

International Conversation Cafe

Bible Topic: All We Need Is Love

Love. It is a subject we sing about, write about, talk about, and lie about. We all need to receive and give love. But what is love? Anthropologist, Helen Fisher, suggests three stages of what we call love. The first is erotic love, the physical/sexual attraction we feel for someone. The second is the deepening romantic attachment we feel toward one person, which can lead to the third stage, attachment. Attachment is not about how we feel but a committed thoughtful decision. The Bible has something to say about all three of these stages, but for this discussion, we will first focus on love, not as a feeling, but as a commitment.

Paul, the apostle, describes what this commitment looks like in his letter to the Corinthians, chapter 13.

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not want what belongs to others. It does not brag. It is not proud. It is not rude. It does not look out for its own interests. It does not easily become angry. It does not keep track of other people's wrongs. Love is not happy with evil. But it is full of joy when the truth is spoken. It always protects. It always trusts. It always hopes. It never gives up. Love never fails.

What do you like about this passage?

Is there anything confusing?

Do you think it is possible to be truly unselfish?

A person's motives seem to determine if their actions are truly loving. Again Paul writes;

Suppose I speak in the languages of human beings and of angels. If I don't have love, I am only a loud gong or a noisy cymbal. Suppose I have the gift of prophecy. Suppose I can understand all the secret things of God and know everything about him. And suppose I have enough faith to move mountains. If I don't have love, I am nothing at all. Suppose I give everything I have to poor people. And suppose I give my body to be burned. If I don't have love, I get [gain] nothing at all.

Define any words you are not familiar with.

Summarize Paul's thoughts in your own words. Do you think it is possible to act in a sacrificial way and not be loving? How?

What do you think he means by the last statement, "If I don't have love, I get (gain) nothing at all."

God's love toward people is a full of commitment, but also emotion. One picture of that commitment and emotion is that of a father and child. Jesus tells a story in Luke 15 that describes God's love for people even when people disrespect him.

Jesus continued, "There was a man who had two sons. The younger son spoke to his father. He said, 'Father, give me my share of the family property.' So the father divided his property between his two sons.

"Not long after that, the younger son packed up all he had. Then he left for a country far away. There he wasted his money on wild living. He spent everything he had. Then the whole country ran low on food. So the son didn't have what he needed. He went to work for someone who lived in that country. That person sent the son to the fields to feed the pigs. The son wanted to fill his stomach with the food the pigs were eating. But no one gave him anything.

"Then he began to think clearly again. He said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough food! But here I am dying from hunger! I will get up and go back to my father. I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven. And I have sinned against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants."' So he got up and went to his father.

"While the son was still a long way off, his father saw him. He was filled with tender love for his son. He ran to him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him.

"The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer fit to be called your son.'

"But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattest calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. This son of mine was dead. And now he is alive again. He was lost. And now he is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Retell the story in your own words.

What is this story saying about people?

What is this story saying about God?

How does this story affect your attitudes towards God?

Describe what is going on in the painting.

What clues tell you what is happening?

Keep looking. What else can you find?



Barolome Esteban Murillo. Return of the Prodigal Son. C 1667-70. Oil on canvas, 236 x 262 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington