

Love The New Reality

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 0 0] can happen from any human source. So that it is a more excellent way, something which is beyond all comparison. If you look again in chapter 13, and you see verse 8, you'll find that it is something which never fails, or never falls.

That it goes on and on and on. And it's always positive. It's never negative. It never fails. It never ends. If you look at the matter of faith, you will discover that when faith moves to sight, or when faith becomes fact in the ordinary, tangible way that we can grasp it, then this will still remain.

And when our highest hopes are fully realized, this will still remain. So that when hope is completely fulfilled, it remains.

We end up by going into chapter 14 and discovering this word, make love your aim. That is, the focus of your life.

so that it's more excellent than anything else. It never fails. It is the perfect which remains when the imperfect passes away.

[1 : 3 1] It is there when faith has been fulfilled, when our hopes have been realized. It's the thing that we are to make the focus of our lives.

And when you come, as we do at this time of year, to review the whole of the world history of the past year, and people feel very downhearted and very discouraged, and people feel the impact of these days on their personal lives, and people are carrying the burden and the anxiety of strained relationships and stresses, and everything seems to be out of sorts.

You wonder how God is going to deal with that. Well, this obviously is the way that God intends to deal with it, by the introduction into the world of this kind of reality.

Between the time of the cross and the time of the end of history, which Pat spoke about this morning to the children, the only consistent, relevant, forward-looking attitude which belongs to us is marked by this four-letter word.

This word, love. In this, what God has done and is doing, man joins and unites with God in doing it.

[2 : 5 5] The goal of God's love for us is not that we should love God, but our life is to be at the service of our neighbor. So that in all these things, we have the reality of the purpose of God being worked out in our lives.

If you think about the word itself, you will discover that it's a word which had very little use, either in classical literature or even in Scripture before the time of the New Testament.

And Paul had to find a word to describe a whole new dimension which had come into human experience with the person of Jesus Christ.

There was no word in all the literature of the classics. There was no word in all the literature of the Old Testament which could say what needed to be said.

And so a word that had been little used in the past suddenly was brought in by Paul and by John and given this tremendous meaning describing the whole new reality that happens in the world because of Jesus Christ.

[4 : 17] It's the new thing that has happened. Well, when it happens then, you find that man's life is changed because of it.

You see, one of the difficulties with having the church decorated this morning is that it looks lovely. In Holland, there's a cathedral church which is all whitewashed inside to try and make it look as plain and perhaps even ugly so that people will not be attracted by it.

Because if they're attracted by it, then it's not expressing the new reality which belongs to Christians. The thing that should decorate this church is the love which you bring to it and with which you adorn one another.

That's what this is all about. It's not something that you find there that attracts you. It's something that you bring there. And you decorate and you adorn it.

The greatest adornment in this church today is the people in it. And they are to be beautiful beyond comparison, not as from within themselves, but by reason of the love in which they are held by everybody else here.

[5 : 47] So that the decorations, in a sense, would fade into insignificance compared to the glory and beauty of the people that are here held as they are commanded to be held by Christ in the love one of another.

That's who you're to be. And that's the new reality which is to be discovered in our lives. So that you, as a person, you must learn to love yourself.

Not because you find yourself particularly attractive. And I trust that you don't because you're not all that attractive. But we have an infinite capacity to deceive ourselves.

But the fact of the matter is that with this new reality, there are the grounds for loving yourself because of the love in which God holds you.

And then that love is to be expressed not in seeking to build yourself up, but in terms of your neighbor.

[7 : 04] That he is to be the object of your love. And you are to express to him all the love which God has expressed to you in Christ.

Now, if you are attracted by your neighbor and find it easy, then that's not really, this kind of love isn't required.

It's when your neighbor has nothing to attract you. When he's not anything that would naturally incline you to relate to him.

When this reality is there, then you are called upon to love him as an expression of who you are. And who you are is the expression of who God is and how he has made himself known to us in Christ.

So that love is not going out seeking something, but love is going out conferring upon people and upon situations all that which God has shown us in Christ.

[8 : 10] early in my career, I ran across a distraught young lady whose husband had left her. And I asked him subsequently why he had done it.

And he said, I just fell in love with this other woman. Well, that seems a reasonable thing to have done. It didn't seem reasonable to his wife, but it seems reasonable to him.

Except that if you are working on the basis of the New Testament, love is something you confer upon somebody. If they happen to attract you, that's well and good.

But basically the covenant of marriage is based on you conferring your love on somebody. Choosing in obedience to God to love that person.

So that love isn't something which suddenly takes you over. Love is the matter of obedience to God. And you love with the love that you are given by him.

[9 : 21] So that the new thing that comes into the world is the love of God. But it's not. It's not just an idea.

It's not just a concept. It has a hard reality to it. And that hard reality is that Jesus Christ came into the world to demonstrate the love of God.

And the way he chose to demonstrate the love of God was to be perfectly obedient to his father. And that perfect obedience he knew and understood would lead him inevitably to the cross.

So that to follow the way of love led Jesus Christ to the cross. God's love. So that we see love illustrated in that kind of reality.

Well, what happens after that then is that the demonstration of the love of God in Christ becomes the basis of God's appeal to you as an individual.

