

# **LOVE IS THE GREATEST**

By Pastor Glenn Pease

## **CONTENTS**

- 1. EVERYTHING MINUS LOVE EQUALS NOTHING Based on I Cor. 13:1-2**
- 2. LOVE IS A CHOICE Based on I Cor. 13:1-13**
- 3. THE EXPRESSION OF LOVE Based on I Cor. 13**
- 4. GOD-LIKE LOVERS Based on I Cor. 13:4**
- 5. POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF LOVE Based on I Cor. 13:4**
- 6. LOVE IS KIND Based on I Cor. 13:4**
- 7. LOVE DOES NOT ENVY Based on I Cor. 13:4**
- 8. LOVE IS NOT PROUD Based on I Cor. 13:4**
- 9. LOVE IS NOT RUDE based on I Cor. 13:5**
- 10. LEGALISM VERSUS LOVE Based on Matt. 5:20**
- 11. BODY LOVE Based on I Cor. 15:35-49**
- 12. EDUCATED LOVE Based on Phil. 1:1-11**
- 13. LOVE'S LIMITATIONS Based on I John 2:15-17**
- 14. THE END IS LOVE Based on I Tim. 1:5**

## **1. EVERYTHING MINUS LOVE EQUALS NOTHING Based on I Cor. 13:1-2**

Where love is absent hate will reign. This is true in every area of life for individuals and groups of all kinds. We are grateful for those who give their lives to protect us from enemy forces, but we cannot thank God that their sacrifice was necessary, for we would not have needed such sacrificial protection if love had reigned instead of hate. It is the lack of love that causes the wicked, wasteful, worthless wars that force men to become dead heroes. Woodrow Wilson said that World War I was "A war to end all wars." Such an ideal was impossible in a loveless world. There are no end to the conflicts of classes and races because of all the prejudice and hatred in the world. It is no wonder that even the life-long skeptic Burtrand Russell said, "The only hope of the world is Christian love."

It is not because this was his conclusion, however, that we want to consider love, but because his conclusion has always been the conviction of those who accept the Bible as God's revelation. In this great love chapter Paul makes it clear that love is the supreme gift. All of the human relation problems in the world are caused by a lack of love, and only love can lift us above the hatreds in the hearts of mankind. Paul is writing to a church that is filled with

conflicts because of their immaturity, and lack of Christian love. The specific problem Paul has been dealing with concerns the gifts of the spirit. The Corinthians, like so many Christians since, were so preoccupied with the secondary that they lost sight of the primary. They were losing the best for the sake of the good.

The external gifts such as speaking in tongues were coveted by them. Everyone wanted to speak in tongues or interpret, or do something special and unique like doing miracles, and this caused a great deal of excitement. The more sublime gifts of faith, hope, and love were pushed to the back burner. Paul has to write and explain to them that not all Christians have these more eternal gifts, like healing and tongues, but the greatest gifts are available to everyone, and he urges them to covet these. He ends chapter 12 by saying that he wants to show them a more excellent way. Chapter 13 is a great Psalm of Love in three stanzas. First we see The Absence Of Love in verses 1-3. Second we see The Attributes of Love in verses 4-7. Thirdly we see The Absoluteness of Love in verses 8-13.

## **I. THE ABSENCE OF LOVE. vv. 1-3.**

In these first 3 verses Paul says that according to divine mathematics, all gifts minus love = nothing. Tongues, prophecy, knowledge, faith, and sacrifice, minus love = nothing. When love is absent all is lost. Take away love and you eliminate the value of everything else.

### **A. TONGUES.**

Paul begins his rebuke of the Corinthians with this reference to tongues because this was apparently the most showy of the gifts, and had become the one to be most coveted in order to gain prominence in the church. Paul warns them that the gift of tongues at its greatest conceivable development is worthless if love is absent. Too much interest in tongues led them to abuse the gift, and create such disorder that Paul had to counsel them to follow an ordering pattern lest the world think them to be mad.

There is a great deal of disagreement as to whether the tongues here refer to language or ecstatic praise to God. It is conceivable that both are true. The tongues of men being foreign tongues, and the tongues of angels being sounds not known to human ears. Whatever be the case, Paul says it is just so much racket without love.

Paul would have loved the hymn Love Lifted Me. He knew that the lost were not lifted by languages, but by love. Even if you can break the language barrier, if you do not love, you will not lift. Language will not convince where love has collapsed. Some of the most eloquent polished sermons ever delivered in the great churches of England were listened to by handfuls of people, while outside the city limits many thousands gathered to hear Wesley and Whitefield. It was not because of their greater eloquence, but because of their greater love. Goethe said, "But never hope to stir the hearts of men, and mould the souls of many into one, by words which come not native from the heart."

The secret of effective communication is in the heart and not the tongue. That is why a Christian need never fear that he will not say the right thing when he is witnessing, if his heart is filled with love. Love will cover a multitude of mistakes, and win a person to Christ

far faster than cold and empty eloquence. Paul spoke in tongues more than all the Corinthians, yet he is not known for this gift. He is not known as a great soul-winner because of his eloquence or ability to communicate. It is because of the constraining love of Christ. Paul was even willing to be accursed for the sake of his people Israel that they might be saved. Meyers in his poem St. Paul gives us a beautiful picture of how love, as the Queen of Graces, characterized Paul.

Then with a thrill the intolerable craving  
Shivers throughout me like a trumpet call-  
O to save these-to perish for their saving-  
Die for their lives, be offered for them all.  
O let thy love my heart constrain!  
Thy love for every sinner free,  
That every fallen soul of man  
May taste the grace that found out me;  
That all mankind with me may prove  
Thy sovereign everlasting love.

Jesus did not come with brilliant oratory, but with simplicity of speech, and a life of love. People thronged to Him because of His acts of mercy and compassion. His parables and the Sermon on the Mount are beautiful language, but they would be but sounding brass without His life of love. His teaching does not save, but He does. The essence of Christianity is not what Jesus said, but what He did. Love is something you do, and not just something you say. Jesus demonstrated His love by both His life and His death.

Paul is saying to the Corinthians, stop majoring on minors. Stop wishing you had some unique gift that would make you more spiritual, for nothing will do this without love. Covet love, and ask God to fill you with the love of Christ, and then your life will count for the kingdom. To try and communicate the unsearchable riches of Christ, or to try and praise God with tongues without love, is like trying to play one of the Beethoven's beautiful symphonies with a clanging symbol. You are trying to do the greatest task with the least important instrument.

Someone said, "Love is the leading instrument in the orchestra of character." Without love there is no melody or harmony, but only loud irritating noise. In a world of hate, discontent, and disharmony, it is obvious that there is need for clanging symbols to add to the deafening racket. What is desperately needed is spiritual Davids who can soothe the half-mad Sauls of the world with saving harmony from the harp of love. If we do not love we will not lift. Without love all of our efforts will be as worthless as the attempt to play classical music on the lid of your garbage can. Eloquence is only noise without love, and none of the gifts amount to anything without love.

## **B. GREATER GIFTS. v. 2**

It is not surprising that Paul exalts love over tongues, for tongues were clearly among the lesser gifts, but here he tells us that even the greater gifts are of no value without love. The implications of this verse are astounding. Certainly a man who can prophesy and have great

knowledge, and have such strong faith that he can do miracles, must be somebody, but Paul say he is nothing without love. Jesus said there will be those who will come to Him on the day of judgment and say, "Lord, we have prophesied in your name, and did many mighty works in your name," but Jesus will say, "I never knew you." Paul explains how this could be true by telling us that they did some great things, but it had to be all in self power, for they never were motivated by the love of Jesus to do what they did. Their lack of love made all they did of no value.

When it comes to knowledge the Pharisees were marvelous. They not only memorized the law, but added hundreds of their own laws. They knew more about right and wrong than God had even revealed, but for all that they were nothing, for it was knowledge without love. Paul was a Pharisee, but he counted all his knowledge as dung that he might know the love of Christ. When Jesus was at the home of Simon the Pharisee, a woman came in and wiped the feet of Jesus, and Simon said, "If he knew what kind of woman she was he would not allow that," but he was wrong, for Jesus was not like him. He had knowledge without love, but Jesus had knowledge with love, and that made all the difference in how he dealt with sinners. He knew what she was, but he did something about it. Knowledge just knows and looks, but love lifts, and that is what Jesus did. It does nobody any good just to know that someone is a sinner. It is love that is needed to help them see there is a better way.

The rich young ruler had the knowledge of God's will, and even obeyed it, but he lacked the love necessary to give his all to the poor. He had everything but love, and everything without love is nothing. Paul goes so far as to say that even faith is not enough without love. This is the great Apostle of faith that is writing this. Faith that is not mixed with love is dead faith. We see Paul in full agreement with James here. James says that faith that does not lead to acts of love is a dead faith. What good is a faith that moves mountains, if there is no love with it to move men? If you really want to be somebody in the kingdom of God, then love people, and show it. God does not need a lot of people who can move mountains, but there is no end to His need for those who can move men by love.

When Carl Lundquist was President of Bethel College and Seminary he told this story of Ann Marie. She was a little German girl who came to Bethel. She was not a Christian when she came, but soon opened her heart to receive Jesus as her Savior. She was working her way through college by baby sitting, and one of the jobs that came her way was an emergency situation. A family had just moved to the area, and had not even unpacked when the mother-in-law had to be rushed to the hospital. They had several small children and knew nobody to call, and so they called Bethel that was just a few blocks away. They asked if they could get someone to watch their children. Ann Marie went to help out. The man told her they did not know when they would be back, but the envelope on the stand has some money, and she could leave the next morning when his sister would be arriving.

The sister did come and Ann left. When the man got home he found the envelope still there, and with it this note: "I don't want any money for baby-sitting. I am glad as a Christian I could help you in your hour of need." That man was so impressed that he called Bethel. He said he did not know that people like her existed, and that her love had an impact on him greater than all the sermons he ever heard. She never moved any mountains, but she moved men, and did what no amount of eloquence, or any other gift, could have

accomplished. That is why Paul wants us all to covet this gift.

Paul says love never fails. Faith can fail and turn to doubt. Hope can fail and turn to despair. But love endures to the end. People wonder about security in Christ, and the answer is in love. Can people be lost who are preachers, or teachers, or speakers in tongues, or people who do wonders? Yes, all of such can be lost, for security is not in these things, or anything else. It is in Christ, and we only have Christ in reality when the love that took Him to the cross is in our hearts, and motivating our lives.

The controversy over eternal security can easily be resolved by showing that both sides are correct. People can have every gift in the book and be marvelous professing Christians, and yet have not security, because everything minus love is nothing. Eternal security is found in the love of Christ that gives value to all of the other gifts and virtues of the Christian life. Each side of the controversy has much Scripture to back up their view, and each can be right when it is all seen in the light of the importance of love. But it is not enough to be right, for even being right is nothing without love. Nothing is enough without love, but with love all is of value. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ, but we must have this love to have that kind of assurance and security.

John confirms this truth of Paul in I John. He writes in I John 2:5-6, "But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. "This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to love in him must walk as Jesus did." In 2:15 He writes, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." In 3:14 he writes, "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death." In 4:7-12 he writes, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. this is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son in to the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God loves in us and his love is made complete in us."

In the light of all that Paul and John have to say about love, who can doubt that its absence is the greatest loss, and its presence the greatest gain and gift possible. We many never have many of the lesser gifts of the Spirit, but God forbid that we ever lack this greatest of all gifts, for everything minus love is nothing.

## **2. LOVE IS A CHOICE Based on I Cor. 13:1-13**

Missionaries often get into complicated cross-cultural issues. Such was the case of the missionary to Africa who had the chief of a tribe all ready for church membership. Only one barrier blocked the way. The chief had 50 wives, and the church would not admit him to membership until he dismissed his harem, and kept only one wife. It was a day of rejoicing when he finally decided to surrender to this demand. But there was one technicality, which wife should he keep? The missionary ruled that it should be wife number 1, but the chief thought it should be wife number 16. They departed to think it over for the night, and the next morning the chief returned. "How many wives you got?" he asked the missionary. "Why, only one, of course," he replied. "Well then," said the chief, "That settles it. You got one wife, I got 50. Therefore, I know 50 times more about wives than you do. I keep number 16."

We do not know all the reasons why number 16 was his choice, but this story illustrates a basic truth about love, and that is that love is a choice. This is the essence of this whole great love chapter of Paul. He stresses that we are nothing, and we gain nothing, if we do not have love. Even if we have all kinds of other gifts, we are nothing without love. Everything minus love equals nothing. That is the formula for failure. Leave out love, and you leave out the heart, and life is empty. But the whole point is, nobody has to leave out love. Love is a choice. That is why his first words in chapter 14 are, "Make love your aim." In other words, love is no mere accident that happens to you. Love is something you do. It is an act of the will. It is a choice.

God did not look down upon the fallen world and suddenly get goose pimples, and feel love for lost man. God has feelings of compassion for man, but God's love is not a matter of feeling, it is a matter of His will. He could have justly chosen to destroy man, but He chose to show mercy, and provide a way of escape, that man might be redeemed. God's love for us was a matter of choice, and not emotion, for it was while we were yet sinners that He chose to die for us. His emotions were just the opposite of His choice of love. Sin makes God angry, and you too can be angry with someone, but still chose to do the loving thing, just as God did, because love is a choice.

This does not mean love is cold and unfeeling, but that love can and does function with or without the energy of feeling, for it is primarily an act of the will. Ordinarily the two will coincide, and the choice of love will produce the positive feelings that go with a loving choice. But if for some reason the feelings are short-circuited, true love goes on choosing without their support. This is how you distinguish between love and infatuation. Infatuation is an emotion which controls you. It is a powerful feeling that motivates you, but circumstances can alter it, and, therefore, it is dependent upon that which is outside you. Love, on the other hand, is an act of the will, and you can continue to choose it regardless of changing circumstances and feelings. Someone defined love as the feeling you feel when you feel like your going to feel a feeling like you never felt before. This is infatuation and not love.

In our culture we often we fall in love and marry on the basis of infatuation. Then we learn to love, that is, develop a pattern of choices whereby we relate to our mate in love as acts of the will, and not emotion. In many cultures the young people start off on this level. They do not date or experience the emotion of infatuation, but they are brought together by their parents, and they choose to love the one so selected. This is not appealing to us, but it has been a very effective method for marriage, for it is based on love as a choice, and not as an emotion. We are so hung up about feelings in our culture, it is hard for us to grasp this truth that love is a choice.

The more we can make love a choice, the more we will understand love in all relationships, and the better we will be able to sustain and improve all relationships. Jamie Buckingham, an outstanding Christian author, was explaining his parental love to his 14 year old daughter. He said to her, "When your older sisters and brothers were born I loved them. But I did not love you because I did not know you. When you arrived, several years later, I willed myself to love you as much as I loved them. I did not love you simply because I had to. The nurse could have handed me any baby in the nursery and I could have willed myself to love that baby. Fortunately she handed me the one your mother had given birth to-and I chose to love you because I wanted to." Then he said, "I went ahead to explain how my parents, after having had four sons, adopted a tiny baby girl. They willed themselves to love her as much as they loved their own children. In turn, I willed myself to love her as much as I love my brothers."

The point here is, my love relationships in life are not built on emotion, but on acts of the will. It seems so easy and natural to grasp. You do not love your children or other family members because you feel all gooey about them necessarily. They often aggravate and anger you, and your emotions are frequently negative. Nevertheless, you love them, because your love operates on the level of the will. Love is a choice. The more we apply this truth about love to life, the more we will build relationships. Many a marriage would be greatly strengthened if mates would see their love for one another as a matter of choice. Emotion is too unstable, and too subject to change, and so love based on emotion is more unpredictable than the weather. Nobody always feels positive about someone they love. But love based on choice can remain solid and sure through all the turmoil of change, for negative feelings do not alter one's choice.

I like the way this author put it, "I have bound myself for life; I have made my choice. From now on my aim will not be to choose a woman who will please me, but to please the woman I have chosen." He is heeding Paul's advice by making love his aim. Here is a man who has caught the Biblical meaning of love. It is not feeling, it is a choice. We show our love for God, not by our emotions, but by our choices. This does not mean we never feel awe and deep feelings of love for God. But it means that these feelings are not the key element. They are the frosting on the cake, and make love more enjoyable. Feelings that are positive are always a welcome addition to the choices of love. But love that is more than superficial sentimentalism will go on making the right choices pleasing to God whether there are feelings or not.

Jesus said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments." So we demonstrate our love by choosing to obey regardless of how we feel. I may have feelings that pull against the

choice of love. I may feel like stealing something, but I chose love, and keep the commandments. Usually I feel like obeying, but even when I don't feel like it, I chose to obey, for love is in my choice and not my feeling. Feelings may be opposite of my love, but they do not hinder my love when I make the right choices. If I only obey God's will when I feel like it, and have emotional support, I do not love God at all. I only love my feelings, for they are the dominant motivation of my life, and not the will of God.

What is true in my relationship to God is true in my relationship to my mate and others. If you are trying to build a marriage on feelings, you are like the foolish man building his house on the sand, and you are heading for collapse. The wise man built on the rock, and the rock on which any loving relationship must stand is the rock of choice. Your love must be based on your choices and not on your feelings. There is too much of life's responsibility that cannot get done based on feeling. How often do you feel like scrubbing the floor, or taking out the garbage in below zero weather. You get many tasks of life done, not because you feel like it, but because it is a loving choice to do it.

Love is what makes you do so much that you don't like to do. You do it because you love God, you love yourself, you love your mate and family, and you love your neighbor. You feel obligated to shave and comb your hair, and to keep your kids clean and well-clothed, and to keep your yard in respectable appearance. What are all of these social pressures? They are opportunities to chose, and when you chose to do what you do not feel like doing, because it is the best choice for others well being, that is love. Love is the constant making of choices that are for the benefit of one's family and community. It is also love for self, for the person who does not care about how he subtracts from the over all beauty and harmony of life, has a poor self-image, and lacks a love vital to his relationship to God and others.

Franklin Jones was certainly accurate when he said, "Love does not make the world go round, but it makes the ride more enjoyable." We do not want to minimize the value of feelings, for they are precious and God-given. We just want to recognize they are not the engine of love, and that love can function well without them. Plush seats do not make the car go, nor do they make it go better. They just add to the pleasantness of the going. That is a positive value, but it is a negative factor if people refuse to make the trip, because the plush seats are absent. When the journey of a couple through life revolves more around their emotions then there choices, they are like a couple who refuse to go on vacation because their velour seat cushions are matted down, and are no longer attractive. When love is seen as emotion rather than choice, there will be confusion, and a loss of God's perspective and value system.

