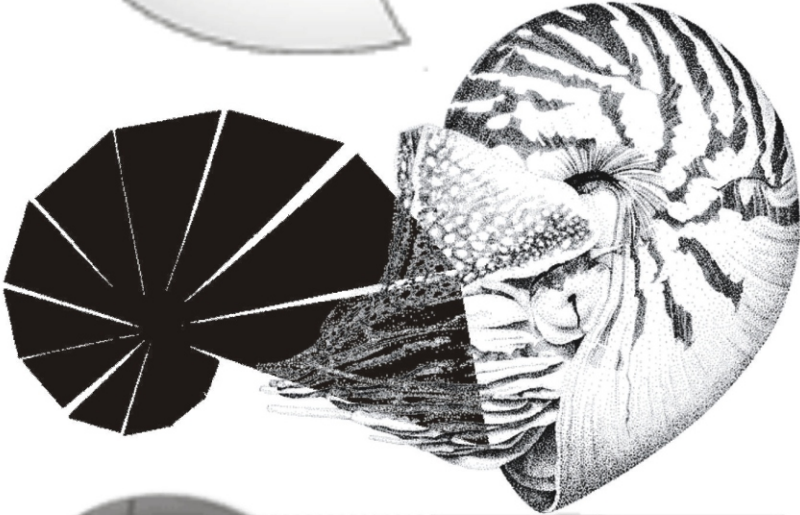
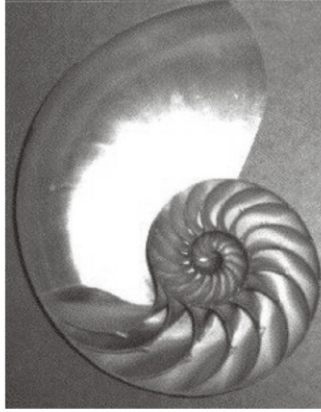


KNOWING THE HEART OF GOD

by Dale Rumble



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Preface

To be effective in ministry is more than simply being orthodox and timely in what one says. It comes by being able to speak from what is in the heart of God. When we address an issue in ministry, if it were possible to express what He would say and how He feels concerning the subject, our words would always be fruitful. A key in doing this is to recognize the unchanging burdens of His heart. This tract has been written to unveil what I believe these burdens to be.

“When I Was a Child (1 Corinthians 13:9-12)”

A child’s first concept of its mother arises through recognizing her as a source of food. Over time, understanding grows to include such things as comfort, care and eventually love and relationship. When the child has grown up it will possess a mature understanding of the concerns, desires and aspirations that are in the mother’s heart for her child.

It is not too different with Christians and their comprehension of the Lord’s will and priorities for them. For example, I recall how, as a new convert, God’s heart toward me seemed to be expressed by the words of John 3:16. I saw the Lord primarily through the eyes of this scripture. It was true revelation of Him, but it was also a limited view.

Some years later as I considered the Lord’s claim on my life, the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12) came alive with meaning to me. They expressed the Lord’s heart for how He expected me to walk before Him. They became key principles of kingdom conduct, a distillation of God’s righteousness that He seeks to infuse into my life. My understanding of the heart of God grew with this new dimension of knowledge.

However, after I had become active in ministry, the Lord began to reveal His heart to me in a still newer way. I developed a greater appreciation of His love for the church. Four chapters, in particular, became very real to me: Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, 14 and Ephesians 4. For the first time I began to realize how significant the horizontal aspect of salvation is; how the children of God are related together as *one* body in Christ. The

Lord's heart became much larger in my sight when I saw how He loved *equally* all of His children, even those with whom I personally found it more difficult to fellowship.

Today, as I look back over the history of changing emphasis in my life I immediately face the following question, "Will this process continue to take place?" I believe, and hope, that the answer is "Yes," for it surely is a sign of spiritual growth.

It is certain that God's Person and ways will always *be* greater than our understanding of them, but is also true that as we grow spiritually we will increase in our knowledge of Him. Therefore, we must always be open and willing to adjust our theology as we know Him better.

However, there is a concern. When I recall the periods of different emphases in my personal life, I realize now that I was not always well-balanced in what I majored on in ministry. And if I was not properly balanced, then I could not impart a balance of truth to others.

Consequently, I began a search for scriptures that have a place of *foundational and invariant* importance in the heart of the Lord. While it is true that my understanding will be modified as I grow in Christ, there must be key truths in His heart that *never* change in their importance.

The night before the Lord Jesus faced the cross, having completed the ministry for which He came to earth, He poured out His heart in prayer to His Father in heaven. His words, recorded in Chapter seventeen of John's gospel, are an expression of the major concerns that filled His heart. He foresaw all that would occur before He was to return for His bride. He prayed for the total victory of Calvary, not only for His disciples of that day, but also for those in each subsequent generation who would believe in Him. I see no reason why His concerns, on that night nearly two-thousand years ago, are any different today. They are *vital* truths that reveal the heart of God to us and they are *unchanging* in their importance!

