

**Russell Kelfer**

# **Are You In Love?**

**# 1204-A**

**Series: Starting Over**

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# Are You In Love?

What a magnificent sight! There He was: the King of eternity seated on a donkey, hordes of admirers surrounding Him, spreading their cloaks on the road before Him, others paving the way for His triumphal entry with the branches of trees. An awesome sight it was indeed.

They cried,

“Hosannah to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosannah in the highest!”

(Matthew 21:9b NKJV)

What a moment of victory. The whole city was stirred. Matthew records:

Then Jesus went into the temple of God and drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple,

(Matthew 21:12a NKJV)

Proclaiming with authority Jesus said to them,

“It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer,’ but you have made it a ‘den of thieves.’”

(Matthew 21:13 NKJV)

And verse 17 adds

Then He left them and went out of the city to Bethany, and He lodged there.

(Matthew 21:17 NKJV)

And so to those whose hearts had felt the touch of eternity, Jesus was at last bringing out into the open His claims of Lordship. Yet there were those whose lives were not in tune with His, who were threatened by His very presence, whose robes of self-righteousness were being seen for the first time in the light of *real* truth, and as a result, *they could not receive His words*. They were the religious leaders of their day, the ecclesiastical hierarchy who had memorized the motions but had lost contact with the source. To them Jesus was a cloud that hovered over the horizon of their self-satisfied world, and if they were to continue to control the spiritual destiny of the people, this man Jesus

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would have to go.

So in Matthew 21:23, we read that Jesus entered into the temple courts and began to teach. It was there that the priests and the elders came to Him and began to question His authority, hoping to corner him in a weak moment, and humiliate him in the eyes of the people.

“By what authority do You do these things?” And who gave you this authority?”

But Jesus answered and said to them, “I also will ask you one thing [as He so often does] which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things:

The baptism of John—where was it from? From heaven or from men?”

And they reasoned among themselves [they were trapped], saying, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’

But if we say, ‘From men,’ we fear the multitude [would stone them], for all count John as a prophet.”

So they answered Jesus and said, “We do not know.”

And He said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.”  
(Matthew 21:23-27 NKJV)

Then Jesus began to teach them in parables. He shared the parable of the two sons, then the parable of the tenants, and soon the religious leaders got the picture for we read,

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them.

But when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

(Matthew 21:45,46 NKJV)

So the priests began to look for ways to entrap Jesus by sending the leaders of various religious sects to him to incite division by causing Him to reject their doctrine. In of Matthew 22:15 they send the Herodians to ask, “What about paying your taxes, Master?” “Good idea,” Jesus responded, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”

Then they sent the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, with a question about a man who had more than one wife, pretending they were interested in who would be his wife in heaven. Jesus took care of that one quickly. “You do err,” He

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replied. “You don’t know the Scriptures or the power of God. No one will be married in heaven,” He explained; and then He quoted Exodus 3:6 to them, and we read “and when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His doctrine.”

Hearing that Jesus had prevailed again, the Pharisees called a committee meeting and said, “Fellas, this has got to stop. Let’s all go stand in front of him where the people can hear, and ask Him which of the commandments is the most important. Then no matter what he says, we’ll have him.” So they did. They called out a lawyer and made him their spokesman, and we read in Matthew 22,

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”  
(Matthew 22:35,36 NIV)

Jesus must have studied their faces for a moment, looked at the crowd that surrounded Him, and quietly answered with these incredible words.

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment.”  
(Matthew 22:37,38 NIV)

In one sentence, the sentence of divine purpose fell upon all who listened, and those words of the Master have continued to ring from the courts of heaven for generations since as the one true measure of a man’s devotion to God.

In one sentence, Jesus swept away the tattered remnants of the legalistic straitjacket that had enslaved men and held them in bondage to their own works. Jesus simply proclaimed that man had two basic reasons for being...and the first and foremost was to fall in love with God. It was not a new thought. Jehovah had been whispering in the ears of His people since first He called them to be His people those very same words of love. They were engraved in the golden phrases of Deuteronomy 6:5, repeated in Deuteronomy 10:12, reechoed in Deuteronomy 30:6, and reiterated in Proverbs 23:26, where the Holy Spirit simply stated God’s desire for man in this beautiful valentine,

My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.  
(KJV)

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The simple call of man from God is for man to fall in love with God. That love will issue forth in a thousand ways, but the sum total of the commandments is simply this: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart; with all your soul, with all your mind," and Luke 10:27 adds, "with all your strength". That is Christianity. It is not what we do. It is who we are in love with that will change the course of history.