Nobody really needs you to feel any particular emotion. What they need is for you to chose to do those things that say I love you. This is what makes courtship so romantic and enjoyable. People do things that are fun and loving in courtship. Their feelings are also excited and positive, and we see the two go hand in hand. The emotions motivate us to do things that are loving. But mature love is when we go on choosing the loving things, even when the flames of emotion are no longer pushing us. This is Christian maturity. The enthusiasm of the new Christian is long past, but the mature Christian goes on doing what God delights in by choices of the will, and not emotion. Mature love is choosing to do what meets the needs of others, regardless of emotions. You cannot decide how to feel, but you



can decide to do what is loving. Make love your aim, for love is a choice. Here are some Biblical examples.

1. The rich man Dives chose not to help Lazarus in his poverty, and so non-love is also a choice.
2. The priest and the Levite chose to ignore the need of the man robbed and beaten. It was their choice not to be loving. The Good Samaritan made the other choice. Both choices face us daily in many situations. We chose to love, or we chose to ignore a chance to love. All of life is choosing, and we are doing it constantly, and so everyday we are choosing love, or choosing non-love.
3. Jesus chose to go to the cross. He said, "No man takes my life, but I lay it down freely." The cross was His choice, and that is why the cross is the greatest symbol in the world of God's love. He could have chosen to let man be lost forever, but He chose the cross, because God is love.

Every choice in life can be evaluated by asking, is this a loving choice? If it is not, it is a bad choice. All sin is a bad choice, for it is a violation of love for God or others. Everything that is right is so, because it is loving. Everything that is wrong is so, because it is not loving. Why is lying, cheating, and stealing wrong? Because they are not loving choices. Why is being honest, generous and kind, good? Because they are loving choices. All of life revolves around choices. You are what you chose. Man was lost by unloving choices, and man was saved by loving choices. Every time we make an unloving choice, we are part of the problem. Every time we make a loving choice, we are part of the answer. The goal of life is to simply make love your aim, and this means making choices that please both God and man, for love is always, and primarily, a choice.

### **3. THE EXPRESSION OF LOVE Based on I Cor. 13**

Predicting the unpredictable is what weather forecasting is all about. There are so many variables that nobody can be sure what tomorrow holds. Back in 1816 Mt. Tambora in what is now Indonesia erupted with a blast 80 times greater than that of Mt. St. Helens, and sent a massive cloud of volcanic dust into the atmosphere that affected the weather of the Eastern United States. It affected it so much that 1816 was called the year without a summer. The temperature rarely got above 50 degrees. On July 4th in normally sultry Savannah, Georgia the high was 46. Snow, sleet, and ice caused crop damage as far West as Illinois. Such radical variations from the norm are impossible to predict, but even the normal variations make weather hard to nail down.

Love is like the weather in many ways. It is always a popular subject, and it affects all of us, and it is also hard to predict, for it too has many variations. Love is as mysterious as the weather. Adam and Eve had it made in the shade. They had a love enhancing environment,

and even then the enemy of love was able to cloud their minds and seduce them into an unloving choice. This made the first storm that came to spoil the perfect sunshine of their relationship to God.

In that fallen family, however, there was still a lot of love, and Adam and Eve loved each other, and there was love for God, as well as love for their children. Love was still a major ingredient in their lives. But without all of the divisions of modern life even that small family developed bad relationships, and Cain, like lightening, struck down his brother Abel, and man's environment of love was invaded again by a storm of anti-love. And that is the pattern of the rest of history. It is like the weather, and you can be basking in the sunshine of love, and all of a sudden the clouds cover the sun, and you are plunged into darkness and the storm. David is basking in the sunshine of great victories over his enemies. God loves him, the people love him, and he has a loving family and lovely loyal wives. In the midst of all that love the storm of temptation strikes, and a flood of lust washes him off the road of righteousness, and David's life is never the same.

We could go on with illustration after illustration of how people can have the experience of love, and yet lack the ability to come through on the other end with the expression of love. Judas was so loved by Jesus that never once did Jesus embarrass him, even though he knew his heart was not right. He experienced an inflow of love like few in all of history, and yet his outflow was unloving betrayal. The major problem of life, therefore, which makes love as unpredictable as the weather is man's inability in the area of expression of love.

When Paul says, if one does not have love he is a sounding gong or clanging symbol, or if one does not have love he is nothing, he is referring to the outflow and not the inflow. The Corinthians had experienced the love of God and the love of Christ. They had experienced salvation, and they had experienced the multiple gifts of the Holy Spirit. They had all kinds of experiences of love, and yet their lives were tossed and troubled by the storms of non-loving behavior. The problem was not that they were unloved, for they were, and had abundant evidence of it. The problem was for them, as it was for Adam and Eve, David, and Judas, and every other human being, the expression of love. They had love in the sense of being objects of God's love, but they did not know how to express it.

God inspired Paul to give them this great love song as the greatest tool in history to aid men in the expression of love. Paul tells us what love does, and what it does not do. He reveals to us how to express love. This makes it clear that love has to be learned. Love is not automatic. It takes time and effort to learn how to express love. Love is patient Paul says. If Adam and Eve had just taken some time to talk over the temptation of Satan with God, they would have been expressing love, and that would have led to understanding and victory over the deceiver. Had David not acted on impulse, and had been patient in dealing with his temptation, he could have resolved it in love rather than lust. Had Judas shared his impatience with Jesus, and gotten his greed off his chest, he could have been released from the bondage that destroyed him. Patience can change the history of almost everyone.

The point is, there is a way of escape from all temptation, and that way is the way of love that patiently waits to see the escape route. Learning to express love is the highest level of learning. The story is told of the German professor who dreamed he saw two doors. One

door led directly to love and paradise, and the other led to a lecture on love and paradise. There was no hesitation on his part, and he went in to hear the lecture. It sounds like a foolish choice of an egghead intellectual, but in fact, it is the wise choice, and the only choice God gives us. There is no easy road to love. Love is learned, and it is a hard subject, even for those who are redeemed children of God. It is no snap course, but the most challenging course in the university of life.

The experience of being loved is a gift that God freely bestows because He is love. We do not have to learn how to be loved, for we just are. But we do need to learn how to express love and be loving. Even natural love for family and friends needs guidance to be expressed wisely, and how much more the love for the unlovable, and for one's enemies. These expressions of love call for the most rigorous training. We train people hard to know how to hate and defeat an enemy. They are put through the rigors of boot camp, and they are forced to learn effective aggression.

We think the soldiers of the cross, however, do not need such training, and that we can march off into the world and just automatically know how to encounter the enemy with a spirit of love. It is just not so, for it is often very painful to try and love those who are unlovely. This is why Christians have failed in many battles. They did not know how to express love for the enemy. They expressed hostility, prejudice, and all kinds of non-love, and so they lost the battle. They didn't even know how to use their greatest weapon, and so they used all kinds of other weapons without love, and they learned the hard way that what Paul was saying was true-everything minus love equals nothing.

History confirms this over and over. The great Christian failures of history all revolve around the fact that Christians did not know how to express love. All of North Africa and the Middle East should be Christian, for it was strongly Christian at one time. Then Christians began to fight among themselves, and like the Corinthians they chose their loyalties and began to persecute each other, and fight over all kinds of theological issues. The result was a divided and unloving church. When the Muslim invaders came many Christians, weary of the persecution and controversy, joined the invaders and Christians were removed as a force in that part of the world. They did not learn love, and the result was they lost their chance to be the light of that part of the world.

Christians have failed to win the Jews to Christ because they never learned to express love to them. Only in modern times do we see Christian groups working hard to learn love. In the Middle Ages the Jews were the prime target of Christian hostility. The Crusaders robbed and plundered and killed Jews for no other reason than that they were Jews. The expedition of Columbus to America was financed by confiscating the wealth of Jews. Christians have persecuted Jews all through history, and then we wonder why so few Jews believe that Jesus loves them.

The point I am making is that Christians do not know how to express the love of Christ just because they experience the love of Christ. The Dead Sea takes in water from the Jordan River, but no water ever flows out. It is possible to receive love and not know how to let it keep flowing through you out into the lives of others. This is the problem that leads

Christians, like the Corinthians, to have so much and yet do so little. They have received so much love, but they are expressing so little love. Their very gifts are doing harm to the body of Christ. The storm that is rocking their boat is due directly to their lack of knowing how to express Christian love.

This is the great challenge of the church in every age-how to teach, and how to help Christians learn to express the love of Christ. Dr. Cecil Osborn, a leader in Christian psychology, says, "The final goal in all theology is to release within the individual a greater capacity to love." He is convinced that the small group is a key to helping Christians learn how to release this capacity, and learn how to express love. The resistance to small groups is evidence of the problem Christians have in expressing love. The fear of intimacy and the fear of getting to close to 8 to 10 people is the fear of love-that is the fear of expressing love. Because Christians have this problem the world starves for lack of love. It is like starving for lack of food. It is not that there is not enough food in the world for everybody, but the problem is in the distribution. It is piled up in one place and extremely rare in other places where people need it most. So it is with love. It is a distribution problem. It is a problem getting the outflow to match the inflow, and getting love to those who most need it.

In a novel by the Israeli writer Shim Shalom called *Storm Over Galilee*, there is a group of children gathered on the roof of the school taking turns looking through the telescope. They express awe and wonder, but one girl makes the comment, "Teacher, I want to be a star." The teacher asked, "Why?" She replied, "Because they are so lucky. Teacher loves those stars." Here was a hunger for love in a child who saw an adult express love for the distant stars, but who could not manage to express such love for her.

Children have the same problem expressing their love. I read of a problem child who just created all kinds of problem, and the teacher was frustrated with her. One day she saw her pin a note to a tree in the school yard, and when she left the tree the teacher went to see what it was. The note said, "To whoever finds this-I love you." The child did not know how to express love. She had it in her, but could not express it, and so non-love comes out instead. How many rotten people are really lonely people who cannot express love? It is easier to say that nobody loves me than to admit that I do not know how to love, but that is the real problem.

Back in II Sam. 23 there is a fascinating little story of only 5 verses in the life of David. He is camped in a cave outside Bethlehem where the Philistines were in control. David makes a remark, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of the water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem." Three of his mighty men heard this remark and took it seriously. They broke through the Philistine line, and risked their lives to get the water from the well and get it back to David. He was so impressed with their love that he refused to drink the precious water gotten at such a price. He poured it out as an offering to the Lord. David did not need water from that well. He could have taken a drink of water from the supply they already had, and we know he did or he would not have survived. His wish for that water was an expression of longing for the good old days of his youth in Bethlehem. He was happy with his family and friends that met his needs for love.

Now he is the king, and had many enemies and burdens. He wondered if even his closest

friends really loved him, or just served him out of duty and obligation. All of us long sometimes for the good old days when love was assured. These three friends of David were not ordered to go get that water, but chose to do so in expressing their genuine love for him. David is overwhelmed by it, and feels that his deepest need was met, for he sees that he is still loved just as he was in his days of youth. These three friends expressed the essence of love by doing for him that which brightened his life, and gave him joy, not because they had to, or were ordered to, but because they chose to. Love is doing something for another voluntarily without feeling it is an obligation and a necessity. It is an act of free choice.

One of the primary values of the group experience is that it helps people discover ways of expressing love. For example, a man had a hard time understanding why his wife was so unresponsive to his giving of gifts. She would merely say that is nice and it almost seemed like indifference to him. In a small group she shared in one session that her mother did not know how to express love, and so she substituted gifts instead. She felt the need for love and not gifts. When she shared this it suddenly dawned on both of them why she was not responsive to the giving of gifts. They represented a substitute for love. When she saw this she was able to correct her attitude and recognize that the gifts that her husband gave were not a substitute for love but an expression of love. She may never have learned this apart from the group experience. Now she could respond with a flow of love out to express her love and joy for what she was given.

## **4. GOD-LIKE LOVERS Based on I Cor. 13:4**

Homer, 900 years before Christ, wrote his famous epic The Odyssey. The hero Ulysses had been gone for 10 years, and his faithful wife Penelope had been waiting even though there were many suitors trying to win her love. Finally she feared he must be dead, and so she promised she would marry the man who could shoot an arrow through 12 rings using the bow of her husband. In the meantime Ulysses finally returned and heard of the trial for his wife's hand in marriage.

He disguised himself as a beggar and went to the place of the trial. One by one the suitors stepped forth, but they found they were unable to bend the bow. Then Ulysses came forward and said, "Beggar as I am, I was once a soldier and there is still some strength in these old limbs of mine. Let me try." The others jeered him, but Penelope consented for him to try. With ease he bent his old bow and sped the arrow unerring through the 12 rings. Penelope knew instantly, and she shouted, "Ulysses!" She threw herself into his arms. This story is one of the first, "They lived happily ever after," stories in human literature. It had a happy ending because both Ulysses and Penelope had a love for each other that was filled with the quality of patience.

In any great love story you read, or see in a movie, the key ingredient that leads to a happy ending is this virtue of patience. If the story is a tragedy, and does not end happily, it

is often due to impatience. Gerald Kennedy, one of the great preachers of the 20th century, said, "As one grows older, one comes to the conclusion that more lives are destroyed by impatience than any other sin." This is illustrated by history. Lucy Lambert Hale, the daughter of Senator Hale from New Hampshire, was the most ravishing beauty in Washington D. C. when Lincoln was president. She was the talk of the town, and many famous men dated her. One went on to be a senator; another was justice Oliver Wendell Holmes of the Supreme Court.

The 24 year old John came along and won the heart of this 23 year old beauty. It seemed a perfect match except for one thing. John was very impatient with her, and he demanded his own way always. They quarreled all the time, and even through Lincoln's second inaugural address. Things got even worse when Lucy danced with Robert Lincoln, the president's oldest son. Then came the straw that broke the camel's back. Lincoln appointed Lucy's father to be Ambassador to Spain, and she went with him. Later she married Will Chandler who was a Harvard man and Senator. John's impatience lost him a woman that he loved, and his reputation forever after, for he let his angry impatience lead him to murder. John was none other than John Wilkes Booth, the man who shot Lincoln. Love gone sour is behind much of the tragedy of history, and love usually goes sour because of impatience.

The first thing we need to see is that everyone has some problems in relationships. You can't have a dog or cat who does not at some point make you angry because of something stupid or destructive they do. In a fallen world all relationships have problems of some kind. It is the price you pay to avoid total aloneness. So you will have problems with relatives, friends, neighbors, and you will have problems with your mate. It is inevitable. We have no examples of marriage in the Bible that are problem free. The first one should have been perfect, but it was not, and Adam and Eve set the stage for all human relationships to follow. Even God had endless problems with His bride Israel, and Jesus has had no end of them with His bride the church. The perfect marriage will not be experienced until all evil is defeated, and we enter the sin free environment of eternity.

This ought to be a clue as to why patience is vital to happiness in time. If you are going to give up and run out on a relationship because it is imperfect, you are going to spend your life running, for that is the only kind of relationship there is. There are limits, of course, and everyone recognizes there are sick relationships where the only cure is to dissolve them. There are far fewer, however, than the divorce statistics in our culture would indicate. Impatience destroys love, and this is a major problem in our world today.

The reason marriages used to last was because couples knew it took time to work out problems and adjust to each other. The reason they do not last today is because couples want instant solutions or they give up. Dr. David Mace, one of America's great marriage counselors, looking back over his career of 52 years observes, "One of the ironies of the decade is that young people talk about intimacy and relating skills, and yet their marriages are flying apart at an alarming rate. Older people never thought in those terms, and their marriages lasted a lifetime." He goes on to say that the typical young couple today does not want to hear the advice of being patient. They want a solution right now, and they are not willing to wait and learn.

Love that is patient will win, and it will learn to enjoy the mate they have chosen. Impatient love will demand instant solutions, and when they are not forth coming will forsake the relationship. Masses of people are divorced who could have saved their marriage with an exercise of patience. This is the key to maintaining all relationships. In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch and his daughter are discussing a school problem, and he is explaining what a compromise is, and he says, "An agreement reached by mutual concessions. In the calm of discussion and agreement is sure to be worked out by mutual concession, involving some give-and-take by both parties. The important word when arguments arise is patience. Wisdom is always on the side of the tortoise."

The most unloving thing you can do in any relationship is to make hasty negative decisions. You see it in advice columns all the time. Someone does a rude or offensive thing and people want to disown them, cut them out of the will, and never speak to them again. This is not love. This is letting your life be controlled by anger. If God would have let His wrath decide His plan for man, rather than His love, we would all be hell bound with no hope of redemption. But God is love, and that means God is patient, and He is able to look beyond the offense to the joy of forgiveness and reconciliation.

True love is not manipulated by the emotions and circumstances of the moment. It looks at the over all long range plan, and lets the ultimate goal be its guide. Too many marriages and too many relationships are destroyed because people are deceived into thinking that the negatives of the moment are all that matter. This impatient perspective pushes love to the back burner, and decisions are made on anger and frustration. Impatience is destructive of all love. I can see this in my experience of trying to learn the computer, and in trying to learn to play the piano. If you do not keep the long range goal in mind, you will forsake the whole thing in frustration. It takes time to learn, and if you are impatient you will give up before you learn.

If you let impatience dominate you, it will destroy your love for anyone and anything. Love has to be ever focused on the long range goal to keep you persistent in learning. Once your love ceases to be patient in its plodding toward a goal you will stop short of the goal and begin to lose you love. No doubt all of us have given up some goals in life because we became impatient, and because of it lost our love for the goal. All love on any level will be eroded and finally eliminated by impatience. Patience is the key to the survival of all love. This means all love is a matter of the mind as well as the heart. Love is an emotion, but it is also a matter of the intellect and the will. Love is a learned experience. It is not like breathing, which is an automatic function that we do not have to learn. Love is learned by example, imitation and practice.

If your parents never verbalized their love, you probably won't either. If they were openly expressive of their love, you probably will be as well. Your style of loving is learned by what you see and experience. If a child does not experience love, they do not learn how to love. Children are being conditioned by the love they experienced as to the kind of love they will express.

When two people have the same love style instilled in them they will have a much easier relationship to adjust to, but often couples have different love styles they grew up with.

When they marry they have conflict and a lot of hurt, for they see their different love styles as being unloving. This is why patience is the key to their happiness, for it takes time to learn to understand the other's love style. The good news is that because love is learned new love styles can be developed to make couples more compatible, but it takes patience.

Mates are much like computers and musical instruments. If you do not hit the right keys, you do not get the response you are aiming for. You have to understand how to communicate with your mate just as you do a computer or instrument. If you do not, your relationship will be one of frustration rather than pleasure. Patience persists and does not give up because of obstacles. It presses on with determination to find the right key. It is committed to the ultimate goal of harmony and oneness, and sees all disharmony and conflict as an opportunity for learning what does not work. Two people committed to patient learning will overcome all obstacles.

Francis Hunter, the charismatic evangelist, deals with a lot of Christians in troubled marriages, and she writes, "Did it ever dawn on you that love, understanding and patience can do more to change undesirable characteristics than anything else? God removes the things from our lives that are not pleasing in His sight through His great love of us. When we find ourselves totally committed to Him, we want to please Him. In wanting to please Him, the things which we know displease Him fall by the wayside. The same principle is true of a husband-wife relationship. If we exhibit patience in loving our mates, and our love is unchanging in spite of their idiosyncrasies, they will want to change because of our patience and love. Try it on your mate and see what happens."

Paul says in v. 8 that love never fails. Why is that? It is because, as he says in v.7, "It always protects, it always trusts, it always hopes, it always perseveres." In other words, it never gives up because it is always patient, and so always optimistic about the future. The present problem is not permanent. We will get over it; through it, or around it and beyond it. This is love's perspective, and that keeps it going.

A good example of this is the enormous patience needed on the part of mates in overcoming problems due to sexual abuse. A woman who had been abused by her stepfather married a fine man, but then discovered that she could not return his love. When he showed her affection it would elicit the ugly feelings of hatred toward her stepfather. She sought counseling and began a long process of forgiving her stepfather. She tried hard to see his good points, and she studied all the Bible said about loving your enemies. She began to pray for him and for his repentance. She gave him a birthday present and tried to civil with him. The whole process revolted her, but she persisted because she wanted to be a loving wife.

Week in and week out she prayed and worked at her feelings. Then one day she saw her stepfather leaving the grocery store and go to his car. She was amazed that she felt no hatred for him, but had a feeling of compassion instead. She had conquered her hate, and love was now free to be expressed. She was able to love her husband and their marriage was saved. This was not a quick or easy answer. It took a long winding path to get there, but they made it. Only patient love could have saved that marriage. Had either partner lost their patient persistence the battle would have been lost. In millions of cases it is lost because couples are not patient.



Patience is so loving and God-like because you never know what changes life will bring that makes a bad thing good. This is often true in the world of love and romance. Joy Davidman, for example, was not a likely candidate to be the wife of a famous Christian. She was brilliant and had her college courses started at 14, and she had her Master's Degree by age 20. By 25 she had her own book published. Her father was an outspoken atheist, and she followed in his steps. She joined the Communist party in the 1930's, and she got a divorce. Most would write her off at this point, and assume she would have no role in the kingdom of God. But such impatience would go counter to the ways of God.

Joy was lonely and fearful when her husband left her, and even though her first published poem was about denying the resurrection of Christ, she became open to the possibility that Jesus was alive. C. S. Lewis said, "Every story of conversion is a story of blessed defeat." Joy was defeated, and all her arrogant brilliance and defiance of God had gotten her nowhere. She sensed in spite of her rebellion that God loved her, and in 1946 she surrendered, confessed her sin, and became a believer. She said that she was the world's most surprised atheist, for God took her into His family. She began to read the books of C. S. Lewis, and she saw her need to make Christ Lord of her life. She opened her heart to Jesus and felt that C. S. Lewis was the key person in helping her to become a true Christian.

To make a long story shorter, she went to England and met Lewis, and after a long courtship she married him, and made him one of the happiest bachelors in England. It is a fascinating love story of how two former atheists became two of the leading Christians of the 20th century. They have touched untold millions for Christ. But none of this would have been possible without the patience of God's love. Had He judged them in the early stages of their lives He would have robbed the world of great lovers of His Son, and authors who have led masses of others to love His Son. God is patient because He knows that often the best surprises are near the end rather than the beginning of a life. God can wait, and that is why He sees victories when others have given up. God-like lovers are lovers who can wait in patience.

The major mistake people make is in thinking that love always feels good. The fact is, love often feels awful and painful. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, and that was not a pleasant feeling for Jesus to die for the sin of the world. The world is filled with people who leave their mates because they don't feel love anymore. They have the foolish idea that the caboose is what pulls the train. Feelings are the caboose in our love for God and our mate. They are the after effects of acts of the will. Studies show that when people start acting like they love each other their feelings of love will return. If they are kind, thoughtful, affectionate, and patiently work through the obstacles that put a wall between them they can again have the feelings that brought them together in the first place. But people are too impatient. They want the feelings of love at the flip of a switch, and when it does not work that way, they walk out of the relationship. This is a rejection of the way God has provided for getting through life's valleys.

We exercise our muscles to keep them in shape, but seldom do we think of exercising our virtues to keep them alive and vibrant. Christians should select someone they do not like very much and start behaving toward them in loving ways to see how their behavior will change their feelings. If you start praying for one you do not like and doing loving things for

them you will discover that acts of your will can change your feelings. It will be a valuable lesson to remind you that if at some point it is your mate you don't like at the moment, the thing to do is to not let your feelings lead you, but take control and exercise love as a choice, and do what is loving. This choice will restore you to a positive level of feeling. Loving our enemies is more often than we realize the challenge to be patient with our mate until they are again our friend. This is to be a God-like lover.

## **5. POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF LOVE Based on I Cor. 13:4**

The theme of love has been associated with the Lord's Supper down through the centuries. The early Christians had what came to be known as an Agape feast before they partook of the Lord's Supper. This was a time in which they ate a full meal together in an atmosphere of Christian fellowship. It was a great contrast to the pagan parties which were held on behalf of false gods. Most of the Corinthian Christians had been involved in this corrupt pagan celebrations before their conversion, and some of the self-centeredness of those began to creep into the love feasts of the church. The result was that the outgoing concern for others in agape love faded, and eros love came in, which is a love that is more concerned about self and what pleasure it can get at the expense of others.

It was a constant battle to keep the love feast a time of true Christian fellowship. After New Testament days the church changed the feast and held it after the Lord's Supper, but there was still problems of corruption. In times of persecution the agape meal was had in prisons with condemned Christians before they were martyred. It soon became a custom to have a love meal after weddings and funerals, and so our modern days receptions after such events are nothing new in the church. During the Middle Ages, however, the practice became so corrupted by non-Christian influence that the Council of Trullan in 692 A. D. ruled that those who held love feasts in the church should be excommunicated.

The agape feast is still practiced in the Eastern Church just as it was in New Testament days. A small group in England called the Peculiar People also have the love feast. They demonstrate that the practice does not have to be corrupt. The only trace of the idea left in most churches today is the practice of taking a benevolent offering after the Lord's Supper to be used to help the needy. The result is that few people today connect love with the Lord's Supper. It is appropriate, however, to consider the theme of love before we commune with the Lord of love. We want to focus our attention on the attributes of love that are first mentioned, and they are patience and kindness.

### **I. LOVE IS PATIENT.**

Patience is the first attribute that Paul mentions, for this is essential in all the relationships of life. If God was not patient, He would have destroyed the earth long ago, and there would be no plan of salvation. But God is love, and His love is patient, not willing that any should perish but that all come to repentance. God is exceedingly patient with people. Jonah even became angry at God when He did not destroy Nineveh but forgave

them, and gave them a second chance when they repented. God is patient because He is love, and if the love of God is in us, we too will be patient with people.

This means that we must have the capacity to forgive. This word always means patience with people, and not just with circumstances. In verse 7 Paul deals with enduring all things, but here at the start he puts first things first and says that the first attribute of agape love is the ability to be patient and forgiving of people. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "He who is devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love." The Corinthians desperately needed to learn this, for there were weak Christians and proud Christians, and Christians of every type of personality all mixed together with different convictions and likes. If there is no patience in such an atmosphere, there is bound to be trouble, and there was. Some were of Paul, others of Apolos, and others of Cephus. At their love feast some would have steak, and others would have just vegetables. The rich would not share with the poor. Some ate meat offered to idols, and others thought it was a sin.

The church has the hardest task in the world. It has to take people of all walks of life with endless differences in background, convictions, and personalities, and unite them in one unified mission of extending the kingdom of God on earth. The task is not difficult, it is impossible unless the unifying power of agape love is present, only agape love can bear patiently the conflicts in human personalities. Someone said, "To live above with the saints we love, Oh that will be glory! But to live below with the saints we know-that's another story."

It is the basic ingredient in the unity of every church. In any church business meeting you will find differing opinions and convictions. In any group of Christians you will find varying viewpoints on many practical issues, and how to deal with them. If the patience of agape love is not present the result will be division and conflict which is neither for the glory of God nor the good of man. If love does not reign in the church, it ceases to be the light of the world and, as one has said, "Only adds deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars." Love alone can dissolve the clouds of darkness and let the light of God shine through.

Abraham Lincoln had a bitter enemy when he was seeking to become President of the United States. Stanton was his name, and for some reason he hated Lincoln. He did everything possible to degrade him in the eyes of the public. He used to call Lincoln, "The original gorilla." On one occasion he said that a certain Frenchman was a fool to be wandering about in Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could find one so easy in Springfield, Ill. In spite of Stanton, Lincoln was elected. Lincoln then began to select his cabinet of men to work close to him, and the man he chose to be his Secretary of War was a shock to everyone, for it was none other than Stanton. His advisors warned him, but Lincoln, knowing all the things he had said about him, still felt he was the best man for the job, and so he was appointed.

Such an act of love, forgiveness and patience in the face of hate made Stanton a great servant of his country, and a great friend of Lincoln. When Lincoln's body was laid in a little room after he was shot, it was Stanton who stood over him and said through tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." Maybe not all felt like Stanton, but then not all men experienced the power of Lincoln's longsuffering love. Likewise, only as we

recognize the longsuffering love of God for us can we be patient with others. It was while we were yet sinners that Christ died for us. It was while all the hate of sin was being poured out on Him that He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Only after we have entered into, and experienced that forgiveness, can we forgive those who trespass against us.

That is why love is linked so closely to the Lord's Supper, for it is our remembrance of His longsuffering love that endured even the death of the cross that keeps us conscious of our obligation to be patient with all others for whom He died. It is this attribute of patience that enables us to love even our enemies as God loves His. The Christian destroys his enemies by making them his friends, even as Lincoln did with Stanton.

Longsuffering agape love is the basis on which Martin Luther King Jr. waged his war against those who hated the blacks. He demonstrated in an historical crisis that love can conquer hate. Here is a paragraph from his book titled Strength To Love.

"To our most bitter opponents we say: We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-cooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory."

The wicked weeds of hate and prejudice will eventually wither in the brilliant light and blazing heat of such longsuffering love. Little did a young lady in England many years ago realize how important longsuffering love is in teaching Sunday School. She had a class of 4 ragged boys, and they seem to be hopeless, and especially Bob. It was a struggle just to keep him coming. The Sunday School superintendent gave him a new suit of clothes so he would not feel out of place, but after a couple of Sundays he was gone again. The teacher went after him and found the clothes all torn and dirty. She invited him back and he came. The superintendent gave him another suit of clothes, but after a week or so his seat was empty again.

The teacher was so aggravated when she found him again and the clothes were a mess. She reported to the superintendent that she was utterly discouraged and felt she must give him up as hopeless. He asked her to give him one more chance, and he gave more clothes to him if he would promise to attend regularly. Bob promised, and he was won by this persistent effort. Later he accepted Christ as Savior and went on to study for the ministry. He became the famous Dr. Robert Morrison. He became a missionary to China, and he translated the Bible into the Chinese language. Agape love never fails because it never

admits defeat. Longsuffering love found a way to redeem my soul, and it will find a way for me to bear with those who aggravate and discourage. He loves us with patience at our slow growth in grace, and we must pass on to others this same patient love.

Sometimes people are melted into one by the fires of affliction. We see this in the classic musical tragedy set in South Africa called *Lost In The Stars*. The moment of anguish has arrived. The white son is dead, and the black son is about to be executed for his death. The two grieving fathers are together, for they have worked through their grief and bitterness together, and in spite of the calamity that has fallen upon them they come to this moment with something beautiful as the black father, whose son is about to die, says, "I have a friend," and the white father, whose son is already dead, responds, "I have a friend."

It is one of the great paradoxes of history that people you suffer with you get to know quickly, and you tend to care about more deeply. Suffering produces an atmosphere conducive to love. Anyone who has ever had a loved one go into the hospital with a crisis, and who has sat with others in an intensive care unit room knows the truth of what I am saying. Suffering brings people together. It breaks down walls, and people who are total strangers become like family over-night. People can instantly identify with others in their common bond of suffering, and so they have a oneness built into their relationship however diverse they might be apart from their suffering.

There is a clear cut relationship between suffering and love. This is a side of love that we seldom explore. It is like the dark side of the moon. We prefer the light side of love, and so we tend to conclude that love always feels good, but when we probe deeper we discover that sometimes love hurts. If God would have been guided by the principle that if it feels good do it, do you think there would have been a cross? God so loved He gave His only Son, and that gift linked together forever the bond of love and suffering. For it was the greatest love ever expressed, and it was expressed by the greatest suffering ever experienced. The cross brings these two together and shouts the message down the corridors of time so that we cannot escape it-love can hurt! We like the love can help message, and the love can heal message, and the love can give hope message, but we prefer to listen less intently, if at all, to the message that love can hurt.

Longsuffering means to suffer long, and to put up with what you do not enjoy. You do not have to be patient and endure pleasure. It is pain that you have to endure. It is irritation that you have to be patient with. Longsuffering is that aspect of love that enables it to relate to a fallen and imperfect world. It is that part of love that can hurt and not cease to care because of the hurt. Eros love only functions as long as there is pleasure. It cannot survive pain. It ceases to exist when it has to endure. Those who love only on this level are totally self-centered, and do all they can to avoid pain. Did it hurt God to love man? Yes! Did it hurt Jesus to love man? Yes! The cross is the answer. Yes it hurt, and all love that is truly of God will be willing to hurt. It does not hurt all the time, however, for Jesus was not always a man of sorrow. He was not so until the end of His earthly life, and He never will be again for all eternity. His love just had to hurt until His purpose was accomplished.

Any love that ceases to be when it costs pain is not agape love. It is pure self-centered love which says I love me, and like you, for you make me feel good. When you cease to make

me feel good, I don't like you anymore. This is the love that leads to the weak commitments of our day in all realms of life. Agape love says that even when it hurts to love you, and even when it costs me pain, I will be loyal to you. This is the love that is the fruit of the Spirit. The essence of this love is the being willing to suffer for and with another.

## **II. LOVE IS KIND.**

Love does not just patiently put up with people. It also positively puts out for people. In other words, it is not enough to just turn the other cheek. You must also walk the extra mile. Agape love is not satisfied with the avoiding harm to people. It must also desire to be of help to people. The Roman Stoics had a longsuffering patience that enabled them to avoid getting angry if someone aggravated or injured them, but the emotion of sympathy and kindness which would motivate them to help others was absent.

The Christian has a motivating factor in his life that no one else has. He has experienced the kindness of God's love, and so by God's grace he is able to express that kindness to others. We must always remember that agape love is not automatic. It operates only when we consciously will to allow the love of God to flow through us. That is why Paul can write in Eph. 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. When we remember what Christ did for us, let us also remember what He expects us to do for others. He expects us to love with the kindness of His love, and His loving kindness is supreme. Jesus said that if we love even our enemies our reward will be great, and we will be sons of the Most High, "For He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish." (Luke 6:35).

Why does God love His enemies, and why is He kind? Paul tells us in Rom. 2:4, "Do you not know that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance." God's kindness is not to encourage His enemies, but to erase them by making them sons through repentance and acceptance of Christ. So we are to be kind to all men that we too might destroy our enemies by making them friends, and part of the family of God. God grant that we will be able to give the testimony of Lord Shaftesbury who said, "During a long life I have proved that not one kind word ever spoken, not kind deed ever done, but sooner or later returns to bless the giver and become a chain binding men with golden bands to the throne of God."

There is real danger in a sermon like this. It is so easy for people to think of it as a mere moralistic message. He has told us what all good people already know-that we should be patient and kind. The same counsel can be gotten from a Buddhist priest, a Christian Scientist, a PTA lecture, or a government pamphlet on social adjustment. That which makes it a distinctively Christian message is agape love. Only those who know the love of God through Christ can practice this kind of patience. Only those who have been enlightened by the flame of God's kindness can be kindled with this kindness to others. In other words, only those who have experienced agape love can express agape love. God so loved He gave His Son, and only if we have received that gift can we so love.

Sometimes people are melted into one by the fires of affliction. We see this in the classic musical tragedy set in South Africa called *Lost In The Stars*. The moment of anguish has

arrived. The white son is dead, and the black son is about to be executed for his death. The two grieving fathers are together, for they have worked through their grief and bitterness together, and in spite of the calamity that has fallen upon them they come to this moment with something beautiful as the black father, whose son is about to die, says, "I have a friend," and the white father, whose son is already dead, responds, "I have a friend."

It is one of the great paradoxes of history that people you suffer with you get to know quickly, and you tend to care about more deeply. Suffering produces an atmosphere conducive to love. Anyone who has ever had a loved one go into the hospital with a crisis, and who has sat with others in an intensive care unit room knows the truth of what I am saying. Suffering brings people together. It breaks down walls, and people who are total strangers become like family over-night. People can instantly identify with others in their common bond of suffering, and so they have a oneness built into their relationship however diverse they might be apart from their suffering.

## **6. LOVE IS KIND Based on I Cor. 13:4**

Clovis Chappell, the great Southern preacher, told this story of a Christian man who bought a lovely home in the suburbs in one of the big cities of the South. He had his furniture moved in one day, and the next day he arrived and was out walking over the wide lawn of his new property. His next door neighbor came rapidly across the lawn to meet him. He was glad to see he was eager to be a friend. But his neighbor did not greet him peacefully, but instead, with a voice of anger asked if he had purchased this property. "Yes," he replied. "Well then you have just bought a law suit. That fence is 7 feet over on my land, and I'm going to have every inch of what is mine."

These provoking words encourage a response of anger and defense, but the Christian man said, "There is no need for a law suit. I believe you are perfectly sincere in what you say, and though I bought this land in good faith, I am not going to claim it. I will have that fence moved." The neighbor was wide-eyed in amazement. "Do you really mean it?" "That is exactly what I mean," was the quiet response. The neighbor said, "No you won't. This fence is going to stay right where its at. Any man who is as white as you are can have the land." They became good friends because hostility was met with kindness rather than more hostility. We greatly underestimate the power of kindness because we look upon it as a mild and superficial virtue.

