

Leading to Love

By Susan Forde

Subject: Love

Theme: Love commanded within the church

Proposition: Drawing closer to God will allow us to love our brothers and sisters in the church the way God does, in a deeper and more supernatural way.

Transitional Sentence: Because of the spiritual disciplines that we've been practicing, prayer and Bible reading, we have a closer relationship with God, know God better, His heart and His will. His will is that we love Him with our entire being and love our neighbor as ourselves. What does that look like?

Introduction

We have been talking about developing a closer to God by taking action through the spiritual disciplines of prayer and Scripture reading. In this way, we develop a closer more intimate relationship with God.

But why do we need a deeper relationship with God? What could possibly come out of it? What is the point? We sang a song recently about “more love, more power, more of You in my life” and I’ve pointed out that this more of God in our lives, more of His blessings and abundance, is not for our own indulgence. So what is it for?

It’s for love. A relationship that leads to selfless love. In Mk 12:28-31, one of the teachers of the law heard Jesus giving a pretty good answer in response to a difficult question and he asked Jesus, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

The first part of this is a quote from Deut 6:4-5 and is called Shema (shə-’mä). Shema in Hebrew means hear: ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

It is a Jewish confession of faith made up of three key passages in which God commanded His people to love Him with their entire being (Deut 6:4-9, 11:13-21 and Num 15:37-41). Included in these verses were promises for those who followed God’s commands and warnings to have no other gods before them, to not go after the lusts of their own hearts and eyes, instructions to keep God’s commandments before them, to listen to and heed His words. This is what came to their mind when they heard Shema quoted. (Example – Christmas.) It was a call to be wholly devoted to God.

The second greatest command came from Lev 19:18 “*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.*”

Love. What does love look like? Is love chocolate in a pretty heart-shaped box? Is love hearts and winged cupids? Is love a celebration of intimate affection? We associate Valentine’s Day with love and affection as a result of a long and rich history but it is reserved for those to whom we are attracted or love.

Valentine’s day is short for St Valentine’s day. There were a number of early Christian martyrs named Valentine. But Valentine was a martyr and in 496AD Pope Gelasius established a day to honor one or more Christian martyrs who gave their life, their all, for love, for Jesus.

So today is Valentine’s day. And I am certainly not here to say that we shouldn’t show affection and offer a sweet gift to our sweethearts. Nope, I want a box a candy just as badly as the next gal. But let’s think today, about love, true love, selfless love. Because what comes into most of our minds when we think about love really needs redefining. So, what does love look like in the Bible?

Jesus gave us two examples that I will describe to you today.

Jesus Emptied Himself

Phil 2:1-11 (NIV) “*If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion,² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.⁴ Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.*

⁵ *Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:*

⁶ *Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,*

⁷ *but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

⁸ *And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

⁹ *Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,*

¹⁰ *that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*

¹¹ *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Kenoo (kenō ō) from verse 7 is a verb that means to empty ones self. Jesus emptied Himself, he made himself nothing. He demonstrated His willingness to obey God and serve others. He set aside, not His deity, but the glory of His deity—His privileges¹, His rights.

The King of kings emptied Himself so that we could be filled. He was fully God and retained His deity, but clothed Himself in the form of a man. He had the rights to exercise His deity, but

¹Thomas Nelson, I. (1997, c1995). *Woman's study Bible* . (Php 2:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

surrendered His right to manifest Himself visibly in all His glory and splendor. He veiled His deity in the form of humanity.

The Creator of the universe was born as a human and walked with mankind. He had rights, but he gave up His rights. To show us how it's done. To show us how living together in community was meant to be.

He was the Prince of Peace and gave up His right to peace (Is 9:6) so that we could enjoy peace now and everlasting.

In Him was life and that life was the light of men (Jn 1:4) and he gave up his life that we could experience life now and eternal life and be a light to others as He shines through us for God's purpose and glory, as we follow His example.

