

Love in Relationships and Ministry

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Many times when we think we are giving something away it is simply passing from our hands to our neck. It has changed shape and become a noose. Much of the misery in our lives is made from the miserable responses that we have to the situations we face. When we face a difficult matter, we must decide what to do about it. Even ignoring the situation is really doing something. It is a response.

From the center of what is now Turkey through to the southern shore of the Black Sea is an area that was called Galatia in the first century. Paul wrote a letter to the congregations in Galatia that he had helped create by evangelizing there. In the letter, he was contending with people who had infiltrated the Galatians' fellowships with a false gospel of salvation. The bad teaching the infiltrators were trying to convince the people to believe included the idea that gentiles had to become Jews before they could become sons and daughters of God through salvation. Paul reminded the Galatians that they had become sons and daughters by being born of God through faith in the sacrifice of Jesus. He reminded them, that just as they had been reborn through faith, they *lived their new lives* by faith in the power of the Spirit of God to keep them from sin, and in His power to lead them into love and ministry.

Paul gave the Galatians two lists. They contrasted behavior that was based on attitudes and strengths that were influenced by the sin that lived in their flesh with the righteous behavior that they could enjoy when they were influenced by the Holy Spirit, Who lived in their spirits, and wanted to influence them. In chapter 5, the first list, which he called the "desires of the flesh", or in other translations, the "works of the flesh", begins in verse 19. This list includes adultery (sex with a person married to someone else), fornication (sex with an unmarried person), drunkenness, murder, envy, jealousy, fits of rage, idolatry, witchcraft, causing divisions between other people, and selfish ambitions. The other list, which he called the "fruit of the Spirit," starts in verse 22: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, being full of faith, gentleness, and self-control.

In every situation we face, we make a response, even if it is simply to ignore the situation. Our responses are empowered by or led by influences that help us make decisions about how to respond. If we are more given to bitterness, selfishness, fear, or pride, our flesh or an unclean spirit can influence us to respond with actions like the ones Paul called the "works of the flesh." If we are more interested in attitudes and actions that please the Holy Spirit, He can influence our responses to be formed by what Paul called the "fruit of the Spirit". If we respond to life's events with our flesh's value system, we will be very miserable, and so will anyone who is in range of our influence. If we instead respond with the Holy Spirit's value system, we will not have a problem with any situation we might face, no matter how terrible or destructive it is. If we respond with the Holy Spirit's peace, we

have peace. If we let Him work in our hearts to respond with patience, we have patience as a result, and so on.

What we seem to be dispensing toward the situation is what we are really receiving. Our response is our possession in the end. If we launch a fit of rage at a situation, we, as a result, have in our hearts and minds and even in our bodies, rage. It makes us emotionally, mentally, and/or physically ill. If we release peace toward a situation, no matter how bad it was, we have as our possession peace. It, likewise, will affect our hearts and minds and/or bodies. It brings us life.

It is the same for any fruit of His Spirit. They are evidences of His presence. They are manifestations of Him - little revelations of Him that we are bringing into the earth in our area. We are not only drawing ourselves out of the pit that the bad situation could have left us in, but, by completely submitting to His power to respond, we can even be brought up into the place of serving Him in the situation. We can bring life to others by the Life we access from His Spirit. What Paul called "the fruit of His Spirit" is our power to minister - to serve our Dad in Heaven in His ministry of reconciliation that He gives us the privilege of joining Him in.

My responses to situations are either the source my life or the source of my problems in life. Depending on their source, they are the power to accomplish ministry or the power to imprison myself or others in cages of sin and despair. If I am talking to a person about their failure, and I am presenting the truth through the response filter of bitterness, or selfish ambition or pride, it is likely that I will simply leave them condemned and bound instead of free from the oppression. I will also be bound, by my carnal response. In his letter to the churches in Rome, Paul wrote in chapter 8 that to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace (vs 6). He did not say that it would lead to death, but that it was death to have our minds empowered by fleshly values. Likewise, being spiritually minded is life and peace.

