

## ***COMPELLED TO LOVE, PHIL.1:1-11***

Better Together #1

◆ **Intro:** Pastor and author Mark Buchanan writes, "A few years ago, a friend assembled a weekend work party to lay sod in his yard. The sun was shining. He had fresh coffee and cinnamon buns. And the crew he'd called together were all good friends. We liked each other immensely. Then Al said, "Guys, do you realize something? This is it! This is it!" We stopped.

◆ "Al, this is what?"

◆ "This is community." We all murmured our assent and congratulated one another. Yes. This is it.

◆ But then I said, "Al, this is great, but I don't think this is it. I like you all too much. Add a person or two to this company who lacks social graces, who looks different, who's needy, smelly, and irritating. If we truly loved a person like that, then that would be it." Silence. Then one of guys said, "Uh, Mark. We've accepted you, haven't we?"

◆ Mark made an insightful point about community. "Jesus said it's no credit to us if we love those who love us—our kind of people. We don't need God to love them; natural affinities are sufficient. But you, Jesus said, are to love the least of these and the worst of these—losers, enemies. That takes God: a supernatural subversion of our own prejudices, and a heaven-borne infusion of God's prodigal love."

◆ **1.** Sometimes we think the God is all about duty, say what we can or should be doing for him. Some folks think God is an indifferent vending machine. There are lots of thoughts about

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what mainly God is like but basic and central is this truth: **God is all about love.**

◆ *"And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him." 1 John 4:16, NASB.*

◆ **A.** The God of the Bible is himself a mysterious community of three in one, Father-Son-Holy Spirit. God in his own nature is a relational being. He is not Fate, or a name we attach to happenstance. He is a person, who unlike some of us, is not satisfied with existing in an impersonal world of mere stars, planets, starfish or protoplasm. His creation of mankind whispers the mystery of ..."love". Love you see, can only exist in community. You just can't have love alone.

◆ Wherever you find people who are genuinely walking with God, you also find love. Wherever you find people who are genuinely loving each other, you have also found evidence of God.

◆ *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35, NIV.*

◆ **B.** Something else you should know about God: the love of God is not a waiting love; it is a creating love. Let me explain. It is a love that *causes*, or *produces* community where it was not before. It is proactive. It is an initiating compassion, a pursuant kind of love. Think of the parable of the Banquet.

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◆“And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled.’” Luke 14:23, RSV.

◆This is not a love that waits for someone to “fall” into it, as we like to speak of love. “They fell in love.” No they didn’t. Somewhere along the line a decision is made to love, but because it is so moving, and often involves overwhelming emotion we speak as though we had no choice and just “fell” into it. But in reality all love is a choice. And let’s not miss this: to say that God is love doesn’t mean his is all cuddly bears, rainbows and ponies. Love is not mere feeling of excitement or joy. Real love can draw a line, speak a hard word for the sake of another’s benefit. But if I am to love like God loves, I am to initiate, not wait. HARVEST CHAPEL is a good example...

◆**C.** Now I think you will agree that it is heart-rending when the body of Christ, who by definition is love, does not live up to that itself. But Philippi is a beautiful example of living up to it. Look what Paul writes:

◆v1: It’s not written to the Council of the Church. “Dear Elders and Deacons...and congregation too of course...” No, it’s “To the saints (the believers who by association with Christ are considered holy, saintly, set apart -what an amazing status freely given) ...To the saints... oh and of course the Elders and Deacons! Grace to you!” That’s revealing, is it not? So we can tell that Paul’s stay in Philippi

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was not a traveling preacher show, not a revival tour where the crowd gathered for the inspiring speaker who left the next day to do it again in another town. No, Paul and these people in this little Greek town were friends.

◆v3 *I thank God in my remembrance of you.*

◆v7 *I have you in my heart.*

◆Ch4 mentions *Euodia, Synteché, and Clement* by name.

◆Here's where this is going: community comes from friendship, not from fame and performance. It always strikes me when on a show like AGT the performer shouts to the audience "I love you all." Really? Love is pretty intentional and personal. You don't even know who I am behind my clapping hands. Maybe say, "Hey Everyone, thank you, I'm really glad you enjoyed my performance." But "I love you." I'm just saying. But we lean toward the impressive as though that creates love. Church people sometimes think that too.

◆Did you know that all the major attraction aspects of a church put together only account for about 10% of the new people that come to the church? A good preacher/speaker, a special event for kids, a cool seminar, social programs, classes offered, great facilities, location –these all account for about 10% of new folks coming to the community. But 90% of people who join a church community came on the arm of a friend! So you say, "Then why do we do all those other things, preacher?" Simple, they are all

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opportunities for you to include a friend in your life, and at the same time move close to God.

