

Love's Call
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The Sadducees and Pharisees are taking turns. Each group tries to stump Jesus with their questions. To the astonishment of the crowds, Jesus has just silenced the Sadducees. Now the Pharisees huddle. What to say? What to say? Then a lawyer, who loves the repartee of give and take, jumps into the fray. "Teacher, what is the great commandment in the law?" High fives all along among Pharisees. Jesus speaks. He simply quotes two passages from the law. The Pharisee knows these words. And yet, He strikes a word at the very heart of the Pharisee.

As Jesus speaks about loving God and loving neighbor, the word and act are united in Him. In Jesus, the law is fully unveiled: the Word is Made Flesh. Even as He recites the call to love he reveals the call to love God and love man. Perfect love stands before them. His words break into this world of human constructs with the unwavering call of God.

As the word of Jesus resounds, the lawyer steps back. Winded. Even though he knows the command and can recite the words to the command and can even debate the command, he cannot obey the command. An expert of the law though he be, he is not a doer of the law. Each word, each invitation, each call to love God is but a stinging, burning rebuke to his pretense, his false expertise, his absolute failure to love God wholly and to love His neighbor as himself.

Even as God's command to love is revealed in Jesus' words and actions, the failure of Israel is also revealed. The very men who have devoted their lives to studying the law, applying the law, and rehearsing the law, stand outside the heart of the law. Love God with all your heart, and all your soul and all your strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.

These words expose the hypocrisy of the religious faithful, or the disciples of the Law. And yet, this revelation is also an invitation. Jesus invites the Pharisees into God's present action. God is unveiling perfect love this very moment in Jesus. Come and behold. God is calling you even now to enter into the fullness of love, loving Him with all your heart, soul, and mind. Loving your neighbor as yourself.

For some Pharisees, the penetrating words enflame their resistance. For others, the call comes as an invitation to leave behind the false loves of Egypt, of Babylon, of the cities of man, for the one united love of God.

Even now, as we look back and remember this story through the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is looking out, addressing us a community, addressing us as individuals. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." ³⁸ This is the first and

great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’
⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Every week we rehearse these words. Every week we confess that we do not love God or our neighbor as we ought. Every week we look with hope during the Great Eucharist, anticipating the healing power of Christ to redeem and restore His people.

Every week the call to love goes forth. Today Jesus is addressing us. If we but pause even for a moment at the totality of this command, we realize how awesome, how overwhelming, how absolute is the call of God to His people. This call to love is relentless and devastating. There are no experts in the way of love. We all fall short.

No matter how much I say or explain or define or clarify, my words cannot substitute for our response to God’s call to love, for the mark of living out our discipleship in word and deed. Let me rehearse the command again, so we might hear the unwavering call, the unhesitant expectation, the unfulfilled command of Jesus: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

As I have reflected upon these words, rehearsed these words, studied these words, I am convicted. I am convicted of heart so cold before God, of a life so consumed with my own desires. My first temptation may be to step away from the directness of the call and suggest, Jesus never meant for us to obey the command. Jesus commands such total obedience because He knows that I will fail, you will fail, we all will fail, and thus we are driven to the throne of mercy and grace.

Time after time, I’ve heard people say that the law, the 10 commandments, are given to expose our own sinfulness and thus that is the purpose of giving them. There is some truth to the reality that we fall short, we are not perfect in love, so we do disobey, we love incompletely, we follow in part, we are duplicitous say one thing and acting another way.

And yet, does this mean we discard the call of Christ? The fact that we rehearse this command every Sunday should be a reminder that we have not turned from the call, but recognize that this call for total obedience in our thinking, feeling, and acting is an ever present call. Christ is calling today and everyday to follow me. Follow me into the fullness of love. Follow me into the way of perfect love.

In the letter of first John, we are not only commanded to love but we are reminded that, “He who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 John 4:8). How can I say that I know God who I have not seen, if I cannot love my brother who I have seen? The call of Christ to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and to love your

neighbor as yourself” is repeated in various ways all across the New Testament. The cause is unrelenting, unceasing, ever present.

Today the call sounds forth afresh.

Here are four things we might consider in this call to Love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, and with all our mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. In these words, I hear

1. The Call to Examine of Our Lives
2. The Call to Let Go of Our Attachments
3. The Call to Behold the Beautiful One
4. The Call to Live in the Dance

The Call to Examination of Our Lives

The call of Jesus to love should provoke real and genuine examination of our hearts.

“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!” (Psalm 139:23). As we seek to practice times of Sabbath rest and remembrance, it might be helpful to pause with this Scripture. Read it aloud. Listen to it. Ask the Lord to reveal your heart. I personally am asking Him to expose the coldness and deadness within. As I pray for His Spirit to speak, I read over the command.

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

In morning prayer, while I am driving, while I am waiting in line, I rehearse the command in my thoughts, asking God to teach me, to examine me, and to lead me into the freedom of His love. I may repeat this for several days or several months. As I listen, I ask questions,

Has my love grown cold? Is my life of faith living or virtually non-existent? Paul exhorts us, “whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). Am I living a life unto God’s glory? Are my thoughts directed toward the Lord? Do I meditate upon “whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy” (Philippians 4:8). Or am I more likely to think about people who irritate, problems that plague me. Does complaint flow more often than thanks? Are my affections directed toward the Lord?

