

## Relational Holiness

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### Ephesians 1:3-14

#### How is love expressed?

*To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.  
(RH)*

God acts intentionally, in response to man's sin, to promote man's well-being by dying on the cross to pay the penalty for sin, and to delivers man from the power of sin. Then, being raised from the dead, He gives man the possibility of eternal life. And finally, to secure the possibility of holy living, He sends man the indwelling presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. This well-being is not forced on mankind, it is only offered freely so than man can be a free being, making his or her own choice about their relationship with God.

I have a calling to preach the Gospel. Currently God has given me the assignment of preaching this series on holiness. As I have studied and presented holiness so far, I keep running into the word LOVE. I am having a hard time putting into words the experience I have in being loved by God, and in loving Him in return.

To see how He loves me is fairly easy.

- To study science and understand how He created everything to sustain life is to know His love in a very visual way.
- To realize that He gives me the freedom to make the choices I wish to make about my life, instead of fixing my destiny like an animal, this is truly a gift of love.
- To stand in the black of the night and look into the heavens, to see our universe and realize how vast and wonderful and mysterious it is, is a pleasure that I can only fully understand as a gift of love to me from God.
- To look at the rocks, and trees, and flowers, and mountains, and rivers, and lakes, and snowflakes falling out of the sky, and the rhythm of the waves gently messaging the sands of the seashores. To see a rattlesnake slither out of the way, or a coyote run for cover, to hear the birds singing in the trees, or to see a cotton tail rabbit hopping about looking for food. To see a pair of quail and their 8 or 10 young chicks run across the road, and for a hundred thousand other wild things that God created just for me to enjoy and wonder about, in all of these I see His love for me.
- To look at the rolling surges of wheat as the wind pushes them across the plains of Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas in beautiful golden waves. To realize that every farmer who ever planted a seed, planted it with the realization that he could do

nothing to make it germinate and grow and produce fruit. That can only happen because God made it so, and in that I see His love.

- A glance at a cross and what it represents in His torture and death gives me a clear picture of His love.
- To realize that His tomb is empty and that this Jesus was God almighty, the creator of the universe. He conquered death so that I could have eternal life, WOW! What a gift of love for me.

It is truly easy to see the love of God for mankind if one will just look. But to love Him back is more difficult. It is easy to say I love Him, but when I look at how He first loved me, I must be honest and say, how can I ever love Him like He loves me. I gave my life to Him which started the great adventure of walking in the light that He gives me to walk in. Over the years He has spoken to me about many things in my life that needed to be changed, and because I love Him I have worked hard at changing those things. Some of the things He asked me to change were easy. It only took the mention of His displeasure to eradicate it from my life. Other things have taken years of hard work and self-discipline to correct. Many times it seems as though I have taken more steps backward than I have taken to move forward. My frail attempts at walking in the direction He has pointed me, are actions from my heart to step toward change and that is what holiness is all about. This effort is an act of love for Him because He first loved me. But still I feel inadequate to the task of communicating how much God really does love us. Be patient with me as I attempt to carry out this assignment to communicate His love. It seems to be just beyond my grasp.

In John 3 we saw how God expresses His love toward us. We read in 1Cor. 13, Paul's description of what love looks like and how it should be expressed in practical ways in everyday living. We might see love expressed, or we might express love ourselves in many different ways. For example...

#### **1. Common expressions of Love:**

- Forgiving
- Offering words of encouragement
- Donating time or money
- Displaying self-control
- Showing humility, trust, respect, or compassion
- Telling the truth
- Being patient
- Liberating the captive and oppressed
- Just listening
- Doing my best at the task at hand
- Being kind

French philosopher La Roche-foucauld said, *"There is only one kind of love, but there are a thousand different versions."* But if we are honest even the actions listed above are not always acts of love. For example we could donate money to a destructive cause, or we could encourage someone to do something destructive to

themselves or someone else. So how do we decide which acts are loving and which are not? Thomas Jay Oord and Michael Lodahl say that one's context largely decides which acts are loving and which are not. *"What form love should take depends upon a variety of factors to which we intentionally respond to God and others as we seek to promote abundant life. To say this in a relational way, the relations we have with others, especially our relationship with God, largely determine what counts as love in any particular moment."*

Many of these common expressions of love can be seen in the cross of Christ. The cross was a barbaric instrument of humiliation and torture. Yet in the context of God's plan of Salvation it became the universal symbol of God's Love.

