

The Holy Trinity Part 5: John 17:23-26 - Shared Love

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[0 : 00] Now, as I'm sure most of you will know, we have been recently been studying the doctrine of the Trinity in our evening services. And as we've been saying, this is one of the most profound and glorious topics that we can study. We are thinking about the nature of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And at one level, when we look at the Trinity, we see what we've been calling the beyondness of God, the fact that he stretches our minds to their very limits.

We see that God is bigger than anything that we can comprehend. But alongside that beyondness of God, we also see the nearness of God. Because we know that God is a triune God because he has come to us to reveal himself. And he is sharing himself with us. We have looked at various topics under four headings so far. The first of these was shared nature, the fact that God has one substance, nature, God is indivisible, cannot be separated. He is unique. Only God is the one who has God nature. He has one substance, a unique inseparable substance. But that single God nature is made up of three persons, the Father, the Son and the Spirit. And that is why God is triune.

He is three in one, one substance, three persons. Secondly, we looked at shared life, highlighting the fact that God has life in and of himself. He is independent. He's the source of all other life. And that life is shared between Father, Son and Spirit. But that life is also shared with us, whereby God comes and gives us life. And so the God who is independent, yet he wants to create us and share himself with us. Our third title was shared work. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, they work together in beautiful harmony. They work together in creating and sustaining the universe, creation and providence. They work together in the revelation of God, both through creation but specifically through his word. And they work together in salvation, working together perfectly to save you. And so we see in the Trinity a shared work. Last week our title was shared glory. And we saw how the glory of God reflects both his weightiness, the fact that he is awesome and substantial and utterly worthy, alongside the fact that his glory also conveys his brightness, the radiant splendour and majesty that shines from God. And that glory is shared between Father, Son and Spirit. But as we saw, that glory is also shared with us. Indeed the pinnacle of God's glory is seen not in the radiance of heaven, not in the majesty of creation, but on the cross, where Jesus came to save us. That was where the Son of man was glorified in his death and resurrection. So shared nature, shared life, shared work, shared glory. Tonight we come to our last heading, so this will conclude our short study on the Trinity. Our title is Shared Love.

[3 : 48] Now the love of God is a vast subject and it's perhaps the most precious area of theology to which we can turn our attention. And for so many reasons, between now and seven o'clock, we will only be barely scratching the surface. But I want us to spend a bit of time looking and to see what we can learn. And in particular, we're going to focus on the words of John chapter 17 from verse 24 to 26. And it's on the screen. This is John 17, Jesus's prayer before his arrest.

And it's a chapter that we've come back to numerous times in our study on the Trinity. These are the last few verses. Jesus said, 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. O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. I made known them to them your 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.

We read from first John chapter four, which is a very well known chapter for various reasons, not least because it contains the short but immensely profound statement that God is love.

And that's reminding us of the fact that love is the characteristic that lies at the very core of who God is. As John says, anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love. And it's amazing how profound and glorious three little words can be. God is love. So if you ask what is God's like, what is God like, the answer is he is love.

[5 : 50] But yet we are also forced to ask ourselves the question, how do we understand that statement, God is love? Well, the key point I want to initially emphasize is the fact that it's the doctrine of the Trinity that enables us to understand just what these three words mean. Because when the Bible says that God is love, it's not making a sort of vague, optimistic or even mystical statement. Some people can interpret it that way. Sometimes people can think of love as a sort of force or a sort of principle of reality. And God is that kind of vague, mystical force. But that's not what this statement is saying at all. It is saying something much more specific. It is pointing us to the fact that from all eternity, God has existed in a beautiful bond of love between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. So when we think of God before the world came into existence, we are not to think of him in isolation, alone and solitary, as it's easy to think.

Rather, we should think of him in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity. Because the God of the Trinity, the Triune God of the Bible, has never existed in cold isolation. From all eternity, God has been loving. The Father, the Son and the Spirit is and always has been a perfect united fellowship of love. In other words, we're reminding ourselves of the fact that when you say God is love, essential to that is the fact that there has to be someone to do the loving and there has to be an object of that love. And so the Persons of the Trinity are eternally both lover and beloved to one another. And again, that reminds us of the unselfishness of God. Because God himself to his very core is a model of mutual love, attention, care, and devotion. There is no selfishness in God. There is the purest, tenderest, most intimate union of love. So if you've ever asked the question, what was God doing before he made the world, the answer is quite simple. He was loving. God's love is a shared love shared between God the Father,

God the Son and God the Spirit. But we want to be able to say a little bit more than that. And we want to try and go a little further into this whole statement that God is love.

