

January 6th, 2008 “Physical Touch as the Sign of Love”

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John 3:16

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

Thank you very much for coming to hear the message for today. Before we begin our next lesson, let us reiterate our reason for attending Church.

We attend Church to obtain the mind of Christ, meaning, to have the Bible illuminated in our minds so that we can clearly understand the principles that Jesus taught and base our daily personal decisions on those principles.

We come to Church because we want to be obedient to the Bible, which is the doctrine of Jesus Christ, in an informed, insightful and intelligent manner.

Before our “end of the year” interruption, we looked at four different ways for a spouse to show love for his or her mate, those being, speaking words of affirmation to our spouse, spending quality time with our spouse, giving gifts to our spouse and committing to and performing routine acts of service for our spouse. For most people one of these methods of showing love elicits a stronger response than the rest. If you have a spouse that responds most strongly to receiving words of affirmation and you show your love for your spouse by either giving gifts or performing routine acts of service, you may find yourself sending a message of love to your spouse that your spouse does not fully receive.

It can become a serious problem in a marriage when one spouse does not recognize the way that the other spouse receives the messages of love most strongly. Often when love appears to be lost between spouses, it may not be that the commitment to love is actually lost, but that the messages of love sent by one spouse are not received by the other. It is analogous to one spouse speaking in Spanish while the other is listening in German. **1Corinthians 14:8-11** explains:

8 For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?

9 So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air.

10 There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them is without significance.

11 Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.

In our marriages, we can become foreigners to one another by not sending our love to our spouse in the way that our spouse most receives it. In our lesson three weeks ago, we talked about Bill and his wife Betty Jo, who contacted their counselor because their marital problems. The counselor diagnosed their problem as them not giving each other enough affirming words. The counselor advised them to make a list of the good things that they did for each other and then to start complementing one another for the good things that each of them did. Bill was

ecstatic about the change in their relationship. Betty Jo, however, was much less enthusiastic. She told the counselor, “Bill is a good provider, but he doesn’t spend any time with me. What good is the house and the recreational vehicle and all the other things if we don’t ever enjoy them together?”

After Betty Jo proved not to be not that moved by the complements of her husband, the counselor recognized that affirming words did not do it for Betty Jo. He contacted Bill and said, “Bill, you’re doing a great job of complementing Betty Jo, but I have discovered that she has a different way of recognizing your love than listening to you talk about it. She told me that the way that she recognizes your love is the amount of time that you spend focusing on her and her needs.”

Here, we have a concrete example of a man trying to show love to his wife, but his wife was not being able to receive his love gift because it was wrapped in the wrong package. Bill was very busy trying to climb the corporate ladder, but he found that, in order for his wife to see and experience his love, he had to do more than just be successful and bring her the fruits of his labor; he had to spend more focused, quality time with her to meet her specific need to feel loved.

It is important to remember that spouses usually come from different backgrounds. We may share religion, ethnicity, occupation and even socioeconomic status, but we probably come from two different households with two different sets of parents that brought us up in two different ways. That which was very important in my house was probably less so in my wife’s house, and vice versa. My mother and father probably had strengths in areas other than the strengths of my wife’s parents. As a function of our different genders, we had different formative experiences. We are two different people, and we need to understand that although we may agree on religion, politics and economics, the chances are great that we will respond differently to various emotional stimuli, and it is important for each of us to find out that which the other finds most important emotionally and to show love in that way.

Showing love is an act of the will that aims to stimulate the emotions of the object of our affections, and we cannot complete our love task unless we find out the most effective way to do so.

We have examined four different ways of showing our emotional love to our spouse, those being, speaking words of affirmation to our spouse, spending quality time with our spouse, giving gifts to our spouse and performing routine acts of service for our spouse. The fifth way of showing love has to do with physical touch. For many people, physical touch is the predominate way to communicate love.

