

Jesus, Unleashed

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Chapter Two:

An Unlikely Love

What if I told you that we have no idea what love is, that we've replaced it with everything it isn't and never was? What if we've believed every lie about the very thing that gives life to life? How can we believe that "It's all about love" and yet be so clueless about what it really is? Would that not taint everything else that we think and believe?

We've heard about the "goodness" and "kindness" of God over and over again. The problem is that we've allowed our culture and a partial, preferential view of the Gospels to define "goodness" and "kindness" for us. Of course, we *all* think we see Jesus clearly and, therefore, know what love is, but the truth is that we've been sold a bill of goods that shines light on half of who he was, leaving us with a distorted view of who he was and the life he wants for us in this world.

We've conveniently invented someone who we call Jesus and yet he has nothing to do with the genuine article. And what's sad is that if anyone of us ran into the same Jesus who was in Judea over two-thousand years ago, we'd run from him like our life depended on it. Why? Because the way he loved everyone doesn't fit "our" definition of love at all. But those who have the guts to start from scratch, with Jesus alone, will be changed forever.

Our Love

We all have different ideas of what love feels like, looks like and sounds like, based on how we've been conditioned by varying influences in our lives (e.g. parents, teachers, friends, ministers and books). Our definitions of love, which are constantly changing every day based on the impressions of everyday life, have made us into who we are today. As a result, we've developed a variety of grids or measurements regarding the essence and expressions of love whereby we judge everything and everyone as being loving or unloving, kind or unkind, friendly or unfriendly.

But do our perspectives agree with Christ's? Do our measurements measure up?

Since we compare and measure ourselves and everyone else by ourselves and everyone else, we're nearly blind, especially when it comes to discerning the trueness of real love. Our love is simply not like Christ's because it can have a variety of related but distinct meanings in different contexts. Therefore, for the most part, it's earthly, conditional and appears sweet on the surface, in order to maintain appearances. Our love prefers unity over integrity, friendliness over honesty, sweetness over truth, acceptance over righteousness and the approval of man over the approval of God. Our love is selfish while his love is self-less. Our love is motivated by what is best for us while his love is motivated by wisdom. Our love seeks short-term benefits while his love seeks our highest and best.

Instead of seeking true love, which is God, to know and experience him as he really is, we've created love in our own image and likeness and replaced him with a deity that is more like us than like him (of course, all of us would deny this). Instead of embracing his love, to search out the essence of his nature in Spirit and Truth, we've invented a fashionable love with many convenient sizes, shapes and colors for everyone under the sun. As a result, we've all but lost God's love in the mix of a relativistic age where Truth-ful love is barely breathing.

Therefore, whenever the Lord has interacted with us, we've often misunderstood him when he's loved us his way. When he's corrected or disciplined us, we've taken it as rejection, not seeing his rod as love; when he's convicted us of sin, we've interpreted it as condemnation, guilt or shame, unknowingly stiff-arming his desire to make us like himself; when he's judged us, we've called it the work of the accuser, not seeing his mercy in his judgment; when he's brought us into the wilderness to mature us, we've taken it as punishment, unable to see his beauty in the desert; when he's spoken the Truth, we've rejected it when it wasn't communicated "in love," as "we" believe it should have been.

Jesus said the world would know we are his by our love, but whose love? Ours or his? The worlds or Heavens?

How did Jesus love people? How do we love people? And how do the two compare?

True Love

The true love of God is the summum bonum, the supreme good – greater than faith, hope, power, knowledge and the law. And yet, it is weakened when mixed with even our greatest intentions because "Every man at his best state is altogether vanity" (Psalm 39:5, KJV).

We need a re-evaluation of real love as seen in the life of Jesus Christ. The Word became flesh and lived among us but he didn't communicate like we do and he didn't change his Word to be like ours, for our sake. He expressed the singular heart of God in ways that were always good for us but rarely good to us, from our limited, flea-sized point of view.

Jesus defines true love. Thus, everything we learn about love should be measured by him, by the life he lived, by the words he spoke and by the tone he took. Our tendency is to define love by first Corinthians thirteen ("The Love Chapter"), the epistles, good sermons, best-sellers and so many other things, especially when they confirm our ideals, but Jesus must be our plum-line and everything else must be compared to him. The Old Testament and Acts through Revelation have much to say about love but they can only be truly understood through his life – not the other way around. Therefore, if what we believe about love does not agree with Jesus' life, we must be willing to dismantle everything we think we know about love and start from scratch, with him at center-stage.

His ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts are greater than our thoughts. There are depths and dimensions within God's love that surpass knowledge and extend far beyond our earthly love, that benefit eternity far more than our mere goodness ever could (Ephesians 3:18-

19). We define love by the quality and quantity of what we think or don't think, say or don't say and do or don't do toward others, but 1st John 5:2-3 is crystal clear:

“By this we come to know (recognize and understand) that we love the children of God: when we love God and obey his commands (orders, charges)--[when we keep his ordinances and are mindful of his precepts and his teaching]. For the [true] love of God is this: that we do his commands [keep his ordinances and are mindful of his precepts and teaching]...” (Amplified. See also 2 John 6).

How do we know we love God and people? When we love God and obey him. This is the acid test.

But how do we know? By looking at Jesus who loved people by loving and obeying our Father (John 14:31; 1 John 2:5). He kept the first commandment first and kept the second commandment second and never confused the two (Mark 12:29-31). And while he loved people, he didn't trust them because he knew what was really in them (John 2:24-25). He was in the world but not of it which is why he didn't love the world or the things in the world (1 John 2:15). His loyalties were unshakable. His devotion to our Father and their Kingdom was immovable.

He was consistent, a man of deep integrity, because he loved in deed and truth, not just in word (1 John 3:18). He always spoke the truth in love but not like we think because when he spoke the truth, even in seemingly unkind ways, it was always for love's sake (Ephesians 4:15; John 5:19-47). Every word he spoke and everything he did communicated more love than anyone ever has since the beginning, but he didn't show it like we do.

His love was kind and severe, all the time, like the symmetrical love of a mother and father (Romans 11:22). He was a disciplinarian and a nurturer, a fighter and a lover, a master and a servant. His love was always redemptive and permeated his vision because he saw the potential in everyone around him which drove him to love them toward that potential even when it threatened their immediate comforts. There were times when his love was very offensive, but who did it offend?

Tradition has manufactured a “Jesus” that is far more like us than our heavenly father. We've envisioned someone who travelled around, telling people to be nice to each other but how could this have gotten him killed? He wasn't safe or conventional. As Phillip Yancey wrote, “What government would execute Mister Rogers or Captain Kangaroo?” The tone and demeanor of his life rarely fit our common definitions of gentleness, kindness, humility and self-control. His love was unlikely and, at times, unlovely, as he was and is very unlike you and me.

The Rest of His Love

If Jesus were alive today, like he was in his first advent, he wouldn't fit any of our molds. He would be hated and rejected by most so-called Christians (including, perhaps, you and me). We would judge him through our tainted lenses, religious paradigms and humanistic logic and label him by our own cultural nuances. And he would never survive as a so-called pastor or bishop, let alone an evangelist or teacher. He would be weighed and found wanting in comparison to

today's average religious leaders who are rarely, if ever, rejected or slandered, let alone killed, as Jesus was.

As love personified, Jesus came with the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. With his winnowing fan in his hand, he thoroughly cleaned out his threshing floor, gathering and storing his wheat in his barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matthew 3:11-12; Luke 3:16-17). Can you imagine the success that would be had by your average minister today who brought these kinds of credentials to their job interviews? How many call-backs do you think they'd get?

Jesus didn't seek the approval or disapproval of men because he wasn't interested in becoming a popular public figure (John 5:41, 44; 7:1-7). He never sought human praise or honor but was fully secure in his father's love; therefore, he could not be bribed or pressured with the affections of men and was thus free to be himself without fear (1 John 4:18). He never responded to human demands, out of human empathy or sympathy; he only did what he saw his father do and only spoke what he heard him say (John 5:17, 19, 30, 36; 6:38; 7:16-17; 8:16, 26, 28-29, 38, 40).

He was fully human but chose his father's disposition over human propensities. He didn't care like we care because he didn't see as we see. He saw every situation from a higher perspective, enabling him to behave in a way that was best for everyone's ultimate good. His love was unconditional and self-less but upset many; it was illogical and eccentric but personified God's heart; it was contrary to the laws of human conscience but reflected heaven's way and the world hated him for it.

If we're going to truly see and know Jesus, as he really was (and still is, since he never changes), we must know both how he loved and how he didn't love. We also need to know what he loved and what he hated because you can tell what a person loves by what they hate. We have to know how he treated the meek, repentant and broken versus how he handled those who "had it all together." He was patient and gentle (but not like us) toward the teachable and repentant but he was very hard on the selfish and stubborn. He had integrity, taught the ways of God accurately, was indifferent to opinions and never pandered to his students (Matthew 22:16).

Jesus never consulted himself, taking counsel in his own soul as we so often do. He showed love heaven's way.

