

ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED “Love’s Motivation”

John 3:1-17

- 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council.
- 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."
- 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."
- 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"
- 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.
- 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.
- 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'
- 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."
- 9 "How can this be?" Nicodemus asked.
- 10 "You are Israel's teacher," said Jesus, "and do you not understand these things?"
- 11 I tell you the truth, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. [see Heb 1:1-2]
- 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?
- 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-the Son of Man.
- 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,
- 15 that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.
- 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. NIV

Although this section of Scripture is very familiar to us, I want us to concentrate and meditate on the realities presented about the character of God in verses 16 and 17. Why did God send the Son into the world? Love. Love is the reason that God sent the son. Love, like holiness, is not something that God does. Love is something that God is.

1 John 4:8 “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” NIV

Maybe it would help us if we looked at it like anointing vs. manifestation. Is speaking in tongues the Holy Spirit? No. Speaking in tongues is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Is sending the Son to save the world love? No. Sending the Son was the action the Father took because of love. Because God is love, He sent the Son. Love was the motivation, the driving essence of the action.

Why do we pray? Why do we go to church? Why do we seek after righteousness? Why do we obey God? Many times in life and ministry, I have found myself feeling guilty for not doing or not doing enough. Often, it is the memory of such guilty feelings that drives me to my prayer closet or makes me study. If I don't do this, I say to myself, God will be displeased. Has anybody here gone through anything similar to this?

Though I believe that it is noble to endeavor to lead a life that is pleasing to God, the question remains: why are we doing so? In the face of this question, the Lord's letter to the Ephesian church is very helpful.

Rev 2:1-5

- 1 "To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands:
- 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.
- 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.
- 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.
- 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. NIV

The Ephesian church was a hard working, persevering, and overcoming church. If you or I were to look at that church, we might have held it up as a great model. And in many areas of church life, rightly so. And yet, what does the Lord put his finger on? They had forsaken their first love! Those of us who are married, remember the times of courtship and honeymoon? Why did you seek your mate out? Why did you help? Why did you talk? Why were you with them? Love was the motivation. Why do you mow the lawn now? Do you buy flowers out of obligation or love?

The Ephesian church lost the reason for its hard working, overcoming discernment: love. Without the foundation, the house would not stand. The candlestick was removed and even the material wealth of Ephesus withered away as surely as their true spiritual treasure was lost. The Lord told them to go back to the things that they had done at first.

Jer 2:2

- 2 "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. NIV

What was our state of affairs when God found us?

Rom 5:8 NIV

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Eph 2:1-5

- 1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,
- 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.
- 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath.
- 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,
- 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-it is by grace you have been saved. NIV

1 John 4:9-10

- 9 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.
- 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. NIV

What God-pleasing activity where we involved in that caused God to save us? Rebellion, disobedience, sin. I know that this is basic and foundational to our faith, but sometimes we need to be reminded. WE DID NOT EARN GOD'S GREATEST GIFT! Whatever makes us think that after having received the ultimate gift of God for free that we could possibly earn any other gift? Gifts are given.

<p>Rom 8:32-34</p> <p>32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?</p> <p>33 Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies.</p> <p>34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-more than that, who was raised to life-is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. NIV</p>	<p>Rom 8:32-34</p> <p>32 Since he did not spare even his own Son for us but gave him up for us all, won't he also surely give us everything else?</p> <p>33 Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? Will God? No! He is the one who has forgiven us and given us right standing with himself.</p> <p>34 Who then will condemn us? Will Christ? No! For he is the one who died for us and came back to life again for us and is sitting at the place of highest honor next to God, pleading for us there in heaven. TLB</p>
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Rom 8:35-39

- 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?
- 36 As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."
- 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers,
39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. NIV

*Our motivation for living for God should not be to gain His love. Having received his love should be our motivation to return that love. And loving God is keeping his commandments. As John said, we love Him **because** He first loved us. Our loving Him certainly involves emotion.*

Luke 7:36-48

36 Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table.
37 When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume,
38 and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.
39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is-that she is a sinner."
40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said.
41 "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.
42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"
43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said.
44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.
45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet.
46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet.
47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven-for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."
48 Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." NIV

The emotion is thick and obvious in this narrative. The woman expressed her love through a sacrifice of perfume. Her love for the master so overwhelmed her, that she literally bathed his feet in tears. But what was the spring of that love? His forgiveness of her. She recognized what had been forgiven, thus she loved much. When we recognize how much God has forgiven us, love for Him will well up in our souls.

