

Better Together: Loving God
Sermon 6-10-18
By Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Romans 8:31-39

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Message:

(Play video at <http://www1.cbn.com/leaving-behind-love-hurts>) If you're human, you crave love. For Lakeisha, she was on this quest for love. After mom and dad divorced, where could she turn to for love? Who could she trust? Over the years through bearing a child, multiple boyfriends and even abusive relationships, she still couldn't find love. Until a daycare woman shared the true love that we all know and trust in Jesus Christ. Even though she went through another abusive relationship thereafter, the seed was planted. And Lakeisha really started to believe in God when her life was on the line. And God didn't disappoint with a knock on the door. Through all the things Lakeisha had done and what she went through, God still loved her. God still loves her. God still loves you.

Her story reminds me of a series of parables from Luke 15, "Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." ³So he told them this parable: ⁴"Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? ⁵When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that

was lost.’ ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance. ⁸“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? ⁹When she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.” When Lakeisha came to Christ, when she called upon God, I imagine God saying, “Rejoice with me, for I have found Lakeisha, who was lost.” Or the following parable in Luke 15, one many of you know. A son runs away and squanders his father’s wealth. After blowing all of his wealth, the son finds himself in a destitute situation. His only hope was to return home. He planned his repentance to his father. He was prepared for his father’s wrath. And yet upon his return, his father ran to him, embraced him and threw him a party, saying, “...this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!” Paul says in our passage, “³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Nothing will separate us from the love of God.

³¹“What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?” Before our passage, Paul goes through a long series of arguments of logical reasons to believe in Christ in chapters 5-8. Our passage is the summary of this section of Romans. He talks about embracing the grace of Christ. Turning away from sin. He talks about dying to the law so that we may be married with Christ. He talks about how there is not life in the law, even though the law is good, but there is life in Christ and in His Spirit. That we are not to live by the flesh or the laws God bestowed because only Christ can fulfill the law and make things right. So our righteousness can only be found in Christ. And so in verse 31, when Paul says, “He who did not withhold his own Son...” He is drawing a parallel that a Jewish audience would understand. If you remember way back in Genesis, the father of the Israelites, Abraham, was instructed to sacrifice his son, Isaac. He was about to sacrifice his only and beloved son, but an angel stopped him and he instead sacrificed a goat. Unlike Abraham, God the Father, sacrificed his only and beloved son, Jesus for the sins of all of humanity. God/Jesus loves us so much, that He sacrificed His son or Himself so that we could know and experience the love of God. So if God is willing to sacrifice His beloved son, “...will he not with him also give us everything else?”

“³³Who will bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.” ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” WHO will separate us from the love of Christ? WHAT will separate us from the love of Christ? Absolutely nothing! Even though Paul makes some very strong logical argument in Romans chapters 5-8, the bottom line is that it doesn’t compare to the love of Christ. Logic can’t trump the love of God. Even the worst ills of this world can’t overpower the love of God. Even the most powerful force that we know to humankind, death, can’t overpower the love of God. A great Saint, Father and Ancient of our faith, Augustine of Hippo says this, “To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances; to seek him, the greatest adventure; to find him, the greatest human achievement.” Nothing can separate us from the love of God. “³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What does this all have to do with being “better together?” Well...if nothing can separate us from the love of God. If we have this loving relationship with Christ. If Providence Church has a loving relationship with Christ. If Abundant Life has a loving relationship with Christ. What’s the common denominator? We all know the love of Christ. Abundant Life is independent. Providence is Church of the Brethren. Abundant Life is younger. Providence is older. We practice Love Feast. They don’t. They have a booming children’s ministry. We don’t. All those things that separate us don’t matter compared to the love that we have in Christ. Don’t you see, our identity is not first and foremost in the Church of the Brethren. Our identity is not first and foremost in Providence. Our identity is not first and foremost in our age. Our identity is not first and foremost our job, our location or the color of our hair. Our identity is first and foremost in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We will not know any greater love than Him. The body of Christ is most unified when we can acknowledge that we know the love of God.

And the big question is, do we TRUST this love that God has for us? That God has for His people. That God has for Providence. That God has for Abundant Life. God’s love isn’t fleeting. It isn’t whimsical. In God’s framework of love, there is no such thing as “falling in love” or “falling out of love” because He first loved us. God made the first move. And He’s not backing down. If the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin or the Prodigal Son is any indication, God’s love and

knowing of us is so deep and so rooted, that we can't possibly be separated from it. But let's turn this around, do you love God? Do you love God? Do you have a loving relationship with Him? Because as Paul outlines in Romans 6, God is not interested in a one-sided relationship. In fact, it's not much of a relationship if only God loves you. God wants you to love Him in return. Not because He needs it, but because He takes pleasure knowing you and you knowing Him. God wants to deeply and intimately know you. Andy Stanley says this, "When we decide that we can't trust God's love for us, our relationship with him becomes religion, which is just a quest to find the right combination of belief and ritual to get God to do what we want him to do." If we don't love and trust God, then what we believe is nothing more than religion. Love and trust means letting go of control. It means letting go of knowing everything. It means dying to our selfish desires and surrendering all that we are to our Lord and Savior, to our great love, to the one who first loved us.