- In the cross is the forgiveness of almighty God given to the rebellious
- In the cross is the encouragement to love others as we have been loved by God
- In the cross is the donation of everything God has, to take care of the sin problem
- In the cross is the display of self-control, as the song says, "He could have called 10,000 angels, but He died instead, for you and I."
- In the cross He shows humility before sinful men, trust in His heavenly Father, respect for the governing authorities, and compassion to those who falsely accused Him and hurled insults at Him as He hung there dying for them. He utters the words, "Father, forgive them..."
- In the cross He shows us the ultimate truth about the penalty imposed on sin.
- In the cross we see His patience.
- From the cross comes the possibility of liberation from the captivating power and oppression of sin.
- In the cross we see the kindness of a Creator for His creatures.

## 2. Love in context:

I guess the only true way to understand love is to understand it in the context of how I am loved and no one has ever loved me like God has. When I see God's actions of love toward me then I know how I should love God and others. Paul wrote to the Ephesians expressing the well-being that God brings to us in His love for us. Love is seen and understood in the context of Jesus Christ.

### **Ephesians 1:3-14 (NASB)**

[3] Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, [4] just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In **love** [5] He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, [6] to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. [7] In Him we have redemption **through His blood**, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace [8] which He **lavished** on us. In all wisdom and insight [9] He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He

purposed in Him [10] with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him [11] also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, [12] to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. [13] In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, [14] who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

This passage can be summed up in these few words, taken from the passage itself. “...Love...through Jesus Christ...through His blood...” Love in the context of the cross is forgiveness, and that gives us abundant life or well-being or happiness. Oswald Chambers talked about this passage in one of his devotions.

### **The Forgiveness of God**

“In Him we have ... the forgiveness of sins ...” Ep 1:7

Beware of the pleasant view of the fatherhood of God: God is so kind and loving that of course He will forgive us. That thought, based solely on emotion, cannot be found anywhere in the New Testament. The only basis on which God can forgive us is the tremendous tragedy of the Cross of Christ. To base our forgiveness on any other ground is unconscious blasphemy. The only ground on which God can forgive our sin and reinstate us to His favor is through the Cross of Christ. There is no other way! Forgiveness, which is so easy for us to accept, cost the agony at Calvary. We should never take the forgiveness of sin, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and our sanctification in simple faith, and then forget the enormous cost to God that made all of this ours.

Forgiveness is the divine miracle of grace. The cost to God was the Cross of Christ. To forgive sin, while remaining a holy God, this price had to be paid. Never accept a view of the fatherhood of God if it blots out the atonement. The revealed truth of God is that without the atonement He cannot forgive — He would contradict His nature if He did. The only way we can be forgiven is by being brought back to God through the atonement of the Cross. God's forgiveness is possible only in the supernatural realm.

Compared with the miracle of the forgiveness of sin, the experience of sanctification is small. Sanctification is simply the wonderful expression or evidence of the forgiveness of sins in a human life. (*Sanctification is holiness*) But the thing that awakens the deepest fountain of gratitude in a human being is that God has forgiven his sin. Paul never got away from this. Once you realize all that it cost God to forgive you, you will be held as in a vise, constrained by the **love** of God. **(HIGH)**

Love in the context of the cross is forgiveness, and that gives us abundant life, well-being, happiness.

*To love is to act intentionally, in response to God and others, to promote well-being.*  
**(RH)**

Let us take communion together this morning as a way to remember God's wonderful love for us.

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