

Session 4 Abiding in Love: The Ultimate Reality of the Kingdom

I. THE ULTIMATE REALITY

- A. The Holy Spirit's first agenda is to establish the first commandment in first place in the Church. Jesus referred to Deuteronomy 6:5 and then defined loving God as the first commandment, thus identifying it as the highest priority to God and the first calling in our life and for every 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 primary in the relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. From eternity past, God has loved God with all of His heart and strength. The Father loves the Son, the Son loves the Spirit, etc. God is fully satisfied in the fellowship within the Godhead.
- D. We must see the first commandment in its eternal context of the fellowship in the Godhead instead of it being merely 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 wholehearted love. It is the core reality of our relationship with God and the essence of salvation.
- E. "God's desires" are the most important thing in life. His infinite power and great wisdom are employed to carry out His desires—they are used to establish His plan to fill the earth with love.
- F. 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).
- G. 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.

- H. **Abide in love:** God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God (Jn. 15:9; 17:23). We are to abide in or *stay focused on* living in His love in its various expressions. Thus, we are intentional about continuing in conversation with Him about receiving and expressing His love.
- ⁹***“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)***
- I. The truth of the **abiding in love** is developed in John 13-17. These chapters give us insight into Jesus’ life of abiding in God and the nature of God, His kingdom, and our relationship to Him.

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). Their love is the foundation of all the love experienced in the kingdom.
- B. **The Holy Trinity:** 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 relationship and work. Each person’s work is unified, fully engaged with, and interdependent on the others’ work.
- C. In John 13-17, Jesus taught on the union of the three persons in the Trinity—the Father lives in the Son, and the Son in the Father (13:32, 34; 14:10-12, 20; 17:11, 21-23). Thus, the three persons are one in heart, thought, and action, so that the one God acts as one and as three.
- ¹⁰***“Believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me...The Father who dwells in Me does the works. ¹¹Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me...” (Jn. 14:10-11)***
- ²¹***“...they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they may be one in Us...”***
- ²²***The glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one as We are one:***
- ²³***I in them and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You...have loved them as You have loved Me.” (Jn. 17:21-23)***
- D. **Their relationships:** The union in the Godhead reveals the nature, quality, and intensity of Their love. Their relationships are the *model* and *source* whereby we relate to God and each other.
1. They give us a picture of what perfect love is, and of how God relates to God, how He relates to us, and how we relate to Him and others.
 2. Each person of the Trinity enjoys and fully engages in the relationship with the others. Jesus has joy and enthusiasm in His love for the Father. He is moved in loving the Father and in being loved by the Father. His love is never mechanical. He is neither disinterested nor bored in His relationship with the Father.

- E. ***Their work***: The three persons are each fully involved with every work of God (Jn. 10:38)—creation, the incarnation, healing miracles, the atonement, the resurrection (Jn. 10:18), etc.
³⁸“...***believe the works, that you may know...the Father is in Me, and I in Him.***” (Jn. 10:38)
¹⁸***I lay it [His life] down of Myself...and I have power to take it again.*** (Jn. 10:18)
- F. God’s eternal nature is humility. The Spirit delights in glorifying the Father and the Son (Jn. 16:13-15). Jesus delights to use His authority to honor the Father (Jn. 5:23; 8:49-54; 12:26; 13:31-32; 14:12; 17:1, 4-5, 22, 24; 18:19). He is forever the greatest Man and, thus, the greatest servant (Mt. 23:11). He will relate to us forever with humility and a servant’s heart (Lk. 12:37).
- G. The glorious truth of the union within the Trinity affects how we read the Scripture. We can gain insight into this grand reality by meditating on the details in Scripture of how each person in the Godhead relates to the others. When reading the Gospels, think on how the Father and the Spirit were deeply involved with joy in each of the works that Jesus did.
- H. As we read each episode in the Gospels, we should pause to ***thank God*** for the details of how the Trinity worked together and to ***ask for more insight***. We ask the Spirit to show us what each divine person ***did*** and ***felt*** and how ***we are to respond***. Reading the Scripture in this way can be like a treasure hunt into the beauty of God that fascinates and exhilarates our heart.
- I. The details of their relationship give us insight into Jesus’ beauty, supremacy, and worth. It also gives us insight into the way that He loves us and how He wants us to love Him and others.
- J. Our primary life goal and preoccupation needs to be focused on beholding God’s love. This includes understanding, experiencing, and imparting the truth of His love to others. By beholding or seeing the quality of this love, we are more empowered to resist temptation, endure persecution, and press into God in the midst of various trials without drawing back.
¹***Behold what manner [quality] of love the Father has bestowed on us... (1 Jn. 3:1)***
- K. We are to make this the primary preoccupation of our life before, during, and after revival. We do not need to wait for revival or special seasons of visitation to deeply engage in this reality.

III. GOD’S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE

- A. Jesus declared that He loves the redeemed in the same way or intensity that 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. He wanted others to experience the joy of their 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 lacked something emotionally.

IV. OUR LOVE FOR GOD

- A. The Spirit's first agenda is to establish the first commandment in first place in the Church (Mt. 22:37-38). Because of how He feels about us, He wants us to respond to Him with all our love.

He created us in His likeness with a capacity to participate in this fellowship of the burning heart. God's very own love is imparted to His people by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5). We love Him because He first loved us (1 Jn. 4:19). We are empowered to love by first receiving His love.

- B. Jesus defined loving God as being deeply rooted in a spirit of obedience (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23; Deut. 6:1-9). There is no such thing as loving God without seeking to obey His Word.

¹⁵*“If you love Me, keep My commandments...” (Jn. 14:15)*

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. When we see ourselves and our destiny in God's love, it empowers us to love ourselves by His Spirit. Jesus delights in who we are in His love. He enjoys us enjoying His love for us.

³⁹*“And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt. 22:39)*

- B. 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. He is glorified in us as we rejoice in His will, which includes *His enjoyment* of releasing His love in and through us. “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” (John Piper)

- C. A profound transformation occurs in us as we accept His love for us. This is another expression of the fellowship of the burning heart. We love ourselves in His love without despising our appearance, gifting, or ministry assignment, regardless how small or difficult it is. Self-hatred results in a deep sense of rejection that damages our ability to love and receive love.

VI. OUR LOVE FOR OTHERS

- A. We are to love others “as” Jesus loves us (Jn. 15:12). We do this to the measure that we see how He loves us and loves others—even those who mistreat us. Our love for others is an expression of our love for God (1 Jn. 4:7-12). We’ll forever delight in one another as God loves us.

¹²***This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. (Jn 15:12)***

³⁹***“...and the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt. 22:39)***

- B. Jesus wants us to enter into how He sees and feels about others—by seeing His bigger storyline. We feel deep emotions of zealous love when someone comes against a person we love deeply. We love fellow believers who mistreat us because God loves them just as He loves God (Jn. 15:9; 17:23). We participate in the fellowship of the burning heart by walking in love for others.

VII. SALVATION: EXPERIENCING DEEP RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (JN. 17:3)

- A. Jesus revealed that the essence of eternal life is to know God—this speaks of experiential knowledge; it is more than intellectual information. Salvation is an invitation to participate in deep fellowship with the Godhead (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3). It is the *why* behind the *what* of creation and redemption. Salvation is so much more than escaping hell.

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

- B. Make it your primary life vision to participate in the ultimate reality of the kingdom, which is the *fellowship of the burning heart*. Examples of this include the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk. 24:32) and John the Baptist (Jn. 5:35)—who spoke of a baptism of fire (Lk. 3:16). It was seen at Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and eventually will empower all God’s people (Isa. 62:1).