

THE GREATEST OF THESE

I'd like to share a few thoughts and a lot of scriptures with you.

Now days when someone talks about love, they're usually speaking of an emotion, an attitude, or an action. It's something that you feel, something that you do, or something that you have.

People everywhere have it in varying degrees. We love our wives, our children, our friends, our leisure activities, and even our jobs.

People around the world vary in color, culture, and language, but our nature is the same. We are ALL sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. We have inherited all of their attributes.

Let's look at a few scriptures.

Luke 6.32

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.

Our love is completely natural. We tend to love people as long as they love us back. We love them until we are offended, then we criticise them, judge them, and then often have nothing to do with them.

Let's look at a few more scriptures that show the progression and final outcome of our natural love.

Matthew 24.12

And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will become cold.

2 Timothy 3.3

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For PEOPLE WILL BE LOVERS OF SELF lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, slanderers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power; *avoid such people as these.*

Wow! I don't like where that is heading.

The problem with our natural love is the source of it. Satan lied to Adam and Eve and told them that they could be like God. He deceived them to believe that independence from God was what they needed. We inherited our love from Adam and Eve after their fall of man from God's presence.

Adam's disobedience caused his spirit to die and his senses became the controlling force of his life. He became self-conscious, completely self-centered, and self-preserving. Every input of his senses was interpreted by how it affected him.

Without the spirit of God residing in his spirit, man's view of reality became completely distorted. Man's natural love became faulty because man was the source of it.

Let's look at a few more scriptures that reveal love's true source.

1 John 4.8 declares that,

GOD IS LOVE.

God doesn't do love. He actually is the source of love. Love is not one of His attributes. It's His nature, it's WHO HE IS.

Genesis 1.26+27 says

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

ALL of mankind was created with the nature of God. We were originally created to love like God and to be the expression of His love and His eternal life to this entire planet.

But they submitted to Satan's lie. Then instead of being God's supreme creation to manifest His love in this world, men have lived in this world searching for love through our senses.

God had a plan to restore our original oneness with God.

Let me share a few scriptures that show the tremendous effect of God's incredible love in this world.

John 3.16

For GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but so that the world might be saved through Him.

Ephesians 2.4-7

But God, being rich in mercy, BECAUSE OF HIS GREAT LOVE WITH WHICH HE LOVED US, even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the boundless riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

GOD MADE US ONE WITH HIM BY HIS OWN DOING.

1 Corinthians 1.30

2 Corinthians 5.17

therefore if anyone is in Christ, THIS PERSON IS A NEW CREATION; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. NOW ALL THESE THINGS ARE FROM GOD, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ

It's something only God Himself can do. The Gospel is not a religion. It's the supernatural work of God on our behalf.

I'd like to focus for a bit on the incredible effect that God's love has on our lives.

John 1.12

But as many as received Him, to them HE GAVE THE RIGHT TO BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD, to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of a man, but THEY ARE BORN OF GOD.

The very thing that makes God, God (His supernatural, eternal nature) is the same thing that made us His children.

1 Peter 1.23 says that we have been born again of imperishable seed. There is only One in the universe Who's seed is imperishable, and that's God.

Colossians 1.13

He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

God's love redeemed us as His children and made us citizens of His kingdom.

Colossians 1.21 states that,

although you were previously alienated and hostile in attitude, *engaged* in evil deeds, yet HE HAS NOW RECONCILED YOU in His body of flesh through death, IN ORDER TO PRESENT, YOU BEFORE HIM HOLY AND BLAMELESS AND BEYOND REPROACH.....

God's love restored our originally created nature.

Paul's letter to the Hebrews shows four more things that God's tremendous love made our reality in Christ.

Hebrews 9.12. He entered the holy place once for all *time*, having obtained ETERNAL REDEMPTION for us.

Hebrews 9.15

those who have been called may receive the promise of the ETERNAL INHERITANCE.

Hebrews 10.10

By this will, WE HAVE BEEN SANCTIFIED through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once FOR ALL TIME.

Hebrews 10.14

For by one offering HE HAS PERFECTED FOR ALL TIME those who are sanctified.

Our own human effort could never obtain for us even one of these realities, and surely not all four.

1 Corinthians 1.30 says,

BY HIS DOING YOU ARE IN CHRIST JESUS, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption....

By our being in Christ, we now get to share the attributes of of Christ.

Romans 8.32 declares,

He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?

In John 16.15 Jesus, speaking of His Holy Spirit said,

Everything that the Father has is Mine. That is what I meant when I said that He [the Spirit] will take the things that are Mine and will reveal (declare, disclose, transmit) it to you.

