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**“KINGDOM LOVE” (Part 1)
Matthew 22:34-40**

⊛ Every group, institution, and movement, from gigantic multi-national corporations down to neighborhood churches down to two-member families, has an organizing principle (a set of core assumptions that shape its structure and guide its actions, a “rule” by which it governs itself and interacts with the world).

○ This might sound like an abstract concept but it makes all the difference. Our organizing principle governs how we view the world, treat each other, relate to outsiders, spend money, manage resources, handle success, deal with failure, and so on. Organize your group around the principle of using common interests to build friendships, and you end up with an athletic league or Knitting Club or Pie Club; organize it around the principle of destroying your common enemy by any and all means, and you get a terrorist cell.

The more common organizing principles at work in the world boil down to slogans, like: “Money makes the world go ‘round’”; “Do what feels good”; “Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven”; and “Survival at all costs.”

‽ What about the kingdom of God? What is its organizing principle?

□ Please turn with me to Matthew 22:34-40. Jesus declares: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second**

is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on” – depend on, are determined by, are summarized in – **“these two commandments.”**

⊛ The organizing principle of God’s kingdom is love for God and others.

⊙ That sounds simple enough. But love isn’t so easy, is it?

■¹ Paul laments~ **“I really want to do what is right, but I don’t do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. When I want to do good, I don’t. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway”** (Romans 7:15, 19 {NLT})? Can’t you identify with him? I can!

Why is it so hard to love God and others, anyway? There are many reasons. Here are two:

① We frequently misunderstand love.

We read, **“Love the Lord your God”** and imagine it refers to a feeling of devotion. We hear, **“Love your neighbor”** and think it is warm affection.

Jesus embodies perfect kingdom love.

■^{2,3}As for loving his Father, the Son set aside {Php 2:6-7, NLT} **“his rights,” “made himself nothing”** and **“took the humble position of a slave.”** He resisted temptation. He begged to avoid crucifixion – and still He prayed {Lk 22:42} **“yet not my will, but yours be done.”**

Does that sound like a “feeling of devotion”?

As for loving his neighbors, Christ recruited disciples from among the good and bad. He endured their failings, washed their feet – and took them to task when necessary.

■⁴ He healed the sick, touched lepers, and liberated the demonized. He dined with tax collectors. He saved an adulteress from execution, then said {Jn 8:11} **“Go... and leave your life of sin.”** He berated hypocrites in scathing language, but never stopped reaching out to them (a few even became his followers).

■⁵ Jesus willingly suffered misunderstanding, rejection, denial and betrayal. And {Php 2:8} **“He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!”** for our sakes. Does that sound like “warm affection”?

The organizing principle of the kingdom is active, sacrificial, determined *αγαπε* love that does not depend on feelings. This is what God calls us to receive, return to him, and share with others.

We often misunderstand *αγαπε*. Sometimes, like most of Jesus’ neighbors, we don’t even *recognize* it.

Even when we do, comprehending love and doing love are different things. My intellectual grasp of kingdom love exceeds my application of it.

This spotlights a second reason why loving God and others is harder than it should be:

② We are frequently ambivalent about love.

■⁶ I praise Jesus for saying {Mt 5:39} **“If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other.”** Yet I felt a rush of satisfaction when Rambo got even with that sheriff who drew first blood.

■⁷ I praise Jesus for telling us to forgive not once, not seven times but {Mt 18:22} **“seventy times seven”** times (meaning, without limit). But I must remind myself to forgive after only the 4th or 5th offense.

I praise Jesus for refusing to annihilate the sinners who crucified him. Still I am tempted to celebrate when the military destroys our enemies.

⊖ The most basic, persistent and insidious cause of our ambivalence is our old sin nature.

■⁸ Paul puts it this way in Romans 7 {7:20, NLT}: **“If I am doing what I don’t want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it.”** We get it backwards when we excuse sin by saying, “I’m only human”; we are most human (most ourselves) when we love, and least human when we fail to love.

■⁹ He continues ~ {Ro 7:22, 23, NLT} **“I love God’s law with all my heart. But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.”**

All of God’s law hangs on the love commands, but our old sin nature is anti-*αγαπε* (agape) love.

○ It is also hostile to pure *Φιλια* (filia), affectionate love for friends, community and country; but since *φιλια* is easily degenerated into pride and prejudice it is not that big of an impediment to sin.

○ And it is hostile to pure *Στοργε* (storge), familial love for children and siblings; but *στοργε* isn’t much of a problem for sin, for it is easily bent into self-centeredness.

○ And, contrary to what some in the Church have taught, it is hostile to pure *Εροσ* (eros), romantic or

sexual love); but ερως is easily perverted into lust, so it is not such a huge obstacle to sin.

! Αγαπε is different. It can be weakened (so we do not love as well) or even eradicated (so we do not love at all); yet it cannot be bent into a wicked parody of itself that is a useful tool for sinning. There is no way to sin by means of agape love.

Hence our old nature subverts αγαπε even as our new nature embraces it. The self that serves the kingdom of the world makes war against αγαπε while the self that serves the kingdom of God battles for it.

? It sounds hopeless, doesn't it? And it will be, if we depend on our feelings and natural ability.

■¹⁰ Paul says, {Ro 7:24, 25, NLT/TNIV} **“Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin?”** But then he adds: **“Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.”** **“Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!”**

Kingdom love is possible. With the spirit of Christ alive inside us, we can do it.

More than that it is a certainty, if we pledge our allegiance to God every day, espousing the values outlined in the Beatitudes, making God-centered concerns our priority, and devoting ourselves to building the kingdom of heaven.

Αγαπε won't be easy. It won't always be our first choice. We won't do it perfectly.

⊛ But we will increasingly **“Love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all**

[our] mind,” and we will increasingly **“Love [our] neighbor as [ourselves].”**

Actually, we do **“Love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart and with all [our] soul and with all [our] mind”** better than before. We do love **“[our] neighbor as [ourselves]”** better than before. I have seen it!

At the beginning I introduced the concept of the organizing principle, the core assumptions that shape a group's structure and guide its actions, the “rule” by which it governs itself and interacts with the world.

⊛ The organizing principle in the kingdom of God is love. To the degree that Beverly Covenant Church loves God and others, we embody and serve God's kingdom. To the extent that we do not love, we do not represent and further the kingdom of God.

May our worship and obedience to God, and our words and deeds of truth, mercy, compassion to our neighbors, always reveal and build his kingdom.