

HOLINESS IN RELATIONSHIPS

**Galatians 5:13-14; Mark 12:28-34; Psalm
15:1-15; Isaiah 33:15; Micah 6:6-8;
Habakkuk 2:4; Deuteronomy 6:4-5**

A Matter of the Heart

By

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Opening.

It should be an unspoken assumption, a given, that those who walk in the Light of Grace *desire holiness* as a reality in their relationships. There are two ways in which this works, two realms to play this out: loving the Lord and loving people; loving God and loving people. How we treat people is the second most important aspect, the second most critical component of our character and convictions, our holiness and humility. The essence of a real and genuine holiness, a Christ-centered spirituality {inspired by the Spirit}, is **“to love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength; and to love your neighbor [those within your proximity] as yourself.”** For **“on these two commandments,”** Jesus said, **“depend the whole Law and the Prophets,”** which is what the Jews called the major portion of their Scriptures—Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-28.

To love people means to live in the Cause for which Christ came: **“not to be served but to serve”** and to give our lives for the ransom of many. Like the line from the movie *Tears of the Sun*, “The lives of many rest in the courage of a few.” This means we’re committed to investing our lives in the only thing that lasts: the hearts and souls of men and women. We **“love one another”** in the Family of Faith by caring for each other—mentally, physically, spiritually, emotionally, relationally. We pursue honesty, openness, transparency in relationships. We tear off the masks and drop the defenses. *That’s* how we learn to love. And to love is something we must learn, as the Father pours out more and more and more of Himself within our hearts.

This is the fundamental reality God was getting too throughout the entirety of the Old Covenant. Paul says virtually the same thing in Galatians 5:13-14: **“Do not use your freedom [the primary issue under the *New Covenant* of Grace] to indulge the sinful nature, but through love serve one another. For the entire Law is summed up in a single command, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”** It’s a simple way of getting to the heart of the matter, the spirit of all divine revelation, and it comes down to this: **the willingness to love in these two relationships!** This is not about externals... what you wear, how you look, the things we do to impress other people, the masks we put on to cozy up to those who can benefit our personal portfolios of health, wealth, and wisdom, our impressive obedience to traffic laws, or our self-righteous adherence to a strict moral standard, none of which has anything to do with our relationship with the Trinity—Father, Son, and especially Holy Spirit. This is a wholeness of heart and a holiness of life which goes much, much deeper than that and gets right down to the core of who we are, to the centre of our souls, and deals with *why* we do what we do. Out of *love* or *legalism*? Is it love or is it law?

Essay— Holiness in Relationships.

“One of the teachers of the Law [a scribe, a professional class in 1st century Judea] came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked Him, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most

important?’ ‘The most important one,’ answered Jesus, ‘is this: “HEAR, O ISRAEL, THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.” The second is this: “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” There is no commandment [singular] greater than these [plural].’ ‘Well said, Teacher,’ the man replied. ‘You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but Him. To love Him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, He said to him, ‘You are not far from the Kingdom of God.’ And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions [never again did they test Him in this way]” {Mk. 12:28-34 NIV}.

Let me set the historical stage for you. There was this tendency in Judaism to expand the Law on one hand to a limitless number of rules and regulations, to parse it out in to tiny little details numbering in the *thousands*. On the other hand was this tendency among the Rabbis to distill the entirety of the Law into a single sentence, to compound the whole of divine revelation to the people of God in one single sentence.

There were numerous schools in ancient Israel for the training of rabbis, for scholars and scribes to get an in-depth education in the Law. Not only in a knowledge of the Word itself but in all their interpretations, all their traditions, and all their multitudinous rules and regulations which had been parsed out indefinitely. Keep in mind that none of this information was written down, it was all *oral tradition* which was passed on from teacher to student to teacher to student, etc. The verb for ‘to repeat’ in the Rabbinic schools was exactly the same as the verb for ‘to teach:’ to teach = to repeat, to repeat = to teach. Some examples:

Rabbi Hillel, asked by a proselyte {which is a Gentile convert to Judaism} to teach him the Law while standing on one leg, said: “What you hate for yourself, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Law; the rest is commentary. Go and learn,” i.e., live like this! Rabbi Akiba once said, “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself:’ this is the greatest general principle of the Law.” Simon the Righteous, whose life and ministry extended down to 300 BC, said: “On three things stands the world— the Law, the worship, and the works of love.” Another rabbi taught that Moses had received 613 separate precepts on Mt. Sinai: 365 according to the days of the solar year, and 248 according to the generations of men. Here’s how he broke this down.

