

Relating In Love pt. 3  
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### Relating In Love pt. 3

We're going to continue this morning talking about relating in love. This is our third week on this subject. I want to take a few minutes just reviewing what we have looked at so far. And then I would like for us to continue looking at how we relate to one another in the Lord's body in love.

I realize that these things are easy to misunderstand. The things that I am sharing now are certainly not the first things that I began to see in him. Nevertheless, they are great and wonderful things. And if perhaps our hearts are not currently being dealt with by the Lord in these realities, I still want to just say them, record them, and have them available for whenever the Lord does deal with our hearts in this way.

We've been looking at love as it has to do with **sharing one life**. As a matter of fact, what God calls love can only be experienced when the many share what God calls life. **When there is one life shared, and when there is one life known, love is the nature of the relationship that exists between all who are in that life.** This is what we have been talking about.

God loved us, and is loving us, by giving us his life. That is the nature and reality of how God loves the world. And we have seen this in many Scriptures. We have seen that the love of God was made manifest to the world by giving us a Son in whom, and by whom, we could all live. God's love is not simply the way he feels. His love is not known this way. God's love is a Son given, a Son given to be our life and our relationship with the Father. And the greatness of God's love is the greatness of God's Son. The greatness of God's love is the greatness of his gift.

Incidentally, we can talk about the great love of God in the church every single Sunday, but we will never experience or know the love of God if we do not come to see Christ as the greatness of God's love. The boundaries of God's love are the boundaries of Christ. The height and depth and width and breadth of God's love is the height and depth the width and breadth of Christ. When we come to know Christ as he is revealed by the Spirit then we come to know the great love of God.

From here we talked about our love *for* God. I won't get into all that we have said about that. But let me just say that there is no way for us to love God if we are not receiving his love. Jesus says it like this, "I can tell that you do not have the love of God in yourselves"... "there is no room for my word in your hearts".

But when there is room in our hearts for the Word of Christ, for his life to be received and to increase and conquer and reign in our souls, then we can begin to experience the love of God. And our experience of the love of God is our experience of Christ. Our experience of the love of God is our experience of sharing one life,

being moved and motivated by one life, doing all things, saying all things, wanting all things for and from the one life that we share with the Son and with one another.

**This is what the love of God is all about. It is about receiving a life, living in that life, doing all things as one from that life and for that life. Love becomes the experience and expression of every thing that God has established through the cross of Jesus Christ. It is how we relate, it what is real, its what we want, its what we serve, when we exist and function as one new man.**

You and I share one life. The life we share is not the flesh. I may have nothing in common with you in the flesh. That is irrelevant. The life we share is not natural. The life we share is the life of Christ. Now, the fact that we don't know that life very well, the fact that it has been revealed in us only to a small degree, this limits or restricts the measure of love that we can experience. In other words, if you and I know ourselves according to the flesh, and know each other according to the flesh, then we are going to relate to one in other as individuals, independent of one another, and as those who are important to each other only in the way of mutual selfishness,

You see this is how people relate in the natural world. I was talking about this with a couple guys at lunch this week. Remember a while back I talked about how relationships in the flesh are a little bit like two ticks without a dog. Without a dog to be the source and life of these two ticks they just suck life from one another back and forth back and forth. They have entered into a kind of relationship, and the relationship might be very important to them. But it is important to them because of what they gained from it both through the life of the other person, and through feeling important and necessary to the other person. This is how natural relationships work.

And that's not always a bad thing. I mean in marriages, for instance, there is a certain appropriateness to our mutual need for one another. But what I'm trying to say is simply that natural relationships have to do with mutual need, with extracting from different people in different situations the things that are most necessary to our individual needs. And, in a lot of ways, our relationships in the flesh are a little bit like a tangled web of 500 interconnected ticks where everyone involved in this giant relational web is drinking life and identity and purposes and needs and attention and entertainment from one another. That's a little bit gross to imagine, but there is a lot of truth in this analogy.