We are nearing the time when God's purpose for this age will be completed, and Jesus will return. Therefore, this particular scripture should be used to review our theology and reexamine our commitment to Him.

Let us consider His prayer, as recorded in John, Chapter 17, which so vividly expressed our Lord's heart as He faced Calvary, and which I believe is still His heart's cry today. The following *three* foundational truths were His burdens.

(1) The Glory of God

The glory of God is the dominant theme in His prayer, being mentioned eight times in the twenty-six verses, and it is the first subject introduced in verse one. It took precedence *over all other* concerns in our Lord's heart, and it should merit the same emphasis to us and in all ministry goals of the church. When we gather together there is *never* an objective more important than the glory of His presence. If He is missing, we have nothing!

When we elevate some doctrine, practice, structure, or anything else as a goal above seeking the glory of God, we are in error. It is the glory of God, not the needs of men, that must come first in our prayers, our theology and our ministry. Whether or not it will glorify God is the one valid test of *all* endeavors.

The first prayer request of Jesus was for His Father to glorify Him as He went to the cross, so that He might, in turn, glorify the Father. In whatever we undertake in ministry, *absolutely nothing* else should ever rank above that same request in our prayers. Everything that we seek to accomplish in the kingdom should, first of all, be tested to ensure it would glorify God. This is the *one* true test for all ministry goals. We ought not pray to be delivered from unpleasant circumstances, but that we would bring Him glory as we go through them.

His words contain an encouraging, although indirect, reference to God's keeping power and grace that is extended to those who trust in Him. In verses six to ten, Jesus declares that He *has been glorified* in those believers whom the Father has given Him. He says this despite His foreknowledge of their failures in the future, how they would fail to keep watch with Him in prayer that very night, and how they would forsake Him the next day. Our prayers and service to Him ought to have the same confidence and faith in the sovereignty of God over all affairs in the lives of those who we serve and care for. Within the context of our commitment, we must know that God causes all things to work together for good in our lives! He will *never* leave us or forsake us. We can expect to go through testing and tribulations, for these are what established character in us. If we recognize that at all times we can glorify Christ, even in the low times of our experiences, it will give us great confidence. We need not go from crisis to crisis but we can learn to live in the supply of His presence that is *always* with us. It is not how I see myself in the circumstances of the present

that is reality, but how He sees me in the future being a partaker of His glory.

*For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the first-born among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also **called**; and these whom He called, He also **justified**; and these whom He justified, He also **glorified**! (Romans 8:29-30)*

The key verbs in the above verses are in the past tense; I “*have been*” glorified in Christ.

We often become caught up with the importance of momentary issues so that we lose sight of the overall picture. Perhaps it is a trial we face, or we feel overwhelmed by an affliction or by the magnitude of some ordeal before us. God wants us to relate *everything* in our lives and ministries to His purpose, and rest in Him to bring His will to pass. After all, it is the *purpose of God* that is to undergird and direct what we do for Him. He has called us and given us grace to serve Him in works that He has prepared beforehand for us (Ephesians 2:10).

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. (Romans 8:16-17)

For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake. (Philippians 1:29)

Once we understand that we are being prepared for His glory, we no longer need to be discouraged or surprised by tribulations and testings. They are our friends.

*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you **for your testing**, as though some strange thing were happening to you. (1 Peter 4:13)*

*Therefore, we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. **For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.** (2 Corinthians 4:17)*

The bottom line for us, when we faithfully endure, is that the eternal qualities of His character will be developed within us.

*. . . we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance **proven character** . . . (Romans 5:3-4)*

*Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, **that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing** . . . Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life . . . (James 1:2-4, 12)*

*. . . For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him; **if we endure, we shall also reign with Him** . . . (2 Timothy 1:11-120)*

These were the thoughts of Jesus when He said that He had been glorified in His disciples. His words bridge the time between when the purpose of God is initiated until the day it will be completed. Before the world was created, Jesus shared the glory of His Father. At that time long ago, God purposed to express the fullness of His glory through many sons, those from the world who would believe the gospel, and, choose to love and serve Him being conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:16-19, 29-30). At this time, before Adam was created, the Lamb of God was committed to the cross. Jesus referred to this early period of time when the purpose of God was set in motion, as He prayed that those who would believe in Him might be with Him in the future to behold His glory. Thus, His prayer embraced the whole of God's ministry. The Lord is not just saving sinners from hell, He is preparing a people for His glory!

