

Galatians 5:24-26

And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us have no self-conceit, no provoking of one another, no envy of one another.

Leonard Sweet tells a story of a mission trip he went on to South Korea. As he was preparing his sermon for the first night, he thought it better to try out his illustration, which highlighted the church's loss of its reason for being, on his translator before hand. He said, there was this little girl who was given her birth certificate by her mother to take with her to start school. As the mother gave her daughter the birth certificate she said, "Be sure not to lose it. Your teacher needs to see it so you can join the class. Be sure you bring it home this evening, and again, do not lose it." Of course the child lost her birth certificate, and when she arrived home she came in the house, sat down and cried, afraid to tell her mother what had happened. Her mother heard her crying and tried to comfort her, and asked her what had happened, and the little girl said, "Mama, I lost it; I lost my reason for being born."

When Leonard Sweet asked his translator what he thought, he said, "I don't get it." "What do you mean you don't get it? That's what has happened to many churches: we've lost our reason for being born." The translator said, "I still don't get it." It was then Leonard realized what his translator didn't get was the concept of a birth certificate. He then asked his translator, "Do you have birth certificates here in Korea?" "No, what's a birth certificate?" He explained that in America every individual born, receives a document, a birth certificate, which proves they were born on such-and-such a date, in such-and-such a place. You keep this paper document and use it for passports, or acquiring a driver licenses, getting married, and for other things. His translator said, "No we do not have anything like that in Korea."

So Leonard started over, he asked his translator, “When a child is born, what happens.” His reply was, “When parents give birth to a child, that child’s name is then added into the family record.”ⁱ Think about that for a moment, let it sink in. When parents give birth to a child, that child’s name is added onto the family record. Here in the West every child that is born is legally defined as a separate individual being. In the East, every child born is legally defined by the family into which he/she is born.

In some African cultures, a child does not achieve moral standing until he/she is presented to the community. Until an infant is introduced into relations with others, he/she has no moral standing, only a biological arrival. If an infant dies before being shown, or presented to the community, he/she is buried without mourning or ceremony. But, if the child has been presented to the community the child has all the rights and privileges of any other person within the community. Out of this culture comes, what African theologian John Mbiti believes is the greatest contribution to global spirituality, and that is the principle of “I am because we are.”ⁱⁱ

One of the greatest heresies we have in the church today is the notion that we are or can be separate from one another. This belief that we can function in this world without the “You,” is ridiculous. We just read Paul’s words in **verse 24**, “*who belongs to Christ Jesus*,” in other words we belong, we are not separate, we are not alone. Even Jesus said in **John 10:30**, “*I and My Father are one*.” Jesus never saw Himself separate. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray He said, “*Our Father*,” meaning we are not alone, we are not and cannot be separate.

If you notice in the Lord's Prayer the big pronoun we have been discussing these past few weeks "I" is silent. It reads, we pray "OUR Father," ... "Give US this day OUR daily bread" ... "Forgive US OUR trespasses," ... "Lead US not into temptation," ... "Deliver US from evil." We never pray alone.ⁱⁱⁱ God is always present, thus the impossibility of being alone.

Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 12:21-22**, "*The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable,*" which means we cannot be alone and should not ever strive to be alone. Nothing sucks the life out of a relationship, faster than when the mouth opens up and says, "Leave me alone!" It does not matter whether it is a relationship with another person or with God, it cannot be done alone, but thank God for His word which says in **Hebrews 13:5**, "*For He has said, I will never fail you nor forsake you.*"

What we are talking about this morning is about the "You" in "I Love You." This "You" we are talking about is other people. It's like saying, "If I were You." I know every one here has said those words before. We put our selves in their place, we turn the I, into you. Unless we learn to turn I into you we never will reach peace, peace of mind, body, or spirit. Famous 7th century poet John Donne wrote a devotion, in 1839, listen and hear how these words still apply today:

PERCHANCE he for whom this bell tolls may be so ill as that he knows not it tolls for him. And perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me, and see my state, may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions; all that she does, belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns

me; for that child is thereby connected to that head which is my head too, and engrafted into that body, whereof I am a member. And when she buries a man, that action concerns me; all mankind is of one author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated; God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation, and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again, for that library where every book shall lie open to one another; as therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come; so this bell calls us all: but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness ... No man is an island. entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, ... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.^{iv}

We are all part of each other and to separate ourselves from each other is against our very nature. To attempt to stay closed off from each other is like cutting off part of you. We need each other, we need to hold each other up, we need to support each other, and this cannot be accomplished from a distance, we cannot continue to run and hide. Some are saying, "I don't run and hide," but look at how little contact we have with each other throughout the week. We may call one or possibly two people, but other than that we stay separated from each other all week long, only to see and maybe not even speak with come Sunday. We need to reclaim our relationship with each other, and this cannot be accomplished from a distance.

