

What I Understand About Jesus' Ultimate Message...

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Small world definitions block true peace: If we define the "we" in too small of terms, we create boundaries. When those boundaries are reinforced with bigotry, we create walls bound with razor wire. When we view outsiders with hostility and evil intentions toward us, we arm ourselves. When we view them as intruding upon us vis a vis those intentions, we seek to destroy them. CCJ 2009

Intro: To me, Jesus ultimate message was NOT one about personal salvation. That it has almost exclusively become that is at least disturbing to me. It marks a significant deviation to me about who he was and what he really hoped to accomplish with his life, and then, with his death.

For me, Jesus ultimate message was about love - loving myself through the choices I make, consciously and unconsciously, loving God in turn by those choices and how those choices manifest love of others, whether those in community with me or my enemy. Especially my enemy.

The process of loving is just that... a process. It is the result of a continuing process of making choices. These choices are made unconsciously in most cases. The significance of them cumulatively is profound both on the individual level and on the social level. It becomes more difficult the farther away from us the people are we are trying to love in terms of our personal comfort zones and in terms of the conflicting values that may be entering into the equation. Such as those who seem far from me in culture and other types of subjective experience and morality and ethics. Loving my enemy is obviously more difficult and challenging than the effort required to love a neighbor.

But we must realize that our enemy may be as close as our spouse in a heated moment or the tribe to whom we have shared enmity for centuries. Both situations will require us to find a motivation to seek a conflict resolution in loving.

Those who imagine that a lasting peace can be realized through mere social and political processes have not really understood history and human nature. Only love, true love, not romantic love, which accomplishes a complete restoration can solve the problems of people with people. Social contracts and peace agreements are often whims of fantasy easily thwarted and discarded because they are not rooted in a value system empowered to offer eternal resolution. To truly love my enemy requires an ongoing commitment not so easily put aside merely because of conflict.

The commitment to love knows no borders, no ideology, no nationality or race or ethnicity. It does not avoid complex and important social and moral issues but it approaches them in a different manner than we might normally pursue.

Love is not about emotion though it may have emotion as a part of it as a relative component. But it is a state beyond emotion. It is not to be mistaken as some romantic state. It is not about attraction. Or control. Or dominance and submission. It is most assuredly not about power.

In the following I have tried to identify the components associated with the act of loving. It is not suggested to be complete, comprehensive or without error. But as a topic of theology and religion, it may be a good place to examine what we think we mean when we say we should love and how that is accomplished. And the factors that may limit or hinder it and some issues of what really constitutes the concerns of love.

The first premise I see that relates to this message is that God gave everything to us in creation: everything, to support, nurture, maintain or give opportunity for love to exist, grow and prosper. In this, ALL love is realized in relationships. This is the second premise. There is no true love if there is only an "I". It must be an us. Love was created as a relational condition. That is, 2 or more parties must exist in a relationship for true love to exist, prosper and grow.

The third premise is that for love to exist, prosper and grow, 2 preconditions MUST be present: They are...

1. Intimacy

2. Vulnerability

These two are interrelated co-existing conditions.

The first condition is intimacy. Intimacy is that condition wherein two bodies ALLOW, MAINTAIN and PROTECT a state of tension where the two bodies not only allow but SEEK a proximity to each other. A state of tension being that even if there is no "natural" attraction so to speak, they seek this relationship nonetheless. This is likened to 2 celestial bodies seeking an orbit in common to each other. Independent orbits, but orbits nonetheless.

The bodies involved will have their own unique gravities, (i.e. egos), densities, (personal histories), and surface environments, (personalities). These might seem on the surface to be in a natural conflict because of the gulf between their differences and from a relative human historical perspective this might not just be an appearance but actually a reality.

But such celestial bodies, to have intimacy, must exercise one arbitrating condition that can make such a "miracle" possible.

This is "free will" fueled by a personal motivation of such power so as to neutralize any seeming conflicts of interest long enough for the intimacy to progress. Such a condition can make the impossible, possible. This initial step represents a profound opportunity if combined with the following conditions for humanity, especially a humanity in conflict.