The goal of these questions is not guilt or condemnation. It is simply to pause and wait and listen, allowing the Lord to convict me. Oddly enough, the command may come back to mind in the middle of the afternoon in a meeting or when I am standing in line or even in the middle of a conversation, I may suddenly feel the prick of the Holy Spirit.

When I feel the conviction of the Spirit, I ask Him to cleanse me, heal me, restore me. There are times when He may reveal a deeper brokenness in my own heart. These damages are false attachments that can drain my love for God and distract my pursuit of God.

The Call to Let Go of Our Attachments

We can grow attached to broken patterns of thinking, desiring, feeling and acting. Our minds and hearts can be overly occupied with disappointments, desires, complaints, frustrations, lusts, pride, anger, unforgiveness and more. These thoughts, these passions can consume our hearts, causing us to grow cold in our love toward God, toward our spouses, toward the people around us. Some of these attachments are big things like controlling sins that endanger our souls, but others are little things. Little distractions.

Someone compliments my outfit. The compliment might attach to me as pride or lust. Someone else insults me and the insult attaches. When I think of them I am offended. Throughout the course of the day, various encounters with people and places and emotions may cause attachments. These little, virtually unnoticeable attachments collect around my soul, hindering the free flow of God's love. Think of them like refrigerator magnets. My mom's refrigerator is covered with so many magnets, you can barely see the door.

Our souls can be covered with all sorts of little attachments that cause pride, anger, cause prejudice, discouragement. Instead of loving freely, we respond to a multitude of filters that can distort our true perception and diminish our ability to love.

These attachments, these passions, prevent us from loving freely. Thus for every act, there may be a series of hidden motives: some of which I can see and others that are not so clear. I act to protect my pride. I act to exact revenge. I act to fulfill a longing for acceptance. I act at the impulse of lusts. And in all these actions, I might outwardly be acting in the name of the Lord. A.W. Tozer warns that the selfish man glories behind the pulpit and kneeling at the alter.

Paul suggests in I Corinthians 13, that a person can do all manner of kindnesses even giving his body to be burned and still not really love. God calls us into the freedom of His love and then makes a way for us to know and live in that love. We should ask God to reveal this patterns of brokenness, and lead us into His healing. This is where the voice of a spiritual director can help expose these areas to the light of God's Word.

The Call to Behold the Beautiful One

As we seek to be cleansed and healed, we also need to behold the beauty of the Lord. As we meditate upon the Word of God, we ask for eyes to see and ears to hear the good and beautiful news again. Consider the Gospel of John. Here we behold a love that flows between the Father and the Son. We behold a self-giving love that is free and unattached. The Spirit of God

embodies that love, and the Father, Son and Spirit love in a self-sacrificing flow of continuous delight.

While we can never fully grasp the wonder and glory of this love; we do see glimpses. The Son comes to reveal this love on earth. He reveals this love most fully in the cross. As Son approaches the cross, he acknowledges that the hour of glorification is at hand. The Son reveals that the cross is the fullest, clearest image of God's love on earth. It is completely free, completely abandoned, completely unhindered, and completely poured out. Even as He dies, love and forgiveness continue pouring from His lips.

So as we pray and seek the Lord, we ask Him to reveal the beauty of His love. We pray alongside the Apostle Paul's prayer,

“...after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.” (Ephesians 1:15-21)

The Call to Live in the Dance (perichoresis)

As we catch but a glimpse of this hope in Christ, we may begin to see how Paul could talk about all things being gathered together in one, all things gathered together in Christ (Ephesians 1:10). The call into Christ is a call into the love of Father, Son and Spirit. The Church Fathers used the word perichoresis to describe this ever-flowing love of God. Perichoresis is sometimes understood as a loving dance between Father, Son and Spirit. In the dance, we cannot distinguish between Father, Son and Spirit. They are one, and yet they are three.

The Church Fathers suggested that in Christ, God has call all creation and all the spheres into a dance of love. The whole cosmos is created to reflect the loving dance of God. Every particular person and thing in creation is distinct and yet all are created to move in a harmony of love. As our eyes and ears are healed in Christ, we see glimpses of God's love at the heart of all things. Whether we look at the trees outside, the sky above, or even the people around us, we behold the great grace of God. When we speak of mission in this world, we might think of our service as participating in the dance of love.

I pray that we would hear this call of Christ into love with fresh ears and open hearts. As we meditate upon the call to love the Lord with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind, might offer our lives anew as living sacrifices to worship to the Lord and serve one another. I pray that even as we lie down to rest tonight and tomorrow night and the night ahead, we will feel the weight of the call to love, may we feel convicted of any unforgiveness, any bitterness, any thoughts or attachments that keep us from loving.

I pray that His words will greet us as we awake. That His words will call us forth into a new day, set apart unto Christ. That we might discover the reality of living out His call to love wholly and completely as we follow Christ into our responsibilities of the day, our activities, our leisure time, our family time. I pray that we might all set aside a real and honest time of Sabbath waiting, asking Christ to convict us of our lovelessness and to reveal to us the beauty of His holiness, the glory of His perfect love. May His Spirit lead us into worship and out from worship into action, into love with the world around us.

Might this call provoke our entire church as we seek to live out Sabbath and mission, might our times of worship, our times of mission and service to the community, our times together be characterized by love, fullness of love, perfect love,

For we reveal His glory, His joy, His perfect as we are transformed into love. As St Paul prays,

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.