With these ticks, the good of the one is not really the good of the other. I mean, we care whether tick number 256 is present in a group, but we care for their presence primarily because of how their absence would affect **us**. We are happy to have them there, but that is because so many situations and ideas and needs and so much identity and emotion are plugged into that person. And it's a real delicate thing, this pile of interconnected ticks. It's easy to disrupt the balance. It's easy to feel left out. It's easy to be hurt. Everything you are gaining is so contingent upon everyone else's position. You can't shift around in these relationships without affecting the people around you. They can't shift around without pulling a plug that you have plugged into them.

We think that we need each other. We think that we love each other. But more often than not our relationships are fueled and controlled by the way that we have aligned ourselves in the pile of ticks for mutual self-gain. We call this love because we feel

that we need these people so badly. We call it love because we cannot imagine being without them. We call it love because we will often do things for these other ticks to maintain the relationships that we need with them. We will serve them, but we serve them to maintain their relationship with us. We cry if we lose one of them, or if our relationship with them changes. We are not really crying for them. We are crying for whatever we have lost by losing them.

The reason I give this analogy is because it is precisely the *opposite* of how love functions in the body of Christ. Love in the body of Christ is not many joined together and relating based on mutual self gain. There aren't a bunch of ticks in Christ. And so there aren't a bunch of needs in Christ. In fact there are not a bunch of purposes, identities, and lives. There aren't a bunch of anything. There is one head with one body. And in that one body, though there are many members, it is Christ all and in all.

Therefore there is one life, one spirit, one mind, one Father, one expectation. There is one door into this relationship -- baptism into death. There is one good, one gain, one purpose, one identity. We are the body of one Christ.

Now you see, we fail to relate as the body of Christ precisely because we do not see or understand what we are. We do not know how to love one another in truth and in spirit because our unrenewed darkened minds still see ourselves as a bunch of Christian tick. We are like ticks that have been granted the largest dog in the world. Maybe a better analogy would be that we are like parasites that have been injected into a Great Dane. And though we are in him - our host - and though we have his life as our own, as our food, as our home... still we continue to feed on one another, and relate according to what love meant outside of him.

I know that these are strange illustrations. But they make a very simple point. The point has to do with the nature of love. Love is not when a bunch of ticks in a pile that like and need and serve each other based on independent gain and independent purposes. Love is not when these ticks are nice to each other, and fall in love with each other, because of what they gained from each other for themselves. That is how love works in the world. But that is not what love is in Christ.

To continue the language from this analogy, the love of God is to give you a Great Dane in whom you can live. Your love for God is to abandon everything having to do with the pile of ticks and come share the life of the dog. You have to leave behind all that love meant to you in the tick pile. You have to let love be redefined by the new life that you have been given. And you will find that your relationship with the dog and with all those who share his life will be entirely different.

We have, as a matter of fact, been translated out of the tick pile and made to dwell in the Son of his love. And yet we have brought into his Son our loftiest ideas about relating to one another in the love of the flesh. We have brought into him an understanding of love and relationship that is entirely irrelevant, and in so many ways contradictory, to what is real in Christ. **And the primary misunderstanding, the issue that is at the heart of our great confusion and blindness, is the reality of our union with Christ. It is the reality of our sharing and relating in one life. When we come to see and know that Life in a greater and greater way, then love is the necessary and unstoppable nature of our relating to one another.**

This is why Paul says, in second Corinthians 5, that the love of Christ compels him or constrains him. We must understand what he is talking about here. Let me read this passage first.

**2Co 5:14** *For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; 15 and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again. 16 Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. 18 Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*

What is Paul saying here? I hope that it is fairly clear. The love of Christ compels us, he says. Why? Well, Paul says, it is because everything has changed. There has been an unspeakably great change, a division, a judgment. He says, here is why the love of Christ constrains me, compels me. It is because of the judgment. It is because of what God has accomplished at the cross. One died for all and therefore all died. Yes, when one died for all, all died.

