

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

Ephesians 4:32

My Relationship with God— Maturity (Part 2)

Theme: The need for a maturing, personal relationship with God

Review of Lesson 11

God designed us and had a plan right from the beginning to buy us back (because He knew we would go astray). The Bible clearly states that everyone in the world, in all of history, has an internal understanding that there is a God, and they know of Him through creation. If they seek Him, they will be shown what they need to know. No one has an excuse for not knowing about God. However, Satan does all he can to keep us from coming to Christ in faith and teaches lies about God. Salvation requires personal faith in Christ, that is, "Christ died for me." It is a private matter between each person and the Lord. Personal faith gets beyond the fact that Christ died and applies the significance of that death to one's self. So true faith realizes, "I put Him on the Cross and He died for me."



Bible Truth

Introduction

Salvation begins a new, personal relationship with God (all three persons of the Godhead). This lesson presents the **next step** after placing our faith in Him. The next step is realizing each of us needs to mature spiritually. Just as our human relationships have to mature and grow, so does our relationship with the Almighty. All through our lives God wants our relationship with Him to grow, because being a Christian is ever changing and always maturing. There is so much to learn about a maturing relationship that a hundred lessons would not adequately do the job; thankfully, the Lord reveals what each of us needs to know in His time and in His way.

Love is a Key to Maturing in Christ

Love is a primary building block of our relationship with each other and Christ. We will look at just a few aspects of love to see how it influences and builds our relationship with the Lord.

Love is not Infatuation: Sometimes "being in love" with another person is mistaken for love itself. The thrill of being in love is often referred to as a fantasy love. It is not real, but what we imagine love should be. This is the love of the common fairy tales like Cinderella. This occurs with people of all ages, perhaps even more so in teenagers, who are thrilled with a new relationship but do not yet really know the other person. Fantasy love is called "infatuation." It is

wild, exciting, crazy, and emotions rule over common sense. True love is more down to earth and requires we see the other person as a real person and for who they really are.

The terms we use to describe infatuation point out its true nature: "head over heels," "blind love," "dazzling," "puppy love," "crazy," "can't sleep." These are not descriptions of reality, but more of a dream world. With infatuation the thrill of being in love makes us feel warm and tingly all over; but it is not based on loving the other person for who they really are (but who we hope they are). This infatuation stage may lead to true love, but it also may result in a crash when our eyes are truly opened. When real life takes hold of our senses, infatuation passes away. We must not make any life-long decisions (like marriage) until we are well past this stage.

Sharing: Would you like to describe a case of infatuation with which you are familiar?

Our relationship with Christ may have an element of infatuation at first; it is common to us humans. It is not always bad; for example, infatuation does not find faults and overlooks minor problems which are good traits. However, if a relationship is going to be rewarding in the long run it has to mature. God's love for us is always true; it is our love for Him that must mature. It is true love that makes a vibrant, maturing relationship with Him.

A common example of infatuation occurs when we think of Christ as though He were still a carpenter or refer to Him in wishful human terms such as "the big surfer in the sky." Our love has to grow and be based on Who He is now and not be merely based on Who He once was. To love the Jesus of the Gospels is a good start, but it must mature to also include Who He is now (after His ascension to Heaven). He is no longer

an earthly man but the glorified Lord Jesus Christ in Heaven. The Bible addresses this issue by stating, **"Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer"** (2 Cor. 5:16).

Biblical love: The Bible describes true love, **"Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things"** (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Yikes, these verses say an incredible amount about true love. They teach the following:

1. True love is tolerant and does not get upset easily. Love realizes any relationship will have misunderstandings and unplanned occurrences (it even understands we all have a bad day now and then). Love does not get angry and understands there will be unexpected conflicts; getting through those conflicts in a godly manner is the issue. It also realizes that to prosper we have to be willing to forgive. Forgiveness is absolutely essential for a maturing relationship. Do not make someone "suffer a little" in order to earn your forgiveness. Just let them "off the hook" even if they do not deserve it (Eph. 4:2, 4:32; Col. 3:13).

2. True love is kind at all times. It does not try to find ways to "pay the other person back" for hurting you. It rejoices in truth and hopes for the best (is optimistic) because it sees the good in others. It is a realistic love that desires the best for the other person; so true love builds relationships. It is not controlling or demanding. It looks on the heart (faith, character, and values) of the saved person, not on the outward appearance (Rom. 5:8, 12:10-19).

3. True love is not negative, selfish, or proud. It does not pout, scream, "give the silent treatment," or behave inappropriately. When people display true love, they do not have the need "to be right" and to spend time proving it. Working hard at proving you are/were right only destroys relationships (because it also proves the other person is wrong). True love builds the other person up with encouragement and comfort, it does not tear others down. It is not God's will for you to keep a list of things others do wrong so

you can remind them of those wrongs later. Keeping lists is hurtful and destroys trust. Notice how the Lord has treated you and apply that to others (Rom. 12:16; 1 Thes. 4:18).

4. True love involves good communications (discussed in **Life Applications** below).

Discussion: True love means not keeping a list of wrongs things the other person has done in order to use it against them in the future. Discuss how harmful and destructive such a list can be.

Life Applications

Love is a broad topic yet a child can often understand it better than many adults. We will now consider in more detail how communication (an essential part of true love) relates to real life.

Closeness: When you are close to someone, you are as aware of that person as you are of yourself. You are as sensitive to his/her thoughts, feelings, needs, and dreams as you are to your own. That person is as important to you as you are to yourself. You listen without objection even if you do not totally agree. This is closeness. Closeness only occurs when you *accept* another just as he/she is; just as Christ accepted you. **"To the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved (Jesus Christ)"** (Eph. 1:6, parenthesis added). Recall He accepts you for who you are and does so while you are a sinner (Rom. 5:8). He does not demand anything from you to be accepted. The believer is closer to Him than is possible with any human; that is, you are in Him and He is in you.

