

CHAPTER THREE

RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS

If our eyes are fixed firmly on Jesus and our focus is right, certain implications should follow in our Christian lives. The first of this is right relationships.

“The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

Mark 12: 29-31

Here, the Lord Jesus made it clear what are the most important commandments for His people and keeping these commandments essentially fulfil the moral requirements of the law. These two commandments also point to the right relationships for God’s people.

We would remember how the Lord Jesus rebuked the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 when He told them that they had forsaken their first love. This has to do with the first commandment: to love the Lord God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind and with all our strength. This right and vital relationship between the believer and God must be treasured and nurtured

throughout our journey on earth and beyond. Otherwise, all else is in vain.

THE FIRST FOREMOST COMMANDMENT

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

1 John 4: 9-10

We must acknowledge the fact that it is God who initiated His love towards us, and in His love, He sent His only Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. In His grace, Christ died for us even when we were yet sinners and enemies of the cross. If we truly appreciate deeply His love, we ought to love Him in return. It is His love that enables us to love Him and to love others. It is His grace that reached out to us even though we were wretched in all our ways. As we learn to love Him in return, worship, gratitude and thankfulness take root in our hearts and spur us on to live lives worthy of Him and His high calling.

OBEDIENCE REFLECTS OUR LOVE FOR HIM

If you love me, you will obey what I command...Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me

*will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him
and show myself to him.*

John 14: 15, 21

The Lord Jesus disclosed that the manifestation of our love for Him is our obedience to His commands. A life of obedience to the Lord is a reflection of our love for Him and this would in turn cause the Father and the Son to love us. Fixing our eyes on Jesus would include living a life of obedience to Him in love. Obedience to God is to be seen in the routine things of life, not just in spectacular deeds. As we focus on Him and grow in our appreciation of His sacrifice and love for us, we grow in the quality of our worship of Him as well as in our depth of gratitude to Him.

What is the quality of our worship of Him in our lives? How deeply grateful and thankful are we to the Lord for what He has done for us? These would serve as yardsticks or measurements of our love for the Lord and God of our lives. They can be seen in our longing to spend time with the One we love; also in our pursuit of God and in our desire to grow in our knowledge of Him and the truth. If all these are lacking, perhaps our eyes are no longer fixed on Jesus. In all probability, our focus is on something else or somebody else.

THE SECOND FOREMOST COMMANDMENT

The second commandment has to do with our relationship with our neighbour. Do we love our neighbour as ourselves? What did Jesus mean by ‘loving your neighbour as yourself’? Jesus was referring to the healthy attitude of concern for self and loving the self. This attitude has to do with desiring what is for our own good and to seek that also for our neighbour. This healthy attitude is legitimate and is different from the love of self-life and the preoccupation with the self that is self-centred and negative.

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love...Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

1 John 4: 7-8, 11

Apostle John communicated clearly that we are to love one another because love comes from God and God is love. Our knowledge of God and our new birth in Christ are authenticated by our lives of love. And we love because God first loves us. In other words, it is not possible for a true child of God not to love.

Loving our neighbour as ourselves would include the willingness to forgive our neighbour. Oftentimes, when we find it difficult to forgive others who have wronged us, it is

not so much because we cannot forgive but rather because we do not appreciate enough how much we have been forgiven by God. Loving our neighbour would involve practical concerns for our neighbour. We are familiar with the parable of the good Samaritan. In this parable, we see how a Samaritan was willing to help a Jewish stranger who was robbed and injured. He was prepared to be inconvenienced; he was willing to dress the wounds of the injured man and to pay the expenses for his stay in the inn. The parable illustrates that true love and compassion, to be real, must be manifested in deeds. The Samaritan, in contrast to the Levite and priest, showed us that love is more concerned about doing the right thing before God than doing the safe thing to preserve self-life. The Levite and priest might have felt sorry for the stranger, but no amount of positive feelings can take the place of faithful doing because of love.

Loving our neighbour would mean being other-centred rather than being self-centred. It may involve inconvenience; it may incur a cost and sometimes it may cause us much pain. To love, we must be prepared to be vulnerable. When we love, we must be willing to suffer pain. Most of us fail in this area. The Lord Jesus is our supreme example as seen in Philippians 2: 5-11. He did not consider equality with God something to be grasped but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross! And He did all these because of love. If we refuse to move towards someone in the spirit of love because we are afraid they

may disappoint us, then we are seeking to protect ourselves from pain rather than seeking to love others. In effect, we are disobeying God's command to love our neighbour and disobedience is sin.

LOVING OUR BRETHREN

Loving our neighbour must include loving our brethren, and much more so, because we belong to the same family of God.

We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him. This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

1 John 3: 14-18

The evidence that we have passed from death to life is our love for our brethren. And this love is meant to be a sacrificial love as exemplified by the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus for us. Also, it is to be a practical love – not just

limited to our words – but demonstrated by our deeds and our actions.

We see how significant and central this truth is: no true child of God can excuse himself from not loving his brethren. If we do not love our brethren, we have to seriously evaluate whether we have been truly born again.

It is easy to say that we love from our hearts but true Christian love would be seen in practical loving deeds and actions. When believers find it hard to be kind to one another; when even saying ‘Hello’ becomes such a difficult task and a chore, how can we claim that we indeed love one another? When we spend most of our energy and time concentrating on building our own lives, careers and families and have so little left for our brethren, how can we show practical love and concern to our brethren apart from the occasional ‘How are you doing?’ Do we seriously have time to pray for our leaders, for the needs of the brethren; have we sufficient energy left to render practical help to those who are really in need?

The Apostle John made it clear that our love for the brethren ought to be sacrificial, even to the point of being willing to lay down our lives for them. For many believers however, even overcoming small inconveniences involved in rendering a little help to the brethren become such an insurmountable obstacle; what more if we are referring to sacrifice.

TRUTH AND LOVE GO HAND IN GLOVE

But the Apostle John also wrote that we are to love in truth. And that would imply the need to “*put off falsehood and speak truthfully to our neighbour for we are all members of one body*” (Ephesians 4: 25). It may involve correction and rebuke in love, for truth and love must go hand in glove. When we condone falsehood and sin in our brethren and dare not speak up for fear of men, we are, in effect, not loving our brethren in truth. However, we need to be honest and ensure that truth is applied in genuine love and not as an excuse to vent our displeasure and own frustration. Nevertheless, focusing on Jesus must necessarily be focusing on truth and love. Even though it may be unpleasant at times, God’s truth must be upheld at all times, for God is love and God is light.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work.

2 John 10-11

Notice that although Christians are to love and to be hospitable, the Apostle John warned the believers not to be hospitable to false teachers, for to do so would be to share in their wicked work. In wisdom, we must know how to draw the line, yet in a spirit of love and truth.

Fixing our eyes on Jesus would mean nurturing our relationship with God and our relationship with our neighbour, especially our brethren. The Lord Jesus came to save a people for Himself, a holy people, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God, a chosen people and relationship is central in this: relationship between God and men and relationship among the brethren. This is a relationship of love of the highest degree, a relationship of love in the context of truth, made possible only by God Himself.

What is the state of our relationship – with God and with the brethren? Are we keeping the right focus? Are we indeed fixing our eyes on Jesus?

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