It wasn't fair to be innocent and crucified, but he gave up his right to defend himself. *"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."* (Is 53:7) *"But Jesus remained silent"* before the high priest. (Mt 26:63, Mk 14:61)

He operated completely in dependence upon and in relationship with His heavenly Father in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. He lived out the example that we are to follow. Deep relationship with God results in being enabled by the Holy Spirit to love supernaturally, to do things supernaturally that we never could do on our own, in our strength, or with our own resources. **1 John 2:6** says, *"Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."*

So how are we doing in this??? Do we claim to live in Him? Are we walking like Jesus did? Are we looking beyond our own interests? Is our attitude the same as that of Jesus? Are we offering selfless love? Are we emptying ourselves? Do we consider others better than ourselves? Are we like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose?

Jesus Washes the Feet of the Betrayer

The second example that Jesus gave us is found in Jn 13:1-5

"It was just before the Passover Feast. Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.

² The evening meal was being served, and the devil had already prompted Judas Iscariot, son of Simon, to betray Jesus. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; ⁴ so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. ⁵ After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him."

Foot washing was a common custom in Bible times. People's feet were hot and dirty from traveling on the road, mostly walking. This service was generally performed by the lowliest of servants in the household or guests were offered water to wash their own feet. At the Last Supper, Jesus washed His disciples' feet and He explained that this act was an example.

Jn 13:14-17 “Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. ¹⁶ I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.”

But what is the big deal? Ok so he washed the feet of his disciples, those closest to him, those whom he loved. I can do that.... Let’s take a closer look.

Jesus **knew** He was going to be betrayed (Jn 13:11). He **predicted** His betrayal in all four gospels (Jn 13:18-30, Mt 26:21-25, Mk 14:17, and Lk 22:20). He **knew** by whom. Yet He washed not only His beloved disciple’s feet, but also **Judas’** feet.

He washed the feet of the betrayer. He told us to love our enemies (Mt 5:44, Lk 6:27), but He lived it, giving us an example. He loved and served Judas just like all the rest.

So, Jesus emptied Himself to serve. He took the job of being a servant very seriously, but not only to wash feet. He showed an example to His disciples **and to us** about serving. He went so far with His love as to die for US, for OUR sins, though He was innocent, to release us from the bondage of sin and death. We were enemies of God before we came to believe (James 4:4). We were separated from God and spiritually dead and Jesus restored to us life and a relationship with God through His selfless sacrifice (Eph 2:16). In Jn 15, Jesus talks to His disciples about the relationship of Him and His Father and His disciples. He did everything for God’s glory and only what He saw the Father doing only spoke what He heard the Father speak (Jn 5:19, Jn 12:49).

Jesus, the Head of the Church

Col 1 starting with verse 15 talks about the supremacy of Jesus and plainly says He is the Head of the church, the body. (Col 1:15) And who are the body? We are! We are His body, the body that Jesus still desires to be a servant through. We cannot do it on our own strength or by our own resources, but only through a relationship with God and by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit that He sent as a gift to us so that we could walk like Jesus did for God’s purpose and glory.

So What Does Love Look Like

So, what does love look like? Do you see a different image in your mind now after these two examples? This is what I see...

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| John 15:12-13 | <i>(Jesus said,) My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.</i> |
| 1 John 4:11 | <i>Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.</i> |
| John 13:35 | <i>(Jesus said,) By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.</i> |
| Gal 5:13 | <i>You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.</i> |
| Rom 14:19 | <i>Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual</i> |

- edification.*
- Rom 12:10 *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*
- Eph 4:2, 3 *Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*
- Eph 4:29 *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.*
- 1 Pe 4:8, 10 *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*
- 1 Pet 3:8 *Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.*
- Heb 13:1 *Keep on loving each other as brothers.*

Forgiveness

And I see a need for forgiveness:

- Mt 6:14-15 *"For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*
- Mt 18:21-22 *"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*
- Mk 11:25 *"And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive him, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."*
- Eph 4:32 *"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*
- Col 3:12-14 *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."*

How does God forgive us? *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (1 Jn 1:9).

