

Relating In Love pt. 2
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I want to continue this morning with what I stated last week. I want to talk about what it means for the body of Christ to relate in love, to relate in love with God and with one another. And I think that if we let the Spirit deal with our hearts we will find this love to be a much greater thing than any of the types and shadows that exist in the natural realm.

Last week I tried to say a few things about the nature of love. Specifically I talked about how it is that God loves us, and what it means that we love Him in return. I know that these things can be difficult to hear. I am not trying to make these things very new person friendly. I'm just dealing with you. You and me, and those that listen to these regularly and can hear them as I intend them to be heard.

Lets review for a few minutes. What is the reality of God's love for us? What does it mean that God loves us, that He has loved us with a great love. God's love is Christ. God's love is not defined as a feeling, but it is defined in a Person, in Life, a Gift that He has given. Let me use a simple analogy. Lets say you loved your child with the kind of love that would actually be considered a type and shadow of God's love. And lets say you also knew that you were about to die. And so you found a huge box, and you took out a magic marker and wrote "My Love for You" on the side of the box. This box was going to be a gift for your child. Your last and greatest gift. And so you begin to put every single thing that is of value to you into this box. You start with all of your money. Then you put in your favorite movies, all of your pictures, an address book with every one of your contacts and relationships that this child might need or benefit from. Then you put in your clothes, your favorite music, **EVERYTHING that was from you, and everything that represented you**. And you gave that box to your child.

God's love is a little bit like that. God's love is not merely a feeling that He feels. It is an enormous box. And in that box is every single thing that is from Him and that represents Him. In that box is the absolute fullness of everything that He could possibly give you. It's all there. Nothing has been withheld. Everything that God is and God has, has been put into that one box, and He has labeled the box "My Love for You". And that box walked as a man, and then was imparted into your soul. His name is Jesus Christ.

The love of God is Christ. What a precious truth this is. The love of God is everything that God is, everything that God has, eternally deposited into your soul through the Spirit He has given you. Paul says it like this: "the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Rom 5:5. God's love for you is a Son in whom you can live. God's love for you is a relationship where you have full access to all that God is through and in the Son. And in Christ that love is unconditional. And yet, Christ is the condition of God's love.

I'm not going to try to make a big deal out of this point today because I want to go somewhere else. But let me just say a couple things. Christians are always talking about God's unconditional love. Well, ok. There is truth to that. But that unconditional love has a

condition. I'm not trying to sound clever or cute. God has unconditional love, but there is a condition to that unconditional love. Christ is the condition. The unconditional love for you and I is in Christ. In other words, the place where that unconditional love exists is in Christ. The reality and experience of God's unconditional love is the reality and experience of Christ. In other words, it is IN THE BOX. There's nothing for you besides what He has perfected and packaged in that one living Container. That is the love of God.

So we said last time that the love of God for you is His life poured out, His life given. And the WAY that He loves us is through the cross. You see, that is HOW God loved and loves the world. The cross is how God opened the box. The cross is how God made Himself available to our souls. We do not have access to Him, He could not have union with us, except by the cross.

But, as we already know, the cross was not simply like a bridge where Adam walked right over into Christ. The cross was the pouring out of Christ's life in such a way, and to such an extent that all of the first man and his shortcomings were poured out in that blood. The man of sin, the fallen world, were poured out and discarded in the blood of Christ. And then, to the dead, God offered a place in Himself. To those who painted that blood and that judgment on themselves....to those who received that death as their own...God offered access into Himself. For us who would accept ourselves crucified with Christ, judged and buried, to us He could pour out his love in our hearts through the Spirit that He gives us.

And in this way God begins relating to us in love. He begins relating to us in that Life, in that Son, according to that box, and all that is within it. He begins dealing with us as partakers with Him of His Life. He treats us and teaches us as the literal body of His Son. By showing us His love, by showing us His Son, He conforms us to His image. We are transformed from the first to the second, from the old to the new. By beholding through faith we come to know the gift of love, and we are established and secured and learn to abide in what God has given. Paul says it this way:

Eph 3:14 For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

So God's love for us is a Son in whom we live and relate to Him. His love is His very life given to us as the place where we are and the connection that we share. I hope that is coming a little more into view.

OK...how do we love God? What is that all about? The answer is not as simple as it seems. As we said last week, more often than not we are much fonder of our ideas about God than we are God's ideas about Himself. We often say that we love God when we are really loving the things that we imagine and need God to be. And I won't say much about that again.