For example,

- When he healed the sick, diseased or handicapped, he used many crude and unusual methods that were very impolite, unusual and downright disgusting (i.e. Matthew 9:1-2; Mark 7:32-34; 8:22-26; John 4:46-49; 9:1-11). On the surface, his procedures seemed very offensive and even belittling, but from heaven's perspective, love was always there.
- He healed the man who was crippled "with a deep-seated and lingering disorder for thirty-eight years" but didn't heal the "great number of sick folk" who were also present at the pool of Bethesda, desperately needing a miracle (John 5:1-9, Amplified). On the surface, it seems Jesus played favorites but nothing could be further from the truth (Romans 2:11; Ephesians 6:9). As for why Jesus healed only one out of a multitude, I'm

not quite sure and don't expect to understand everything that was going through his head at the time; he could have easily shown great love by healing everyone who was there but he did not allow himself to be led by sympathetic feelings roused by the spectacle of misery. Besides, love is just as often in the withholding as in the giving of healing depending on the leading of our father who "knows best".

- When he was informed that Lazarus, his dear friend, was sick, he didn't immediately go to help him. Rather, he waited four days and then went to him after he had already died (John 11:1-44). Of course, when he got there, he raised him from the dead. But why didn't Jesus go to see his friend the moment he heard he was sick? Why did he deliberately let Lazarus die and his family grieve? Did he not love them? Of course! But the reason he let Lazarus die was so that he could show his glory by raising him from the dead. Obviously, Jesus' eternal purpose, as set by his father, in letting Lazarus die before he raised him from the dead, was more important than healing him while he was sick. Depending on your perspective, you may call this insanity or genius but doesn't all genius have a touch of madness? Obviously, to Jesus, the end justified the means.
- He spoke in parables and fuzzy-language to the multitudes, religious and political leaders and even to his very own followers and often expressed frustration when they didn't understand what he was saying (Matthew 15:17; 16:9,10; Mark 4:13; 6:52; 8:17-21; Luke 9:45; John 3:9-10; 6:22-71; 8:43). He didn't use the latest and greatest principles of public speaking in order to reach his audiences, to appeal to their way of learning. If he had been considerate of his hearers, by our standards, he would have "known his audience" and done his best to communicate in a way that was simple and down-to-earth for them, no matter who they were. Right?
- He saw into people's secret lives – into their hearts – and often disclosed them, removing their ability to hide from the Truth (Matthew 9:4-6; 12:25-37; John 1:48; 2:24-25; 4:16-19). He didn't coddle the darkness but exposed it, which brought embarrassment to the proud and self-righteous, who kept their skeletons, demons and blemishes in the closets of their hearts.
- He publically rebuked, condemned and judged individuals, crowds and cities for their silliness, stupidity and stubbornness, for witnessing his miracles without turning from their sins toward God (Matthew 11:20-24; Luke 10: 13-15; 11:27-32). He called his generation evil, hypocritical, irresponsible and adulterous (Luke 11:29; 12:54-59). Does that sound like love to you? No! But he rebuked (and still rebukes) those he loves (Hebrews 12:5-11).

One time, after healing someone, he gave them a strong warning, "See, you are well! Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14, Amplified). Was that a threat? Of course not, but it sure sounded like it, didn't it? And it didn't seem very encouraging at all either. But why do we put so much stock into how things "sound" and "seem"? Why are we so quick to think the worst? Why do we have to immediately jump to the "glass-is-half-empty" point of view? The truth is that Jesus wanted them to stay whole and gave the no-nonsense tip for how to keep the life they had been given.