Maturity emotionally, socially, and spiritually can be measured by how likely we are to respond to events and influences in our lives with what Paul listed as "the fruit of the Spirit." Having our hearts and minds given over to these response-influencers makes us stable, trust-worthy, and not only useful in, but powerful in the Kingdom of God. The measure of the speed at which I submit to the leading of the Spirit in my response is what I suggest indicates my maturity.

Imagine a person who faces a very difficult situation. Because of their strongholds and experiences, this person's first response is to seriously want to take the life of the person who caused the situation. Another person is facing a terrible situation, but their response is not to care about the problem, even though the Spirit would like to lead them to be involved and help. Measuring the two responses, the murderous one would seem worse than the lazy one.

Imagine, though, that the first person quickly submits to the Spirit leading them to repent of the desire to see their persecutor dead, and the lazy person takes a few weeks to repent of laziness and do what the Spirit wanted to empower them to do. I am saying that the first person is more mature in the spirit than the second. They more quickly turned to the influence of the fruit of the Spirit of God.

As we interact with other people as ministers of the gospel of reconciliation, we will encounter people who are influenced by many forces other than the Holy Spirit. They may be demonized, their minds broken by sin and curses, they may simply be immature and influenced by sin and death in their flesh. If their responses to our presence or to our ministries fit into what Paul called the works of their flesh, they will present us with challenges to which we, then, must respond. If their responses are not the fruit of the Spirit, their responses are works of their flesh. We must remember this as we listen to them.

Evil coming from them is about them, because it is about their flesh and their carnal minds. It is not about us. Even if what they are saying about us happens to describe something that is true about a failure or weakness of ours, if their intent is to degrade or attack us, what is happening is about them, not us, because it is their flesh at work. Just like our bad responses to situations become our possessions, theirs become their possessions. Their carnal responses to us belong to them, not us. We cannot accept them as about us. We cannot “own” them and allow them to become burdens or weights to our hearts or minds. What we allow to influence us are the truths that our God says are true about us, not the bitterness that others may allow into their hearts. It may influence them, but it cannot influence us. Their carnal responses to their lives and to our lives are about them.

Greek philosophers had different words for what they perceived to be different types of what we call love. Some of these words appear in the New Testament. We show little discernment by translating them each as “love.”

One is “agape,” which describes a love that is completely about its target. It needs no thanks, it is not seeking payment for service, but considers the opportunity to serve to be a privilege. Another is “phileo.” It describes a family love; a tribal love. It may require acceptance in the tribe or benefits of the family relationship before being willing to make sacrifices or to serve the tribe or a member of it. In the last chapter of the good news John recorded, there is a scene on a beach where Jesus asked Peter, “Do you agape Me?” Peter replied, “Lord you know that I phileo You!” His answer was a contrast from the question like: “Do you love me with all your heart?” “Well, I *do* like you... You are like family to me.”

A third Greek word denoting a type of love is “eros.” The word “erotic” appropriately comes from this root word. The American understanding of “erotic,” however, inappropriately comes from Victoria’s Secret and the pornography industry. To use this word as if this was its only meaning is equal to declaring that fruit = apples with no exceptions. Eros means “desire.” It could describe my relationship with French vanilla ice cream, my enjoyment of

my job, or my desire to spend time with you because you make me feel good about myself or about life when you are around. Its target is my pleasure or my comfort or my satisfaction. It is all about me.

When we love someone with agape, our love is completely about them. If it is about us, it is desire (eros), not agape. Most marriages in the United States fail. Most of the failures are the result of being built on desire rather than being built on love. If I love a person, I want them to benefit from my love even if I do not get to enjoy any benefit myself. I may not get credit for loving them, but that cannot stop my love, because love does not seek its own benefit - it seeks the benefit of its target. If I am expecting something in return for loving a person, it is no longer love that I have for them, but love that I have for myself. I can love you for thirty years without being loved by you, and find that my love for you is undiminished. It is because my love is all about you. If I throw a party for people I hope will be influenced to in return invite me to their next party, I am simply purchasing my next invitation to a party. If I agape you, and I give you a gift that you do not appreciate, I will simply be more motivated to find what you will appreciate and give you that, not be moved to stop giving you gifts.

