

Reacting to God's Love

My wife, Betty, and I were watching a scene on TV, when she interjected: "It must be awful to love someone and for them not to reciprocate."

God knows that feeling better than anyone else. God loves the world so much, but how much of the world loves him in return? And how much do I love him? Do I love him with all my heart? How do I show my love to him?

God knows what it means to have his love rejected. The greatest love receives the greatest rejection. It breaks his heart when individuals do not accept his love, when they don't respond with love. If people rejected God because he was mean, that would be understandable. But how do you explain, how do you justify ignoring or even disliking someone who loved you so much that he would do anything for you, die for you, redeem your wretched soul and take you to heaven to be with him forever? You wouldn't treat a dog that way!

It's true that your heavenly Father wants to have a working relationship with you. But that's secondary. First and foremost, he wants a love relationship with you.

Did you notice that the great commandment does not say, "*Work* for the Lord with all of your heart"? It says, "*Love* him with all your heart." So, it's not just a *working* relationship. The emphasis is on love – on the senses, emotions, passions. It's not an impersonal religion but an intimate relationship.

God is not interested in my loveless labor. He already has enough of that kind of service from his individually made, non-reproductive agents – the angels. God neither has nor wants a love relationship with angels. He wants it with humans – with those who were created in his likeness and image.

And none of us, as born again believers, can use the excuse that we cannot respond to the Lord and to people with enough of the right kind of love, "*...because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us*" (Romans 5:5). We dare not disregard or limit this poured-out, poured-in love. Apostle John says God's love is in us (1 John 3:17). We will be acting like true children of God when we "*...live a life of love...*" (Ephesians 5:2).

God does not want work or even worship that is only bound by intellect, theory and procedures. He wants us to *love* him experientially and passionately. He deserves no less and he will settle for no less. God created me with the capacity and capability to love him acceptably.

Why love? Because love is the purest, peerless, positive power in the universe. It is far superior to everything else in existence. Apostle Paul calls it the "*...most excellent way*" (1 Corinthians 12:31). "*...this love that surpasses knowledge...*" (Ephesians 3:19). We most accurately portray God when we do everything with his love.

The Lord says to the Christians in Ephesus, "*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love*" (Revelation 2:4).

What, precisely, is first love? I believe it is what we experience when we are initially born

again. We are overflowing with relief, gratitude and praise to God for setting us free from sin, for removing our guilt, for forgiving our sins. Our hearts are thrilled with the gift of the Holy Spirit and with eternal life. In any case, we are unreservedly and unashamedly in love with Christ. As much as possible, our thoughts and conversations are about him. We talk to and about him eagerly, we obey him willingly and we serve him joyfully.

But, if we do not continue to nurture and enhance our love relationship with the Lord, we can lose it. If it's neglected, it can be forfeited.

If I have lost my initial love for Christ, there is a way to recover it. It's not easy, but it is possible. *"Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first"* (Revelation 2:5). *"...realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked...So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me"* (Revelation 3:17,19,20). *"And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1:3). *"...and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you..."* (2 Corinthians 13:14). If you want to find lost love, go back and look for it where you lost it. *Realize! Remember! Repent! Return!*

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is – you said it – love." ♦♦♦