

“I am the Vine; You are the branches” – The nature of Fellowship

Fellowship with God, as we saw in the last article, in essence, is a relationship between God and man that is blossomed out of love for each other, which expresses itself in an intense desire to ‘*be together*’, to ‘*share together*’, and to ‘*act together*’.

When we study the Scriptures and the church history we find the record of some great lives God mightily used to bring light into the community they belonged, and even transform the continent they represented. Today we read and write the biographies of such lives, and celebrate the fruit that sprang out of such lives, but unfortunately ignoring the root of the fruit. Behind every genuine external fruit outside the ground, there is a hidden root under the ground. Trying to produce the external without attending to the needs of the root will be a futile effort on our part. Jesus said, *“If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”*

Apostle Paul stands as a shining example before us. He challenged the world around him based on this love relationship with God, and said, *“Who shall separate us from the love of God? Shall trouble, or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors! Again in Philippians 4:13, the Apostle confidently declares his ability to do all things solely based on the love relationship he holds with Jesus Christ, ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’.*

What made the Apostle make such confident statements solely based on a love relationship? In today’s world, it will be insane to make such statements entirely based on a ‘love’ relationship! Think about a business contract! It is webbed with legal languages not often understood by a common man. It is not difficult to know why – because, we live in a world of mistrust and broken promises - right from the wedding covenant to political contests. The word ‘love’ has almost lost its meaning in the world we live. The word ‘love’, unfortunately, is often misunderstood to be a cheap,

superficial and momentary emotion that tickles our feeling.

But the Apostle knew a love where the basic premise was fundamentally dissimilar in its nature to the love that is expressed in a modern day context. That love - the love of God, often referred to as ‘Agape’ love in the Scriptures, is totally unconditional, never changing, always looking for the best of the object of love, expecting nothing in return. The Apostles and prophets, though they tried, could not describe this love using any possible human imagery. While prophet Isaiah trying to portray the love of God, he could only say that God’s love is greater than the love that a mother expresses towards her infant on her breast. Apostle Paul breaks down into a rapturous worship as he tried to describe God’s love, *‘how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ!’* Apostle John could best describe this love as, *‘Behold! What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!’* In a world where we are drunk with our own self-importance, even when we stretch our hands to help a needy person, or when we use our words to bless others, the unspoken question that often hums through our hearts is, ‘What do I get in return!’, or ‘How have I become more important through this!’ I think Dr. A.W.Tozer, was right when he said, *“Perhaps the greatest mistake we humans make is in our insistence upon trying to measure the love of God by our own human standards of love (corrupted by our own self importance)”*

I know that it will be a folly on my part trying to describe God’s love to you, but let me simply state that GOD’S LOVE NEVER FAILS! The revelation of this love, my dear brothers and sisters, was the reason behind the confidence of the Apostle Paul. So, ***firstly, The Root of this relationship is based on the Unfailing Love of God.*** Jesus said, in John 15:9, *“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now, remain in my love”.*

Now, ***what are the rules of this relationship?*** Every relationship can be traced back to a point where it

started and the present degree of the bond of that relationship will vary based on how well the rules of relationship are upheld between the two parties involved. The relationship will flourish where the rules are upheld, and it will decline where the rules are ignored. The rules are not same in every relationship. A husband and wife relate to each other in an entirely different way than a child and parent, or an employer and employee relate to each other. In other words, the rules of relationship vary depending upon the identity of the individuals that participate in a relationship: Employer and Employee, Father and Child, and Husband and Wife, and so on!

Through a simple illustration of a vine and branches, Jesus teaches us a number of truths concerning the relationship that binds us to him. Let me try to show you two aspects of this relationship in this article.

a. God must always be first. The 15th chapter of the Gospel of John begins with the words, ‘*I am the true vine*’. Jesus repeated his words again in the 5th verse of the same chapter, ‘*I am the vine! You are the branches*’, so as to impress upon his disciples, God must always be first. It is not accidental that he did not start with, ‘*You are the branches*’.

The Bible starts with the words, ‘*In the beginning God*’. He is the *beginning*, the *reason* and the *end* of our existence, our salvation, and all the blessings we enjoy. The Bible says, in Romans 11:36 (NLT), “*For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory.*” Even God’s plan of redemption of mankind is centered around God, and not around man. The Bible says, in Revelation 7:10 ‘*Salvation belongs to our God!*’. The first search ever recorded in the Scripture is not man searching for God, but rather God searching for man – ‘*But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”*’ (Gen 3:9).

In our fallen world, where self centeredness of man is well-woven into our thoughts and actions, our natural tendency is to put ourselves at the center, while putting God’s existence as to merely supply our needs – to save us from sin, to save us from sickness, and to provide us in our needs. While it is true that God is all sufficient, it is more accurate to

say ‘*I exist for God*’, than to say, ‘*God exists for me!*’.

So, the first rule of the relationship with God is to seek the glorify of God as an end in itself. Jesus said in John 15:8, ‘*This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit*’.

b. Walking in holiness. Fellowship with God, and the love relationship that follows can be gravely misunderstood, if we don’t start with the holiness of God. The Bible says, “*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth*” (1 John 1:5,6).

A personal encounter with the Holiness of God, and a sudden realization of the personal unfittedness to face this Holy God, the deep cry of the heart that follows for forgiveness of sin – this I say, is the beginning point of a long intimacy with God. That encounter, is not a matter of intellectual comprehension, but a spiritual revelation. A pain-filled cry rose from the lips of a prophet who was already an expert in the Law, the prophet Isaiah, ‘*Woe to me! I am ruined!*’, when he was confronted with the inward sight of the brilliance of the holiness of God is found in Isaiah 6.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones wrote that if you do not start with the holiness of God, the whole concept of the grace of God is going to be false, and you will never understand Calvary! Our sincere, uncompromising commitment to walk in obedience to the holy calling is the rule of relationship that keeps us in fellowship with God. Jesus said, in John 15:10, “*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love*”.

CONCLUSION. Celebration of the inexpressible joy that the intimate fellowship with God brings into our lives, the contentment, peace and security that is experienced through the nearness of God felt in our lives **is the** very acme of Christian faith and teaching.

Its root is the Love of God; Its purpose is the Glory of God; Its nature is the Holiness of God.