

The Father's Character

(Acts 17:22-31; Joh 14:15-21).

* In order to realize my ambitious, I try to prove that I am a good person. In order to avoid confusions, conflicts and misunderstandings, I build friendly relations with others based upon a mutual openness. As I remember, on my arriving at St. Luke's as a new pastor, I started by introducing myself as early as possible. During the following months, the parishioners watched my attitude in various ways and with different purposes. As for me, I also made an effort to acquaint myself with every member. Therefore, for two and half years of my being at St. Luke's, the curious parishioners have been acquainted with me and I with them 'from both sides.' After all, the parishioners and I have known each other better. The reason of success bases on our mutual openness and values. However, we recognized that the knowledge gained by physical observation is subjective and not sufficient; meanwhile, there are still a countless number of things behind the veil.

* Once we discussed the ideas about how to improve the interpersonal relations between the pastor and the congregation with reference to the Johari Window model. *Well, and what in the world is that?* said the friends. Generally speaking, it is some kind of paradigm by which means we can better understand how to improve interpersonal relationships and our personal influence. The authorship of this paradigm belongs to Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, American psychologists of the 1950's.

* Those of you who are not familiar with this model need to imagine four quadrants. The first, second, and third quadrants or the areas represent the combination of man's knowledge of his own personalities with the knowledge of others about his personalities. And the fourth area, called the *Unknown Area*, represents man's unique qualities that nobody knows, including that person. On hearing the explanation of the fourth area, it turned to us that science speaks of something in a person that cannot be grasped by anyone, even the very skillful American psychologists, if not to mention the first party. However, we are not only amateur psychologists but theologians as well; and so far, it makes us believe that God knows everything that is in a man because we are the fruits of His creativity. For it is written, *The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts*, (Prov 20:27). On the other hand, what can we learn about the personality of our Creator, if He would decide to be a mute and invisible? The answer is simple, - just nothing.

* At our gathering today, we continue to evaluate the glorious resurrection of our Lord in the context of the Bible readings from (Acts 17:22-31;) and (Joh 14:15-21). The first reading has impressed us with the excellency of Paul's preaching in Athens, the Capital of Greece. The starting point for his preaching Paul found in the pantheon of Grecian deities while being in Athens. Here he came across the altar to *An Unknown God*. Thinking over this phenomenon, Paul concluded that the devotional Athenians might have been somewhat acquainted with the true God.

Somewhere we read that the altar to *An Unknown God* was erected in commemoration of the Athenians' deliverance from an epidemic disease. The civilians believed that their deliverance from death was an angelic manifestation, not a self-generated process. However, they didn't find any analogy in actions pertaining to their gods. That is why they provided the new memorial altar with the inscription: *To An Unknown God*. Regarding the people's knowledge of this God, the Athenians found themselves out of touch with Him. And if we go back to the Johari Window model, it allocates the Athenians' stage of knowledge about God's personality to the forth quadrant - the *Unknown Area*.

* When comparing ourselves with those in Athens, we are the persons who stay on top of the knowledge of the true God. No doubt, we are the super advanced! Unlike the generations of old, we received the knowledge of the Unknown God and His will through the revelation of Jesus Christ. But the point is not in knowledge itself rather in its effect. The knowledge of God's identity is the milestone of all our knowledge, (Joh 17:3); if it's believed, the gate of eternal life is opened. Today God welcomes all people to learn from Him and cooperate with Him. *The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price,* (Rev 22:17).

* With reference to Paul preaching in Athens, the apostle described the *Unknown God* as the sovereign governor of the world, the giver of life and of all goodness, (v.25). In addition, Paul's listeners received the knowledge of what God likes us to do. In many passages of the Bible, we read that God commands all people to repent, (v.30). Paul was taught that soon the Lord would judge the world through the appointed Man, Christ Jesus *giving proof of this to all men by rising Jesus from the dead,*(v.31).

* Speaking of God's character, we were taught that God the Father loves His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father loves the Son because he obeys his Father's will, even to dying on the cross. Friends, it is essential to know the Father's character in order to grow in our salvation. Do you know that the Father loves justice and spares not his enemies? Do you know that the Father accepts everyone who loves His Son, but He brings dishonor to the proud people? Do you know that the Father forgives our sins for Christ's sake, but whoever hates His Son are not to be forgiven? To be acquainted with God's identity and with His will, we were given the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, (Joh 14:16). He teaches us from the inside what the Father does love and what He does not so that through the obedience of His will, we may inherit the salvation of our souls!

* The observation of the contemporary world indicates that some Christians still have not known the Father's character and His will; even they may have read and heard the Scripture many times. In order to illustrate our statement, we'll tell you a true life-story. It speaks of a wealthy Englishman named Fitzgerald, a widower. He was a famous collector of the fine arts. He had only one son whom he loved very much.

In the passing of time, his son became very ill, and he died in his late teens. Some years later, the father died as well. Before his death, Fitzgerald had left explicit instructions about the further destiny of his art collection. According to his will, the paintings should be sold at auction. On the day of selling, the masterpieces were exhibited. Among the great pictures there was a poor, non professional one; but it was the painting of Fitzgerald's beloved son. Before the bidding began, the attorney announced the will of the collector; it said that the first painting on sale should be the picture of his beloved son. It shouldn't surprise us when the auction started, that only one bid was made. The painting was purchased for less than 3 dollars by the old Fitzgerald's servant who had known the son and loved him. When the first bargain was ratified, the auctioneer stopped the selling. *What had happened?*, That was a common question in people's mind. *The auction is over*, said the attorney. Then, the final will of the wealthy man was loudly pronounced. It said, *"Whoever buys the painting of my son gets all my art collection."* On hearing this message, the people sat for a moment in shock. *Wow! The man bought the priceless collection of art for less than 3 dollars! Could you believe it?*, exclaimed a museum curator. *Ah, if I only knew how much Fitzgerald loved his son, I would not miss his reward*, said a private collector.

* Friends, isn't it a wonderful illustration about how it is important to know the Father's character? Do you understand how important your personal concern is to God the Father regarding His Son? In anticipation of a clear understanding, we decide to detail no more the Father's character, but to sum up it.

* Today we've learned that the former *Unknown God* became Known to the Athenians by virtue of His acts shaped by love through the Word and the Holy Spirit. God revealed His nature and His will to all people, in and through His Son, so that people would build the proper interpersonal relationship with Him. Also we've been reminded that our God is awesome; He loves those who respond to His love adequately; He promised to make us His own dwelling place, if we are eager to demonstrate our love toward His Son, (vv.20,21).

And that is all that we need.

Amen

Beloved of the Lord, grace and mercy belong to you,

Amen.