

Being Loved, Love

(Reflections from the sermon on November 1, 2015)

Perhaps we've not thought of our lives this way before, but we were made to be like Christ in all his wonder and glory. According to Paul we are God's masterpiece, created to do great things as we represent Jesus, His Son (Eph. 2:10).

So many passages speak to our spiritual nature as one that comes from God's love. Ephesians 5:2 is an encouragement to live a life of love as Christ has loved us. Paul stresses that we believers are compelled, or controlled by the love of Christ (2 Cor. 5:14). Christ should live in our hearts because of our faith, trusting in Jesus so that our life will be strong in love and be built on the love of Christ (Eph. 3:17). John shared that we are only capable of loving because God loved us first. Well, let's break that down.

Our lives are only possible because God breathed into our nostrils the breath of life. He literally gave birth to us. He loved us so much that He gave us life and had intended all along to extend that life into eternity. We have always been purposed to be the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:11-12) when we first believed and received the promised Holy Spirit. He is our deposit in our lives that guarantees our inheritance in heaven, but He is also the one who changes us (2 Cor. 5:17) from the inside out. We literally become born anew (John 3:5-6).

We generally consider the first people who loved us to be our parents. The first voices we have heard, the first eyes we connected with, the first smile we saw – all from the loving presence of our parents, especially our mothers. They, too, are responsible for our physical birth. With that responsibility comes the compelling desire to care for our every need – this is love and affection. We might say that parents are controlled by love and our very existence rests in the concept of love. We have been given the natural ability to love, but it was the love of our parents who modeled it for us and demonstrated the significance of expressions of love.

The love of a parent is so much like the essence of God and His character that is demonstrated throughout scripture. Now, through the grace of God and in His great mercy we have been given the gift of love (His Holy Spirit) by believing and trusting in His promise through the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death (John 11:25). This love lives in us and is at work in our hearts and minds for the sake of God's great plan.

Paul indicated that because Christ is now living in us, we no longer live. Our body may be the same, but the person has been changed because of faith in the One who loves us and gave Himself for us (Gal. 2:20). Just like our physical birth when we needed to be loved and cared for to understand the value of our first love – our parents, so it is with our Spiritual rebirth. God is at work *for us* toward salvation and *in us* for His great pleasure.

“Think about what we have in Christ” (Phil. 2:1-3). This introduction pulls us into the rest of Paul’s teaching. He highlights what Jesus Christ has brought to us in Philippians 2:1-3:

- Encouragement
- Comfort of love
- Spirit of unity
- Mercy and kindness

Now, “If you enjoy these blessings, then do what will make my joy complete (vs. 1b-2).” As a pastor would lead his flock, the apostle Paul tells how to take the gifts of Christ Jesus and make productive use of them in the living, loving Body of Christ:

- Agree with each other
- Show your love for each other
- Be united
- Don’t let selfishness or pride be your guide

This list addresses the heart of all relationships, but most importantly the Body of Christ. These are the very areas of attack that the adversary targets in the church. And for good reason; there is no greater deterrent of God’s love to the general public than a church acting like they don’t love each other.

Satan is well aware that he has lost the ultimate war – Christ has already defeated his only hold on humanity, death. But that has not stopped him from making the effort to keep the love of God out of the lives of people everywhere. What is his target? – The church. How can he discourage the people in the church? – Disagreement, emotional discontent, division and determination to have things done “my” way.

According to Barna over 4,000 churches are closing their doors each year in the US. The church is the living evidence of Christ’s work and we have the greatest example of how to live, how to be loved and how to love others – Christ Jesus, our savior! Let’s understand the love of Christ and be controlled by *it*, not our selfishness or pride.