

Talk given on September 5th, 2010

Love

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law?

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).

Why is it so important to love? Why is love the great commandment, to love the Lord and to love everyone around us? First of all, I am not talking about romantic love. I am talking about a Christ like love that He has for His brothers and sisters: us.

“Love is a feeling of deep devotion, concern, and affection. Love for God and fellow men is a characteristic of disciples of Jesus Christ. We manifest our love for Heavenly Father by keeping His commandments and serving His children. Our expressions of love for others may include being kind to them, listening to them, mourning with them, comforting them, serving them, praying for them, sharing the gospel with them, and being their friend” (True to the Faith 96).

In my personal opinion, love is what this wonderful gospel is all about. We are to be that light on the hill for all to see, we need to be examples for all, and especially we need to love everyone as Jesus Christ loves each of us. I will say this, love is a gift. For an individual to love everyone they meet is merely impossible, but with faith and prayer...all things are possible. We need to recognize our relationship with those around us that may be our enemies; as sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father.

There was a point in my life where my older brother who is my best friend, was serving a mission. He was gone and I missed him very much. When he would write back, he would frequently teach about love, and how much he had changed on his mission. And this was at the time that he had only been out about a month or two. But he would tell us how amazing it was to pray for love in his heart, and to feel a Christ like love for all people.

I heard this several times and was convinced that it was something that I needed in my life. I started praying fervently and diligently, hoping that I could start to feel this love, to have that blessing in my life. After a couple weeks I realized that nothing was happening. I decided that it wasn't my Heavenly Father that wasn't pulling through, I was probably missing something. So I started to study my scriptures more, to pray more, and to serve more. I changed the music I listened to, and the movies I

watched so that I would be more in tune with the Spirit of God. I continued to pray, and told Him of my goals and my challenges. Then ...gradually I felt a change. I did start to love. I would see people on the city bus while coming home from school, I would want to talk with them, want to help them, want to share the Gospel with them...because the Lord had blessed me with the ability to love. It wasn't long when I realized that I loved everyone I would ever see or meet.

When this happened, my entire outlook on life itself changed. Everything just seemed so wonderful and full of opportunity, and it is because of love. If I had not asked the Lord for this gift I would not have received. If you are one of the many who believe that it is impossible to love everyone...pray about it with faith, ask and ye shall receive. The Lord wants to help us, wants to bless, we just have to let Him.

Why is it so difficult to love? There are so many wicked people who pollute our lives and we are supposed to love them. We are supposed to love everyone, even Lucifer himself. There was once a boy who struggled greatly with sin, he tried to pray to Lucifer one day and told him to stop making his life miserable. He told him that he didn't have to be like this; that he didn't have to make everyone miserable because that wouldn't help him at all. For some reason, Lucifer did not comply with the tender boy's humble request. So the boy continued to pray to the Lord, asking for help in his endeavors. Later in life, this boy had recovered from the struggling times and he proclaimed to God that he loved Satan himself. This boy did not love him because he liked him or because he wanted anything to do with him; but because somehow, this boy could see that Satan was his brother, and the boy still loved him. This boy plead with the Lord to help Satan, to forgive him if Satan was repentant. Apparently it never happened. But the joy that this boy felt in forgiving the very adversary himself was more than he could comprehend. It truly was a gift from the loving God who created him.

It is so difficult to love because it is against our nature. We are taught that love comes from strengthening relationships, liking someone...then growing closer to them. When really, love is also found by realizing our divine relationship with every person we will ever see in this life. The fact of the matter is every person you see is your brother or sister. There is a part of them that wants to be loved, that wants to change, and that wants to be better. There is a part of them that knows there is something worthwhile out there, and your love can help them find what that is.

Deiter F. Uchtdorf told an amazing story, and I will take a moment to quote him in sharing it with you today,

"An old Jewish legend tells of two brothers, Abram and Zimri, who owned a field and worked it together. They agreed to divide both the labor and the harvest equally. One night as the harvest came to a close, Zimri could not sleep, for it didn't seem right that Abram, who had a wife and seven sons to feed, should receive only half of the harvest, while he, with only himself to support, had so much.

So Zimri dressed and quietly went into the field, where he took a third of his harvest and put it in his brother's pile. He then returned to his bed, satisfied that he had done the right thing.

Meanwhile, Abram could not sleep either. He thought of his poor brother, Zimri, who was all alone and had no sons to help him with the work. It did not seem right that Zimri, who worked so hard by himself,

should get only half of the harvest. Surely this was not pleasing to God. And so Abram quietly went to the fields, where he took a third of his harvest and placed it in the pile of his beloved brother.