You can study history and discover that almost everybody recognizes the value of kindness. It is a universal virtue, and, therefore, because it is not unique to Christianity we tend to minimize its importance. This is folly, for if the natural man can love on this level, what a poor testimony it is if Christians do not. In Acts 28:2 we read that after Paul and all the other prisoners had survived the shipwreck, and made it safe to the island of Malta, "The islanders showed us unusual kindness." Here was a pagan people showing Paul and the

others great kindness which they much needed. Cicero the Roman said, "Nothing is so popular as kindness." Sophocles the Greek said, "Kindness is ever the begetter of kindness." The religions of the world all praise kindness.

Bertrand Russell, the famous atheist philosopher, wrote a book titled *Why I Am Not A Christian*. In this book he surprised the world by saying that the key to a stable world is Christian love. He wrote, "If you feel this, you have a motive for existence, a guide in action, a reason for courage, and imperative necessity for intellectual honesty." Here is a non-Christian praising the value of Christian love, and the impact it can have on all humanity by means of its kindness. If anybody can see it and have it, then it is too commonplace to be a major significance is the way we sometimes tend to think. The only problem with this logic is it has to ignore the fact that the Bible gives kindness a major role, and the Bible is to be our guide, and not logic, or our feelings that it is too universal to be a major Christian focus. And so the first thing we want to consider is-

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF KINDNESS.**

Paul writes in Eph. 4:31-32, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgives you." Being kind is the opposite of all those negatives, and so it covers all that is involved in being polite, courteous, tolerant, and thoughtful. Peter does not hide this virtue in the closet, but puts it right up there with the key virtues of the Christian life in II Pet. 1:7. He writes, "Add to godliness brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love." You are playing in the major leagues when you are being kind.

Eros love says I am in the world for my pleasure. Agape love agrees that pleasure is a valid and vital part of life, but its vision goes beyond self-pleasure and seeks to give pleasure to others, and that is why it is kind. Kindness is giving to others the pleasure you desire for yourself. You like to be treated with respect and courtesy, for this enhances your self-esteem. Jean De La Bruyere said, "The most delicate, the most sensible of all pleasures, consists in promoting the pleasure of others."

During World War I Marshal Foch, the French commander, was approached by a noisy Westerner who criticized the French politeness. "There's nothing in it but wind," he sneered. The Marshal replied, "There's nothing but wind in a tire but it makes the ride very smooth and pleasant." Being kind may seem superficial, but the superficial is more important than we realize. Washing your face is superficial, for it only affects one layer of skin, but it is important none the less. Waxing your car is superficial. Painting your house is superficial. Wearing clothes is superficial. There are hundreds of things that we do that are a mere surface things, but they are still important. The surface is not irrelevant just because it is not the ultimate. Being kind may not be the ultimate goal of the Christian life, but it is one of the aids to achieve the goal of being Christ-like.

Dr. Harold Dawley says if we are wise, we will not only check the oil level in our car, but we will check the lubricant level of our lives, and see if we possess an adequate supply of kindness to make life run smoother. If not, we need to add, add, add. Get yourself prepared



to live in a world where friction is frequently wearing us down. Agape love meets life's friction with kindness, courtesy, and politeness, for many a rough ride is made easier by these lubricants of love.

Napoleon was one of the world's great generals. Many thought he was the anti-Christ in his day, but there was a reason for why his troops would die for his cause. He made it a point to be kind to every soldier who fought under him. He would find out some personal information from the commander of each unit about each soldier, and then on the day of review he would walk up to one, address him by name, and ask him how is your family in such and such a place. He made them feel like he knew them personally. This kindness expressed publicly made him a great leader. We do not know if he was sincere, or just using good psychology, but it does not matter. Even if a virtue is abused, it is no reason for a Christian to neglect its proper use. There is power in kindness, and the Christian has an obligation to use this power for the kingdom of God.

Lack of kindness is the cause for much of the conflict among Christians. Samuel Coleridge said, "The first duty of a wise advocate is to convince his opponents that he understands their arguments, and sympathizes with their just feelings." I read of Christians all the time who do not show the slightest interest in understanding their opponents views, nor in being sympathetic to their feelings. The result is another area of life where the wise pagan may be superior to the unwise Christian, for he knows the value and the power of kindness.

It is a secular problem that says, "You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." Most of us are not into catching flies, but it works with people too. Kindness can bring peace and reconciliation where all else fails. Criticism tends to compel people to justify their bad behavior, but compliments reinforce the desire to do what is good. This is just good psychology that secular people use as well. The difference is, nobody is commanding them to do it, but the Christian is commanded to be kind to one another. The expression of God's nature demands it. The example of Christ's nature demands it. The experiences of life's nature demand it. It is important for all aspects of life.

It is the positive that balances out the merely passive attribute of patient longsuffering. Longsuffering puts up with people, but kindness puts out for people. It was longsuffering that made the Prodigals father wait and hope, but it was kindness that called for the party to celebrate the son's return. Longsuffering endures the pain, but kindness enhances the pleasure. God does not just endure the folly of man, but He responds in kindness to them. He is active in His expression of love for the least and the lost.

Sometimes Christians feel proud because they tolerate the sinners and endure their presence in the world. We share the same world and put up with them, but we do little on the active side of showing kindness. Jesus, however, demands this as evidence that we are truly children of God. In Luke 6:35 he says, "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." God is actively engaged in being kind to the wicked of the world. He makes His sun to shine and reign to fall on the unjust as well as the just. He does not withhold the blessing of creation and His

providence from those who are not in His kingdom.

It is God's conviction that people will be won more through kindness than by judgment. Paul writes in Rom. 2:4, "Or do you show contempt for the riches of His kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance." D. L. Moody was one of history's most powerful evangelists, and it was his conviction that the loving kindness of God is what the world most needs to hear. It is because people do not feel loved that they flee from righteousness, and even commit suicide. Moody wrote, "If I could only make men understand the real meaning of the words of the Apostle John-God is love, I would take that single text, and would go up and down the world proclaiming this glorious truth. If you can convince a man that you love him you have won his heart. If you really make people believe that God loves them, how we should find them crowding into the kingdom of heaven! The trouble is that men think that God hates them; and so they are all the time running away from him."

Moody learned from experience that kindness was no minor value, but was the key to evangelism, and one of the reasons we do not win many to Christ is because we are not kind to those outside of Christ. He said, "Many of us think we know something of God's love, but centuries hence we shall admit we have never found out much about it." He said that over 100 years ago, and we can now rightly say that he was a prophet, for we may know even less rather than more about the love of God. What we want to learn in this message is that the kindness involved in the love that Paul speaks of is central to its effectiveness.

We sometimes get so use to hearing the stories of the Bible that we forget how radical they were. The story of Jesus meeting the woman at the well is a good example. It was rare for a Jewish man to talk with his own wife or mother in public, and it was unheard of to talk to a strange woman. To talk to a Samaritan would be beyond the bounds of dignity. Yet here is Jesus, a Jewish Rabbi, talking to a Samaritan woman at a public well. It is no wonder that the disciples marveled that He talked with her. But it was this kindness toward one who would expect to be condemned that makes one of the greatest stories of victory in the New Testament.

She was not only a Samaritan, but also a woman of very questionable morals. There were social rules that guided how you relate to such a person, and the disciples would have followed those social rules and shunned her. Jesus showed her the kindness of one who was worthy of being cared about. He did not scold or condemn, but treated her in a caring way, and she became one of the most effective witnesses for Christ in the New Testament.

Jesus specialized in being kind to people who were supposed to be rejected. Zachaeus, for example, was shown the kindness of coming to his home to eat. That was a scandal to the Pharisees, but to Jesus it was the way to lead him into the kingdom. If you want to have a great impact on someone's life you need to be kind to them. If you read accounts of marvelous conversions of people not likely to be won, it is often the case that kindness plays the major role.

In an Indianapolis prison for women one old woman who had been there for 30 years was known as the terror of the jail. She was a tough wicked person who had broken all of God's

commandments. A Christian woman became the warden of that prison, and when she began her duties this miserable wretch was brought to her office in chains. She told the guards to release her. They warned her of the danger, but she insisted. She had compassion on this 70 year old woman whose life had been wasted in sin and folly. She stooped down and lifted her with her arms around her. The old woman was overwhelmed by this act of . kindness, and she began to weep as she said over and over, "Do you think that I could be better? Do you think that I could be better?" Nobody ever dreamed that she could, for they labeled her as the worst there was.

One person showing kindness gave her hope that she could be better, and 6 months later she became a Christian. In a year this terror of the jail was better known as the angel of the jail. Kindness brought her into the kingdom. What all the condemnation of 70 years could not do, kindness did in a short time. This is the pattern for great conversions. You don't find any stories where the hardened sinner was blasted and finally saw the light. It is kindness in spite of their folly that makes a person melt and lose their hard heart. Condemnation only makes them resist and become harder. It is the age old story of the wind and the sun seeking which one had the greatest power to make a man remove his coat. The wind blew and raged around the man, and he only clung to his coat all the tighter. Then the sun sent its warm rays upon the man, and soon he voluntarily removed the coat. The warmth of kindness will get people to respond more than the cold wind of condemnation.

Jesus went through His life being kind, and turning funerals into festivals and water into wine. He did not ask whether all He did would pay off or not. Much of it did not. Nine lepers that He healed did not even come and say thank you. Many whom He fed and healed did not follow Him. He was kind because love is kind. It is the nature of love to be kind, just as it is the nature of the sun to shine. Love does not calculate and say, "If I do thus and so will I gain this or that?" That is eros love that says I will love only if I get pleasure by doing so. Agape loves because love is needed regardless of the response it receives.

Part of our problem is that we have stressed certain cliches so often that we have lost balance. We say we are to do all things with eternity's values in view, and so we tend to say that just being kind will not change anything for eternity, and so why bother? Being kind seems so temporal and insignificant that we feel justified in neglecting it for bigger fish in the sea of Christian values. This is a major mistake, and it is based on a unrealistic view of life. Christians who go through life waiting for some spectacular chance to show love and do something great will be living in a fantasy world. It is the Christian who sees that everyday we are presented with opportunities to be kind who will really be living with eternity's values in view.

The one thing that every Christian has in common is not their gifts, for these vary widely, but it is in their ability to be kind. Beth Robertson wrote,

When I think of the charming people I know,  
It's surprising how often I find  
The chief of their qualities that makes them so  
Is just that they are kind.

The most common Greek word for kindness in the New Testament is chrestos. The word for Christ is christos. There is only the one letter difference between them. To be kind and to be Christ-like are very close to being the same thing. Andrew Blackwood Jr. wrote that God speaks to this world through the human voice that is kind. Frederick Faber said, "Kindness has converted more sinners than zeal, eloquence, or learning." What we need to see is that it is just because everybody can see the value of kindness that makes it a universal language. People cannot understand many things that Christians believe, but everyone can understand kindness.

You do not need any special training of skill to be kind, or to be touched by receiving kindness. It is just because it is so universal that it is so important. There is nothing else quite like it, for all of us have the capacity to give and receive it. This means all of us have a great potential power with us at all times. We cannot understand everybody's language, but we can be kind. We cannot agree with everyone's ideas, but we can be kind. We cannot follow everyone's behavior, but we can be kind. There are endless numbers of things that I cannot do to touch people for Christ, but the one thing that I can do in relation to every human being who crosses my path in life is to be kind.

Emerson spoke truth when he said, "You can never do a kindness too soon, for you never know how soon it will be too late." Someone else said that you need to be a bit too kind to be kind enough. Gypsy Smith was one of the great evangelists of America, England, and Australia. He tells of how a total stranger's kindness affected his life. In his autobiography he tells of how he traveled with his gypsy family and how he felt rejected by those outside the family. He only felt loved by his father.

One day as a young boy he stood gazing at a chapel when an old man shuffled up to him and took his hands and said, "The Lord bless you my boy. The Lord keep you, my boy." Those are hardly immortal words to be carved in stone. They are not the words of an eloquent speaker. They are nothing more than the words of an old laymen given to encourage. But listen to the testimony Gypsy Smith. "The dear old man passed on, and I watched him turn the corner. I never saw him again. But when I reach the glory-land, I will find that grand old saint, and thank him for his shake of the hand and his "God bless you." He made me feel that somebody outside the tent really cared for a gypsy boy's soul. His kindness did me more good than a thousand sermons. It was an inspiration ;that has never left me. Many a young convert has been lost to the church of God, who would have been preserved and kept for it and made useful in it by some such kindness as that which fell to my lot that day."

The great need of the world is not for more gifted people, but for more people who use the gift of kindness. We can make a difference in this world of friction if we will add to it the lubricant of kindness.

## **7. LOVE DOES NOT ENVY    Based on I Cor. 13:4**

Sometimes the best way to say what something is, is to say what it isn't. If a child asks you what a smooth surface is, you would probably say it is a surface with no bumps and no rough spots. Bumps and rough are not what smooth is, but what smooth isn't. It would be hard to describe what smooth is without reference to its opposite, and what it isn't. If a daughter asks a mother what she means by perfectly clean sheets, the mother will say, "I mean that there is no dirt or stains on them." The easiest way to describe a vacuum is to say it is the absence of air. The easiest to describe total darkness is to say there is no light, and the easiest way to describe pure light is to say, as John does of God, He is light and in Him is no darkness at all. When John tells us about what heaven is like, he focuses on what heaven is not. It is the absence of night, pain, tears, sin, and death.

The point is, a quality or value can only be fully grasped by seeing its opposite, and by knowing what it isn't. That is why Paul, after telling us two things love is-patient and kind, follows up with a list of 8 things which love is not. Love is like all supreme values, for it is easier to say what it isn't than to say what it is. The first thing Paul says that love is not is envious. Pride is usually considered the first sin of man, but envy is a partner with this first sin. Satan envied God, and he tempted Adam and Eve to envy God. He said that they could be like God knowing good and evil. In other words, God has something you do not have, but it can be yours if you do what I say. Envy makes the self the center of focus, and this opens the door to all sin. Paul puts envy before pride in this list of what love isn't, for it leads to all that is unloving.

1. Cain killed Abel and became the first criminal in history because he envied his brother.
2. Joseph brothers envied him because of his relationship to his father, and they sold him into slavery.
3. Saul sought to kill David because of his envy of David's popularity.
4. The leaders of Israel sought to kill Jesus because they envied His popularity.

The number one cause for all non-loving behavior in human relationships is envy. Watch children play and you will see them fight over a toy bitterly when there are dozens of other toys to play with. It is not that they want it that bad, but they just do not like another to have it. They are motivated by envy, for as soon as one loses interest in the toy the other will no longer crave it either. Paul says he gave up childish things like this when he became a man. Maturity is the ability to not need what somebody else has to be content. It is not easy to grow up emotionally and be loving instead of envious.

We live in a world of much inequality. People do not get equal breaks. Some have better looks, better health, more wealth, and even more spiritual gifts. This is a major problem in the world, but also for Christians. We do not like a world where this reality kicks us in the face almost daily, and reminds us that we are inferior to others in some way. It all seems so unjust and unfair, and it leads easily to envy. One can get so obsessed with his own inequality that his own gifts and blessings lose their meaning. The women sang, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." This led Saul to feel that he was nothing, and no longer a hero. He could have been a great hero of Israel, and a great king,

even if David did surpass him, but he so let envy take over in his life that all that mattered was the destruction of David.

Envy causes people to lose perspective and they are made to feel so inferior that with the loss of self-love comes the loss of all love. They become so bitter that they are like one who said, "I can't read, and therefore wish all books were burned." P. J. Bailey said, "Envy is a coal that comes hissing hot from hell." It leads to all that is the opposite of love. It shrinks the soul and destroys all relationships. Envy can kill the best relationships. George Whitefield and John Wesley were great friends, but they came to a time of tension in their relationship. A man who did not like Wesley asked Whitefield if he thought he would see Wesley in heaven. He said, "Certainly not." The man was pleased until Whitefield explained. He said, "Wesley will be so near the throne of God, and you and I so far that we will not be able to see him." Whitefield could have indulged in some envious slander, but he chose the way of agape love, and that saved their relationship in spite of the tension.

Love does not envy Paul says, but he does not say that Christians do not envy, for we know that being a Christian does not eliminate envy. It is love that does not envy, and so when we do envy we need to recognize it is because we do not love, or that love is not now in control of our emotions. What this means is that love must be a constant choice of the will. It is not automatic. What is automatic is the response of the fallen human nature. The negative is more likely to be automatic, and the positive is more likely to be work. Katherine Porter said, "Love must be learned, and learned again and again; there is no end to it. Hate needs no instruction, but wants only to be provoked."

So when you feel envy you need to recognize this is a defect, and a falling short of the ideal. You do not have to go to pieces and feel guilty, but simply acknowledge your feelings are sub-Christian. This means they are not to be the basis for your behavior or your talk. You check any of your words or acts that are motivated by this emotion, for they will not be loving words or acts. Suppression of the natural man is not only good, it is essential to the Christian life. You hold back the negative results of non-loving emotions, and instead you chose to act and talk on the basis of love.

Can you be loving when you feel non-loving? Of course you can, and you must, or you will let your old nature, rather than your new nature, be your guide, and this is to quench the Spirit. When you are open to the filling of the Spirit of God, you will quench the works of the flesh and deny their expression, and you will choose instead the way of love. This calls for honesty with our emotions. Gary Collins, the Christian psychologist writes, "Envy is an emotion that everybody possesses but to which nobody admits. While many people would confess that they are anxious, discouraged, lonely, overly-busy or bothered by feelings of inferiority, very few of us will tell another we are envious. Indeed, we don't even like to admit this to ourselves. But above all, we especially want to keep our envy a secret from the person whom we envy."

Envy is a dangerous emotion for our mental health. The harsh and horrible things said about it cause us to so fear it that we do not want to acknowledge we have it. We need to learn it is far healthier to be aware of our emotions, and learn to control them, and not repress them. Do not fear your negative emotions so much that you do not face them. The

only way to gain the victory is to face your enemy and say, "I am now envious, and in a non-loving state. My attitude and behavior will be influenced by this emotion, and I can easily do or say what is non-loving. I must now choose to do and say that which is the will of God for me. I must will to love even though my feelings would take me down a non-loving path." You will only be able to be this honest when you are fully aware of your negative emotions. There are three things about envy that we want to focus on. First let's look at-

## **I. THE EVIL OF ENVY.**

Envy is a violation of love on all levels. It is a rejection of loving God with all your heart, for envy says I consider God unfair to me, for He has given others what He has not given me. Therefore, I am rejected by Him, and I will in turn reject His will for me. This is why Cain killed Abel. He said that life is not fair, and God plays favorites, and so I will try to fight God's plan and kill the one he favors. His envy led him to first despise God, and then to despise his brother. Envy leads us to violate God's commandments by leading us to a low self-image where we hate who we are, for we are less and inferior to someone else. This in turn leads us to despise that someone else who is superior, and so we have gone full circle and end up hating God, and hating our neighbor, as we hate ourselves. Envy leads to the reversal of the will of God for us completely.

