

## **Your First and Most Important Love**

‘An insurance [agent] was settling up with a woman who had just lost her husband. He had brought a check for [his life insurance policy benefit] for [\$500,000] to present to her. She looked at it and said (with a little catch in her throat), “You know, I miss him so much. I’d give [\$250,000] of this to have him back”.’

It seems to me that that husband took out too big of a policy! But it’s really all a matter of what or who we love. I don’t like to think of love in terms of degrees, or amounts. One either loves someone or something, or one doesn’t. Love is all in, total, or it’s not real love. If there are any conditions attached, then it’s not love. It’s no more than an intense liking, or attachment to someone or something. If one is willing to give one’s life for someone or something, then that’s love. People often call first responders heroes who end up dying to save a stranger caught in an accident, or other harrowing incident. But even here, did the “hero” give their life because they loved the person they were trying to save? Was it love that was motivating them? Or were there mixed motives involved? Was it simply a sense of duty? Or assuming if they died trying to save someone else, was it the thought that they’d be well thought of, even declared a hero?

You see, true love does not think of self. This is why most of

what we call love in this world is not really love. If we need to know what love really is, we need to look at Christ Jesus. God is love. He is love. Only His love is pure love. Only His love is total and all-encompassing. God is love. God is life. God is light. God is goodness. Truly, God is everything. He is love and because He is the creator, our creator, what He has created are, by definition, objects of love. He created us for many purposes, but first and foremost, He made us to love us.

When we love someone with all our heart, such as a spouse, a child, a parent, it's not really pure love, because in nearly every case, we can not maintain a constant, altruistic love for another unless there is some reciprocation. If one loves someone, normally the other person will love back. Many times it may be a little one-sided, but usually something is given in return. And how many people in this world are looking for love, and if they don't find it in a lifelong marriage, they keep looking and looking for the feelings of romance, to fall in love, seeking always for someone to openly and completely share their lives with? Even if a so-called "soul mate" is found, even if their love is as total and all-encompassing as is humanly possible, it will be lacking in some area or other. Unless, the two people are also in love with their Creator, the very author and source of love Himself. Human love can never be perfect. But if we allow God to love us, as He so desperately desires, and then love Him back the very best we can, our love will be elevated and its gaps filled in with God's very love. For as

the Apostle John explains in I John 4:8: “God is love”. And in 4:19: “We love because He first loved us”.

With all that in mind, then it's much easier to understand what we've been reading in Hosea, and in many other places in the Scriptures, as well as what Lord Jesus taught us in our Gospel lesson. For God did not make us because He needed us to worship Him, to sing songs to Him, to praise Him, tell Him how good He is, how much we “love” Him. Does He need us to love Him? Absolutely not. God needs nothing from us! He needs nothing at all. He is God. But He is love. And love loves to love!! God is so very great, and so very, very good! He is totally and absolutely lovable. Because He is love itself. If anyone knows Him, we love Him automatically because He is love itself. He is so awesome! So good! He is indescribably wonderful and perfect. Really knowing Him we can do nothing but love Him. Unless we're filled with evil. For as we know, the opposite of love is hate. And if one does not love God, then we are evil. We are hate itself, regardless of what kind of beautiful facade we put on. And that is exactly what the devil and his minions are. They once loved God, but when pride arises, that is, consciousness of self, ascribing of any kind of worth to one's self apart from God—that is what pride is—then love turns inside out as hate.

While love is the supreme force that attracts beings together in sublime contentment, hate is the strongest force that separates and drives people apart. And the ultimate separation is death it-

self. Hate inevitably craves the destruction and death of everything that is not itself, that does not serve its own desires and interests. Need an example? What about all the people marching in “pride” parades this past month? Pull out a Bible, tell them God loves them, and all of a sudden, they’ll start literally barking in your face, turn up their music and chanting, all to drown you out, and rip your Bible from your hands so they can tear it up and burn it. Yes, all these very things happened last month! Such people are literally not themselves. They’ve sinned and opened the door to their souls to the demons who hate God, and all things of God. Therefore, they hate all God’s people. If you stand up for God’s truth, read from His Word, you will be opposed. Violently. For these people are truly on “drugs”, demons that is who constantly egg them on to ever greater depravity and sin against God.

In our modern day, in this Age of Grace inaugurated with Christ Jesus’ self-sacrificial death on the cross, our sense of the absolute horror of sin has faded over the millennia. Especially in our own lifetimes, in these last few decades, depravity has accelerated and multiplied, because God’s timeline is quickly approaching the End of this Age. Because the devil knows his time to wreak havoc on this earth and its inhabitants is closing, he’s been pulling out all the stops. Even Franklin Graham prophesied that when his father, the Rev. Dr. Billy Graham passed from this earth into heaven, all the demons held captive in hell will be released to afflict mankind, they becoming the unwitting agents of

God's judgement on all humankind who hate Him. We're so much more surrounded by sin than we were even just 20 or 30 years ago. Things then were so much "nicer". Decent, We can all remember! How much better were things when Ardyce was young, she who has the honor of being the eldest among us! Many of you remember the days before television. But even early television broadcast wholesome entertainment, that reinforced God's laws. *Andy Griffith*, *Gomer Pyle*, *Leave It to Beaver*, etc., were shows that assumed people were familiar with God's laws and strove to obey them; that people knew what sin is and what virtue is. But how different things are now!

We've become desensitized to so much evil; all affected to some degree. We're so much more sullied by the influence of evil in our culture than we realize. What 50 years ago would have shocked and horrified us, much of it now we hardly blink an eye at. As our Lord prophesied in Matthew 24:12, our love has grown cold. Well, no more! As He admonished the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2, we must rekindle our love. Our love for Him. For the Kingdom of Heaven. Only in this way will America, and the world, be given more time to propagate the Gospel which saves men's souls that many more will be saved and receive eternal life before the great and terrible day of the Lord arrives when the seven years of the Tribulation come to their fiery end. Why else would our Lord tell us that we must love Him more than family? For some of our own family will reject us because we love God.

If, in order to please others, even family members, we do not lovingly stand up for God's love and truth, why, have we not in effect forsaken the Lord? This is what He means. Loving Him first, because He first loved us, is how we love others! For how can we truly love others, our families, without loving God first? He is the One Who shows us how to love them! He knows our families far better than we do. Loving God ensures that we will also truly love our families, with a pure love, with no mixed motives. Only then can we truly love them, and others.

Is your love for God somewhat cool? Love is *not* a feeling! Though we can feel it emotionally sometimes, love is a state of being. It's a decision. We will love God, even when we don't feel like it. Because He is worth it. So much more than worth it. Only He is worth it. Only He is worth all our love. Only then will His love then flow out from ourselves to those around us. And, truly, many of them, even most, will then respond to God's love shown to them through us, and they join God's family. That's what it's all about. This life, that is. God's plans and purposes are so magnificent that we can't even begin to imagine just how wondrous they are. Just to be in them, just to play even the tiniest part in them, which He has called each and every one of us to do, is the greatest privilege for us imaginable. So, don't be like the ancient Israelites. Don't be like the pitiable, oppressed and deceived souls around us. Instead, let the love and light of Christ shine through you. For the days are getting short! Time is running out!

