

Relating In Love  
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## Relating In Love

One of these days I am going to finish going through the book of Ephesians. Today is not that day. I have had something else on my mind for a couple weeks and it is a much more pressing thing in my heart. It has to do with love. It seems to me like several times a year the Lord circles my heart back around to deal with me again about love. And that's a really good thing -- because love is everything.

Even though I do this every time, I'm going to open with the usual disclaimers and warnings. What I mean is that before we even say anything about this, I want to warn everybody, as I always do, not to bring anything of our natural definitions of love into this. Our natural understandings or experiences or definitions have no place in the truth as it is in Christ. We must not allow them entrance. They are from a different realm, a different mind, and they only ever contaminate and destroy when they are given place in spiritual reality.

I was talking to somebody this week and they used a helpful analogy. We were talking about fellowship -- true fellowship, the sharing of the life of Christ when his body comes together. He was talking about how fragile and delicate true fellowship is. What he meant by that was that it is so easily disturbed, so easily interrupted, stopped altogether, when a natural mind with natural thoughts and ideas jumps into the middle of it. And here's my paraphrase of what he was saying. Fellowship is incredibly real and eternal, and yet all you have to do is touch them with one natural finger and it starts to fall apart. All spiritual reality is like that to a degree.

Not that they really fall apart in themselves. But that they fall away from our experience and remain out of reach inasmuch as we approach them or try to mix them with anything natural. So please, for the sake of experiencing your salvation, **do not give your ideas about love any place in the kingdom of God. They are a foreign seed, they are an uncircumcised enemy in this land.** If you give them any place at all it will be a thorn in your side. This is the story of the book of Judges. And this is the story of our souls when we allow any measure mixture in His land.

So I want to talk about love again. Love is a reality that grows bigger and bigger in our hearts as the Lord shows us more of Christ. I trust, and anticipate, that it will always be this way.

Let me make the following statement - **Love is the relationship where everything that God has done is perfectly experienced and expressed.** That's quite a statement if we understand it. Love is the relationship where everything that God has done is perfectly experienced and expressed. Love is a relationship where there is only one life, only one good, only one kind of relating. That's where I would like to head. But lets back up a little bit first.

What is love? I want to give you a very simple definition but I want to ask you to let the Lord fill up this definition with its meaning. I want to say it, but I want to say it only to put it out there as an empty package for the Lord to pour substance into. Here's the definition: Love is giving your life for another. Please don't let the familiarity of that sentence rob you of its greatness.

I want to eventually talk about what it means for us to love God, and to talk about how we relate to the body of Christ in love. But let's start just by talking again about what it means that God loves us. What is the love of God? You could answer that question very simply this way -- the love of God is God giving himself, in all that he is and has, to you. That is the nature of God's love. He gives His life to you.

However, initially God could not love us in this way. In other words God could not give himself to us, unless he made a way for Himself to do so. It was in God's hearts to give himself to a creation, to a people. It was in God's plan to lavish himself in glory and grace upon humanity. That was a part of his eternal plan and purpose. But in our natural condition God was not be able to love us in this way.

The natural mind objects and says, "of course He could! God can love anything He wants". But again, that is where we misunderstand the nature of God's love. He could not love His creation in the way that He desired until he provided a way for love to reach us. Love is more than a feeling with God. Love is the giving of Himself. And God needed to provide a way for us to access his love that He gives us in and as Christ.

This is the cross. **The cross is the way that God loves the world.** This is so important for us to understand. The love of God is the giving of his life, the pouring out of himself. But the **way** that God was able to love us is the cross.

Let me give you a very silly analogy that might help explain what I'm trying to say. Let's say that you are a father or a mother that desires very much to love your son. You desire very much to give your life to your son, to lavish yourself upon him, to make everything that you have available to him. But there was a problem. Your son lived on another planet. He was from an entirely different realm and reality than you. You could not access him. So the plan that was in your heart was unattainable. The desire to give yourself, your life, your love, to your son could not be realized.

But in the genius of your mind you devised away whereby you can love this boy. You built a spaceship that can bridge the distance between the two universes. So the love was your plan and purpose, but the spaceship became the way that your plan and purpose was realized.

Now this is an extremely simple and silly analogy. And my point can be misunderstood very easily in this story. But my hope in sharing it is that you would see just one thing. **God cannot love what he has no relationship with. God cannot give himself to something that is absolutely foreign, separated from, contrary to, dead to himself.** Humanity was outside the boundaries of God's love until God gave Himself through the cross. And so the cross became the way that God loved the world. For God, in this way, loved the world... that he gave them Christ crucified. The cross as a rocket ship out of one life, out of one man, one universe, one creation. The cross as a way to become dead to one world and come and live in another world called Christ.

