

LOVE Like You Never Knew It

Chapter 2: Relationship Paradigm Shift

Friends NOT Slaves

I want to take you through three passages of scripture from the major voices of the New Testament. **Jesus**. We will look at another one of His in a moment. Then we're going to look at **John**. And then we'll consider **Paul**. They made comments that reflect what Jesus is saying in this passage. Realize that I am lifting these somewhat out of context. But I want you to understand the context they are in. We can look at them later and make sure that these are what I say they are.

These are not just scriptures lifted out of nowhere. These are theme passages speaking about a paradigm shift in the way God wants to relate to us. Jesus evidences it here when He says a new command. Remember the old command that you love God with all your heart, that you love your neighbor as yourself. That's the old command. Now, let's think about that for a minute. Can you really command love? Could I command you to love me? And whatever you do toward me would be love. I mean commanding love is an oxymoron, isn't it?

I think when Jesus says, "... a new command I give you ... to love one another," He's got his tongue firmly planted in his cheek. This is not really a command, this is a reality. Father loves you more than anyone on this planet ever has or ever will. And when you learn to live in the reality of that love, you realize that He doesn't expect us to do it alone. You see, this new commandment Jesus gives doesn't begin with

what I do. It begins with what he does. He loves me. And when I encounter that love, experience that love and live in the reality of that love, I will know exactly how to treat people around me. That's because it's no different than how I'm being treated by the One who loves me most.

And so this is a whole new way of thinking about it. In John 15:15, He gives us another way to look at it. He's saying this to his disciples. This is the same upper room discourse. It's the conversation He's been having with them. In these words, "I no longer call you servants or slaves because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I've called you friends for everything that I have learned from My Father, I've made known to you." Paradigm shift again. I no longer call you slaves. When did He ever read the gospels with me? Did He ever say, "Hey slave Peter, I want you to go do this." "Hey slave John ..." It's not there. There is no place in the New Testament where Jesus is calling people slaves. He's not. He's built friendships with these brothers and sisters. He's built friendships with Martha and Mary in Bethany. Jesus loves going to Lazarus's house in Bethany because He's at home there with people He loves. He never treated people like slaves.

What is this statement, "I no longer call you slaves"? What is that, if it's not a reflection back to the old covenant. The old covenant, as we understand it, did set up between us and God the 'master to slaves' relationship or the king to subjects. It teaches that God is high and lifted up and worthy of honor and praise. We better do what's right. If not we're going to get whacked. Just do what's right, not what's wrong because the king says it. That's the way it was.

LOVE Like You Never Knew It -- Jacobsen – Clarkson

Jesus came and died on a cross and resolved our sin and shame forever in the presence of the Father. Now it's not about the performance of slaves or subjects but the affection of sons and daughters to a loving father. "I no longer call you servants." "I call you friends." And Jesus defined friendship in this passage in a way that, boy, we can't even grasp. It's hard to get a handle on it. He already defined this friendship as strong enough to die for another person!

We have friends. Have you ever had a good friend who betrayed you? It may have been in kindergarten, first grade, second grade. You have a friend. They were your friend one day. Then the next day because they wanted to get in with this other person or group, they teased you and made fun of you. I could have been in church, business, in the market, on vacation or any other context. Likely it has happened to all of us. You know how it feels and it isn't great.

We talk about relationships and we all know it's a double-edged sword. The greatest pains in your life have probably come from broken relationships. And the greatest joys of your life come from healthy relationships. I notice when people die, whether it's in the towers on September 9, 2001 in New York City, or in the floods of New Orleans, whether houses are at risk in Los Angeles with wildfires, that people in moments of tragedy reach out to their friends. The thing they do most intuitively is pick up phones and call loved ones and say, I love you. I want you to know I'm okay or I may not be okay here. And I just want you to know I love you. When you go to a funeral of a dear friend, what you're most aware of is the friendship in your life and how valuable they are,

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and the fact that I don't give enough time to them. As is often said, "No one dies regretting that he didn't spend more time at work." But we do regret that we didn't spend more time with family, with friends, and people we care about.

Am I Loving Me or Loving You?

