

Session 2 The Fellowship of the Burning Heart

I. THE ULTIMATE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM

Tonight I want to continue on the theme of growing in prayer. We are doing part one in this fall semester and part two in the spring semester. This is a big subject. We want to address the foundational, practical issues to developing a strong prayer life over ten, twenty, thirty years. You can develop a strong prayer life in a short amount of time, but to grow it deep takes decades.

Session two's topic is, I believe, so foundational to our prayer lives. We could easily overlook this subject. It is the subject of God's burning heart. The way that God's heart burns with love for God. The way that God's heart burns for love for His people. Then how He awakens that in His people for Him. This subject is absolutely foundational to growing in prayer.

You could call it intimacy with God, but you might not grasp the full ramifications of that if you only use that term. This is not a secondary subject to growing in prayer. I have found over the last forty years that this is absolutely foundational. That is why it is session two; it is the beginning point. It was not where I first began, but some years later I found the true beginning point of our prayer life is understanding this reality.

- A. Growing in prayer is deeply connected to embracing the first commandment. 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)

Growing in prayer is deeply connected with embracing the first commandment. Understanding it, embracing it, understanding its implications in God's heart and understanding the significance of the first commandment to our prayer life. Jesus said, "You should love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your mind." Jesus identified this as the first and the great commandment. The Holy Spirit's first agenda right now in the body of Christ is to establish the first commandment in first place in the whole church. Particularly for you, it is in your own life. He wants to establish the first commandment in first place in your heart. This is critical to growing in prayer, this subject right here.

Jesus identified the first commandment as the highest priority to God. He was quoting Moses in the Old Testament from Deuteronomy 6 where Moses said we are to love God with all of our heart, mind, and strength. Jesus added here in the gospel of Matthew that this is actually of first priority to God. It is the first commandment. He added that commentary as He was quoting this command from the writings of Moses.

This is to be the first commandment in our life, of first priority in our life and in our ministry. In other words, the focus of our ministry is not first about making an impact. It is first growing in this commandment in our life, even in our weakness, and seeking to impart this reality to others. That is where ministry impact begins. That is the definition of ministry impact in one sentence. Of course it is not the entire definition, but that is the foundation of making an impact on others. Some people are happy just to get a room of people excited about what they are singing or what they are doing. The Lord has something far bigger on His heart than just getting a bunch of people excited about your ministry. He wants people walking in the first commandment.

- 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 burning with perfect love within the fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity.

The command to love God with all of our heart does not begin with us. The command to love God with all of our heart is actually one expression of the ultimate reality of the kingdom. It is a reality that existed long before the creation of the world. Before God ever created the world and before He ever told us to love Him with all of our heart, He loved us with all of His heart.

God loved God with all of His heart. The three persons in the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God in three persons. Each of these distinct persons loves the other with all of their heart and their mind. Then they loved us in that same intensity. They have called us to respond, again in our weakness and in our brokenness, but in the grace of God, that we would continually grow in this grace to love Him with all of our heart.

This “all of our heart and all of our mind” loving is actually a reality that exists in God from eternity past. God has always loved God this way. When He calls us to love Him this way, He is saying, “You are just in an overflow of a reality—the ultimate reality—that has existed from the foundation of the world.” That is God’s heart burning in love within the fellowship of the Trinity.

- C. The essence of how God thinks and feels is summed up in wholehearted love. The Lord has great power and wisdom, which He uses solely to express His love.

God is love. That is what the Scripture says. God is love. 1 John 4:16, “God is love.” Love is the very essence of how God thinks and feels. Love is not just something He does. It is something He is at the core of His being. In our context tonight, growing in prayer is based on understanding this reality, receiving it, and being focused on it.

- D. We understand the first commandment best by seeing it in its eternal context of the fellowship in the Godhead, rather than seeing it as one aspect of kingdom ethics. God 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 essence of salvation and our relationship with God.

We understand the first commandment best by seeing it in its eternal context. Meaning the first commandment is not just a kingdom ethic like serve one another, bless your enemies, stay away from impurity, love God with all of your heart. It is not just one of the very important kingdom ethics. The context of loving God is the way God loved God in eternity past. That is the context for understanding this mandate from God. It is much more than a kingdom ethic or a kingdom behavior.

