Willing to traverse the space between isolated Samaria and proud Jerusalem, Jesus re-writes the painful history of those badly segregated peoples. To ask the woman for a drink at her well was no more a put-off for him than had he accepted a cup of water from a Pharisee. Love as seen through the eyes of the man who sat by the well at Sychar was far deeper than that ancient water source dug by their common ancestor, Jacob. Jesus knew a Father more concerned about the Samaritan woman than Jacob could ever be. In the interest of his Father’s love, Jesus accepts the burden of a Samaritan woman’s water-jar so that he might reveal to her a love capable of lifting every burden from her heart.

The Lenten season reminds us of the great redefinition of human love found in Jesus Christ. Coming into the world from the heart of God Himself, Jesus brings to human beings a new way of being human. And his journey to the cross embodies that love. At first, that journey brought offence to his followers who would rather not have their Master shamed by such a grievous humiliation. Whole worlds require re-orientation when love undergoes such radical transformation! Surely there must be a safer love! But, no, Jesus attracts the perishing world to himself, not by coercion but by love. Uncomfortable at first, the woman at the well soon came to rejoice in finding Someone who knew her best of all — and loved her still. The Gospel is God’s Good News that, in Jesus, love has been redefined.

Glory to God! Amen.

Digger Deeper: A Case for Christ-Lent 2010: Jesus as Love Redefined
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *A Case for Christ-Lent 2010: Jesus as Love Redefined*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Make a list of the different ways you use the word “love” in ordinary conversation. What surprises you about the range of meanings in this list? Think about the ways we use the word “love” in relationship to God: His love for us, and our love for Him. How is the meaning different in each case?
2. Based on reading the following texts, how does the Old Testament understand the idea of God’s love? (Deuteronomy 7:7-8; Jeremiah 31:2-3; Psalm 25:10; 107:8; Psalm 136).
3. One prominent Hebrew word for love is *hesed*, often translated “loving-kindness” or “steadfast love.” Study the following places where the word occurs, and explain the emphasis in each case (Genesis 19:19; 39:21; Psalm 6:4; 25:7; 51:1; 86:13; 109:26; 119:41; Micah 7:20; Deuteronomy 7:9-12; 2 Samuel 7:15).
4. The primary New Testament word for “love” is *agapē*, a word seldom used in secular Greek literature. What do the following New Testament texts tell us about this Christian-style love? (Matthew 5:43-44; Matthew 22:36-40; John 3:16; 13:34; 15:12; 17:16; Romans 5:5; 13:10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Galatians 5:6, 22; 1 John 4:7).
5. What key statement is made about love in 1 John 4:8, 16, and how is this important to our understanding of why Jesus came?
6. Read John 3:16-21. What is the supreme evidence of God’s love? For what purpose did He express His love for the world? What is the greatest offence we can show to God’s love? How do we best honor that love? In what ways is God’s love an evidence for the authenticity of Jesus?
7. Read John 15:9-17. What persons are involved in God’s love-community? List them, and then draw lines showing the different relationships created by God’s love. What verbs does Jesus use to show how his love expresses itself? According to Jesus, what is the supreme evidence that his love is genuine?
8. In the same passage, discuss the nature of Jesus’ new “commandment.” Do you find it unusual that Jesus uses this word to characterize our love for him?
9. Read John 13:1-17. What is the setting for this passage? What motivated Jesus, according to 13:1, and how did this express itself at the end of his life? Why did Jesus choose to express his love for the disciples by washing their feet? How do they resist this form of love? Why? Which disciple has the greatest difficulty with this expression of love, and why?
10. For what purpose did Jesus perform his act of love on this occasion? What does Jesus tell the disciples about calling him “Master and Lord”?
11. Carefully read John 4, focusing on Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman at the well. What cultural barriers did Jesus face by talking with her? Is she aware of them? Explain. How does Jesus overcome them? How was her life shaped by a different kind of love than that which Jesus showed her?
12. Based on her testimony to her townsfolk, how did the woman react to Jesus’ treatment of her? How did Jesus model for the woman a redefined version of love?
13. After completing these questions, write a paragraph or two on this subject: Jesus redefined the way human beings can experience love. Make sure to include the contrasts between human-only love and the kind God makes possible.