

Worship (11) The Secret of Worship (6) - Rooted and Grounded in Love

Think of when we visit an aquarium, or a zoo. We see that, in some of the enclosures, the temperature, amount of light, foliage, etc. are controlled quite carefully. Likewise, there is a certain environment of life that is the secret of worship.

That environment is love - living a life governed by love; or, as Paul put it, *to be rooted and grounded in love*. Think of that – rooted – love is your source; it is what your life feeds on, like a plant is rooted in the soil. Grounded – love is your foundation; it is what you base everything on. The idea is that your life is to be characterised by love for others. For worship to thrive, love must be the atmosphere, the foundation, the environment of your life.

The world has sometimes caught just a kernel of this truth and made songs about it - “You’ve got to love someone”, “Put a little love in your heart and the world will be a better place”, “It’s love that makes the world go round”.

Now, they don’t understand what real love is, or what its source is, or what its object is; but they sense this much – *life is supposed to be lived in an atmosphere of love*. It is part of our design instructions. It’s part of our priority.

In that way – it is part of worship.

And didn’t Jesus tie the two together when He said so in Matthew 22?

Mat 22:35-40 *Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, ³⁶ Master, which is the great commandment in the law? ³⁷ Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*

Our whole obligation to God is summed up in the two laws of love – *love God and love our neighbour*.

This is echoed by:

Gal 5:14 *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

Rom 13:10 *Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

1Tim 1:5 *Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,*

1Pet 4:8 *And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*

Col 3:14 *But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.*

Therefore, there is no way that you can be worshipping God, nor magnifying His glory through the lens of your entire being, if you are failing to love your neighbour.

Worship is really the first commandment – *to love God with all your heart, soul and mind*; but it cannot be taken apart from the second – *to love your neighbour as yourself*. God has paired the two up far too closely. Loving Him, and loving others, must emerge from a life rooted and grounded in love.

Well, what does this look like? What does it mean to live a life grounded in love?

It means simply, to continually love your neighbour as yourself.

Now let's unpack that for a moment.

Who is my neighbour?

1) *My neighbour is the person closest to me.* Taken literally, your neighbour is the one closest to you. He lives right next door. Relationally, that might be your spouse, your children, and your parents - your physical family. It would be your brothers and sisters in Christ. It would be your colleagues that you rub shoulders with from day to day, your friends and close relatives.

2) *My neighbour is the person furthest from me.* When Jesus was asked by a lawyer "Who is my neighbour", what did Jesus say? He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Who did the Samaritan help? He helped a wounded, left-for-dead Jew. Samaritans and Jews were enemies. So here are two men, who should hate each other on racial and religious grounds, who are total strangers, who have no obligations to each other; and the one tends the others wounds, puts him on his donkey, and books him into an inn at his own expense. Jesus says, "That's your neighbour." The person furthest from you is your neighbour too. That means the strangers on the street. It means the colleagues and schoolmates you hardly know. It means those neighbours in your street you hardly ever speak to. It means your enemies. Those who, for whatever reason, despise you and seek your harm – be they family, colleagues, people at school, previous friends, possibly even professing Christians.

So the meaning of neighbour runs the gamut from those closest to us – our brothers and sisters in Christ, our immediate family right, through to the unfamiliar people and even to saved or unsaved enemies.

And to live a life of love and so make worship possible we are to love them as ourselves.

What does it mean to love them as myself?

Desire for them the happiness you desire for yourself; in the same measure you seek it for yourself.

When hungry, we feed ourselves. When cold, we warm ourselves. When in pain, we medicate ourselves – seek healing. When lonely, we seek company. When sad, we seek comfort. When afraid, we seek assurance. When unsure, we seek counsel. When grieving, we seek solace. When tired, we seek rest. When we are restless or bored, we seek purpose.

We need to take all those desires we have naturally for our own happiness, comfort, pleasure, purpose and satisfaction; and feel them, and pursue them, for our neighbour. When they are hungry – feed; when lonely – visit; when sad – comfort; when tired – strengthen; when in pain – seek to heal/help.