- E. One foundational premise in Scripture is that God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God. We must abide in and stay focused on this truth (Jn. 15:9; 17:23).

⁹“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)

This is one of my favorite truths. I want to encourage you to really take hold of this. One of the foundational premises in Scripture is that God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God. Jesus is the only one who revealed that. He revealed it very clearly in the gospel of John. When you understand that revelation of God’s heart from the lips of Jesus, then we understand that, from Genesis to Revelation, this is what God was after. God was after love filling the entire earth, starting in this age, throughout the Millennial Kingdom, and then on into the eternal state and the new heavens and the new earth. That we would love God in the same intensity that God loves us, and that we would understand God loves us in the intensity that God loves God.

John 15:9 is the verse I have referred to the most. If I had to pick the one verse that I have referred more to than any other verse in forty years of teaching, it would be John 15:9. Now verse 7 is the abiding in the Word, which is all about prayer leading up to this in verse 9. Not that you have to do that, but if this is a new verse to some of you, I just want to highlight that in my opinion this is absolutely central to a life of growing in prayer—abiding

in the Word—which is really John 15:7, just before this. In verse 9, Jesus said, “As the Father loved Me, I have also loved you.” In other words, “In the same intensity that the Father has loved Me, in the same intensity I have loved you.”

F. The love burning in God’s heart has at least five distinct and deeply interrelated expressions.

There are five expressions of the love that burns in God’s heart. Again, these are intricately tied to growing in prayer and being motivated in prayer. When I lose motivation in prayer, I lock into this reality. When I lose confidence in prayer—meaning if I think God is about to just ignore me or just disregard me because I have stumbled, I have tripped, I am not connecting with Him in the way I want—I go back to these truths. It not only motivates me in prayer, but it gives me confidence that even in my weakness my prayers matter because God delights in the relationship that He has with us with such intensity.

1. **God’s love for God:** Each person in the Trinity intensely loves the others with all His heart.

These five expressions of this burning heart that God has beginning, number one, with God’s love for God. God intensely loves God. The Father intensely loves the Son, intensely loves the Spirit and vice versa.

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.

God loves us with all of His mind. Imagine that reality. These are not just truths we look at and say, “Wow, that is kind of neat.” These are truths we want to thank God for. We want to ask Him to give us living understanding. Today as I was praying for this session, I was going down these five things and thanking the Lord specifically for them and pondering each one of them and asking the Holy Spirit to teach me more, to mark me with all five of these. Not one of the five. All five of them. I want that because that is what the kingdom of God is about. It is the way to grow in prayer.

I look at a lot of folks trying to grow in prayer separated from this reality. Prayer ends up being a duty that they embrace as a way just to get more circumstantial blessing. As long as they want more blessing, they will put up with prayer. Prayer is not a delight when it is just a means to an end, to get our lifestyle blessed. God does bless our lifestyle. There is not delight in prayer if we separate it from this reality of His love.

3. **Our love for God:** The Spirit imparts God’s very own love to His people (Rom. 5:5).

The way we love God is an expression of His burning heart. It is His own love that He has one for the other in the Trinity. That is the love that is imparted to us. It says in John 17:26 that we love Jesus with the love wherein the Father loves Jesus. John 17:26, we love Jesus in the love the Father loves Him. Even the love we have for God is an impartation of that burning heart that God possesses.

4. **Our love for ourselves:** We love ourselves in God’s love and for God’s sake.

We are to love ourselves in God’s love and for God’s sake. This is something that some folks neglect. Others trip over this reality. They are confused by it and trip over it. I like to share the story—I share it every time—of the lady who prayed, “Lord, I want to love my neighbor as I love myself.”

The Lord said, “That is the problem. You do love your neighbor as you love yourself. But you hate yourself. That is why you hate your neighbor.” This is really true. Many people despise others because they despise themselves. We will never love others more than we love ourselves in the love of God for God’s sake.

In other words, we see the investment God has made in us and how precious and true that investment is, and who we are to Him, and we say, “Thank You for who I am,” in the essence of who we are in our personality. Yes, we want to improve in our character and the issues of our life. There are areas where we are improving, in

wisdom and godliness, but the core essence of the real you is the gift of God. Through the transforming power of grace God has worked something in you that is very dear to Him and He loves it. He wants you to love it.