Here is the great end of the independent, self-governing, self-reliant soul. There's been a judgment. Many were joined to him in his death, but only one was raised in resurrection. Many independent humans were united to the Lord in his death. But one new man came forth in the resurrection. Now there are many members, and yet one man, one life.

And so Paul says, "he died for all that those who live should live no longer unto themselves, but unto him who died for them and rose again". Can you see what he's saying here? You cannot live yourself, unto yourself, or for yourself if the many died with the one and only he was raised! You cannot live for yourself or from yourself or to yourself if there is one life and you are not that life. When one died all died, and now he is the life of all who live. There is no more independent you. You are an individual, but there is only one resurrected life given to each individual partaker of Christ. One body many members. As Paul says in Romans chapter 12, "so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

So Paul says, "of course the love of Christ compels me! Of course the love of Christ controls and motivates and moves everything in me. Because the love of Christ is all that exists when there is one body, one spirit, one good, one gain. Of course I am constrained by the love of Christ, because the love of self is part of what died when the one died. Love governs in this body because there is only one life. Love reigns in this relationship because there is only one good. Love conquers in this union because the darkness of self is dissipating."

This is all so real to Paul. It's what moved him. His view of this relationship where we have been joined to the Lord and become one spirit -- this view controlled him according to a judgment. It is behind his prayers. It is behind his service to the church. It is behind his statement to Corinth, "I desire only to spend and be spent for your souls, even if in loving you the more I am loved less."

What a wonderful Scripture! To spend and to be spent for one good and one gain and one life. To love you in such a way that I am loved less. Death works in me so that life works in you. This was the nature and reality of Paul's love for the church. This is why he can say that he prayed without ceasing -- quite simply because this judgment never left him. Love always controlled him.

Can you see that Paul related to the body of Christ according to the finished work of the cross? He related to the body of Christ according to a judgment that said -- "one died for all then all died". He related to the church, not as a group of independent ticks that love each other for self gain, but as a united body of Christ who had one spirit, one life, one purpose, one Father. And that is what he says in verse 16, "therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him thus no longer".

That's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about a love for one another that is not according to the flesh. I'm talking about relating to one another, loving one another, in a way that is not according to the things that have died. You see, very naturally, we all want love to be according to the flesh. We all want relationships to be according to the flesh. Not only is that what makes sense to us, but that is how we relate for self gain.

But there is a love that has to do with serving one another, feeding one another, and relating to one another NOT according to the things that have passed away but rather according to the things that have become new in him. Not according to the things that were from us and for us, but in a relationship where now all things are of God and for God. And this is why the very next verse in second Corinthians 15 says, "therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, "

We are reconciled through one death into one life. I know that I am taking a lot of time to describe this. But we each have spent a lot of time in the pile of ticks. And because of our unrenewed minds, we have each brought those ideas into the Lord's body where they have no right to exist.

So love is the relationship that I have with you where what you are gaining is my gain because your life is my life. Love is the relationship that you have with me where serving me **is** serving yourself, you can love your neighbor as you love yourself because we are individually members of one another. Love is this relationship where the judgment of the cross decides everything. The truth of the cross has made us one. The revealing of the cross will cause us to function as one.

If this sounds abstract or theoretical then it is because we have not seen it yet. And that is ok. But this is not an abstract principle or some kind of lofty ideal. This is a fact that stands completed on the finished work of the cross. It is a relationship that works in us in the wake of the judgment that the cross is.

I had intended to talk more today about serving one another as his body, but I'm already running out of time. Let me just say a few things. In light of all that we have just said, in light of the reality of love as it is established by the cross and revealed by his Spirit, in light of all of this what does it mean to love one another

in the Lord's body? What does it mean to serve a need in another? What do you need from me? What do I most need from you? These are things that we greatly misunderstand.

