

Series: Ruin to Renovation	Reference: John 13:34-35, 1 John 3:14 & 16	Title: Up, Down, Back & Forth	Date: 06.24.18
Website Writeup:			
We want to avoid devolving into assault & withdrawal in relationships, and commit ourselves to evolving to the glorious expression of the love of Christ in Community!			

Color changes in text indicate slide changes

Thanks to Dallas Willard, this series is born out of his book, *Renovation of the Heart*. Many of his thoughts & words make it into these sermons; read the book as you follow along.

(TITLE SLIDE UP FIRST) Today we talk about Christians in community & society. We've often said the local church, living under the kingdom reign of God, is a glimpse of heaven on earth, however imperfectly reflected. An example to society as to the health & vitality found & practiced under Christ's loving guidance in the individual, extending to community with others.

For that to be realized, those within the church must know Jesus in a personal way as both Lord & Savior. If it's only as Savior, we've not yet grasped the Gospel. He demands allegiance as Lord as well; the Church unified under His direction & call. It's not that He's a petulant despot & just wants to be in charge, it's the fact that there is no other way in life. As Bob Dylan said on his one Christian album (*Slow Train Coming*), "It may be the devil, it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." He was right. And Christ's lordship, unlike Satan's, is life-giving. Jesus said, ²⁸ "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Mt 11:28-30)

Satan doesn't care that you profess or even know your in allegiance to him, he only cares you don't profess it to Jesus. Since in living in allegiance to him, even if unaware, by default you're not living in allegiance to Christ. Jesus demands identification with Him in profession of faith & baptism (if possible). And as Ephesians 2:10 says, as a result of grace we grow to live out the good works of love he's prepared in advance for us to do.

To know Jesus is to know the truth spoken of in Romans 6:14 which we studied in part last week, ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace. Right there it speaks of an exchange of power in our lives. And in v18, ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin & have become slaves to righteousness.

The freedom Christ brings isn't freedom to do as we want. Rather, that false anarchy is what we're saved from - no one's every truly free from an attachment to allegiance. We're saved to a freedom & power to live under the life-giving reign of God. We've lost one master & gained another; exchanging Oppressive Tyrant for Benevolent King. As it says in v12 in that same chapter (TPT), *Sin is a dethroned monarch; so you must no longer give it an opportunity to rule over your life, controlling how you live & compelling you to obey its desires & cravings.* And in Romans 7:4, ⁴ So, my brothers

and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

Kim & I backpacked the John Muir Trail ending up on the top of Mt. Whitney in California, the highest spot in the continental United States (14,496 feet). Incredible. Beautiful. Sunny. Cool. Satisfying. The pinnacle of our 240 mile trip through the Sierra Nevadas. A panorama of colorful mountains, crystal blue lakes, the Mojave Desert & endless sky. A moment to remember! But just 80 miles to the southeast was Death Valley, the lowest spot in the U.S., 280 feet below sea level - the hottest place in the country - records of 134 degrees in the shade. A contrast of death & life. Christ has transported us from the suffocating heat & death of the lowest valley to the cool sunny vistas at the top of the highest mountain.

Let's assume we've all made that move towards Christ. We've crossed over the threshold of the wedding chamber with Him as Groom, us as willing Bride. We've made our professions, standing at the altar of life saying, "I take thee Jesus, to have & to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness & in health, to love & to cherish, until we unite fully." We've made our declaration of devotion & love towards Jesus as Lord & Savior.

The wedding illustration is an example of our our conscious commitment. In reality it was much more like him extracting our lifeless body from Death Valley & miraculously breathing life back into it at the top of Mt Whitney - and as we open our eyes, cradled in his loving hands, we realized salvation has already been wrought in us, and we express devotion as a result of gratitude for it. As Ephesians 2:4-5 says, *⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved.*

As this happens in individuals, we're drawn in & made part of Christ's Body as it states in 1 Corinthians 12:27, *²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. A unique body where* Colossians 3:11 (TPT) says...*in this new creation life, your nationality makes no difference, or your ethnicity, education, or economic status—they matter nothing. For it is Christ that means everything as he lives in every one of us!*

So we come into this glorious body of Christ together, the local church, living under the kingdom reign of God. A glimpse of heaven on earth, however imperfectly reflected. An example to society as to the health & vitality found & practiced under Christ's loving guidance in individual, extending to community with others. Which means, we're not spiritually formed alone; **for us to be truly transformed, relationships must be transformed.** There's the rub, since that takes uncomfortable work in ourselves with Jesus & outwardly with others.

