

Love Lived

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Primary Scriptures from John 15:8-17, and 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

I. Introduction

- a. The theme for the third Sunday in Advent is Love
- b. Love has been spoken of in so many ways that its meaning has become fluid
 - i. It is spoken of in the most tender terms
 - ii. And it is wielded as a club to get one's own way
 - iii. It is the source of bliss
 - iv. And it is the source of great heartache
 - v. It is used as the superlative of "Like" as in, I like chocolate, I like chocolate a lot, and I love chocolate.
- c. But what does the Bible say love is, and what are its implications, and what inferences can be drawn?
- d. We will be looking at love defined, love exemplified, love twisted, and love lived

II. Love Defined

- a. John 15:9-10
 - i. Jesus states that He has loved the disciples even as the Father has loved Him, and then tells them to abide in His love.
 - ii. Further, in order to abide in His love, He tells them to keep His commandments. He speaks of it naturally because He has kept His Father's commandments and so abides in His love.
 - iii. But what exactly does He mean?
 1. Does He mean that the disciples must keep the commandments in order for Him to love them?
 - a. That view is contradicted even by verse 16, among others, that they did not choose Jesus, they did not earn His love, but He chose them, He set His love on them.

- b. He does not say that He will continue to love them if they keep His commandments.
 - c. He speaks of abiding in His love, living in, dwelling in His love.
 - d. Abiding in His love is not earning His love
 - 2. Abiding in His love is to live concordantly with it, not living contrary to it.
 - a. Jesus commands what is good. He commands what is best for us.
 - b. To obey His commands is to live in agreement with His determination of what is best for us.
- iv. Therefore, love is desiring the best for the one loved.
 - 1. The “best” is not properly defined by what that person wants, or what would make that person happy in that moment, though incidentally there may be some agreement.
 - 2. By the “best” I mean that which will most clearly lead him towards God, helping him grow to be what God is calling him to be, and that will lead to a sure and lasting happiness.
- b. Feelings of love can introduce confusion. So-called feelings of love are more properly called affections and do not necessarily indicate the presence of real love or what is the true object of any love that is present.
 - i. Often relationships begin due to strong affections. If there is no real, substantial love present when the affections diminish, then the relationship will disintegrate.
 - ii. Hence the multiple breakups of couples starting in the teen years
 - iii. For those that marry with affection as their only reason to be together, then without a change, divorce is likely.
- c. In 1 Corinthians 13 we see ways in which love is characterized and thus expressed.

- i. Love is patient and kind, and is not jealous or arrogant; it does not brag, act unbecomingly, seek its own, or take into account a wrong suffered; it does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
 - ii. These are all expressions of love that work themselves out in real time, not held captive by feelings.
 - iii. Therefore, love is expressive, and so where love exists, there must be expressions of that love.
 - iv. So to think loving thoughts of someone without expressing your love for them in some way, whether known or unknown to them, is not true love.
- d. If love is desiring the best for the one loved, and love is expressive, then love must have an object. That object is the focus of that love.
 - i. To say, "I am filled with love" and yet have no object is actually to mean, "I am filled with feelings that I associate with love," which in fact says nothing.
 - ii. Clarifying the object of your love, namely the person, then determines and directs the expressions of that love.
- e. In John 15:8-11, the best that Jesus is seeking for those He loves is
 - i. The glory of the Father (v. 8)
 - ii. The fruitfulness of the disciples (v. 8)
 - iii. His joy abiding in the disciples (v. 11)
 - iv. The fullness of joy for the disciples (v. 11)
 - v. Therefore, since love is desiring the best for the one loved, then love must be purposeful. It has a goal in mind for the one loved.
- f. In summary
 - i. Love is a desire for the best for the one loved
 - ii. Love is expressive
 - iii. Love requires an object
 - iv. Love is purposeful