God wants us to enjoy Him enjoying us. Did you know the Lord is actually enjoying you, but some of you are not connected with it? You despise yourself, and you have no connection with God enjoying you. He actually wants you to enjoy Him enjoying you. I am saying that not as a correction. I am saying that as a statement of liberty, as a statement of hope, like, “Wow!”

Our prayer life will not go very far if we despise ourselves. Even if we are aiming to love God, but we despise who we are in His sight in the grace of God, who we are in the grace of God, our prayer life will not go to the same dimension of maturity. These are not just subjects that are to build up your spiritual life unrelated to prayer, though that would be good in and of itself. These are also dynamically related to growing in prayer.

5. **Our love for others:** We love others in the overflow of experiencing God’s love (1 Jn. 4:19).

Our love for people is actually the fruit of the first four. When we touch the first four, our love for others grows.

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 in the family dynamics of the Trinity.

I refer to these five expressions of love as the fellowship of the burning heart. You do not have to use that term, but there is this fellowship that the Father has, with a burning heart, with the Son. That the Son has with the Spirit. That fellowship is what God has with us. That fellowship we can have with one another. That fellowship is so critical and foundational to the kingdom of God. I refer to this as the fellowship of the burning heart, entering into it. Our greatest destiny is to participate in the burning love in the family dynamics within the Trinity.

When I talk about the family dynamics of the Trinity, I mean between the Father, Son and the Spirit. Their unity. Their love. Their mutual embrace and working together. There are many dynamics. We are called to participate in some of those dynamics. We are not just the work force on the earth that gets the kingdom done. We are the vehicle that God uses to extend His kingdom, yes, but also something far more dynamic. Beloved, we are called in a way the angels are not called. We are called to participate in the family dynamics of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God calls us sons and daughters. The Scripture calls us the bride of Christ, the eternal companion of Jesus forever. We are not angels who serve God at a distance. They serve God at a distance as merely servants. Yes, we serve God, but we are in the family. We are in the royal family. We have the indwelling Spirit, and we can participate in the family dynamics of the Trinity, of the Godhead, in the way that angels cannot. This is absolutely critical. Not that we are mature in this right now, but it is critical that we are reaching to grow in this and talking to the Holy Spirit about this. That it is critical for the maturing of our prayer life is the point I am making.

H. **Abide in love:** To “abide in love” means to continually live in it and reflect on it. This requires that we *stay focused on* living in God’s love in its various expressions. We are to set our heart to go deep in our understanding of this.

I. 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 season of revival to engage deeply in the love of God.

⁹**“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)**

Our primary life goal is to be focused on receiving and expressing God's love. In John 15:9, Jesus said, "As the Father loved Me"—in the same intensity the Father has loved Me—"I have also loved you. Abide in this love." That phrase, abide in this love, is essential. In other words, focus on it. Make this the primary occupation of your spiritual life. You and I have a number of assignments in our lives. When I think of my life, I have several assignments I am to do in the kingdom. The primary assignment is always to abide in love. That does not just mean to love; it means study it. Focus on it. Grow in it. Do not ever outgrow your focus on this subject.

Jesus is saying, "Lock into this reality. Abide in My love." I want to challenge you to talk on this subject often. Pray about it. Study it. Fellowship around it. That is one aspect of abiding in it. It also means to live in it, to experience it. We will experience it somewhat related to how we study it out, how we talk about it, and how we pray about it. I want to encourage you to talk much about this subject. Do not ever outgrow this topic in your study. Some people want to get to the deeper stuff. This is the deepest subject that you will ever study. I believe this is one of Jesus' most important commandments, not that we have to list the importance. "Abide in My love." Search it out. Study it. Stay focused on it. Pray about it. Talk about it. Share it with others. Seek to walk in it. Seek to experience it. That is not just something we will do in this age. We will be abiding, locked into this subject, even in the age to come with a resurrected body.

