

Faith, Hope & Love—Part45

1 John 4:7

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

As a part of our study on God's divine *agape* love, I promised we would dive a bit further in to our relationships and understand how the love and intimacy we are to know and experience with one another in Christ translates or crosses over into such things as dating and marriage. From the onset, I want you to understand that I believe we, the generic "we," have this all upside down and inside out. Both in secular culture and most definitely in our "Christian" culture, we have been taught that the relational constructs of dating, engagement, and marriage provide the only practical forum for us to be truly known and loved. Yet, that is not a Biblical perspective; it is a "world" view, a demonic perversion, intended to keep us hoping and believing that if we can only find the right person then things in our life will be good, safe, secure, and satisfied. It is a fiction and it is a lie.

1 John 3:23-24 says, "This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him." We have focused intently on what it means to believe in the name; but we cannot forget that we are also to love one another, just as He commanded us. And in **John 15:12**, He commands us to love and continue to love one another, just as we have always, from beginning

to end, been loved by Jesus. This involves:

- Choosing and pursuing one another all the while considering others as more important than yourself. This means making decisions by what you know is over all best for the other person not just what is best for the moment and definitely not based on what is best for you.
- Always speaking the truth to one another not with the desire to get your way; rather, to build up, encourage, correct, and to save another from hurting themselves with lies and deviations from the truth—to protect them from themselves and the places of blindness where they don't see as they should.
- Refusing to be rude, manipulative, deceptive, or to lie to one another.
- Extending true freedom in the relationship where the other person has the freedom to choose you in return, or to walk away; and you do not demand that they choose you because you chose them.
- Standing with one another and not leaving just because they may be going through great difficulties and have failed or disappointed you. Refusing to moving on to what you consider to be a better or an easier deal.
- Being true to your word and commitments; being willing to sacrifice your life for one another. This sacrifice involves time, emotion, money, possessions, convenience, and so on.
- Being the first one to lay down your self-protection and control to enable room within your soul to truly be known and loved. Foregoing your dysfunctional coping mechanisms, knowing that they act like a substitute which prevents you from having and experiencing true intimacy with one

another. And doing both of these things regardless of whether or not the other person joins you. Taking that risk for the sake of love.

- Taking responsibility for the places within a person's soul to which they have entrusted you. This is not a passive venture, but requires a very active level of commitment and care. You must be willing to confront and fight for one another, with one another, especially when the other person doesn't have the strength to fight for themselves or the relationship.
- Being willing to comfort and care for one another through trials, afflictions, and great failures—even repeated failures. Being willing to rejoice with one another in their successes.
- Being willing to communicate, communicate some more, and continue to communicate even when the person is stuck and is having such a hard time. Sharing your thoughts, wisdom, emotions, ideas, dreams, while seeking out the thoughts, wisdom, emotions, ideas, and dreams of one another.
- Knowing one another inside and out, and being committed just the same. Knowing what makes one another sad, upset, what gives joy, brings pleasure, etc. Accepting one another believing they are special because Jesus brought them into your life. Learning how to delight in one another.
- Learning how to be battle partners fighting the enemy side by side or back to back and sticking with each other throughout the duration of the skirmish, the battle, or the war.
- Walking with another as they travel through the Valley of the Shadow of Death. Death is not easy and it is not pretty. But everyone needs a patient

companion during this time. And when a person blows it with you, being the first to extend relationship, forgiveness, and acceptance. Don't make them have to earn their place back with you. Don't punish them for failing, but encouraging them helping them learn how to succeed.

- If however they don't want to succeed, don't want the relationship, and have decided to just do their own thing and go their own way, being willing to let them go.

This is how we are to love. After all, it is how we have been loved. I want you to consider, just dream with me for a moment, the level of intimacy and affection that will be shared when you love in this way. It will be full, complete, satisfying, safe, secure, and beyond anything you have experienced. And by definition of its selfless nature, and what we studied in **2 Timothy 2:22-23**, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart," it will be godly and holy and absent of the corruption of sexual immorality. And remember, although this may seem like a dream, according to **1 John 4:8** ("The one who does not now love in this manner does not know God, for God is love") this is the standard for determining whether or not you truly even now know Jesus—to determine if you now actually walk in the Spirit or are still abiding in the *flesh* (even if your *flesh* has learned how to act and speak like one who knows God). To love as you have been loved is the benchmark. This kind of love transcends all manner of relational boundaries.

