

Abiding in Love: The Ultimate Reality of the Kingdom

I. THE ULTIMATE REALITY

- A. 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)*
- B. The command to love God with all our heart does not begin with us. It is one expression of the ultimate reality of the kingdom that existed long before the creation of the world, namely, God's heart that burned with perfect love within the fellowship of the three persons of the Trinity.
- C. God is love (1 Jn. 4:16). The very being of God is wholehearted love. It is first in God's personality and in the relationships of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. From eternity past, God has loved God with all of His heart. The Father loved the Son, Jesus loved the Spirit, etc. God is fully satisfied and filled with joy in the fellowship within the Godhead.
- D. The essence of how God thinks and feels is wholehearted love. The Lord has great power and wisdom, but He only uses them to express His love.
- E. 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. He wants us to respond in wholehearted love because it is *who He is* and *who He created us to be*. We were created in His image for wholehearted love. It is the core reality of our relationship with God and of salvation.
- F. 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 reality (Jn. 15:9; 17:23).
- ⁹"As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." (Jn. 15:9)*
- G. The love burning in God's heart has at least five distinct expressions that are deeply interrelated.
1. **God's love for God:** Each person in the Trinity intensely loves the others with all His heart.
 2. **God's love for His people:** He loves His people with all of His heart, mind, and strength. He loves the redeemed with the same intensity that He loves within the fellowship of the Trinity.
 3. **Our love for God:** The Spirit imparts God's very own love to His people (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).
- H. 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. **Abide in love:** This is a call to live continually in love and *stay focused* on gaining insight into its various expressions. It is the main exhortation of the Bible and includes studying it, praying over it, and sharing it—going deep in love and being students of how God feels about His people.

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

- J. 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 this reality.

- K. The essence of eternal life is to know God—this speaks of experiential knowledge; it is more than information. Salvation is much more than escaping hell, but is an invitation to fellowship with God (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Jn. 1:3)—to participate in ***the fellowship of the burning heart***. Examples of this include the disciples at Emmaus (Lk. 24:32) and John the Baptist who was a burning lamp (Jn. 5:35) and prophesied of a baptism of fire (Lk. 3:16) as seen at Pentecost (Acts 2:3).

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

II. GOD’S LOVE FOR GOD

- A. The first expression of perfect love is found in the relationships within the Trinity. The Son loves the Father (Jn. 14:31), and the Father loves the Son (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 15:9; 17:23).
- 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—that would deny His 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.
- 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 enjoys His people in a similar way as they embrace their new identity in Christ.

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.

“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. 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. God created human beings to participate in this glorious fellowship because **He is love**. God does not lack anything. He has no need. He did not create humans because He was lonely or discontent or 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.

- B. The Holy Spirit imparts God’s very own love to His people (Rom. 5:5). We will not love God more by “trying harder” to love, 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)

- 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 being liberated so we can engage in parties that other believers do not feel right about. It is not about freedom to live in compromise. It is freedom to live with an exhilarated heart by encountering God’s heart.

V. OUR LOVE FOR OURSELVES

- A. The redeemed are to love themselves in God’s love and for God’s sake. We love ourselves through the lens of the revelation of Jesus, His cross, and our great worth to Him. 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)

- 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.

- 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.

- D. Bernard of Clairvaux called it *loving ourselves for His sake*—that is, to be jealous to be all that He called us to be, for His sake. Jesus does not want us to walk in false humility that minimizes how much *He enjoys loving us* and how He wants us to *enjoy being loved by Him*. We magnify Jesus as we love ourselves in agreement with His love for us and honor His “investment” in us.
- 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)***
- F. We must receive what the Word says about the activities we do in God’s will—though many are small and go unnoticed by others. 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 loved 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, then we do not have to strive to get the eyes of people to recognize our accomplishments. We do not need to get the time and attention of the powerful and popular people because *we already have the time and attention of the most glorious Man*.
- H. Self-hatred results in a deep sense of rejection that damages our ability to love and receive love. God desires to liberate our heart fully 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. We love ourselves without despising our appearance, gifting, and ministry assignment, regardless 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 must 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—this changes 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)*

- B. The first and second commandments are deeply connected to each other and cannot be walked out separately. We are to love fellow believers who mistreat us because God loves them as He loves us. 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—who are popular and powerful and who can enhance our status, etc. Strong, mature believers are to pursue the weaker ones.

For **FREE resources** on this subject, see mikebickle.org for a 12-part teaching series with notes, titled *Abiding in Love: Experiencing the Heart of God*, and for a free e-book, *7 Longings of the Human Heart*.