

2018 Advent – 3rd Week – God's Definition of Love

This is the third week in Advent and it has been interesting to see the non-obvious truths that help us realize and enjoy Hope – Peace – Love – and next week it will be Joy.

Hope cannot happen without faith.

Peace (Shalom) cannot happen without forgiveness that we both give and get.

Love – cannot happen without giving. It is centered in giving yourself to God and giving to your neighbor without expectation. It is also loving or giving to yourself.

The Big Idea: The root of God-love is giving. It's not a feeling. It's an action.


When Jesus was in the midst of His ministry, a lawyer came up to Him hoping to catch Him in some misstatement of Mosaic Law. The lawyer figured if he could discredit Jesus, perhaps He could be convicted by the Sanhedrin (Saducees and Pharisees) or at least people would stop following Him. Matthew Chapter 22 gives us a look at the incident.

The Greatest Commandment

Matthew 22:37 = Shema = Hear

- Matthew 22:37 And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."

Shema Yisrael at the Knesset Menorah in Jerusalem



³³ When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as

yourself.⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

I want start the discussion this morning talking a little bit about how Sandy and I met and ended up becoming husband and wife. Please understand I am not doing this to bore you with the details of our relationship, but rather so that we can use it as a starting point to better understand how you and I are to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

English is horribly deficient in its definition of love. If you open the dictionary and look up love, you'll find an entire page trying to describe it. When we use the word to talk about a romantic relationship between two people, we generally are talking about an affection and attraction that we have for another. When we talk about it concerning friends, it's a devotion and affection we

feel for the welfare of others close to us. We desire the best for them with all of our hearts. Also, in English we use the word “love” to express how something might satisfy us or make us feel: I love pizza. I love sports. Or, I love Bluebell Ice Cream. Obviously, when I say I love Bluebell Ice cream and I love my wife I am talking about two different kinds of love. That’s part of the confusion of English.

In the movies we use a term “falling in love” as though it is the objective or the “end all” in relationships. The “love” we see in novels and other fiction is just that. It is fiction. It is not real. Love that is infatuation cannot and will not last. Most of us have had that feeling that we can hardly breathe when we’re in the presence of some other person. That is sometimes called “a crush”. This is exciting and fun to experience, but it would kill us if it went on for very long. We just can’t handle such intense emotions. And often that “crush” is well founded, and indeed is an attraction to some wonderful attributes in another human being. You might see their loyalty, faithfulness, giving spirit, willingness to serve, willingness to work, their dedicated walk with Christ, etc.

I remember the days after I met Sandy, I could think of nothing other than being in her presence. I felt so near Jesus when I was near her. When I would go to the office, she dominated my thoughts. When we went on our first date, we rode a bus out to the North Carolina State Fairgrounds, and all I could think about was the precious little hand I was holding that was connected to the woman that had gotten the attention of my soul. But was that love? Perhaps it was the beginning of love, but it was not mature love as the Bible defines love. Was it wrong? Of course not. It was a tiny spark of interest that began our relationship.

So the question becomes, “when did that spark, that attraction turn into real love?”. It became real love as it moved from an emotion or an interest into an action. You see, God does not define this thing called love as an emotion. Rather, you will see that He defines it as an action. Real love is not something you feel, but it is something you do. And the main action associated with that kind of deference and devotion to another human being is tied up in giving. First, I gave her my attention. This was quickly followed by the giving of my time to her. Then I began to give her pieces of my heart that no one else had. Then I gave her that piece of my heart that I didn’t even know was there. That makes my love for her different. I can love others deeply, but it is a different love than how I love her.

Then I gave her a ring as I offered myself and my all, and asked her if she would take me as I was. I was relieved when she agreed to do so, and then she offered herself, and her life to me. We decided to make it public. We met on a snowy day in a Lutheran church on February 3, 1979, where we publicly gave ourselves to one another before God, and made certain promises. We then gave ourselves to one another totally and we became as one. But, our love was still just a spark, or perhaps at this point a tiny flame at the bottom of a possible pile of logs. It really was nothing more than that.

The years have gone by, and the strength or weakness of our relationship has come and gone with the degree of giving in our relationship. When we stop putting logs on the fire, the love starts to go out. When the giving withers, the love we feel toward one another suffers. People

ask me how we've stayed married 40 years, and I will tell you, it is in the giving of the little things.

It is the commitment I make to her each month as I make provision for her to take care of herself, the house, and me. I give when I take her out for a meal. Most days I give when I load the dishwasher. I give when I take the garbage out. I give when I make the coffee if I'm the first one up. It is little things like these these that nurture love. She gives to me in many similar ways. These acts of giving are the glue that hold a marriage together. And the magic is that she too gives back to me, not to repay me for my kindnesses, but because she made a commitment before God that day in that Lutheran Church to love me with that kind of love. The love between Sandy and me pales in comparison to the kind of love that Jesus is reciting in the *Shemah*. This leads us to examine what God means by love.

