

Session 5 Stage #2: Understanding God's Love for His People

I. REVIEW: THERE ARE 5 STAGES TO GROWING IN LOVE

- A. The foundational premise in this teaching series is that *God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God* (Jn. 15:9; 17:23). The measure of God's love for us is the way God loves within the Trinity. This quality of love is foundational to life in God's kingdom. It is the ultimate reality in the kingdom. Jesus called us to abide in love—to continually live in and stay *focused* on it.
- ⁹***“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)***
- ²³***“...that the world may know that You [the Father]...loved them as You have loved Me.” (Jn. 17:23)***
- B. The love burning in God's heart has at least 5 expressions that are deeply interrelated. Each of these expressions represent the 5 stages of how a believer can grow in love. We seek to understand and walk in all 5 stages simultaneously since they are revealed and imparted to us by the Spirit.
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.
 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).
- C. Thus, 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.

II. STAGE #1 GOD'S LOVE FOR GOD

- A. Stage 1 is to receive increased understanding of the perfect love that 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. We best understand God's love as we consider the glorious truth of the Trinity. Why? The way that God loves within the Trinity *is the way that He loves us*—because it is the very same love. *He always loves in fullness*—He never loves us with only a part of His love, because that would be to deny His own character. He will never diminish or grow in love, because His love is infinite in measure and eternal in duration.
- C. In John 13-17, Jesus taught on the loving union of the three persons in the Trinity. In Their union we see the nature, quality, and intensity of Their love. Their relationships are the *model* and *source* of perfect love giving us a picture of how God relates to God, how He relates to us, and how we relate to Him and others.
- D. 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 both in loving the Father and in being loved by the Father. His love is never mechanical. He is not bored in His relationship with the Father.

III. STAGE #2 GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE

- A. Stage 2 is to receive increased understanding of the love that God has for us (Eph. 1:17; 3:18-19). 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)

²³**...that the world may know that You have...loved them as You have loved Me.** (Jn. 17:23)

- B. The ultimate statement about our worth is that Jesus has the same measure of affection towards us that His Father has towards Him (Jn. 15:9; 17:23). This is both the simplest and deepest truth in the kingdom. It is both the introduction and the ultimate experience of the kingdom. This truth gives every believer the right to view themselves as one of “God’s favorites.”
- C. John 15:9 is a most dynamic truth for which we should often say, “Thank You,” and ask the Spirit to reveal more of ***God’s love for us*** and to impart more ***love for God in us***.

IV. THE LORD ALWAYS LOVES IN FULLNESS

- A. The Lord always loves in fullness. He would deny His character if He ever loved less than in fullness. He never suspends any of His attributes—not even 1%. He will never diminish or grow in love, because His love is infinite in measure and eternal in duration. He never changes (Heb. 13:8).
1. The Lord is always 100% true to who He is. Never for one moment is God less than 100% loving or 100% wise or righteous, etc. God cannot ever be less than who He is. If He were, He would deny Himself—even if He was 1% deficient in one attribute.
 2. Because He fully acts as God in all of His attributes all of the time, it follows that the Father loves us in the way that He loves Jesus because He only loves in fullness.
- B. He does not withhold His love when a sincere believer stumbles or struggles with sin. Our spiritual immaturity does not affect the way He feels about us. He never loves us less in this age than He will love us in the age to come when we live in the perfection of the resurrection state.
- C. When God wants to empower us to love Him, He reveals Himself as One who loves us. We will only love God to the measure that we see that He loves us. It is the core truth that transforms us. We will not love God more by “trying harder” to love but by “seeing more” of His love.

¹⁹**We love Him because [we understand that] He first loved us.** (1 Jn. 4:19)

- D. Thus we are to be students of how the Father loves the Son. We are called to *behold*, or understand, the quality of the Father’s love for us (1 Jn. 3:1). To *behold*, *abide in* or to *keep ourselves* in God’s love includes studying how the Father loves Jesus, so that we gain insight into how God loves us. Pray, “*Holy Spirit, let me see and feel what You see and feel about the Father’s love for me.*”

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

²¹**Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus...** (Jude 21)

