

Freedom in Christ

RELATING TO OTHERS

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” Mathew 22 v 37.

How are you doing?

And.... “Love your neighbour as yourself” Mathew 22 v 39.

How are you doing?

“A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” John 13 v 34

How are you doing?

“We love because he first loved us” 1 John 4 v 19.

How are you doing?

He loves and by his love he is keeping the dream alive. He loves so that his dream of relationship with people like you and me might live. He loves and because of his love we can know him and be known by him. In his love he wants to share himself with people like you and me. Everything we know of God demonstrates he has given his excellent best, in love, to keep the dream alive. Right now, here, in this place, he is giving his excellent best to keep the dream alive in you and me and us!

How has he loved us?

By giving his excellent best: his excellent creation that gives us life and a magnificent world in which to live; his excellent best in gathering a people to be a light to the gentiles – Israel – his choice; his excellent rescue of his people from captivity in Egypt to freedom across the Jordan; his excellent provision daily for 40 years as they wandered in the desert. his excellent provision of the law under

Moses – simply the best way to live as community; his excellent promise of land fulfilled under Joshua; his excellent patience as he was tested again and again and again by their rebelliousness; his excellent rescue from exile.

At every turn God gives his excellent best – in love to keep the dream alive. And what has God done for you? He's given his excellent best. In love he's given you Jesus, Jesus who gave his excellent best. Jesus, who, on the cross cried: "It is finished!" I did it – I gave my excellent best for you! I gave my excellent best that I might be known by you. I gave my excellent best that I might know you in relationship. I gave my excellent best and now that relationship is possible. I gave my excellent best – and the dream is still very much alive.

Our love for God is a response to God's great love for us – he gave his excellent best. How do you know you love God? The answer is both simple and challenging! You know you love God when you love others. That has to be true otherwise what Jesus said is impossible. How can we love God with **all** our heart, mind, soul and strength **and** love our neighbour? The only way this can happen is if our love for our neighbour is included in our love for God.

"If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen." 1 John 4 v 20-21.

How are you doing?

"When you are your best self, you are a reflection of God..... a reflection of love."

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13 v 4-7.

This is a reflection of God's love and when we fully love God, we reflect this kind of love to others. And perhaps when we are our best self, we could rephrase this passage like this:

- I am patient with you because I love you and want to forgive you.
- I am kind to you, because I love you and want to help you.
- I do not envy your possessions or your gifts because I love you and want you to have the best.
- I do not boast about my attainments because I love you and want to hear about yours.
- I am not proud because I love you and want to esteem you before myself.
- I am not rude because I love you and want to overlook your offences.
- I do not keep a record of wrongs because I love you and love covers over a multitude of sins. ¹

In relating to others – how are you doing?

This kind of love is not a character trait, this kind of love comes from the heart – it is who we are becoming. And it is who are becoming because it reflects who God is. 1 John 4 v 8 says “Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.” So the more we love God in response to his excellent best in love for us, the more we are becoming like him, and the more we will reflect his love. The challenge though is this – love always results in action. Peter says “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4 v 8

So if Jesus is right, that the greatest thing we can do is to love God and love our neighbour – then we must know how love expresses itself in relating to others.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...” John 3 v 16. The profound truth about love is that it gives whatever the cost. Relationships cost ... don't they! We like to talk today about rights and responsibilities don't we? Actually – that's a very Baptist thing too – the rights and responsibilities of membership! We are encouraged in today's world to focus much more on rights than on responsibility aren't we? Protect your rights! Love focuses more on responsibility.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interest, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus....” Philippians 2 v 3-5.

Looking to the needs of others costs.... doesn't it?!! That is our responsibility in love toward others.

How are you doing?

“Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.” Romans 14 v 4

This is about judging another's character and Paul makes it clear here that the character of another person is not our concern. We have to leave that to God. That's disappointing isn't it?!! There's nothing more satisfying than a bit of character assassination to make me feel better is there? But that's not the way of love. Love costs...doesn't it? We are responsible for our own character and we are responsible for meeting the needs of others. That's love ... and it costs doesn't it?

Imagine a community or a relationship in which people choose to give up their rights and take up their responsibilities towards others. I would never fear that my character would be assaulted, but I would have all my needs met! That is the way of love – it reflects what God is like and it reflects all that God, in his dream, so longs to share with us.

Imagine a marriage in which the husband loves his wife as Christ loves the church. Imagine a marriage in which the wife works to support and respect her husband in everything. That is the way of love. Imagine a family where parents fully engage in their responsibility to bring up their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. Imagine a church where people related to one another with God's excellent love as their example. That is the way of love.

Love does not ignore rights – it respects them but does not demand them. Love does not ignore when someone does wrong, but it does not condemn them. Love chooses not to judge, but it takes discipline seriously. Love does not seek to punish, but it seeks to restore, for love does not keep a record of wrongs but looks to the future. When we are mature in love, and live in the freedom Christ brings us – we do not need to defend ourselves. If we make a mistake we can freely admit it and we have no defence. If we are right – we don't need a

defence. Love does not choose to tear down and destroy, it seeks always to build up, encourage and strengthen. Love gives ...whatever the cost!

God so loved, that he gave – he did not demand. In Christ we are accepted, just as we are. In Christ we are affirmed: “And I am especially fond of that one...” God gave his excellent best because he loves us because he loves us ...Our response is to love God and submit to him out of gratitude and love, and as we become like him and love whatever the cost, we learn to accept others as he accepts us, to affirm others as he affirms us. Imagine how this would transform our relationships at home, in church, at work if we loved like this!

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. And love your neighbour as yourself.” He gave his excellent best for you – how will you live in response? Maybe we could live this way:

People are unreasonable, illogical and self-centred.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for the underdog anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help, but may attack you if you help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you've got and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you've got anyway.²

1. Taken from: "The fruitful Life", Jerry Bridges: Navpress 2006 page 62/63
2. Taken from Leader's guide Freedom in Christ p. 213.

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