

051120  
Jason Henderson  
Akron Vineyard

## The Love of Christ

We've been talking about the judgment between the first and the second, and all that it means for the Lord to take away the first and establish the second. We've seen what it means in terms of the first man, the first covenant, the first creation...all being taken away through the cross and the new man, the new creation, the new covenant all being established in the resurrection.

And then we've been looking at what it means to then have that division, that reality working in our hearts...where the Lord literally takes away the first and establishes the second.

We've said this before, but I've been known to repeat myself. What we're after here is not just the ability to tell the difference between the two. What we're after here is the taking away of the first and the establishing of the second. So that we then experience the new man, walk in the new covenant, live by the life of another.

The cross working in our hearts does away with the one, and does not just distinguish between the two.

And so a lot of what is happening in this process is the getting rid of **things** and finding a person. We're getting rid of righteousness as a thing, and finding righteousness as a person. We're getting rid of truth as a thing and finding truth as a person. We're getting rid of all things....good things, religious things, right things, ALL THINGS. We're gathering up all of these things into Him who is their fulness, who is their substance. All things are being summed up in Him as Him.

And we're seeing what it means that His name is I Am. Maybe you haven't realized that yet, but there is no better name by which He could be called. We haven't been given a relationship with a bunch of things, but with the One who is those things. The I AM.

Lord, I need righteousness. I AM. Lord, need life. I AM. Lord, I need truth! I AM.

You see, He is the great I AM, not the great "here ya go". Your experience of righteousness is a receiving of the one WHO IS righteousness. Your experience of truth is a knowing of the One WHO IS truth. A revealing in you of the one who is truth, righteousness, life, light, salvation. Not the handing over to you righteousness as thing. Not teaching you truth as a thing. But the I AM being made unto you all things spiritual. All things eternal.

Do you see that's why Jesus kept saying "I am". He didn't come to tell you truth. "I am the truth". He didn't come to make you righteous. "I am made unto you righteousness". I am not giving you some bread, I am the living bread. I am not pointing to the door, I am the door. I am not showing you a way, I am that way. I am not here to do resurrections, I am the resurrection. It all comes back to I Am, because our salvation is a person.

Everything of salvation is the I AM Himself living in you. Everything spiritual, everything eternal, is the I AM who, through the cross, has become your life.

And the judgment working in our hearts is always cutting away that which is not Him. It is separating more and more, dividing, cutting, and always only one thing remaining. And the one thing that remains as life in you is the I Am.

Not you becoming Jesus. That's heresy. But the one Christ living in you, reigning in you, at work in you both to will and to work. The Christ who you received when you were born again, now being formed in you, now being expressed through you.

Now religion teaches you all of these spiritual terms as things and not a person. Things that you either must do, or you must learn about, or you must teach. And that's because religion has the wrong head on His body.

And one of the things that we've seen as a thing and not as a person is love. For the most part, Christians and unbelievers share the same concept of love as a thing. It involves certain emotions, certain actions, certain values, etc. A Christian might tell you that God is better at "doing love" than man, but in either case it is a thing that we can learn, or do, or teach, or even try to legislate. It is a thing and not a person.

And so we say things like "teach people to love and not to hate". "I believe in love and not war". **But I'm afraid that love as a thing only serves the one who is the source of it.**

We've been getting into 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5 for the last couple weeks now, and just about each time I get to this verse that reads "the love of Christ constrains me" I want to stop what I'm saying and just hang out there for a while.

I felt this week that the Lord would have me do just that. A little while ago I did a long series on faith, which led to a shorter series on hope/expectation. And then we touched on love, but never spent much time there. Perhaps we should have then, but now it seems more alive in my heart.

Love. "The love of Christ constrains me". Christ's love controls me, motivates me, moves through my veins. Christ's affections, Christ's perspective, Christ's emotions have become mine, by sharing his life. The love of Christ now operates in me. The love of Christ now dominates my thoughts and feelings. That's what Paul is writing here in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5.

You see, man values love as a thing, love as an emotion, love as certain behavior, love as certain values, but really knows nothing of love as a person. I wish I could say that we, in the church, have come to know that "God is love, and those who abide in love, abide in God". But I'm afraid we've come to know it as a thing.

But love as a thing has man, has Adam, as its source. And so, friends...if we're really honest...much of human love relationships are simply mutual self-gain. Mutual selfishness. **Our own gain is at the very heart of why we enjoy it.** Isn't that true? Take away our gain, our comfort, our satisfaction, our protection, our thrill, etc...and what is left?

