

Series "Living the Gospel as a Way of Life" from City of the Lord Community

#1 - Understanding and Living Covenant Love

Tom Singer, January 29, 2017

The Goal of this series is knowing God's call for brotherhood for our life and living it out.

"Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life? Jesus said to him, what is written in the law? How do you read it? And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your mind, and with all of your strength, and with all of your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.'" And he said to him, You have answered right; do this and you shall live." Luke 10:24-28

The Lord Jesus is quoting from the Book of Deuteronomy 6:4 – the Shema 'Hear O Israel'

When the people ask Jesus what is the greatest commandment OR what shall I do to inherit eternal life, he responds to the two fold obligation and loving God AND loving neighbor. If we love, we must love our neighbor and if we love our neighbor we must be in love with God! They are interdependent!

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. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be expiation of our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 1 John 4:7-11 *We love, because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19*

In response to God's love, we are invited to love God as the source and origin of our love for others, meaning that we will love our neighbor on the basis of HIS unconditional love and commitment to them. Tonight we want to explore and encounter the depths of Christ's so that we can love another!

What is Covenant Love? What kind of love does God love us with? How does he love us? He loves us with covenant love. What is covenant love? How does God love us with covenant love? How is God's covenant love different than man's love? In the Old Testament, covenant love is 'hesed', that is steadfast or loyal love. Hesed indicates God's merciful fidelity to his covenant promises, despite the fickleness of His human partners. Hesed is mentioned 245 times in the Old Testament, including 127 times in the Psalms alone.

Covenant or *berith* in Hebrew, stands for 'chain' or 'binding pledge'. God's loyalty to his covenant, even in the face of betrayal and human sin means life for his people. ****

"The Lord passed by Moses and proclaimed, 'the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (hesed).'

God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us... Rm 5:8

If God is for us, who can be against us?... Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Rm 8:31,35

God is faithful and in Jesus Christ he has fulfilled the covenant love promised to David in Psalm 89:20-35.

I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him; So that my hand shall ever abide with him, my arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him.

I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. My faithfulness and my mercy shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted... If they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, then I will punish their transgression with the rod, but I will not remove from him my merciful love, or be false to my faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips; I will not lie to David.

To love in covenant love means a decision to love a person or group of people not once or twice, but in an ongoing way – in fact over a lifetime. As shown in the history of Israel, the Lord over the centuries constantly forgives those who seek him and ask for his mercy. How often did Israel make idols and sacrifice to other gods or make alliances with other nations that the Lord forbade them. Yet, when the prophet spoke often the people turned from sin and tore down idols they have made (see II Chron 15 on how King Asa responded to the prophet Azariah). Who are the prophets that are calling us to return? It is important that we remember our encounter with the Lord's covenant love. This is what the prophets in our midst help us do!!

Contractual vs. Covenant Love Covenant, as its Hebrew word implies (*berith* or chain) has the negative sense of binding us, preventing us from doing whatever we will. There is a positive sense of holding us and our deepest investments in place even in the struggles of life. This is the way, the character of *hesed*, of how God loves us!

Contractual thinking/love, on the other hand, is characterized by provisional commitments: I agree to love this person or to be loyal to this institution in accordance with certain expectations, determined on the basis of whether he or she or it responds to my perceived needs. If circumstances or expectations change, or unanticipated difficulties arise, then I can renegotiate the terms of the relationship.

By covenant, I mean a personal relationship characterized by commitment and fidelity to another person or institution, even when it means loving the other or being faithful to the relationship entails personal suffering and loss. This is not mere language, it is an issue developing character.

Covenant in the positive sense holds us and our deepest investments in place in the midst of the uncertainties of life. Another word often used is *unconditional love*. This is why the Catholic Church upholds the sanctity of marriage because it upholds covenant love according to Ephesians 5 which mirrors Christ's (*hesed*) love for the church. As God the Father chose us in Christ, so we too make a choice to love. That choice determines the character of our love. (2 examples of covenant love)

Myth of Emotional Authenticity Our choice to love covenantally is not based on a feeling. Love is often characterized in our society as a positive emotional feeling that we have rather than an intentional way of thinking and acting. While emotions play a part of what makes human love, they are not the central reality of Christian love. We act to love our brother or sister or a neighbor in need because Christ first loved us and gave us an example of loving one another (John 13). Christian covenant love is a decision in the heart to act in committed personal relationships, not primarily based on a feeling.

Our culture puts a lot of emphasis on having 'emotional authenticity', the idea that one should only do those things that one feels deeply about at the moment, or which constitute matters of strictly personal choice, outside the realm of obligation or ethical demand.

Building brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ means recovering the importance of DUTY and unlearning some influences from our culture, particularly about the primacy of emotions in determining relationships and how we act in them.

Our relationships are more than duty or obligation; it should also have a sense of devotion know in that this is the people that the Lord has called me to share my life with. A sense of loyalty is there to keep us grounded in what is most important to us – the relationships that we value that are not disregarded because of circumstances or inconvenience.

Love Your Neighbor In the Gospel of Luke 10:28 the question is: *"And who is my neighbor?"* Covenant love in the end must extend to everyone because of the very nature of who God is.

Therefore, we must love those who we don't care for or like. We must love those people who have differing views of life especially those whom we don't have much in common, those who are challenging and those who are even my enemies – especially those who reject my attempts to love them.

As we begin this series of teachings, I encourage all of us to look at what Covenant Love is because it is the basis for everything we do in our Christian life. The questions included are to help us first find out if we are living in the covenant love of the Father. Do we know how much God the Father loves us? If we do, are we able to extend that covenant love to others especially those in our family, community, church and neighborhood? If not, let beg the Lord to reveal it to us again and get into a place to receive it.

Questions

1. Do we understand the importance of the greatest commandment in our lives? Not only are we called to love God, but we are called to love another because of God.
2. Describe what is covenant love? How is it different than natural human love? How is it different than a functional agreement?
3. What prophets in your life have called you back to Covenant love? Be specific.
4. How can you practice covenant love through our personal choice with devotion as well as duty?