- J. The essence of eternal life is to know God, which is more than just information, and speaks of experiential knowledge. Salvation is much more than escaping hell; it 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)***

The essence of eternal life is to know God. To know God is much more than just information about God, but includes experiential knowledge. Jesus said, "This is eternal life"—this is the essence of eternal life—"that you might know"—you might experience—"God. Know Him." Again, it is more than information, though information is important. Our heart knowledge grows somewhat out of our head knowledge. Head knowledge is not bad at all. We fill our mind and renew our mind with the Word. The Holy Spirit touches and marks our heart with it.

Salvation is so much more than escaping hell. I know that you know that. It is an invitation to participate in the fellowship of the burning heart. When we are offering salvation to somebody, and we are saying, "Come and be saved," we are not just saying skip hell and go to heaven. We are saying, "Enter into the family dynamics of the Godhead. Enter into the fellowship of the burning heart." We are offering so much more than escaping hell and having a little bit better circumstances in this life.

That is how a lot of folks present salvation. "Get forgiven and get out of hell." That is foundational. That is important, but then they say, "If you give your life to Jesus, He will touch your life and your life will get a lot happier." Sometimes new dynamics happen in our lives that do not always make our lives easier. A lot of times the gospel is presented as "How to make your life happier in this age. Obey Jesus' leadership."

I say that there is a lot of truth in that. Our life does certainly get blessed and happier, but there are other dynamics that come with it as well that are not so easy on the flesh. We want to understand salvation as a call to participate in these family dynamics of the Godhead, to participate in the fellowship of the burning heart.

- K. Examples include the disciples at Emmaus (Lk. 24:32) and John the Baptist, a burning lamp (Jn. 5:35) who prophesied of a baptism of fire (Lk. 3:16) that was seen at Pentecost (Acts 2:3).

II. GOD’S LOVE FOR GOD

We are going to go through and cover the same area again. I have given the introduction. I will make a few points and skip most of the notes here. Let’s look at all five of them again. Some of them I will mention really briefly.

- 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).

The first expression of perfect love, the first expression of this burning love is in the relationships of the Trinity. It is in the way the Father loves the Son, the way the Son loves the Spirit, etc.

- 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 only part of His love, for that would deny His character.

The way that God loves God is the only way He loves, meaning His love is always wholehearted love. God does not love in any way less than wholehearted. God cannot love ninety percent. He only loves fully. He never denies any of His attributes when He exercises others. Everything He does He does from a foundation not just of love, but of wholehearted love. The way the Father loves the Son is the only way He can love you because He cannot deny part of His character to love you. That is the way God loves. He always loves in fullness.

His love never diminishes. His love never grows. Like when He loves you, then He loves someone else on the other side of the world, His love for you does not diminish. Like, “I am loving her over there in another country. I am really kind of overtaxed right now. My bandwidth is really full. I will get back to you. You are dear to Me, but I will get back to you.” No, He does not diminish His love for you when He loves another.

He never grows in love. Jesus, a million years from now, is not going to make a grand announcement, “Hey, it has been a great year this year. I grew in love this year.” That is never going to happen. He dwells in perfect, eternal, wholehearted love. That is who He is, and He never changes. He cannot change. If He changed, He would deny the truth of who He is. His love is infinite in measure and eternal in duration. Infinite: it cannot increase. Eternal: it lasts forever. He will love you this intensely a billion years from now. He does not love us with part of His heart, part of His love. That would be to deny some of 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, of how He relates to us, and how we relate to Him.

The relationships within the Godhead—again the Godhead is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are the model of how God loves us, and also the model of how we love God. We find particularly in the gospel of John—more than that, but that is where most of the information is—we get insight into how the Father and Son relate to each other, some very significant insights. The relationship of Father and Son, Father to the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit to the Son, and the Son to the Holy Spirit is the model of how we relate to God and even how God relates to us. There are dimensions that are uniquely “God to God,” but many of the ways that God loves within the Godhead, He loves us that way as well.

- E. Jesus has joy and enthusiasm in His love for the Father. He is moved in loving the Father and being loved by Him. Jesus is not bored in His relationship with the Father. One implication of this is that Jesus' enjoyment of His relationship with His people is an expression of how He enjoys His relationship with His Father.

For example, Jesus has joy and enthusiasm in His love for the Father. He is moved in loving the Father. He is moved in being loved by the Father. When the Father loves Jesus, it moves Him. When Jesus loves the Father, it moves Him. In other words, Jesus is never bored in the relationship with the Father. Never. He has joy in it. He has enthusiasm. He loves being loved by the Father, and He loves loving the Father.

