

Relating In Love pt. 4  
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I'm going to continue this week talking about love. This may be our last message on this topic for the time being. I have no doubt that we will talk about love many more times. The more our faith grows, the more we will understand and access love. In other words, the more we see Christ and truly know him as he is revealed by the spirit, the more love will be the predominant experience that we have in his body, and the predominant reality that we know and exemplify as his church.

Every thing that I said so far about love is a reality that we come to by faith. In other words, what we have been talking about for the past several weeks is not natural. You will not access it with a natural mind or experience it in a natural relationships. It does not have to do with natural definitions of love, natural experiences of love, our natural relationships of love. There is nothing natural about the love of God in Christ. The love of God in Christ is purely a spiritual reality and it can only be accessed and experienced and understood by the mind of the Spirit himself.

Until you and I begin to know love according to the mind of the Lord, all that we know, at best, are the types and shadows of love that exists in the natural realm. And even these types and shadows of love are not rightly understood or discerned by the natural mind. I'm trying to say that love is a foreign reality. It is absolutely foreign to you as a human being. You know the word love, and you have given that word various definitions. But you cannot know the reality of love in natural life. You cannot understand it, walk in it, live in it with any of the faculties or capacities of your natural birth. It is foreign to you, contrary to you, dead to you, until two things happen. **First, you must be given the life where love is a reality. This is the miracle of new birth. And second, you must grow to know that life where love is the reality. This is the revealing of Christ.**

And this is precisely what John the apostle says in his letter. "*Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."* (1Jo 4:7) Can you see how John is saying the same thing that I just said? Love, he says, is of God. It's not of man. It has God as its origin and as its reality. And though, of course, we all have various things that we call love, John is clearly talking about something that we cannot naturally know or experience. That's why he says that anyone who loves has met at least two basic prerequisites: they have been born of God, and they know God.

I hope that strikes you in a way that confronts and challenges all of our natural definitions. Not just Christians, but everyone in the world claims to love. We all claim to have some measure of genuine love that we know and experience. But according to this verse either John is greatly confused, or our definitions of love do not suffice. Love, according to John, was something entirely out of reach, out of bounds, unless a person was born of, and was abiding in, the person who is love.

Consider this verse in first John. *"And we have known and believed (faithed) the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him". (1Jo 4:16)* And this one as well, *" He who does not love does not know God, for God is love."* (1Jo 4:8)

Basically, John is saying the same thing from different perspectives. In a nutshell, John is saying that to be in God is to be in love. To know God is to know love. To know the reality of love is to know God. To abide in love is to abide in God, and vice versa. Now either John is seeing something about love and about God that we very rarely understand, or John is saying something not very important of all. **I mean, either these words about love are so simple and basic and common that everybody in the world already can know and assume their meaning....or they are so real, so purely spiritual, so utterly foreign to our nature, that hardly anybody does.**

Can you see what I am saying? One day I was reading verses like these. I was reading things like "everyone who loves is born of God and knows God". And it struck me – "Everyone says that they love. So does everybody know God? Does that make sense? Or is John using the word love here to describe something that I don't understand? Is there an understanding of love that I am so far away from that I cannot yet even approach the reality behind this verse?"

It's always a good idea to assume ignorance. It's always wise to NOT give yourself the benefit of the doubt in questions like these. Assume ignorance and the Lord can teach you. Assume ignorance because you are ignorant. Well, little by little I began to see that there is a relationship where love exists. There is a place where love is how all members relate to one another. There is an experience of the soul where nothing is done by self or for self, and all things are done and said and lived by Christ and for Christ. Brothers and sisters, John is describing this place, this relationship, this experience, this life. I'm trying to help you face something -- something that I need to face as well. I'm trying to help you realize something -- something that I just beginning to realize. Two things really, and they are these: **the reality of love is perfectly unapproachable except by faith. And the reality of love is the perfect culmination, the fulfillment, the climax of God's eternal purpose in Christ.**

Now I don't say these things so that you and I will become introspective and analyze our progress. Don't ever do that. Not only is it a waste of time, but it is a completely backwards step. Never waste a single minute analyzing your spiritual progress, or comparing yourself today to any other time or to any other person. It will only have the same effect as it has always had – either pride or self condemnation. And in both cases it will take your eyes off the Lord. Some of you need to hear this – ITS TIME TO STOP THE SELF ASSESSMENT. God's assessment of you is demonstrated in the death of Christ. God's gift to you is the resurrection of Christ. You cannot change either of these...so just turn your heart to know the Truth and don't look back.

But with that said, lets wake up and realize together that love is where faith eventually leads. This is the biggest and greatest thing that I have seen in the Lord. If anyone were to ask me what is the greatest thing that you have ever seen in the Lord (if such things can even be measured or compared)...or maybe a better way to say that is to ask what is the furthest you have seen into Him...either way, my

answer would have to do with the little bit that I have seen about the reality of love. The little that I have seen about faith working through love, or love working by faith.

**Love is the relationship where everything that God has done is perfectly experienced and expressed. And growing in faith is how we are rooted and grounded in this love.** Those two sentences are bursting with significance.