I must ask you, "Are you in love?" Does your heart beat faster at the mention of His name? Is your only desire in life to please Him? Is your only purpose in life to know Him better? Can the order of your life's priorities be listed in logical order; and will the list read, "Jesus...Jesus...Jesus?"

Is He everything to you? Or is He less than everything? The question isn't *how much* less. Jesus didn't say, "Love the Lord your God with as much of your heart as you can; as much of your soul as you can; as much of your mind as you can." He said, "Here is the essence of life. Love the Lord with *all*."

And so we come to the place in our quest to start over and reassess all of life by taking inventory, where everything else we have discussed pales into relative insignificance. We have taken pencil in hand and examined the shelves of our spiritual pantries these past few weeks, counting the boxes of false guilt, the barrels of bitterness, the cases of unresolved conflicts, the boxes of besetting sins, and in our last study, the empty containers where the disciplines of life were supposed to be...and we've been asking ourselves lesson after lesson, "How would you like to start over?"

But dealing with all of those issues, though necessary, was only preliminary, for once you have counted everything in the store and determined what's missing, you have to ask the question "Now that I have my house in order again, how committed am I to what I am doing?" You can have all your shelves stocked and your totals corrected, but unless you then proceed to run the business as it was supposed to be run, what difference does it make how much stock you have?

In one fell swoop, Jesus in Matthew 22:37 took our inventory sheets and held them up to the light and said, "Now, why are you here? Are you looking for fire insurance? For a cause to support? For a better self-image? For new relationships? For even a whole new kind of life to tack on to the life you are already living?"

None of that will do.

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Jesus is standing before us today, I believe, making the same request of us He has made of mankind for centuries. He is commanding us to give Him everything, to stop two-timing Him by holding hands with the world, and by pretending to give Him first place in our lives, while implying that first place doesn't mean every place.

We have already determined that the one great essential in life according to Jesus Himself is simply to love the Lord (our deliverer) who simply happens to be God (our creator) with all of our hearts (the totality of our commitment), with all of our souls (the totality of our being), and with all of our minds (the totality of our thinking), and we are to do it with all of our strength (with everything we have and nothing held back).

But we have to determine the essence of love in order to do it. In other words, what is love? Where does love originate? How do we manufacture this invaluable commodity that is to God not only essential, but the only essential? The Bible very clearly answers the question for us. In I John, the book of love, chapter four, we read in very simple terms what love is, and how we get it.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

(I John 4:7 NKJV)

In other words, unless you've been born again you cannot love.

He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

(I John 4:8 NKJV)

Again He is saying, "If you don't have love; you don't know God because God and love are inseparable."

By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him.

(I John 4:13,16 NKJV)

God could not have made it any clearer. In these few verses he confirms the following facts about love:

1- Love is, in essence, nothing less than a part of the character of God.

2- Therefore, until God lives in a man, a man cannot love.

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3- In like manner, if you do not possess love, you do not possess God.

4- It is, therefore, not something that originates in us; it originates in God Himself, and is imparted to us and through us by virtue of our relationship with him.

That's the essence of love. Love is the nature of God as it is reflected and reproduced in and through man. It is that quality of His nature that gives of Himself without regard to Himself, and operates thus independently of either the worthiness or the response of the recipient. It is, therefore, both constant and consistent, and it is solely predicated on the will of the initiator. In simple terms, love is God giving Himself to man; therefore, it will always reveal itself in man as man gives Himself back to God, and in the like manner as man then gives Himself to others as unselfishly as God did.

John 3:16 defines love. God so loved that He what? He gave Himself away. Love is giving yourself away. It originates with God, because God is by nature of His being love. You cannot separate love from God, anymore than you can separate hydrogen from water and still call it water. God is love. Therefore, you cannot have love, unless you have God. It isn't a part of His personality. It is a part of His character. Therefore, it cannot be separated from Him and sold as a separate commodity in the general stores of life.