When Jesus defined friendship, he defined it this way, right before the verses we just read in John 15, "Greater love has no one than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This is love like you and I don't know it. This is why until I feel loved by him, I'll have no idea how to love you. We grow up in a human sense of love, which is as one of my friends defines it, "Love in a human sense is simply the mutual accommodation of self need." Well that's fancy language. What it means is this. If we're friends it is often about exchanging favors. If I do some things that makes you feel happy in some way or I benefit you in some way, then I'm your friend. And if you benefit me in some way, then you're my friend. This is the essence of our friendship. But if something happens and you no longer can benefit me or you do something that hurts me, then the friendship breaks. It shatters our friendships. We even talk about it in a romantic sense as falling in love and falling out of love. When there's this mutually beneficial relationship and then something goes wrong and we come to a difficult moment and either one doesn't feel loved, then we fall out of love.

Our whole sense of love is self-based. It's all about me. The love of the Father is not all about Him. It's all about you and me. When Jesus comes

into the orbit of a woman at a well or tells Zaccheus, he's coming to his house today, He risks rejection and ridicule. And often we withhold our affection in order to avoid embarrassment by association. Jesus came into the orbit of selfish mankind, but He is someone who is others focused, other preferring. Jesus didn't go through life with this 'self-preferring' nature, which we call sin. This selfishness is evident when I resort to the often expressed thought, "If you don't look out for number one (yourself), no one else will." Here's what that self preferring nature is like.

Whatever situation I'm in, I look to either maximize whatever joy there might be in that for me or I look to minimize whatever pain there might be in that for me. Whatever relationship I'm involved in is very self-focused and it's good when I get something I desire out of it. And it's not good when I don't. We measure love based on something that God doesn't know because God's sense of love is infinitely selfless. "Greater love has no one than this, that God (Jesus) laid down His life for His friends (you and I)." I'm giving myself to you whether or not you ever give back. That's how Jesus lived it. He loved His disciples through their stupid moments of wanting to call down fire on the Samaritans; through the fighting over whom is first in the kingdom. He loved them. He kept on loving them. And it's that unconditional love that transforms them. That's what Jesus knows about this love.

Do you see this? If I only love you because God told me I had to or, if I don't act loving towards you or better yet my neighbor next door, if I don't love them and act loving towards them, then God's going to be disappointed with me. Notice that in this

LOVE Like You Never Knew It -- Jacobsen – Clarkson

case my loving them is still about me, isn't it? If I don't love them, I'll feel guilty. I don't want to feel guilty, so I'm going to love them. If I sit down in a public transportation vehicle next to a person and my job there is to convert him to the kingdom, then I'm doing that for me. I really do not love him. He is the object of my evangelism project. I'm going to manipulate him. But if I truly care about him and I don't need anything from him and whether he acknowledges Jesus or not, it is sure indication that I genuinely love him. The objective is that I express to him the same love of Father that has been expressed to me, whether or not he comes, whether or not he sees it, whether or not he acknowledges it.

If I'm only loving you as a fellow slave, I am just doing for you what benefits me? And it's still all about me. When Jesus invites Himself to Zaccheus' home, Wow! The scandalous murmur that rippled through the crowd was incredible, "How can He go home with that guy. That is the cruddiest person in the world? That would be like Jesus going to Federal prison and having lunch with the rapists and murderers! "You can't go to lunch with them!" That's exactly what the crowd was saying. And Zaccheus is very aware that the crowd is murmuring that. But he has come near someone now that isn't saying, "I'm worried about my association with Zaccheus. What it's going to look like to them. Jesus wasn't worried about that. He was there to love Zaccheus. When Zaccheus came in the orbit of an others-focused person, it changed him.

Let's look at first John, another major voice in the New Testament. Here's what John says about this, "God is love and whoever lives in love, lives in God

LOVE Like You Never Knew It -- Jacobsen – Clarkson

and God in him. And there is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. And the one who fears is not perfected in love.” If I do what I do for God because I'm afraid of the consequences if I don't, I'm still missing the best of what this kingdom has to offer. John says, “You will not be perfected in fear. What perfects us is love. Love transforms us. When I get a sense of the Father's affection for me and I learn to live that alongside other people, that's when I become increasingly transformed by the life of Jesus.

But, I can't do that. I can't live in circumstances, I can't live in situations unaware of myself and my needs and maximizing my joy or minimizing my pain until I know that all my joy and all my pains are somehow in God and He is big enough to watch my back take care of me. You see, what we learned in kindergarten was if you don't look out for yourself, no one else will. And we've grown up jaded. We've grown up with defenses, always looking out for how I could get hurt in this or how I could maximize my pleasure. And I want to be that person's friend because that would be really good for me. It's all about me. And we miss the life of the best relationships in which I don't have to look out for my benefit because my Father is doing that for me every day. I don't have to try to minimize my pain because I've got a Father who can walk through any pain with me and make me whole through it. I have a father like that!

And now let's look at the scripture penned by Paul in Romans chapter eight, verse 15 and his discourse about what the cross did to reacquaint us with the Father and reconcile us to Him. The chapter

LOVE Like You Never Knew It -- Jacobsen – Clarkson

begins with, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus...” This is not about guilt. Again. If I'm loving you so I don't feel guilty, I am still serving me, not you. And here he says, “... for you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear.” Again, you did once. The spirit of the old covenant was that we are obligated to the king to be his slaves. And the only reason you do that is because you are afraid of something worse happening to you. Read Deuteronomy. It says, “Do good. Get good. Do bad. Get bad. Follow my covenant, and I'll bless you, protect you, bring the rains, bring your crops, and everything will be wonderful. But if you ignore my covenant, I'll bring enemies to you and locust will eat your crops and you won't get rain. When you do good, you get good. When you do bad, you get bad.” Performance-based relationship is what the old covenant was built on. Unfortunately, that is how most of our relationships are.

Paul lets us know that God knew the old covenant would never work, it would never transform you. It could make you pretend as long as your fear is greater than your sense of self-indulgence, you'll do better for a while. But you will not be transformed. Here's what Paul says about this paradigm shift, “... but you have received the Spirit of sonship and by Him we cry out Abba Father!” Oh, it's not that spirit of obligation. Jesus knew this. Here's what Jesus taught us. Father does not want the terrified service of slaves. He wants the genuine affection of sons and daughters living in the celebration of His life. God knows that the Holy Spirit is the most transforming thing God can put in the world to help us learn to

love like He loves. Not because we're trying, not because we're acting, but because we've experienced His affection in such great measure. This is the Spirit of sonship where we cry out, "Daddy!"

You know what that spirit of sonship looks like. Imagine showing a photo of your favorite person, your child or your grandchild to another person. This picture of my granddaughter is shameless way to show you my pride and joy in family. I'll acknowledge that. But it's also a great picture of awe and joy. Look at Amy smiling as she looks into the eyes of her Mom! That's Julie, my daughter in the pool throwing her daughter into the air. See that look? Can you see the delight in the child's eyes? Now, that's what I'm talking about. This is how Father, God, wants you looking at Him every day. The word Abba is essentially our word Dada, later becoming Daddy. Abba is the first thing a child says when it tries to say Father, now it is Papa or Dad.

When God co-ops this metaphor of a child on his lap, son or daughter, he's taking it at the Abba age, the age when the child says its first words. When I look at my granddaughter when she comes to my house and gives me that big smile, there is no better picture of the relationship Father wants with you than you see in a picture like that. The same delight I have when that little girl comes in my house is only a small measure of the delight this Father feels for you when you wake up in the morning.

"Oh no, not me man. You don't know me. Maybe when I get some things fixed up a little bit, He'll feel that way. But I'm not doing so well. I don't read my Bible enough. I said some bad things. My marriage is

not going well. I just can't get it together. No, God wouldn't give me that wake up look." You won't be changed until you know that Father delights in you even at your most broken place. Mostly we live life, as sons and daughters of God, like teenagers who are supposed to know better. When we do the wrong thing, we think that God is just sitting there saying, "He's a stupid idiot!" And yet, He's not!

When Paul makes the analogy, He puts it at this age, Abba. And it's a spirit of love. It's not an intellectual conclusion. It's okay. God loves me, I'm a little kid. Okay, I get that. Paul said, "... you've been given a spirit of sonship, it said in our translation here. Many translations say "a spirit of adoption." You've been brought in to the family. It's a spirit of belonging. The heart cries out, "Abba." This is not an intellectual conclusion. This is an experiential reality. Sorry to be existentialist on you here. But I think this life in the Kingdom is about a reality of belonging and feeling loved, genuinely loved. It's not about intellectual conclusions, creeds and confessions. It's about a life lived in that kind of affection with Father as his 'beloved' son, as his 'beloved' daughter.