It is impossible for love as a thing, love as it is in Adam, to "keep no records of wrongs", or to "not seek its own gain".

Now, in saying all of this I am not saying that human love is worthless or not enjoyable or whatever. I'm just saying that it is simply "other than" the love of Christ. I'm just saying that it is not the same thing as "the love of Christ constrains us". And to try to make His love simply an increase of ours or an improvement of ours is the same mistake, the same injustice, as to try to make receiving His life simply the improvement of ours.

Only in the losing of our life are we able to truly love. And I don't mean losing the physical body. I don't want to get too much into that this morning because I want to go somewhere else. But let me just say this – what did Jesus say repeatedly? "Unless you lose your life, you'll never find life". And **until we have lost our lives, love is always the seeking of our own gain. If you seek to save your life, you will never overflow with His. Christ's love flows out of Christ's life, and so long as there are two lives there will always be self love. Until we are conformed to His death, love remains an inward need and not a life poured out.**

Only in the losing of the old man is love made pure...because only then is it able to be a clean vehicle of Christ's heart. A vessel of honor. Only in letting go of the first can the love of Christ constrain you.

Love is His nature. Love is the nature of the Lamb. And there is no greater love than the nature of the lamb, which is exemplified in a life poured out, a soul poured out. Love: not the inward need, not a passionate desire...but the laying of a soul down, the out-pouring of life for another.

That verse in John 15 – "greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his soul for his friend". The word is "soul", not "life". It does not refer to letting somebody kill your body for a neighbor. That's just one momentary decision – to take a bullet for the president, etc. Somebody might do that as a matter of principle and then turn around and steal a lolly-pop from a baby. No, laying down a life is a soul poured out, a life poured out. Not just one dramatic event.

Tell the story of the car crash and the man with the Micky Mouse shirt.

But you see that is love as a Person. The person of love who poured Himself out. Not just that one day on the cross. That's not where his out-pouring began. It was the entire incarnation, life, ministry, death, and burial. That is not love as a thing. That is the opposite of all that man's love is.

Only as you are conformed to His death...where you lose that which is gain to the old man... does the nature of the lamb have place in your heart.

I remember when it dawned on me that 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13 was talking about the nature of Christ's love and not something that I could ever manufacture. I saw that it was something I could never copy, it had to be formed in me in the increase of Christ. And it seemed to me kinda funny and sad that we dump this chapter on newlyweds and then tell them to go out and make sure their marriage is a reflection of this chapter.

You know "love is patient, love is kind, it keeps no records of wrongs, seeks not its own gain, etc".

I was reading through it again this week and I re-wrote it as it would have to read if it was talking about love as a thing, love as a human emotion. And all I had to do to write this was look into my own heart. Here goes:

Love is not patient, it generally demands the object of its desire. It is only kind when love is returned, or when kindness is enjoyable. Love often envies, because, frankly, it always wants the best feeling, the most intense emotion...wherever it can be found. And so it puffs up and exalts itself in obtaining the object of its desire. It certainly behaves indecently...in fact, there seems to be no boundary, no limit to what behavior will be provoked, fueled, or excused in the name of love. By its own nature and passion it seeks its own, and so it takes almost nothing to be aggravated, irritated, and motivated. It keeps all records of wrongs, demanding compensation, demanding a return on its investment, demanding reimbursement and recompense. If it is not returned, it has been known to kill, to take, to slander, to hate. It rejoices in iniquity, or in anything that is unto its gain. And because it demands all things, it cannot bear all things, cannot hope all things, cannot endure all things. This love, though it may last the lifetime of a human, always fails.

Now, in saying all of this, I really am not saying that human love is purposeless or evil. I'm simply saying that it is corrupted by that which is its source – Adam. It is unstable. It is mixed, at so many levels with selfishness, lust, control, self need, etc. I'm not saying its not fun, I'm just saying that it is other than the love of Christ.

Remember the story of David's son Amnon and his half-sister Tamar? How he loved her to the point of becoming sick...and what became of that situation. As soon as he had obtained his goal his love turned to hatred. Remember that story?

We have to realize that everything that comes from the heart of Adam is Adam. How true is this of Adam's heart, Adam's passion, Adam's love.

Are you telling me that God's love is different from how I love my spouse? Well, take all of your gain out of the picture, and tell me what's left. Strip it all away...no returned love, no appreciation, no service, no financial help, no provision, no physical gratification, no...whatever, everything you get out of it. How long would you stick with that marriage if you weren't afraid God would strike you for getting a divorce?

