

Spring Training “Love Part 2” 04/15/07

Actions Points:

Jesus Ministry: dwell where the people are, dine with sinners

Paul’s Ministry: respect for the image of God means “what is right in their thinking?” & “what is commendable about their way of life?” (Jerram Barrs’ *Heart of Evangelism*)

Last Week: until we are secure in the love of Christ, we will not love as Christ loved us

We dealt with 4 issues last week, issues critical enough to warrant some follow-up

Issue 1 Faith & Works:

Last week’s foundational truth was that what you believe has everything to do with how you live, particularly, what you believe & your faith in the love of Christ for *you* has everything to do with how you love one another. The converse is true, our actions reflect a gospel. The question is ‘which gospel is it?’

We see this connection throughout the Scriptures, very clearly in passages like

1 John 4:7-11 ⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”

Note the structure (Chiasm – a-b-b-a)

Let us love one another
 For love is from God
 If God so loved us
 We also ought to love one another

Observations –

What’s the means whereby we love one another?

v.7 “love is from God” – lasting, permanent, secure, unchanging love.

See the connection between faith & life

v.7b-8 Joshua’s paraphrase “true biblical love is only possible through a relationship with God in Christ”

Where’s the assurance of God’s love? Where do we go to find & see the proof when our faith wavers & when love is hard?

v.9 this love was “manifest” among us --- HOW? --- v.10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Romans 8:31-32 ³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

I focused on God's love for us, because I think we can get the cart before the horse and [as I mentioned last week] whip out a 20-pt., "how to love your neighbor" ...but the 20-pt outline will not produce personal growth in Christ, it will produce professionals, it will not give you endurance in love particularly when it hurts, because it's a list and what you and I need to focus in on is Jesus.

He will sustain you, grow you, produce the fruit of the Spirit, but we will not acquire lasting fruit by focusing on fruit.

We focus on Christ, and he gives the growth.

Issue 2 – Law & Gospel

There's another thing a list can tend to do, and that is to place us squarely under the yoke of law, rather than gospel.

Here's what I mean. When we focus on love because of its outcome (*church growth, family health, restored relationships, people to like us, earn God's favor or man's, fear of judgment, etc.*) we have missed the thrust of the whole New Testament.

When we focus on Christ, then love is the natural outcome.

illustration - It's like garlic. My wife makes a mean hummus. She made this one batch that had sooo much garlic in it, it was literally coming out of our pores, you could smell garlic all over us. I didn't need to apply garlic cologne or work hard at producing a garlic-y smell, it just happened. So to when we drink deeply from the well of Christ, love is something that naturally flows out, it oozes out of us, so to speak.]

[john piper hyphenation for a second]

When we focus on the all-sufficient, never-ending, surpassingly-glorious, never-failing, never-abandoning love of Jesus Christ,... THEN love is simply something that comes from us, no techniques needed. No need for additional "law"-type of approach.

illustration – many in looking at 1 Cor 13, argue you should replace the word "love" with your name to see how you are doing. Well and good, but a bad starting point. Instead of "me" what I'm arguing is that first and foremost you replace "love" with the name of "Jesus" and behold your Savior first.

Objection – but "love" is clearly commanded.

John 15:12-13 ² "This is my *commandment*, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

John 13:34-35 ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

1 John 3:23-24 ²³ And this is his *commandment*, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has *commanded* us. ²⁴ Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

Yes, but the only way Jesus' yoke is easy & his burden light is through faith in Jesus Christ.

The function of Law -

The law for the Christian shows us **two things at the same time**, our sinfulness, our love-less-ness, our selfishness,...**but then it points us to Christ** our righteousness, overflowing with love for us, who came not to be served but to serve & give his life a ransom for you and me.

Love is the sum of the law, to follow Jesus is to keep that law of love,...but unless the focus is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,...& the law drives us to Jesus, Jesus, Jesus

then we are simply moralists, trying to behave
& pragmatists, using love as a tool for our own goals.

Here's the jist of what I'm trying to say: John Owen, Mortification of Sin in the Believer, "what *gospel principles* do not, *legal motives* cannot do."