But what I do want to review for a minute is that for us to truly love God we must approach Him in a similar way to how He has approached us. We must pour out our lives. And by that I do not mean that we must dedicate our lives to God. I mean we must literally pour out, throw away, "hate" as Jesus says, what we call our natural life. We must dispose of it at the cross, so that we can receive and enter into fellowship with what God knows Life to be.

Jesus says that we must lose our lives to find Life. He says that we must hate our life to gain life. Paul says that we must see that it is nothing, and that its gain is merely dung. And we must repudiate it entirely, and give it up for dead. We give it up for dead because to God it is dead. In order for us to approach God, we must pour out the thing that is keeping us from God. In order for us to approach God we must allow Him to cut off by the sword of the cross all that has fallen short.

In the types and shadows, for Israel to enter into the land that represents abiding in Christ, coming to purpose, for them to enter in they had to leave their foreskins on the banks of the Jordan. A gruesome picture, but an accurate one nonetheless. We don't bring flesh into this fellowship. We cannot bring it in except in the imaginations of our unrenewed mind. God has seen fit to remove it from His presence. We must see fit to remove it from our relationship to Him. It must be cleansed from our conscious.

We must pour out our life and receive His if we are going to love the Lord. How are we loving Him if we are refusing what He calls life in favor of what He calls an enemy. This is what Saul tried to do. He tried to keep and even offer to God what God had already said was His enemy. God called it dead, Saul called it alive. God called it his enemy, Saul wanted to make peace. Saul said He did it all in the name of loving God. But God did not recognize that kind of love. **God stripped the kingdom away from Saul because He loved what God hated, and hated what God loved.**

David, on the other hand, had in His heart the judgments of the Lord. He despised the uncircumcised of the land and knew that the Lord's had was against them. David was a man who loved the Lord, and He demonstrated this love by increasing the boundaries of Israel. He demonstrated this love by removing the uncircumcised from God's cities, and giving God room to exalt Israel His Son.

Is that how we have learned to love God? Have we learned to love him with words and songs and feelings? Or have we learned to love Him in spirit and truth. Have we learned to love the Lord by pouring out this depraved tangle of self-obsession that we call our lives...and allowing Him to deposit in us, reveal in us, form in us what God calls rivers of living water?

The cross is the condition for our experience of God's love. The box that He has filled with his treasure, the box that is called Christ, is on the other side of the cross. He came onto our side and became the judgment and execution of our fallenness. He then returned to His side and invited us out of one man and into another. He invited us out of the land of the dead, and into the land of the living where love could be the reality and relationship that we have with God.

And this is what I want to try to explain today. Love is this reality and relationship where God and man have come together in the person of Christ. **Love is the relationship where everything that God has done is perfectly experienced and expressed.** I mentioned this last week but never really developed it.

These days when I think about relating in love, there are a few Scriptures that always come to mind. There is the one in John where Jesus says, "I am in the Father, you are in Me, and I am in you". That is the relationship where love is a reality. That is the relationship where love is experienced because life is shared. Another verse that comes to my mind is Ephesians 2 where Paul describes the "one new man" – Christ the head, and we the body. But there is only one new man. Not a bunch of new men and women. But one new man,

having been baptized into one death, relating in one Spirit, living by one faith, having one Father.

Another verse that I think about is Colossians 3 – “you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God”. More and more this verse has also become a description of love to me. We have died. We poured out our life, threw it away, counted it as dung, acknowledged the judgment of the cross. And because we have died with Him, we are now hidden with Him in the Father. And again, in this great reconciliation, in this incredible union, love exists. **Love is the relationship that we all experience because we have all been made one.** Another familiar verse would be 1 Corinthians 6:17 – “the one that joins himself to the Lord has become one spirit”.

Now just for anyone who may not be following at a heart level, let me just reassure you at a head level, that I am not talking about a union where we become God, or God becomes us, or we are dissolved into God, or any other strange idea. I’m talking about the union that the Bible describes in the verses that I just quoted. And I don’t suppose it would do much good to define that union theologically because the Spirit would still have to define it experientially.

In Christ, God has given us His Life. That life is never ours in the sense of personal ownership or origin. But it is given to our souls as our indwelling and defining life. It is difficult to define life. And I’m not even going to try this morning. What I am going to try to do is describe how, **when there is one life in many members, love is how those members relate.**

The best type and shadow of this that I have seen is not in natural friendships or families, but actually in natural bodies. Every member of your body loves and needs and serves the one life that they all share. There is no argument about it unless there is some sort of disease. When one hand is cut by a sharp object, the other hand instantly and instinctively comes to its aid. The burden of one part is necessarily the burden of each part, not because the two hands are the same, but because the two hands share one life. So the lack or injury of one part is necessarily the lack of the entire body. It is effortless for my hand to minister in love toward my other injured hand because there is one life, and one mind, and one good, and one goal. There aren’t two different ones that are in agreement. No, there is just one that works in every member.