That is why one of the most destructive characteristics of non-love. It is anti-love which makes us weep with those who rejoice, and rejoice when they weep. Theogenes, the Greek hero of the public games, was so envied by another athlete that it drove him to destroy the statue that was erected in his honor. He finally succeeded in toppling the image, but it fell on him and killed him. Envy is like this-it is like shooting an arrow straight into the air above you. It will not likely hurt anyone but the one it falls on, which is you. Envy is so destructive to the self that it can cause the self to lose its sense of value and esteem, and thereby lead it to take risks in doing evil and folly that would not be considered with one with a healthy self-image.

Envy of another is saying that you are of little worth compared to them. You are saying that you are rejected and have little value. Others are so much better off, and so they are superior. You want to rise up and destroy their good fortune for that is the only way you can feel self-worth by making others less. Much of the evil of life is caused by this lethal logic of envy. The victory over this evil is clearly found in the development of one's self-esteem. If I can see that I am not of less worth and value to God, and to others, because I do not have the name, fame, or assets of others, then I need not be motivated by envy. It may enter my emotions, and I feel it, but then my mind weighs the facts in the light of my self-worth, and I conclude that I am loved and valuable even without the gifts that others have. I may be inferior in many ways, but I am loved by God, and I love God. I am loved by others, and I love others. I will not let envy rob me of these values that make me an equal to any who have ever lived.

As parents, we know that when we bring a second child home from the hospital that we do not love our first child less because now we have another one to love. But the first child does not know this and so there is often a battle with envy at an early age. It is based on the fear that another's good fortune is my loss. This is not so in God's family, or in our earthly

family, God does not love any of children less because some are more blest, but it is a felt emotion of many children and many Christians. We all go through the battle of seeing others in the family seemingly more loved than we are. This leads to life becoming a competition where you have to fight for your share of love. You are no longer the exclusive object of attention, for now there is competition, and the new baby seems to get more affection. The rest of your life will be competition as other children get the teachers approval more than you. Others will get awards that you don't get. The coach will pick others over you. Someone else gets the job you wanted. There is always some realm of life where someone else is the winner, and you are left feeling envy.

The lower your self-image the more you will envy those who win out over you. Their good fortune will seem like a curse to you. Envy can become such a vicious beast that it will never forgive those who surpass you, and in that relationship love is blocked. When love is blocked all sorts of negative emotions grow. The Pharisees were envious of Jesus and His popularity with the people. They become totally blinded to all the good He was doing, and they sought only for a way to eliminate Him from the scene. Such is the power of envy. So much of the persecution of history is motivated by envy. Christians have done their share of persecuting each other to prevent the success of one another.

Pride cannot endure someone else becoming superior, and so it give rise to envy. Paul writes in Gal. 5:26, "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." The Christian is in the same danger as anyone else, and can let the inequality of life led them to envy. There are Christians who become rich, get fame, and have many blessings of all kinds. There is no equality among Christians, and so they have all the grounds for envy that anyone else does. If they do not control it, Christians can be just as resentful and unloving as the non-Christian.

Victory over this vicious vice must begin with an honest awareness that we carry the virus for this vice with us at all times. It is especially dangerous when we are in a negative mood and down on our own self-image. St. Augustine said many centuries ago, "May God take this vice not only from the hearts of all Christians, but from all men, for it is a vice proper to demons and from which they will always suffer. The devils have fallen, but they are envious of man who still stands upright. So also, some men are envious of others, not because they wish to have the prosperity that they see in others, but because they would wish that everyone be as wretched as themselves."

Do you ever find yourself feeling good at the misfortune of another? It is time to recognize, if you do, that you are letting envy be your guide. To be loving one needs to keep in constant contact with his or her own emotions. They must be evaluated in the light of love, and seen for what they really are, and then kept under control by the will which chooses the way of love regardless of feelings. Next we see-

## **II. THE ENERGY OF ENVY.**

Where does the energy come from that feeds this anti-agape emotion? It comes primarily from a poor self-image. Lack of self-love is what leads us to not love our neighbor. Just as loving yourself will led to loving your neighbor as yourself, so also not loving yourself will



led to not loving your neighbor as you don't love yourself. A healthy sense of self-esteem is the key to victory over many negatives, and envy is one of them.

We are all in the same boat with the elder brother of the Prodigal. Had he felt loved by the father he would not have needed to envy his younger brother. But because he felt unloved he felt cheated and inferior, and this was the source of the energy for the envy that made him such a negative person in a story with a happy ending for everyone but him. Had he felt secure, and could have said that he felt good about himself and his loyalty to his father, he could then have felt good about his foolish brother being forgiven and welcomed back home. Instead of pouting on the outside, he could have joined the party on the inside in celebration of a lost one who was now found.

The reason he could not do this was because he felt sorry for himself. He was saying, poor me, I never had a party with my friends, and I have been good and loyal. I am being treated as inferior, and all my efforts are forgotten. Most Christians find their emotions tending toward envy when people they feel are inferior are saved. It almost seems wrong that they should get to go to heaven after all the lousy things they have done. It does not seem fair that these people should be equal to them when they have been so good in comparison. This feeling comes because of a lack of adequate self-worth. If you get your self-image together you can keep envy under control, and prevent its energy from dominating your emotions. Next we see-

### III. THE EASING OF ENVY.

I could have said the erasing of envy, but this would be unrealistic. We will not be able to eliminate all non-loving emotions. They are a part of the package of life, and it is self-defeating to be plagued by the presence of such emotions as envy. Just accept it as a force that has to be dealt with, like pimples, mosquitoes, or rainy Saturdays. Look at your negative emotions as a testing of your love. Can you cope with it, or do you collapse under it? The Christian needs to learn how to handle the negatives of life so as to ease the pressure, and be able to choose love rather than be carried away by the negatives.

One of the ways we can all help ease the pressure provoked by envy is to recognize the worth of all members of the body. The church often gets so caught up in the culture that all of its focus is on the superstars. Christians are as bad as the world in their exaltation of the few, and their neglect of the many. We need to counteract this tendency and appreciate people for being who they are. It is the glorifying of the gifts of the few that leads to rivalry just as we see it in the Corinthian Church. Some were saying, "I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ." Where is the group that says I am of Joe Blow or John Q. Smith? We create envy and rivalry by creating a hierarchy of gifts and forget that love is the greatest, and that love is the level where we are all equal. Joe Blow or Jane Doe may not have equal ability in many areas, but they are equally objects of God's love, and are to be equally loved by the body.

If this is practice, and people feel loved, there is no need for envy to get a foot hold. When love reigns each member of the body can rejoice that others are superior in ways they are not, for that just adds so much more to the body. My leg loves my arm and does not feel bad

that my arm can throw a ball better than it can. The whole body is grateful for all the different gifts of the individual members, for each gift makes the body as a whole more capable. The diversity and the many superiority's of one member over the others are not causes for envy, but for enjoyment.

Christians need to develop the unity of the body to erase the power of envy. Ruth Esbyornson says Christians can move in this direction by developing the ability to empathize. When you hear another Christian play an instrument, instead of wishing you could play like that, you enter into the blessing of the music and enjoy it. It becomes your music as one part of the body provides something for another part.

By empathy it becomes your music. It is not a cause for rivalry but of unity. When one Christian has had the chance to travel and see the world do not be envious that it was not you, but enter into the picture and see the world through their eyes and their experience. It is by empathy that we can see the treasures and feel the thrills of other members of the body. By empathy you make the experiences of all the members of the body become your experience. Life is made full, and you are enriched by the experience and gifts of others. You cannot be the ear, eye, nose, mouth, skin, arm, leg, and all the members of the body. No member can be the whole body, but each member can enter into the experience of the whole body, and by so doing enjoy the wider experiences of the whole body.

Do not limit your life to what you have done and feel, but by empathy enter into the experience of all the members of the body. By doing so you enjoy the blessings that go beyond your own limitations, and this eases the pressure of envy. Why envy that which enriches your life, and the life of the whole body? Empathy eases envy, and if it is consistently practiced a Christian can escape the power of envy to hurt his life. This is easier to do in an atmosphere where we do not promote pride. When the gifted are made to feel they deserve special praise and honor, we are back on the world's level where pride reigns. Jesus said the truly great are those who serve. The gifted are to be a blessing to the whole body, and the great are those who minister to all.

The pride pattern is to exalt the class president, the star athlete, the beauty queen, and make them the recipients of honor. This is what leads to envy. As Leslie Flynn says, "We try to blow out the other fellow's light when it shines more brightly than our own." But we need not feel that way if we can see the other's light is for our enlightenment and enrichment. Any Christian who is superior to us in any way is for our blessing. Their superiority is to serve the members of the body who do not have their gift. When love is kind, and all gifts are used for the good of the whole, then love is not envious, for there is no need to feel envy toward that which is a blessing.

It is rivalry that promotes envy. Gen. 30:1 says Rachel envied her sister. It is because Leah and Rachel were rivals and not partners. Joseph's brothers envied him, and so it is all through the Bible and history. Rivalry builds up envy, but unity and empathy eases envy. The reasons we envy other Christians is because of our lack of love. If we could feel we are one with them, and that we were all part of the family of God, then we could better handle the emotion of envy. I would love to hear that my brother or sister won a trip around the world, or ten thousand dollars a week for their life. Even more so if one of my children had

such a good fortune, but I would probably envy if such good fortune came to one of my peers. The reason is that I do not love them on the same level. It is lack of love that leads to envy.

Had the rulers of Israel loved Jesus, and saw His fame and popularity with the people as a blessing, they could have entered into and enjoyed the ministry of Jesus. But instead, they saw Him as a rival and a threat. In Matt. 27:18 we read that Pilate, "Knew that for envy they had delivered Him." This four letter word is a four letter demon that will destroy all that is good and precious. This enemy will always be with us, but we can take the pressure off and let it be a force in our lives if we grow in love, for love does not envy.

I envy, but love does not, and so only as I and love become one can envy be eased out of my life. It may not be easy, but we must work at it. We should practice loving actions to get rid of envy. Go and do something good for someone you envy. The more love you learn to express, the more you will see envy fade, and you learn by experience that love does not envy.

## **8. LOVE IS NOT PROUD Based on I Cor. 13:4**

Ignorance may be bliss, but it is a fools paradise when others are in the know. General Motors learned this the hard way back in the early 60's when they launched a campaign to sell their new compact, the Chevy Nova, in Mexico. It was a flop, and the sale figures were appalling. That is when their investigation discovered that Nova in Spanish means "No go."

History is filled with the blunders of big corporations who act first and think later. Back in the 1950's the Pepsodent Corporation decided to export their toothpaste to Southeast Asia. They took their success winning slogan from America with them. "You'll wonder where the yellow went, when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent." When nearly nobody was buying their product a vice-president was sent to investigate why. He discovered that the people in Southeast Asia chewed Betel Nut like Americans chew gum, but Betel Nut is much more expensive, and it stains the teeth. The stain teeth are a prized symbol of affluence. There was little demand for a product that promised to eliminate this status symbol. It would be the equivalent of trying to sell a product that would make gold look like copper.

Man, in his pride, is constantly trying to impose his ideas and values on others without knowing the others and their needs. Love listens before it speaks. It is patient in striving to understand the other. It is kind in seeking to meet the needs of the other. Non-love is just the opposite. It comes to conclusions about the other based, not on the other, but on the self. I think this is what is good for them, or bad for them. I think this is the way they should go, and the way they should be. It does not ask what others feel, but operates on how the self

feels, and it seeks to impose those feelings on the other. Not only is this a disaster when business does it, it is a tragedy when tyrannical governments do it to their people, and it is a catastrophe when the church does it to people.

When Jesus came into the world He did not come in pride to dominate, and to have His own needs met. He came in love to serve and meet the needs of others. He knew what those needs were. People did not need more religious laws, and they did not need more religious ritual. They did not need condemnation, what they needed was to know that God loved them in spite of their sin. They needed to know God cared, and that He cared enough to find a way out of the dilemma of a holy God relating to sinful man. They needed to know that God had provided a way to forgive sin. They needed to know that God wanted them to have life, and life abundant. No wonder the common people heard Jesus gladly, and flocked to be near Him. He gave the sinner a sense of self-worth.

Pride does not do this, but love does. Pride seeks to take from others and not give. Pride does not care to serve, but to be served. Pride is always self-centered, whereas love is always others centered. This is why the people flocked to Jesus. They knew He loved them. This is why they fled from the Pharisees, for they knew they loved only themselves, and they thanked God that they were not as other men.

A test was given to 676 students at the University of Illinois. They found that the number one characteristic that both males and females did not like about another student was conceit. The person who thinks too highly of himself is the only one who turns everyone else off. A sophomore said to a freshman said, "The trouble with you is that you are too conceited. I use to be that way too, but now I'm the nicest guy on campus." His progress in overcoming pride is very questionable.

People are constantly talking about finding themselves, but the Bible keeps telling us that the self is not something you find. The self is something you create by the choices you make. If you choose the path of pride, yourself is headed for the pits. If you choose the path of love, yourself is headed for the peak. Being proud is the refusal to accept the truth that without love you are nothing. Pride says I am something, and I am somebody on my own, and independent of God and His love. It is the spirit of defiance that says I need nothing of the image of God to be of worth.

Being loving goes the opposite way and says I am nothing without love. I am dependent upon God for my self-worth. I only have worth because God made me in His image and gave me eternal value. Which person really feels best about himself? The loving person is the one who does, for he knows his worth is not just in how he feels, but it is in how God feels. His self worth is not in subjective feelings, but in the objective promise of God. He knows that what is done to the least of God's children is done to God, and so even if he feels he is the least of the lot, he is still of infinite worth to God, and so he can have love for himself.

This self-love which is based on the love of God for you is also a form of pride, but it is not sinful or destructive. It gets somewhat confusing when we use the same word for both the terrible and the tremendous, but the fact is, we do. We are proud of our children and grandchildren. We are proud of our school, team, or church. We are proud to be

Americans, and proud to be Christians. So before we look at what love is not, we need to see that there is a positive pride which prevents the pits.

The Bible and psychology are in full agreement that self-esteem and self-respect are essential to a healthy personality. It is not dangerous or damaging to recognize the worth of the individual. It is, in fact, a Christian duty. Paul says we are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and start boasting in conceit that we are really something. But it is also true that we need to think high enough of ourselves so that we have a sense of self-worth. The Christian is one who has enough self-worth to feel he does not want to loose his reputation by doing what is foolish or sinful. I think of myself too highly to tell a dirty joke from the pulpit. It is a sense of pride that would keep me from damaging my self-image that way. There are things we are all kept from by our sense of pride. Pride keeps us from being dirty and slovenly. We would not wear a dirty shirt with big holes in it to church. We comb our hair, shave, and try to look presentable because we have a sense of self-worth, and we want to be acceptable in appearance as well as behavior. This is all a part of praiseworthy pride.

It is important that Christians see the positive side of pride, for if all self-worth is bad, it forces the Christian into the intolerable position of not being able to be honest about values and excellence. If you bake the best cherry pie in your circles, it is not pride to know that, or to be told that. It is legitimate to accept compliments and praise for your skill, and not have to think that Christian humility demands that you act like your pies are not fit for the pigs. All gifts, talents, and skills are to be recognized for their excellence and value, and each one who possesses such should feel good about what God has blest them with, and feel pride in their cooperation with God in developing their gift. This kind of pride is a virtue. As long as pride is cooperative, and is an aid to uniting people, it is on the side of love, and is that necessary ingredient in the Christian life to obey God's command to love your neighbor as yourself.

It is only when this self-love leads you to the pride that seeks self-glory to the detriment of the body, and which leads to competition and division within the body, that it crosses over to the negative side. Pride is a good thing that can go bad, and that is why it needs to be constantly checked and evaluated in the light of love. Love is always the greatest because it is love that helps us keep all things in balance. Here is a poem that expresses a popular idea I have heard many times.

Sometime when you are feeling important,  
Sometime when you ego is in bloom,  
Sometime when you take it for granted  
You are the best fellow in the room;

Sometime when you feel that your going  
Would leave an unfillable hole,  
Just follow the simple instructions  
And see how they humble your soul:

Take a bucket, fill it with water,

**Put your hand in it up to the wrist,  
Pull it out, and the hole remaining  
Is the measure of how you will be missed.**

**Author unknown**

**The problem with this idea is that it goes too far, and it fights pride by damaging the self-image. It reduces the person to nothing, and makes the self of zero worth. That is as anti-Christian as the pride which makes the self a god. Love gives us balance, and it helps us see the self as of great worth to God and to man. But it keeps the self-worth limited so it does not soar beyond its bounds, for love loves God as well, and in loving God it comes to know that He is the source of all worth, and He has placed worth on all by His grace. He has made the salvation of all possible by the gift of love, which is the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior. All legitimate pride is pride in God and His love, and the worth He has placed on all people.**

**Some are proud of their face; Some are proud of their race, Some are proud of their lace, but Christians are to be proud of God's grace. This is God's favor which is given because He loves us, and because we are of infinite worth to Him. Self-love is a virtue as long as it is balanced, and as long as it is only one aspect of love. If you love God supremely, and love your neighbor as well as yourself, then you have the balance that prevents the vice of pride taking over. Self-love becomes the vice of pride by making the self the only object of love, and all other loves are excluded. God is cut out, and so are all others, and it becomes a love perverted, and like all perversions of good things it becomes a bad thing. The higher the value that is perverted, the worse the evil of it, and because pride is a perversion of the highest virtue of love, it is the worst of vices. It is the king of the 7 deadly sins. Now let's look at the other side.**

**The path of pride leads to the pits. It is considered the parent of all other sins, for it was the sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. You shall be as God's is the appeal of the tempter, and it is hard for anyone to resist the opportunity to play God. That is the essence of pride. Pride exalts the self to the level of the supreme authority. It says, I am the master of my fate, and the captain of my soul. Pride not only puts its possessor in competition with God, and leads him to the pits, it is so offensive to others that it leads the world to the pits. Pride is the number one cause for the revolutions of history. The ruling class becomes a pack of proud snobs who consider all who are not in their class to be of little or no worth.**

**Madam Roland was once visiting an aristocratic chateau in France, and the lordly owner of the place said, "Show her into the servants hall." This snub made her so angry that she became a leader of the French Revolution. It is a story repeated over and over through history. People who are treated like dirt by the ruling class tend to want to bury that class. We saw it in South Africa. It was in that part of the world where Gandhi was made to feel sub-human, and where he began his fight for human rights and dignity, which he took back to India, and by which he began a revolution that changed the course of history. Pride which puts others down will inevitably put you down. Hitler and his Aryan pride destroyed millions of innocent people, but it also destroyed him.**

**People and powers of all kinds have always loved the idea of playing God. It was Satan's**

first, and man's first, sin. Pride led most of the rulers of Israel to their fall. The Roman Emperors loved to do the same thing. Caligula built a temple in his own honor. He sacrificed peacocks and flamingoes to his own statue. He even took a gold statue of himself with him. He had the most famous images of the gods of Greece brought to Rome where he lopped off the heads and substituted his own. Nero made a statue of himself 120 feet high, and did all manner of evil, for he felt he was god and could do as he pleased, for he answered to no one. These and many others demonstrated that pride goes before a fall, and that a halo can quickly become a noose as it slips down, and men are hanged by the folly of their pride.