God by nature of His being is love; therefore, all love, even the love we need to love Him, must come from him. Back again to I John 4 this time to verse 10:

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

We love Him because He first loved us.

(I John 4:10,19 NKJV)

In other words, we can't really initiate love. We are reflectors. All love comes from God, and all man can do is receive that love and reflect it back to God and then on to man. The experience of love, then, is that it is the act of being a receptacle for the greatest commodity the world has ever known, a receptacle that was not meant to be a storehouse, but rather a holding tank for a commodity that, like the manna in the wilderness, was not meant to be hoarded, but rather to be given away.



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We have no need to store it. There will always be more. Nothing that can happen or has happened can stop God's love from flowing. In Romans 8:35 Paul asks the question:

Who [or what] shall separate us from the love of Christ?  
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or  
nakedness, or peril or sword? (Romans 8:35 NKJV)

Then in verse 37 he answers,

Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through  
Him who *loved us*.

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels  
nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things  
to come,

Nor height nor depth, nor any other creature thing, shall be  
able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ  
Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37-39 NKJV)

## THE LOVE OF GOD

The love of God, how great it is...  
Our finite minds cannot contain  
The endlessness, the awesomeness  
That echoes from its soft refrain.

It reaches into wretched hearts  
Where nought but evil e're hast been,  
And through its undiminished power  
It cleanses every spot of sin.

The love of God...the love of God  
Will He its power forever send?  
Oh, praise His name, the greatest truth  
Is that His love will never end.

The supply is unlimited. But the source is limited. It is limited to the nature of God from whom and by whom all love is transmitted and to whom all love must be returned if the soul is to be whole. As we will see in our next study, a portion of that love is to overflow into the lives of those about us, but even that overflow is not an item in and of itself...it is a product of the love we return to God.

So all the love you will ever need has been given to you in the form of Jesus Christ. The question is: What will you do with it?

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Will you keep it to enjoy for yourself? Will you give it away in the energy of the flesh for the glory of the flesh? Or will you do with it what God intended, and give it back in its totality to the one who gave it to you in the first place. Not part of it...all of it. That's the issue.

Which leads us to the expression of love. What is the measure of a man's love for God? Is it our faithfulness to His teachings? Partly. Is it the zeal with which we serve Him? Not entirely. Is it the uncompromising spirit with which we adhere to His doctrines? Not really. You say, "How do you know that?" Turn to Revelation 2:1-5, and let God Himself explain it for you.

To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, "These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars;

And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary.

(Revelation 2:1-3 NKJV)

We would call this the ideal New Testament fellowship. They were fruitful in their works, faithful in their labors, not fretful in their worship, fervent in their disciplines, and forceful in their testing those who would lead the flock astray. Without fainting, they have labored. Without wavering, they have witnessed. If you found a church like that, you'd call all your friends and say, "I've found the perfect church!" Not so. Look at the next verse:

Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent.

(Revelation 2:4,5 NKJV)

*They were doing ALL the right things...but so caught up were they in the doing of them they had lost sight of why they were there. They were there to love God above all, through all, in all, with all they possessed. But they were so busy serving God, they had forgotten how to love God.*

So the question of questions is this: In all of your frenzied

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enthusiasm to do the will of God, have you forgotten that this is the will of God: that we love the Lord our God with everything we have all the time without stopping, without limits, the way He loves us?

Are you in love? More in love than you were the day love came down and entered your heart at the foot of a cross? Are you in love? More in love than you were the day He freed you from the shackles of sin that had so tormented you; forgave you, and lifted you up into a whole new realm of existence? Are you in love? More in love than when first you tasted of the cup of His grace that enabled you to live in victory where once defeat alone had been?

Are you in love with Jesus? Or have you, at least to some degree, lost that “first love”, that freshness, that power, that awe at the mention of His name? Have you begun to take His mercy for granted? Have you begun to be presumptuous with His grace? Do you receive His compassions that fail not each morning as though He owed them to you? Are the miracles He sends into your life now so commonplace you forget to praise Him? Are the answered prayers so expected, that you fail to fall to your knees in worship with each new evidence of His love? Have you lost your first love? Is there a measure in which the mention of His name no longer evokes the same wonder, the same awe, the same love?

