

Our Inheritance In Christ
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“The Kingdom of God is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Gal. 5:22-23; this is our inheritance in Christ.” That, however, was not my life! And, more to the point it was not characteristic of Paul’s life—at least not at the moment in time depicted by Gal. 1:15-17. And, I wonder, if it is descriptive of your life? If it is not, then Pentecost is an excellent occasion for some critical analysis. If **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** are my inheritance, why am I living as if I have no such inheritance? Let’s try to explore that this morning.

Taken from a theological perspective, and from a biblical standpoint, this summary of our Kingdom living in Galatians is identical to the original condition of mankind in the Garden of Eden. The innocent and childlike Adam and Eve found their identity in God; they were at home with God, fearless and content with their own being. What is missing is the angst, the anxiety, the alienation which comes from being homeless—sin brought a great displacement (literal expulsion from the Garden)—we became as vagrant as Cain, rootless and restless, living as fugitives under indictment. These terms describe the curse of sin. Now, immediate upon our turning from God, God initiated a rescue plan. He set about mending the breach we had caused (this is the plan of salvation which included the sending of his Son, his atoning death and sacrifice of blood—as well as resurrection life which is like the breath of God reviving our drooping spirits. This breath is heard as **a mighty rushing wind** at Pentecost and it was accompanied by flames **as tongues of fire** descending from heaven and resting on the head of each disciple. This moment is nothing less than a new creation, bigger than a reboot, bigger even than a factory reset on a personal computer.

The new creation of Pentecost brings about the church as a living expression of the Kingdom of God. This is new. Prophesied, yes, witnessed to, yes, again. And yet what is put back in place is the **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** which God intended from the beginning. The purpose of Pentecost, framed in terms of divine love, is one of homecoming. God pours forth the Holy Spirit as the power, or empowerment that we need to make our way back to the Father’s embrace—whereby we experience the love that God has for the Son as our very own possession! The power to recognize love, true love, when it is gifted to us.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son . . . is a true, explicit statement. There is no statement like God so loved the world *that he created it* in the Genesis account—at least I have not seen it explicitly stated so. Yes, it is implicitly there. But Let us make man in our image doesn’t disclose a motivation of love very clearly—however, it doesn’t preclude a love motivation. Man was likely

fashioned out of love, and fashioned for love at the same time—because behind the phrase **It is not good for man to be alone** is an intimation of lovelessness (and of loneliness) which a loving God would want to rectify—and does so by adding Eve to the mix. Yes, Eve is added to the pre-existing relationship between Adam and God. But, again, the motivation of love for Adam is rather more implicit than explicit. Adam saw his need for **someone like himself** but God is the One who supplied that need. God blessed Adam by giving him a wife, and both of them by giving them a human family to love each other in.

Blessing seems inseparable from love. But, again, Gen.1:28 reads: **And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”** First, a few observations: 1. the earth is not full; 2. the earth is not subdued; 3. and the subjugation/dominion we are blessed to do, which curiously align with certain environmental and green aspirations, are not being accomplished along the lines of the blessing: **be fruitful and multiply; fill and subdue; and exercise dominion over all the earth.** So, one final observation: love is not explicitly mentioned in this whole blessing passage—and as it has come down to us as “the cultural mandate,” ***the love motivation is conspicuously absent.***

In praying over homelessness, the migrant poor, human slavery—I have come to the place where I sense a relationship between the homeless, the fatherless and the godless that marks so much of the misery we see around us—is directly derived from sin. And I see the accompanying pursuit of **self-realization**¹ and we should note its catastrophic outcomes. What I mean by “self-realization” is “the effort to be moral, religious and upright in order to realize oneself as a person”—in psychology this humanistic goal is known as self-actualization, or integration. Adam knew himself in relationship to God! Now it occurs to me that this (natural, normative) pursuit, self-realization, is contrary to salvation; it may actually be anti-Christian. Simply, knowing ourselves, and being true to ourselves, are *humanistic* goals (not necessarily godly ones) which do not align with being **in Christ**, or with knowing ourselves as we were created to be: remember, innocent and childlike as were Adam and Eve initially in Eden. They were at home with God, fearless and content with their own being. Therefore, Jesus’ efforts to bring us home to God, and to restore our original purposes, are diametrically opposed to what our schools teach and our culture aims at! To be well-adjusted in this world is to be ill-fitted for the Kingdom ***where every finds identity in God***—or something, like that.