If you and I have come to a relationship with God in Christ where we are participating in his life, and sharing that life with one another, then what we need from each other is not primarily natural. What we need from each other is not primarily earthly. That may sound pretty obvious, but if you think about it for even a minute you will notice that the things that we demand from one another in the Lord's body, and as the Lord's body, are primarily natural things, natural expectations.

But with a little bit of light we can begin to see that, although love does bleed over into the natural realm, true love has to do with a spiritual relationship. If you have been translated out of sin and death, out of flesh and law, out of self and fear and condemnation and all that is involved in being the seed of Adam, then the greatest thing that I can do for you is to help you become rooted and grounded and established in the love of God. **The greatest way to serve you is to deal with you, relate with you, speak to you, in ways that both confirm and teach and establish and reflect the reality of the life that we have, and at the same time in ways that expose and nullify and wash you from the life that you have known.**

You see that is what you need for me. That is how I can love you and serve you and help you. That is how you can love me serve me and help me. Speak the truth in love. That does not mean speak truth is a loving way. That means speak the truth as it is in love. Speak the truth, live the true, relate in the truth as it is in love. **Love me by relating to me in such a way that the world that God has put away is washed away from my consciousness. Relate to me in such a way where the things that we share are those things that have been made new, those things that are of God. Let me serve you in such a way that our relationship is effective in cleansing the unrenewed residue of the Adamic man from your heart. Let our relationship in love be one that excludes everything except for Christ.**

I believe this is precisely what Jesus was demonstrating in John chapter 13 when he washed the disciples feet. I am aware of the more common interpretations of this passage. And yet I do not believe that Jesus is giving the disciples an example of natural earthly love. I believe, as always, he is using natural earthly pictures to paint pictures of deep spiritual realities.

In the beginning of chapter 13, John tells us that we are looking at the love of Christ. "Having loved those who have been given to him out of the world, he loved them to the end." What did he do? He took off his garments and put on a linen apron. He didn't just grab a wash rag. If you look up the word in the Greek Jesus took off his clothes and put on a linen towel or apron. And he approached his disciples as priest to wash their feet.

Peter objects, and then insists that Jesus wash his whole body if this is necessary. Jesus replies to Peter that he is clean because of the word that Christ has spoken and that Peter had received. Peter is like one, Jesus says, that has taken a bath and been made clean and needs only now to wash his feet from the dirt and the residue of the world. And so Jesus demonstrates this kind of love. With his linen

apron he washes the filth and darkness that sticks to Peter from walking and living in this world. He washes from him everything that does not belong on him. He cleanses him from the way that the world has touched him, affected him, stained him.

Again, pay attention to the fact that Jesus says that Peter is already clean because of the word that he had received. This corresponds to Christian who is clean in the sight of God, made new in Christ, through receiving the living Word himself. And yet there is something that still must be washed from you and I. There is something that still must be washed even though in God's sight we are clean. We must be washed with the water of the word. We must have our consciences cleansed with the water of the spirit of truth. We must let the truth rinse from our hearts the soil and stain of the earth.

This, I believe, is the love that Jesus is demonstrating. Having loved the ones the father had given him, he loved them to the end. He loved them all the way. He loved them unto the consummation of the goal. And he gives this kind of love, this cleansing and washing as the example for his disciples and how they must relate to one another.

I do not believe that this is merely an example of self-effacing service. Nor do I believe that Jesus is primarily setting natural examples for behavior. I believe that Jesus is establishing a way of relating in love with one another that has the effect of cleansing one another's hearts from the residue of the old man, the old creation, and the old covenant. Many people, both inside and outside of religion do many good deeds for many different reasons. But only a Christian who is learning the life of Christ can love the body of Christ in this way. Only Christians that are experiencing the judgment of God that Paul speaks about in second Corinthians 5 can relate to one another in a way that establishes love and washes away self.

That's probably enough for today.