The next morning, the brothers went to the field and were both astonished that the piles still looked to be the same size. That night both brothers slipped out of their houses to repeat their efforts of the previous night. But this time they discovered each other, and when they did, they wept and embraced. Neither could speak, for their hearts were overcome with love and gratitude.

This is the spirit of compassion: that we love others as ourselves, seek their happiness, and do unto them as we hope they would do unto us.”

He later taught that true love requires action. In reality, love is an action word. I could tell someone that I love them all day long...but am I willing to serve them? Am I willing to put their happiness before my own? Am I willing to share everything I have with them, to always be there for them? The emotion of love is a gift from a loving Heavenly Father, but it is our responsibility and privilege to exercise that love and to share it with others. I say the word privilege because the joy that comes to the individual who does love, who is selfless, who serves others and puts their needs before his own...is incomprehensibly infinite. How can we ask God for the gift of love...exercise it, and not only be blessed for helping others, but also be blessed with more joy than we could have previously imagined? Like I said, the Lord wants to bless us, but He cannot unless we submit our will to His, and let Him.

President Eyring taught,

“Love is the motivating principle by which the Lord leads us along the way towards becoming like Him, our perfect example. Our way of life, hour by hour, must be filled with the love of God and love for others. There is no surprise in that, since the Lord proclaimed those as the first and great commandments. It is love of God that will lead us to keep His commandments. And love of others is at the heart of our capacity to obey Him.”

It is interesting that the love of others is the primary point in our capacity to obey God Himself. If I had to venture a guess as to why that is, I would say it is because loving others invites the Spirit of God into our life, brings joy to us, and brings us closer to Jesus Christ. When we love others we have the love of Christ in us, and we want to serve Him and obey Him because of the joy we feel.

It is imperative that we love those around us, and equally imperative that we love our Heavenly Father and our Savior, Jesus Christ. The great commandment is to love God, and then to love others. I do not believe that that order in the scriptures is a coincidence by any stretch of the imagination. We must love God. President Uchtdorf taught in a Liahona magazine,

“God the Eternal Father did not give that first great commandment because He needs us to love Him. His power and glory are not diminished should we disregard, deny, or even defile His name. His influence and dominion extend through time and space independent of our acceptance, approval, or admiration.

No, God does not need us to love Him. But oh, how we need to love God!

For what we love determines what we seek.

What we seek determines what we think and do.

What we think and do determines who we are—and who we will become.

We are created in the image of our heavenly parents; we are God's spirit children. Therefore, we have a vast capacity for love—it is part of our spiritual heritage. What and how we love not only defines us as individuals; it also defines us as a church. Love is the defining characteristic of a disciple of Christ.

Since the beginning of time, love has been the source of both the highest bliss and the heaviest burdens. At the heart of misery from the days of Adam until today, you will find the love of wrong things. And at the heart of joy, you will find the love of good things.

And the greatest of all good things is God.

Our Father in Heaven has given us, His children, much more than any mortal mind can comprehend. Under His direction the Great Jehovah created this wondrous world we live in. God the Father watches over us, fills our hearts with breathtaking joy, brightens our darkest hours with blessed peace, distills upon our minds precious truths, shepherds us through times of distress, rejoices when we rejoice, and answers our righteous petitions.

He offers to His children the promise of a glorious and infinite existence and has provided a way for us to progress in knowledge and glory until we receive a fulness of joy. He has promised us all that He has.

If all that is not enough reason to love our Heavenly Father, perhaps we can learn from the words of the Apostle John, who said, 'We love him, because he first loved us.'"

Not only is it a commandment to love Him, but it is a gift. When we begin exercising our love for Him, being obedient to His commands, and willfully serving Him, we will experience more joy than ever before, and that joy will continue to grow as we let it. This joy we feel is the pure love of Christ filling our souls.

Moroni eloquently describes this pure love of Christ when he taught,

"And charity suffereth long, and is kind, and envieth not, and is not puffed up, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, and rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in truth, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things" (Moroni 7:45).