Pride is primarily competitive, and love is primarily cooperative. This is not to say all competition is bad, for it is not so. It can be good in many ways, but when the goal of life becomes proving that you are superior to others, you are on a God-displeasing road that is heading for the pits. This is what leads to those personalities that are so obnoxious. They are all the time boasting of their superiority, and comparing themselves with others. They become conceited bores, and destroy the chance of being loved and loving. Pride's goal is to ever widen the gap between the self and others, for this magnifies the superiority of the self. The man with a million dollars is seldom happy if he is proud, for he lives with and associates with men with 10 million dollars, and they make him feel that gap. Love is just the opposite of pride. It's goal is to narrow the gap between self and others. The gifted person who loves does not make others feel inferior. He brings himself down to their level to be one with them, and to be a blessing to them.

Jesus is the greatest example of love narrowing the gap. He was infinitely above us, and He had the riches and glory of the universe at His disposal. He was on the top, and among the most intelligent creatures. Yet Jesus narrowed that gap-that infinite gap-and became a man on our level, and with our weaknesses. That is what love is all about. He did not use His superiority just to lord it over us, but He used it to lift us. He brought His power and glory down to our level that we might be saved and lifted to His level. His life and death reveal cooperation, and the stooping of the loftiest to lift the lowliest. Envy says, "I am less if you are more, and so I must seek to bring you down." Pride says, "I am more if you are less, and so I must seek to keep you down." Love says, "I am more if you are more, and so I must seek to lift you up." Love seeks to make life an adventure where everybody wins.

Pride says, "Why should I stoop to life others. I am above that. If others are too inferior to climb to my heights, that is their problem. I will enjoy my mountain air without them." Pride says, "I am superior because I am made to be served by others who are inferior." Love thinks just the opposite, and it says, "If I have a gift that makes me superior to others it is because God has selected me to be a blessing to others by means of this gift. I will use my gift to help and lift and encourage others so that they feel my gift is God's gift to them."

Those who are truly wise are humble about their gifts. Michaelangelo as an old man would be seen studying the works of the ancients, and when asked why he responded, "I go yet to school that I may continue to learn." Mozart on his death bed said, "Now I begin to see what might be done in music." Sir Isaac Newton after his life of fame and discovery said, "I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, while the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me."

Paul in the realm of spiritual truth says in v. 12, "Now I know in part..." He knew we are still only children in comparison to what infinite light God has for us. Let us not be proud of what we have attained, but be humble because we know we are just tasting of the riches that God has for us, and let us in love share what we have that others might enjoy the taste. Love is not proud that it has what some others do not have, but it is proud that it has what it can share with others so that all can have the pleasure of God's love in time.

## **9. LOVE IS NOT RUDE based on I Cor. 13:5**

The ship Tecumseh was engaged in a battle with the ship Tennessee. A torpedo struck the Tecumseh and it began to sink immediately. Out of a crew of 114 men, 93 went down with the ship because it sank so fast. Tunis Craven was the Commander and at the time the torpedo struck he was in the tiny pilothouse with the pilot. Both ran for the small opening in the pilothouse but only one could pass at a time. Craven stood back and said, "You first, sir." The pilot escaped, but Craven went down with the ship. Courtesy was extremely costly in that particular situation, and the natural response is to think it was foolish. Even Christians do not place that high a value on being courteous, but that is due to the fact that we seldom consider the value of polite behavior for the kingdom of God.

We are fully aware of the eternal dividends to be gained by a life invested in following Jesus, but we seldom realize the potential gains to be made for both time and eternity by being courteous and polite. In other words, we do not bring out Christianity down into the practical level of everyday behavior. Agape love is segregated and reserved for special occasions only.

A survey of employees who were dismissed by 76 firms showed that only 10% lost their jobs because they lacked mechanical skill. The other 90% lost their jobs because of bad manners. A rude person who is not courteous and polite is a liability in every area of life. But one who has these qualities is always an asset. Therefore, a Christian has an obligation to be courteous, even if the Bible had nothing to say about the issue. The Bible does, however, have much to say about it because it is directly linked to agape love. Paul tells us in v. 5 that love is not rude. Phillips has it, "Love has good manners." Berkeley has it, "It is not conceited or unmannerly."

We could generalize and say that whatever is socially offensive is behavior which is incompatible with agape love. A Christian who is filled with this fruit of the Spirit will not be offensive because of personal ill behavior. His beliefs may be offensive to others, but his attitudes and manners are to be above reproach if he is to be a true channel of God's agape love. Beauty and charm are to characterize Christian conduct. This beauty of the soul is far more significant than beauty of the body. Fleshly beauty is a matter of chance, but spiritual beauty is a matter of choice. Every Christian has an obligation of God and man to be



beautiful of soul by not behaving in an offensive manner. Those filled with the Spirit will be truly ladies and gentlemen.

Dr. Buckingham once said, "Wendel Phillips is the most beautiful person I ever saw...what I mean by beauty is his grace of character, his kindly generous manners, his brightness of mind, and his perfect purity and whiteness of soul." Every Christian should strive to fit that description. There are people who are proud of their offensive manners. I have heard many people say with a tone of pride, "I say just what I think, and I don't care who it is or who it hurts." This is supposedly a superior quality of character in comparison to the silent sufferer who doesn't strike back when his toes are stepped on, but according to the highest standard for Christian conduct, it is an inferior quality of character. In fact, it is incompatible with agape love, for agape love does not behave in such a proud conceited unmannerly way. Hilaire Belloc wrote,

Of Courtesy, it is much less  
Than Courage of Heart of Holiness,  
Yet in my walks it seems to me  
That the grace of God is in Courtesy.

The Christian must realize that all of his life is to be lived decently and in order, and not just during a church business meeting. No Christian ever has the right to be disrespectful, vulgar, or embarrassing to either a brother in Christ, or an unbeliever. When we do it, it is because we are not filled with the Spirit, and, therefore, not expressing agape love. Like the Corinthians we often fail to shape up and live in the perfect form of loveliness.

These clumsy feet, still in the mire,  
Go crushing blossoms without end,  
These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust  
Among the heart-strings of a friend.  
Author unknown

In relation to the unbeliever agape love makes the Christian care what other people think, and not so much about you, but about the Christ you claim to love and follow. The Christian guided by love is cautious in the means he uses to gain his end. If he is rude and impolite, and in any way unethical in his behavior it is Christ who suffers. The Gentiles blasphemed God because of the behavior of the unfaithful Jews Paul said. Many reject Christ because of the behavior of professing Christians. Someone said, "the means some people use in getting ahead in this world probably means they are getting behind in the next." No means that is inconsistent with agape love has any part in the life of the Spirit led person.

One of the most common errors in thinking is that truth is always good. This is not so, for truth can be a great evil. A great deal of truth is evil in itself. All of the smutty and pornographic literature is dealing with what is real and true. The Chicago scandal sheet deals with bloody and gruesome facts. Gossip is often dealing with what is true. The world is filled with true things that have no place in the Christian life. Truth can be a weapon of the most cruel nature, and can be used with the most depraved motives to crush and destroy other persons. Francis de Sales said, "Judicious silence is far preferable to the truth roughly

told." Agape love will often be silent when the tongue of flesh is aching to speak what is true.

Another area of life where we fail to express agape love is in the area of judging. Christians often behave unseemly at this point. Instead of giving people the benefit of the doubt we are so quick to hold them guilty until proven innocent. It is by being guilty of this myself that I have learned the folly and unkindness of it. It shows contempt for a basic principle of our way of life that says one is innocent until proven guilty. For example, we are so conditioned to think according to generalizations and categories and labels that persons are irrelevant to our conclusions. If a man belongs to a certain group, convention, church, or school of which I have formed an opinion, then I do not need to bother with finding out what the person believes, for I simplify everything by accepting or rejecting him on the basis of his association. This is a common reason for much evil thinking and judging.

Persons are the primary value in Christian thinking. Every individual is to be accepted or rejected for his or her personal views and commitments. To judge any person by impersonal things such as labels and associations is not only being false logic, it is being false to love, for love does not behave that way. A New England Episcopal Bishop met a young minister at a social gathering, and when he discovered he was a Congregationalist he said, "Mr Jones, excuse me, but while I recognize you as a gentleman, I cannot recognize you as a Christian." "That's all right Bishop, for while I can recognize you as a Christian, I cannot recognize you as a gentleman." Mr. Jones was right, for no man is a gentleman who judges another by a mere label. May we so yield to the Holy Spirit, and become such channels of agape love that we shall be recognized as both Christian and gentlemen, or ladies, as the case may be.

One of the major problems of the Christian life is the folly of waiting for some big opportunity to serve the Lord. This leads to meanwhile missing the many opportunities to so His will in the everyday routine of life. Dr. Paul Tournier wrote, "Love is not some great abstract idea or feeling. There are some people with such a lofty conception of love that they never succeed in expressing it in the simple kindness of ordinary life. They dream of heroic devotion and self-sacrificing service. But waiting for the opportunity which never comes, they make themselves very unlikable to those near them, and never sense their neighbor's need."

This has implication for our relationship to the world that we seldom consider. The eminent biologist T. C. Schneirla studied all types of life from the ameba to man, and concluded there is one fundamental activity common to all of them, and that is approach and withdrawal. When confronted by a stimulus that enhances pleasure the ameba moves toward the stimulus. If it is harmful it moves away. All of life seeks what is pleasurable and shrinks from what is painful. All of life moves toward what is positive and helpful. It moves toward love and away from what is not love. If the Christian is not polite, kind, and courteous, people will move away from them, but if they are loving, and all that goes with love, then people will move toward them and the Savior they represent. It is loving behavior that will draw people to Christ, and bad manners will keep them away. Just read this testimony and you realize how little Christians realize how their behavior looks to the world.

"Presently our daughter Laurie is going to college and working as a waitress in a restaurant. She frankly agrees with other waitresses that Sunday is the worst day to work. As

one of the non-Christian waitress friend said, "It's horrible on Sundays with all those Christians coming in. All you hear is griping and unreasonable demands from them. They have little fights among themselves, they complain about the menu and the prices, and they are just plain disagreeable. Then, after I serve their food, they stop everything, bow their heads, fold their hands, and pray their little prayer. It blows my mind because right after their prayer they are their same mean old selves." These Christians are totally unaware of how they are witnessing to the worthlessness of being a Christian.

When a Christian is aware of the importance of love in every relationship they will seek to add oil to the machinery and not sand. The goal is to keep things running smoothly, and to keep people living in harmony. The loving Christian is always seeking for ways to counteract friction and ease tension, and not add to it. Rudeness is insensitive and does not care if other people are offended or not. Rudeness says I have a feeling that I am going to express, and if it hurt others that is tough. It is a form of pride that says all that matters is how I feel, and how others feel is no concern of mine. When a movie wants to express the essence of pride and rudeness they have a motorcycle gang ride into town and destroy property and treat people like dirt. It is so obvious as evil that we despise them, but we fail to see we do the same thing when we show disrespect to others by being rude.

This is a major problem in marriages. Arnold Bennett wrote while single, "In a long and varied career as a bachelor, I have noticed that marriage is usually the death of politeness between a man and a woman." Smiley Blanton said, "The typical husband will be quite considerate and attentive with his friends' wives. He'll open car doors for them, help them on with their coats-but somehow consider himself exempt from such niceties where his own wife is concerned. That kind of neglect is hurtful to women, who tend to equate it with lack of affection. Isn't it foolish not to try to make a good impression on the woman you will be seeing constantly for the rest of your life?"

The Corinthians were hurting the church-the bride of Christ, by their rudeness, and we often do the same to our brides by this form of non-love. There are so many ways to be non-loving. It is no wonder we fail constantly, but if we realize when we fail we are growing in love. What love is, we are not, is the essence of what Paul is saying in this great love poem. He is saying it in a dozen different ways so we get the point that we are a long way from the goal, and we need to keep on moving. We cannot stop and be content with where we have arrived, for wherever we are it is still a long way from the ideal of agape love. Our growth in love is never done in this life.

If we lived on a deserted island we would have no problem being kind and courteous. All the characteristics of love, however, are relational, and if you have no one to relate to you cannot be loving. Until we are able to relate to all people in love we are not through growing. Marjorie Holmes writes of just what a struggle it is to be loving in all relationships, and hold back the rudeness that wants to let loose. We have all been where she is. She writes, "Right now, calm my exasperation as I try for the third time to get that telephone operator to respond. Let me sit gently, think gently, speak gently when the connection is made.....Help me to practice gentleness in small inconveniences like this as well as large problems with those close to me. If I can just keep gentle, firm but gentle, then I'll be better able to meet life's major crises with dignity and strength."

John Wesley was once put to the test. After he preached on the village green he was invited to the home of a wealthy man for lunch. Other guests were there, including a local preacher who was seated next to the lovely daughter of the wealthy host. She was noted for her love of luxury which was conspicuous by the several rings on her hand. The thoughtless visitor seized the hand of the young lady and said to Wesley across the table, "What do you think of this sir for a Methodist hand?" The girl was embarrassed, and began to turn crimson for everybody knew Wesley's aversion to finery and materialism. Wesley could have joined the flow of rudeness that was begun, but he nipped it in the bud and with a smile he said kindly, "The hand is very beautiful." He was not compromising his convictions, but he knew that love demanded that this was a time to ease the girl's fears and embarrassment. Love has a time for judgment, but this was not the time, and in that setting it was time for love to be courteous and not rude. May God help us all to be as sensitive as Wesley was in our relation to people we can help or harm by how we express love, or fail to express it.

## **10. LEGALISM VERSUS LOVE Based on Matt. 5:20**

We live in a world where competition is a master motive. When the news reached Russia in 1945 that the United States dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Stalin ordered secret scientists to find a way to catch up to the U.S. Andrei Sakharov was only 24 years old then, but his brilliant mind was fired by the challenge of the competition. So much so that he helped Russia leap frog ahead by developing the hydrogen bomb months before the United States.

Then when Russia surprised the world with Sputnik, and beat the U. S. into space, American scientists reacted with such a competitive spirit that they quickly thrust the U. S. into the lead, and on to be the first to reach the moon. Is it really love, or is it competition that makes the world go round? One of the reasons we look to the Olympics with anticipation is because man is a competitive creature. Will Durant in *The Lessons of History* writes, "So the first biological lesson of history is that life is competitive." Even cooperation, he goes on to say, is a tool of competition. We cooperate with our group, be it family, club, church, nation, or race, in order to strengthen our group in its competition with others. It is human nature to want their group to be the best. Everybody enjoys the opportunity of saying, we are number one, top dog, high man on the totem, king of the hill, and champions.

I have been in enough church league sports to know that one of the things that being saved doesn't change is the competitive spirit. Christians love competition as much as anyone, and they love to come out on top as often as they can. Some of the largest Sunday Schools in our country got that way by well organized contests where the competitive spirit

was used to motivate people to come and bring others. Christians are challenged by competition. They love to win and set records. They love to win prizes, and gain honor and status. All of this carries some risk, of course, for one can get so caught up in competition that winning is everything, and other values are lost.

The story is told of three churches that sat on three of the four corners at one intersection. It was a hot Sunday morning, and the windows were open in each church. The Methodist began their service by singing Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown? The Presbyterians then began to sing No Not One, No Not One. Finally, the Baptist began with O That Will Be Glory For Me. It is like the Pastor of a small church which was not growing. He thanked God that none of the other churches were growing either. The competitive spirit can be dangerous and divisive as well as delightful.

Dr. Milburn describes how people use to act in the days of river travel. "If another boat came in sight, you find yourself becoming anxious that she shall not pass you. If she gains upon your craft, all your fears about the danger of racing are laid aside. And with your fellow passengers, male and female, you are urging the captain to do his best....Side by side the boats go thundering along, and so completely has the thought of winning taken possession of you, that you would almost as soon be blown up as beaten." This is the same competitive spirit that leads so many youth to be killed or injured in racing. Competition can become so strong that it drives out all fear of danger, and this can be good or bad depending on the situation.

The fact is, there is no escape from competition. You might just as well try to eliminate the trivial from life as to try and eliminate competition. Jesus, in this great sermon to His followers, uses the language of competition. He begins this sermon with the beatitudes which are promises of prizes. Christian life can be tough, but it is worth it, for there will be great rewards for those who take the risks and endure the rigors of it. Then Jesus, like a coach before a big game, gives His team a pep talk to motivate them to do their best. "There is a job to do, and you have got to do it. The salt has got to be active, and the light has to shine. The opponents are tough, and Jesus says, you can't afford fumbles and penalties. Don't neglect the least of the rules of the game. Go out there and be great." Then in verse 20 He sets the standard for His team. He says, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." Paraphrased, He is saying, "Unless you guys play better than your opponents you won't make it to the Super Bowl."

Now you may not like the football analogy, but choose your own sport or arena of competition to illustrate what Jesus is saying. You can't escape it. He is using competitive language like least, great, and exceed. Jesus is saying that He wants His followers to be winners, and that means being better than the religious leaders of Israel. That is competition, and the whole thrust of this chapter is competition. Jesus says, here is the old standard, but you are to do better than that. The Christian is to set new records, and leave the Old Testament saints in the dust when it comes to fulfilling the law.