The 2nd condition: Vulnerability. Vulnerability is the state of allowing a condition to exist where opportunity, between 2 bodies, can allow impact or effect on each other, and through this condition actually come to change each other through the impact or effect.

This condition implies that defense mechanisms are at least held in reserve, if not actually suspended.

I have often felt that the power of a free speech amendment lies not so much in the speech itself, but the real power lies in the opportunity to be heard and in being heard, to either cause others to change their views or to find likeminded people wherein political and social action can coalesce. Change, whether in the individual or in a social arena, is accomplished most quickly in such a climate where such speech is not only protected, but held as a high value.

Vulnerability is a condition necessary for such change and is absolutely critical for love to exist, prosper and grow.

Thus, when free will, with a proper motivation, is employed to create, support and maintain a condition of intimacy and vulnerability, the preconditions necessary for love to exist, grow and prosper are met.

If we are truly exercising these qualities, a natural condition of empathy will emerge. With this empathy, we will come to perceive our own image in those we are relating to. We will even be further motivated to allow vulnerability and intimacy to develop, viewing this person as worthy for relationship in as much as we see ourselves in them. This reflection affirms our mutual value and purpose in being. It also can recognize the uniqueness of the other without inherently viewing that as a threat or source of conflict. It will even be willing to seek to learn from that source for qualities of being they can incorporate to expand their own being.

Truly, as we actualize empathy in listening to our other, that being we have entered into relationship with, we will find discovery and surprise awaiting us. This even creates a condition where we will be inevitably be affected by that other and as a result not only will we be changed but the relationship will change.

The 3rd condition for love to exist, grow and prosper, (not a precondition but a condition nonetheless), is a commitment to relational maintenance.

Relational maintenance is the condition wherein a party makes a commitment, followed by a disciplined effort to nurture, nature and feed a relationship, hopefully as a natural state of being rather than an artificial and forced state of being.

This can be likened to the car owner who checks fluids periodically, changes oil in a timely fashion, monitors tire wear, etc.

When all the preceding factors exist and are in place, then the opportunity for love to exist, grow and prosper are at least optimized.

Yet, for 2 celestial bodies to function as love entities to each other, each must also desire to love the other and significantly, desire to be loved by the other. How often we say we love some others but really don't desire to be intimately loved by them. This is not true love.

This is where intimacy and vulnerability are evident or not. For without this, true love cannot exist and merely represents at best good intentions, at worst true deception. Love is a relational condition, or it cannot truly exist. It is not just a one way proposition, though it may be partly successful in the effort to establish love with another entity, as a condition encouraging a relationship of love. But unless there is a responding object to the love initiated that freely, uniquely and willfully initiates its own love, the act of love will be like a driver reaching a dead end in a road. One can go no farther and therefore nowhere and unless the dead end was the goal, an oxymoron when one considers what love really is, the love's value is at least temporarily rendered powerless and meaningless.

To truly consider the significance of Jesus imperative to love, we must also understand other significant hindrances that can occur to diminish, limit, or stop love, at least in completing the process by which love grows and prospers.

First, people experience pain from others, intended and unintentional. This is the foremost condition contributing to the lack of love and the breakdown of love relationships that may already exist.

This pain causes a sense of frustration. Beyond the mere experience of pain is the sense that such pain should not be. That there is some value and part of being that is being violated in the experience of the pain.

The result of recognizing and affirming that such pain is somehow "wrong" is a sense of defilement, of violation. This violation, if not processed and digested, can result in anger. Anger that such violation has occurred that somehow should not have occurred. When a perpetrator is identified and is attributed as the source of the pain, negative confrontation can emerge towards the source of the pain. If repentance, change and reconciliation is not forthcoming in response to the confrontation, resentment may emerge.

If the source intentionally causes the pain, or ignores the effect on the other, frustration may cause the person to withdraw in relationship to the source and cause of the pain. This results in alienation from such sources and effectively renders any previous intimacy and vulnerability null and void. This withdrawal ensures that love cannot exist, grow or prosper.

We are not seeking to establish blame here, merely trying to identify the factors involved in the hindrance to love relationships being established or maintained.

Further, the alienation may seem to encourage a hostility towards the offending party.