Here is the good news. He loves you in the same way. He has enthusiasm in loving you and being loved by you. Though our love is weak and frail even in the grace of God—because of the weakness of our flesh, the way we walk out our love is weak and the grace of God is strengthening us over the months and years—yet He is enthusiastic about our love for Him. He is not looking at it and saying, “Well, you call that love? Are you kidding Me?” That is how people relate to people many times, but He has joy and enthusiasm in loving you and in being loved by you.

This is a practical implication of understanding some of the truths about the Trinity. When I know how the Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father, it is an insight into how He loves me and I love Him. Some people say, “I do not really do that ‘study the Trinity’ stuff. It is kind of theological and difficult.” It is true that many of the theological presentations on the Trinity are complicated and difficult. However, there are some on the Internet and out and abroad which are really helpful and kind of pick the low-hanging fruit. They tell you the practical things. I encourage you to spend some time studying the Trinity and how the Father, the Son, and the Spirit relate. Number one, it is glorious in itself. It is fascinating to behold in and of itself. It leads to us glorifying God and seeing the very worth of Jesus and the worth of the Father and the Spirit. Also, it is really practical in stirring up our own hearts.

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)***

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

We are looking at the second of the five expressions. I am pointing out what I believe are two of the most dynamic statements in the whole of the Bible. Two of the most dynamic statements made by the lips of Jesus. We already looked at one. We are going to look at a second one.

John 15:9, “As the Father loved Me,”—He is talking to the twelve disciples—He says, “In the way the Father loved Me, that is the way I love you.” He knew that night they would all deny Him. Jesus was not living in idealism. He was not saying, “I love you because I think you guys really have it together. You are the kind of guys I want to hang out with.” It was more than that. He said, in effect, “I love you in the way the Father loves Me. I want you to know that all of you will deny Me tonight, but that does not change anything I just told you.”

Beloved, is that good news or is that good news? I mean we have it made. Life is hard, there are challenges, difficulties, and setbacks, but He loves me the way He loves the Father and in the way the Father loves Him. Oh my goodness! In the same way the Father loves Jesus, Jesus loves me! I do not like difficult circumstances. I do not like setbacks and challenges, but no matter what I have it made. So do you. If you are a believer and you are

a new creation in Christ, I am telling you that you have it made. If we lock into this, and we abide in it—in other words we focus on this truth. We abide in it. We stay locked in on it—it will change your inward life.

He did not end it in John 15:9, “As the Father loved Me that is how I have loved you.” In John 17:23, He said, “That the world may know that You have loved them.” Jesus is praying now to the Father. “The world will know one day”—it is talking about in the Millennial Kingdom when this comes to full expression—“The world will know, literally the nations of the world will know that, Father, You love them in the same intensity that You loved Me.” Not only does Jesus love you in the way the Father loves Jesus, the Father loves you in the way the Father loves Jesus. Jesus loves you in the same intensity the Father loves Him. The Father loves you in the same intensity the Father loves Jesus. Fantastic! God loves with all of His heart. Can you imagine He loves you with all of His mind, all of His strength?

- 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. He 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.

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. We will only enter into our full inheritance (destiny) as we love God with all of our heart.

*God loves us with all of His heart, and He wants us to respond with all of our heart. He wants us to bring our all into the relationship. I love it how Dana Candler says it, “Though our love is small, He wants our all.” It is not the **measure** of our all. It is the **fact** of our all. In our weakness and brokenness, we bring our all into the relationship. He brings His all into the relationship. It is really different, but it makes us equally yoked in love. Our all is small, but we are bringing it to the relationship. He says, “Yes, we are equally yoked.” His capacity is infinitely beyond ours, but we are bringing our whole capacity into the relationship.*

God does not want us to love Him with all of our heart because He feels lonely. Some people think, “Well, God really needs us.” No, God delights in us. He is not lonely at all.

The Father, Son, and Spirit are fully satisfied in the fellowship they have with one another. They are not lacking and thinking, “I am a little lonely. Why don’t we create some humans because we feel a little lonely and a little empty.” That is not at all what is happening.