Child development experts will tell us that babies who are held, hugged, and kissed on a regular basis generally develop healthier emotional lives than those who are left for long periods of time without physical contact. The importance of physical touch as a way to show love is not a modern idea. In the first century, the Hebrews living in Palestine, recognizing Jesus as a great teacher, brought their children to Him to have him touch them. **Mark 10:13-16** records:

13 Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

14 But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God.

15 Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it."

16 And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.

Physical touch as in the laying on of hands has long been connected with healing.

Matthew 8:1-3 tells us:

1 When [Jesus] had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him.

2 And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."

3 Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed." Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.

Was it necessary for Jesus to touch the leper to heal him? I doubt it, because in some cases, Jesus healed with just a word. The leper, however, had probably not been touched in some time; the disease of leprosy is spread by physical contact and first century individuals avoided touching lepers.

Jesus' touch healed the leper, and it also restored the leper to the community of human fellowship.

Most people use physical touch as a sign of fellowship. How do you feel about someone who will not shake your hand when you extend it? Aren't you put off by this rejection? If the person is someone with whom you have had a relationship, wouldn't you inquire as to the nature of the problem between you that caused them to not shake your hand?

As touch relates to marriage, Jesus tells us, in **Mark 10:6-8**:

6 But from the beginning of the creation, God 'made them male and female.'

7 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,

8 and the two shall become one flesh'; so then they are no longer two, but one flesh.

It is instructive that Jesus does not say that we who are married are one in mind, or one in spirit, or one in soul, although such total oneness is to be desired. Jesus specifies that we are to achieve essential oneness through touch, by becoming one in flesh. The creation of woman is equally instructive. God used part of the man's body as the raw material to form the woman, and then declared the necessity for that which had been taken out of man to reunify with man, so that man would become one once again.

God was so serious about our physical unity that He left us in the Garden naked, so that we would have the maximum amount of skin area immediately available to commune with one another. At the completion of God's creation, **Genesis 2:25** tells us:

25 And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

The entire rationale for the fashion industry, and the reason that we have clothes, is sin. Not the avoidance of sin, but because of sin itself. After the man and woman sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, **Genesis 3:7-10** tells us:

7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings.

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

9 Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"

10 So he said, “I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

The devil’s persuasion brought sin into the world and took away our physical openness with one another, and, by extension, our intellectual and spiritual openness with one another as well. Lucifer brought us sin, which is a mindset that makes us feel afraid and ashamed to come before God and display ourselves to one another without a covering to keep us from showing our true selves.

As we have read, physical touch was the initial way that God created for us to show love, and for many people, physical touch is still the way that they determine that their mate loves them. In marriage, the touch of love may take many forms. Since touch receptors are located throughout the body, lovingly touching your spouse almost anywhere can be an expression of love.

Some touching is purposeful and demands your full attention. A massage or foreplay culminating in marital relations is such a type of touch. Other touching may be more incidental and requires only a moment, such as putting your hand on your spouses’ shoulder as you pour a cup of coffee or rubbing against your spouse as you pass in the kitchen. Purposeful love touches obviously take more time, not only in actual touching but in developing your understanding of how to communicate love to your spouse this way. If a back massage communicates love loudly to your spouse, then the time, money, and energy you spend in learning to be a good masseur or masseuse will be well invested. If marital relations are your mate’s primary way of receiving your love, reading about and discussing the methodology that brings each of you the most pleasure will enhance your expression of love.

Incidental love touches may also be just as important as purposeful love touches to the person whose primary way of recognizing love is physical touch. We are often in situations in which purposeful love touches are not appropriate, and incidental touches can help us to shore up our feelings of love for one another. Holding hands as we walk or touching one another underneath the table in restaurants are examples of incidental touch that speak volumes to a person that for whom physical touch is the sign of love.

In a time of crisis, we find it almost instinctive to hug one another, because physical touch is such a powerful communicator of love. In a time of crisis, more than anything, we need to feel loved. We cannot always change events, but we can survive if we feel loved.