Issue 3 – Christ As Center – because of all, that week I made a plea for Christ-centered relationships & Christ-focused speech (moving into what the command to love one another looks like)

When the focus is not on Christ, then the best solution we have to offer others is ourselves, our own advice.

A danger we will come back around to later on

Issue 4 – What does love look like,...sacrifice & suffering. We saw this in Ephesians 5, Mk 10:45, etc.

This Week's Pt. – how does all of this work out in the context of a real relationship?

Jesus, Paul, Christ-centered focus, Love as sacrifice & suffering,...how does it work out? What does it mean to incarnate the love of Christ?

Here's where Paul Tripp takes us,...

Paul is going to argue that to incarnate Jesus' love means to identify with others in their weakness & sufferings & therefore we are to identify with others in their sufferings as a means of discipleship & evangelism. [needs explanation]

So let's look at **Christ's example**
 Define "**identify with suffering**" &
 Give some examples of what that looks like

Christ's Example Heb. 2:10-18

Hebrews 2:10-18 ¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise." ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me." ¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Why? Why was it fitting that Christ should be made perfect through suffering? Wasn't he perfect already?

- It means to "fully" or completely identify with his suffering people, he too had to suffer
- v.11,...which means that Christ "who sanctifies" and those in Christ "all have one origin"
- NOTE the connection here between sanctification & suffering. If Christ was made perfect through suffering we can expect no different,...in fact there's an apparently ominous if-then in Romans 8.

Romans 8:16-17 ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

(back to Hebrews) NOTE the two strands – our relationship with Christ...he's the foundation & he's the focus,...he brings us into relationship with HIM as brother, and therefore to one another as brothers.

- which means that Christ is not ashamed to call them brothers,...because, v.17, he was made like his brothers in every respect

-we are brothers with one another, able to identify with one another, suffer with those who suffer & rejoice with those who rejoice because Christ is our brother.

Here's how Tripp applies this passage:

He encourages us to grasp onto the identity of brother, of an equal, as paramount to our relationships. He argues, pg. 149,

“When you have spent fifteen minutes in front of a Monet, you are thankful he had paintbrushes, but you are not in awe of them. You are in awe of Monet and his ability as a painter. The posture of brotherhood presents Christ as the great redemptive Artist. We are simply brushes in his hands. The glorious changes he paints into the hearts of people are not the result of good brushes, but of the skills of the Painter. As we point people to Christ, he becomes the focus of our attention and the recipient of our praise. Truly biblical personal ministry always results in increasingly mature worship.”

[ironically – Tripp takes a passage about the surpassing greatness of Jesus & makes it about counseling principles, about brushes & techniques]

So that's Christ's example, Tripp argues.

But then he dives into this “identify with others in their suffering” language without any explanation.

But what Tripp doesn't flesh out is critical. Because here's the way it sounds, “What business do I have talking to someone who has cancer if I've never been through it” All of sudden the sphere of who you can minister to has shrunk to you & a few other people.

So what does the biblical category of suffering look like? What counts as suffering? How is it used of Jesus? Of us? And then how can we “identify” with it?

At Least 3 Kinds of Suffering – you'll find them all in Romans 8 & Heb 2

Paul begins **Romans 8:16-17** ¹⁶ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ and if children, then heirs- heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

But what kinds of suffering does he describe?

1. Bondage to Decay (diseases, deterioration, genetic abnormalities)

2. Suffering under Temptation (this is the internal & external spiritual opposition,...Eph 6, this is Romans 6-7

Hebrews 2:18 ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Illustration - a strong man attempts to bend two bars. One thin, one thick. The first one bends as he exerts pressure. How much more pressure needs to be exerted on the thick bar! Christ's suffering under temptation was far worse than our own!

3. Suffering under physical opposition & oppression (Rom. 8 "sword, danger, persecution")

Now, who of us does **not** have a story of God's grace in any one of these three categories? John Piper points out, in talking about how suffering in God's plan A for his people, said "no one will ever tell you they felt the love of Christ & the power of God & the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit most when everything was going well (josh paraphrase)

This is the message of Romans 8, isn't it? God's love does not mean removal from trials, removal from these sufferings,...but a Savior who endured them all & promises to be with us & never leave us in them.