[10 : 45] Now you have seen God's love demonstrated. That becomes the call to you to respond to that love.

Now that's probably the most difficult thing. If I was to go home today and knock on doors as I went and tell my neighbors that I was there to love them, they would indeed say, who needs it?

Because it's very hard to respond to love. And probably one of the goals of our society is to be in the place where we don't need anybody's love.

We can do it ourselves, thank you. But you see, what God has as his purpose for your life is not something you can do yourself.

You can only, it can only be done as God's love takes hold of you and fashions and forms you into what he wants you to be. That's the only way.

[11 : 53] And so, the thing that we have to do is to be enabled to respond to that love. Now usually in our pride and in our arrogance we say, well, I don't need that.

I'm a good enough person by myself that I don't need that kind of love. I can understand how poor people need it and I can understand how old, old people need it and I can understand how sick people need it and I can understand perhaps how deformed or other kinds of people need it but I don't need it.

But if you could see what a monstrous deformity you are in the sight of the perfect purpose of God for you, then you'd suddenly discover that you need it.

That you need this love of God shed abroad in your heart. You need the working of God in you to fashion you into the thing that he wants you to be.

But how hard it is to open our hearts to that love. the reason I got you to say the peace of the Lord be always with you to one another was in the hope that it would do for you what it always does for me.

[13 : 18] It makes me shrink with embarrassment and I don't want to do this. But I wanted to do it to you simply so you would see how little love there is in your heart really to do such a simple thing as greet your neighbor in church on Sunday morning.

It doesn't come easy. And that's in a sense just a telltale clue of the lovelessness that is in our heart and how hard it is to give and how hard it is to receive.

And to recognize as we must the love of God for us is something which is very hard. And I tell you this because I want you to understand I want you to understand that a group of people like this like us this morning could be held together by our common appreciation of that which is aesthetic of that which is beautiful in music and in architecture and in light and in color and in the day all these things could attract us and give us a sense of well-being.

It's a beautiful world and this is a beautiful day and I am a beautiful person and everything is as it should be. But that's very superficial.

And God has a far more profound work to do in our hearts. And so by His Word He wants to open up the reality of your life and my life and to show us how much we need Him.

[15 : 19] How much we need His love. How much we need the love one of another. It's essential to us.

And proud as we may be we can't get along without it. And so to expose ourselves to the love of God in Christ is very difficult indeed.

But then God wants to go God the Father is the source of it. God the Son is the example or illustration of it. We are called by it to open our hearts to this love.

with which He has loved us. And then we are told that God's purpose is to shed abroad in our hearts this love by the Holy Spirit.

So that what happens is that God isn't asking you to love Him directly in a quiet personal relationship friendship, but He's asking you in a very practical way to make His love known to your neighbor and to your friends.

[16 : 37] Beginning not with somebody who is in some distant island of the world, but perhaps beginning with the person closest to you.

the person that you see every day, the people that you contact all the time, and to work from there out.

Religion offers us the serious temptation of learning to love people who are from a mile to a million miles away, but never within a mile. But it's to begin there.

It's to begin in effect with our coming to terms with ourselves and the knowledge of God's love for us, so that God sheds abroad in our hearts His love by the Holy Spirit.

You see, this is what goes to the root and heart of our situation. this love is the new reality so that somebody has written, in fact, it's Stephen Neal who's written, that Christian faith is prepared to submit itself to the most radical text as to its relevance to the life of man now and at all other times.

[18 : 00] It is supremely relevant to our lives. It maintains that in, this is what Christian faith does, it maintains that in Jesus, a count has been taken of the whole human situation in every aspect of it.

Nothing has been overlooked or ignored. No situation can ever arise in the future which cannot be interpreted in the light of the central event of human history, which is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Though the interpretation of that event may demand more sensitive patience and humility than Christians are always able to command.

We have, as Christians, this reality in our midst, the reality of the life and death of Jesus Christ.

God, and it is our business to make it relevant to the whole world. And it demands of us more sensitive patience and humility than we always are able to command.

[19 : 22] But this is what I long we should know as a congregation. This is what I long that God should work in our hearts. I find myself as a minister running around hoping that I might do something that would attract people to the Christian faith.

If we do this this way or if we do that that way or will we please this person by doing this this way and how can you get that grumpy old character to agree with this or that or the other thing?

And there is nothing in the Christian faith that can do that. The thing that needs to be done is that they need to know not that the Christian church is prepared to be what they want it to be so that it is practical but that they would recognize the love that God has for them in spite of their unattractive we would know and acknowledge and be open to the love of God.

you see right at the heart of this in this communion service that's what you're invited to. Put out your hands and receive the elements of the love of God in Christ through his body broken and his blood thin.

You are at least outwardly receiving the symbols of this love in the bread and wine. May God by his Holy Spirit grant that deeply and inwardly we receive the reality of his love for us and allow him to come in and change our lives from the inside out.

[21 : 16] Amen. Let us pray. our God, how hard it is to acknowledge that we are loved by you.

How hard it is to express our love one to another. How hard it is to receive love from one another. Our God, break our hard and stony heart that we might learn to be loved in order that we might learn to love as the disciples of Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.