

Episode 103: Love, Part 4

This is the fourth part of a special series on love, where Denver teaches us how we can live according to the two great commandments: Love God, and Love One Another.

DENVER: Today—and I say these words advisedly and I want you to take them seriously—today, *all* Christian churches have become corrupt. They love money more, and acquiring financial security and church buildings more, than caring for the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted. The institutions claiming to be the Church of God are all polluted by the cares of the world. I want you to understand what I mean by that. During the apostolic era, there was no such thing as a Christian church building. Christians met in homes. They did not collect and compensate ministers. They gathered money and they used it to help the poor and the needy among them.

As soon as you get a church building, I regret to inform you, you'll have to hire a lawyer. In what name are you going to take title to your building? How are you going to hide title, or hold title, and deal with succession? What form will the organization take? Do you intend to qualify for tax deductibility? If so, do you intend to file as a charitable institution—as an eleemosynary institution? As an educational institution? Those are all words that you find in 501(c) of the Internal Revenue Code. And what do you do if you want to hire and fire a minister? And you want to dispossess the one you fired and put into possession the successor in the building? What rights, and who's on the board, and who possesses the right to deal with that? As soon as you own property, the *cares of this world invade*. It's unavoidable.

If you meet in homes as the early Christians did, and if you gather your tithing—one tenth of your surplus after you've taken care of all your responsibilities, all your needs, whatever's left over, one tenth of that is your tithe. After you gather your tithes, then you ought to look at your brothers and your sisters who are there in your meeting, and you ought to help those who have needs—who have health needs, who have education needs, who have transportation needs, who have food needs, who have children that need care. Christians should take care of the poor among them.

And *no one* should be looking at the flock and saying, "I need your money to support myself." Christian charity should be used to take care of the poor among you, and *not* to engage in acquiring the cares of this world. This is why *all* Christian churches have become corrupt. They love money, and acquiring financial security and church buildings, more than caring for the poor and the needy, the sick and the afflicted.

The idea of the love of Christ was preserved in Johannine Christianity. Spirit, knowledge, and ritual were designed to preserve knowledge of Christ. Although lost to western Christianity, John taught that man would become divinitized, or ascend in stages of progression to become *just like God*. His teachings have been lost, but two passages in the New Testament writings of John preserve that teaching still—1 John 3, beginning in verse 1:

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope...purifieth himself, even as he is pure. ([emphasis added] 1 John 3:1-3; see also 1 John 1:13 RE)

And then in Revelation chapter 3, beginning at verse 20, it is Christ who is speaking:

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches. ([emphasis added] Revelation 3:20-22; see also Revelation 1:20 RE)

Christ came as the least, as a servant kneeling to wash feet, as a teacher of righteousness. He invited, persuaded, and taught. He did *not* demand respect for His authority. He submitted to abuse, rejection, and ultimately to being slain. He loved mankind. Those who demand their authority be respected are anti-Christ because they oppose the core of Christ's example. We are most Christian when we are most *like Christ*.

Religion should not divide us as it does. It's tragic that anyone's search to find truth and to connect with God should divide them from their fellow man. Christ said the greatest commandment was to love God, but immediately added that the second greatest commandment was *like unto it*, and that commandment was to love our neighbor as ourself (See Matthew 22:35-40; see also Matthew 10:23 RE).

Christ never taught us 'love only those who love us in return'. He taught:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if [you] love them which love you, what reward have [you]? do not even the publicans [do] the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. ([emphasis added] Matthew 5:43-48; see also Matthew 3:26 RE)

Let us make our search for truth one that brings us closer together rather than something to divide us apart. We share more than we disagree. I want you to consider the meaning for us all in the account of Adam and Eve. We all have one set of original parents in common. All of the genetic potential for the entire human race comes from these two original

parents. No man or woman possesses any genetic feature that did not first come from them. They set the limits on their descendants' height. They set the limit on how high their descendants could jump, how fast we could run, how intelligent we could become, how strong we could become. Every facet of us, their diverse descendants in the world at this moment, were determined by the genetic makeup of Adam and Eve. When we despise the differences we see in one another, we despise our first parents. Christ taught:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye [should] also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34-35; see also John 9:5 RE; see also T&C 171, The Testimony of St. John 10:7 RE)

Menno Simons, who was one of the Reformation fathers after whom the Mennonites are named, said, "True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant, it clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry, it comforts the sorrowful, it shelters the destitute, it serves those that harm it, it binds up that which is wounded, it has become all things to all creatures" (*Why I Do Not Cease Teaching and Writing*, by Menno Simons, 1539).