- He said many harsh things to the multitudes for their dullness, rebellion, wickedness and unbelief (Matthew 16:27; 17:14-20; John 6; 7:7, 19; 9:39). There were also times that he came across as bossy, elitist, cocky and cold-hearted (John 7:16-17, 24, 28-29, 34, 37-38; 8:12, 14-59). By normal standards, he wasn't encouraging or seeker-sensitive as a leader, nor was he comforting to those who doubted him. In fact, there were times when he openly threatened people with death if they would not repent, saying, "...Unless you repent...you will all likewise perish and be lost eternally", like the Galileans who were slaughtered by Pilate and the eighteen people who were crushed to death by the tower that fell in Siloam (Luke 13:1-5, Amplified). Clearly, he didn't preach or teach the party line, ebbing-n-flowing with "ministry trends" for mass appeal or cultural relevancy. As a result, he often fell behind in "the polls".
- He entered the Temple, on at least one occasion, and violently drove out the merchants and their customers. He pushed over their money-tables and overturned the stalls of those who were selling doves, yelling at them, saying, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a place of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!" (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:13-22). His father's zeal burned in him like a bonfire. This was a major expression of divine love and respect for his father, despite the way it looked or what everyone may have thought at the time because he loved and respected his father more than he loved and respected anyone else (Hebrews 12:5-11).
- He wept over Jerusalem, broken over its rejection of his embrace. As a result, he pronounced desolation upon her house and the removal of his presence and said, "You will not see me again until you say, Blessed...is he who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matthew 23:37-39, Amplified).
- He cursed an unfruitful fig tree for being unfruitful even though it wasn't the season for figs (Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 22-24). Why would he curse an innocent organism that was obviously doing what it was supposed to do? He did it as a prophetic picture of what he was about to do to Israel (which is typified, in Scripture, as a fig tree) and to teach his disciples about faith.
- He raised and maintained the standard, value and integrity of the Kingdom (Matthew 5-7; 20:20-22; Luke 9:23-26). He never twisted or broadened the straight and narrow for mercy's sake (Matthew 7:13-14; Luke 13:22-30). He never lowered the bar or compromised the price of authentic discipleship; in fact, he made "the cost" too great for some to bear (Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 14:25-33; John 8:31).

He never made it easy to follow him. As a result, he separated the curious from the committed (See Matthew 8:18-22; 19:16-26; Mark 10:17-27; Luke 9:57-62; 18:18-23; John 6:22-71). He did not bring peace but division (Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:51-53; 14:26-27). His evangelistic style and methodology were often very hard, cold and unpopular, compared to most well-intentioned evangelists today. For instance, in John 5:19-47, Jesus gave a face-slapping message and finished by saying, "...I simply mention

all these things in order that you may be saved.” Today, we would tell Jesus that if he really cared about “saving souls”, he be more gentle, caring and compassionate; if he really loved the lost, he would tone it down to meet the people where they are instead of beating them with an abusive message.

- When his disciples – his inner circle of “faithful” followers – displayed unbelief and stupidity, he didn’t coddle them or encourage them that they would eventually “get it.” Rather, he scolded them and, at times, would be very harsh, saying things like, “...Are you...yet dull and ignorant [without understanding and unable to put things together]?...Oh you of little faith, why do you doubt?...Why are you so timid and fearful? How is it that you have no faith (no firmly relying trust)?...Do you not yet discern or understand? Are your hearts in [a settled state of] hardness?...O foolish ones [sluggish in mind, dull of perception] and slow of heart to believe (adhere to and trust in and rely on) everything that the prophets have spoken!” (See Matthew 8:23-26; 14:28-31; 15:15-16; 16:5-12; Mark 4:40; 8:13-21; Luke 8:22-25; 24:25; John 14:8-9; 20:26-29; 21:15-23, Amplified). Jesus even went so far as to ask his disciples if they were as dense as the Pharisees (Matthew 15:1-16). And get this: Jesus didn’t open his disciple’s minds to understand the Scriptures until the end of his ministry (Luke 24:45). How considerate was that?

And to further illustrate he charm as a mentor, he once called Peter “Satan” when he saw things from a human point of view rather than God’s (Matthew 16:21-25). Then, on another occasion, he called Judas a devil (John 6:70-71). Does this sound like someone who was full of love? Of course not! Did Jesus love his disciples? Of course, which is why he treated them the way he did. How would you like to be disciple by someone like this?

- As for the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, Lawyers and Teachers of the Law, we know Jesus loved them very much, as he loved everyone; in fact, he loved them so much that he spoke the Truth to them, in love, even to the degree that he scolded and shamed them to their faces, time and time again, verbally undressing them in front of everyone. His language and tone was always very strong and often insulting, leaving the “leaders” shell-shocked and embarrassed (Matthew 9:3-7; 12:1-14, 24-45; 15:1-14; 16:1-4; 19:1-12; 21:23-45; 22:15-46; 23:1-36; Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-6; 7:1-13; 10:1-12; 12:1-40; Luke 5:27-39; 6:1-11; 11:37-54; 13:14-17; 14:1-6; John 9:39-41; 10:24-26; Hebrews 12:5-11). Of course, his contention wasn’t with flesh and blood men but against dark rulers, authorities and powers in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12). And yet, he engaged the religious leaders who, knowingly or unknowingly, enabled and embodied the greatest religious evils of his time. In fact, he oftentimes appeared to have a personal vendetta against the religious and political leaders, though it was never personal (Luke 13:31-33). From the common-man’s perspective, it looked like Jesus had no patience for these leaders, who were blind and deceived, and therefore, didn’t know any better. He didn’t “Kill them with kindness” or “Love them into change,” as we would think, and yet he loved them more than anyone else ever had and ever would.