The Old Testament saints loved their neighbors, but you are to go one better, and love your enemies. The challenge of Jesus to Judaism is matched by another challenge by the

Gentile world at the close of this chapter. Jesus says, if you love those who love you, that is no better than what tax collectors can do, and even Gentiles can't compete on that low level of love. Jesus says, the Christian is to do more, and rise above Judaism and the natural religions of the world. It is, an anything you can do I can do better challenge, that the Christian is to rise to.

Now its not too much of a threat to Christians to compete with tax collectors and pagans. It seems like this is a fairly easy challenge, but when Jesus says we are to exceed the Pharisees, and be better than them, and the Scribes, in righteousness, it is a scary challenge, because they are real pros and formidable foes. The more you know of these guys the Christian team has to beat, the more you realize the story of David and Goliath is a never ending conflict. Jesus is asking amateurs to be superior to the pros, and this sounds like more than any coach ought to expect. Competition can be demoralizing when the non-gifted are pitted against the gifted. Most Christian would feel inadequate compared with the Scribes and Pharisees.

One of Rossini's pupils composed a funeral march commemorating the death of Ludwig von Beethoven. He took it to his master who listened attentively to the uninspired work played falteringly by the amateur. He said, "The circumstances would have been more favorable if you had died, and Beethoven had composed the march." The amateur can't be expected to compete with the pro. Yet, Jesus does not just expect Christian to be in the race with the Scribes and Pharisees, He expects Christians to beat them. In fact, He says you don't even qualify to enter the race unless you can beat them. This is a very discouraging demand if we think Jesus is saying that we have to beat them at their own game. This would be like expecting David to beat Goliath in Saul's armor. It wouldn't work. There is no way Christians could be more righteous than the Scribes and Pharisees on the level of what they called righteousness. They obeyed more rules in a day than most Christians would in a year.

When Jesus says we must exceed them He is talking about a totally different quality of righteousness where even the amateur can surpass the pro. It is not only possible, it is easy when we understand the difference between their righteousness and Christian righteousness. Not understanding this distinction could lead you to feel like the two cows standing in the field when a milk truck came down the road. On the side of the truck it said, MILK-PASTEURIZED AND HOMOGENIZED. The one cow looked at the other and said, "It's not use, we just can't compete with them trucks."

We know there is a radical distinction between the cows and the truck. One is a creator of milk, and the other is only a carrier. So it is with the righteousness that the Christian is to produce that exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees. Christian righteousness is to fulfill the law, and, thus, the purpose of the creator of the law. The competition does not do that. They are only carriers of the law and tradition. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Nothing gives one a more spuriously good conscience than keeping rules, even if there has been a total absence of all real charity and faith." To better grasp this distinction we need to study the contrast between the two kinds of righteousness. We need to grasp the strategy of our opponents if we expect to counter it with a superior strategy. So let's examine first-

## **I. THE OPPOSITION GAME PLAN.**

**Their strategy is really quite simple. It is the oldest and most popular strategy of history. It is the religion of the rule book, also known as legalism. All you have to do to be righteous is to keep the rules. If you don't break any rules you can't suffer any penalties, and so you are bound to be a winner. This is appealing to human nature. It leads to a sense of security. You know where you are at, and you are in control of your own destiny it seems, and once you get into the rut, life is predictable and carefree. Legalism may get technical, but it is always cut and dried. You always know what is right, for everything is regulated by the rules. You don't have to bother with all the complexity of motives, for all that matters are deeds.**

**If you don't kill, that is all that matters. The fact that you are full of hatred and resentment toward another is no issue, for as long as you keep the law by not killing you are righteous. No matter how corrupt you are in your inner life, as long as you do not externally violate the rules you are alright. Legalistic righteousness is all a matter of external conduct. It has nothing to do with the inner life. This makes religion easy, for it means you don't have to be like God at all. You can harbor all kinds of negative attitudes of prejudice, envy, and bitterness of all sorts, and yet be a religious leader. All you have to do is keep the rules.**

**The beauty of it to human nature is that you don't have to change the inner man. All you have to do is conform to external conduct that is in harmony with the rule book. This is religion made easy, and it has been popular all through history. Christianity has had plenty of this as well. The most evil of men can be religious leaders with this strategy. You can be a leader in the Mafia, and still be a good Catholic at the same time. You can be a corrupt politician and still be a good Baptist in good standing at the same time. All that matters is that you obey the rules of the game in public. What you do when you are not playing at religion is your own business. Then you can do what your real inner nature compels you to do. As long as you keep the rules when you are being religious you are acceptable. No sinner could ask for a better religion than one of legalistic righteousness.**

**You don't have to care about God, people, or anything but yourself. You can have your cake and eat it too. The Scribes and the Pharisees were the worst hypocrites that ever lived, but they were also the world's champion ruler keepers. What other strategy but legalism could make this possible. It is perfect for people who want to be super religious, but who don't want to be bothered with God's will and purpose in history.**

**Jesus came to blast the ship of legalism out of the water, but it persists in staying afloat, and competing for men's loyalty. The spirit of legalism has been a part of Christian history. People are led to believe they are super Christians because they keep all kinds of rules. They may be obnoxious people full of bitterness and prejudice, and with little or no love, but they are champion rule keepers, and so are convinced that this is what Christianity is all about. The problem with legalism is it locks one into a narrow rut, and it can feel so comfortable that one cannot change and get out of the rut.**

**Jewish Christians who were raised up under legalism had a hard time adjusting to their liberty in Christ. They had a tendency to slip back into the security of legalism. The**

Pharisees were so locked in that they could not see the value of what Jesus was doing in healing on the Sabbath. Jesus put the value of the person above the law, and they refused to change, but would stick to their game plan no matter what. It didn't matter who got hurt, even if it was God Himself, for they would stick to their game plan. Jesus does not expect us to compete on that level and be better legalists than they were. He has a totally different game plan which we want to look at.

## **II. THE WINNING GAME PLAN.**

In contrast to the righteousness based on legalism, Jesus promotes a righteousness based on love. It is better than the rule book religion, not because it forsakes the rules, but because it fulfills the rules. Legalism stops short of God's value system, and it makes precepts the highest value. Love goes beyond this to make persons the highest value. The legalist says that the law must be obeyed regardless of who gets hurt. What really matters is the law and not people. You do what has to be done, and if people have to suffer its worth it, because this is the only way to win.

William Faulkner said, "If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the ode on a Grecian Urn is worth any number of old ladies." This is the value system of the legalist. The Scribes and Pharisees did not care about old ladies, or sick ladies, or anybody. Jesus healed a number of them on the Sabbath, and they hated Him for it. It was great for the people healed, and there was much rejoicing, but Jesus was not following the rule book. Jesus loved people, and they loved the rule book. This is the main distinction between their righteousness and the winning righteousness Jesus expects Christians to have. This is what exceeds their righteousness, for it is based on a superior value system.

Jesus did not come to abolish the rule book, but to fulfill it, and by that He meant that He came to rescue it from the ridiculous absurdity to which the Scribes and Pharisees had reduced it. Jesus came to restore the law to the level of love where its original intent could be accomplished by aiding people to love God and their neighbor more effectively. The law is not fulfilled just because you don't kill a man. It is only fulfilled when you love and respect him as one made in the image of God, and as one who is loved of God the same as you are. Fulfilling the law and love are one and the same.

What this means is, God is not a legalistic person who sits in heaven with a celestial calculator keeping track of how many times a law is obeyed. God does not get his kicks out of statistics saying this is a good day for commandment number 6, for two billion people kept this one today, but number 4 is down, for only 480 million kept that one. God is not infatuated with the law. God so loved the world means that He loves the people of the world. The purpose of the law is for man's benefit, and not for God's statistical tables. What matters to God is that man's evil nature be controlled, and that he be restored to the image of God where love is the dominate motive in his life.

The righteousness that exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees is the righteousness of Christ, which we partake of when we surrender to Christ as Lord. When Jesus comes in, self-righteousness goes out, and that is what conversion is all about. You cannot be a Christian and enter the kingdom of heaven with a law dominated righteousness.



**The only kind of righteousness acceptable in the kingdom of God is the righteousness of Christ, which is love righteousness. This means that what is right is what is loving and best for persons.**

**How is this better than legalistic righteousness? Just look at the life of Jesus. He is the model of His message. When He encountered a need He let love, and not the law, determine His response. The law said do not work on the Sabbath, but when Jesus saw a need crying out for action, He responded in love and compassion, and He healed on the Sabbath. He was hated by the ruler keepers, for they said that keeping the rules is more important than helping the people. Love says just the opposite. You help the people, and let the law wait.**

**But isn't this anti-law? Does it not set a dangerous precedent? Not at all. Love is not thoughtless. Love asks, what is the purpose of the law? The answer is, that man might be benefitted. God's intention in giving the Sabbath is that man might not be a slave to materialism. God demanded that men leave their labor and learn to rest and relax. They are to develop the higher values of life in the mental and spiritual realm. God's whole motive in the law was to lift people to a higher spiritual level. This being the case, love does not violate the law by doing anything that lifts and blesses man, for that is its very purpose. The letter of the law may be broken, but it is broken for the sake of fulfilling its intent. If that is the case, then let it be broken, for the goal is not to keep a law, but to be a blessing to people.**

**Those who follow legalistic righteousness are bound by the law, for the law is the absolute. Those who follow loving righteousness are free to make decisions about the law, for the law is not the absolute, but persons are. There is flexibility in love to chose that which is best for the persons. Jesus says that this is the winning game plan. This is the value system that makes the Christian superior to the best of the Scribes and Pharisees. Jesus goes on in this sermon to give specific ways in which loving righteousness is superior to the legalistic righteousness. We will be looking at these in coming weeks. For now, let me share with you some examples of how we need to struggle to follow the winning game plan, and avoid the losing one of legalistic righteousness.**

**When I became a Pastor in rural South Dakota one of the first things I observed was that farmers do not obey the law the same way as city people do. Stop signs in the country do not possess the same authority that they do in the city. I was shocked as I watched Christian farmers go through stop signs like they were not there. They gave them about as little thought as they gave to their guardian angel. I was a law abiding citizen, however, and legalistically stopped at every stop sign. I even stopped at the one a mile from the church where you could see if anyone was coming for at least half a mile in either direction. I must admit I felt sort of strange stopping when I knew there was no one in sight, but the law is the law. When it came to stop signs I was a confirmed legalist.**

**I have to confess I felt somewhat superior to those Christians who felt free to not stop. It took time for me to see from their perspective. I never did feel free to ignore a stop sign, but I did learn to slow down and proceed with caution without stopping. Did those Christians make me a law breaker by their influence? No they didn't. They just help me see on a trivial level how easy it is to be legalistic. The purpose of the stop sign in the country is to prevent**

accidents by giving one roadway the right of way over another. Naturally, if a car is coming, everyone stops to let them have that right of way. That is the law. But if nobody is coming you can safely ignore the stop sign, and the law is still fulfilled.

This may sound like rationalizing and situation ethics, and that is exactly what it is, for that is what makes Christian ethics different from legalistic ethics. It is the freedom to think and act in a loving way depending on the changing situations. The city drivers have found a way to break the old law too so as to be more loving to drivers. The rule for many years was always to stop for red, and do not go until it is green. But then the law was changed so that it all depended on the situation. If you were at a red light waiting to turn right you could now proceed through the red light if there was no on coming traffic. People had to go through a lot of guilt feelings to get over going through a red light. I was already prepared by having learned to go through stop signs in the country.

This change in the law was anti-legalistic, and in favor of love, for it permits greater freedom of choice, and prevents unnecessary waste of time that serves no useful purpose. People do abuse this freedom, and there are risks that go with it as in all freedom, but unless studies show that the risks outweigh the value, this freedom to go through red lights under certain conditions will remain a part of our lives. The purpose of lights and stop signs is not to get people stopped who desire to get somewhere. The purpose is to protect and keep people moving toward their goal as safe and fast as possible. Since that is the purpose, you can then fulfill the purpose of the light by violating its basic meaning which is to stop. That is what red has always meant in a traffic light. But now we violate that meaning and break it, but do so in order to fulfill the purpose of it.

This should help us see what Jesus was doing with the Old Testament law. He was fine tuning it, and making it more useful to the end for which it was given, which was to lift man to a higher level of love for God and man. All of God's rules are for man's good, and they are to be for man's blessings and not to be burdens. Jesus calls us to rise above mere legalism, and to get in on the purpose of God which is to love and to lift.

Paul was once locked into legalistic righteousness. He was a Pharisee of the Pharisees. Jesus set Paul free from that prison, and Paul became a great champion of the loving righteousness of Christ. He went on to save Christianity from the Judaisers. Had the Judaisers won the battle Christianity would have been a mere rerun of Judaism. They said every Christian must be circumcised according to the law of Moses, and they tried to coerce the Gentiles to conform to this conviction. Paul fought hard against this legalism, and he won the battle, and set Christians free from bondage to the law, which was no longer relevant to those who were made righteous in Christ.

We are in a world of great religious competition. We will all tend to follow one of these two strategies: The legalistic or the loving, the rule book power, or relationship power. Tom Garrett and his family were held prisoners by two prison escapees for 24 hours. A few days later he went to pick up his unemployment check and he was denied. The law clearly states an unemployed worker must be available for work every day of a normal work week. He was not available the day he was held captive and so did not qualify. This is the folly of legalism which sees the law as the ultimate rather than persons. If you want to be a winner, keep

checking your Christian life to see which strategy you follow. The petition in the Lord's Prayer, thy kingdom come, is only answered in the lives of Christians who choose love over legalism. The dynamics of the distinction between the two kinds of righteousness is seen in the effects on the world of people they touch. One drags people down, and is a burden that makes life hard. The other gives life a lift, and adds beauty to life. Is it legalism or love that motivates your life?

## **11. BODY LOVE Based on I Cor. 15:35-49**

I don't care how widely traveled you are, I know you have never sailed among the Island of Langerhans, or drifted lazily down the Aqueduct of Sylvius. Nor have any of you ever strolled along the banks of Hunter's Canal, or watched the sun go down behind McBurney's Point. None of you have ever ridden through the Tunnel of Carti, nor have you ever climbed the Pyramids of Malpighi. I can say this with confidence, not because I know where all of you have ever been, nor because all of these places are fictions and unreal. On the contrary, they are more abundantly real than most of the places you have ever been. But I can say this because all of these places are parts of our body.

The Islands of Langerhans are small masses of tissues in our pancreas.

The Aqueduct of Sylvius is part of the brain.

Hunter's Canal is in the thigh.

McBurney's Point is a spot on the right side which is tender to the touch in acute appendicitis.

The Tunnel of Carti is in the inner ear.

The Pyramids of Malpighi is in the kidneys.

The point of this little anatomy lesson is that there is a great deal about our bodies that we do not know. We live in them, but we know more about the house our body lives in than we know about our bodies, which is the house of our spirit. Sophocles said, "Numberless are the world's wonders, but none more wondrous than the body of man." We live in this wondrous temple 24 hours a day, and 365 days a year. We never leave this house in which we dwell until we die, for to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

This body we dwell in is the first part of man that God made. Man was a body before he was anything else. As Paul says in verse 46, the natural comes first than the spiritual. Man was first a body as a part of God's creation. Then God breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living soul. Man is a combination of the creation and the Creator. He has a material and a spiritual reality. He is akin to the animal, mineral, and vegetable on the one hand, and a kin to God and angelic beings on the other hand. In God's ultimate plan we can safely say that man is the best of both worlds. He is a mixture of both the dust and the divine.

As soon as man begins to lose his awareness of the reality of this combination, he loses his understanding of just who man is, and of the role his body plays in God's plan. All through history men have followed three basic philosophies concerning the body. They are-

The body is nothing.

The body is everything.

The body is something.

We want to examine each of these philosophies, for only by doing so can we come to a clear understanding of the biblical view of the body. This is important in understanding I Cor. 15, for this is the body center of the New Testament. There is no other part of the Bible where there is so much on the body, and where it is so basic to Christian doctrine. First let's look at the view-

## **I. THE BODY IS NOTHING.**

This does not mean that those who hold this view reject the existence of the body, but they do reject its significance. They say the body is not a value or an asset, but it is a liability, and so it is to be despised and held in contempt. Heraclitus considered death a blessing because it got rid of the contemptible burden of the body, which he called a fetter and dark abode of the soul. Epictetus called the body a corpse, a beast of burden, a product of filth. He referred to himself as, "A poor soul shackled to a corpse."

Pathogarus called it a soma-semas, that is a body tomb. Plato and Socrates felt that the body defiled the soul, and man could never be at his highest until he escaped the prison of his body and entered into the immortality of the soul. Seneca the Roman said, "I regard the body as nothing but a chain which monacles my freedom." Dr. Ralph Stob in Christianity and Classical Civilization writes, "It can be put down as a mark of the Graeco-Roman world that men wanted a deliverance from the body..."

There was another side to this, and some Greeks had a high view of the body. Aristotle came along and took an opposite stand from Plato, and he made the body of first priority, and he said it was before the soul, even as Scripture teaches. But the negative philosophy is what dominated the New Testament world. It gave rise to the great enemies of Christianity, who were the Gnostics. They picked up on the anti-body doctrine and made it fundamental to their theology. They said the body is evil and the source of all sin. Because of this they rejected the Incarnation. They said that Jesus could never take on a real body, for God is holy and could never enter into sinful flesh. He had to be in a phantom body, for real flesh is totally evil.

This negative body thinking influence both later Judaism and early Christianity. It was a part of the culture and people could not escape it without deliberate efforts to resist it. In the Wisdom of Solomon 9:15 it was written, "This contemptible body weighs down the soul..." Some Jews felt this way. Some Christians picked up this negative spirit and developed Asceticism, which is a very anti-body form of Christianity. The body was no friend, but was an enemy. You had to fight it constantly and deny it as much as possible. This led to celibacy in the church.

Truly spiritual people would not marry and engage in the practice of sex, for this was a body centered activity. Some of the church fathers said that sex even in marriage was a polluted way of life. Origin, one of the church fathers, went so far as to castrate himself to thrust the foul desires of the body from him. We do not have the time to trace the impact of Greek thought and Gnosticism in the history of the church, but let me assure you that it can be traced even into the present day so that many Christians feel about their body that which comes from Plato more than that which comes from the Bible. Christians are often more a product of their Western culture than they are a product of God's Word. The reason is obvious. They live in the culture 24 hours a day, and live in God's Word maybe 24 hours a year. The Greek view is not the biblical view, for it says the body is negative, and what matters is the immortality of the soul.