Everything Christ taught is tended to change our inner self. He did not want me judging and condemning *you*. If you decide to abuse me, Christ teaches I should forgive you. If you offend me seventy times seven, Christ taught me to forgive (See Matthew 18:21-22; see also Matthew 9:15 RE).

If we believed in Christ enough to live as He taught, our families would heal, our communities would heal, our nations would heal, and the world would heal. Christ was an idealist, but He showed by His life that it is possible to live the ideal. As a Christian I should commit to that ideal, and at every missed step, resolve to do better. Each of us control only our own life, but your example is enough to change the lives of many others.

All the Lord had previously done in His mortal ministry by healing the sick, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, restoring hearing to the deaf, curing the leper, and ministering relief to others as he taught was but a prelude to what the Lord was now to do on this dark, oppressive night.

As the Lord knelt in prayer, His vicarious suffering began. He was overcome by pain and anguish. He felt within Him, not just the pains of sin, but also the illnesses men suffer as a result of the Fall and their foolish and evil choices. The suffering was long and the challenge difficult. The Lord suffered the afflictions. He was healed from the sickness. He overcame the pains, and patiently bore the infirmities until, finally, he returned to peace of mind and strength of body. It took an act of will and hope for Him to overcome the affliction which had been poured upon Him. He overcame the separation caused by these afflictions and reconciled with His Father. He was at peace with all mankind.

He thought His sufferings were over, but to His astonishment another wave overcame Him. This one was much greater than the first. The Lord, who had been kneeling, fell

forward onto His hands at the impact of the pain that was part of a greater, second wave.

This second wave was so much greater than the first that it seemed to entirely overcome the Lord. The Lord was now stricken with physical injuries as well as spiritual affliction. As He suffered anew, His flesh was torn which He healed using the power of the charity within Him. The Lord had such life within Him, such power and virtue within Him, that although He suffered in His flesh, these injuries healed and His flesh restored. His suffering was both body and spirit, and there was anguish of thought, feeling, and soul.

The Lord overcame this second wave of suffering, and again found peace of mind and strength of body; and His heart filled with love despite what He had suffered. Indeed, it was charity or love that allowed Him to overcome. He was at peace with His Father, and with all mankind, but it required another, still greater act of will and charity than the first for Him to do so.

Again, the Lord thought His suffering was over. He stayed on His hands and knees for a moment to collect Himself when another wave of torment burst upon Him. This wave struck Him with such force He fell forward upon His face. He was afflicted by this greater wave. He was then healed, only to then be afflicted again as the waves of torment overflowed. Wave after wave poured out upon Him, with only moments between them. The Lord's suffering progressed from a lesser to a greater portion of affliction; for as one would be overcome by Him, the next, greater affliction would then be poured out. Each wave of suffering was only preparation for the next, greater wave. The pains of mortality, disease, injury, and infirmity, together with the sufferings of sin, transgressions, guilt of mind, and unease of soul, the horrors of recognition of the evils men had inflicted upon others, were all poured out upon Him, with confusion and perplexity multiplied upon Him.

He longed for it to be over, and thought it would end long before it finally ended. With each wave he thought it would be the last, but then another came upon Him, and then yet another.

But the Lord was determined to suffer the Father's will and not His own. Therefore, a final wave came upon Him with such violence as to cut Him at every pore. It seemed for a moment that He was torn apart, and that blood came out of every pore. The Lord writhed in pain upon the ground as this...final torment was poured upon Him.

All virtue was taken from Him. All the great life force in Him was stricken and afflicted. All the light turned to darkness. He was humbled, drained, and left with nothing. It is not possible for a man to bear such pains and live, but with nothing more than will, hope in His Father, and charity [towards] all men, He emerged from the final wave of torment, knowing He had suffered all this for His Father and His brethren. By His hope and great charity, trusting in the Father, the Lord returned from this dark abyss and found grace again, His heart being filled with love toward the Father and all men.

The waves of torment suffered by the Lord came in pairs which mirrored each other. The first of each wave poured upon the Lord those feelings, regrets, recriminations, and pains felt by those who injured their fellow man. Then followed a second wave, which mirrored the first, but imposed the pains suffered by the victims of the acts committed by those in the first wave. Instead of the pains of those who inflict hurt or

harm, it was now the anger, bitterness, and resentments felt by those who suffered these wrongs.

From each wave of suffering, whether as the one afflicting or as the victim of those wrongs, the Lord would overcome the evil feelings associated with these wrongs, and find His heart again filled with peace. This was why, in the vision of the suffering of the Lord, it was in the second waves that there appeared oftentimes to be injuries to His body.