1 John 3:18

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. NIV

It is easy to say, "I love God." When meditating on all God has done for us, becoming emotional is not unusual. The woman in our story was emotional. But it wasn't just emotion. It

wasn't just tears and hair. She acted. She sacrificed precious perfume and her dignity at the street soiled feet of the Messiah! Because God loved us, we love Him. The proof of that love is obedient action.

John 14:15, 23-24

15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command.

23 Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

24 He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. NIV

John 15:10-12

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. NIV

1 John 2:5-6

5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him:

6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. NIV

We are not allowed the self-deception of saying, "I am in Christ, therefore I can do anything I want because I am under grace." Clearly, if we make profession of being in Christ, then we need to walk as Jesus walked. We need to examine our lives to see if there are things that we do that Jesus wouldn't. And if He wouldn't, we shouldn't! As Paul asked, "Shall we sin that grace might abound? God forbid!" It is precisely because God loved us that we should seek to obey Him.

1 John 5:3

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, NIV

Have you ever sought to serve God in some way and fallen short? Suppose you felt you had a prophetic word and it fell to the ground, or you prayed for someone to get healed and they didn't, or you witnessed Jesus to somebody but felt you were too timid in the delivery; how do you feel? Do you feel God is disappointed in you? Do you feel like God is judging you? If you do, you need to go back to the things you did at first. You need to return to your first love.

Rom 5:8-10

8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

9 Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!

10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! NIV

Heb 7:16-17

16 who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life.

17 For He testifies: "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." NKJV

Heb 7:24-25

24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood.

25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. NIV

Jesus ministers to us in the power of an endless life. He is always in our court, pleading our cause. When in recognition of his love toward us we walk out in obedience to his commands, that same love is matured and completed in us and holds us up. If we should fall short of our expectations, let us remember that God is always encouraging us to go farther and deeper in Him. He sacrificed his son for us when we were dead and disobedient. What do you think he will do when once redeemed we are actually seeking to please Him?

“We are what the past has made us. Yet, we are commanded to not look back and to **‘forget . . . what lies behind.’** . . . With God, this is not impossible, for although the *events* or our lives are irreversible, our *reactions* to those events can still be changed. *And as our reactions change, we change.* In other words, although we cannot alter the past, we can put our past upon the “altar” as an act of worship. A worshipping heart truly allows God to restore the soul.

All of us receive a portion of both good and evil in this world. But for life to be good, God, who is the essence of life, must reach into our experiences and redeem us from our negative reactions. The channel through which the Lord extends Himself, even into our past, is our love and worship of Him.

‘And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God’ (Rom. 8:28). The key for the fulfillment of this verse is that we become lovers of God in our spirits. When we are given to loving Him, all that we have passed through in life is washed in that love. It is redeemed and becomes good in us.”¹

2 Cor 5:14-15

14 For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. NIV

It is precisely because of Christ's love that we are compelled to live for Him! This should be the motivation of our heart.

Eph 3:14-19

14 For this reason I kneel before the Father,

15 from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

16 I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

17 so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,

¹ Francis Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds*, Arrow Publications, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 1989, p. 82-83. Emphasis in original.

18 may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,

19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge-that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. NIV

[Pray for congregation]

APPENDIX 1 – Vine's article on *agape*-

"Agape and agapao are used in the NT (a) to describe the attitude of God toward His Son, John 17:26; the human race, generally, John 3:16 Rom 5:8, and to such as believe on the Lord Jesus Christ particularly John 14:21; (b) to convey His will to His children concerning their attitude one toward another, John 13:34, and toward all men, 1 Thess 3:12; 1 Cor 16:14; 2 Peter 1:7; (c) to express the essential nature of God, 1 John 4:8.

"Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God's love is seen in the gift of His Son, 1 John 4:9,10. But obviously this is not the love of complacency, or affection, that is, it was not drawn out by any excellency in its objects, Rom 5:8. It was an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself, Cf. Deut 7:7,8.

"Love had its perfect expression among men in the Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Cor 5:14; Eph 2:4; 3:19; 5:2; Christian love is the fruit of His Spirit in the Christian, Gal 5:22.

"Christian love has God for its primary object, and expresses itself first of all in implicit obedience to His commandments, John 14:15,21,23; 15:10; 1 John 2:5; 5:3; 2 John 6. Selfwill, that is, self-pleasing, is the negation of love to God.

"Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8,9,10; love seeks opportunity to do good to 'all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith,' Gal 6:10. See further 1 Cor 13 and Col 3:12-14." From Notes on Thessalonians, by Hogg and Vine, p. 105. (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright (c)1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers)