

Today is Saint Valentine's day. People all over the world are celebrating love one way or the other as they understand it best. We think that a day of such significance requires that we take a break from our ongoing series to reflect upon the importance of the day and what it's supposed to mean for us as community of faith.

Even though St. Valentine himself by historical account was a man devoted to the values of love and marriage as an invaluable gift from God, over the years, a lot of people had misunderstood this day as a day of lasciviousness and immorality – a direct affront on God who is love personified and who has defined in His word what constitutes love and what love is not.

He for instance states in His word that every form of physical joining of the body in an intercourse of whatever sort between two unmarried people is not love but sin. Though secular society violently revolts against this divine opinion, we are of the strong view that no other person is better qualified to tell us what love is than God who is love Himself. He is the embodiment, the personification and the full expression of love. In His own definition, true love is only expressed in the context of the coming together of the opposite sexes by unconditional commitment for life which is what marriage presumes.

The world's kind of love is love that is often for personal, pecuniary benefits. It's a love that only glows when the going is good. But God's love is expressed in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly. The love that most people are brandishing all over the world today is counterfeit love- a love that packs out under the slightest assault, provocation or pressure. This can be seen in the high divorce rate that we find world over. In several parts of the western world today, most people do not even like to marry anymore. They simply prefer cohabitation with mutual benefits and other kinds of civil arrangements devoid of unconditional commitment. This is "love" which is no love indeed because it is not for better for worse- it is not unconditional.

The Bible's kind of love to which all of us in this community of faith are called is a love that mirrors God's love to a sinful world. Marriage itself is God's Idea of graphically representing

the relationship between Christ and a sinful world which He by love made his church.

The church of today is yesterday's prostitute, drunkard, fornicator, liar, reviler and hater of God. Jesus Christ did not love her when she started being godly and obedient. While she remained obstinate, willfully recalcitrant, Jesus Christ loved her sufficiently to lay down his life for her. We all are called therefore to love our spouses even as Christ loved the world before it became His church.

Ours therefore is no cheap love and not a sensual love but a love that is rooted in responsibility. Celebrating love from this wholesome understanding is the only way to never go wrong. God Himself is our very first love object and from whom our love to another must flow. A lack of understanding of Agape (the God kind of love) will give birth to confused notions of love expressed only in erotic and sinful sensualities.

No man can truly love who has not had a personal encounter with LOVE and God is Love. No man can understand or possess the capacity to truly love who has not exchanged his sinful, human, Adamic nature for the nature of God which is the nature of love.

True love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It doesn't hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. If you love someone, you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him.

Above is a reproduction of I Corinthians 13:1-4 in modern language. But note that all that love is described as above is exactly an expression of all the fruit of the spirit contained in Gal. 5:22-23. In other words, anyone who will be able to love perfectly in God's way must possess all the fruits of the spirit. This is the reason why any pursuit of true love outside Christ and the experiential expression of His life and nature is an effort in futility.

You can't have true love and peace in your marriage brothers and sisters, until you pursue all the fruits of the Spirit. You cannot possess all the fruits of the Spirit until the spirit and nature

of sin – in itself the spirit and nature of the devil is uprooted from your life. All the marriage seminars in this world and marriage books of all the best authors of this world will avail nothing in giving you a loving and peaceful home that you desire if the old man is not uprooted from your life.

Are you in this community and you are still living in immorality? For you, is a day like this is a day to consummate sinful desires? We charge you straightly to repent. Are you in this community and your relationship is not giving honour to God? ...For it is a shame to speak of what many do in secret... As we celebrate true love today as people of faith, we charge you to make things right and rededicate yourself to holiness. Let Christ come into your life if you don't yet have a living relationship with Him. He is willing to forgive and come into your heart this very minute.

In general, as a mark of today's celebration, I invite you all to join myself and Iyebiye to make a commitment to producing marriages where everyday we will seek to outdo ourselves in demonstrating the unconditional love of Christ; marriages that will be sold out to representing individually the standard of the life of Christ regardless of the misbehaviour of the other person if they so choose; marriages that will be instrumental in the revival of the hearts of men just as they behold how we relate with each other and treat each other.

Your brother and sister,
Peniela and Iyebiye.

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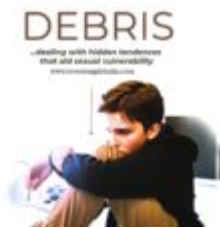
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