The love God possesses demands to be multiplied. Love, by definition, demands multiplication. Love, by definition, demands to be shared. That is the definition of love. He is love. He is compelled by love to share the overflow of who He is and multiply that love. He is not loving; He is love. He does not call us to love because He feels a little rejected, a little lonely, “I wish you guys would give Me a little attention. I feel a little lonely up here.” That is not it at all.

He wants us to love in a wholehearted way because He is wholehearted love. That is why. That is who He is. Again, when I grasp this it helps me shake off the slumber and some of the dullness and remember, “Wow, this is what I am about.” Prayer is the dialogue. We pray in terms of declaring our joy in who He is and the worth of who He is. We pray in giving our hearts to Him. Those are parts of prayer. We pray to release His power into

the created order. There are several dimensions of prayer. At the very center of it is this love dynamic that motivates prayer and gives us confidence to pray.

- B. The Holy Spirit imparts God’s very own love to His people (Rom. 5:5). We will not love God more by *trying to love harder*, but by *seeing more* of His love for us.
- C. Jesus defined loving God as being rooted in obedience (Jn. 14:15, 21, 23; cf. Deut. 6:1-9).

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

This is important that Jesus defined loving God as rooted in the spirit of obedience. It does not mean that our obedience is mature, but that we have set our heart to obey. There is no definition of love for God in the Bible that is separated from the spirit of obedience. Some folks imagine and even declare that they can love God on their own terms, meaning by their own definition. They think they can have sentiment for God without setting their heart to obey Him. The Bible does not call that love.

You can have religious sentiment. You can have feelings in a worship service. If in our heart we are not committed to walk in obedience, we do not truly love God. Again, we fail in our obedience. Our obedience is weak. I am not talking about our track record, how well we do. I am talking about the setting of the heart to obey. It is, “Lord, I want to obey You. I set my heart to obey You in this.” We stumble and fail, we receive His forgiveness, we push delete, we declare war on the area we stumbled in, and we recommit ourselves to obey.

We are never at peace with compromise in our hearts, as in “I am going to live in sin for a while and take it from there.”

The Lord says, “No, that is not loving Me.” It is the setting of the heart to obey. That is an essential part of love. Again, our obedience is weak, therefore our love is, but our love is still real. When our love is weak, it is still real. It is still genuine. Do not wait until you mature in obedience to imagine you are loving God. You are loving God each step of the way. A brand-new believer with a lot of darkness in their lives still, a lot of areas the Holy Spirit is going to clean up with them over the weeks, months, and years ahead, loves God with all their heart the day they are saved. The Lord says, “I will take it. This is good. To the best that you know you are giving Me your all.”

It is like that microscope. You clean up. You put that microscope slide underneath the little lens there. You think you have it clean, and all of a sudden the Lord turns it up 100x power. You think, “Whoa, where did that dirt come from?” You get that cleaned up. He turns it up 1000x power. “Whoa, where did that dirt come from?” It was always there. He increases the light He gives us so we grow in our capacity to love Him as we grow in our capacity to obey Him.

- 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 about having freedom to live in compromise, e.g., “engaging in parties” that other believers do not feel right about engaging in. It is having freedom to live with an exhilarated heart as we encounter God’s heart in our daily walk.

V. OUR LOVE FOR OURSELVES

The fourth expression of the burning heart is also critical to growing in prayer. You cannot skip these truths and grow in prayer to the same measure. You can still grow in prayer some, but not to the same measure. That is why it is at the very beginning of the course that I wanted to lay out this foundational truth about prayer related to the love of God.

- 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 indescribable 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)**

The redeemed are to love themselves in God’s love and for God’s sake. Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself.” Do not forget that phrase, as you love yourself. We are to love ourselves through the lens of the revelation of Jesus. What He is like, who He is. The lens of what He accomplished on the cross. The lens of our great worth to God. Do you know how much you are worth to God? You are worth a lot more to God than you are to yourself. Somebody says, “Well, I just really love myself.”

Jesus could say, “I love you far more than you love you. I want you to enter into the way I love you.”

We have received the very gift of God’s righteousness. What an extravagant commitment that God has made to us in giving us His own righteousness! We have indescribable value and worth to Jesus. Seeing this changes the way we feel about our life. We feel differently about our life when we identify and receive the way God sees us and values us in Christ.