He said that David took the 613 and reduced them to eleven in Psalm 15. “[1] **He whose walk** [‘whose wayfaring in life’] **is blameless and** [2] **who does what is righteous** [‘Right’ and ‘just’ according to whom? To the Lord of Heaven and Earth], [3] **who speaks the Truth from his heart and** [4] **has no slander on his tongue,** [5] **who does his neighbor no wrong** [no ‘evil’] **and** [6] **cast no slur on his fellowman** [NAS has, ‘takes up no reproach against his friend’], [7] **who despises a vile man but** [8] **honors those who fear the LORD,** [9] **who keeps his oath**

even when it hurts, [10] who lends his money without usury [‘without interest’— Ex. 22:25; Lev. 25:36; Deut. 23:20 and Ezek. 18:8] and [11] does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken,” vv. 1-5.

Next, he said Isaiah took the eleven and boiled them down to six. Isaiah 33:14c asks the question, **“Who of us can dwell with the consuming fire? Who of us can dwell with everlasting burning?”** The Prophet’s answer? **“He who [1] walks righteously and [2] speaks what is right [‘speaks with sincerity,’ NAS], who [3] rejects gain from extortion and [4] keeps his hands from accepting bribes, [5] who stops his ears against plots of murder and [6] shuts his eyes against contemplating evil. *This is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress [‘the impregnable rock,’ NAS]. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him,*” v. 16.**

From there, Micah took the six and distilled them into three. In Micah 6:6-8 the Prophet asks, **“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased [will He ‘take delight’] with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgressions, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? [1] To act justly [to ‘do justice,’ NAS] and [2] to love mercy [kindness] and [3] to walk humbly with your God?”**

Finally, Habakkuk took those three and reduced them all to one: **“But the righteous will live by his faith,” 2:4.** This v. is the foundation of three New Testament books: Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews {Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38}. The context of this verse sounds like this: **“See, he is puffed up [the arrogant man or woman with no need for grace or for God]; his desires are not upright. But the righteous will live by His faith” {NIV}— live spiritually, eternally, and abundantly.**

In Jesus’ response to this highly trained religious lawyer, He takes the two greatest commandments and molds them into one ...one *Messiah-centered* way of life. He turns his attention to Deuteronomy 6:4-5 which begins with the phrase, **“Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD is One [indivisible in essence].”** Then comes the command to **“love”** Him **“with all your heart ...soul ...and strength.”** This is the distinctive creed of Hebrew worship; it’s called ‘the *Shema* Israel.’ *Shema* is the imperative of the Hebrew verb *shama-* ‘hear and respond, listen and obey.’ It got its name from the fact that this is the first word in the sentence. *Shema* is what every service in the synagogue begins with down to this very day. The full *shema* is Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 11:13-21; and Numbers 15:37-41. The *Shema* is the foundation of the Jewish faith, of Hebrew monotheism, the declaration that *Yahweh* is the only God and there is no other!

Those three passages were written on little scrolls and contained in tiny leather boxes

called phylacteries {Deut. 6:8} which the devout Jew wore on his forehead and on his wrist when he was praying. As he prayed, he would remind himself of the foundation of his faith. The *Shema* was also contained in a little cylinder called 'the *Mezuzah*' which even to this day is affixed to the door or doorway of an orthodox Jewish home {and many times, the doorway of every room within it} to remind him of God in his "going out and his coming in." {The reasoning behind this came from their understanding of Deuteronomy 6:4-9.} So, when Jesus quotes this first command, *every* Jew would know it and every Jew would acknowledge it.

