

Daily Life with Christ. Love-22: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of love: Fragmented love-3 (love and forgiveness).



(Pdf copy at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/032718.pdf>; for background and complete series, see <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).

George: I can see what you mean when you say that the substratum of all love is an attraction to a perceived good. I can see how that applies to things, but I do not see how this is a universal principle with people. If I love people just because I perceive a good in them, then what would preclude me from just using people for my own good? Seems like love of other human beings includes much more—like their good.

Stephen: It does. That is why I say that all loves are defined according to their proper offices. My love for blueberry pancakes is different from my love for my wife. And my love for my wife is going to be different than my love for my daughter.

George: Yes, but you do not get my objection. Regardless of the office, if love is just seeing something good, like your wife, what would keep you from loving her just because she is some good *for you*?

Stephen: Because in love for human beings one sees human beings, regardless of the relationship, as intrinsically good in themselves—as a matter of fact, all proper love for human beings includes seeing them in terms of eternal worth. Recall, all proper love for anything is going to be according to the nature of the thing. In human beings this is unconditional because of the intrinsic worth in human beings—the same unconditional love God has for all of mankind (John 3:16). Of course, this is not possible for any unbeliever, because the only way to have unconditional love for all regardless of who they are or that they have done is to share in God’s love (Rom. 5:5; 1 John 4:16; 2 Pet. 1:4). No human being, not even a Christian (in and of himself) can love everyone with the perfect and unconditional love of God—it is manifestly impossible for any finite being to generate such a love. However, by living in God, we can participate in God’s own love and in so doing love all others with the very love of God.

George: Seems like you are just adding definitions *ad hoc* to your view of love when you say that proper love for a human being includes seeing that person with infinite worth and value. How do you get there?

Stephen: Because proper love is always according to the nature of the object, and by understanding the nature of man, one understands that each person is of infinite worth and value. So, I am not adding a definition, I am just recognizing the true nature of man. We both know that all men are created in the image of God and that Christ died for all the sins for every human being.

George: Yes, but unbelievers do not know this.

Stephen: They do know this on some level, which is why the cry for unalienable rights is universal. There are also metaphysical reasons apart from the Word of God that teaches that man’s soul is indestructible (it is uncomposed which means that it cannot compose), which means it has infinite worth.

George: Could you define more precisely human love . . . give me a universal and undeniable definition of love for a human being.

Stephen: Proper love for a human being includes two interconnected desires: (1) the desire for the good of the beloved, and (2) the desire for union with the beloved according to the proper office.

George: But can’t one have true love for someone if you wish the good of the person, but do not ever want to have anything to do with him?

Stephen: No! True love always includes wanting to be closer to the person. However, there could be conditions on the part of the beloved that would make that impossible for you to be closer to them. For example, if my best friend became a criminal, I could still wish to be closer to him, but this would be impossible because of his activities. However, the wish remains.

George: But there are certain people that I never want to be around again—and they are not involved in evil. I just don’t like them.

Stephen: So, you do not see them as a good? which means that you do not fully love them. You do not want to be around them because you see them as a bad in some way. Remember, in love the object is always a desirable good to be cherished and desired. Do you think you will feel that way in Heaven?

George: No!

Stephen: So, you do not think that you will be avoiding them in Heaven. Why?

George: Because I will then be able to forgive them . . . and yes, see them in the light of God's love and worth.

Stephen: So, you admit that the problem of you not even wanting to be around them has to do with forgiveness. It is not because they are involved in illicit activity. You really do not care for them at all because you cannot forgive them. Can you see how lack of forgiveness blocks love?

George: I guess.

Stephen: You cannot separate love from forgiveness. A person who refuses to forgive someone who has been unjust to him is not loving toward the offender. Love is always required for forgiveness. A person who does forgive someone who has injured him is always manifesting love of one degree or another. In sum, it is impossible to forgive someone without love, and it is impossible to love without forgiveness.

George: Why is forgiveness such an integral part of love?

Stephen: Consider how a resentful desire for revenge is totally incompatible with love of the person against whom the desire for vengeance is directed. A resentful or vengeful person does not love his enemy in virtue of the fact that he desires the bad, rather than the good, for his opponent.

George: But can't one not desire the bad of the person and still not want to be close to the person, as you say, "according to the proper office."

Stephen: Since proper love emerges from the interaction of two desires, (1) for the good of the beloved and (2) for union with the beloved according to the proper office, the absence of either desire is sufficient to undermine love.

George: I just don't see why that is necessary.

Stephen: Think about God's love. Does He not seek our good? Does He not seek to be closer to us? Wouldn't something be missing if He did not desire to be closer to us? To put it another way, doesn't the fact that God is always seeking to be closer to you make His love more amazing—truer to the nature of love? What if He did not want bad things to happen to you, but did not care if He ever saw you again? Would that be true love? Are we not to imitate His love, Ephesians 5:1-2? I would argue that it is about the only attribute of God that we could imitate.

George: I guess it goes back to our problem of being fragmented: our higher selves know what we should do, like love and forgive, but our lower selves do not want to comply, to love and forgive.

Stephen: Yes, and lack of forgiveness of self is a major source of self-fragmentation. Without forgiveness of self, it is easy to move into alienation of self and self-loathing. A person does not forgive others cannot love themselves, and a person who cannot forgive himself cannot truly love himself properly. He is at war with himself, with the part of himself that he does not see as a good or want to be closer to--this struggle is personified in Romans 7:15-25.