It is not sufficient to see people saved and delivered from sin, we are also to see them prepared and challenged to gain the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

*. . . because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may **gain the glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14)*

*So that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who **calls you into His own Kingdom and glory**. (1 Thessalonians 2:12)*

We must learn to not run from trials and tribulations but to endure them. For in doing so, the discipline of the Lord can prepare us to share His holiness (Hebrews 12:7-11). However, to have faith and confidence to walk this way requires more than opening a window or the back door of one's heart; the front door must be opened wide to Him! The goal of God's

glory is the vision we are to impart to all who receive the gospel, for this is the *first priority* of His heart.

(2) One Body in Christ

I believe the second priority in His prayer is that His disciples experience the oneness that He shares with His Father. Unity of believers is a subject much nearer the heart of God than most of us realize. Four verses (11, 21, 22, 23) of the twenty-six which comprise John Chapter 17 express the Lord's concern that His people be one, even as He and His Father are one. The suffering that Jesus endured in His scourging and on the cross were not only for our sins, sicknesses and well-being, but also for the spiritual health of His own body. He suffered in His flesh that Jew and Gentile believers might be united as one in His Spirit.

*But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the **blood** of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who made both groups into **one** and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, by abolishing in **His flesh**, the enmity which is the Law of commandments contained in ordinances, so that in **Himself** He might make the two into **one new man**, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile them both into **one body to God through the cross**, by it having put to death the enmity. (Ephesians 2:13-16)*

The thrust of most teaching on this subject is often very superfluous. Unity is generally equated to being in agreement on doctrine and practice. In fact, Christians are one in *identity* because they bear His name and they are one in *essence* because they share His life, and they are one in *practice* to the extent that they reveal His character. Thus, unity is *altogether* a question of our relationship to Jesus.

The words of Jesus were clear concerning the identity of His followers:

*Holy Father, keep them in Your name, **the name which You have given Me, that they may be one**, even as We are. (John 17:11)*

It is also quite clear that the reality of being in the body of Christ is through partaking of the Holy Spirit.

*For by one Spirit we were **all** baptized into **one body** . . . and we were **all** made to drink of **one Spirit**. (1 Corinthians 12:13)*

God's glory will unite His people.

And the glory which Thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity . . . (John 17:22-23)

How can glory be the basis of unity? When Moses asked God to show His glory to him, the Lord responded by declaring His name and His goodness (or character) to Moses (Exodus 33:18-19; 34:6-7). Thus, in this life, God equates His glory to His nature (or character). In the spirit world, His glory would be a Shekinah brightness that we could not behold in our flesh.

This relationship of glory and character was confirmed through the life of Jesus, for the disciples referred to His character by saying that they had beheld *His glory* as the glory of the only begotten of the Father, *full of grace and truth* (John 1;14: Hebrews 1:3). It is His nature revealed in our lives that draws men to Jesus and promotes unity in the body of Christ. This is quite apparent in scriptures, such as Ephesians 4:1-3 and Colossians 3:12-15, which exhort us to put on kindness, humility, patience, forbearance, forgiveness, etc. as the means of becoming, in practice, the one body we are called to be in Christ. Love is defined as the *perfect bond of unity*. The proof of our identity to the world is seen in the reality of our love for one another.

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

The heart of God is to bring forth diversity in the body of Christ, with each believer, cell group or assembly becoming a unique expression of the life and character of the Lord. Each Christian has been extended grace to fill a place in local expressions of the body of Christ that no one else could fill. It is only when *each* member has been equipped for service in their unique place, that a church can fully manifest the Lord Jesus Christ to its locality. One only has to look at the *tremendous diversity* exhibited in flowers, birds, jewels, the planets, etc. to understand the heart of God. This same heart has created each of us to be dependent on the supply of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and they upon us (Romans 12:3-16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-28).

The body of Christ is like a beautiful garment that is being woven with multicolored, interleaved strands of fiber united with different types and length of stitches, which displays one overall pattern of the purpose and glory of God among His people.

The five unique measures of grace that the Lord has bestowed on ministerial leaders in the church has been *expressly* given to equip *each* saint for such service (Ephesians 4:11-16). Only in this way can the body of Christ attain to the fullness of maturity and service purposed by God. This can *only* come to pass in assemblies where valid fivefold ministries are free to function. Oversight of the church should be plural and diverse to properly equip the saints. Leaders must do more than minister from a pulpit, they are also responsible to provide the environment where members can build relationships and develop their spheres of service. This environment is small group oriented, where as “iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another,” and believers are built together in the fabric of His life.

The heart of the lord is to bring forth His body as *one new man* in the earth, to be an instrument of His hand for a mighty demonstration of His power to all creation. There will be a great ingathering of souls in the time ahead. The unity and love seen in the church will be proof of the gospel’s truth and of God’s love for lost men. This will fulfill the prayer of Jesus (John 17:18-23).

There is a freshness in the wind of the Spirit blowing over the church today revealing the heart of the Lord that each member in His body be equipped for service. Only in this way, can there exist the diversity of gifts and services for the Lord to do the mighty work in the earth that He purposes to accomplish.