◆**D.** Take look at v8. Paul and Philip had “the affection of Christ.” What’s that? Well, what was Jesus like? Do you recall he was know for hanging out with prostitutes and tax agents? Those were the terms people used for the people you didn’t want to be seen with. It’s like saying Jesus made friends with sloppy people and rednecks, and anybody that wasn’t in the silky instagram crowd. Jesus made friends with people you probably wouldn’t be interested in becoming friends with. *Do you know any people in your sphere of life that frankly, you don’t really want to be friends with? The “affection of Christ” would befriend them.*

◆What is the affection of Christ? Maybe it’s how he prayed to the Father to forgive them while they were puncturing his wrists with steel stakes. Maybe it’s how he spots his mother while he’s hanging on the cross and asked John to take care of her.

◆[Testimonies: when have you experienced the “affection of Christ?”]

◆While we’re talking about community and love, here’s another observation.

◆**2. I can get better at love.** (read v9) That is, love can grow up. Love can mature. It may start small but there is greater love to be found. Lots of folks never progress in love. I counsel parents to tell their kids they love them daily. Lots of them figure feeding them is evidence enough. Clue phone; it’s not. I counsel

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husbands to tell their wives they love them every single day. Lot's of them figure they said it on their wedding day and that should cover it. News flash; it doesn't. The human heart aches for love and community. What a lot of people mean by love amounts to mere toleration. We think we're being loving by putting up with folks and not clobbering everyone we'd like to. Well, ok, but that's just pre-school love. There are more grade levels to love.

◆ A. Why don't people graduate to greater levels of loving?

Higher love is harder. Deeper love takes digging. Wider love takes a while. Longer love takes longer.

◆ *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (Luke 6:32, RSV).*

◆ Who in your life are you trying to love, form community with, that does not like you? Or is at odds with you? Or disagrees with you? Who are your difficult people? Ok...

◆ *But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Lk. 6:35*

◆ God's kind of love costs us. That is why many settle for less than love. Love means you invest, and think about the other person. You drop things when they're hurt. You come running when they cry.

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◆ Adam fell outside...I ran outside in my socks! A grievous sin!

◆ If you misunderstand each other, you don't have the luxury of walking away and giving up -love has removed that luxury. When someone you love messes up their life -lets say gets addicted to a substance, losses a job, can't pay rent, makes poor choices -love drags you into their mess. And not in easy ways. Love won't allow for the simplistic solutions.

◆ Let's say, for example, you know someone who's broke. Let's say you are quite well-off, or even loaded. The superficial person could throw money at the problem and walk away. It's harder to take a deep breath, remove your shoes and step into the deep water with them: "If I give them money will they waste it? What did they do last time? Do they know how to be responsible? Shall I risk giving them a job? If I post bond, or bail them out, is that helping? What problems led to their being broke in the first place? Do I even want to know?"

◆ B. Let's think it over as a church embarking on 40 Days of studying community. Do we have any idea what we are chasing God through on this adventure? Every church likes to think they are friendly and welcoming. But are we? Do you have room in your life for new friends? Are we willing to welcome new people into our homes? When was the last time you brought someone new to your small group? Or are you still the same people you

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were 10 years ago? Will we give new people time on our calendar? That will necessarily mean some things we already like will have to be missed. Maybe some long traditions, or comfortable patterns of life. And if that doesn't sound good to us, maybe we're not ready for God to take us to another level of community. Then again, maybe that's exactly what God is calling us to.

◆ Then we will no longer be infants, ...Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

(Ephesians 4:14-16, NIV).

◆ C. Love can grow in us, but it will only grow in us *together -in community*. This is also why we urge you to take part in this 40 Day campaign with a small group. Sure you can come to worship, or watch online, but one thing you cannot do alone is be in community. A weekly small group is your practice lab for learning community. You'll have to apply what the Holy Spirit teaches you along the way. (Talk with MIKE about forming a group if you not in one.)

◆ **3. The more I Love the more I experience the fruit of righteous.** (read 9-11) What is righteousness? It's living by God's right way. Love brings us there. Listen.

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- ◆ Romans 13:8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to **love** one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the **law**.
- ◆ Romans 13:10 **Love** does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore **love** is the fulfillment of the **law**.
- ◆ Galatians 5:14\* The entire **law** is summed up in a single command: "**Love** your neighbor as yourself."
- ◆ God's laws are about bringing us fulfilling life, life of love and community. Think about it.
- ◆ What is the fruit of breaking God's laws, of unrighteousness? Of rioting, murdering, vandalizing, looting, stealing? The end product is people full of -hate, misery, strife, pressure, meanness, badness, dishonesty, violence, and selfish-impulsiveness (the opposites).
- ◆ What is the fruit of righteousness, the product of living in love? You live trying to love those around you and you end up with joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control." (Gal.5:25) Some scholars believe this verse is to be read "...love: peace, patience..." This is what you get when you try to love people.
- ◆ Jesus love for us started in heaven, in him. John writes that he loved us first, not the other way around. We actually hate God by nature. That didn't stop him. It had nothing to do with our deserving. Jesus' love cost him his life, right? But it was worth it to him. You were worth it to him to have community with us. But

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look where it led. Jesus' love for us resulted in our forgiveness and the promise of eternal life and happiness. So what do you think will come of it if we do the same?