The greater difficulty in these paired waves of torment was always overcoming the suffering of the victim. With these waves the Lord learned to overcome the victims' resentments, to forgive, and to heal both body and spirit. This was more difficult than overcoming the struggles arising from the one who committed the evil. This is because the one doing evil knows he has done wrong and feels a natural regret when he sees himself aright. The victim, however, always feels it is their right to hold resentment, to judge their persecutor, and to withhold peace and love [from] their fellow men. The Lord was required to overcome both so that He could succor both.

In the pairing of the waves, the first torment was of the mind and spirit, and the second was torment of mind, spirit, and body.

The Lord experienced all the horror and regret wicked men feel for their crimes when they finally see the truth. He experienced the suffering of their victims whose righteous anger and natural resentment and disappointment must also be shed, and forgiveness given, in order for them to find peace. He overcame them all. He descended below them all. He comprehends it all. And He knows how to bring peace to them all. He knows how to love others whether they are the one who has given offense or the one who is a victim of the offense.

In the final wave, the most brutal, most evil, most heinous sins men inflict upon one another were felt by Him as a victim of the worst men can do. He knew how it felt to wrongly suffer death. He knew what it was like to be a mother holding a child in her arms as they are both killed by those who delight in their suffering. He knew how it was for ambitious men to rid themselves of a rival by conspiracy and murder. He knew what it was to have virtue robbed from the innocent. He knew betrayal, treachery, and abuse in all its worst degrading horror. There was no cruelty, no offense, no evil that mankind has suffered or will suffer that was not put upon Him.

He knew what it is like for men to satisfy their ambition by clothing their hypocrisy in religious garb. He also felt what it was like to be the victim of religious oppression by those who pretend to practice virtue while oppressing others. He knew the hearts of those who would kill Him. Before confronting their condemnation of Him in the flesh, He suffered their torment of mind when they recognized He was the Lord, and then found peace for what they would do by rejecting Him. In this extremity there was madness itself as He mirrored the evil which would destroy Him, and learned how to come to peace with the Father after killing the Son of God, and to love all those involved without restraint and without pretense even before they did these terrible deeds. His suffering, therefore, encompassed all that has happened, all that did happen, and all that would happen in the future.

As a result of what the Lord suffered, there is no condition — physical, spiritual, or mental — that He does not fully understand. He knows how to teach, comfort, succor,

and direct any who [will] come to Him seeking forgiveness and peace. This is why the prophet wrote: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. [Isa. 19:2] And again: Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. [Isa. 19:2] He obtained this knowledge by the things He suffered. He suffered that we might avoid sin by being obedient to His commandments. None of us need harm another, if we will follow Him. He knows fully the consequences of sin. He teaches His followers...to avoid sin. (T&C 161:2-9,11-12,17-24 RE)

The prophet Alma taught and understood our Lord's suffering as he wrote:

And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people. And he will take upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people; and he will take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may be filled with mercy, according to the flesh, that he may know according to the flesh how to succor his people according to their infirmities. (Alma 7:11-12; see also Alma 5:3 RE)

He can bring peace to any soul. He can help those who will come to Him love their fellow man. He alone is the Perfect Teacher because He alone has the knowledge each of us lack to return to being whole and at peace with God, the Father of us all, after all our transgression of His will. Christ is wise to what is required for each man's salvation.

I believe that there is tension, if not outright hostility, between charity as a priority (on one hand) and knowledge as priority (on the other hand); and that as between the two, it is more important to acquire the capacity for charity, or love of your fellow man, than it is to gain understanding. It's like what Paul said, "If I have all gifts and know all mysteries, but have not charity, I am nothing" (See 1 Corinthians 13:1-2; see also 1 Corinthians 1:51 RE).

Charity or the love of your fellow man is the greater challenge and the more relevant one, and when you've acquired that, you can add to it knowledge. But knowledge has the ability to render the possessor arrogant and haughty, whereas charity renders the possessor humble. If you want the greatest challenge in life, try loving your fellow man unconditionally and viewing them as God would view them, and then behaving according to that view. And out of that you will learn a great deal more about Christ than you can simply by studying. Walking in His path is a greater revelation of who He is than anything else that's provided.

Joseph Smith once remarked that if you could gaze into Heaven for five minutes, you would know more about it than if you read every book that has ever been written on the subject (See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 324; see also *History of the Church*, 6:50).

Likewise, if you live charitably for five minutes in the presence of what you would normally condemn, what you would normally find repugnant— If you can deal with that charitably, you will understand Christ better than if you spend a lifetime reading books written about Him.

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