In addition to that, one time I was praying and I said God, I don't want to forgive this person, b/c they haven't acknowledged that they have hurt me. And the verse that popped into my mind was Lk 23:34, *Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."* God spoke clearly on my heart that the person didn't even know that she offended me and then He spoke even more clearly that there were things in my life, places that I had not acknowledged that I had hurt God, but that He was patiently waiting for my growth in those areas and just overlooked in His great mercy.

He wants us to be likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose with Him. He forgives us so utterly that He remembers our sins no more. He overlooks sin that we don't even know we committed. He has so much compassion, it's like He throws all our sins into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). Our sins are as far as the east is from the west (Ps 103:12). Are you thinking... "Well, I'm not God and I can't do that"? Yes, you can. Through that closer relationship with God, You will know God better, know His heart, you will find all you need to do what He wants you to do, to be all He wants you to be, and to love Him with your entire being and love your neighbor as yourself.

Conclusion

Are we hitting the mark? Are we loving as God loved? Are we walking as Jesus did? Do people know that we are His disciples by our love for one another? Or are we letting disagreements, division, negative responses to offense and having to have our rights rule in our lives? Are we serving in love? Are we doing everything to lead to peace and mutual edification? Are we being devoted to one another? Are we honoring one another above ourselves? Are we being humble, gentle, patient, bearing with one another? Are we building each other up with kind words? Or are we tearing people down by being defensive and fighting for our rights? Are we giving each other the benefit of the doubt, that is, is our love covering a multitude of faults? Are we living in harmony? Are we sympathetic, loving as brothers and sisters, compassionate, humble? Are we forgiving?

It is God's heart that we love Him with our entire being and love our neighbor as ourselves. It's God's word. It's God's desire that we are united in Christ. It's the enemy's desire to cause disunity among the family of God. God's heart breaks when we don't recognize the true enemy and respond to the enemy's tactics, by loving one another as God loved us.

So, today, on this Valentine's day, this day of celebrating selfless love, this day of remembering a martyr who gave his all for love, like Jesus who gave more than we can ever grasp for love, let's everyone bow our heads and close our eyes. God is calling to us is to love one another within the church, to reflect Christ, to walk as He did, to be transformed into His likeness in ever increasing glory.

Let's search our hearts right now and ask God to reveal to us what He desires to reveal. Where am I falling short in this area of love within the church, Holy Father? Who do I need to forgive? Who am I holding something against? Have I hurt someone intentionally or unintentionally? Is there an area of unforgiveness in my life? Is there a time that I said something about someone or spoke harshly to someone? Is there an area of hurt that I need You to heal? Am I holding back from loving You for some reason? Please reveal this to me now, Holy Father.

God may be speaking to your hearts right now. As God reveals something to you, just lift your hand in acknowledgement. By this simple action, you are demonstrating your willingness to allow His change in your life, His transforming power to bring you into His will to love like He loves, His healing of hurts, to receive His forgiveness for any wrongs that He is revealing to you whether intentional or unintentional. Lift your hand if He has brought to mind someone who you know you need to forgive, someone who has hurt you, but you need to forgive and you want to

forgive, you need His help. Right now, raise your hand in acknowledgement of God speaking to your heart. Receive renewal, receive cleansing, receive His healing touch, receive His love, receive right now. Are there any others that want to respond right now to what God is speaking to your hearts, quickly raise your hand and receive from God His healing love and/or forgiveness.

Prayer

We thank You, Father, for this intimate time of renewal and cleansing and healing. We thank You for Your faithfulness and forgiveness and grace that washes over us and cleanses us. We thank You for Your gentle guidance, how You draw us to You and stir in us the desire to live for You with a new commitment and with renewed love for You and for each other. Continue to speak to us in this area and bring to mind the areas in which You want to change us and bring us to a deeper love for You and for one another. Enable us, through this closer relationship with You to worship more deeply, to serve more fruitfully, to proclaim more boldly, and to advance the kingdom of God more effectively. With Your enabling power, we know we can love You with our entire being and love our neighbors as our selves.