

Pursuing Love & The Great Commandment – Pt. 6

Loving Unbelievers

I. Introductory Remarks.

John 3:16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."*

During the past few weeks I have been talking about what it means to pursue love in all of the relationships God has ordained for our lives. In this final message of the series, I would like to focus on the relationships we have with unbelievers and how God wants us to have a passion and a love for them as Jesus had.

God's love knows no boundaries. He doesn't wait for us to acknowledge and believe in Him before He sets His love on us. He loved us while we were still in our sins. Our love for sinners and unbelievers should be the same, since we are called to love as Christ loved.

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Ephesians 2:4-5 *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)...*

II. The Example of Jesus.

When we consider what it means to love unbelievers and sinners and how to go about it, we must look at the example of Jesus, who expressed perfect love to those who were lost in their sins. Jesus was very comfortable in the presence of sinners. He wasn't intimidated by them nor was He judgmental of them.

Luke 15:1-2 *Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."*

There are many examples and illustrations throughout the gospels that show Jesus being very comfortable in the presence of sinners and unbelievers. I believe one of the reasons he was so comfortable was that He had nothing but love and compassion for them. He did not come to them with a judgmental and condemning attitude, but rather one of love, compassion and mercy.

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1. Jesus in the Home of Tax Collectors and Sinners - Matthew 9:9-13.

Matthew 9:10-11 *And so it was, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, that behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to His disciples, "Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"*

What was it about Jesus that made sinners very comfortable in His presence to the extent that they wanted to be with Him and desired to hear what He had to say?

Matthew 9:12-13 *But when Jesus heard that, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. "But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."*

As we look at this passage of Scripture there are several things that jump out at us concerning the attitude that Jesus had towards sinners:

- He recognized His calling to call sinners to repentance.
- He expressed mercy and compassion towards them.
- He accepted and received them as they were without condemning or judging them.
- He showed a real and genuine interest in them.

This is how Jesus loved sinners.

- He had a passion for them, because His purpose and destiny was to seek and save those who were lost.
- He poured His heart and soul into them and it was very recognizable and obvious.
- Just as when you pour your heart and soul into something, it is very obvious to all who are around you.
- Sinners recognized this quality in Jesus and were attracted to Him as a result.

2. The Samaritan Woman at the Well - John 4:5-26.

John 4:16-18 *Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." The woman answered and said, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' "for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you*

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now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly."

Here we find Jesus simply speaking the truth to this woman in the most simple and natural form without condemning or judging her. This opened her heart to her inner convictions and caused her to respond to Jesus' love in a powerful way. Love conquerors all, even the souls of those who are lost in their sins.

2. Jesus at the Home of Zacchaeus - Luke 19:1-10.

Luke 19:4-7 *So he ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Him, for He was going to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, He looked up and saw him, and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down, for today I must stay at your house." So he made haste and came down, and received Him joyfully. But when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, "He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner."*

The story of Zacchaeus reminds me of the story of a man who fell into a pit and couldn't get himself out.

- A Christian Scientist came along and said: "You only think that you are in a pit."
- A Pharisee said: "Only bad people fall into a pit."
- A Fundamentalist said: "You deserve your pit."
- An IRS man asked if he was paying taxes on the pit.
- A Charismatic said: "Just confess that you're not in a pit."
- An Optimist said: "Things could be worse."
- A Pessimist said: "Things will get worse."
- Jesus seeing the man, took him by the hand and lifted him out of the pit.

This is what Jesus did for Zacchaeus. I believe Zacchaeus hated the person he had become, but did not know how to change or get himself out of the mess he had made of his life.

Zacchaeus was a chief tax collector or a publican, which meant that he was regarded as a traitor or an apostate, who was being used as a willing tool of the oppressor.

Tax collectors were classed with sinners, harlots and the heathen. Yet here we see Jesus reaching out in love to this sinner of whom Jesus said He came to seek and save. Zacchaeus needed Jesus' help to be lifted out of the pit he had dug himself into. He needed Jesus' ability to condescend to his lowly state.

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Jesus had a divine ability to condescend to the lowly estate of man. Even though He was high and lofty, He was able to regard the lowly.

Psalms 138:6 *Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.*

III. We Are To Love Sinners As Jesus Did.

As we have seen, Jesus gave us many examples of how we are to love those who are outside the camp. We are to follow Jesus' example in all things, especially in this area of loving those who do not know Him.

Hebrews 13:13 *Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.*

In Jesus' examples there were a number of ways in which He as shown us how to love unbelievers and sinners. Let's review them.

1. Jesus identified with His calling to seek and save the lost. We are called to do the same.

2 Corinthians 5:18,20 *Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation... Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*

2. He expressed mercy and compassion towards them.
3. He accepted and received them as they were, without condemning or judging them.
4. He showed a real and genuine interest in them.
5. He spoke the truth in love and allowed the person's inner convictions to convict them.
6. He had the divine ability to condescend to the lowly estate of man, even though He was the son of God.

IV. Concluding Remarks.

Jesus loves sinners no matter what sin they have committed. He is no respecter of persons. He loves everyone just as much. Jesus came to save sinners from their sin, but in doing so He comes to them on their level of reacceptance and gives the invitation.

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His desire is that we as His disciples would learn this valuable lesson of being able to be a friend to sinners as well – that we would be relatable without appearing self-righteous or pious.

How many of us can honestly say that we really have a genuine love and concern for those who are lost in this world?

I believe, if we really loved sinners the way Jesus did, we would learn how to relate to them in a way that would provoke them to an interest in the gospel.

We would also devise ways to go out of our way to become friends with them. The problem with most Christians is that we become isolated and too Christianized to relate to sinners.

God bless you as you go forth outside the camp loving those who do not know Christ.