I want you to understand, marriage in-and-of-itself cannot create a forum for this type of intimacy, much less engagement or dating. There is only one construct which creates a natural forum for the giving and receiving of God's divine *agape*

love and that is relationships amongst the “**Beloved.**” To know this love, you must first be one who is a recipient, an object so to speak, of the *agape* love of the Lord. This means, according to **1 John 4:13**, you must be filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, **Romans 8:9** makes it clear: if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them, he does not belong to Christ. If you are truly the Beloved, then this type of love, intimacy, and depth of relationship is to be the standard—the norm—in terms of your relationships with the Beloved, regardless of any other sort of human relational construct like marriage, family, or parenthood. That is why Jesus redefines family, marriage, and parenthood in such scriptures as: **Matthew 10:37; 12:48-50; Luke 12:51-53, 14:26**. In Christ, relationships are to be defined by one, and only one, criteria: those who do the will of the Father.

Beloved let us love one another. The sad tragedy is that intimacy of this kind of love is mostly unknown in the realms of Christianity. In part it is because Christianity has been a tool of the enemy to perpetuate this strange covetousness that believes marriage is the answer, the solution, and that all would be good if we could just find the right person. So people rush into marriage, believing they are in love, with a set of expectations that just cannot be met. After all, they enter into marriage while still living behind their walls of self-protection; and marriage has no power, in-and-of-itself, to take down these walls. In fact, because of the increased vulnerability (that comes with things like sex), marriage more often than not amplifies self-protection.

Besides, we have learned that our mortal enemy is fear—a fear that is deeply rooted in our wrong belief and unbelief surrounding the pain we have experienced in life. Unfortunately, fear has such a grip on our souls and is so powerful that unless

one is willing to be seriously subjected to the fire of judgment and the knife of circumcision, unless one is willing to re-define their relationship with the pain they have endured, there is no way they will be convinced it is safe to come out from behind their walls of self-protection. Why would they; they have no grasp of what it means to be safe and secure any other way.

Therefore, when their dreams and hopes of intimacy—of being truly known and loved—does not come to fruition, they dig in deeper behind their walls and most settle for mediocrity—what we would call “normal” life. Then they seek for the next potential solution to their need for intimacy and love. For men, it is usually found in their jobs and for women it is usually found in their desire to have kids. As we have seen, kids tragically far too often become the place where a woman tries to get everything she had once hoped and dreamed she could get from her husband. And it is a sad and awful day when she realizes she cannot get it from her kids either; and by that time the kids are really messed up. It is a sad cycle that keeps going and going and going. And when it is all said and done, there is little true contentment and satisfaction.

So what does the Bible actually say about marriage? We are going to study the truth—the good, the bad, and the ugly. However, I have to ask you to please, for your sake, be willing to submit yourself to the truth even though parts of it may cause you to be very uncomfortable. Don't perpetuate the lie and the fantasy, for it will come back to bite you and its bite hurts. Believe me, I know firsthand the sting that comes from believing the lie.

First of all marriage is a good thing; it is not something to be despised. **Proverbs 18:22.** “He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord.”

God places such a high value on this relationship that when Israel first entered the Promised Land, God established a boundary to protect this covenant of marriage during a time of national war. **Deuteronomy 24:5**, “When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken.” Marriage is also a covenant that transcends human constructs of law and order as it is a covenant established by God. **Matthew 19:4-6**, “Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.” This is why **Hebrews 13:4** says that “Marriage is to be held in honor among all.”

But as we know, even what is good can be corrupted. **Proverbs 12:4**, “An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who shames him is like rottenness in his bones.” **Proverbs 19:13**, “...the contentions of a wife are a constant dripping.” **Proverbs 27:15-16**, “A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike; he who would restrain her restrains the wind, and grasps oil with his right hand.” Clearly, Solomon had serious women issues, but he does bring out the reality versus the fantasy when it comes to married life.

Let’s turn to **1 Corinthians 7:1-16** and **25-40** where the Spirit gives us a treatise on how we are to view marriage. This is practical instruction to those who are single and to those who are married. It is hard core. And quite frankly, not many people are able to abide by its wisdom, even though it is wisdom from the Holy Spirit. Now keep in mind, this passage does not alter the fact that marriage is a good thing and

is a blessing from God, it just gives us the perspective of how we should view marriage if we were to truly live as aliens and strangers in this world. I believe this passage **assumes** that we learn to love the Beloved as we have been loved and therefore are full, content, satisfied, safe, and secure in our relationships experiencing great intimacy. Thus, marriage is not posited as the means to find intimacy and relational fulfillment. Rather, it is put forth as a means to fulfill the need for sex; almost as a concession, a safe-guard, against the unruly lusts within our soul. But it is not depicted as the epitome of human—or Christian—relationship; not at all.

