

Session 1 Abiding in Love: The Ultimate Reality of the Kingdom

I. THE ULTIMATE REALITY

- A. The Spirit's first agenda is to establish the first commandment in first place in the Church. Jesus identified this as the highest priority to God and the first calling in our life and for our ministry.
³⁷Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and great commandment." (Mt. 22:37-38)
- B. The command to love God with all our heart does not begin with us. It is one expression of the ultimate reality of the kingdom that existed long before the creation of the world, namely God's heart that burned with perfect love within the fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity.
- C. God is love—wholehearted love (1 Jn. 4:16). The very being of God is wholehearted love. Wholehearted love is first in God's personality and in the relationships of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. From eternity past, God has loved God with all of His heart. The Father loved the Son and Jesus loved the Spirit, etc. God is fully satisfied in the fellowship within the Godhead.
- D. The essence of how God thinks and feels is wholehearted love. The Lord has great power and wisdom but He only uses them to express His love.
- E. We best understand the first commandment by seeing it in its eternal context of the fellowship in the Godhead, rather than seeing it as one aspect of kingdom ethics. He wants us to respond in wholehearted love because it is *who He is* and *who He created us to be*. We were created in His image for love. It is the core reality of our relationship with God and the essence of salvation.
- F. One foundational premise in Scripture is that God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God and that we must abide in and stay focused on this reality (Jn. 15:9; 17:23).
⁹"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." (Jn. 15:9)
- G. The love burning in God's heart has at least five distinct expressions that are deeply interrelated.
1. **God's love for God**: Each person in the Trinity intensely loves the others with all their heart.
2. **God's love for His people**: He loves His people with all of His heart, mind, and strength. He loves the redeemed with the same intensity that He loves within the fellowship of the Trinity.
3. **Our love for God**: God's very own love is imparted to His people by the Spirit (Rom. 5:5).
4. **Our love for ourselves**: We love ourselves in God's love and for God's sake.
5. **Our love for others**: We love others in the overflow of experiencing God's love (1 Jn. 4:19).
- H. These five expressions of love constitute what I refer to as the ***fellowship of the burning heart***. Our greatest destiny is to participate in the burning love within the fellowship of the Trinity.
- I. **Abide in love**: This is a call to continually live in it and *stay focused* on gaining insight into its various expressions. This is the main exhortation in the Bible. It includes studying it, praying over it and sharing it—going deep in it and to be students of how God feels about His people.
⁹"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." (Jn. 15:9)

- J. Our primary life goal is to be focused on receiving and expressing God’s love. We are to make this the primary preoccupation of our life before, during, and after revival. We do not need to wait for a special seasons of revival to deeply engage in this reality.
- K. The essence of eternal life is to know God—this speaks of experiential knowledge; it is more than information. Salvation is much more than escaping hell but is an invitation to fellowship with God (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3)—to participate in the *fellowship of the burning heart*.

³***“This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ.” (Jn. 17:3)***

II. GOD’S LOVE FOR GOD

- A. The first expression of perfect love is found in the relationships within the Trinity. The Son loves the Father (Jn. 14:31) and the Father loves the Son (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 15:9; 17:23).
- B. There is one God who forever dwells in three distinct persons who are coequal as divine persons. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each fully possess all of God’s attributes. Each person is different from the others in function and authority in their work—which is fully unified.
- C. The way that God loves within the Trinity is the *only* way He loves us. He *always* loves in fullness. His love never diminishes or grows, because it is infinite in measure and eternal in duration; He does not love us with part of His love—that would be to deny His own character.
- D. The union in the Godhead reveals the nature, quality, and intensity of His love. The relationships in the Godhead are the *model* and *source* whereby we relate to God and others. They give us a picture of what perfect love is, and of how He relates to us, and how we relate to Him.
- E. Jesus has joy and enthusiasm in His love for the Father. He is moved in loving the Father and in being loved by Him. Jesus is not bored in His relationship with the Father. One implication of this is that Jesus enjoys His people in a similar way as they embrace their new identity in Christ.

III. GOD’S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE

- A. Jesus declared that He loves the redeemed with the same intensity with which His Father loves Him (Jn. 15:9). He said that the Father also loves the redeemed with this same intensity (Jn. 17:23). Father, Son, and Spirit love the redeemed with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.
⁹***“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)***
- B. Love, by definition, demands an expression—to be shared and multiplied. God wanted others to experience the joy of the Trinity’s experience of perfect love. God created human beings to participate in this glorious fellowship because *He is love*. God does not lack anything. He has no need. He did not create humans because He was lonely or discontent or had an emotional need.
- C. We will not love God more by “trying harder” to love but by “seeing more” of His love.