In my opportunities to serve others, to minister to them, I will sometimes find the gift the Spirit led me to give them wadded and thrown in a trash can the next day. I may give someone a warm coat and find that it was sold for money which was then used to purchase drugs. My costly offerings must truly be considered gifts, or I am in danger of being crushed by the weight of my desires rather than empowered by the life that comes through love.

If what stirs me to “minister” to someone is that they would respect me because I am a “servant of God”, I should plan on much disappointment and eventually on the discipline of my Father. I cannot simply be moved by sympathy to serve a homeless person or a junkie or a prostitute or a religious person and expect to be successful. I will not only not have the power to impact them with freedom or life, but I will be bound to pain myself by the fact that my ministry to them is about me, not them. I cannot be motivated by finding purpose in life and survive costly ministry. Only love can accomplish true, life-giving and life-changing ministry. Only agape can empower me to pay the price that must be paid for real Kingdom of Heaven ministry to occur.

When my costly offering is cast in the gutter, if it was something that I gave at the instruction of the Lord of the harvest, I may still rejoice just the same as I did when I had hope that it would change the life - my reward is based on my obedience, not on their acceptance. It is based on hearing my King say, “Well done,” not on the object of my love submitting to my love. My love for Jesus is what becomes my love for someone I am serving as a minister. If I love Him, I will obey His commandments, including His day-to-day commands in ministry. I still have a desire to see the blind see and the captive released, but those things cannot be my motivations for ministry. My sole

motivation for ministry must be very simply that I saw my Father do something, so I did it, too. When I am walking in this power, it actually also becomes love for the people for whom I make sacrifices.

When my love is rejected by the people I give it to, and this happens much of the time, it cannot diminish my love. If my love does diminish as a result of rejection, it simply means that I can now be sure that what was in my heart was not love, since it melted in the heat of rejection. It must have been desire, instead. How nice to know that! Now, I can repent of having attempted ministry for my own benefit, and ask the Holy Spirit to empower me this time with His love, and go back and offer something even more valuable!

Jesus offered us revelation in Matthew chapter 25 about the mystery of the opportunity we have of encountering Him when we are feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and the rest. He did not tell the sheep and goat nations that they had done or failed to do things *for* Him, but that when they had encountered the least of His brothers, and done things to them, they had done those things *to* Jesus. Based on this truth, we can know surely that there is no excuse for being concerned about any sacrifice being too great to make in serving Him by serving the least of His people. When we are at the altar of ministry and notice that some of our offering is pouring over the side of the altar and spilling out on the ground, we can be at peace knowing that it is not being wasted. It is being poured out on Jesus, so it can never be enough, no matter how much it may look like it is being spent on the ungrateful and is therefore too great a cost for the benefit we can perceive.

If I am serving with the motivation of seeing success instead of with the love Jesus has for the people I am serving, I will not have the power to change them, I will not have the power to stay on the altar, and I will wander away from my duty dejected and angry, like thousands of “ministers” do every year in the United States. Most are trying to do work that they are not gifted to accomplish. Prophets cannot pastor. Teachers are not gifted to pastor. Many pastors are not gifted to teach. If a congregation employs a person as a pastor who does not have the gift of pastor, they are shoving the person down a slope of destruction. The victims will include the people who hope to be pastored, the non-pastor, and the employers, all.