When you seek those things – with how much energy do you do it? With how much creativity do you do it? With how much perseverance do you do it?

Jesus also gave a new commandment – "*To love one another as I have loved you.*"

To love them as Christ loved us is to *be willing to make the greatest sacrifice necessary to bring them that total joy.* It means to be willing to give ourselves up for the joy of the other person. They are not always going to understand or accept or appreciate your desires for them. Jesus died for people who didn't want Him to die on their behalf.

That's a life rooted and grounded in love. It means all the people you encounter in your life are your neighbours – and you are to desire for them, and seek for them the happiness and good you seek for yourself – at your own expense.

And of course, we cannot love all people equally – we are not capable of that, nor does God expect us to. But we are to seek to love each person we encounter by seeking for them as much of God as we are able. For a stranger it might just be a smile, a silent prayer, maybe a tract.

Why is dwelling in love/living a life grounded in love a secret of worship?

1. Loving one another is loving God, by proxy

1 John 4:12 *No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.*

1 John 4:20 *If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?*

"No one has seen God at any time". What's that got to do with it?

Answer: John is saying, 'If we love one another – His love, i.e. the seeing and knowing and enjoying of God is perfected in us.' Simply put – no one sees God the Father directly and loves Him. We see manifestations and reflections of Him. And one of those reflections is His family.

What you see in your brother or sister in Christ is in some way a manifestation of Christ. That believer is one for whom Christ died. That believer is one in whom Christ lives. That believer is one in whom Christ will be fully glorified one day. They have been chosen by Him. They might not reflect Him much right now – but they are His, and loving them is the same as loving Him.

V20 - If you don't like what you see, what makes you think you will like it when you see Him in His fullness? There is no such thing as a love for God which despises all His people all the time.

So, loving others confronts and kills our selfishness – which kills love for God. It is possible for people to live very, very self-centred lives, devoid of any love for anyone except those who they need to benefit them in their lives, and still feel that they are worshipping God. But this Scripture flattens that idea. To truly love – you suffocate selfishness. Selfishness cannot survive; it has no chance when you truly love – because you must deny yourself to love others in this way. You must place their happiness ahead of your own to do it. And here's the thing – a selfish person can never be truly worshipping God. They might be using God. They might be enjoying some religious entertainment. But a worshipper cannot simultaneously be loving him/herself, supremely and loving God supremely.

Someone may say – 'Well, that is all very well for other believers. I can love them because Christ lives within them and, in so doing, love Christ. But how can I love a Christ-rejecting, God-dishonouring unbeliever? What of God is there in them?'

James 3:9 *Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.*

What men are being spoken of there? All men are being spoken of. And after whose image are they made? They are made after the image of God Himself. All men, from all cultures,

religions, backgrounds, ages are made in God's image. They are thinking, feeling, and moral beings. They have a faint glimmer of a sense of God's goodness still resident in their conscience. They have natural affection given by God. Children, particularly, reveal the way man is made in God's image because their innocence and wonder and creativity and simplicity are just like God.

So, just like we can love believers because they, to one degree or another, reflect Jesus Christ, so we can love all men because, to one degree or another, they reflect their Creator.

And let's come at it from the other side. If a man is made in the image of God – and I hate that man – what am I doing to God? This is no doubt the idea James was suggesting – we claim to bless God, but we hate His image. If you are a sculptor and your work is on display and someone comes and scoffs at it, or even spits on it, what are they doing to you? So it is obvious why hatred, from the smallest act of irritation and resentment to murderous acts of revenge and torture, is hatred against God.