III. Love Exemplified

- a. In 1 John 4:8b we read that “God is love.” God is the source, the fountainhead of love.
 - i. Therefore the greatest, strongest, most pure love of all must be that love in the Godhead, which exists between the members of the Trinity.
 - ii. And so the Father perfectly loves the Son and the Spirit; the Son perfectly loves the Father and the Spirit; and the Spirit perfectly loves the Father and the Son
 - iii. In John 15:9 Jesus tells the disciples that as the Father has loved Him, so He has loved them.
 - 1. What greater love could there be than that between God the Father and God the Son?
 - 2. And it is with that same great love whereby Jesus loves His disciples
 - 3. There is no hesitancy, tentativeness, or conditionality
 - 4. Then Jesus makes an astounding remark in verse 12, that His disciples should love one another just as He has loved them!
- b. In John 15:13 Jesus states, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”
 - i. This statement, of course, is looking ahead to the cross. He is stating that He could love them no greater than this.
 - ii. The best that Jesus was desiring for the disciples, and us, at the cross was that they, we, be reconciled to God and live with Him for all eternity.
 - iii. At the cross, love is expressed by Jesus, the One most undeserving of death, taking death in place of the disciples and all who would believe thereafter.
 - iv. The object of His love was all whom the Father had given Him (John 10:27-29)
 - v. And Jesus could not have been more purposeful in this supreme act of love. He had for His purpose the redemption

of millions through the ages and from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

c. The love of the unnamed woman for Jesus

- i. In Luke 7:36-50 there is an account of Jesus at the house of a Pharisee where a woman of ill repute came in and began anointing His feet with perfume and washing them with her hair.
- ii. Jesus ends up instructing Simon, the Pharisee, essentially that she loves Jesus more than Simon because
 1. Simon did not give water to Jesus for Him to wash his feet, but the woman was wetting his feet with her tears and wiping them with her hair.
 2. Simon gave Jesus no kiss, but she was continually kissing His feet
 3. Simon did not anoint Jesus' head with oil, but she was anointing His feet with perfume.
- iii. This woman wanted the best for Jesus as shown by her actions. She risked being rebuked by someone and thrown out of the house in order to show her love for Jesus.
- iv. She could not love Jesus and not express that love. She expressed a wholesome love for Him in the greatest way she knew how.
- v. Her love was purposeful, expressing to Jesus her deepest gratitude for forgiving her of her sins.

d. The love of Gladys Aylward for the Chinese people

- i. Gladys was a small British woman born in 1902 who, after coming to faith in Christ, gained a great love for the Chinese people, a people she had never met.
- ii. Her love for them began when she read about the millions of Chinese who had never heard the gospel, the good news that Jesus Christ saves all those who put their trust in Him.

- iii. She wanted the best for them, namely that many would come to faith in Jesus and be reconciled to God that they might live with Him forever.
- iv. Her love was expressed by her facing immense difficulties in order to bring the gospel to the Chinese people.
 - 1. She toiled long hours to earn enough money to take a train across Europe and Russia, enduring a trip to a war front in order to get to China
 - 2. She was willing to suffer hardship in order to live among the people
 - 3. She was willing to get by on little food in order to stay there
 - 4. She was willing to brave many dangers and lack of provision to bring many children to safety
- v. The object of her love began generally as the Chinese people, and narrowed to those Chinese individuals she encountered while there, which allowed her to express her love in specific ways.
- vi. The purpose of her love was to alleviate suffering there as well as bring them the good news of Jesus Christ that they might be redeemed.
- e. A godly old married couple
 - i. I urge you to learn of the love that a godly older married couple has for one another
 - ii. Ask them what they desire for one another – is it the best?
 - iii. Ask them how they have expressed their love for one another over the years.
 - iv. Ask them what their purpose has been for loving each other and has that changed over the years.
 - v. If you are married now, consider what you would want your answers to be to such questions some years from now.
 - vi. If you are not married now, consider why and how you love whom you do.

IV. Love Twisted

- a. Tragically, the devil has twisted people's conceptions of love such that there are a number of misconceptions found in our culture which cause great harm to individuals. I want to address a few of those that you may better understand real love by contrasting it to twisted love.
- b. One twist is that loving someone, wanting the best for them, means allowing or even enabling the one you love to do whatever he wants.
 - i. The underlying assumption here is that all thoughts, desires, and actions have equal validity and equal value.
 - ii. If that assumption is correct, then your inhibiting that person from pursuing his desires is seen as hating that person, i.e. you do not desire his best.
 - iii. In that case, their view of you will not change until that assumption changes.
 - iv. It is often enough the case that loving someone means telling them the truth about what you think is best for them.
 - v. Children who always get their own way do not realize what they are doing to their character and how much harm they are doing to themselves.
 - vi. As a simple example, an unfettered child will tend to eat only those things which are sweet, but of little value. Real love means desiring the proper development of that child which requires wholesome foods, some of which he will not like at first.
- c. Another related twist that is simply the above assumption brought out into the open is that loving someone means affirming the validity of his ideas or behaviors no matter what those might be.
 - i. If Jesus simply wanted to affirm us in whatever we were doing, there would have been no reason for him to die on the cross.
 - ii. Affirming someone living a lie is not desiring the best for that person, but rather in a real way is condemning that person. It is certainly not loving that person.