You mustn't think of the rocket ship as just a bridge that lets you cross over to where God is. You see, that is where this analogy fails massively. Someone could say in the darkness of their own imagination, "the cross let my life return to where God's life is!" Or "the cross made my life acceptable to the Father!" That is not it at all. The cross allowed God to love you because it removed the distance, it removed the enmity, it removed the hostility, the barrier, the contrariness. But it did not remove that barrier by making you fit for God's presence. **It removed that barrier by putting to death your life, and offerings your soul a life that has relationship to God.**

**This is the great love of God. Not that we loved God, but that God loved us and gave a son in whom we could live. He gave a cross by which we could die, and a resurrection by which we could live -- yet not I, but Christ who lives in me. God was inaccessible until he made a way. God is still inaccessible unless we approach through that way. The way that God loved the world was a cross.**

Let me say this again. Love is giving your life for another. God's love is the giving of his life to all who would receive it. The way that God does that is not financial blessings, physical healings, situational provision, etc. These things may or may not happen. But they are not ever the substance of God's love. The way that God loves you is by giving you everything that He is through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. The way that you receive the love of God is that you and I receive everything that God is as our very own life through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ.

If we refuse to experience and grow in the reality of the cross, then we refuse to let God love us. If we refuse to know the cross then we are refusing the love of God. Because God has no access to you except by the cross. **He cannot reach you with his love unless you know the person and place in whom his love can be known. He cannot reveal in you his life if you are seeking to hold onto your own.** For this reason Jesus says, "anyone who loves their life will lose it, but anyone who hates their life will find it".

**Please, don't ever let anyone preach to you a message about God's love that has nothing to do with the cross.** Don't ever let anyone convince you of any kind of love that does not have the cross as the central reality and way by which we partake of that great love. It is a lie -- no matter how it makes you feel. There is no love if there is no cross, **because the cross made, and is always making, room in our soul to know the love of God.** One of the greatest tragedies in the body of Christ today is the proclamation of God's love without realization of God's cross. To Paul or John or Peter, this would be unthinkable.

The love of God is not just a feeling that you need to believe exists. The love of God is not a natural blessing that he wants to give you. The love of God is not understood in the forgiveness of your sins. It is not a mansion in heaven. The love of God is his life given to you. And there is only one way that we know that love.

So here's the next question. If love is giving your life for another, and God loves us by giving his life through the cross, what does it mean for you and I to love God? This is specifically what I have been thinking about. I was reading John the other day and I read a familiar verse that struck me in a different way. It was this verse.

*Joh 5:39 You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. 40 But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life. 41 "I do not receive honor from men. 42 **But I know you, that you do not have the love of God in you.***

This last sentence caught my attention. You do not have the love of God in you. What was Jesus seeing? What specifically were these people lacking? I can guarantee you that all of these Jews would have claimed a very intense love for God. They spent their time searching his Scriptures, just like many of us do. They spent their lives attempting to order all things according to his ways and his words, just like we do. They had given themselves to God according to what they understood God to be. They were waiting for the Messiah. They were looking for the fulfillment of all the promises. And yet Jesus says to them, "I know that you do not have the love of God in you."

What does it mean to love God? I would guess that everyone that believes in God would profess a great love for God. But let me say something that is a little bit ugly but it is also true. It is true of me as much as it is true of anyone. And I specifically remember the time that the Lord began to show me how true this was of me.

**Most often our love for God has to do with strong emotional feelings that we have towards whatever we need God to be. In other words, we say we love God, but more often than not, we love our ideas about God. We love what we imagine Him to be, what we need him to be, what we think that he does, what we think that he will do. We love the idea of God – and whatever that idea means to us. We love the idea of salvation, eternal life, grace, as long as each of those words correspond to ideas that we already love.**

Somebody says "I love God." Okay... why? "Because he gave me this job." Well, what if you find out that he didn't give you that job. What if you decided you hate this job and it cannot be from God? "Well I still love God." Why? "Because he's going to heal my sickness." But what if that never happens? "Well I still love God." Why? "Because he likes me just the way that I am." What if that's not exactly the truth? What if the cross is what God thinks about the way that you are? "Well... I guess I still of God." Why? "Um... because, if nothing else, he's going to give me a giant mansion one day in heaven." Well... what if you're confused about that one too? "Well that's not true then God doesn't sound very nice. I'm not sure I like God."

What's my point? **My point is that there is a difference between loving God and loving our ideas about God.** There is a difference between loving God and loving the things that we think he does for us. Loving God is more than an emotion that you feel in response to the things you think God is doing for you. Everyone loves God that way. The Pharisees love God that way. The Pharisees loved the God of their own expectations -- but they killed Jesus.