So what does it mean therefore, to "identify with others in their suffering." What does it look like.

Turn with me to **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵ For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. ⁶ If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. ⁷ Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort.

Tripp PT 1 (point I've been making) – **God is the source of true comfort & compassion** – "and this is the comfort we offer people. We don't comfort them by saying that things will work out. They may not. The people around them may change, but they may not (152)." God's comfort is the only sure thing in the midst of suffering. That's the promise of Romans 8.

Tripp PT 2 – "The comfort we have received from the Lord has ministry in view"

Horizontal – we are able through “all our affliction” v.4 to comfort those who are “in any affliction”

Tripp PT 3 – “God wants us to share in Christ’s sufferings”

Vertical – we are being made more like our Savior Jesus Christ & drawn closer to Him. Suffering is his plan A for his people, because it was plan A for Jesus.

1 Peter 4:12-13 ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

“Suffering does not mean that God’s plan has failed. It *is* the plan. We suffer so that we may know him more deeply and appreciate his grace more fully. We suffer so that we may be part of the good he does in the lives of others (153).”

Tripp Pt. 4 – Our suffering does not belong to us, but to the Lord.

When suffering belongs to us “the world shrinks to the size of our pain” ...”it does not take long to learn that suffering gives you power.” “A whole host of self-absorbed temptations greet us when we treat suffering as something that belongs to us.”

Jesus owns your heart-break. To use Paul’s language, he owns your despair unto death. “This is not a call to some creepy kind of Christian stoicism...” the fact that over half the Psalter are psalms of LAMENT says otherwise,...

But Paul’s point is, “...we are to place our mourning into his hands, to be used for his purposes in our lives and the lives of others. And it is a promise of comfort from the God who is the source of it all (154).”

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 ⁸ For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

NOTE: Paul is referring to external persecution, but for our purposes look at this passage and ask “how does Paul share his story? What strikes you, what doesn’t?”

Brutally honest & vulnerable about his weaknesses & feelings – “despaired of life itself” - there’s no pretense of victory here. There’s no pious platitudes (“Just

remember – all things work for the good, or God is sovereign, or, I just spent 20 hours in devotions and fasted” It’s like going up to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and cheerfully reminding him that God is sovereign. He knows that!)

Paul is casting the focus away from himself & his wisdom.

Intentionally vague about the gory details,...why? because they weren’t all that important to be able to share how God worked. Because...

He’s casting the focus away from the story itself

Tripp’s Principles (pg. 155-157):

1. Tell your story in a way that breaks down the misconception that you are essentially different from the person you are helping
2. Always tell a completed story
 - a. A difficult time
 - b. Your struggle in it
 - c. How God helped you

“not ‘ misery loves company’” or “disaster-oneupmanship”

3. As you tell your story, be honest in describing your struggles & failures
“your story must highlight God’s grace in your weakness, not your heroic faith.”
4. Be discerning and purposeful (content)
5. Always tell your story in a way that makes God the key actor in the drama
6. Tell your story with humility, admitting your continuing need for grace.
None of us will have spiritually arrived until glory, let’s not talk as though we have.
7. Always make it clear that you are not what this person needs-God is

This is the path to the dark side. A needy woman comes to a man for counsel, and the moment he begins to think he is what the woman needs an affair is soon to come. That’s the path that self-focus puts you on. They don’t need you, they need Jesus.

8. The goal of your story should always be worship

“Giving hope is about helping a person see the Lord. Suffering commands our attention and clouds our vision, making it easy to forget what anchors our faith. Because trouble has such power to blind and confuse us, it is a sweet grace to have someone come alongside and point us to the One who is the rock, a fortress, a refuge, a hiding place, and a shield. *We all need someone to remind us that life is not defined by our pain but by our union with Christ* (157, italics mine).”

Joshua’s Addition Principle:

Testimonies are broader than the birth canal & can/should include our growth in grace as the Savior leads us by the hand as we tread the footsteps he trod. May the God of all comfort be with us. Amen.

[Tripp quotes all come from *Instruments of Change in the Redeemer’s Hands* by Paul Tripp]