Those are attributes of the love of Christ. Earlier I taught that love is not only a feeling of emotion, but it requires action. When Moroni described it he definitely had action in the forefront of his mind. This pure love of Christ is patient, kind, good willed, humble, selfless, serene, pure, rejoiceth in truth, beareth

all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, and endureth all things. This love of Jesus Christ is not merely telling someone that you love them every day, this is only pure love when acted upon. When each day we seek to serve, each day our thoughts are filled with purity and endowed with righteousness. As we serve and as we love we will grow closer to our Father in Heaven each day without question. President Eyring taught,

“I hope you will go out today looking for opportunities to do as He did and to love as He loves. I can promise you the peace that you felt as a child will come to you often and it will linger with you. The promise is true that He made to His disciples: ‘Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.’”

What an amazing promise! Even in this world of perpetual wickedness and endless temptation, the Creator of this world teaches, “Peace I leave with you.” How can we feel this peace which he so tenderly offers? Love. We must love our brothers and sisters, put their needs before our own; as we do this it will become easier and more natural to do so. At first, loving everyone, regardless of whom, may be difficult at times...but when fervent action is accompanied by faithful prayer, all is possible. President Uchtdorf teaches a bit about love, he proclaimed the following,

“We increase our love for our Heavenly Father and demonstrate that love by aligning our thoughts and actions with God’s word. His pure love directs and encourages us to become more pure and holy. It inspires us to walk in righteousness—not out of fear or obligation but out of an earnest desire to become even more like Him because we love Him. By doing so, we can become ‘born again ... [and] cleansed by blood, even the blood of [the] Only Begotten; that [we] might be sanctified from all sin, and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world, and eternal life in the world to come, even immortal glory.’

My dear brothers and sisters, don’t get discouraged if you stumble at times. Don’t feel downcast or despair if you don’t feel worthy to be a disciple of Christ at all times. The first step to walking in righteousness is simply to try. We must try to believe. Try to learn of God: read the scriptures; study the words of His latter-day prophets; choose to listen to the Father, and do the things He asks of us. Try and keep on trying until that which seems difficult becomes possible—and that which seems only possible becomes habit and a real part of you.”

President Uchtdorf is an apostle of God, and he is teaching that our first step is a step of faith, and we must continue...until it is habit, and is a part of us. If you don’t believe me then believe him when he teaches that love inspires us to be righteous, it cleanses, it purifies us, it strengthens us, and it leads us back to our Father in Heaven.

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.

This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

We must love everyone as Christ did, and love Jesus Christ and our Heavenly Father. It is my personal opinion, that love is the first and great commandment because everything else falls into its significant influence. If we truly love our Heavenly Father then loving everyone around us with a Christ like love will be natural and instinctive. Which means that if we have a Christ like love then all other commandments will be followed willingly, just like President Uchtdorf taught.

In my talk today, we have discussed loving those around us, and loving Jesus Christ and our Father in Heaven; I would now like to speak on one final portion of love which is extremely significant especially at this point in each of our lives. Howard W. Hunter taught,

“We need a more peaceful world, growing out of more peaceful families and neighborhoods and communities. To secure and cultivate such peace, ‘we must love others, even our enemies as well as our friends.’ The world needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who are filled with the love of Christ do not seek to force others to do better; they inspire others to do better, indeed inspire them to the pursuit of God. We need to extend the hand of friendship. We need to be kinder, more gentle, more forgiving, and slower to anger. We need to love one another with the pure love of Christ. May this be our course and our desire.”

Let me reiterate one part, “The world needs the gospel of Jesus Christ.” Members of this church are responsible to teach this Gospel. Some may say, “I don’t know anyone to teach.” Or, “I’ve already tried to teach everyone I know.” Well then go make friends with more people. Others may say, “It is too hard.” “It is too intimidating.” “I don’t know how.” To this, I would say pray. It is a commandment to teach this Gospel, and if you don’t know how, or you are scared...then pray. Ask your Heavenly Father who loves you infinitely for help, for strength, and for additional faith in His ability to help you. This world really does need the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are so fortunate, we have it in our lives, we know about the Plan of Salvation, we know the promises of the temple, the peace that our baptismal covenants bring, we know about the Priesthood on the earth today, and often times we take it for granted. I say this because we do not share this Gospel enough with those around us. Many would say that this Gospel is the best thing that has ever happened to them...and yet they talk with their peers about movies and celebrities more than they bring up the Gospel. HAVE FAITH!

Like I said earlier, our Lord and Savior wants to help us...we just need to ask. So ask with a faithful countenance, a broken heart and a contrite spirit. Ask faithfully. Love is everything in this life, all good things are appendages to it, and all good things are accomplished through acting on love. May this be our course and our desire. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.