So back to my question -- what does it mean for us to love the Lord? The answer has to do with what we already said. It's the other side of how He loves us. It's the same thing from the other direction. It involves approaching the same relationship from the opposite place. And so it still involves giving away our life. But again... don't touch that sentence with your natural mind. I'm not talking about dedicating to him what we call our life. That's not a very loving thing at all. **Loving God has**

**to do with losing what we call our life in order to be joined to, and serve in, what he calls life.**

To love God is to pour out, count as dung, let die at the cross, everything that we call our life so that we can meet God in the person and place that he has provided for relationship. In other words, we can love God because He loved us first. We can love God because He gave us a life that we can exchange for our own. This can sound a bit confusing...but that is only because I don't know how to say it very well. Let me try to say it another way. **For us to truly love God we must give his word, his seed, his life, room in our soul – a place in our soul to live and judge, to crowd out everything that we have called our life. To love God there must be room in our soul for his increase and our decrease.** Jesus says to these Jews,

*Joh 8:37 "I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you.*

You see, if we are not allowing His life its place in us, His Seed place in our soil...if He is not enlarging and we are not giving way, then what is our love? Is our love anything?

These Jews that Jesus was talking to, their minds were longing for a Messiah, but their "life" was rejecting His life. They were like two foreign life forms that could not be merged. In order to be joined to Him, in order to love Him, they had to part with themselves. They had to make room in their hearts for the increase of His Word, which would of course be the death of their own. The increase of His nature, which would be the end of their own. The increase of His mind, His purpose, His identity, His life...which would subsequently mean the putting away of their own. **To love the Lord was to receive and keep His Word in them, and let God establish His home, His reign, His kingdom in their soul.**

Jesus says it like this,

*Joh 14:23 Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone keeps Me, he will guard My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*

*Joh 14:21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."*

Now don't be thrown off by the word "commandments" or the word "keep". If you look up that word "keep" in any Greek lexicon you'll see that it means "guard" or "hold fast to". It doesn't refer to outward obedience or action. This isn't a physical keeping of the rules. It is an inward holding, guarding. Some translations choose a much better word here than keep.

And when Jesus is talking about having His commandments and guarding them, it is no different than when he speaks about having his word and keeping or abiding in it. Jesus never gave commandments to the flesh. Jesus planted a word in whatever soil would receive it. He scattered the seed of His Word into whatever soil would give it room to grow.

He says in the same chapters that the commandment he gives is love. He defines His commandment, his word, as love. Love is not an action to obey in the flesh, regardless of what people say. **Love is a nature and relationship to obey and conform to in the soul. And the only way to keep his commandments, the only way to love God and your neighbor, is to allow His word to develop in you.**

How do you love the Seed that He offers? Receive it into your heart. Become the ground for its increase. Allow the growth of the one Seed to be the end of all that formerly grew in your soil. **Love God by losing your life and gaining His. Love God by entering into a relationship where it is not I, but Christ.** This is what Jesus was talking about in John 14. And this is what Jesus saw to be lacking in the Jews of John chapter 8. There was no room for His word in their heart.

Jesus looked at these men and women who were standing in front of them and saw that they did not love God. And yet many of them were devoted Jews. These were not all self-righteous Pharisees. These were just people. People who believed their Bibles to be true. People who loved the God of their ideas. People who had made room in their hearts for all of their greatest thoughts about God, but would not allow room for God to reveal Himself.

Loving God is different than we think. You cannot truly love God and keep your life. You cannot truly be loving God and providing Him no room in your soul to reveal His life. 1 John 4 says that "we love God because He first loved us". That doesn't mean that He hugged us and then we hugged Him back. That doesn't mean that He loved me on Wednesday and then I started loving Him on Thursday.

God loved us. He gave us Himself. He gave us His Life. He offered Himself as the Life where we can live. He offered His Spirit as the relationship that we can have with Him and with each other. He offered His Son as the covenant, the union, the house where we all live as one. I am in the Father, you are in Me, and I am in you. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. In this way God loved us. And we can now receive that love. We can now love God.

"We love God because He loved us first." God initiated the relationship. How did He do it? He gave. What did He give? Himself. How do we respond in love? How do we enter into a relationship with Him. He approached us through the cross. We approach Him back the same way. He lost His life to be joined to us. We lose our life and are joined to Him. We lose our lives to be found in Him. We lose our gain to know Him as our gain. We receive His Word, the implanted Word, and let it bear its increase. We receive, like the parable of the sower and the seed, we receive that seed and allow it to bring forth 30, 60, 100 fold its own increase. And the increase of Him will always be the decrease of you.

We love God when we enter into His love bringing nothing of our own. Wanting nothing of our own. You see, that's how the relationship of love works. There is nothing of your own left to lose. There is nothing that self is trying to gain. Paul describes all of this in 1 Corinthians 13. I may spend next week looking at it. Love keeps no records of wrongs. Love seeks not its own gain. Of course not. These things don't exist in love. We'll stop there for this week.