If so, it may well be the natural by-product of having received His love and not having returned it to Him in like measure. I believe we lose our capacity to receive love to the degree we do not return it. You say, “Well, just how do I know how in love with Jesus I really am?” Well, when you’re in love in any other realm, it’s easy to determine the intensity of your love, isn’t it? You just answer a few simple questions. That’s what we’re going to do today. If you’re married, you might ask these same questions to test the intensity of your commitment to your spouse. Nonetheless, they are questions we must ask of our commitment to Christ.

Are you in love? Ask yourself:

Question 1- Who do I want to be with?

Have you ever tried to keep two teenagers who are in love apart? Like magnets, they are drawn to be in the presence of one another. In like manner, the child of God who is in love with God longs to be in the presence of God. Deuteronomy says this:

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I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live;

That thou may love the LORD thy God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life...  
(Deuteronomy 30:19,20 NKJV)

The man or woman who loves God clings to Him. He or she is drawn irresistably into His presence, sees no other idols that clamor for his or her attention as even attractive. Jesus said, "Abide in me; crawl up into me and stay there." When you have a moment to spend and no prescribed way to spend it, to what or to whom do you go? To the telephone to gossip? To the television to vegetate? Into your own little world of make-believe to escape reality? Or does every idle minute you have serve as an arm of love beckoning you into the presence of Jesus? Do you set aside hours, even days, to spend alone with only Him? If not, you may have lost your first love. Those who are in love spend a great deal of time with those they love.

Question 2- What do I choose to read when I can read anything I want?

If you go to the mailbox, and you have a love letter from the one you say owns your heart, and also an ad from Sears, and you read the ad, and ignore the letter, I question the intensity of your love. And God has written to you the most incredible love letter ever penned. He sent it special delivery straight to your heart, and gave you the Holy Spirit to interpret every word. The psalmist wrote

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.  
(Psalm 119:97 NKJV)

If you prefer anything to the Word, you must ask yourself, "Am I in love?" Those who love Him love His Word above all else.

Question 3- Who do I want to please?

One of the best ways to tell whether or not you're in love is the length to which you will go to please the one you claim to love. Jesus said it clearly in John:

"He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.  
(John 14:21 NKJV)

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When you love someone, you would rather die than break their heart. Jesus says that is your motivation to obey. “The love of Christ constrains you”<sup>1</sup>; and Jesus is clearly saying, “Don’t simply tell me how much you love me if you’re not going to do what I’ve asked you to do.” No wonder Jesus asked the question in Luke 6,

“But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do the things that I say?”  
(Luke 6:46 NKJV)

When you hear the Word of God or read the Word of God and God points out an area of need in your life, are you quick to respond? Or do you treat it as an incidental event to be filed away for future reference? Do you fall to your knees in conviction, or walk away in apathetic unconcern? If you really love Him, the only thing that will dominate your thinking is how you can better please Him. Ask yourself, “Have I lost my first love?” I’ll just mention a few others.

Question 4- Does my conversation prove I’m in love?

One way you know a person is in love is by his conversation. All he or she can talk about are the attributes of the one they love. They want everyone to meet them. They want everyone to know all about them. They want *to* talk to them and *about* them almost to the exclusion of any other form of conversation. Your tongue will tell if you’re in love.

Question 5- Do I have a grateful heart for what He’s done?

Another sure-fire test of love is a grateful heart. The one who is in love appreciates every little thing the one they love does. Every call is a source of thanksgiving. Every gift is a token of love. If you have ceased praising, you may have ceased loving. You may have begun to lose your first love.

Question 6- Is my heart one with His?

When two people are in love, they almost think alike. What one wants, the other gets. What one asks, the other answers. Before long, their hearts all but beat as one. There is a unity that cannot be explained except by measuring its depth with the yardstick of love.

Question 7- Am I anticipating His coming? Is the wedding a reality to me?

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<sup>1</sup> II Corinthians 5:14

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If someone tells you they are in love; then they tell you their loved one is coming home tomorrow, but they may not wait up for the plane to come in, question that love. If someone tells you they are in love and about to be married, but they haven't given much thought to the wedding, question that love.