¹***Behold [focus on] what manner [quality] of love the Father has bestowed on us... (1 Jn. 3:1)***

IV. OUR LOVE FOR GOD

- A. The Spirit's first agenda is to establish the first commandment in first place in us (Mt. 22:37-38). He loves us with all His heart and wants us to respond with all of our love. He wants us to bring our "all" into the relationship not because He feels lonely and rejected when we love others but because *He is wholehearted love*. He is worthy of our love. It is His inheritance to receive our love. He knows that we will only enter into our full destiny as we love God with all of our heart.
- B. God's very own love is imparted to His people by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5).
- C. Jesus defined loving God as being rooted in a spirit of obedience (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23; Deut. 6:1-9).
¹⁵*"If you love Me, keep My commandments..." (Jn. 14:15)*
- D. **The spirit of liberty**: Liberty is found in the fellowship of the burning heart—it is being liberated on the inside to feel and express God's love. It is being liberated from the spirit of condemnation, rejection, lust, dullness and boredom. It is not being liberated to watch movies or to engage in parties that other believers do not feel right about. It is not about freedom to live in compromise. It is to live with an exhilarated heart by encountering God's heart. It includes more than going on an adventurous ministry trip or having a ministry assignment that impacts many people.

V. OUR LOVE FOR OURSELVES

- A. The redeemed are to love themselves in God's love and for God's sake. We love ourselves through the lens of the revelation of Jesus, His cross, and our great worth to Him. We have received the very gift of God's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21). We have indescribably value and worth to Jesus. Seeing this changes the way we feel about God, our life, and others.
³⁹*"And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Mt. 22:39)*
- B. Seeing ourselves, and our new identity, destiny and worth in God's love empowers us to love ourselves in God. We will never love others more than we love ourselves in the grace of God.
- C. The Bible calls us both *to love ourselves* (Mt. 22:39) and *to hate our lives* (Lk. 14:26). We love who we are in Christ—our new identity in Christ and what we do in God's will. We hate our lives—who we are outside of Christ and what we do outside of God's will.
- D. Bernard of Clairvaux called it *loving ourselves for His sake*—that is, to be jealous to be all that He called us to be for His sake. Jesus does not want us to walk in false humility that minimizes how much *He enjoys loving us* and how He wants us to *enjoy being loved by Him*. We magnify Jesus as we love ourselves in agreement with His love for us and honor His "investment" in us.
- E. Jesus delights in who we are in the grace of God. He wants us to love "the person" that He loves. He wants us to enjoy how much He enjoys us—to delight in how He delights in us.
⁴*But you shall be called Hephzibah...for the LORD delights in you...⁵And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isa. 62:4-5)*

¹⁹*He delivered me [David] because He delighted in me. (Ps 18:19)*

- F. We must receive what the Word says about our new identity in Christ, our worth to Him, and the activities we do in God’s will. We are to value the activities that we do in God’s will—though so many of them are small and unnoticed by others. Most of our love, and service to Jesus consist of small acts that are usually unnoticed by others. We can easily underestimate their value to Jesus.
- ⁴²Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly...he shall by no means lose his reward.” (Mt 10:42)*
- G. When we know that His eyes are on us then we do not have to strive to get the eyes of people to recognize our accomplishments and ministry, etc. We do not need to get the time and attention of the powerful and popular people because we already have the time and attention of the most glorious Man. Our ability to love Jesus is hindered by the emotional traffic that is related to being preoccupied with our own image and what we think people are thinking about us
- H. Self-hatred results in a deep sense of rejection that damages our ability to love and receive love. He desires to fully liberate our heart from self-hatred so that we do not wish we were someone else but are genuinely thankful for being who God made us to be (with our specific calling).
- I. We love ourselves without despising our appearance, gifting, and ministry assignment regardless how small it is. We thank Jesus for who we are in Him and for the unchangeable aspects of our appearance, abilities, personality and life circumstances—family, parents, and nationality, etc.
- J. The Lord wants us to enter into the feelings He has for us. Some must repent of longing to have another’s calling, gifting, family background and appearance, etc. We can imitate the spiritual dedication of godly people but without wanting to have their calling and life circumstances.

VI. OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS

- A. We are to love others in the overflow of God’s very own love (Jn. 15:12). This is a dynamic expression of the fellowship of the burning heart. The Lord wants us to enter into what He feels about others—this changes the way we see people and how we respond to them.
- ¹²This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (Jn. 15:12)*
- B. We are to love fellow believers who mistreat us because God loves them as He loves us. We’ll forever delight in one another in the way in which God loves and delights in His people.
- C. Our love for others must extend beyond loving only the people who enjoy the same things that we enjoy. The spiritually strong believers are to pursue the weaker ones. We must not only love the “cool” people—who are popular and powerful and who can enhance our status, etc.

VII. QUESTIONS FOR SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION (*i.e.*, FCF FRIENDSHIP GROUPS)

1. Which point in this session would you like more understanding of?
2. Which point most inspired or challenged you? Why? What will you do differently to apply it?
3. Which point do you want to impart to a younger believer? Why? How will you elaborate on it?
4. What is one point in this session that needs to be emphasized to the larger Body of Christ? Why?