

## ***The Heart of a Disciple: Abiding in Jesus' Love***

*John 15:9*

Today we are wrapping up our 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting. We've been pressing into the three great love commands of Jesus: love God, love one another, and love our neighbor. These are matters of the heart. Instead of going through the motions, we are to love God with all our heart, we are to love one another fervently from the heart, and we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

What fuels this type of love is our experience of God's love for us. Unless we **experience** the fierce, constant love of God in Christ, these three love commands will merely be ideas, not the passion of our hearts.

And so today we are going to ponder Jesus' simple statement in John 15:9, which reads:

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

We'll unpack this statement by answering three questions: How has the Father loved the Son? How has the Son loved us (as the Father loved Him)? How do we abide in Jesus' love? I obviously won't give comprehensive answers to these questions. But I do want to point us in the right direction by noticing how Jesus spoke about the Father's love for Him, how Jesus spoke about His love for His disciples, and how Jesus spoke about abiding. We'll especially notice how Jesus spoke about these issues in the gospel of John.

### ***How has the Father loved the Son?***

The short answer is "perfectly, for all eternity." The first article in our statement of faith puts it this way:

*We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. . .*

*EFCA Statement of Faith, Article 1*

Our understanding from Scripture is that God has **always** existed in **a loving unity** of three equally divine persons. This means that the Father loved the Son (and the Son loved the Father) long before any other beings were created (John 17:24). God is love. And what God does is an expression of His love. And so the Son came into the world being loved perfectly from eternity past.

Turn with me to John 5. There Jesus made an intriguing statement about how the Father loves Him. Jesus made this statement in the context of a dispute with the Jewish authorities. They were upset that Jesus had healed a lame man on the Sabbath and had told the man to carry his mat home. In verse 19 we read:

19 So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise.

Jesus didn't act independent of the Father; rather, Jesus took His cues exclusively from the Father. Therefore, there was never any competition or disagreement between them. As well, Jesus did everything He saw the Father doing (“whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise”). Jesus did **what** the Father was doing and He did **everything** the Father was doing.

In verse 20 Jesus says that by showing Him what He was doing **the Father was showing Him love**.

20 For the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing. And greater works than these will he show him, so that you may marvel.

Jesus is able to do what the Father does because the Father loves Him by showing Him what He is doing. Scholars and commentators point out that in an agrarian culture such as first-century Israel, a father would show love to his son by teaching him the family business - whether carpentry or farming or raising livestock. Jesus came to earth to carry out His Father's business. One aspect of the Father's love for Jesus was to reveal to Him what He was doing.

What is the “family business” of the Godhead? What was God doing and therefore what did Jesus do while on earth? One way this is answered is found in Luke 19:10; there Jesus said He came to “seek and save the lost.” If you're lost, you're not where you should be and you can't find your way back. That's true of every single human (besides Jesus) who's ever lived. Jesus came as the Good Shepherd to seek and save lost sheep. That's the family business of the Godhead. As an expression of His love for the Son, the Father showed Him what He was doing (John 5:20). That being the case, what would be an appropriate response of love by the Son to His Father? In John 14:31 Jesus makes this statement:

31 but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.

Jesus' love for the Father was shown by doing what the Father commanded.

There is tons of mystery when we talk about the relationship between the Father and the Son (and the Spirit). On one hand there is equality of essence between the Father and the Son (Philippians 2). But there is also what theologians call a “functional subordination” of the Son to the Father. We see that here because Jesus speaks of the Father commanding the Son and the Son obeying that Father. (See NOTE #1)

Why are we told all of this? Why does Jesus want us to know that the Father loved Him by showing Him what He was doing? Why does Jesus tell us that He loves the Father in return by obeying Him? One reason is because the relationship between the Father and

the Son is the paradigm for the relationship between Jesus and His disciples. Jesus loves His disciples the way the Father loved Him. Jesus' disciples are to obey Him just as He obeys the Father. As we'll see, that's how we abide in Jesus' love just as Jesus abides in His Father's love - through obedience. Keep that in mind as we continue.

**How has Jesus loved us?** Let's look at the immediate context to see what Jesus had in mind when He said:

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

How Has Jesus loved us? The short answer is "perfectly." There is nothing deficient or lacking in His love for us. He paid the greatest price possible to seek and save us. A few verses later Jesus tells His disciples this:

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

As the greatest expression of love possible, Jesus would lay down His life for His disciples. In chapter 10 Jesus had told them, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). He wasn't hired help who didn't really care about the sheep and therefore ran away when there was danger; rather, He was a shepherd who loved the sheep so much that He was willing to die for them.