1 Corinthians 7:1-6

Now regarding the questions you asked in your letter. Yes, it is good to live a celibate life. But because there is so much sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. The husband should fulfill his wife's sexual needs, and the wife should fulfill her husband's needs. The wife gives authority over her body to her husband, and the husband gives authority over his body to his wife. Do not deprive each other of sexual relations, unless you both agree to refrain from sexual intimacy for a limited time so you can give yourselves more completely to prayer. Afterward, you should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt you because of your lack of self-control. I say this as a concession, not as a command.

Paul starts by saying it is good to be single, but it is not ok to engage in sexual

relationships outside of marriage. Sex is reserved by God for the marriage relationship. **Romans 13:13-14** says, “Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.” And **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.” Thus, sex is for marriage and marriage is for sex. But marriage is a concession for those whose lust is simply too much.

1 Corinthians 7:7-9

But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. But God gives to some the gift of marriage, and to others the gift of singleness. So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust.

Now, we cannot conclude that just because some desire to get married that they

are weak and are not as spiritual as people who desire to stay single. However, Paul, through the Spirit, definitely full-on states that being single is better and that marriage is a concession for those who burn with lust. But the Spirit also makes the point that marriage is a gift that comes from God, just as is singleness. Jesus talked about this in **Matthew 19:8-12** when He addressed the statement by His disciples that “it is better not to marry.” He said some are born to be single, some are created this way by men, and still some choose to not marry for the sake of the kingdom of God. In other words, not all men can accept the statement that “it is better not to marry.” But He says, “He who is able to accept this, let him accept it.” This is a command; however, “able” is in the *present passive participle*. So we know that singleness is a gift provided by God.

But do you understand the implication of this statement? This means that marriage is not your right and it is not something to which you are by default entitled. It is a gift. Many people however take it into their own hands without truly asking the Lord about this gift. Accordingly, far too many believers have viewed marriage as a right, a Christian expectation and responsibility even, something you naturally do at a certain age, what you are entitled to and what God owes you. This has led many to get married almost as a personal, cultural, and religious mandate without ever really understanding what God had for them.

Marriage is not a right, it is a gift. When the Father grants this gift it is good and it is a blessing. But when you take this gift into your own hands, it is a minefield of trouble. Further, the receipt of this gift does not mean you will experience intimacy, unity, and love as you have always fantasied. You will however be authorized to have sex and to live with a man or a woman, which is a good thing. But as most

married couples know, even sex can be a very lonely and painful experience if there is not relational unity, intimacy, and the kind of love which is to be the standard among the Beloved. In fact, sex can be one of the most emotionally vapid and lifeless experiences of your life. My point is marriage does not equal automatic intimacy and love. Such an experience can only be achieved down the pathway of death where you crucify your selfishness and tear down the walls of self-protection and learn to love the Beloved as you have been loved.

Using the metaphor of a great meal, your relationships with the Beloved is the meat and what you get in marriage is the whip cream and the cherry—you know what I mean. It is not the other way around. Intimacy and God's *agape* love is not reserved for marriage, it is reserved for the Beloved. Marriage provides the opportunity to know a person through sexuality. It is a powerful potential able to connect us to the depth of how God loves the church, but it does not provide the answer to the relational craving in our soul.

1 Corinthians 7:10-16

But for those who are married, I have a command that comes not from me, but from the Lord. A wife must not leave her husband. But if she does leave him, let her remain single or else be reconciled to him. And the husband must not leave his wife. Now, I will speak to the rest of you, though I do not have a direct command from the Lord. If a Christian man has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to continue living with him, he must not leave her. And if a Christian woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to continue living with her, she must not leave him. For the Christian wife brings holiness to her

marriage, and the Christian husband brings holiness to his marriage. Otherwise, your children would not be holy, but now they are holy. (But if the husband or wife who isn't a believer insists on leaving, let them go. In such cases the Christian husband or wife is no longer bound to the other, for God has called you to live in peace.) Don't you wives realize that your husbands might be saved because of you? And don't you husbands realize that your wives might be saved because of you?