Friends, it is the truth of this that gives such power to the triad of parables in Luke 15: all home-based, all reflecting the joy in heaven over one repentant sinner ***who has come home.*** The third parable, “The Prodigal Son,” is rhetorically and pervasively placed in third place (the “this is the point,” or “don’t miss this” position) is built graphically on the theme of ***rejoicing in homecoming to the father***—who

¹ Oswald Chambers is much more emphatic: he sees “self-realization” as sin. Those who pursue self realization are claiming the right to themselves and this choice condemns them in God’s eyes.

stands in for God himself. Our sin history is our trip into a distant country where the squandering of ourselves and of our “inheritance” occurs, *where living for ourselves*, living “out” our self-realization exhausts itself—in futility, sin fatigue, starvation and destitution (the epitome of “homeless” impoverishment!) is played out. We end up inhabiting the pigsty of our own creation! Living filthy and being begrimed—a stitch to God. Repentance (and cleansing) and returning home are necessary before **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** can be renewed!

For the record, I want to say that in the Great Commandment of Jesus, there is no **love yourself clause**. Psychologists, counselors and self-esteem advocates like to slip it in, reasoning, that you cannot love others until/unless you first love yourself. The real truth is that you cannot love others until you have been first loved by God—when you are loved by God you know what love is and from the surfeit, or overflow of that love you can love even your enemies! There’s another cliché out there, “To thine own self be true, And it must follow as night the day. Thou can’t not then be false to any man.” (Hamlet 3:1;563)—this is a humanist delight, but it is neither godly, nor scriptural. Just moral character advice, from Polonius, a court buffoon.

In this parable, the son’s **coming to himself, or to his senses** appears to be the turning point. Less lofty is the insight, **in my father’s house every hired servant has more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger.** (v. 17) however, if the objective of carnality is to bring us to the end of itself, there is a spiritual truth involved—what cannot satisfy, will not satisfy! There is again, no explicit statement that out of love for his father the son returns home—no, but love awaits his return. I suggest the same is true for all who turn to God. God sees that we are “dead in our trespasses” and longs for us “to live again . . . in Him.” He sees us as unloved, and unloving . . . as prone to hate and cruelty, locked in the misery of sin. Such persons are susceptible to rage, protest, public self-righteousness, arrogant indignation and hypocrisy—throwing molotov cocktails and temper tantrums. **Who will rescue me (us) from this body of death?** (Romans 7:28)

Proof: Paul is dead to **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control**. He “feels” alive while hating and persecuting others, but he has lost his way. He is living inconsistently with his being in God, and what he is doing for God turns out to be in opposition to God. That rocks him to his core. It is no wonder then that the Lord says, mercifully, **Rise and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do.** (Acts 9:6) It is the Lord who will give him that instruction—and not his fellow man. The shocking truth is that the High Priest and Elders also thought they were following God’s will when they condemned Jesus to death. However, they were listening to the wrong god! **But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me—in order that I might know him among the Gentiles . . .** we could say it was his epiphany, his conversion, his salvation . . . or his personal Pentecost—it all comes down to the same thing! That was his homecoming. Again, friends, have you come home? Have you run into the open

arms of your loving heavenly Father? Have you experienced his welcome and known his love?

It is not what we know, or how educated we might be that saves us—it is election, calling and commission. **Set apart** before birth, **called by grace** (given a revelation of God's Son) and **given a work to do**, that is what the conversion experience of Paul consisted of. ***This experience of divine love*** was so deep, and the implications so profound that Paul needed time to sort it out, to process it both mentally and spiritually. And we have some idea of what that time out might have consisted of: an initial three years period in the Arabia, after which he returned to Damascus and preached until he was driven out. Paul then went into the regions of Syria and Cicilia for as much as ten years before being recruited to a teaching ministry in Antioch, where, along side Barnabas, he learned the ropes of his church planting mission/preaching to the Gentiles ministry.

“The Kingdom of God is characterized by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Gal. 5:22-23 ***This is God's reason for creating, for blessing and for redeeming us!*** This is our inheritance in Christ. Human thriving comes by way of faith and it is by faith we enter the Kingdom of God.

The world will tell you another story: they say, thriving comes out of Human Resource Departments by way of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion—I know this because I have studied some of their worldly propaganda. In Paul's day it was *another gospel* (the “gospel plus” gospel) DEI, as it is known, comes out of the Human Resource world of corporate America and it is the credo of corporate management (the best of companies are “doing it”). I did notice that if you rearrange the acronym DEI to DIE (which misstep they cleverly evade) the result of their “gospel” becomes clear:DIE. I say this to make the outcome of “self-realization” plainer, and the choice we have clearer. **Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control** excel DEI's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion! DEI is for this world only, and I have no idea how this relates to being a successful company, or to earning profits for the shareholders and investors (that piece was “left out”) but “woke-ness” is more to be esteemed than wealth these days—especially by the human resource professionals who are working hard to remain indispensable “in a world in perpetual crisis(!), but the Kingdom of God is forever.” Now our choice can be made as those informed about the options.

DEI is also one letter “L” (for “love”) away from DELI—for those who like to play around with acronyms. There is no explicit promotion of love in the modern corporate world! This much I am fairly assured of: without “love” you can only fake it because, in the end, you will surely never make it. Blessings and peace.

Amen