

Session 3: Defining Wholehearted Love: Four Spheres

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. God created us to love Him in four spheres of our life which includes our heart (affections), soul (personality), mind (intellect), and strength (resources) because He loves us this way. It is both our debt and gift to love God in these four ways. This requirement to love brings us great benefit.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mk. 12:30)

- B. This session will define some of what it means to express love to God in four spheres of our life.
- C. What does love look like? It is much more than sentiment or extravagant expressions in worship services. True love requires heart responses with follow through. We are not content with love for Jesus that is merely rhetoric about being radically devoted without real expression in our life according to God's terms.

II. LOVING GOD ON GOD'S TERMS

- A. There are many definitions of love, liberty, and freedom in our culture. One of the core issues at the end of the age will be in how love is defined. We define love on God's terms, not by the humanistic culture that seeks love without reference to alliance to Jesus and obedience to His Word. We renounce all the false paradigms of love that are emerging in the Church today.
- B. Nothing more clearly brings the false views of love to the surface as in our view of salvation. All people, regardless how much they seem to love, will go to hell without Jesus.
- C. God's definition of love does not involve accepting everyone with tolerance by abandoning His standards. Love is more than romantic notions about being happy in God. Jesus isn't to be our boyfriend nor is He a humanistic hippie. Love is not about being laidback to chill out.
- D. Our primary assignment in God's will is to grow in love. God measures life differently than man, because He has all the money, wisdom, fame, influence, and time. Did we learn to love?
- E. All of God's commands bring with them the promise of His supernatural enabling to obey them. We must actively cultivate extravagant devotion to Jesus. This takes time and effort. Love does not automatically grow. It diminishes unless we intentionally cultivate a responsive heart. We ask, "What is the most that God will empower me to give to Him?" We are not content with the minimum requirement of salvation. We must choose the good part, as Mary did.

⁴² ***Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her. (Lk. 10:42)***

III. WHAT IS LOVE? FOUR PREMISES

A. Premise #1: love requires the pursuit of obedience.

¹⁵ If you love Me, keep My commandments ... ²¹ He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me ... ²³ If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word. (Jn. 14:15-23)

1. Jesus defined loving God as being deeply rooted in a spirit of obedience. There is no such thing as loving God without seeking to obey His Word. Love requires the wholehearted pursuit of obedience in both our attitudes (purity and humility) and actions (service).
2. Jesus defined love as the Sermon on the Mount lifestyle (Mt. 5-7).
3. Denying our lustful desires is the theater God chose for us to express our love to Him. Each of us has a different struggle according to our personality and circumstances. Thus, we each have a different **assignment** from which we offer our gift of love to God. Saying “no” to sin gives us an opportunity to express our love to God.
4. Some give God more time and money in the hope that He will dismiss an area of compromise in their life. What God wants most is our response of love that is manifested in seeking to obey His Word. Jesus wants love from us that allows Him to take total control of our lives to protect us and glorify us in His love as our place of greatness.
5. All of Jesus’ commands are all related to love. For example, He commands us to stay near His heart, to seek His face, to choose love over lust, to receive eternal rewards, and to be vessels of love to others (by blessing and serving them).

B. Premise #2: love includes adoring trust (gratitude).

⁹ You are worthy ... for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God [proved Your leadership and love] by Your blood out of every tribe and nation. (Rev. 5:9)

1. Adoration and gratitude to Jesus for His greatness and kindness is essential to love. It is foundational to Paul’s theology of holiness and love. With awestruck, grateful love, we adore Jesus and trust His wisdom, humility, and power. He is the most deserving and capable Person to rule our life and the whole earth. We often take the wealth of God’s kindness so lightly. Because of our long history of sin, we deserve God’s wrath.
² Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)
2. Love grows in us as we are moved by the truth of Jesus’ greatness and by gratitude in seeing the whole story of how He is treating us. The psalmist had an overflowing heart of adoration for the indescribably loveliness of Jesus.
¹ My heart is overflowing with a good theme; I recite my composition concerning the King; My tongue is the pen of a ready writer. ² You are fairer. (Ps. 45:1-2)