If we believe, have experienced and know that God loves us. If we have chosen to accept this love and love and trust in God in return. Then, shouldn't that love naturally extend beyond us? It shouldn't be work. It shouldn't be a "have to." It shouldn't be an obligation. If we know that God loves us and we love Him, it's only natural that this magnificent love relationship will extend to those around. And if that's not compelling enough, think about this from Rebecca St. James on Christianity Today's website, "After a concert last year, a guy with a physical disability came up and asked a simple but profound question: 'What is the cure for loneliness?' My heart just sank, and at the time I really didn't know how to answer him." We have world of people who are ailing in heartache because of loneliness. Think about your loneliness. When you feel it. When have you felt it? Think about your friends and family who experience loneliness. We know the love of God. Wouldn't we want these lonely and hurting people to know the love of Christ? Wouldn't we want them to experience the love of Christ through Christian community? If God loves you and you love Him, you will naturally love others. Those who are lonely. Those who may different. Those who aren't normally your people. Those who are from Abundant Life. We are better together when we know the love of God. If you can't love your neighbor. If you can't love the people from Abundant Life. If you can't love those who are lonely. What does that say about your relationship with God? What's the missing link? If you can't trust the Lord, what's the missing love link? Do you not believe that God loves you? Do you not love God in return?

If you're sitting here today acknowledging that you want to know the love of God. It's both instantaneous and it takes time to know the depth of God's love. Henri Nouwen says this, "The spiritual life is a life in which you gradually learn to listen to a voice that says something else, that says, 'You are beloved and on you

my favour rests.”” When you take the time to listen to the Lord, I can guarantee you, you will find comfort in His voice and you will find the love you’ve always desired. But you can’t discover the depth of God’s love if you don’t spend time with Him. Even among the body of Christ, Providence and Abundant Life, you can’t discover the great love God has for His people if you don’t spend time in community with one another. One of the ways God expresses His love is through community. So if you can’t set aside the time for Him and His people, then you’ll miss out on the depth of His love. We need to spend time with Him privately—reading the Bible, Praying and worshipping Him. We also need to spend time with other believers—fellowship, Bible Study, serving together and worshipping together. This is how we expand our understanding and experience of God’s love.

Another key way to experience God’s love is through the act of transparency. Time and transparency. We can make the time for private time with God. We can read our Bibles and pray. But if we’re not honest—the good, the bad and the ugly—then we won’t be able to experience the great love and compassion that God has for us. To know God’s love, it takes being vulnerable with God. Or another way of looking at it, He knows what you’re thinking and feeling, your hopes and dreams. Why not tell Him anyways? He loves to hear from His children even though He does know all that stuff. Similarly, if we want to know God’s love in community with others, it also takes transparency. Meaning, we have to move beyond just talking about the weather or the latest sports chatter. It means that if we want to create something new, something grand, something Kingdom-oriented with Abundant Life, we have to be willing to be transparent about our lives with them—the good, the bad and the ugly. In this vulnerable state, in this transparent state, trust and relationship is formed. Community is formed. A better future together is formed. Again, our common denominator is that we all love God. Why can’t we love our fellow believers in Providence and Abundant Life with our time and our transparency? What’s holding us back?

“³⁸For I am convinced [I AM CONVINCED. NOT UNSURE. I AM CONVINCED. ARE YOU CONVINCED?] that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Providence Church, do you know the love of God? Do you know the incredible sacrifice God made on the cross in Jesus Christ for your sins because He LOVES YOU!?!? Do you know it? Do YOU love Him? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. Can separate you from the love of God. Not pain. Not suffering. Not death. God will chase after you. God will find His lost sheep. God LOVES YOU! And if you know this love. If you’ve experienced it. If you love Him in return. I implore you, to deepen that love and extend it to

Abundant Life. You've all experienced the great love that you have for each other because of the love of Christ. Extend that love beyond the group called Providence and extend it to Abundant Life and all those you interact with. If you have a loving relationship with God, your love will naturally extend beyond you. What would we do without the love of God? What would we do without Christ's sacrifice on the cross? What would we do, if God didn't run after His children? What would we do, if no one else showed us the love of God? Thank goodness that nothing can separate us from the love of God! That we can know the majesty of His Kingdom through the love He bestowed upon us with His actions on the cross. That we can experience this incredibly trusting and deep love to share with all the world. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." We are better together because we all know the love of our savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.