When Jesus answered that lawyer, He was quoting the ancient Hebrew call to faith that is said in the synagogue. It is called the *Shemah Israel*. In fact, it is the very call of faith that I heard when I was 15 years old or so from the front of a church.) Through the power of the Holy Spirit, It changed my life forever, although I didn't fully understand the meaning of it at the time.

In Hebrew the word used in the Shemah Israel is the word

LOVE - אהבה (ahava)

As I have explained, Hebrew words are based on root words that are embedded so to speak in other words. And there are two key words embedded in the Hebrew word *ahava* which we call "love:" One word is *ahav* which means to nurture, or devote oneself completely to another. The other word is *hava* which literally means "to offer" or "to give".

This should be a major game changer in the heart and mind of every believer. It means that perhaps we should restate the *Shemah* like this, "You shall give and offer to the Lord your God all of your heart (your emotions), your soul (all of your personality and resources), and your mind (all of the intellect God gave you). AND....you should give and offer yourself to others in the same way you give and offer or wait on yourself." (Author's paraphrase)

Our lives are given to us as a gift from God. We can take that gift and each day say "Lord, I offer my emotions, my personality, my thinking, my all today to You. Precious Father, use me for your work here on earth." That is giving of ourselves. This will involve a whole lot of removing us and our priorities from the throne of our lives. It will require submission to Him and a willingness to do what He asks you to do.

This *ahava* kind of loving is what also goes on between us and others. The loving by us of those around us should be characterized by our giving and sacrifice for their benefit. The odd thing in God's economy is that you will probably receive your blessing from a different source than the person to whom you give. This is radically different than the so-called "loving" that goes on in the world, which usually involves giving to get something back. The world is totally lost when it comes to love. If you look to the world to understand love, it only offers confusion. And we know from scripture that God is not the author of confusion. (1 Cor 14:33)

ΑΓΑΠΗ

— agape' —

ἵνα τις ἄνθρωπον οὐδεις ἔχει, ἵνα τις τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ θῆ ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων
no one has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his
— John 15:13

When Jesus walked on earth, His manner of loving others was so other-worldly that His disciples did not know how to express it or describe it in the common language of Greek. They used the word **agape** to describe what they saw. It was a love that expected nothing in return. I am not sure, but I think the word really had no common usage outside of this in 1st century literature. It was a love that went against all human understanding. That is why people are still talking about Jesus 2,000 years later.

The story of two people meeting and marrying one another may be a warm story to hear, but it pales in comparison to God giving His son as a sacrifice for many. What manner of **agape** must God have to call you and me His children? (1 John 3:1)

*For God so **agaped** the world that He gave His own Son that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16 author's paraphrase). This is My commandment, that you **agape** one another as I have loved you. (John 15:12 author's paraphrase) "Greater **agape** has no man than this than that he lay down his life for a friend." (author's paraphrase)*

Well, remember how I spoke about that love between people that started perhaps with a little spark, an interest. That may be where you are right now with God. You might periodically have a fascination with Him because you see His goodness and His mercy, or you see Him working through others. You ponder him. You meditate about Him. You ask yourself if He is real, and could He possibly really love you personally. He does. When you see Him working in and through others, build on that little spark of interest by loving Him. It's easy to be distracted by them, but realize that *"¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows."* (James 1:17 NIV). This doesn't mean that we don't thank those who are used as willing agents of God, but our ultimate gratitude should always be focused on the Lord. It is He who takes care of us.

When you **give** and **expect a return**, that's an **investment**. When you **give** and **don't expect anything back**. **That's love.**

Type 'Yes' if you agree.



<3 #LifeLearnedFeelings

Now in this business of loving others. When you give to others are you keeping score? Do you run a tally in your mind to see what you might get back? If you do, you may not be loving. If you find yourself thinking, "I did this and this and this for them and they didn't do anything for me." If you're thinking this way, you're probably thinking the wrong way. When we "give" expecting, we aren't really giving. We're expecting a return on our investment. When others love you with **agape** love, realize it is God loving you. They are merely a vessel. You are a similar vessel when you selflessly love another person.

Lastly, we're to love our neighbor as ourselves. So this means to stop putting yourself down. Realize you're unique and special and God has only made one version of you. You are a 10 in God's eyes.

You'll never appear again in the universe. So celebrate you, and realize you're precious in His sight.

Scripture tells us that "God Himself is love." It also tells us that true love is from God. (1 John 4:7-8) We love because He first loved us. The more you fall in love with God, the more He will love others through you, and probably the more He will love you through others. The more you give yourself to Him the closer you will feel to Him. Don't be confused by this thing called love. It is not a feeling, but an action.

That is the great mystery and secret revealed to us by the Hebrew language. God put these meanings in the word *ahava* so we would know what the real meaning of love is. Don't be confused by the world's definition of these things. Base your life on what God's Word says. Stop fretting about love and allow God to love you and allow Him to love others through you.

³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."
(Matthew 22:37-40 NIV)

Now, let's all go and do likewise.

Let us pray!

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