And the key question that is being raised is this, what is God's love like? God is love. But what's that love like? Well, if we look at these verses in John 17 and indeed the chapter as a whole, we learn a little bit more about the shared love of God. And we learn four things in particular that I want us to highlight. First of all, we see a love that is always there.

Verse 24 highlights that you loved me before the foundation of the world. Now, I want us to notice the depth of the language here. We are being pointed towards the foundation of the world. Now that word foundation, it's pointing us to a starting point.

[9 : 37] Same principle applies to a house or anything like that. You'd say, what's the first thing that goes into a house? You'd say, well, it's the foundation. The foundation is the starting point. And so when we're talking about the foundation of the world, we're talking about the originating point for the cosmos. And that's a question that's always fascinated humanity. Where did the cosmos come from? Where did the world come from? What was the start? And we could easily get sidetracked there, but we love going back to the start. How did it all begin? But this language is taking us deeper.

Because it's not taking us back to the start of the world. It's taking us back to before the foundation of the world. This verse is saying, don't just go back to the start of existence. Go even further back. And what are you going to find? Are you going to find the warring gods of pagan mythology who fight and battle and the aftermath is the creation? Are you going to find the isolated solitary god of a religion like Islam? Or are you going to find the emptiness of nothing?

Which is probably the most irrational of all and yet seems to be the most common. Well, the Bible tells you that if you go back to before the beginning, you are going to find a father loving his son. God's love is a shared love. And that shared love is eternal, ever present, ever existing, never fading, never changing. It has no boundaries. It has no starting point. It has no end point. It knows no limits. It faces no threats. The love of God between father, son and spirit is a love that is always there. God is never anything less than what John tells us that he is. He is love. The second thing that we see is that this love is a love that always knows. In verse 25, Jesus uses three little beautiful little words to his father. He says,

I know you. O righteous father, even though the world does not know you, I know you. And it's reminding us of the fact that this relationship between father, son and spirit is based on a love that

knows one another so intimately, so closely. Now, we tend to use the word know to express the most basic acquaintance. We talk about the fact that you'll know such and such a person. Do you know him? Do you know that person? And we tend to use it to convey the idea of being aware of the person's identity, perhaps their name or what they look like or who they are. We use it for a basic acquaintance, but the Bible does the complete opposite. The Bible uses the word know to express the closest, deepest relationship.

And that's the relationship we see within the triune God. The love between God, father, son and spirit is a love that knows each person in the Trinity knows the other. And of course, that makes perfect sense because they share the same nature that one nature of God is the perfect model of mutual knowing. The father knows the son and the son knows the spirit because they have the same nature. They know what it is like to be each other. They are one. Their knowledge is unimpeded.

[13:29] It is wholly shared. Now, at one level, that knowledge is based upon the oneness of God and the omniscience of God, the fact that God knows everything. And so of course, God, the persons of the God, know each other because God knows everything. And so at one level, it's based upon that theological truth. But at another level and at a simpler level, but in many ways, almost a more beautiful level, that shared knowledge between father, son and spirit is based upon the simple fact that they talk to each other. And this whole chapter, John 17 is an example of the many occasions when God spoke to God. God, the son is speaking to God, the father.

And here, and indeed, as we go on through the account of the crucifixion, we see God, the son, pouring his heart out to his father. So even though the father knows, the son still speaks to him. And even though the son knows, the father still speaks to him. The father, the son and the spirit, they know each other with perfect intimacy and the deepest fellowship, yet they speak to each other.

They share with one another. They are interested in each other. Again, we come back to the fact that there is never a selfishness in God, never a lack of interest, never a lack of care or concern. Their love, the love of father, son and spirit, God's love, it's a love that knows. But isn't it interesting, we were saying a moment ago that the foundational truth of God is that God is love. So if we take the son, for example, the one thing the son knows, first and foremost, about the father and about the spirit is that God is love. Each person is love. And so if anyone knows that God's love is true and real, it is God himself. If anyone knows that the father loves the son, the son will know that as a person within the Godhead. Each person of the Trinity knows that they love and they know that they are loved. Yet even though the father and the son are so aware of all that, yet still the father says to his son, I love you. Even though God, the son, knows perfectly well that he is loved, God, the father wants to just keep on making sure that he knows, which is why our voice came from heaven in Mark 11 saying, you are my beloved son.

[16:18] With you, I am well pleased. And of course, that's an example that we should all follow in our relationships. God's love is a love that knows. Thirdly, we see a love that always wants to be together. And here we are reminded of the fact that sometimes the most amazing words in the Bible are the simplest and the smallest. And John's Gospel uses one of these beautiful, small words quite often, and that's the word with. We find it right at the very beginning of the Gospel.

In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God. Now literally in that verse, that word with is the word towards and it's presenting to us a beautiful vision of togetherness. Father and son, if we can use human language, we would say face to face.

They are united so close, so bound together, each looking towards the other with devotion, commitment and a bounding affection. And the same thing is picked up in John 17.

Jesus says, the glory you've given me, I've given to them that they may be one, even as we are one. There's this togetherness within God. And this is reminding us of the fact that love and separation are always intention. I am sure you are like me. I find it immensely hard when I have to go away.

I hate, hate being away from my family. And being separated does not mean for a moment that you stop loving, but it means that something is wrong in the sense that your love is now intention. And every one of you here who are separated from your loved ones will know how that feels because when you love someone, you want to be with them. And that is most perfectly true of God. Indeed, Jesus held on to this truth as he prepared for the cross. He was talking about the fact that the hour was coming, indeed it has come when you will be scattered each to his own home and will leave me

alone. Yet I am not alone for the Father is with me. When you love somebody, then you belong together. God's love, God's shared love is a love that is always together.

[18 : 51] So we see a love that is always there. We see a love that knows. We see a love that always wants to be together. And we see, fourthly, a love that serves. And one of the many great truths highlighted in John 17 is the fact that God, the Son, has come to serve his Father.

Verse 4, I have glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And that's one of the great truths of biblical love, the fact that it is never ever simply an inward disposition. True love in the biblical sense is always shown in outward action. And we see that within God, the Trinity, the Son outwardly serves his Father. But I do not ask the Father, I do as the Father commanded me so that the world may know that I love the Father. His actions show his love. The Father outwardly reassures the Son, where Jesus says, my soul's troubled. What shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose, I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name. Then a voice came from heaven. I have glorified it. And I will glorify it again.

And the Spirit is exactly the same. The Spirit outwardly works out God's purpose, the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name. He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. So the Father is always an active, loving, supporting Father. The Son is always a faithful, willing, hardworking Son. And the Spirit is always proceeding from the Father and the Son, accomplishing the purpose of God, the purposes of God, and revealing His power. God's love always serves. So the Father never falters as a Father. The Son never wonders as a Son. And the Spirit never hesitates as he proceeds. God's love is a shared love. It's a love that is always there. It's a love that always knows. It's a love that is always together. It is a love that is always serving. And we are again seeing the fact that the doctrine of the Trinity is showing us the beautiful unselfishness that is inherent to the nature of God.

And that's what surely lies at the heart of the fact that God is love. God, Father, Son, and Spirit loves God, Father, Son, and Spirit. And this is what should always shape our understanding of God. The fact that God is love and that His love is so perfect. And never forget the fact that the devil's blasphemous strategy is to make you doubt that. Is to make you doubt that God is loving.

[21 : 49] Is to make you think that God is cold or harsh or selfish. It's what he tried to do with Eve and he does it with so many people. He makes you think that God is actually not that nice. Never listen to that. Because God is love. And that love is beautifully shared within God himself, between Father, Son, and Spirit.

But the most amazing thing of all is the fact that God's love is not just shared within himself. God's love is shared with you.

And the four things that we have just said about God are four truths that apply to you as well and to all who trust in Jesus.

And so God's love for you is a love that is always there. If you look at verse 24 of John 17, you will see that it expresses to us the standard of the Father's love for his Son. It's giving us a glimpse of that standard. It's saying, you've loved me before the foundation of the world. It's telling us that this love is a love that is bigger than the universe. It's eternal. It comes before the beginning. It reaches beyond the end. That's the standard of God's love for his Son. But if we go back to verse 23, we see the standard of love that God has for us as Christians. And so naturally we would want to check what the differences are. What's the difference in the standard of love for the Son and the standard of love for us? Verse 24 says, you loved me before the foundation of the world.

That's the standard for the Son. Verse 23 reveals the standard for us. And it says, you loved them even as you loved me.

[23 : 56] The astounding truth of that is that the standard of love reserved for the Son is the standard of love that is bestowed upon us. God's love for the Son is eternal. No start, no end, no limit. It's just always there. God's love for you is the same.

And that should take our breath away. But it also makes perfect theological sense.

Because as a Christian, if you are a Christian or if you become one, you are united to God the Son. You are adopted as God's own child. And so the standards reserved for the Son are the very same standards that are poured out upon us. And Paul captures that beautifully in Ephesians 1. He uses the same phrase before the foundation of the world.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as

sons through Jesus Christ according to the purpose of his will. These verses are taking the truths applied to the Son in John 17 and they're showing that they also apply to us. Reminding us of the fact that God's love for you is bound up with his love for his Son.

So that means if you ask yourself the question, will God always love me? If you're going to ask yourself that question then you also have to ask yourself, will God always love the Son? And if the second question is true, then so is the first.

[26 : 00] And that's where we find assurance. The fact that we are united to Jesus, held there in union with him and all the blessings that are restored upon him are shared with us.

It's why we're called fellow heirs with Christ. The vital point is that God's love for you is a love that will always be there no matter when it may be in your life. So tonight, tomorrow morning, during the next week, next month, next year, God's love for you will not wobble. It will not fade, it will never weaken, it will never change. It is a love that is always there and no matter what is happening in your life. So if you are criticised at work, God's love for you is still there. If you are worrying about burdens in your life, health or family or work or whatever it may be, God's love for you is still there. And if you are struggling, if you feel weak, if you're failing, if you're depressed, if you're lonely, if you have regrets, if you have concerns, God's love for you is still there. The steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him. God's love for you is a love that's always there.

And God's love for you secondly is a love that knows. John 17 makes it so beautifully clear that the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father. But if we go back to John 10, we see that God knows us too. And he says, I am the good shepherd, I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father and I lay down my life for the sheep.

And again, we see here the benchmark is the standard of relationship within the Trinity, as the Father and the Son know each other so God knows us. Reminding you of the fact that God's love for you is never a cold, distant, detached or even mystical love. It is a love that knows you. God's love for you is a love that knows you. And how precious this truth is, because so often we worry if only people knew me, they would never love me. And that's why people are defensive. Often it manifests itself in their workplaces, often with people who are further up the ladder. What if people knew that I am struggling to cope with my work? What if people knew that I was struggling with sin? What if people knew that I was scared and doubting? I was afraid.

What if people knew the fact that I feel like I'm making no progress as a Christian at all? What if people know all the stupid, awful things that go through my mind? What if people knew all of that? Well, do you know God knows? God knows it all and yet he still loves you.

[28 : 58] So you think of all your worries, God knows them all. You think of all your failings and stumblings, God knows them all. You think of whatever it is that puts tension into the back of your neck, God knows it. But the fundamental truth is that God doesn't simply know these things because he is omniscient. God knows these things because he loves you.