All marriages will experience crises. The death of parents is inevitable. Automobile accidents cripple and kill thousands each year. Disease is no respecter of persons. Disappointments are a part of life. The most important thing you can do for your mate in a time of crisis is to love him or her. If your spouse’s primary sign of love is physical touch, nothing is more important than holding her as she cries. Your words may mean little, but your physical touch will communicate that you care. Crises provide a unique opportunity for expressing love. Your tender touches will be remembered long after the crisis has passed. Your failure to touch may never be forgotten.

John 3:16-17 tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world

through Him might be saved.

Jesus' primary purpose for coming into the world was to forgive our sins. He was sent to a nation that had a leadership group in which many were unwilling to recognize that they needed forgiveness for their sins. Many of the common people in this nation, however, had a serious sense of their own sinfulness, and were drawn to the forgiveness that Jesus exuded. A particular instance of this is described in the Scripture. **Luke 7:36-38** records:

36 Then one of the Pharisees asked [Jesus] to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat.

37 And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil,

38 and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil.

The sinful woman did not come to the Pharisee's house to interrupt the conversation by confessing her sins to Jesus. She did not feel herself worthy of his forgiveness, but understood instinctively that Jesus was a man that provided comfort for others, and the one thing that she needed was comfort.

The woman decided to comfort herself by physical contact with Jesus in the most sacrificial way that she could. Jesus understood that which the woman was doing, but the Pharisee did not have a clue. **Luke 7:39** records

39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This Man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner."

Because of Jesus' reputation for doing miracles, the people thought of Jesus in the class of the Prophets, who along with their forthtelling of the words of God, did miraculous signs to validate their prophecies. The Pharisees thought that it was righteous to reject association with sinners, even their very touch, and so the Pharisee reasoned that if Jesus were truly a holy man, He would reject the touch of a sinner as well. Jesus, however, knew the error in the Pharisee's reasoning and decided to teach a short lesson to correct the error. **Luke 7:40-43** records:

40 And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it."

41 "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty.

42 And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?"

43 Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged."

Jesus, in his story, equates forgiveness with love. He then goes on to contrast the self-righteous Pharisee with the woman. **Luke 7:44-50** records:

44 Then [Jesus] turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head.

45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I

came in.

46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil.

47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little.”

48 Then He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

49 And those who sat at the table with Him began to say to themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

50 Then He said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.”

The sign of the woman’s faith was not her intellectual argument, but the fact that she physically ministered to Jesus. Understand that although forgiveness is an intellectual construct, and that we can decide to forgive someone without being in the room with them and touching them, that the physical response to another person is a serious sign of love.

Jesus Christ did not only forgive us intellectually, but He came to our planet physically and showed us, by His physical acts, that we are truly loved by God and that our sins are forgiven. Jesus could have stayed in Heaven and sent us a book to study or a list of commandments to memorize through the prophets, but He rather chose to come to earth physically, and give us the physical example of His sacrifice.

The cross on which He chose to die was made from real wood, like the wood in this pulpit. The nails with which they pierced Him were made of real metal, like the spikes that hold the railroad tracks into the ground. The flesh that He gave to those that crucified was real flesh like ours, and none of us is going to go home this afternoon and drive a nail through our wrists, because of the pain and the agony that such an act would cause us.

Jesus Christ, however, came down from heaven and wrapped Himself in physical flesh so that He could touch us, so that we could touch Him, and so that He could suffer as we suffer and learn the obedience to God that we need to know from the physical process of suffering. Jesus, as **Hebrews 5:7-10** records:

7 who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,

8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.

9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

10 called by God as High Priest “according to the order of Melchizedek,”

We can see, through the example of Jesus, love being shown through physical touch. Jesus came so that He could actually touch the people, so that the people could actually touch Him, and so that He could actually experience the physical as God created it in Genesis.

While some experience love most intensely through the spoken word of affirmation, or through spending quality time, or through receiving gifts, or through having routine acts of service performed for them, others experience love most intensely through physical touch. Participating in marital relations is known as colloquially as “making love”, because of the physical closeness involved, and the fact that this physical closeness and union was God’s initial way, even before sin entered the world, for us to show our love for one another. Within the

unique institution of marriage, our physical response to one another is the signature sign of love and caring, and to participate in the marital union is to show our love for one another in the most concrete way possible.