Ignoring the strident stipulations of the scribes and all the professional posturing of their oral traditions, He quotes from Leviticus 19:18— "**Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of Your People** [the Hebrew 'people,' the nation of Israel], **but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.**" Now, you can see from its original context it deals quite clearly with a man or woman's relationship to his or her *fellow Jew*. It did not include Gentiles, whom 'teachers of the Law' taught it was quite acceptable to hate. After all, Gentiles were created by God "to light the fires of Hell," and you should never help a Gentile woman in childbirth, for this would only serve to bring another God-forsaken Gentile into the world. What does Jesus do? He quotes it as the *second* great commandment {following and obviously subordinate to the first} without qualification, without preconception, without boundary or barrier of any kind. He took an *old* statute and gave it a *new* spirit.

The brilliant thing Jesus did, as always, was to put these two together; no rabbi had ever done that before. There are hints at it in some of the apocryphal writings about 100 years before the birth of Christ, but no one until Jesus put the two together and fused them into one: loving God and loving man. The amazing thing is that the scribe to whom He was speaking accepted this and thus shows that he gets it. He starts to understand something of the spirit rather than the letter. Hosea recorded the words of the Lord: "**For I desire mercy, not sacrifice** [I desire *faithfulness, loyalty, and love*] **and acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings,**" 6:6. "**I don't want your sacrifices— I want your love; I don't want your offerings— I want you to know Me!**" {TLB}.

Do you know how easy it is to let ritual take the place of reality? Do you know how much easier it is to let worship become a lonely hour on Sunday morning instead of the way we live on Monday morning? It's about how we live on Monday morning, Wednesday afternoon, and Friday night, every moment of every day in every week of every month. The eyes of the "**lawyer**" are beginning to open to the reality of the Kingdom standing right in front of him. You know how far he was from the Kingdom of God? Just one tiny step away, one tiny step of faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

Finale.

Here's what it comes down to. How do you *love* God? We first need an image, a mental map of our righteous Redeemer, which is Biblically accurate and spiritually astute—

able to heal, redeem, and restore the whole of humanity: body, soul, and spirit. We're in the process of uncovering this image every single day of our lives. And we are dedicated at Heart's Journey to seeing the full glory of the Father through Jesus Christ the Son!

Okay. When we talk about loving the Trinity, I think you have to start with how you love *anything*, or *anyone*. What goes on in that love, in the realm of that relationship? **You *delight* in them; you *rejoice* in them— you rejoice in their glories and weep in their sorrows** {while God has no personal defeats to reflect on, there *are* things that affect His heart, and deeply: like the betrayal and rebellion of His creatures and His Children, both by the evil one and by each other}. You give your heart, the centre of your soul, to them. **You *choose* them, freely, over other things, other places you could be, other people you could be with.** They hold a sacred space in your heart and in your life that will never be relinquished. Right? **They get the lion's share of your time, attention, affection, communication, your thoughts and thoughtfulness, your vulnerability** {that's a scary term in the 21st century, isn't it?}, **your presence.** This is what we do with God: with *Abba*, with Jesus, and with the Spirit. **We give our *whole* heart to God; we make Him the treasure of our life.** Just as Jesus said, **“where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”** {Matt. 6:21 and Lk. 12:34 NIV}.

That is the nature of worship: an entire life of loving God, passionately. If we love Him with a deep hunger and passionate desire, by necessity it means we pursue Him with a deep hunger and a passionate desire. A friend of mine whom I consider to be one of the True Warriors of the Faith, a Man among Men in the realm of the Spirit, uses phrases like “stalking the Lord” and “ambushing the Father” to describe a life in passionate pursuit of God. **If we love our Lord passionately, we will *pursue Him passionately!*** Seeking Him— above all other lovers— every day of our lives on this Earth... in anticipation of our real lives on a perfect Earth.

Matthew 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-34; and Luke 10:25-28 all paint a picture of the same situation. Now if the entirety of divine revelation comes down to these two issues, *maybe* we ought to put some focus on this area of faith. You think? Just *maybe* loving God and loving others is the very *heart* of a Jesus-centered spirituality, for {think about it} *no one* ever lived these two realities out any better than He did.