His love for you is a love that knows. You matter to him, your thoughts matter, your worries matter, your fears matter, the detail of your life matters to God and he wants you to know and he wants you to never stop knowing that he loves you so dearly. God's love for you is a love that knows and for anybody who maybe is not sure yet if they're a Christian, God knows whatever is worrying you, whatever is holding you back and he's saying, I know but I still love you and I'll never let you down. Just put your trust in me. God's love for you is a love that knows. Thirdly, God's love for you is a love that always wants to be together. As we said, God's love delights to be together. There's that witness at the heart of the trinity between God,

Father, Son and Spirit and at one level that intimacy, that closeness, that fellowship, it can seem so out of reach to us, can't it? We often think that God is far away and that he would want to stay away but if you go back to John 17, you will see Jesus saying something absolutely remarkable in verse 24. He says, Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me, maybe with me where I am. Now these are among the most precious words ever written because they are answering the question, what does God the Son want? In other words, what desire lies on the heart of Jesus Christ, the Son of God? What is it that he longs for? What is his goal? Dare we even say, what is his dream? Well, his desire, his wish, his longing is that you will be with him where he is.

If you have ever felt worthless in your life or if you have ever felt lost or if you've ever felt that you do not belong, then you need to write these words on your heart because God the Son is talking to God the Father about you as a Christian and he's saying, I really want them with me. And of course,

that's simply pointing us back to the Garden of Eden where God made us to be with him and now it is pointing us forward to the new creation where for all eternity will be with him and whatever that new creation will be like, one thing we can be certain of, it will be a place where we all belong if our trust is in Jesus Christ and the glorious truth is that no matter how much you may want that, no matter how much you may want to be with God, God wants it more.

How do you know that? Well, you think of Jesus's cry on the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That tells you how much God wants you with him.

[32 : 41] God is sharing his love with you and that means he wants you to be with him. So the same things apply, God's love for you is a love that is always there, God's love for you is a love that knows, God's love for you is a love that always wants to be together and finally God's love for you is a love that serves. Now here we probably immediately think of the fact that because God's love is so amazing, it should prompt within us all a motivation to serve him ourselves and that's too of course, Jesus said, if you love me you will keep my commandments and a key part of being a Christian is the fact that we go through life obeying God and it's the greatest privilege to serve God and to live in his way as we go through our lives. That's not what makes us a Christian but as Christians, because we are Christians we want to serve our glorious God but the truth that I want to highlight here is not the fact that we serve God, that's true. The truth I want us to recognize is the fact that before we ever serve him, he has served us because God the Son did not come to be served, he came to serve and to give his life as a ransom for you and when we say that God's love is a love that serves, we are not primarily talking about the fact that we serve him, we are talking about the fact that God has served us. God's love for you is a love that has served in every way that is required, it is a love that serves to the very end, it is a love that has served to the point of dying because Jesus having loved his own, he loved us to the end and God's sharing his love with us and he is doing so in the greatest display of suffering service that the world has ever seen and that brings us back to the fact that here we see God's love shown to us most clearly which is what John tells us in his letter and it's what we read at the very start, it says God is love and then you ask the question well how do you know? It says well in this the love of God was made manifest among us that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him, in this is love not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. We could easily say God's love is so great that we serve him gladly that's true but before that we must realize that God's love is so great that he has served you.

He has served you in dying for you. He has served you in freeing you from sin and he is serving you in giving you eternal life where he can love us forever and he has served because his love for us will never ever fall short of what we need. God's love for us is a love that serves.

Now you might think to yourself here well hold on a minute be careful Thomas. When you say that you're making it sound like we are God's master. He's come to serve us but God's love serves not because we are his master it's because we are his beloved and our response is to fall in worship and say oh God I love you because you first loved me.

God's love is a love that serves and that's where we are going to conclude our study of the Trinity and when you think of the Trinity I want you to think of the five things that we have looked at. I want you to think of God's shared nature the unique perfection of God. I want you to think of that shared life that he has shared with us. I want you to think of that shared work that he has done for us. I want you to think of that shared glory that manifests itself in saving us and I want you to think of that shared love that love that is always there for you that will always know you that wants to always be with you and that has served to the point of time. In the doctrine of the Trinity we see the utter beyondness of God and we see the astounding nearness of God. Amen let's pray. God we bow before you as Father, Son and Spirit and we marvel at the fact that that you are love God is love the perfect model perfect example and indeed the only source of love and yet how we thank you that you have shared that love and sharing that love was so costly to you and how we thank you that you gave your Son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life and so we pray oh God that we would all fix our eyes upon you that we would trust in your Son and that through faith in Christ we would indeed receive your love and walk in that love forevermore. May it be true of us all. In Jesus name, Amen.