So, in my body, in a type and shadow sort of way, you could say that every member of my body is equally concerned with, and willing to serve, and invested in, and attached to every other member of my body. For every member of my body, to love Life is to love my members. And to love my members is to love Life. There are the same. And that is why Scriptures says things like:

Heb 2:11 *For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,*

1Jo 5:1 *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.*

There is one Life, and that Life is Christ. And, very literally, to love that life is also to love those who are part of that Life. To love the Life that is Christ, if we are growing in the truth, is also to love those who are begotten of that Life.

Now listen for a minute. Don't jump ahead of the light here. I know you are all aware that I am talking about the body of Christ and not my own physical body. But let's not jump ahead of the light and assume that we know what it means to serve and love the body of Christ. The first carnal thing that we always do when read of love in the Bible, or hear a message about one body with many members, is that we assume that the body of Christ is served and loved primarily through natural things. In other words, it is common for people to hear me talking about one body with one life loving and serving itself...and immediately assume that the way that we do that is through lending a helping hand in situations, or ministering things like money and time and attention and physical assistance.

But that's not the right view. CERTAINLY there are natural things that we can and must help one another with. CERTAINLY the spiritual realities bleed over into natural situations needs. It is that way because we have this treasure in earthen vessels. But primarily, the way that we serve and bless and love and invest in the members of the Lord's body is through, and according to, **the MEASURE OF CHRIST. That is the Life of this body. And that is always the primary thing that this body needs.**

You see, this is what I'm trying to get at this morning. The church is a spiritual body. It is not natural. But it has a natural vessel for a time. And for a time the spiritual church is attached to natural shells. And that is obvious to everyone. **But that does not mean that the primary needs of the church on earth are natural. That does not mean that the primary way that we love one another is through serving each other's physical bodies.** No. That is where we are so often confused. We define love in the Lord's body as something very much like the shadow in the earth. We define love as the ministering of natural, temporal, personal, independent blessings and gifts and gain and help. **But love in the Lord's body is first and foremost, before it ever touches a physical situation, a ministering of Christ Himself to His body.** A sharing, giving, speaking, responding and relating to one another in our needs according to the measure of Christ that is working in us.

Listen, it may not seem like it. It may not feel like it because our natural needs always feel more pressing. But what you need from me is not to be another buddy. What I need from you is not really another natural friend, or a person I can count on to keep my secrets, or watch a movie with, or reminisce about old times. What you need from me, and what I need from you, is to relate to you in and through the truth of Christ. **You can help me with my lawn, and that is really nice. But if you really want to love me, then relate to me as the living body of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you really want to love me, then deal with me according to the truth, know me according to the Spirit, share with me according to the finished work of the cross. Love me by feeding me Christ.**

And when I say "feeding me Christ" let me explain what I mean by that. When a person offers Christ to the body, again...I'm not really talking about lending a helping hand. I'm not talking about anything natural here. I'm talking about offering something of the reality of Christ. But let me also explain what I mean by this, and what I don't mean.

Perhaps many of us have already realized that the body needs to be fed Christ and Christ alone. And that that is the substance and reality of our fellowship. He is what we need in order to live and see and grow. But what does it mean to feed each other Christ? Remember when Jesus was talking to Peter after He rose from the dead. Peter had denied Jesus 3 times. Peter had put confidence in the flesh, what he could offer, what he could do. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. And now Jesus approaches Peter and says

"do you love me?". Peter says "yes, Lord...you know that I do". And the Lord says "well then, feed my sheep".

If Peter really loved Christ, it is not going to be known in Peter's fleshly zeal, or in his promises to support and fight and stand with Christ. Peter proved that that kind of love didn't mean much. Jesus is dealing with Peter here. Peter if you love me, then you will feed my sheep. So I'm asking again – what does that mean? What kind of feeding is he talking about? What kind of love is this? I believe that it certainly involved preaching and teaching and sharing with words the reality of our salvation, and helping others grow up by speaking the truth in love. But I also wanted to make sure that understand that there is more to feeding truth than just speaking. There is more to offering Christ than just talking about the Lord.