This is a hard pill to swallow and it is why Jesus' disciples said, "...it is better not to marry." The point is that if you jump into marriage and it does not turn out to be what you had hoped, you are not free to just leave and move on. You have made a covenant before God; and, as He said, what God has joined together, let no man separate. God may choose to create separation, but that is not something we can determine because we are unhappy. Therefore, as your Shepherd, I must say, you need to be sure you have been given the gift of marriage and He has chosen the one you are to marry, or else it could be a long, painful, and horrific experience.

1 Corinthians 7:25-31

Now regarding your question about the young women who are not yet married. I do not have a command from the Lord for them. But the Lord in his mercy has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you. Because of the present crisis, I think it is best to remain as you are. If you have a wife, do not seek to end the marriage. If you do not have a wife, do not seek to get married.

But if you do get married, it is not a sin. And if a young woman gets married, it is not a sin. However, those who get married at this time will have troubles, and I am trying to spare you those problems. But let me say this, dear brothers and sisters: The time that remains is very short. So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage. Those who weep or who rejoice or who buy things should not be absorbed by their weeping or their joy or their possessions. Those who use the things of the world should not become attached to them. For this world as we know it will soon pass away.

Paul introduces something here that is to tie our perspective of marriage to our living as aliens and strangers in a world where time is running out. He makes it clear it is not a sin to get married, but seeking to enter into or to exit a marriage is not to be our focus because of the present crisis or present distress. Yet, how many people in our body and across Christianity at large that are obsessed with getting married. They are constantly looking for that guy or that girl believing that it is the answer and will somehow provide what they are missing. This is a wrong perspective and a wrong belief; and, as result, they miss out on the life God does have for them. And instead of living content as a single person trusting the Lord's will, they live in consternation and distress thinking that God is withholding from them. Again, this is a lie of the devil which keeps us from truly living and keeps us obsessed upon ourselves and the "Me."

Now in terms of this statement "present crisis" or "present distress," don't be confused. This translation is horrible and it leads people to believe that Paul was dealing with a present situation that was unique to the Corinthians, which from our

perspective no longer applies. In other words, they had motivation to be single, they were probably being persecuted; but we don't. This translation of "present" is simply insufficient and does not capture the rendering of the Greek, which is in the *perfect active participle*. It would better be translated as the "on-hand" distress that will continue and continue to be "on hand." Thus, this perspective is as true for the Corinthians as it is for each of us. This is why Paul said that the time which remains is shortened and continues to be shortened by God (rendered in the *perfect passive participle*). Thus, the implication is that we don't have time to be obsessed with marriage. There is so much more going on, and people's lives are literally at stake. We must consider the time we are living in—the time of the end and act accordingly.

Now this next part is going to freak you out. I warned you that it would be very uncomfortable. Our translation of **7:29** says, "So from now on, those with wives should not focus only on their marriage." The translators were afraid to say it like it literally is in the Greek: Those who have wives should now be as though they had none and continue to have none. This clearly does not mean a man should ignore their wife or a wife their husband. Rather, it is a statement on priority and perspective. I know the modern folk lore of our Christian culture demands that marriage and family be the first priority. But the Spirit of God does not agree with man. The Spirit wants us to focus on what God has called each of us to do individually, and what He calls a couple to do jointly. But it is not a given that if you are married God is only going to give you assignments that are for both of you; in fact, I believe that is a total fantasy. Your attitude should be one that is not tied to this world and the duties and obligations of this world, but tied to the role God has

given you in the Kingdom and the assignments He has set aside for you. A true idyllic Christian marriage must be defined by this truth not by folk lore. Those who have wives should now be as they had none. This is to be your attitude and perspective freeing you to honor the work God has for your spouse and securing you in the work He has for you.

1 Corinthians 7:32-35

I want you to be free from the concerns of this life. An unmarried man can spend his time doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please him. But a married man has to think about his earthly responsibilities and how to please his wife. His interests are divided. In the same way, a woman who is no longer married or has never been married can be devoted to the Lord and holy in body and in spirit. But a married woman has to think about her earthly responsibilities and how to please her husband. I am saying this for your benefit, not to place restrictions on you. I want you to do whatever will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible.

