

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

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Number: 28
Verses: Luke 6:35
Topic: Love vs. Relationship
Date: 30th August 2011

Now I'm really confusing you! Love versus relationship? Are not the two identical? Not quite! Lets look at this logically, then Scripturally:

1. You can love someone you don't even know e.g. by sending a gift to an orphanage in Africa, thus you can show love without having any relationship whatsoever.
2. You can love your enemies (who, by definition, you have an awful relationship with) and do good to them, pray for them and bless them.
3. You can love someone who is unresponsive, say in a coma, and sit by them, pray for them, and ensure optimal care for them.
4. You can love someone who you are totally baffled by (most parents of teenagers understand what I am saying here).
5. You can love someone who you have a terrible and uncontrollable relationship with e.g. an alcoholic spouse or a mentally ill relative.
6. On the other hand you be deluded and can think you have a great relationship with someone only to discover they don't love you at all!
7. Or you can have a mutually exploitative relationship that feels great in the short term but which is unloving and totally destructive (e.g. most, if not all affairs).
8. Some people have what I call imaginary relationships, with "invisible friends" or with people on TV who they see as part of their lives or even sitcom characters. You cannot love (agape love) a person who does not really exist!
9. You can even hate (in biblical terms) someone that you have a "great relationship" with! Extremely self-centered people are like that. Selfishness, coldness, and lack of empathy are considered hateful in the Bible and in most non-Western cultures.
10. Of course the ultimate example of this is that God loved us while we were yet sinners, were dead in our trespasses and sins, were hostile in mind toward Him, disobedient and ruled by lusts and passions and full of darkness, without relationship with Him at all. "We love because He first loved us.."

Now of course love should lead to and flow out of relationship, but we also have to love even in the absence of a positive relationship! For instance we have to love our enemies, our difficult relatives, and the guy at the telephone company who keeps putting us on hold!

In such a fallen world as the one we live in we often face the dilemma that relationships are often completely out of our control, yet that God commands us to love people anyway. It may be utterly impossible to "have a good relationship with" a mentally ill parent, however it is within our ability to agape love our parents and to honor them. This is why God never directly commands "have a good relationship with" (the closest is the command: "be at peace with all men as far as it is possible with you..." see Rom. 12:18)

So we find that the Scripture never commands that we have a certain quality of relationship with people, even our spouses, but rather that we have certain concrete, observable and measurable attitudes and actions (such as humility, submission etc).

Relationships often depend on someone-else's decisions and God never wants us to be held personally accountable for someone-else's poor life skills. Attempting to manage a "relationship" also means we believe we have some hope of changing the other person and possess the power and wisdom to do so (even through prayer). Yet that would violate the sovereign free will of the other person.

Love is a completely free gift which requires no return and that can be given even to the "evil and ungrateful":

(Luke 6:35) *Rather, love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them, expecting nothing in return. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because He is kind even to ungrateful and evil people.*

If God was not kind to evil people none of us would be saved by the blood of the Lamb!
(Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23)

So love and relationship are separate and independent concepts. Love is under our control but relationships are sometimes a tough call and will totally disintegrate in the Last Days:

(Matthew 24:9-12) *"Then they will hand you over for persecution, and they will kill you. You will be hated by all nations because of My name. Then many will take offense, betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. Because lawlessness will multiply, the love of many will grow cold.*

(2 Timothy 3:1-5) *But know this: Difficult times will come in the last days.) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid these people!*

When the spirit of lawlessness comes in like a flood the world will become difficult, dangerous and treacherous and a "man's enemies will be those of his own household"; indeed at that time there may be no one at all whom you can trust except God!

Even when our relationships become toxic we are still called to show God's agape love, even to our enemies, persecutors and betrayers. Jesus let Judas Iscariot kiss Him and even called Judas "friend" (Matthew 26:47-50). Our demonstration of God's agape love in and throughout such trials will prove our faith and result in either the repentance or in the stern judgment of our enemies.

So here is the big question: Will demonstrating God's agape love improve your relationships? The answer is a definite maybe but probably not! Jesus was filled with God's agape love and He just got betrayed and crucified and His close friends fled from Him when He needed them most. As we saw yesterday (in Isaiah 52:1-5) Jesus was despised, rejected, and turned away from. The most loving person in the world seems to have had lots of enemies and some very disappointing friends! We will see the reason for this later.

Even the love of Jesus did not win over the chief priests, Herod, the money-grubbing crowds or the traitor Judas. Love does not always "win". Sometimes it loses really, really hard. Love gets rejected for all sorts of reasons but one BIG reason is that God's love requires absolutely ethical behavior. We reject God's love because we don't want to change or be changed or to have to give up some pleasurable sin or dishonest practice or to alter a selfish and self-centered lifestyle.

Like the Rich Young Ruler once we get the total picture of God's love we move right along, sad but in a definite hurry to get far away from it! God's love is going to ask us to be loving in return, its going to ask us to "sell everything and give it to the poor and go follow Jesus!"

Jesus' love is not cozy and it can totally mess up our comfortable lives and sever our relationships with those near and dear to us:

Matthew 10:34-36 *Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's enemies will be the members of his household.*

In fact many of the heroes of faith and love had some truly awful relationships: Abraham and his greedy nephew Lot, Isaac and the pagan wives of Esau, Jacob and his twelve out-of-control sons, David and his squabbling, murdering incestuous children, Jeremiah and the whole Jewish nation...

This bleak picture is only partly due to human fallibility. Much is due to the work of the Devil who accuses us to God, God to us, us to each other, and even us to ourselves, and so on, endlessly. The Devil is very successful at producing conflict, war and death. The Devil's reign of lawlessness will soon be complete and human relationships will go sour very quickly and permanently. The sudden and incredible breakdown of numerous Christian marriages is just part of this.

Yet at the same time God's love will be poured out upon His saints and flow out from them in glorious ways as His bride the Church is prepared to be "without spot or wrinkle" on the day of His return. The Church will be perfected in love, even as the world around us becomes completely selfish and totally wicked.

The end of this process will be a huge company of glorious martyrs who love God with their whole being and who love one another as Christ first loved them. Even in the most difficult and terrible of circumstances they will act as believers and live as believers and be sanctified and glorified as believers. Will you decide to be one of them?

Blessings,

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