If no condition emerges wherein a confrontation of a positive nature can alter the dominating reality of the pain and further the desire for cessation of the conflict, the anger and resentment may escalate to the point of becoming hate.

A positive form of confrontation would be someone exercising the skill of sharing emotionally significant information (I am hurting and you are party to this) in ways that would encourage self exploration (can we find a way to change the relationship to one of true love) by both parties in the conflict rather than self defense.

If no form of confrontation is forthcoming, positive or negative, the hate, of self and /or the other, may escalate into hate filled action, resulting in violence.

This may seem a hopeless situation but later we will see how someone who is touched by Jesus and his words and life, may discover hope, and in discovering hope, may choose a course of action that can allow restoration of a damaged relationship. While it is obvious to those who hold with Jesus as at least as a teacher that love was the intended state between all humanity, it is also the means by which damaged relationships can be healed and restored.

For the moment though, let's step aside and consider if notions of justice are an integral part of Jesus commandment to love. On the surface, given he did not really address issues like slavery, we might be tempted to think such issues were of no concern to him. But rather than this being the truth, he might have recognized that until people were love centered, such social issues were really beyond the pale of what he could address until people lived by another code, namely one centered on love.

First I would like to postulate that justice as an idea emerged as a means by which humanity could identify, label, categorize and describe a condition that should not exist. That this condition is wrong, a violation of relationships, not a part of what is good and right and not intended by God to be a part of human relationships.

Once the notion of injustice is sensed, realized, defined and quantified, a notion of its absence, as a "justified" reality, emerges in contrast to the reality being criticized and is given definition. Hence, we then have the idea of justice. The absence of injustice. The state of relationship that should exist that now doesn't.

But is important to note that were there no injustice, such a term as justice would not be required or have emerged. Thus, we must realize that the effort of seeking justice is a response to the reality of injustice. It does not exist by itself. It is a relational condition. It is not also exclusive of love but neither is it inclusive to love, since in love it never need emerge as a concept.

Injustice is the fallen world state of reality. It cannot be said to be a part of God's will for humanity. In fact, injustice must be viewed as a condition that exists only because the world of love God intended does NOT exist. To this end, Judaic and Christian history is the record of God seeking to restore love to humanity, namely through his/her messiah. But it is a messiah and history seeking complete restoration.

But justice, the seeking of such a condition, through societal process, revolution, political processes, individual action, etc, does not seek complete restoration. It seeks a balance or to stop the injustice. This seems to imply that the injustice is merely to stop or at least be controlled with consequences for those imposing injustice on others.

But love, to exist, grow and prosper, requires that both parties exist in a relationship, exercising free will to achieve a state of intimacy and vulnerability. The parties involved must be committed to relational maintenance.

Those who seek justice seldom if ever seek for love to exist, grow and prosper. They do not desire to love the other or be loved by the other. They only seek that the injustice ceases to occur.

Love, as a relational state, seeks an eternal state of union. Justice seeks a tenable and sustainable state wherein two parties can co-exist without harm to the other. Love, conversely, seeks a full restoration of the damaged relationship.

Justice seeks a relationship that may still exhibit tension as a result of cross purposes existing between the involved parties. Justice exists as a social condition involving emotion and power as its primary components. It may be reasonable to seek justice in a world in which there is no commitment to love.

Love is a spiritual state that may involve emotion but is not emotion as its primary state. It does not involve power, politics or social contracts

Notions of justice allow a stasis of being to exist between the conflicting parties, in fact encourages it. But love seeks a full, complete and eternal restoration of unity in relationship, a state almost of total emersion of the two conflicting parties to become as one. Justice seeks, if necessary, only a separation, or an uneasy co-existence in the relationship.

Justice is about power and position, in time and space, of defining the relationship. Love is about relinquishing power and position, of rendering them moot. Of creating free form orbits where the opportunity for growth and prosperity of the relationship are unlimited by time or space.

If we are seeking only a balancing of power and position, we cannot seek complete restoration of relationship. Even terms such as the "normalization of relationships" are not about love, but power and position. Concerns about power and position are results of the fall of humanity from God's original will. It represents the alienation of humanity from itself, God, each other and the environment.