This is a bit difficult to describe, but try to follow me here. Remember, we've been saying that love is this relationship where we have all come into one life. We have all come to share the Life the life of God. We have NOT come to BE the life of God. But we share His Life now in such a way that if we could see clearly we would know that His good is my good, His gain is my gain, my lack is his lack, your lack is my lack, your gain is my gain. This is the nature of relationship that we have come to.

As a side note...I was talking the other night with a friend in Costa Rica. We often ask each other how the various groups are going, both here and there. She asks how my groups are going. I ask how her groups are going, etc. But as we were sharing with one another about the body of Christ she said that, in truth, she should really ask me how OUR group was going. She should say, "how did OUR meeting go last night"...even though she is thousands of miles away. Because any growth in the Lord's body here is growth in the Lord's body everywhere. There is just one body. Every lack in the Lord's body here is a lack in the Lord's body everywhere. And His Light will show this to be real. His view will show that this is all that is real.

And you know...this is the fulfillment of everything written in the Old Covenant. Jesus says that the law and the prophets are summed up in this – Love the Lord your God with all of your heart and mind and strength, and love your neighbor **as yourself**. Well, who could do that in the Old Covenant? Was anyone able to obey that command when that command was words on a page? Of course not. Of course they could not truly love the Lord their God if His life was separate and foreign and contrary to their own. And of course they could not truly love their neighbor as themselves if every neighbor always had his own independent life and goals and good and gain.

But the new covenant changed all of that. **The new covenant didn't change the commandment, but it changed the relationship so that the commandment could truly be obeyed.** You need to hear this. In giving to us the very life of Christ Himself the new covenant, this new relationship, gave us the ability to love in the true sense of the word. We could love the Lord with our heart and mind and strength because we have been given, and we are learning to walk in, His heart and mind and strength. We could love our neighbors as ourselves because now our neighbors are partakers of ourselves. Paul says, "Rom 12:5 so we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another."

So you see...the new covenant didn't change the commandment, but it changed the relationship so that the commandment could be truly obeyed. That is why Jesus says in John that now they can truly keep his commandment. And his commandment is simple –

love the brethren as I have loved you. The commandment is love. It has ALWAYS been love. But only now, in Christ, can that commandment be realized, fulfilled, perfected.

John says this very same thing in 1 John chapter 2. He says I am giving you a new commandment. But then he says, well...actually it is not a new commandment. It is the same commandment that you have had from the beginning. But what was only words, what was only shadows, a love that could never truly be a reality, is now new in Him and in you. The newness is Him. The newness is working in you because the darkness of the old is passing away and the new is already starting to shine. Let me just read this passage for you.

1Jn 2:7 Brethren, I write no new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which you heard from the beginning. 8 Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining.

The newness of love is not a new word, it is not a new concept, it is not a new command. It is the same command from the beginning. The newness of love is the LIFE in which love becomes real. When we share the Life of ONE...then we can love God and our neighbor as ourselves. When there is just one life, and one good, and one gain....and when we are seeing that one life, and desiring that one good, by faith...then can you see how your gain is my gain, and my gain is His gain, and His glory is my gain, and my lack is your lack and your lack is His lack.

And so what we need to do with each other, what we need to do to LOVE each other is not primarily natural. It does not primarily have to do with your individual natural life or with mine. What we need to do to love one another is feed one another Christ. To feed each other a greater reality of Christ.

I am running out of time, but let just say something quickly that I started to say a few minutes ago and got sidetracked. I will say just a little bit now, but we will talk about this more next week.

When I talk about feeding one another Christ, I am not just talking about preaching or teaching Christ to the body. And you all know that I think that is essential. But feeding Christ isn't only when we *speak* the truth, it is also when we RELATE to one another in the truth of what is Christ. It has to do with relating to one another according to whatever you have seen Him to be – and allowing that to be the reality of what we are, who we are together, what we say, what we don't say, what is real to us, and what is no longer real, what we see, don't see, what we care about, and what we leave behind, what we reach for, and what we ignore. It is allowing the truth that we have seen in Christ become the define reality and boundary of our relationship.

So I'm not talking about a bunch of Christians sitting around in a room and not talking. I'm talking about a million little things that happen in our lives and hearts and days and conversations and motivations and words that all have Christ as their center and motivating reality. I'm talking about relating to one another in the reality of where and what we are learning ourselves to be. We will talk more about this next week.

But let me just close by saying this. If you want to love me, there is something far greater than babysitting my kids or mowing my lawn. If you want to love me the way I need to be loved – feed me Christ through what you share with me, what you don't share. Relate to

me in Christ according to the measure of Christ that you have known. Don't let me relate to you in a lie. Don't let me know you according to a lie.