But God's love is the nature of the Lamb. It is a manifestation of His self-giving life. It is the outpouring of all that one has. It is love according to truth and not according to opinion. It is eternal and not circumstantial. It is according to His finished work and not contingent upon getting anything. It is true kindness, unfeigned patience, it is by its very nature not seeking its own gain. It is a never failing manifestation of Him.

And the entire reason that I felt to talk about this today is because "the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and an unfeigned faith". Because "circumcision and uncircumcision is nothing, but only faith expressing itself in love". Because it is possible to "speak in the tongues of men and angels, to understand all mysteries, have all knowledge, have great faith"...but have not love and be nothing at all.

I talked about this with the Friday night crew, but I just wanted to say something to us this morning as a church family. For many of us we are seeing so many things in

new light, in His marvelous light. We are understanding the cross. We are understanding the eternal purpose of God. And with Terry sharing this weekend, we are perhaps understanding spiritual gifts in a greater way. In a more Christ-centered way. Some of us are feeling that we understand eschatology more clearly in the light of the cross, in the light of his life.

And that is wonderful. Let all things be seen in His light. And I am glad for all of that. Truly I am. And what I am about to say is in no way a rebuke to us. It is only an attempt to make sure that we hold fast the eternal purpose of God. It is only an attempt to lay the plumb line in this fellowship.

So don't hear what I'm not saying, but try to hear this: Let this never just become about getting a better understanding. Let this never become simply a "proper understanding of the cross". Let this never be about "the right way to do church" or the "a better way to move in gifts", etc.

Christianity is Christ Himself planted in you, formed in you, and expressed through you as His life. The nature of the Lamb. The Love of Christ constraining you.

Let us never in our hearts fall in love with a message. Fall in love with a contrast. Fall in love with a new way to see things. Fall in love again with religion.

Christianity is not a message. It is not a doctrine. It is a Person who is life. It is a Person who is love. And there are messages that proclaim this Person, and there are doctrines that define His work and being and purpose. But the eternal purpose of the Father isn't the defining of doctrines or the proclaiming of messages. It is the increase of a Person...and that is always unto love.

And I'm saying this only because when Terry was here answering a lot of questions I began thinking back on my short journey. And I remembered that when I brought a million questions to the table and got a million really good answers that were exciting and helpful. I love having my questions answered...and knowing that those answers are true. **But answered questions are not life.**

Life is not seeing a contrast between religion and Christ. Life is not seeing the division between old and new. Life is not looking back and seeing how dead religion is. Life is not being able to point out death. Salvation is not looking back into the Red Sea and seeing dead Egyptians. Life is not dead Adam. It is a risen Christ.

Brothers and sisters, I do not want to be a "trumpeter of a message"...unless that message is a Person. I want to manifest that person. I do not want to help restore a right understanding of this or that. I want "the love of Christ constraining me". I don't want to proclaim mysteries, unless that proclamation is in and of the person who is the mystery of God.

I am telling you, by the authority of Scripture, that understanding the "truth", the "message" of Christ as your life is NOTHING apart from the manifestation of the person that is that life.

Now please...I am not saying this so that you will beat yourself over the head and say "well, I guess all I'm doing is falling in love with a message". That's not true. I know most of you quite well and I don't see that happening at all. I know you have seen a Person, and seek to have that Person formed in you.

But I have seen people de-railed by this. I have seen people fall in love with a true message, and it took them only as far as a message can take them....unto the next message. And I've seen that tendency in me. And I've seen how the soul can spin off so easily and get de-railed by a million and one things. And I just want to agree together with you this morning that the goal here is the life of God manifesting in love.

That must be our plumb line. If we have a true message, a right teaching without the life and love of Christ, than we have nothing. If we have a great knowledge of spiritual things, and even see those things in Him fulfilled, but have missed His love working in us, constraining us, then we've missed it.

I'm not saying that because I think we're missing it. I don't think we're missing it at all. I'm only saying this simply to remind us of our direction, our goal, our aim. The goal of our instruction, Paul says, is love from a pure heart. A heart no longer mixed with the old, the first, the dead.

I see people growing in understanding, growing in light, seeing this scripture or this event or this whatever more and more clearly, and I rejoice. But then the Lord just drops it into my heart..."son, this is great. Just hold fast to my eternal purpose".