- iii. Sadly we now have governments making laws that forbid counselors and even parents from properly loving their children.
 - 1. These laws forbid speaking the truth to the children and forbid the adults from expressing themselves in ways that are truly best for the child.
 - 2. So, not only is the expression of the parents' love for their children forbidden, but the purpose as well.
 - 3. In some cases, the government wants even to remove the object of the parents' love from them
 - d. Yet another twist is to say that love should seek to remove all consequences of bad decisions or sin
 - i. For example, determining that the government must give money to those who are not working, even due to laziness or indifference. Such action removes the consequence of hunger and homelessness, which sounds quite compassionate.
 - 1. 1 Thessalonians 3:10b states, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat."
 - 2. The purpose here is not cruelty, but quite the opposite. If a person becomes hungry because he will not work, then his hunger will drive him back to work.
 - 3. Eliminating the consequences allows the person to continue in sin or continue making the same bad decisions because the consequences are not there to serve their purpose of teaching the person what needs to change.
 - ii. It can be very difficult for parents to watch their children make a bad decision, that they are intent on making, knowing they will suffer consequences. And yet the parents know if they don't allow the consequences to come, then their child will never learn to make good decisions.
 - iii. Sometimes the most loving thing to do is to allow the one you love to follow a bad decision and reap the consequences so

that he or she will understand why that decision was a bad one.

- e. Love is also twisted by half truths that destroy
 - i. One pattern is, “If you loved me, you would do thus and so,” while thus and so is not in their true best interest.
 - ii. The classic example is, “If you loved me you would have sex with me.”
 - iii. Such a statement, usually made by a guy to a girl, is manipulative. It works on the girl’s affections and uses as leverage the proper outworking and expression of love in the context of covenant marriage. He takes what is proper in the right context and falsely advocates for it in the wrong context.
- f. One last twist worth mentioning is the expression “Making love.”
 - i. The sexual act does not “make love”
 - ii. It can be an expression of love
 - 1. In the context of marriage based on real love, it should be an act of bonding and unity, an expression of desire to give comfort and pleasure to the other, and it can even represent a commitment to raise children together.
 - iii. However, it is often a supremely selfish act, whether in marriage or not.
 - iv. Outside of marriage, the very act is a betrayal, and the term “making love” disguises it.
 - 1. Consider Amnon’s treatment of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13. Amnon selfishly wanted to have sex with Tamar, but did not want marriage to her, though she would have been willing.
 - 2. He wanted the act, but not the long-term commitment and care of her.
 - 3. Even in a consensual situation, which is the only cultural requirement these days, the people are living a contradiction. They may say they love each other, but

they are committing an act of bonding while remaining unwilling to bond in a covenant relationship of marriage for life. In actuality, they are sinning against each other and against God, which is definitely not love.

V. Love Lived

- a. So having covered love defined, love exemplified, and love twisted, there remains the question of love lived. In other words, how do I live out a real love?
- b. I should address first the idea of self-love
 - i. There is a proper self-love, which can be deduced from Jesus' command to love our neighbor as ourselves. If we do not love ourselves properly, we will have a hard time understanding that command.
 - ii. A proper self-love is a love that seeks what is truly best for oneself and expresses it appropriately.
 - iii. That very statement indicates there can be an improper self-love, which is a sinful self-seeking which leads to the corruption of the body and the soul. That self-seeking is quite often at the expense of others as well and is most destructive.
 - iv. A proper self-love will seek to care for your well-being to the extent it will aid you in being who God has called you to be and accomplishing the work God has given you to do.
 - 1. Many of us have difficulty in one area or another disciplining ourselves to do what is best for ourselves.
 - 2. Eating lots of comfort food may feel good in the moment, but will likely cause your body to degrade over time. Thus you are not, ultimately, seeking what is best for yourself.
 - v. A proper self-love expresses itself in the pursuit of knowing and serving God.
 - vi. A proper self-love is purposeful in order to help the self become all that God would have it to be.