You see, in a very real sense, it doesn't really matter whether or not you have understood anything that I have said in these past three or four weeks. It doesn't really matter whether, right now, you understand the verses that I am quoting from first John or from Paul's letters. It only matters that you are growing in faith. I'm not contradicting what I just said a few minutes ago. The fact is, if we allow ourselves to grow in faith, to grow in the mind of the Lord by the revealing of Jesus Christ, if we will just have this one goal, this one expectation, then love is where we are going every time.

If we allow faith to have its increase in our soul, love will be the result. You can never try to jump ahead of faith and get to love. You can never hear a sermon about love and try to make a personal application. Love has nothing to do with the person you're trying to apply these verses to. Love has to do with another person who was only accessed by faith.

Faith is a little like a train track. If we follow the tracks of faith love is always the destination. And by faith, of course you know I do not mean your beliefs in God, or your deeply held convictions. By faith I mean the mind of the Lord, the view that God has in the light of his truth. By faith I am referring to the God-given gift whereby we can participate in what he sees and abide in what he knows. This is a work of the spirit.

Faith is the seeing that happens in God's light. Hope, or expectation, is what arises within our soul to possess and experience and live in all that faith sees. Love is the perfection of God's purpose. Love is where faith brings us to rest. In Christ these three remain -- faith hope and love, but the greatest of these is love. The greatest of these is the goal that faith can see, and the thing that hope always reaches for. The greatest end, the perfect culmination, his love.

And what I'm saying to you is that your responsibility is not to figure out what these verses about love are referring to. Your responsibility is not to understand everything that I may be saying on Sunday mornings. Your responsibility is to humble your heart like a little child, to turn to him like a baby, and cry out from your soul for the faith that begins to possess the finished work of God in Christ. That is it. That is all you ever have to do.

And as faith begins to increase in your soul, then you embark on a journey. You embark on a journey of faith. You walk the walk of faith. You fight the fight of faith. You never have to concern yourself with the destination because faith only goes one direction. You have to concern yourself with the turning your heart to know the Lord by faith. You need to concern yourself with staying on the path of faith. Seeing Christ as the spirit shows him to your soul. Knowing Christ as the spirit feeds you the milk of his word. This is your only objective. But love will be the land where faith brings you. It won't be a love that you recognize. You have not gone this way before. But it will be extremely real.

And this journey of faith turns many corners. What I mean is that as you walk this path of faith, just like the types and shadows in the story of Abraham, you will experience many altars. There will be times in this journey where certain things are clearly left behind. There will be times in this journey where certain things are manifestly changed, and something of the land is experientially possessed.

Love is not the first thing you encounter in this new land. Perhaps it is better to say that love is not the first thing you comprehend in this new land. Generally speaking there is way too much that we have brought with us from the old land for us to begin to experience love right away. And that's normal, and understandable. Abraham did the same thing. It was hard for Abraham to experience the bountiful provision of God in the land of promise when he had brought with him his relative Lot, and was trying to share the inheritance with him. We've looked at these things before.

But sooner or later the road of faith brings us to the beginnings of love. For a while you can see the signs of love coming. You can catch glimpses and tastes of what it should and will be like to relate to one another and to God without a constant reference point of self. It's like the road sign along the journey of faith – “200 miles until faith turns into love.” I'm speaking very symbolically here -- don't take my words too literally. I'm simply trying to say that if we will concern ourselves with faith, with growing in faith by constantly turning our hearts to the Lord, then love will be where every road of faith leads. You can rest assured in that.

So if you happen to be sitting there this morning thinking to yourself, “I don't think I have any idea what he's talking about” – don't worry about that at all. Faith always heads the same direction. Faith will bring you to hope and hope will not disappoint you. (As we have said before, the word hope in the Bible is much better translated “expectation”.) Faith will create in you a deep and real expectation. And that expectation will never disappoint you, because the love of God has been poured out in your heart through the Spirit He has given you. That is Romans 5:5.

So, love is a supernatural relationship of spiritual union that is accessed and experienced by supernatural light. And that is why so many verses in the New Testament declare this to be so. So many verses in the New Testament link faith and love together in this way. Allow me to quote a few for you.

- (1Ti 1:5) Now the goal of the instruction is love from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* sincere faith
- (Eph 3:17) that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,
- (Phi 1:9) And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment,
- (Gal 5:6) For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.
- Tit 3:15) All who *are* with me greet you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace *be* with you all. Amen.
- (2Ti 1:13) Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

- (1Ti 1:14) And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.
- (1Th 4:9) But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;
- (1Th 3:6) But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love,
- (Col 2:2) that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,
- (1Co 13:13) And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

That is just a small sample. There are so many more. And my point is not to quote the Bible to you this morning. My point is really just to assure you of two things. **First is that all things that are of God are aiming towards love. And second is that faith is how we walk towards and arrive at this thing that Paul calls "being knit together in love."**

This relationship of love is where God has been pointing from the beginning. Some people in their ignorance make statements about the God of the Old Testament appearing different than the God of love in the New Testament. There are so many things wrong with that statement it would be hard to even know how to respond to it adequately. But the fact of the matter is that every arrow that God has ever given us to point towards his purpose and plan has been an arrow that points towards love.

