

SABBATH THOUGHT 2022-05-14—FIRST LOVE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

When we think of our relationship with God and Jesus Christ, it is a reflection of our human connections and experiences. When a child is born, it cannot speak. In fact, an infant has no capacity to think in normal terms. That is because we all think in a primary language, something that has yet to be learned by an infant. Instead, it responds emotionally. At birth, the mother already has a deep love toward her child whereas the infant does not know how to love—yet. At birth, it is overwhelmed by the new and full experience of sights, sounds, touches, and tastes. It is driven by its senses—nursing satisfies hunger, singing and talking are pleasant sounds, and cuddling is warm contentment. A mother has a profound need to love her child who responds completely to her nurturing. The fact that a life can be formed in a woman's body is truly amazing. This is an experience that no man can have so I can only stand in awe and wonder of the gift that God gave to women.

As a child grows, it relates to others from within the love, safety, and security of the family. In its early years, play with other children is a selfish role because they do not know how to love others. A young child is still driven by its needs, not an urge to put others first. As they grow, they start to have a real desire to be with other children but, again, it is part of satisfying the selfish needs of the child rather than from the perspective of what it can give to others. This is the beginning of learning how to love others. The family is critically important during these times because children must learn to see beyond their own needs and recognize the welfare of others. In other words, they must be taught how to love.

The urge for relationships with peers outside the family becomes very strong in the teenage years when children long to be with friends, sometimes more than parents. For some parents, this is hard to accept. They do not realize that children can only have a relationship beyond their parents if they are secure in the love of their family. This time, for a child, is important because it is when they first begin to consider the needs of others. As their desire grows and expands, they start having real feelings of love toward their friends.

This course of events leads to the next step—relationships between boys and girls. However, socialization with the opposite sex also does not happen except from within the safety and security of same-sex peer groups. Why? Because their ability to love is not yet a selfless one—they are fearful of being rejected by someone of the opposite sex. In simple terms, opening their heart up to others is something new. It is unique because, up to this point, they have shown love toward others who *first* loved them! That was the case for a child within the immediate and extended family. So, offering love to someone else *first* is a new and uncertain venture.

Obviously, there comes a point when a young man and young woman get past all the awkwardness of that time and discover how satisfying love can be when it is returned by someone to whom they unselfishly gave it. This is when they begin to understand how powerful and fulfilling love can be. In the circle of life, the birth of a child is the fulfillment of their love because it becomes focused on the life of another human being.

What an amazing creation we are! God made us to love and be loved. Love is the most amazing gift and desire. We begin life only being able to respond to it but unable to share it. However, love is something that can never remain selfish. In the end, love always strives to be shared between people.

The potential of love can only be truly understood when we give it **FIRST** to someone, as in the case of a young man and young woman before marriage. I think we all understand this. When we offer love to someone and it is reciprocated, it grows into a powerful connection. It is that kind of love that motivates people to give their physical life for someone.

Relationships in this physical life were always intended to lead to a relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ. It began with their love for us:

1 JOHN 4:16-19 And we have known and have believed the love that God has toward us. **God is love**, and the one who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him. 17 By this *spiritual indwelling*, the love of God is perfected within us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment because even as He is, so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in the love of God; rather, perfect love casts out fear because fear has torment. And the one who fears has not been made perfect in the love of God. 19 **We love Him because He loved us first.**

God the Father and Jesus Christ loved us *first* because we are like infants in the beginning—needing to be loved but not knowing exactly how to love others. In loving us first, they knew they risked sorrow by those who reject their love. But these verses say something powerful—“there is no fear in the love of God” (v. 18). Unlike the uncertainty of a young man and young woman who tentatively expose their feelings to each other not knowing if they will be reciprocated, God’s love is sure. They offered love **first** to us and *without reservation*. In fact, we can have absolute confidence in their love because Jesus Christ **died** out of His love for us even *before* we loved them. This is why no one should be fearful that they do not love us! They proved it beyond a shadow of a doubt before we were ever born.