1. Ironically this last piece can manifest itself in self-denial for a greater purpose.
- c. Now we come to living out our love to others
- i. Going back to John 15:13 we are reminded that the greatest love we can have or express to others is to lay down our lives for them.
 1. There are cases where people have literally laid down their lives that others might live.
 2. It seems this year or last I read of a mother that went into the ocean to save her children in distress and possibly drowning. She retrieved one, but drowned seeking to save the second one.
 3. In other ways, however, we can metaphorically lay down our lives for others.
 - a. Even before Paul died, because of the gospel, he tells us he was "...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death..." as well as lashed, beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, adrift, and in other perils. (2 Corinthians 11:23ff). He suffered all of this because of the love of God producing in him a love for the lost. Without such love he might rather have spent his days in a quiet teaching job.
 - i. Such love requires self-denial and self-sacrifice in order to fulfill greater purposes than his own comfort or well-being
 - ii. Such love also involves inconvenience, hardship, and disappointment.
 - b. In our day I have seen mothers give up aspirations in the business world in order to homeschool their children. Their desire for the long-term well-being of their children overrides their desire for self-advancement and more income.

- c. Fathers have foregone promotions so that they may spend more time with their families, or be able to serve the church or community better.
 - d. As for myself, when I had a job offer in North Carolina and one near Washington D.C., I took the one near D.C., though the one in North Carolina looked more promising and idyllic. The reason I took the one in D.C. was that there was both a sense that they needed me and I could be home much more which would ensure I would be able to be in church regularly, whereas the other would have involved regular travel around the country.
4. Jesus asked Peter in John 15:21ff if Peter loved Him more than these.
- a. Assuming Jesus meant the fish, for fishing was Peter's default activity to that point, Jesus was truly asking Peter, "Do you desire my best, the fulfillment of my purposes, more than you desire to catch these fish for your purposes?"
 - b. Jesus told him that if he truly loved Jesus, he would feed his sheep. That is, Jesus was calling Peter to give up fishing as his primary way of life and focus on teaching and preaching to God's people.
 - c. Likewise, we need to be willing to give up what we are doing, if He calls us to do so, and redirect to His purpose. Such an act would actually incorporate the love of Jesus, the love of those whom we would serve, and the love of self. Because love originates with God, such loves will accord together and not conflict.

ii. The characteristics of love given in 1 Corinthians 13 help frame our living out of love described thus far.

1. Firstly, love is patient.

a. Love is willing to wait for the right time to do something so that the one loved actually will benefit.

b. Being impatient with the one you love expresses your care for your own desires being stronger than your care for the others' ultimate good.

2. Love is kind

a. It is indeed kind to want what is truly best for someone.

b. As a matter of fact, though it looks kind to give a person what he wants, if that is not what is best for him, then it is unkind to give it, because you are not loving him.

3. Love is not jealous (or envious) because it is seeking the benefit of another. It is outwardly focused and has greater purposes than momentary self-fulfillment.

4. Love does not brag and is not arrogant because again those are focused on exalting the self and not seeking the benefit of the one loved.

5. Love does not act unbecomingly. That is, love does not behave in a manner inconsistent with its purposes, which are to gain the best for the one loved.

6. Love is not provoked and does not take into account a wrong suffered. This makes sense because love is seeking to accomplish the best for the one loved, regardless of personal injury or inconvenience, even if the source is the one loved.

7. Love does not rejoice with unrighteousness but rejoices with the truth. Unrighteousness destroys people, and the truth sets them free. Thus in seeking their best, love

cannot applaud or condone unrighteous actions or words, but it can certainly rejoice when the truth is brought to light.

8. Love bears all things. It bears misunderstanding, awkwardness, insults. Instead it applies a God-given grace to the situation.
9. Love believes all things. It is not that it is gullible, but rather that it believes the end toward which it is working is possible with God's help. If it did not believe it were possible, then it would not work towards the purpose for which it began.
10. Love hopes all things. Love has a forward-looking expectation that the one loved will ultimately come to the purpose for which he is loved.
11. Love endures all things. It endures inconvenience, hardship, setbacks, and opposition for the sake of the one loved.

d. Concluding remarks

- i. Living out love is far deeper than the cultural connotations of what love is.
- ii. It is far more exciting and much more rewarding as well.
- iii. As you keep in mind what love is, how it is properly expressed, its object, and its purpose, may you find yourself loving more deeply, and may you understand more wonderfully the great love with which God loves those who are His.