



Reflections

February 2014 - *God's Gift-love and Our Need-love*

When C.S. Lewis decided to write on love, he initially thought it would be a fairly easy task until he reflected more thoughtfully on the generous love of God toward needy men and women on this planet. He writes in the introduction to his book, *The Four Loves*:

Every Christian would agree that a man's spiritual health is exactly proportional to his love for God. But man's love for God, from the very nature of the case, must always be very largely, and must often be entirely, a Need-love. This is obvious when we implore forgiveness for our sins or support in our tribulations. But in the long run it is perhaps even more apparent in our growing – for it ought to be growing – awareness that our whole being by its very nature is one vast need; incomplete, preparatory, empty yet cluttered, crying out for Him who can untie things that are now knotted together and tie up things that are still dangling loose. I do not say that man can never bring to God anything at all but sheer Need-love. Exalted souls may tell us of a reach beyond that. But they would also, I think, be the first to tell us that those heights would cease to be true Graces, would become neo-Platonic or finally diabolical illusions, the moment a man dared to think that he could live on them and henceforth drop out the element of need. “The highest,” says the *Imitation*, “does not stand without the lowest.” It would be a bold and silly creature that came before its Creator with the boast “I'm no beggar. I love you disinterestedly.” Those who come nearest to a Gift-love for God will next moment, even at the very same moment, be beating their breasts with the publican and laying their indigence before the only real Giver. And God will have it so. He addresses our Need-love: “Come unto me all ye that travail and are heavy-laden,” or in the Old Testament, “Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.”

Thus one Need-love, the greatest of all, either coincides with or at least makes a main ingredient in man's highest, healthiest, and most realistic spiritual condition. A very strange corollary follows. Man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God. For what can be more unlike than fullness and need, sovereignty and humility, righteousness and penitence, limitless power and a cry for help? This paradox staggered me when I first ran into it; it also wrecked all my previous attempts to write about love.



The good news of the Gospel is that God reaches out in love continually to human beings in need of forgiveness, healing, and help. When we cry out to God in the moment of our greatest need, we can get a taste of the infinite love of God that is available to all who seek His name.

“Then turning toward the woman he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven—for she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little.” And he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

LUKE 7:44-48 (ESV)

¹C.S. Lewis. *The Four Loves*. Inspirational Press: New York, 1984, p. 214.