- When the Syrophenician woman came to Jesus, begging that he would deliver her daughter of a tormenting demon, he responded, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But this didn’t stop her. She threw herself at his feet and worshipped him, pleading all the more for help, to which he said, “It is not right...to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs.” Did you catch that? “Sweet and gentle Jesus” called this woman a “dog”! Does this sound like the Jesus our Sunday-School teacher told us about? Where was the love in that? On the surface, it looks like Jesus didn’t care anything about her or her daughter when, in fact, he did love her and was simply testing her character and the strength and persistence of her faith. He was “rude” in order to test her true nature, to see if she would allow herself to become offended or embittered. Besides, those who know the story, know that she passed the test by her right-response; she did not allow her feelings to be hurt and, in the end, received her restored daughter (See Matthew 15:22-28 and Mark 7:24-30).
- One time, when Jesus was speaking to a crowd, someone told him that his mother and brothers were waiting to speak with him. To this he said, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Then he pointed to his disciples and said, “Here are by mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother!” (Matthew 12:46-50, Amplified) Can you imagine what this looked and sounded like to everyone who was there? Can you think of how this may have hurt Mary and his blood brothers? Was he disowning his family or was he just trying to shock everyone? No! He was speaking out of his priorities, his Kingdom perspective, putting his spiritual family before his biological family. He didn’t show favoritism to anyone but put everyone on a level playing field, putting conditions on those who wished to be his true family.

What if someone – anyone – actually loved like this today? Would we like them? How popular would they be, in the church, in the highways and byways, in the marketplace? How many parties would they be invited to? How many true friends would they have? How would we treat them? Would we be their friend? How would we talk about them? Would we invite them over for dinner? Would we let them into our hearts?

Think about it – seriously!

He modeled real friendship. He didn’t flatter, lie, compromise or pretend in any way in order to “win friends and influence people.” He didn’t wear masks, flaunt himself or his abilities, serve out of self-interest or say one thing and do another. He was loyal, generous, honest, fair and selfless when everyone around him was not. Most were uncomfortable with him because he was simply true – not everyone wanted a real friend and, sadly, most still don’t.

Your Real Nature

Jesus told us to love each other as he loves us and later told us that everyone would know we are his by our love (John 13:34-35). But, as we’ve seen, his love is not at all like ours, and it is the kind and quality of our love that determines who we are following. We will live the love we’ve

learned. The question is: Who was our teacher? The World? Your Pastor? Your Church? Tradition? The Media? Your parents? A friend? Who?

When Jesus commanded his disciples and, in turn, commanded us, to love each other in the same way that he loves us, he was, at the same time, directing us away from our love, away from the love of the world and every other kind of love that was and is not like his (John 15:12). But this requires a choice.

What if we actually loved like Jesus? What would that look like, sound like or feel like? What if we stopped comparing ourselves to each other? What if we stopped measuring each other by each other? What if we adopted the only love that can ever advance the Kingdom?

What if we stopped doing “the right thing”, being “a good person”, and chose, instead, to follow the only One who is right and good? What if we stopped focusing on being “kind” or “hard”, “merciful” or “tough”, and just relaxed in being who he wants us to be every moment? What if we stopped letting our hearts be leveraged by the way we were loved in the past by our parents, friends or extended family? What if we weren’t influenced by our environment or the people around us but simply lived out of who we are in him? Would we not influence everything and everyone around us for good 24/7?

Do we want to be relevant to this world or to the Kingdom of God? Who do we want to have the most in common with, people or Christ? Our great aim should be to follow our father’s example, to know him, see him, hear him and follow his lead in everything we do, out of love for him. If Jesus did nothing independently, of his own authority, speaking and acting out of his own mind, but reflected his father’s words and actions of love in everything he said and did, how much more should we commit ourselves to obeying our father in everything we say and do?

The nature and demeanor of Christ is already in you because you came from him and he is in you. So let it flow through you and don’t be afraid when it comes to the surface in a form and tone you don’t understand or agree with. If you love like the world loves while trying to live the Christian life, are you really a Christian at all? How can we pander to one and give lip service to the other?

Those who truly know this love - his love - will be filled with all the fullness of God, “wholly filled and flooded with God himself” (Ephesians 3:19). Christ in them will become Christ on them as he lives and loves through them. They will not be governed or controlled by the world and its systems or the people and things in it; nor will they be manipulated by what “seems” best or “appears” right. They will only be governed and controlled by the love of Jesus who fills them because his love never fails.