We need to reclaim our relationship with God and this can not be done from a distance. God desires an intimate relationship with each one of us, but yet we still stand back in the crowd just looking. We act like we are at a parade standing on the side watching as the parade passes by, all the while claiming we

were part of the parade. Yes we came. Yes we saw, but we were not part of, and this is how we act towards God. We agree we are here to worship, but we sit back and enjoy the music, sometimes; we sit back and listen to the words spoken, sometimes; but yet many never make the slightest effort to participate, or to be part of.

God is here, He is here to meet us where we are. Just as Jesus met Peter where he was, God is ready to meet us where we are. Jesus makes this clear in **Matthew 18:20**, "*For where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in the midst of them.*" God is always with us, He is always ready to join us, so why do we continue to push Him aside and not embrace Him; because we continue to put "I" ahead of "You."

The number one type of books being produced by Christian publishing house today are about the need to restructure the church and make it more relevant to today's congregations. The only restructuring churches need today is restructuring of relationships. Restructuring relationships with each other and especially restructuring God. We need to really concentrate on putting the "You" first instead of the "I."

A teacher asked a boy this question: Suppose your mother baked a pie and there were seven of you, your parents and five children. What part of the pie would you get? A sixth, replied the boy. I'm afraid you don't know your fractions, said the teacher, remember, there are seven of you. Yes I do teacher, said the boy, you don't know my mother. My mother would say she didn't want any pie.

This happens to be one of the great traits of mothers. The heart of a mother is a heart to give themselves to something or someone else. The Lord placed this same heart in all of us. It is what brought Jesus all the way from Heaven to earth. It is what took him to the cross, and even to hell and back, literally. “*Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.*” I want to ask you today ... Who are you living for? Is it “I” or is it “You?”

2 Corinthians 5:20 tells us, “*So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.*” Notice that, through us? Jesus does not want to just live in us, he wants to live through us, but this is only possible when we are in a right relationship with Him. We have relationships with many people some good and some bad, and you know how much you like being with those you have a good relationship. It’s the same with God. God desires to be in a right relationship with you. It’s God who draws you into this loving relationship, Jesus tells us through **John 6:44**, “*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*” Do you feel God drawing you closer, drawing into this right relationship?

How do we achieve this right relationship with God? Many people believe if they can put some distance between them and all the distractions of this world, put distance between them and all the loud people. Then find some place to sit and meditate in solitude, but that is not what Jesus taught. Jesus said, we encounter God’s Spirit in the middle of life, not by separating ourselves. As Jesus met Peter where he was, we too need to meet each other where they are. Its time we stop all our selfishness, it time we stop thinking about ourselves and start thinking about each other.

The ultimate problem we have with “I Love You” is with our grammar. “I” is the subject. “Love” is the verb. “You” is the object. When ever we see these three apart from each other, we compromise the gospel. When we say to anyone “I Love You,” we are saying we God, we accept the responsibility which has given us by you loving us first. Because I am loved by God, and only because I am loved by God, can I love others. We love, because He loved us first. We are not here alone, we are not in this world alone God is with us. The question is are you in relationship with Him, or is it just a one way relationship? Are you trying to run and hide and live your life just for you?

“Don’t just say it, Live it!” Words are cheap, live what you believe. Jesus lived the words He spoke. Do You? Is the Holy Spirit drawing you into a relationship with God? If not, you need to run to this altar and pray with all your heart for forgiveness right now. If you feel the Spirit drawing you to God, what are you doing about it? Are you answering His call or are you running away and hiding. God loves each and every one of us here this morning. He loves us so much He sent Jesus to die for us. Since you have been loved, do you in turn love others? Not just loving a select few, but loving everyone ... do we? To whom do we belong to this morning? We belong to God. Isn’t it about time we show it? We have a responsibility to love are we?

ⁱ Leonard Sweet *The Three Hardest Words In The World To Get Right* (Colorado: WaterBook Press, 2006) 125-126.

ⁱⁱ John Mbiti, *The Contributions of Africa to the Religious Heritage of the World*
www.wcccoe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd3714.html (accessed 14 May 2009).

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark and Patti Virkler *Communion With God* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 1990) 49.

^{iv} Donne, John. *The Works of John Donne. Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* Vol III. Henry Alford, ed. London: John W. Parker, 1839. 574-5. www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/meditation17.php (assessed 14 May 2009).