Love, in the final analysis, is a choice. We have explored the various signs of love that we can show one another, and have determined that it is in the best interest of our marriages to find out which sign of love that our spouse most desires and to show our love in that way so that our spouse will receive it. We can also communicate the sign of love that we most desire to our spouse, and then hope that our spouse will receive the message and reciprocate in kind. **Matthew 20:25-28** tells us:

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them.

26 Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant.

27 And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—

28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.”

The essence of love is the choice to give. Sometimes, our spouse fails to do that which makes us feel loved. When this happens, our feelings for our spouse start to fade, and the emotion of love with which we started our relationship begins to wane. We may, quite naturally, begin to look for other ways to fill the void in our life that this causes. It is easy to rationalize turning to others to meet our needs, but God calls us to work through these tough times with our spouse and to put our marriages back on track by being attentive to our spouse rather than vindictive.

The crux of our Christianity, however, is the ability to choose to work through the tough times to reach the ultimate aim our on agenda. When the one we love becomes the one we hate, we have the best opportunity to exercise our Christianity. Jesus tells us, in **Matthew 5:43-48**:

43 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

44 But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?

48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

A woman that was having a problem with her husband spoke to her counselor. She said, “My husband and I just aren’t getting along, and I have a great deal of resentment toward him. I just can’t stand to be physical with him. Isn’t it being hypocritical to express love sexually when you have such negative feelings toward the person?”

“Perhaps it would be helpful for us to distinguish between love as a feeling and love as an action,” said the counselor. “If you claim to have feelings that you do not have, that is hypocritical and such false communication is not the way to build intimate relationships. But if

you express an act of love that is designed for the other person's benefit or pleasure, it is simply a choice. You are not claiming that the action grows out of a deep emotional bonding. You are simply choosing to do something for his benefit. I think that must be what Jesus meant.

“Certainly we do not have warm feelings for people who hate us. That would be abnormal. However, we can do loving acts for them. That is simply a choice. We act positively towards them in hope that such loving acts will have a positive effect upon their attitudes and behavior and treatment, and because we have decided to do something positive for them.”

Our lives will not follow the pattern of Christ if we only do that which we are moved to do by our emotions. To say, “I don't feel like it” and then fail to act when faced with keeping our commitment is the least Christlike thing that we can do. Quite often, God fixes it so that our emotions respond to our actions rather than leading our actions, meaning that the feeling that we need to motivate us to do that which we are suppose to do comes after we begin doing it.

God tells us, in **Luke 6:37-38**:

37 “Judge not, and you shall not be judged. Condemn not, and you shall not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

38 Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.”

The key to a fulfilling marital relationship is to be giving. Not judging, not condemning, but giving. Jesus gave His life on the Cross on Friday, and received it back from God early on Sunday Morning. We must give ourselves through speaking words of affirmation to our spouse, spending quality time with our spouse, giving gifts to our spouse, committing to and performing routine acts of service for our spouse, and providing our spouse with the physical touch that they need to thrive. We need to investigate one another, to find out the specific sign of love that our spouse needs so that we can give our spouse that which they need, not that which we need, and give it to them, in order that our relationships might grow and our marriages might improve and our needs might be met and that we might continue to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

The marital relationship is the relationship in which we can most closely express the love of Christ. The real Christlike relationship was not just between Christ and Man, but between Christ and God, as God had such a loving relationship with Christ that He was able to send Him to us to show us the love that He wants us to emulate. In **John 14:23-24**:

23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

24 He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me.

God created us with the design that we would become one; God sent His son Jesus Christ to show us an example of the proper expression of the love that will lead us into the oneness that He wants us to have and that He wanted us to have originally. The purpose of our lives is to emulate the Love of God in giving ourselves to one another. As our text, **John 3:16** tells us:

16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

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