Jesus said though in John 13:34-35, *A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.* Easier said than done - but this is the sure mark

Jesus gives for spiritual formation - we become people who love one another. Specified in the idea, *just as I have loved you, you must love one another!* So, what we do in Christ, is born out of what he's done for us. Which then leads us to 1 John 3:16, *This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.* Failure to do this is seen just 2 verses ahead in 1 John 3:14, *We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.*

This is a love beyond the normal expression we see in society. A divine love extended even to enemies. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 5:44-48, *But I tell you: Love your enemies & pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil & the good, and sends rain on the righteous & the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

A divine love beyond personal affinities, extending towards all peoples, even enemies. Radical thinking! To reach a level of perfection of living in love, which isn't about being right all the time, or having no moral failures - it's about reacting in divine love toward others. For instance, we're living perfectly when we ask for forgiveness for a failure on our own part. We're living in perfect love when we care enough to share Christ with another despite it being uncomfortable. Or, gently admonishing someone for inviting sin into their lives. Or, when we seek reconciliation & restoration in relationship although it's hard to do. It's counter intuitive, you wouldn't think it, but it's the easiest way!

Our love has limits, Jesus claims it must go further. And the only reason we can do this is because God himself is love expressed in the Trinity. Three divine persons, one nature; Father, Son & Spirit. Persons refer to *who* one is. And nature - *what* one is; three persons sharing the same substance, essence, or nature. Each receiving & sharing love in a social matrix. He's the reflection of what he calls us to. And the joyous truth is, love resides in us at the moment of our salvation when we're filled with the Holy Spirit! Individuals filled with the essence of love, residing in community, sharing & receiving His love with one another; reflecting God's nature to society.

What stands in the way of this is the lack of attention to detail. The indifference. The lack of submission. *Not practicing Romans 12:1-2 - offering our bodies as living sacrifices, our spiritual act of worship.* Our conforming to the patterns of this world instead, therefore not being transformed by the renewing of our minds - by the revealed knowledge of his Word & direction of his Spirit. If we had, we'd know the will of God! His good, pleasing & perfect will - there's that word again, *perfect*. Perfect nature of love emanating from us due to our residing in Christ; extending love to others in community.

John Wimber used to say, faith is spelled R.I.S.K. Divine love is risky business. But we have a safety net found in Colossians 3:3-4, *For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear*

with him in glory. We're safe in Christ, no matter the loving risk we take to reflect God's love in relationship with others.

When we live in risky faith & love, there's something profound which happens. We find a wholeness we were meant to find as reflected in the Trinity. **In the knowledge God's for us, we're for others, and they're for us, which brings about an assurance of being, a sense of peace & stability.** When that's not present, we feel turmoil, depression & instability. It's why 'church' is so important & why we must be vigilant to guard relationships & love strongly.

Life has it's troubles. We're sometimes attacked in various ways, directly, or indirectly. We need this divine sufficiency of being rooted in Christ - the vertical connection with the Trinitarian God is the only one truly all-sufficient. But we were also created to be in relationship with one another, the horizontal relationships of sufficiency in Christ's Body between brothers & sisters who've also professed & are devoted to that allegiance to Christ's love in life. We do this imperfectly as we look to God the Father, God the Son & God the Holy Spirit to transform us through fellowship & difficulty.

We all have families of origin, circles of friendships, communities growing up in life where we've received good & bad. Experiences which have been loving & life-giving will serve well against the hits of life & why even someone who's passed on can still live on in their progeny, or students - their influence still felt & practiced. Good directive loving action & proper discipline towards the young, create in them a solidity for the future. If a child's taught strong values, behavior & character's instilled in them at a young age, they'll be able to withstand life's hits well. But if they're never disciplined, or the discipline isn't strong enough, they'll not be able to interact in community with others well in the future, opportunities will be missed, relationships won't last, since we've emotionally & spiritually stunted their growth.

Some of our interactions have created wounds by which we've not recovered. Those who've experienced abuse have a very hard time finding trust & health in community. Without divine intervention, often times they never recover since it's undermined their ability to have healthy community. They'll live by a false reality in their imagination unable to receive love or care because they're bruised from the beginning. This is the affect of sin. Sin in self. Sin in others. Sin in structures. And inevitably we place this blame on God & can't imagine that loving life-giving community found in the Trinity & extended to us on earth in the Body of Christ.

Our wounds may be derived through the actions & words of others, but they're perpetuated by us & reciprocated to others in two ways; assault & withdrawal. If we're to find freedom & be spiritually formed well, these two things must be addressed & their power broken. We can't live out of past & current wounds, assaulting others, or withdrawing in relationship with them (which in itself is a form of assault). It's hard to imagine, in Christ we can live without these things which sometimes control our relationships.

Out of our wounded-ness we often assault others when we act against that which is good for them, even when we have their consent in doing so. This can be a direct assault verbally, physically, financially, sexually, or what have you. An intentional acting against the good or betterment of another. It may be intentionally standing in the way of their progress just because they did or said something, or we simply don't like them. It could be the single guy not guarding the honor of a woman by enticing her to the bedroom without the commitment of marriage which reflects the love of Christ for his Bride. It could also be the assault of a woman acting intentionally provocative to tempt a man to sin. Assault comes in many forms.