Often, when we read the Old Testament we are so startled and shocked by the severity of what is excluded from love that we fail to see the greatness of what God is doing. In other words, we see the Egyptians struck down, the Canaanites cast out, the punishments for disobedience to the covenant. We see these things and we do not understand what God is showing us. We do not understand that these are the pictures of what we choose for ourselves when we refuse the love of God. We do not understand that these disastrous stories are like looking in a mirror at our own choices and our own lives.

We somehow miss the fact that God is lavishing himself upon a people by grace, through the death of a lamb that he provided. We miss the fact that God is relating to a people as the body of his Son, that he is loving of people in and as the Son that he has known from the beginning. We miss the pictures of spiritual blessing and promise and inheritance that God has given to us in this relationship. We miss the nature of our relationship with him in covenant, and therefore our relationship with one another. We don't see these things when we read the Old Testament. We just see law, and sin, and death.

And of course there is law and sin and death. But even man's failure is used to point to God's great salvation. Even man's disobedience and rebellion becomes the backdrop in contrast to which we can see the great love of God. God has always desired this relationship called love. Not the cheesy, meaningless love of the flesh, from the flesh, that we project onto him. But the love of God that brings us into Him,

and relates to us in him as the body of his Son. A love that says "you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God". A love that says, "I am in the father, you are in me, and I am in you."

Love is where God has always been pointing. One time a man asked Jesus how he would sum up the entire law and prophets. The answer was love. Paul, Peter, and John Paul say the same thing. The purpose of God has always been from love and for love. Not man's ideas of love. Not this idea that God loves me just the way I am. Not this cheap love that somehow involves me in God's love without the cross. God's love couldn't reach you the way you were. And that is why his love put you to death in the body of Christ and brought your soul into himself. God's love could not reach the world except through a cross that justified God's nature, and opened a door for us to lose our lives and be found in him.

The love of God created a place for you to live. The love of God created a place for you to experience love, to experience a relationship where there is no self gain, no self preservation, no self interest. This is a relationship where you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. This is a relationship with God and with one another that is no longer according to the flesh. This is a relationship that has a judgment at the door. When one died all died. Now he is the life of all who live. Therefore the love of Christ constrains us. Therefore we relate to no one according to the flesh.

**The love of God has invited you into a place, a person, where there is one good and one gain and one faith and one spirit in one God and Father. And this place, or this person, is called the church. Christ the church. The church is the body of God's love. The church is the person and place in whom we relate as one. The church is the body of love.**

I'm not talking about what eyes can see. You will never see the glory of the church from your perspective. You will never see the glory of the church with natural eyes, natural experiences, natural music, natural anything. The glory of the church is a relationship where we have been grafted in, translated into, the son of his love. You can't recognize this with five senses. But this is the glory of the church.

Failing to see that, we will drag all kinds of things that we think are glorious into the Lord's body and establish them there as the glory of the church. Will build Gothic masterpieces and say "behold, the glorious church". We'll build beautiful buildings, fill them with amazing numbers of people, fill the air with beautiful music, fill our ears with teaching that is naturally wise or sentimental or motivational. And we will say, "behold, the glory of the church". We will travel over land and sea, we will establish our missionary agencies, we will build enormous ministries, publish millions of books, declare thousands of miracles. And we will say, "behold, the glory of the church".

But none of this is the glory of the church. You will never see the glory of the church in these ways. The glory of the church will never be something we do, something we build, something we touch, or watch, or sing. **The glory of the church is a relationship with God where all that he has done by the cross is experienced and expressed. The glory of the church is our union with the resurrected son of God and our Fellowship together in him as one.** The glory of the church is the fact that, "I am in the father you are in me and I am in you". And this glory will only ever be seen by faith.

You can stop waiting for it by sight. You can stop praying that God's glory will return to the church. God's glory never left the church. If it did there wouldn't be a church - - because the church is the body of God's glory. We can all stop looking around with our eyes and assessing the body of Christ. It cannot even be seen or recognized with eyes.

**But what we can do, and will we must do, is turn our hearts to the Lord to be granted the indescribable gift of faith. We can humble our hearts like children and ask God to open the eyes of our understanding, to give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that we can see what the New Testament describes as the glorious church. You'll never see it in me. But you will see it in spite of me. You'll never see it in this building -- not really, not the substance of it. But you experience it when those in this building relate to one another in love.**

The church is the body of love. The church is the dwelling place of the glory of God. The church is where God's eternal purpose and plan of love has been consummated. Will we grow up by faith and be rooted and grounded in love? Will we put on love which is the fulfillment of all the law and prophets? Will we relate to one another in the love that passes knowledge? Will we be constrained by love because faith has seen the judgment - where One died and therefore all died? Will you walk the walk of faith all the way to its destination? These are things I would like us to consider.