- C. Premise #3: love requires loyalty to truth (confidence in Jesus' perfect wisdom).
1. True love expresses loyalty to God's Word instead of yielding to fear of man. In the end times, there will be a battle for the truth as some believers give heed to doctrines of demons that promote lies about Jesus (1 Tim. 4:1-2). The conflict will center around defining who Jesus is and how we love Him. We must love God on His terms.
 2. Love for God is loyalty to His truth as seen in Jesus. Our love must be expressed in alliance with the Jesus of the Bible, not the Jesus of humanist sentiment. The Holy Spirit will glorify and exalt Jesus by guiding us into all truth about Him (Jn. 16:13-14).
 3. Three truths about Jesus that offend humanists include, first, His deity—His right to establish absolute standards for which the nations are accountable to Him. Jesus is not tolerant and accepting of everyone's view of love. Second, the only way of salvation is through Jesus. Third, He possesses the wisdom and love to judge sin in time and eternity.
- D. Premise #4: love includes consuming desire (lovesick and abandonment to God).
- ⁸ *If you find my Beloved ... tell Him I am lovesick! (Song 5:8)*
1. Love is not passive but includes burning desire. To be lovesick for God means we seek to love Jesus more than anything else. Being wounded with love is to be sick, or pained, with desire for more of Jesus and for removing all compromise that hinders love for Him.
 2. God is Love. He burns as an all-consuming fire of jealousy. He wants to take over our life and to consume us from the inside out, dominating our affections, thoughts, and words as He determines our destiny and establishes our eternal greatness and joy.
¹⁴ *For the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God. (Ex. 34:14)*
 3. The God who has everything wants us because He is love. Love is not toleration but desire. The God who has everything still wants something. Why? Not because He is needy, but because He is the fountain of desire. Desire implies want but not lack. God wants the ones He loves without lacking anything.
 4. Jesus will reveal Himself to us as more than our Savior (forgiver), healer, and provider, but as the jealous Bridegroom God who will not relent in His pursuit of us until He has all our heart. We cry, "Lord, we want more of You." He responds, "I want more of you."
 5. Jesus beckons us into abandonment: "Take up your cross and follow Me. Leave it all behind. Say goodbye to houses and lands for My sake." This is the voice of a Bridegroom who gave all for the sake of love (Eph. 5:29-32). Jesus defined love as one who lays down his life for his friends (Jn. 15:13). Jesus loves us with all of His heart, soul, mind, and strength, and what He wants is a people yoked to Him in this kind of love. The bridal paradigm is abandonment (Eph 5:29; Ps. 45:10).

IV. SPHERE #1: LOVE WITH ALL OUR HEART: AFFECTIONS

- A. ***Love with all our heart***: with all our affection (emotions). The heart speaks of our emotions, affections, and longings, and the very impulse of desire that affects every decision we make. The heart is the hidden current that moves our inner man. Our heart has powerful emotions that color the way we see everything. Our heart defines our core reality and drives all that we do.
²³ ***Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life. (Prov. 4:23)***
- B. We can set our love, or affections, on anything that we choose. Our emotions eventually follow whatever we set ourselves to pursue. In doing this, we determine the course in which our emotions develop over time. As we change our goals, the Spirit changes our heart (emotions).
¹⁴ ***Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him. (Ps. 91:14)***
- C. Setting our love on God includes removing all that diminishes our affections, such as bitterness, lust, and being over-stimulated by entertainment, or the pursuit of gaining things and influence.
- D. David made a choice to set his heart to love God. We decide the things that eventually form our emotions most. Our decisions by themselves are not enough to change our emotions. Yet they are an indispensable part of the process of emotional transformation.
¹ ***I will love You, O LORD, my strength. (Ps. 18:1)***
- E. We delight in the Lord, or choose to set our affection on Him. We must not underestimate the power of setting our heart on God. In doing this we put ourselves in the path of the Holy Spirit. We set our heart to love Him by committing to walk in obedience, even when it is costly.
⁴ ***Delight yourself also in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. (Ps. 37:4)***
- F. The Spirit honors the power of our decisions and waits on them before imparting love in us.
⁵ ***The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 5:5)***
- G. The power to choose where we set our hearts is part of the great dignity of the human spirit created in God's image. Angels do not have affections like humans created in God's image.
- H. We set our heart on loving God by regularly asking for supernatural help to love Jesus. Ask God to pour His love for Jesus into your heart and to direct your heart into His love.
⁵ ***May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God. (2 Thes. 3:5)***
- I. No one else can give God all "your love" except for you. A unique part of Jesus' inheritance has been entrusted by the Father to you specifically. It is the love that only you can give. We only get one opportunity to do this in a fallen world where love for Jesus is both costly and rare.
- J. Affection-based obedience is the strongest type of obedience, because it flows from experiencing Jesus' affection. It is the most consistent obedience, because a lovesick person will endure anything for love. People in love are untouchable. Freedom is found in the yoke of Christ.