Closeness means *giving up some parts of yourself to help you be more aware of the other*. That is what Romans 12:1 teaches, **"I beseech you therefore,**

brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." God wants us to present our bodies (here meaning body, soul, and spirit) as a living sacrifice for Him. When you are close to Christ, you are willing to give up your wishes and plans to be more aware of His. With closeness it is not about you as much as it is about Him. However, no one can use closeness to manipulate another (to change them into what he/she wants). The idea is to accept them for who they are in order to enhance the relationship. Christ accepts us for who we are.

Being close to the Lord means we have to listen to Him and put His concerns first in our lives. With God it is especially important to recognize He alone has the answers, He alone can provide help, and He alone affords the comfort and direction we need. So be sensitive to His leading, and be sure He wants to listen to you.

Openness: Openness means we can be ourselves without fear of the other person getting upset (we can "open up"). This is important with God because that means you can tell Him the pain, fears, and dark

thoughts in the deepest parts of your heart. He is patient to listen to your every need, dream, and desire. You can reveal things that are so secret or shameful you cannot share them with any other person. He will not punish you for being open, but will instead help you. He wants this openness from you because it prepares you for a maturing relationship. You can discuss the fears you have, the immoral thoughts that come into your mind, and the doubts you may have about Him. Pour your heart out to Him, but please be respectful when doing so. Any time day or night He cares and wants to hear from you, **"casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you"** (1 Pt. 5:7). Hearing from you can be through prayer or just the thoughts you have in your mind as you think about the things of God. He is always there to comfort and help you. **"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus"** (Phil. 4:6-7).

Discussion: Have you ever had a friend or relative you could not be open with because you could not express what you believe for fear they would get upset? Does such a person accept you for who you really are?

Being open with the Lord draws you closer to Him; pour out your heart and know He is listening and will not hold anything against you. Being open means acknowledging your sins, doubts, hopes, wishes, and fears to Him. Actually, He already knows everything in your mind, but once you express it to the Lord, then you begin to see the need for Him to transform your life (to improve your relationship). Being open draws you close to Him because you trust Him enough to reveal the secrets of your heart—the good part is that He is listening and wants to help. So you can be 100%

open with Him. This openness allows you to reveal your deepest secrets.

Intimacy: When two people are close, you get to know the other person when you are together. When two people are open, the other person gets to know you when you are together. So being close and open with another person will help ensure you develop a good, personal relationship. Developing a relationship is important, and it is important that the relationship matures and grows. Growth is brought about by intimacy. When two people are intimate, they are also aware of themselves; so I know myself when we are together, and you know yourself. I can be totally myself without stopping you from being yourself. We can be totally open with each other without fear of the other getting upset or hurt. We bring the best out in each other and through our relationship we aspire to be a better person. **"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers"** (Eph. 4:29).

Discussion: With God closeness allows you to know Him which is good. Openness lets you pour your heart out to Him—also good. Why is intimacy with the Lord good? (Answer: It helps you to be aware of yourself, and God can use this self-awareness to help you see areas in your life needing growth/change. This allows you to see the need for His transformation in your life.)

Concluding Application: Closeness, openness, and intimacy enable you to accept the other person for who he/she is—not who you wish the other to be or into whom you hope to change him/her. Male-female relationships and marriages often fail because one or both parties cannot accept the other for who they really are. When you accept each other this way, you will forgive them of wrongs against you. Forgiveness

means you will not hold against them what they did wrong, you will not make them pay for it (get even), and you will move on as though nothing happened. This will encourage each other and make your relationship something that builds you both up not tears you down. So true love enables people to be themselves, accept each other as they are, and erases fear of the other's anger. True love sets the stage for

transformation (next lesson). As your relationship matures, God reveals your inadequacies to you so that you and He can move to the next level of maturity. **"Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you"** (Phil. 3:15). As we cooperate in God's leading, He will transform us so we can have a renewed mind.

Take 2 Heart

Summary

It is important not to confuse true love with infatuation which is a fantasy love. It is true love that makes a vibrant, maturing relationship with Him. True love is patient, kind, seeks the best for the other, and requires good communications. Once you trust in Christ, you have begun a personal relationship with God; you then want that relationship to continue to grow and mature. Good communication means:

- You are aware of Him in your daily life as you are of yourself. He is the Head, you are part of the Body (Eph. 1:22-23). Just as your body could not function without your head, neither can the Body of Christ (body of believers) function without following the Head.
- You can pour your heart out to God and trust Him to help you, not to punish you.
- When you are aware of Him, He will make you aware of your true self which will help you spiritually mature.
- When you are aware of your true self, you will see the need for help to make you more like Christ. You will then cooperate in His desire to transform your mind (next lesson).

Gospel

"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave

you" (Eph. 4:32). Kindness, tenderness, and forgiveness are essential elements of love. God loved you before you were born and will forgive you of all sins (including the future sins) the moment you trust in Christ. He completely forgives us and remembers our sins no more. That is the model of how we are to love and forgive. He always has our best interest at heart and communicates truth to us so that we can mature to be more like Him.

Encouragement

It is often hard to follow the teachings of this lesson with other people. All too often one of us is misunderstood or selfish motives create problems. So with others we have to do the best we can, by His grace, and realize there will be times of conflict and hurt. During those times, we must still act as the Bible teaches. Thank you for doing your best to be forgiving and kind—it may encourage others to also act in love. Please know the Lord does not expect you to let others push you around, control you, or demand you act or do certain things—these are clear signs the other person is not acting according to biblical teaching. You will be in His will when you are close, open, and intimate with the Lord. He will help your relationship mature and that will give you inner confidence and assurance that He is working in your life.