- 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.

By seeing ourselves in Christ, we see our new identity. That is how God sees us. We need to see our new identity in Christ, our new destiny, and our worth to God. By seeing this, we are empowered to love ourselves by the Holy Spirit. Beloved, you will never love other people more than you love yourself 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.

There is a paradox. The Bible calls us to love ourselves in the grace of God, but to hate our lives outside of the will of God. We are to hate what our life is outside of the will of God. That is, what we would do outside of His will, we are to despise it and say, “No, I do not want that.”

Who we are in the grace of God, we love. I can love who I am in the grace of God, yet be sorrowful for some of the things I have done outside of the will of God. I am sorrowful for what I have done, but I love who I am in His grace. I am talking to sincere believers who are seeking to obey Him. They are enjoying the Lord enjoying them.

We are to love who we are in Christ. We are to love our new identity in Christ. We are to love what we do in the will of God. That is a big point, to love what we do in the will of God, because most of what you and I do in the will of God is very small and weak. Even giving somebody a cup of cold water in the name of the Lord. We look at it and say, “It does not really matter.” We serve somebody, we bless somebody, we bless our enemies, we pray in secret, we give in secret, and nobody notices, nobody cares. They might even criticize you for the way you are serving them. Most of your service is weak, small, and out of sight. We can look at it and say, “I am not even going to do it. It is not even worth it.” That is despising what you are doing in the will of God. That is what I am talking about right there.

I have heard people say, “I gave all these years to do this or that, and I wasted it all.” Not if you did it for God, you did not waste it. “I was involved in this ministry or that ministry, and I did not get anything back that I thought I was going to get.” If you did it for God, then your deeds are alive and well in the heart of God

forever. You never waste any investment of time and money when done in the will of God in God's eyes. If you are doing it to gain some recognition or to gain some benefit—and that is not a horrible thing that you want to gain some recognition and some benefit. That is a normal thing, but if that is your motive—you can get really burned out in serving and you can really despise your serving. “It is so small, it is so weak. Nobody notices what I am doing. It hardly impacts anybody. I encouraged a couple people today, a few conversations. So what?”

God says, “Are you kidding? I have that recorded in My books forever.”

Beloved, do not despise your destiny, your identity, or what you do in the will of God. Do not despise it. Do not underestimate its value. Some believers are only excited about what they will do one day that they think will be a big thing. They are enduring today. They think, “These are years of preparation. I will endure the preparation. One day I will do something really big.” That is a really bad mindset. That will get you into burn out and bitterness every single time. I have watched this for forty years, people serving hard today with the thought that what they will be doing five, ten, twenty, thirty years later will be really amazing. They get there, five, ten, and twenty years later, and it is not what they thought. They are angry with God, they are angry at the church, and they are angry with the ministries they were serving. Beloved, serve God in joy and delight in the smallness of today because it matters to God today.

The fact that it is preparing you for something tomorrow is still true, but I am not pouring myself out today because I am waiting for a breakthrough tomorrow. I am waiting for a breakthrough tomorrow, but I am doing what I am doing today because today is good to obey God. It can be little. It can be weak. It can be out of sight, but God sees it, and it moves Him.

- D. Bernard of Clairvaux called it *loving ourselves for His sake*—being jealous to be all that He called us to be, for His sake. Jesus does not want us to walk in false humility, which minimizes how much He enjoys loving us and His desire for 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.

Bernard of Clairvaux was a monk in the twelfth century in France. Clairvaux is a city in France. He was one of the most influential men in the twelfth century in all of Europe and was really focused on prayer and intimacy with God. He wrote this statement about loving ourselves for God's sake. To be jealous to be all that God has called us to be for His sake. Meaning, be everything He has called you to be. That does not necessarily mean bigness. It might be bigness, but have that focused connection to God, that life of obedience, and be all that you can be for His sake. Beloved, that is a beautiful thing to do: to love this and not despise it, and not to like it only if it is big, but to love it because God loves our obedience. We want to be all that we can be for His sake.

Jesus does not want us to walk in the false humility that minimizes how much He enjoys loving us. He wants us to enjoy being loved by Him. We magnify Jesus as we love ourselves in agreement with the way He loves us. I want to say that again. You are actually magnifying and glorifying Jesus by loving yourself in agreement with the way He loves you. We are honoring 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.

⁴But 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)

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

Jesus delights in who we are in the grace of God. In Isaiah 62:4, God said to name the people of God “Hephzibah.” Call them Hephzibah. Hephzibah means “the Lord delights in you.” Name My people “I delight in them.” Name My people this, “I like them.” Name My people this, “I rejoice in them” or “I enjoy them.”

Beloved, your name is “God likes you.” Your name in the Spirit is “God enjoys you.” Basically He told the prophet, “Tell them that is what I call them. I want them to buy into this and agree with Me.” He wants us to love the person that He loves. The person that He loves.

We do not have wisdom in the full way we want. We do not have follow-through in the full way that we want. We struggle with issues. We fail and stumble, but we say in our spirit, “Yes, we love the gift of righteousness. We love who You are, Jesus. We want to obey You. We are stumbling. We are tripping.”

He gets all of that. He says, “I love that person. I love that person. I really do love that person.” Beloved, it will really change your prayer life when you love that person like He loves that person, if you do not at this time.

David understood this a bit. He said in Psalm 18, “God delivered me because He delighted in me,” that is, because He liked me. Here is the context. Psalm 18 was written right after David was in Ziklag. Ziklag was sixteen months of compromise in his life. David repented of his compromise. His compromise was not in every area of his life, but he had an element of compromise in Ziklag. The day he was delivered from Ziklag, he said, “God delivered me because He liked me.”

His team could have said, “He delighted in you? David, you have been in some compromise lately.”

“I know, but the Lord delights in me. That is why He broke in and rescued me.” What a glorious thing!

- F. We must receive what the Word says about the activities we perform in God’s will, though many are small and go unnoticed by others. In fact, most of our love and service to Jesus consists of small acts, but they move His heart, and He will reward us forever for them. Eternal rewards are about Jesus expressing publicly how He feels about the way we love Him in this life.

¹⁷“Well done...you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.” (Lk. 19:17)

²¹“You were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things.” (Mt. 25:21)

⁴²“Whoever 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. *Ask the Holy Spirit to let you see what He sees and to feel what He feels when He looks at you. When we know that His eyes are on us, we feel no need of striving to get the eyes of people to recognize our accomplishments; we do not need the time and attention of the powerful and popular people, because we already have the love, time, and attention of the most glorious Man. C. S. Lewis wrote, “True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less.”*
- H. Self-hatred results in a deep sense of rejection that damages our ability to love and receive love. God 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 He made us to be (with our own specific calling).
- I. Loving ourselves includes not despising our appearance, gifting, or ministry assignment, no matter 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, nationality, etc. The Lord wants us to enter into the feelings *He* has for us. Some believers need to repent of longing to have another’s calling, gifting, family background, appearance, etc.

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—it will change the way we see people and how we respond to them.

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

The fifth and final expression: we love others in the overflow of the way that God loves us. Right there in John 15, it is all one passage describing prayer and Jesus loving us and us loving people. It is all connected together. The Lord wants us to enter into how He feels about others. He does not want us just to enter into how He feels about us. When we see how He feels about us, it changes how we feel about ourselves. Then we are far more empowered and equipped to see how He feels about others.

These other believers that are bothering you, some of them have the same last name that you have. Some of them live in the same apartment you live in. Some of them are on the same worship team you are on. Some of them bug you. Let me tell you, the Lord wants us to see how He sees and feels about them. It gives me a tremendously different perspective, and I ask Him, “Lord, let me see and let me feel what You see and feel about this guy that is on my leadership team that is bugging me.” Hypothetically, of course. My point is we can enter into that fellowship of the burning heart. Amen and amen.

- B. The first and second commandments are deeply connected to each other and cannot be walked out separately. We are to love believers who mistreat us, because God loves them as He loves us.
- C. We will forever delight in one another in the way in which God loves and delights in His people. Our love for others must extend beyond loving only the people who enjoy the same things that we enjoy. We must not only love the “cool” people, those who are popular and powerful and can enhance our status, etc. Stronger believers are to actively love weaker believers out of a heart of genuine compassion, rather than “loving them” in order to gain something from them.