In the next few verses we have an example of how Jesus loved His disciples in a way that is exactly parallel to the way the Father had loved Him (as we saw in John 5). See if this sounds familiar. . .

14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

We saw back in John 5:20 that "the Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing." Here we see that Jesus' self-disclosure is one of the ways that He loved **His** disciples. Jesus has loved us by revealing to us the very things that the Father had told Him. As we read the Bible and hear about the mission of God in this world - and therefore our mission in this world - we should see it as an expression of His **love** for us. He is including us in the "family business" of making disciples of all the nations!

It's interesting that Jesus tells them that He considers His disciples as friends, not merely servants. A core dynamic of a friendship involves not merely talking about facts; you speak about what you are doing and why you are doing it. You give your friends an insider understanding of yourself. For me that's one of the most satisfying aspect of friendships, the freedom and the privilege to be transparent and to share deeper desires and aspirations. We can have this same satisfaction in our relationship with God.

Think about what Jesus is saying. "The Father loved Me by showing Me everything that He is doing. As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you by telling you what the Father has told Me." Keep this in mind as we consider the third question:

***How do we abide in Jesus' love?*** Let's return again to John 15:9. Again, we read:

9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

To abide means to remain or to stay put (as we would say it). The love of Jesus for us is constant, but our experience of that love depends on our abiding (or remaining) in it. Implicit in this command is that ***Jesus wants us to have a constant experience of His love***. How do we do that?

In one respect, we abide in Jesus' love as we "abide in Christ and let His words abide in us" (as we are told in verse 4). As we remain in close relationship with Jesus and as we let His words occupy our hearts and minds all day long (Psalm 1:1-2), the love that Jesus has for us becomes clearer and more precious to us.

This is yet one more reason why spending time in God's Word is profitable for us: God's Word explains and reminds us of the deep, deep love Jesus has for us. If you're like me, you sometimes wonder if Jesus really loves you or barely tolerates you. Like many of you, I have thoughts of self-condemnation and self-loathing. Sometimes I say to myself (sometimes out loud when I'm alone), "You are such a screw-up. . . such a loser. . . so flawed and unworthy. . . you'll never measure up." When those thoughts are running through my mind, I'm not "feeling the love" (I'm not experiencing Jesus' love for me).

But when I turn to Scripture and allow the words of Christ to dwell richly within me (Colossians 3:16), I experience healing and life. I experience the love of Jesus. For example, in Luke 22 we read that Jesus told Peter (knowing that Peter would deny Him three times), "<sup>31</sup> *Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;* <sup>32</sup> *but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.*" That's an example of Jesus' restoring, healing love. Jesus knew Peter's future sin, Jesus had prayed for Him, and Jesus would restore Him to a place of usefulness. When those types of words occupy my mind and heart, I experience the love of Christ.

But there is another very tangible way that we abide in Jesus' love. In the very next verse (John 15:10) Jesus makes a statement that can give us a new vision for obedience.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

Notice again that Jesus' experience of the Father's love is meant to be a paradigm of our experience of Jesus' love. Jesus says that He abides in His Father's love by keeping His commandments. The Father loved His Son by showing Him what He was

doing; Jesus loved the Father in return by gladly entering into the Father's plan through obedience. Consequently, the loving unity between the Father and the Son continued.

When we immerse ourselves in the words of Jesus (and the Scripture more generally), His commands don't seem burdensome and unreasonable and a distraction from what we really want to do. We find ourselves increasingly wanting to be part of the family business; we long to be part of what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are doing in this world. As an expression of our love for Jesus, we keep His commands. In the process we experience His love in fresh ways. The people I know who love to obey Jesus' commandments would tell you that they experience His love in new and fresh ways all the time.

What we've been talking about today is a make-or-break issue for us if we want to be disciples who love God, love one another, and love our neighbors as ourselves. That will never happen unless we abide in Jesus' love.

We are now going to have a time of worship through music. One thing music can do is connect head and heart; by rehearsing spiritual truth through the songs we sing, our hearts are stirred and awakened. Let's rehearse the love of Christ through worship this morning. [Prayer]

#### NOTES:

#1 - "The Father commands, sends, tells, commissions - and demonstrates his love for the Son by 'showing' him everything, such that the Son does whatever the Father does. The Son obeys, says only what the Father gives him to say, does only what the Father gives him to do, comes into the world as the Sent One - and demonstrates his love for the Father precisely by such obedience." (Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God*, pp. 39-40)