(3) Ambassadors of God

The third priority in the Lord’s prayer is seen in His declarations of how He had accurately represented His Father. As the Son, He was the perfect first Ambassador of God. Jesus pointed to the following four specific areas where He faithfully represented His Father; if we are to minister out of the heart of God as His ambassadors, we also will faithfully represent Him in the same manner. This is how we fulfill the great commission!

1. *I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. (John 17:4)*

Jesus *only* did what He saw His Father do (John 5:19). We can become very busy with much service being full of zeal and activity in His name, but unless the Lord has called us to what we are engaged in, we do not accurately represent Him. It is those who are led by the Spirit of God who are truly His sons. We are to move in the purpose that God has for our lives, not in our understanding of what should be done for God. If we faith-

fully represent the Lord in our work, the fruit of what we do will glorify Him.

2. Our service for God is more than quoting scripture. It is more than being accurate in what we say. If our conduct contradicts what we preach then we *actually misrepresent* Him. Any form of ungodliness, such as gossip, backbiting, going our own way, unconfessed sin, etc., can only misrepresent the Lord. To minister for Him is to represent Him accurately by our lives as well as our words. It is what *we are* as well as *what we say*, that qualifies us to be ambassadors for Christ. If I speak with the tongues of men, or of angels, but do not have His love in my words, I will only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:26)

God's name is more than His identity as a being, for His name implies His authority, character, majesty, glory, power, excellence and *all* other attributes of His person. If our ministry does not endorse Him in His fullness, we do not *faithfully* represent Him. An example would be neglecting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. If our ministry denies any of His attributes, then we *misrepresent* Him. This is one mark of all cults who make Jesus less than God.

If we build our own "religious kingdom" while we are ministering in His name, we misrepresent Him. If what we build in ministry stands or falls on ourselves, we surely have built wrong, and thus have failed to represent Him accurately.

If we gather believers around ourselves so that they become an exclusive group with a spirit of elitism and competition with the rest of the body of Christ, then we have misrepresented the Lord.

To do "good things" in His name for wrong reasons or motivation, does not represent Him faithfully. If what we do or say robs Him of His glory, we misrepresent Him.

*3. I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You, Holy Father, **keep them in Your name** (John 17:11)*

The heart of the Lord is to gather His followers together so that they are not scattered, but can be shepherded and cared for. If we fail Him, the Lord does not give up on us. He will never leave nor forsake us. When we exercise the same care and concern that His children who fail will not be

scattered, we represent Him in truth. Whoever would dominate the Lord's sheep with force and severity, or discourage them so that they are scattered, misrepresents the Lord. We represent the Lord when we stand united in the grace of God.

If we teach the saints to avoid and to stay out of contact with the world, we misrepresent the Lord. On the other hand, if we equip them to overcome the world, and pray that they are kept from the evil one, we represent Him faithfully. We are not shielded from hostility and persecution of the world so that, like Jesus, we too can overcome the world and bear witness of Him. To overcome the world is to represent Christ.

4. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one. (John 17:22)

Perhaps the most important contribution of Jesus in His ministry was to reveal, in His own life, the character and nature of His Father. He was living proof of all that He taught; thus, He *perfectly* represented His Father. He and His Father were one in character, acts and words.

For us to accurately represent the Lord, we must be united in the area of godly character. Our lives should exemplify what we say, otherwise we can misrepresent Him without even being aware of it.

If we set a standard of conduct of God's people other than to become like Jesus, we again fail to honestly and faithfully represent Him. The Lord has directed us to be perfect, just as His Father in heaven is perfect. We are to be conformed to His image. To place Christians under laws and rules of conduct, is to turn them away from the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, and thus misrepresent the way of righteousness given by the Lord.

Just as Jesus was sent into a hostile, rebellious world to represent His Father, we are also sent into that same world as ambassadors of Christ. How well we represent Him determines how many from the world will believe the gospel that we preach and trust in Him.

Whether we are with our family, in a church meeting or relating to someone in the world, we *never* lose our role as ambassadors of Christ. This is the great commission. The question is, how faithfully do we represent Him?

Conclusion

It is possible some may disagree and argue that the Lord's heart is equally, or even more burdened for other aspects of ministry, such as spiri-

tual warfare. The answer is that the quality of *all* ministry flows out of these three burdens that we have looked at. If these are in proper focus in our hearts we will be fruitful servants of Christ in whatever He calls us to do. Because these are the burdens of His heart, we can be assured they are what we also must be concerned with. If we are deficient in any of these three areas we will certainly be deficient in our service for Him. *“The glory of God,” “the one body of Christ,”* and being *“ambassadors of God”* define the priorities of our service for Christ.

The purpose of God is the burden of the Lord; and the burden of the Lord is our call to minister.

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