Withdrawal is simply another form, where we intentionally disregard another's well-being & goodness, or are simply indifferent to them - we don't care. The absence of love is deadly, as seen in withdrawal. This may just be looking right through them, not recognizing their existence, being too preoccupied with self to care about another. Or, it could be the intentional silent treatment because we despise someone. It could be not saying 'no' in the crowd for fear of not being liked allowing sin to take root.

A problem is, in a digitally connected world, we can't effectively practice this love towards everyone & in every situation. To try would be to invite total frustration. Scripture speaks of a common community, those close, within our realm of interaction. Sometimes we need to draw realistic boundaries. But that feels wrong. I was watching a *Portlandia* skit. The wife was listening to the news, seriously bothered. The hubby asked, "Are you bothered by what's going on in the world?" She said, "How can you not be?" He said, "Believe me, you'll be happier if you just don't care." Comedy playing off the tension that there's just too much going on out there & we can't solve all the ills - the new monthly major issue to be upset about disturbing our spiritual chi - just tune out.

But the answer Scripture gives & one which must be weighed in every situation is, love the one you're with. Love your neighbor as yourself. Does that mean we don't do anything about all the big world issues? No, but it does mean we keep our focus largely on what we're doing in relationship with those around us, not limiting it to those we just feel affinity towards. Maybe there's a vote to be made, a petition to be signed, a march to be had. If you feel strongly, do that thing, understanding your divine calling is to love even those on the other side of the issue. And most importantly, we don't allow those huge world issues to cause us to withdraw & divide from those close by which we have the most chance of infecting with the love of Christ. We're finite people with an infinite God who'll right all wrongs & address all injustices, that doesn't mean total retreat, but it does mean proper boundaries & effective love from us on the ground.

Spiritual formation's a social thing - it's never just me & God, it's always me, God & you. Everything I experience with God effects who I am, and in turn, what I do with you. Likewise, my relationship with you effects my relationship with God. I can't beat my wife & have fellowship with Jesus, they're mutually exclusive. As a caucasian, I can't harbor racist thoughts towards others - spiritually, I'm clogged if I do. As Christ transforms me, I must be emotionally & spiritually present in the relationships around

me to see them also transformed by his love. The sure mark of spiritual formation is, we become people who love one another. I love & forgive you, as he's loved & forgiven me.

As 1 John 2:6 says, *Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did.* A profound difficult statement. One in which we'll not act perfectly in God's love, given the tension we live under, but one in which we're called to pursue nonetheless. We can't live our life demanding others to love us, we must draw our worth & love from the all-sufficient source which is God & in doing so we overflow love to others - then & only then, do we find the solidity of being loved by others as well. Church isn't just to feed you. When it becomes about your felt needs, you're withdrawing from ministry & discipleship of others. We're to be filled to overflowing. Love, the kind Jesus calls us to, is not a special way of feeling, rather it's a divine way of relating to God & others intentionally, which restructures our world, changing individuals & societies.

The call to love your neighbor is a constant for the Christian. Those you have community with & within reason, extending beyond that. When we don't intentionally engage, we retreat into the death of isolation. If we try to save ourselves by withdrawal, avoiding difficult relational issues, not addressing them when appropriate, or simply not caring about those around us, we don't save our lives - we lose them. For some of you as you grow older the temptation to withdraw will grow. For others, you will assault more. For the former, fight that, trust Jesus & talk. For the latter, fight that, trust Jesus & shut up a little - give people room to come out. If you want to live the full life of Christ, then give as well as receive. Seek transformation of self in Christ, and in relationship with others.

Ask yourself, have I been guilty of personal assault on others? Gossip? Angry divisive words? Injecting doubt into relationships? Am I upset, just because I've not gotten my way? Do I hound or nag? Do I force my agenda, think I'm right & want to win arguments? Am I withholding love? Giving the silent treatment? Have I given up? Have I disengaged myself from relationship with individuals, or the local church body? Am I being cliquish with my relationships in community?

Being intentional in these ways is frightening & risky, but it's the way of life. When we lovingly & humbly address issues we're always glad we did, even if just to clear our conscience. How've you let life's busyness, or hurt, make you withdraw from church life? Or from family, neighbor & work relationships? How've you allowed assault & withdrawal to destroy peace? How can you allow Jesus to transform your social relationships bringing reconciliation, life & health to them once more; overcoming & destroying the power of past wounds which have governed them so long?

You gotta serve somebody, might as well be the God of life. The all sufficient Creator of life - love Himself. Draw from him, overflowing to others in community using the mechanisms & relationships available to you. Be intentional in your love, don't let Satan have the upper hand. Don't devolve into assault & withdrawal, evolve into the glorious expression of the love of Christ in Community! Draw from your vertical relationship to Jesus (up & down) to minister in your horizontal relationships with others (back & forth) - bring those issues to Him, his yoke is easy, His burden is light!