It is His love at work in me by His Spirit that makes me a pastor, or a prophet, or an apostle, or a worker of miracles, or whatever my giftedness is that is producing my ministry or work. It is His love that sends me into what place He has seen fit to ordain me to in His body (1 Corinthians 12:18). It is His love that gives me life as people draw on Him through my gift and give me opportunity to serve Him by manifesting Him. It is obedience to His call and His commission that become what He calls my ministry. It is not seeing a need and meeting it. It is not being appreciated and successful in life in ways the world can measure that I can call my ministry. It is seeing my Father’s hand moving in the earth and allowing it to synchronize my motions. It is being His glove. It’s

never allowing rejection to influence my decision to serve. If He tells you to continue, do so without regard for either the cost or the resulting product. If He tells you to leave and begin a new work in another place, do so without regard for the success that will not continue if you don't stay.

Based on the definition of love that I have found in the Scriptures and alluded to in this article so far, it should be easy for you to realize that there are few people involved in the practice in the earth at this time. That is changing. As you go forth in your service to Him teaching the proper definition of love, and living the proper example of love, you will influence the number of people who are receiving genuine love and practicing genuine love to increase. Even though you should not be looking for love in return for your love, even though you should not be expecting any payment or reimbursement for your sacrifices, even though your love for Him is the real motivator for real ministry, you need to receive love to have life. If you are not receiving love yourself, you will not have the strength to stay in the harvest, much less on the battlefield.

There probably are not many people you can look to in your life right now and expect the kind of love I have described here: love that is completely about you, that expects nothing in return, that is really the love God your Father has for you being manifested in a human. That is not necessarily a problem. Having only one person through whom you know that you can access the love of God when you need it can be enough. Even when you cannot contact the person and hear them confirm it, you can receive the power of your Father's love through the knowledge that they love you.

When the hemorrhaging woman mentioned by Mark in chapter 5 of his gospel record touched the hem of the clothing of Jesus, she was not reaching out *to* Jesus, but *through* Jesus. She did not have a clear theology regarding His Kingdom or His salvation or of His divinity. She did, though, recognize Him as the Door. She realized that if she could reach through Him she would access the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that God loved her, and that in His love He not only was able to heal her, but that he wanted to heal her. When she accessed the Father's love through Jesus, He did not see it coming. He was not sure what had happened when it happened. He simply felt heaven touch earth through His body. Love was not just a motivation to ministry in this picture - it was the power to heal. Jesus was not directing His love toward the woman. He was manifesting the Father's response to her faith in His power. Father was drawing her to His love through Jesus.

You need to experience His love or you cannot bear the weight and cost of your cross. You must draw as often as possible on His love - directly from His Spirit, and through people you know love you with real love. Do not waste your time and emotion looking for love through selfish or stingy or greedy or bitter people. There is none to be found there. You may find that they will offer something that looks like love which you will only discover is their desire for your person or your possessions, but you cannot find love where it does not reside. Don't let their self-centeredness stop you from having a

relationship with them, or from loving them, but do not expect them to love you just because you want them to. They cannot give you what they do not have. Look for it where it is, and take full advantage of it. It will not be an unfair advantage or abuse for you to draw heavily on love where it exists. It will be life to you and to the person you allow to love you.

If the love the Holy Spirit gives you through them includes a word of correction or instruction, receive that, as well. If you are immaturely responding to situations in your life and, therefore, miserable, it will not be love that you are receiving from them if you are just asking them to listen to you complain about your circumstances. When something terrible or costly happens to you, they should be nearby to help comfort and heal you. If you are still complaining about the same thing six months later, you really still need to be healed or delivered, perhaps. Don't expect their love to agree with all of your false ideas or with your mental or emotional strongholds. Your Father will discipline you if He loves you, and He will use your neighbor if you won't listen to Him. As Abraham discovered, He will even use your enemies to deliver a word of rebuke or advice to you (Genesis 13). Receive it as His love.

Let the people He has given to you to express to you His love express it to you. You really do need it to make it through life. You need it even more to make it through ministry. Do not let lack of personal benefit influence your freedom to love others. Do not let others' bitterness or accusations or attacks become a weight to your heart. Those things are about them, not you. Rest in the fact that your Father loves you more than you can presently comprehend. Allow Him to show it to you through the people who are willing to allow Him to use them. It is better than life.