So it clear why living a life rooted and grounded in love is a secret of worship – man, both saved and unsaved, is a partial 'stand-in' for God Himself. To not love them is to not love God. To love them in the same way God does, is to love God, *i.e. love one another because they are reflections of who He is*

2. Loving one another reveals Christ to us and through us.

I John 4:7-8 *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

I think I John 4:7-8 could be put into a metaphor. *Beloved, let us be rivers of blessing to one another, for this blessing comes from God.* God is a fountain of blessing. Every river that flows comes from the fountain – God, the source. A dry river bed is not connected to the fountain, because the fountain is unceasing.

God's nature is to overflow in blessing. His nature is to do good to those He loves. This is His very nature. He eternally seeks the good of His people.

To live a life grounded and rooted in love is to be, as it were, a river connected to Him – the source. You are not a river dammed up by hatred, bitterness, resentment, selfishness – but a vast open gulf for God's flood waters of love to flow through.

God told Israel – **Psalms 81:10** *I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it.*

And in a sense, He says – 'Enlarge your hearts to love like I do, and I will fill it with my love – and you will know me all the more and show me all the more.'

Loving your neighbour is rather like being a sail that catches wind – you travel where God is going, you experience Him, you come to know Him, and make Him known.

When Jesus told His disciples of the defining mark of how the world would know they were His disciples what was it to be? *"If you have love one for another"* In other words – by your love for one another – you reveal that you are of Christ. It is obvious that He is being revealed to you and through you.

“*If we love one another – his love is perfected in us*” (4:12). It is as we open ourselves up to being channels of love that we come to know His heart ourselves. Any Christian has found this to be true in experience. It is in the act of sacrificing that God’s love pours through, and you in that very moment sense God’s love for you and for that person.

Conversely, if you do not live a life rooted and grounded in love – you become like a dry river bed, in every sense - very little to offer people except a reminder of what once was.

The Pharisees are surely a warning in this regard. When Jesus rebukes them, it is clear they had lost true love for people (**Matt 23:4, 13-15**). What had happened to their knowledge of, and experience of, God? It had dried up. They had become petty debaters over words, useless teachers of useless facts – a help to no one because they loved only themselves. They had become a stark warning that you can be at the top of the religious respect pile, but have no worship of God, because you have chosen to love yourself and not others.

Perhaps you have met some hard, crusty, weather-worn saints. They have some nasty experiences in their past to tell you about. They have been stabbed in the back, slandered, hurt, lied about, cheated, and ganged up upon. But instead of allowing the Holy Spirit to apply His balm of forgiveness and kindness and tenderheartedness to those wounds, they chose to heal themselves by hardening their hearts, loving less, becoming indifferent, calloused, cynical and somewhat bitter. And without realising it, their channel grew smaller.

A simple question to ask is this: If you loved a group of orphaned children, and you could choose from about 50 people twenty who would care for them in your absence – what would be almost the main thing you would look for? You would want to work with and pay and reward and entrust the children to people who mirrored your heart for them, who loved as you did.

Jesus asked Peter ‘Do you love me?’ ‘If so then feed my sheep.’

It is not much different with God. Those who sometimes have the greatest experience of God are those who choose to love what He loves and hate what He hates. As they do so, God is pleased to enlarge their channel and flow through them all the more. Those who live in very self-centred love ‘compartments’ soon find that their experience of God seems to be more like a drip from a tap, not a running river.

So, it is clear why living this life of love is a secret of worship. *Love, because that is how He is.* God is love, and He works through the loving.

Someone might object, ‘If I live like this, it will take away my own pursuit of happiness. I will lose out.’

But to live a life grounded in love is to make more worship possible – which satisfies your soul. To be a channel for God to bless others necessarily means you will partake of, experience, the delight that God is.

A pipe would be silly to say, “If I am always supplying water to others, when am I ever going to get any?” The pipe always has an abundance of water – precisely because it is open to letting it flow through it.”

Jesus meant it when He said that the entire Old Testament hangs on two commandments – *love God, and love your neighbour*. You cannot split them apart from each other. To truly love

your neighbour, you need to know and love God. But once you do, to continue to love God, you need to live a life rooted and grounded in love – which is one of the secrets of worship.