V. SPHERE #2: LOVE WITH ALL OUR SOUL: PERSONALITY

- A. ***Love with all our soul***: the soul is our personality, or the animation expressing the uniqueness of our abilities and desires, including the way we talk and walk and what our preferences are.
- B. Our personality is expressed most dynamically by our speech. What we say enhances or quenches our ability to grow in love. Therefore, we set our heart to express ourselves and to communicate in a way that enhances, not diminishes, love. When the Spirit is grieved, we do not receive from Him in the same measure (Eph. 4:29-32; 5:1-6).
²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. ³⁰ Do not grieve the Spirit of God. (Eph. 4:29-30)
- C. Our love can be diminished by the negative fire released in us by wrong speech that affects our inner man (Jas 3:6-10; 4:10-11; 5:8-9; 1 Cor. 3:2-3, 16-18). We renounce grumbling and speaking against one another, knowing it hinders our ability to love God and feel God's love.
- D. In our failure we confess, ***"I'm loved [by God] and I am a lover [of God]; therefore, I am successful."*** I am not defined by my failure or by my accomplishments. I am not despised by God, nor am I a hopeless hypocrite because of my weakness. We must live by our spiritual identity (what we look like to God) instead of our natural identity (what we look like to others).

VI. SPHERE #3: LOVE WITH ALL OUR MIND: THOUGHTS

- A. ***Love with all our mind***: we fill our minds with long and loving meditation on God's Word and resist putting anything in our minds that diminishes love for Jesus and quenches the Spirit.
- B. To love God with all our mind involves taking time to fill our mind with God's Word and to agree with biblical paradigms of God. This involves refusing lies about Jesus as our Bridegroom, King, and Judge. We gain revelation of God's love by meditating on it from God's Word.
- C. The language of the human spirit is image. Our mind is our intellect, understanding, and the place of our imagination and our daydreams. It is our internal movie screen, giving us pictures (good or evil). It is like a camera that stores our memory. As we renew our mind with God's Word, we repaint our internal canvas. We erase and replace wrong thoughts with godly thoughts.
- D. Much of our life occurs in our mind because we can never turn it off. Our mind defines so much of who we are and how we love. God's Word equips us to think first and most naturally about God. To love God with all our mind is a powerful possibility. Through meditation, we can take the reins of our mind and write the script of the movie we continually watch within. We cannot shut down the images in our mind, but we can direct them. Jesus can become our first thought, even our daydream. As our mind is renewed, Jesus becomes our sweet escape from lust, pride, and fear as we retreat into His beauty and love. Jesus desires to be our resting place, or getaway. When you take a deep breath or while driving alone, where do you go in your mind?

VII. SPHERE #4: LOVE WITH ALL OUR STRENGTH: RESOURCES

- A. ***Love with all our strength:*** with our resources (time, money, talents, reputation, and influence). We love God by using our resources in relationship with the Spirit in a way to grow in love.
- B. We fast in the area of our strengths, especially in the five activities in Matthew 6:1-18. These five areas express voluntary weakness because we invest our natural strengths (time, money, energy, reputation, etc.) into the Spirit's hands. Jesus describes five grace-releasing activities that position us to receive more. We ***serve and give*** (charitable deeds: giving service and money; 6:1-4, 19-21), ***pray*** (6:5-13), ***bless adversaries*** (forgive, 6:14-15; 5:44), and ***fast*** (6:16-18).
⁹ ***My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness [voluntary weakness of the fasted life style]. (2 Cor. 12:9)***
- C. The normal use of our strengths is to increase our personal comfort, wealth, and honor. In other words, by the fasted lifestyle, we bring our natural strengths to God as we trust Him to return our strength back to us in a way that enriches us and transforms us with meekness.
- D. Our devotional lives are the means of appropriating free grace, not of earning it. In these five areas we position our cold heart before the bonfire of God's enabling grace so as to receive the Spirit's empowering. ***Analogy:*** we put our cold heart before the bonfire of God's presence.

VIII. LOVING GOD WITH OUR ALL

- A. We are equally yoked to Jesus not by the size of our love but by the "all" of our love. Though our all is small, the point is that it is our all. He wants to be loved in the way He loves us.
- B. A sustained reach for 100 percent obedience is different than attaining it in our life. When we sin, we repent and renew our resolve to reach, and to fully obey with confidence that God enjoys us. The Lord values our journey to grow in love. The reach of our heart to love Him moves Him. ***If we do not quit, then we win.*** We do not find our identity in our failure but in the fact that He loves us, in the gift of righteousness (2 Cor. 5:12), and in the cry of our spirit to love God.
- C. Power in our life is found in pursuing hundredfold obedience. There are powerful dynamics that occur in our heart when we soberly seek to walk in total obedience. The 98 percent pursuit of obedience has a limited blessing. The last 2 percent positions us to live with a vibrant heart. Reaching for full obedience for decades is the definition of living radically before God.
- D. When we neglect to thoroughly confront sin in our life, we are not loved less by God, but we do suffer loss in minimizing the full gift of our love from this life to Jesus on the last day.
- E. People in love are untouchable. True freedom is found in the yoke of Christ as we become extravagant lovers of God—who refuse to get trapped in bitterness by those who mistreat us or get caught up in seeking wealth and fame as our primary goal in the kingdom.