Jesus said there was a reward for those who "love his appearing"<sup>2</sup>; who look forward to the wedding; who are waiting in eager anticipation for the groom to come for the bride. If the thought of His coming does not evoke excitement in your heart, then ask yourself, "Have I lost my first love?"

There are, of course, many other questions we can ask, but these ought to be enough to give us an idea of what love is like; and how lovers ought to act.

So I remind you and myself as well, in the light of God's simple instructions to each of us, that we are to love Him with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds, and all our strength. The question we need to ask ourselves, then, is: "How would you like to start over?"

How would you like to fall in love with Jesus again? Remember, He is the source of all love, so you begin by asking His forgiveness for not having returned to Him all of the love He has given to you. Then ask Him, in a spirit of humility, to pour out the cup of love upon you once again, that you, through worship and obedience, can return it to Him in its entirety. Ask God to help you recapture your desire to be with Him constantly, to read His Word continually, to talk about Him consistently, to want to please Him perfectly, to be thankful for all He has done practically, to have your heart beat as one precisely, and to anticipate His coming personally. Then begin to monitor your life in the light of life's one great commandment: to love your God with *all*, and do not let the fire of love begin to flicker again.

In closing, I would like us to take a journey back into the Word to the love chapter (I Corinthians 13) to look at that chapter now in the light of the essence, the experience and the expression of love as we have seen it today. Remember! Before we can love others, we must first learn to fall in love with God. Only then are we free to love our neighbors as ourselves.

With that in mind, I would like to paraphrase I Corinthians 13:1-8 with a slightly different twist as we close.

<sup>2</sup> II Timothy 4:8

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I would like to paraphrase it as an expression of our calling to love God. I would like to read I Corinthians 13 then, as a valentine from us to God. It would read like this:

*Dear Lord Jesus,*

*Suppose I could speak with the eloquence of the world's greatest orators, even, if you will, with the voice of an angel, but I was not really in love with my Lord; I know what I'd be! I'd be like a noisy orchestra that devoted all its time to tuning up its instruments, but never learned to play a melody.*

*Or suppose I were a prophet. Suppose I could speak words of truth that stirred the hearts of men, even words that unlocked great treasures of spiritual truth. Suppose I had such absolute faith that I could speak to a mountain, and that mountain would move. But I had never learned to love you, Lord, the way you asked; I know what my life would be! Nothing!*

*Suppose my heart were so filled with charity that I sold everything I owned and gave it away, and I even offered my body to be burned as a sacrifice for what I believed, and yet, I wasn't really in love with you, Lord. What would I have accomplished? Nothing!*

*So I ask myself, "How will I know if I'm really in love with you Lord? You have answered me, Lord, in your Word.*

*First of all, if I really love you, I'll be patient. I won't badger you into working your miracles into my time frames. I won't tell you how long you have to answer a prayer. I won't limit your grace to minutes. I'll be lovingly content to see years unfold, if you choose. I'll just wait.*

*How else will I know? I won't be negative and critical of either your plans or your purposes. I'll rejoice at whatever you give me and know that you are but expressing your love. I'll not be possessive. I'll not design some exclusive set of parameters to determine your will for others. I'll not limit your body to those whose doctrines conform to mine. I'll not pretend to tell you who you can save, or who you can use.*

*Not only that, but if I'm really in love with you, Lord, I'll cease being impressed with myself, with who I am, with*

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*what I've done, not even with how much I've grown.*

*I'll only be impressed with You!*

*I'll be filled with respect. I'll reverence your name.*

*I'll seek only your will and not my own.*

*I'll not be on edge, just daring you to do something that causes me to be angry. You can do what you want with me. I'm yours!*

*I'll not compare the way you treat me with how you treat others and become resentful or bitter. I know now that however you treat me is your way of saying, "I Love You". Because you love me so, as I return that love, I am assured that my adoration will endure through every storm, never doubting, never fearing, never failing, simply resting...in your arms!*

*That's what my life will be like...if I'm really in love with you, Lord.*

*Oh, Dear God, may it be so.*

*Amen.*

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