V. JESUS DEEPLY DESIRES THAT HIS PEOPLE BE NEAR HIM FOREVER

- A. Jesus is zealous for His people to be very close to Him forever (Jn. 14:3; 17:24; Rev. 3:21).
²⁴*“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am.” (Jn. 17:24)*
³*“I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” (Jn. 14:3)*
²¹*“To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne...” (Rev. 3:21)*
- B. We are so dear to Him. The truth of our worth and identity is found only in Him. The revelation of *His worth to us* is magnified in seeing *our worth to Him* in His grace. He also magnifies His greatness through releasing His glory in and through His people. We are vessels of His glory, “trophy of grace” even, that express how loving, kind, wise, and powerful He is (Eph. 2:7).
⁶*He...made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:6-7)*
1. He is exalted in openly manifesting the great quality of His love, power, and wisdom. In seeing who we are to Him, we gain insight into His majesty. Who would love us this much? What kind of Man loves so deeply—even undeserving ones such as we are?
 2. We see only the mere edges of how He feels about us and who we are to Him (Job 26:14). As beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, so great love reveals the nature of the one who loves so deeply. Our exaltation in His grace is just one of many expressions of His supreme greatness that is infinitely superior to all others.
- C. The Most High went *so low* in becoming man and bearing our sin to bring us *so near* to Him. The measure of His love is seen in the drastic measures He took in redeeming us to be with Him. Jesus’ glory includes many facets of His greatness—He who is *so high* (transcendence) went *so low* (immanence) in love and humility to bring us *so near* (to rule with Him forever) because we are *so dear* to Him (Bride/sons). He went so low because of His desire for partnership—including us in ruling the earth with Him forever (Rev. 2:26-27; 3:21; 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:5; cf. Mt. 19:28; 20:21-23; 25:23; Lk. 19:17-19; 22:29-30; 1 Cor. 6:2-3; 2 Tim. 2:12; Rom. 8:17-18; cf. Dan. 7:22).
- D. We matter so much to Him! He wants us to have “ownership” with Him in His unfolding plan of redemption. We are not disassociated spectators who will merely sit back to watch Jesus rule. We should be awestruck with Him and filled with gratitude in seeing how far His love goes.
²¹*For all things are yours: ²²whether...the world or life or death, or things present or things to come—all are yours. ²³And you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s. (1 Cor. 3:21–23)*
- E. David was overwhelmed at seeing the dignity and value of the redeemed in God’s sight (Ps. 8:4-6). This was surely a component of David’s passion for God. This understanding awakened David’s heart in love for God. We marvel at seeing what His love is capable of and how far it will go.
⁴*What is man that You are mindful of him...⁶You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet...* (Ps. 8:4-6)

VI. THE TRANSFORMING JOY OF AFFECTION-BASED OBEDIENCE (JN. 15:9-11)

- A. Our joy is anchored in the intensity of how the Father loves the Son and how the Son loves us. Jesus spoke of His love to empower joy in the life of His people (Jn. 15:11). Understanding Jesus' love helps to free us from the dominion of the inferior pleasures of sin and allows us to experience the superior pleasure of His love. As we experience more of God's love, we feel joy—a *deep sense of well-being with confidence*—even in the face of disappointment, temptation, and persecution.
- ⁹*“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love...”*¹¹*These things I have spoken to you, that...your joy may be full. (Jn. 15:9-11)*
- B. This joy empowered the disciples to walk in victory after the devastating experiences that occurred soon after Jesus spoke these words. They suffered the shocking disappointment of Jesus' sudden death, the deep shame of betraying Him, and the threat of death and imprisonment from the political authorities, along with their normal temptations in life.
- C. God's people are motivated to obey Jesus in different ways:
1. **Affection-based obedience:** obedience that flows from experiencing Jesus' affection for us and giving it back to Him. It is the strongest, deepest, and most consistent obedience. Why? Because a person moved by strong love will endure anything for love.
 2. **Duty-based obedience:** our commitment to obedience even if we do not feel God's presence. God's Word requires that we obey God without feeling inspired to do so.
 3. **Fear-based obedience:** obedience motivated by the fear of negative consequences. It is biblical to appeal to shame and fear to motivate people. Scripture actually does have many *do's and don'ts* such as do not commit adultery, steal, slander, etc. We know that God will use His rod because He loves us too much to leave us in compromise (Heb. 12:5-11).

VII. WE WILL NEVER EXHAUST THE LOVE OF GOD

- A. We will never exhaust the vast ocean of God's love but will forever experience new aspects of it.
- ¹⁸*May be able to comprehend...what is the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹*to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. (Eph. 3:18-19)**
- B. God's love is like a vast ocean that is big enough to reach all people and to cover our sin forever. The **width** of love speaks of embracing each type of person, personality, and nationality. The **length** of love speaks of reaching far beyond our failure in this life and continuing forever. The **depth** of love points to how far Jesus descended and what it costs Him to save us (Phil. 2:8). The **height** of love speaks of the measure of exaltation that we receive in His grace (Rev. 3:21).
- C. **Passes knowledge:** It requires the aid of the Spirit to understand God's love, and it will take all of eternity to comprehend its immensity. His love will never be fully calculated or measured.
- D. **Fullness of God:** Walking in our full destiny is connected to our growing in the truth of His love.