1 JOHN 4:10-12 In this *act* is the love—not that we loved God; rather, that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation** for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also are duty-bound to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. Yet, **if we love one another**, God dwells in us, and **His own love is perfected in us.**

What is so amazing about these scriptures is that God is perfecting His love in us. How? As “we love one another”. An infant begins life not able to properly love others; however, every child begins with a *need* for love that grows into proper outgoing love through relationships with family, then friends, and finally a spouse. Love is matured along the way and the result is another baby born who can love others eventually.

While the pattern of life has evaded some—in particular those are unmarried or unable to have children—we all have the surety of God’s love. “God IS love!” The love of God the Father and Jesus Christ for every one of us is certain and sure. It was established at the creation of mankind when God made a man and woman for the purpose of multiplying people, it was made manifest by the way a child develops within a woman, and it was proven when Jesus Christ died for us. Their love is given to each of us and is being perfected in us. No one should doubt the love of God the Father and Jesus Christ because we are their CHILDREN. How much love do a mother and father have for their child? Their love is even greater! They loved us first, they sacrificed for us, and they personally called each one of us! When we are willing to love someone else **first**, it is the *beginning* of perfect love. God the Father and Jesus Christ loved us FIRST because they ARE perfect love. We are given a glimpse into the perfect love they desire with each of us in the prayer of Jesus Christ:

JOHN 17:20-23 I do not pray for these only, but also for those who shall believe in Me through their word; 21 **That they all may be one, even as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us,** in order that the world may believe that You did send Me. 22 And I **have given them the glory that You gave to Me, in order that they may be one, in the same way that We are one: 23 I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one; and that the world may know that You did send Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.**

If anyone ever has doubts about the love of God the Father and Jesus Christ for us, read this scripture. For those who were withheld from the opportunities of life, read this scripture. God the Father and Jesus Christ want to be ONE IN LOVE with us—they want their singular perfection of love to exist IN us and between us in the exact same manner that they love each other. God gave you life so that you could become a vessel of their perfect, eternal, and abiding love. While physical relationships can experience a powerful, selfless love, it is nothing—I repeat—nothing compared to the perfect love of God the Father and Jesus Christ.

All who are called must suffer. Some suffer because they did not have love in their lives whether as a child or as an adult. In many ways, that is worse than those who suffer pain, sickness, illness, poverty, and so forth while being with others and cared by those who love us. But the message of God the Father and Jesus Christ to us all is their love—perfect, gentle, kind, comforting, eternal love. And They are perfecting all of us in Their love!

1 CORINTHIANS 13:10-13 But **when that which is perfect has come**, then that which is in part shall be set aside. 11 When I was a child, I spoke as a child, **I understood as a child**, I reasoned as a child; but when I became a man, **I set aside the things of a child**. 12 For now **we see through a glass darkly**, but then *we shall see face to face*; now **I know in part, but then I shall know exactly as I have been known**. 13 And now, these three remain: faith, hope *and* love; but the greatest of these *is* love.

Paul understood that God's love is being perfected in us. He talked about a child having a selfish desire for love to becoming an adult willing and able to give love to others (v. 11). He talked about when "that which is perfect" comes—i.e., the love God the Father and Jesus Christ—and it is completed in us at the resurrection (v. 10). He talked about only knowing "in part" now but truly knowing the fullness of the love God the Father and Jesus Christ when we are born of the spirit. He talked about these things because he understood that—beginning with Adam and Eve and is continuing with us—God's greatest creation is the perfection of love in us.

Revelation 2:4 says this to the Ephesian church, "I have this against you, that you have left your **first love**." Whose was the *very first love*? That of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Their ultimate desire is for us to love Them. A man and woman enter into marriage because both were willing to love the other person before knowing if the love was mutual. Once that love took root, it grew to the point where they needed to tell the world of their special love in their wedding day. God the Father and Jesus Christ have offered their love to us *first* and are looking for us to love them because Jesus Christ desires an eternal bride and God the Father desires children. They have proven their love for us and we are proving our love for them. Each and every day their love grows in us if we draw close to Them and continually seek first "that [*love*] which is perfect" that God the Father and Jesus Christ are bringing to us.

May God's grace and peace be upon you!

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