In John 17.22 Jesus told the Father,

The glory which You have given Me I also have given to them, SO THAT THEY MAY BE ONE, JUST AS WE ARE ONE; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and YOU LOVED THEM, JUST AS YOU LOVED ME.

As I said before, God is the only one who can do these things for us.

God's supernatural work on our behalf far surpasses our own religious efforts.

Jesus said in John 6:63 that, it's the spirit who gives life. our flesh profits absolutely nothing.

And if these things weren't enough, 1 Corinthians 2.9 declares that God's love has held nothing back to bless and empower His children.

It reads,

Things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and have never entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those that love Him.

Let's look at some more scriptures.

In the Bible we read a lot about covenants. A covenant is a promise.

In Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham and Jesus made a new covenant with His disciples in John chapter 15.

These were blood covenants. They signified that everything one person had and everything that person was, was available to the other if they ever needed it. They were eternal covenants.

God's love is part of His eternal covenant with us. It's His promise to love us eternally, because that's His divine nature.

Paul states his own conviction of the trustworthiness of God's promise in Romans 8.38.

I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The greek word translated as faith means to be "fully persuaded." It appears that Paul was.

When someone promises to love us that much, we have two choices, we either trust the promise by faith or we reject it.

Let's look at some more scriptures.

1 John 4.9 declares,

By this the love of God was revealed in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we may live through Him. IN THIS IS LOVE, NOT THAT WE LOVED GOD, BUT THAT HE LOVED US and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation (the atoning sacrifice) for our sins.

Verse 19 says that, we love, because He first loved us.

Our love is a reaction to His love for us.

A covenant relationship requires the complete giving of oneself to the other person forever.

God has always wanted an eternal love relationship with His people. From the very beginning He revealed how He wanted the relationship to function.

Deuteronomy 6.5

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

It's a great feeling to know that God loves us and wants us more than anything. The rub for most of us is that He wants ALL OF US. Our spirit, soul, and body committed to Him forever.

One of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of God in Matthew 13.33 was about a woman who put leaven in three measures of dough, until it was ALL leavened.

Another one in Matthew 13.44 was about a man who found a treasure in a field. He then went and gladly sold all that he had so that he could buy the field.

These parables illustrate the total commitment by both parties of a covenant relationship with God. He commits to fill us with His eternal life and we abandon our natural lives so that we can receive His.

Jesus also shared God's expectations of His eternal covenant relationship with us.

In Matthew 22.36 Jesus was asked "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the great and foremost commandment.

The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets."

Please note that these are not suggestions. They are not optional. They are commands from God, Who created the universe and everything in it.

Responding to God's word shows that we love and trust Him.

In John 14.21 Jesus said,

The one who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him."

He also reciprocates by giving us Himself in return.

"If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our permanent dwelling with him.

Many Christians are stuck in a religious performance experience. They've been taught the ten commandments and have been trying unsuccessfully to perform them with their best natural effort. They experience condemnation thinking that perfect performance of the Word is required.

Verse 21 states that if you "keep" my word, you love Me.

I looked up the word translated as "keep" in this scripture. It means to guard or protect by keeping your eye on it.

John 1.1amp states that,

In the beginning [before all time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself.

So when we receive and honor God's Word we are actually receiving and honoring Him. As we receive His word in our hearts by faith and give Him His rightful place as Lord of our lives, we allow His Holy Spirit the right to transform us into His image.

2 Corinthians 3.17+18 says,

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (emancipation from bondage, freedom).

And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His *very own* image in ever increasing splendor *and* from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.

God's love which is His very nature is the transforming power in our lives.

1 John 4.16

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, we also are in this world.

In 1 John 5.3 John says,

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Jesus' commandments aren't what most people think they are.

In John 13.34 Jesus told His disciples,

I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all *people* will know that you are My disciples: if you have love for one another.”

To walk in His commandments requires a relationship with Him, not a powerful natural will. He will empower anyone with a simple childlike trust in His Word.

Matthew 18.3

“Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven.”

And now for a few final thoughts and scriptures.

GOD IS LOVE AND HE IS THE MOST POWERFUL ONE IN THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE.

Hebrews 11.3 confirms that,

By faith we understand that the world has been created by the Word of God so that what is seen has not been made out of things that are visible.

1 Corinthians 13.8 states that,
God's love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13.13 declares,
But now faith, hope, *and* love remain, these three; but THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE.

I'm sure that's why Paul instructed his young disciple Timothy in his first letter that,
THE GOAL OF OUR INSTRUCTION IS LOVE
from a pure heart, *from* a good conscience, and *from* a sincere faith.

God bless you.
Jim Fuller