It is not a paradigm of the original will of God. When we subjugate the need for power and position in relationship to others, a seeming acceptance of injustice, we are left with one possible outcome- namely relationship; full, intimate relationship.

The original will and the will of God as expressed through history has been exclusively about relationship. Total, uncompromising, totally embracing relationship - relationship based on the restoration of love, true love.

When we accept the will to this truth, we will not only find comfort in it, we will also be on the path to full restoration. It is such an environment, by seeking to love and available and willing and desiring to be loved but not controlling others to be loved that real individuality, true family, true community can emerge.

The process to this state requires, because of human history, forgiveness; of self and other others.

What is the purpose and value of forgiveness?

If loving relationships are the ideal placed in front of us, then sin or evil is that which would not only hinder it but even be able to stop it. The act of forgiveness is, if understood, the foundation by which an offending party is released, conditionally, from being excluded from relationship to those hurt so that a love relationship can be re-established. The forgiver, in forgiving is saying to that person(s), we no longer have love relationship. That is not what God intended nor what I want. Thus, I forgive you and in doing so seek to re-establish a relationship with you where love might be restored. In doing this not only do I want to love you, but even more significantly, I want to be loved by you.

By forgiving others, we re-establish the intimacy, the vulnerability necessary for love to exist, prosper and grow. We do not say the pain is gone, or forgotten, but in the hope of restoring the relationship, we believe the pain can be digested and survived. By being willing to and being able to digest that pain through our genuine desire to restore love back to our relationship, we give the offending party the room and encouragement to change. We are taking a risk for them to allow them to reach into their own God created being and find that place where God first created them and in doing so, taught them life was all about love.

Without forgiveness, there is no hope for anyone of us. It is the consummate act of love for the fallen world. It is the only act which empowers us to become the children of God that was originally intended and the will that remains to this day in the very purpose of salvation.

When we forgive, we come to understand the heart of God towards all of humanity through all of time. By practicing it, we become Christ-like and God-like. We grow up. We come to be true brothers and sisters re-creating the opportunity for others to take their place in the circle of love family is and was intended to be. And 7 times 70 may only be the beginning...

One of the important measuring sticks of maturity of our children is their capacity in understanding our love and then to forgive us as parents the mistakes we make. One of the measuring sticks of our humanity as God's maturing children will also be in understanding the love of God for us and to understand how forgiveness is a significant kind of love that arises situationally and is the only means by which love can truly be restored to all parties. And to be willing to shoulder this kind of love and bring it to bear on our brothers and sisters as life puts them in front of us.

As we do this, then we take up the cross and join Jesus in re-creating opportunities for true love to exist, prosper and grow.

It requires forgiveness of Satan, forgiveness of our enemy, be they God, self, spouse, parent, child or neighbor. With forgiveness, which is born of the desire to be a "being" of love, with the desire to love and be loved in place, the opportunity for relationship to develop emerges and can be realized.

In this we are not seeking a tension of cease fire, not a pretension to some kind of peace. What we are seeking is a full restoration of the opportunity for relationship and the opportunity to create relationships of true love - eternal, unchanging in quality and yet ever stimulating.

When we embrace the commandment to love, we embrace all possible futures in all relationships. With God, ourselves, our neighbors and our enemies. To embrace our enemies we will have to digest our pain, our anger, our resentment, our hate. Only the desire to love and be love can help us do that.

Digesting such pain is the last true frontier. It may produce a catharsis of self realization. In it we may come to truly see ourselves in all others and they in us. From here we may truly understand the potentials of true love and in doing so, truly, for once, really understand God. To understand what Jesus meant when he said to be perfect as our heavenly father is perfect.

The life God intended was not about rights, obligations or justice.

It was about freedom and opportunity.

One path seems to lead to a state of hell and one path to a state of heaven, in relationships.

One to an everlasting seeking of balance that is ever changing and never stable.

The other to a world in which freedom to create is boundless and all expressions of love are only bound by the limits of imagination brought to bear by give and take. Such limitlessness of imagination are eternal and endless. Such limitlessness offers eternal stimulation. This is what, to me, Jesus' admonishment to love really means and ultimately requires. And what it means to me. And the challenge it thrusts into my world every day. Ready or not. Success or failure. Failure being no option.