Again, Paul through the Spirit is not dissing marriage in-and-of-itself. He does not write these things to bind you in some legalistic chain or some twisted hierarchy of holiness based on singleness. His instruction is to establish your perspective on life and marriage and the Kingdom. The Lord places a greater emphasis on the things of His Kingdom than He does on the things of this earthly life, including marriage. It's as if marriage is a concession for our lives on this earth (and it is good and

beautiful); but our focus as aliens and strangers is not to be our life on this earth. We must never make the mistake of making our abode in this world; we are to be free from the concerns of this world. Thus, if we are seeking happiness, fulfillment, and contentment through marriage instead of through loving the Beloved as we have been loved, then we risk being distracted in our lives with divided loyalties. And there is no guarantee that if you choose to pursue the things of the Kingdom of God that your spouse will want to join you. Your spouse may want to have fun, have kids, go on vacations, and just do life as a married couple. In that case, you will either compromise or be divided and live in conflict and stress. That is why Paul says he is writing to save us from this type of pain. Your goal should be to live in a manner that will help you serve the Lord best, with as few distractions as possible. For some, marriage will provide this; but for others marriage will be the biggest distraction in the world.

1 Corinthians 7:36-40

But if a man thinks that he's treating his fiancée improperly and will inevitably give in to his passion, let him marry her as he wishes. It is not a sin. But if he has decided firmly not to marry and there is no urgency and he can control his passion, he does well not to marry. So the person who marries his fiancée does well, and the person who doesn't marry does even better. A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If her husband dies, she is free to marry anyone she wishes, but only if he loves the Lord. But in my opinion it would be better for her to stay single, and I think I am giving you counsel from God's Spirit when I say this.

When it says that the person who doesn't marry does even better, it should probably be translated as "has an advantage," and it is to be understood in the context of seeking first the Kingdom of God. The single person can be undistracted to seek the Lord, to truly listen to His voice, and to do only what He tells them to do, say only what He tells them to say, and go only where He tells them to go, nothing more and nothing less. The married person will always be conflicted by nature of the marriage relationship. Clearly, there is a premium to living single, at least when it comes to the Kingdom of God.

The cultural notions surrounding a Christian marriage have been so perverted. Marriage is a gift, it is not a right or something to which you are automatically entitled. For the Beloved, marriage is to be exclusively for those ***who are in the Lord***. We are not free to marry those who are not from among the Beloved. Marriage however is never be our obsession; it is only to be embraced if God grants it to you; and then it is to be received as a blessing. But even then, it must not be your obsession and it must not take away from what God has called you, or your spouse, to do in terms of the Kingdom of God. Again, there is no indication that God is going to call you both to the very same tasks; so don't make that assumption. In fact, the implication is just the opposite. The time is short and God is making it shorter. Thus, what matters is not the affairs of this earth, but the affairs of the Kingdom. He wants us to live as aliens and strangers undivided in heart, undivided in spirit, and undivided in purpose. To the extent that this can be accomplished in marriage and God provides it, yay! But to the extent marriage distracts and takes away from this focus, it is not to your advantage.

As I said at the beginning, I believe this instruction by the Spirit, as hard as it may be, is premised on the idea that you have many, many relationships (with the Beloved) where you are full, complete, satisfied, known, safe, and secure because you are being loved by others as they have been loved by God, and vice versa. You are able to love the Beloved, unrestricted, as you have been loved by God. He has made relational provision for you in the body of Christ and He wants you to accept it and enjoy it. Then if He adds marriage, great; it will be a beautiful gift. And if He does not, you are going to be ok. He will enable you. But I have tell you, unless you learn to love (and be loved) as He has loved you, marriage will not satisfy; it will only amplify the hurt, pain, and loneliness in your soul. Only Jesus as He lives in and through the Beloved can satisfy our soul.

I want to make one other comment. It seems that almost every Christian girl, at one time or another, believes God told her she will be married to the man of her dreams; and they live for this promise. The frequency that this happens seems out of line in terms of what we just learned about God's perspective of marriage. Perhaps such "words" came from their own minds, emotions, or from spirits not submitted to God. If you have heard this promise, it may be true; time will tell. But it may not be. Regardless, your focus should not be on marriage. If the promise was from God, He will fulfill it as He always does what He says, it is just a matter of time. In the meantime, focus your undivided attention on doing the Lord's work and thinking how to please Him. That is to be your obsession, not getting married. And there is only one way to please the Lord, by faith: the faith that leads to hope, the hope that leads to love. And love is the answer. Beloved, let us love one another.

Let's Pray