The anti-body feelings were so strong that at one point in Christianity it was considered giving comfort to the enemy to bathe. Some of the saints went for years without a bath, and vermin would fall from their bodies as they walked, and this was proof of their hatred for their body. Some of you probably have children who have a touch of Gnostic philosophy because they hate to bathe, but fortunately most Christians who have anti-body feelings do not carry it to such a logical conclusion.

Christians can, however, as Christians were in Corinth, carry their low view of the body into their theology and corrupt the Christian doctrine on the resurrection of the body. The idea that the body is nothing is anti-Christian, and totally out of line with the biblical view of the body. Next let's look at-

## **II. THE BODY IS EVERYTHING.**

Novalis expressed this view as strongly as anyone when he said, "There is but one temple in the world, and that is the body of man. Nothing is holier than this high form...We touch heaven when we lay our hand on a human body." The materialist says the body of man is all there is of man. There is no non-material spirit, but only matter. This is the view of the atheist and the secularist. The conclusion you come to with this view is, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." If the body is everything, then all life is good for is sheer animal pleasure. If it feels good, do it, for physical pleasure is all there is.

In contrast to those who say the body is evil, this view says the body is the only good, and anything that deprives the body of pleasure is evil. This leads to the rejection of all moral restraint and a libertine life-style. The body becomes an idol, and men worship it by devoting all their time, talent, and treasure to its exaltation. This view is totally anti-Christian, but it is a very popular view in our culture.

Evolution is taught in the schools, and youth get the impression that they are just another animal, and if there is a soul and a spiritual part of them, they do not get much insight into that. They become almost totally secular. I wonder how many young people are writing things like this essay I found on anatomy written by a young boy: "Your head is kind of round and hard and your brains are in it and your hair is on it. Your face is in front of your head where you eat. Your neck is what keeps your head off your shoulders, which are sort of shelves where you hook your overall straps...Your arms you got to have to pitch with and so

you can reach the biscuits. Your fingers stick out of your hands so you can scratch, throw a curve, and add arithmetic. Your legs is what you got to have to get to first base, your feet what you run on, and your toes are what gets stubbed. And that is all there is of you except what is inside, and I ain't seen that." We live in a culture where this is the common view. The body is everything, and without some instruction that will be the total view of persons. Next we look at-

### **III. THE BODY IS SOMETHING.**

Between the two extremes of those who say the body is nothing, or that the body is everything is the biblical view that the body is really something. It is not a trivial something, but a tremendous something, and a something without which we can never be fully what God made us to be. When God made the first human body, that of Adam, He had made the body out of which every other human being would come. For out of Adam He took Eve, and out of them came all other humans. In Adam all humanity was in a single body, and God pronounced it, not just good, but very good.

This body was the handiwork of God, and God made it to last forever. God was not just playing around with clay forming a body only to squash it and roll the lump into some other shape. He made Adam's body with the potential for immortality. He tells us this in Gen. 3:22, "And the Lord God said, the man is now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take hold of the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So God banished Adam and Eve from Eden, which was a place where they could have lived forever had they not eaten the forbidden fruit. The body God made was not weak and inadequate house for man. It was created to be his eternal palace. But they ate the wrong fruit, and God did not want man to live forever as a rebel, and so access to the tree of life was cut off. Even so, Adam lived 930 years before his body gave out and he died.

Death was an enemy and a punishment, but you can also see how death was essential for God's plan to save man. If he never died, he would be an immortal sinner like Satan. God did not want such a fate for man, and so it was ordained that he die. This made it possible for him to be redeemed and resurrected to life, not as an immortal sinner, but as an immortal saint. Even the great enemy death is used in the long run for the good of man. Better to die and rise to live forever holy than to live and never die, but be forever unholy. The choice was to let man live forever in hell, which is separation from God, or let him die and be raised to be forever with God. With these two options I think we can all agree that God made the best choice for us, even though it would cost His Son the tasting of death for every man.

The body is a God-made wonder, and should be honored as such. There is nothing Christian about treating the body like dirt and thinking that one is more spiritual because his body is weak, drab, filthy, or suffering. You don't have to go to the other extreme and replace praying with jogging, but the fact is, there is nothing anti-spiritual about a clean healthy body. Adam had the best and there is no hint in the Bible that the body of Jesus was anything less than an ideal specimen of health and strength. There is no virtue in being sickly or unkempt. Many a fool has developed muscles of steel and the lungs of a race horse, and still broke all the commandments, and so there is also no ultimate virtue in health and

strength in themselves.

The Christian view is that the body is not everything, but it is something, and something important to the total man. It should be treated with honor and loving care so it can be the best of what God made it to be. You don't worship it, but neither do you whip it. You work it by discipline to be a tool for God's glory, and you dedicate it as a temple in which God can dwell. The defamation of the body is anti-Christian, for it is a denial of the body as God's handiwork. The deification of the body is also anti-Christian, for it is idolatry, and it puts the body in competition with God.

In between these two extremes is the dedication of the body to be what its Creator intended; recognizing that He loves His handiwork enough to send His Son into the world to redeem the fallen body of man as well as his lost soul. In cooperation with God's plan the Christian is to love his body and discipline it to bring it under the control of God's standards. We often blame the body for our sin and folly, but the fact is, it is not the body at all, but our minds choices to force it, or to not discipline it. C. S. Lewis gives us an insight into the plight of the body by means of this verbal conflict of body and mind;

"You are always dragging me down, said I to my body.  
Dragging you down replied my body, well I like that!  
Who taught me to like tobacco and alcohol? You, of course, with your idiotic adolescent idea of being grown-up. My palate loathed both at first, but you had to have your way.  
Who put an end to all those angry and revengeful thoughts last night? Me, of course, by insisting on going to sleep.  
Who does his best to keep you from talking too much or eating too much by giving you a dry throat and headache and indigestion?  
Well what about sex? said I. Yes what about it retorted the body. If you and your wretched imagination would leave me alone I'd give you no trouble. You give me orders and then blame me for carrying them out.

Lewis is making a powerful point. The problem is not the body, but the things the body is forced to do by the mind. Sex is absolutely no problem as far as the body is concerned. God made the body for sex, and He built the body to enjoy great pleasure in sex. He told man to practice sex and populate the world. Then in the New Testament Paul makes it clear in I Cor. 7 that sex is to be a regular part of married life. Paul goes so far as to say, not only is it not a sin to have a lot of sin, but it is a sin not to, for soon as you cease to satisfy one another in marriage Satan will tempt you to find satisfaction outside of marriage.

The Christian method of preventing immoral sex is not to denounce the world of sexuality as the devil's plot, but rather to promote moral sex, and to exalt the joy and pleasure that God intended for the body. Don't blame the body is the point. The body is good and its sexuality is another of God's wondrous works of art. The way the body functions is not man's problem, for that is God's gift. The problem of man is that he will not discipline his

body to function within the guidelines God has established. If you want to blame anything, blame the disobedient spirit of man, but don't blame the body and start dragging in all this Gnostic heresy and foolish Christian asceticism that rejects the body as evil.

The body is not evil and sex is not evil, and nothing the body does is evil. There is no evil function of the body. It is God's handiwork and it is good. If it is treated right and loved right it will not seek the false and fake love that makes it a tool of evil. Nobody knows more about the immorality of the body than Paul. He wrote more about lust, impurity, debauchery, orgies, and all forms of sexual immorality than anybody. You can't add anything to Paul's knowledge about sexual corruption. Nevertheless, Paul says sex is good and the body is good, and is even the temple of the Holy Spirit and the agent by which all the gifts of the spirit can be expressed.

The point is, you do not fight evil by rejecting the good. You do not hold the body in contempt just because it is a gate Satan so often uses to get to us. This is as senseless as breaking down your front door because you are sick of germs getting into the house by that route. Satan is clever. He has convinced Christians all through the ages to throw out some of God's best blessings because he gets his agents to use them as weapons. If evil can use the body to promote its line, then the Christian says we must attack and reject the body. We do not fall for this in conventional warfare. If Russia comes out with a tank or a supersonic airplane, we do not demolish our tanks and planes, and refuse to use the same weapons as an enemy. Instead, we say how can we make our tanks and planes better, and more efficient and powerful.

That is the biblical approach with the body. Satan does use the body as one of his primary weapons. Some Christians react by saying the body is an enemy, and they develop anti-body life-styles. The Christian who listens to God's Word will see the body as a key weapon in the battle for righteousness. The body is not our enemy. It is an ally and one of our greatest friends. It is made of the dust of the earth, but it is not contemptible. It is God's doing and the source of all who gives us life. We do not despise the earth even though its dirt can be used in negative ways. It is not always pleasant when it gets on your rug, and the body has its unpleasant side as well, but it is nevertheless a friend and source of great blessing.

The body of man is something because God made that body to live forever. We tend to think that death is natural to the body, but it is not. Death only happens to the body as a judgment. It does not die naturally. It has to be killed by force or by disease. The body is designed to keep renewing itself. The cells that form the body keep replacing themselves so that we have a new body every 7 years. There is no reason why they should not keep doing this indefinitely. Science can only tell us that for some unknown reason degeneration sets in, and each generation of cells becomes less efficient until death occurs. It is not natural at all. It is unnatural and contrary to the way the body is built. It is built to experience natural immortality. Adam and Eve's bodies would have lived forever had they not sinned, but ate of the tree of life.

This is not a far fetched idea, for we have examples of natural immortality even in God's fallen creation. The Ameba does not get born, grow old, and then die. They divide into two



daughter cells, and pass on all their substance, and leave no corpse behind. If they die, they die by accident and not by nature. The Paramecia also live forever if no accident kills them. Man has protected a single celled Paramecia as it went through 20 thousand generations in the lab over a period of 37 years. That first cell they started with never died, but it lived on and on for an equivalent of a quarter of a million years.

The living for nearly a thousand years by Adam and some of his descendants is not in the least hard to accept in the light of what we know about natural life and the potential of cells. Before man loused up the body it was designed to live forever. Sin poisoned the system of God's cellular renewal, but it took time to destroy this marvel of God's handiwork. And so for generations the body still lived on for centuries as it renewed itself.

Even today the body does not die naturally. It has to be killed by external forces. Arthur Constance says there has never been a case of natural death on record. Dr. Hanns Selye, the world's authority on stress, says that he never found in all his autopsies a man who died of old age, and he does not think one will ever be found. Everybody dies because something kills them.

The point is, man's body is not like a car or a pair of shoes. These things age naturally. They only have so much potential and no more. When that is gone they are worn out and useless. But the body of man is built with far more potential than is ever used. But death comes as an intruder and as an enemy of the body, and it robs it of its potential. Paul says death is the last enemy to be destroyed, and when this enemy is out of the way man will have a body that will live forever.

Modern man has already discovered in the lab that death is an outside force and not anything that is inherent in life itself. They have confirmed that death is a foreign agent and not natural. They have taken the cells of rats and chickens and have nourished them in test tubes for 30 years. They just go on dividing and living without death being a part of the picture. Science has already demonstrated that if you can get an environment that is free from the poison fingers of death, cells can live forever. This excites man to try and figure out how to conquer death, but he never will be able to do it. But God can, and He has promised to destroy death and give us bodies that will never die.

What man can get hints of, but can never produce, he can have freely as a gift of God. He can have eternal life in Jesus who submitted His body to death that He might conquer death and give all who trust Him victory over death. This body is such a gem of God's creation that He will not be satisfied until it is totally redeemed. Paul in Rom. 8:23 says this too is what we wait for as Christians, which is the redemption of our bodies. In Phil. 3:21 he says again that we eagerly await the coming of Christ because He will, "Transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body."

To be anti-body is to be anti-Christ, for He lived in an ideal body in time, and He dwells in a perfected body for eternity. His goal is to see that all who love Him have their bodies raised and transformed like His. To be in any way negative toward the body as a philosophy of life is to be on the opposite side from Christ. Satan's goal is to see both body and soul cast into the lake of fire.

The goal of Jesus is to see both body and soul saved and united with each other and Him forever in heaven. The body was made to live forever, and the plan of salvation is not completed until man is in a body that will do just that. So the body is not everything, but it is something, and a powerful, valuable, and honorable something.

## **12. EDUCATED LOVE Based on Phil. 1:1-11**

The best of Christians make their share of mistakes, but John Turner was apparently trying to get a large portion of his quota of mistakes out of the way all in one day. John was a conscientious pastor who got to his church early one Sunday morning, and he discovered that he had left his sermon notes at home. He thought it was no problem. There was plenty of time to correct his first mistake of the day. But when he got home, he discovered his second mistake. He had left his notes on the table right where his 18 month old daughter eats breakfast. The notes were sopping wet from a glass she had turned over. It was no problem he thought, for he could wipe them dry in time. The words were blurred somewhat, but still readable.

He finally left for church as he corrected his second mistake of the day, and all was still under control. Out of the house he bounded with all he needed, except for one thing. He left his car keys in the house, and also the key to the house on the same key chain. Mistake number three was staring him in the face. He didn't have time for mistake number 3. Church was about to begin and he was several miles away locked out of his house, and with no keys to the car, and his family had already gone to church.

Desperation drives one to desperate measures. They had a dog's door on the bottom of their back door that led to the back yard. It was for the dog to be able to come and go, especially to go. Pastor Turner was not so proud that he would not lower himself to getting into his house by Woofy's door. He shed his suit coat, and got on his knees and proceeded to squirm into mistake number 4. He was bigger than the dog, and when he got half way in he was stuck, and could not move either way. There he was half in and half out, and his congregation was probably already singing, "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus."

His dog was deeply impressed with the new game, and was licking his face the whole time. It seemed like an eternity that he was stuck there, but he finally was able to twist around and reach the door knob. He even eventually got to church, but due to his lateness he had to share the whole embarrassing story of his comedy of errors. His experience proves that reality can be funnier than fiction, and that there is always room for improvement in our lives as Christians. And not just in the trivialities of where we put our notes and keys, but in the tremendous areas of life like what do we do with our love?

Is it possible to ever make mistakes with our love, and follow up life with a poor use of the highest of all virtues? If not, why would Paul pray that the love of the Philippians would

abound more and more in knowledge, and depth of insight, so they could discern what is best. The implication is that love can lack knowledge, and when it does it can choose what is less than the best. In other words, uneducated love can make foolish choices.

J. Vernon McGee in his famous Through The Bible Series tells of when he first became a pastor of a church in downtown Los Angeles. He did not know that there were people who loved to see new preachers come into the area, for they tended to be such suckers. One Sunday morning a man came forward in the service, and he refused to talk to anyone but the pastor. The personal worker told pastor McGee, and the pastor showed the man the way of salvation. He was so interested that tears came to his eyes. He got on his knees and prayed the sinner's prayer. Then he told pastor McGee that he needed money to get his suitcase out of a hotel. They were holding it until he paid for his room. McGee felt obligated to help him out and so he gave him the money for the hotel. He felt good about being such a Good Samaritan. But then, six weeks later, he saw the man's picture in the paper. He had been arrested. The article told of how he had been living for six months off the preachers of the city. His comment was, "They are the biggest saps in the world." McGee knew he was one of them, and he learned quickly that love has to be discerning, or it can be used for folly.

McGee focused on this verse for his own life, and he wrote, "Paul says to let your love abound more and more, but let it abound in judgment, let it abound in being able to discern. Over the years when I would drive to my study in Los Angeles, I use to say to the Lord, "I'm going to meet new people today, and I don't know them. Some of them I will be able to help. Others of them will put a knife in my back. Lord, help me to be able to distinguish between the two. Show me which I should help." Actually this verse rescues a Christian from being naïve and gullible. His love is to abound in knowledge and discernment."

Like most loving people, he had to learn by experience that love alone is not enough, for love can be uneducated, and when it is it can do stupid things. Love has to abound in knowledge. It has to get educated if it is to make wise choices that lead to the glory and praise of God. Feelings alone can set you up for a fall. A young boy wanted to go swimming but his mother said no because it is too cold. He said, "Can I just go and look at the swimming hole?" She said, okay to that. He came back and his hair was all wet. She said, "Did you swim?" "No, I fell in." "Then why are your clothes dry?" "I felt like I was going to fall in, so I took them off." His punishment made him realize that he allowed his feelings to lead him into making a wrong choice.

Paul's point here is, if love gets educated and abounds in knowledge, it will be able to discern what is best. Uneducated love chooses what is less than the best because it is not able to discern. Uneducated love goes too much by feelings alone, and this leads to unwise decisions. I love music, for example, but if I went by my feelings alone and decided to give my life to music, I may waste my life trying to do what I am not gifted to do. Wise love seeks for confirmation of feelings. If other Christians do not feel the same, then I have to recognize my feelings may not fit the evidence. If there is no abounding evidence to support my feelings, they must be seen as love on a very low level of education, and not mature enough to make major decisions. "It is not the calling of cats to plow, or horses to cat mice."

Every Christian needs to do for God what they are gifted to do, and it is growing in knowledge that helps them discover their gifts. My mother had less than an 8th grade education. She would be what many would call a non-gifted Christian. But at her funeral I was impressed by the service of my mother. For 46 years she did what she could. She loved other people's babies in the nursery at her church. There are all different levels of love, and all of them are good, but they are not all the best. Kindergarten love is good, for it is a loving feeling of caring about people, but it is like the tiny bean spout, and not the full grown bean ready for harvest. All love has to begin here just as all beans have to start as mere sprouts. Christian puppy love is positive, for all love has to start somewhere, but it has to press on and get an education is what Paul is getting at. Light is good, but there is candle light, moon light, and sun light. There is an enormous difference in the power and value in these different degrees of light, and so it is with love.

Paul is not knocking the love of the Philippians. Kindergarten love is not bad, but it is no place to level off and be content. A child who does not progress beyond kindergarten is greatly handicapped, and so is the Christian whose love does not abound more and more in knowledge. Why is it that Christians can do every stupid thing man is capable of doing stupidly? It is because their love has not abounded more and more in knowledge, and so they choose what is second best, third, or tenth, or even worse. If there is no limit to how wise love can be, then there is no limit either as to its lack of wisdom. If love does not go the way Paul prays it will, and abound in knowledge, it can become a drop out, and abound in ignorance or lethargy. This can lead to all the folly Christians have proven themselves capable of in history.

Christians have supported tyranny, persecution, intolerance, slavery, and every form of non-loving oppression you can think of. It was because they had a kindergarten love that did not abound more and more in knowledge. But to the credit of Christians, it was those Christians who did what Paul prayed for who did so abound, and who became the key leaders in history for the victories over oppression. Christians with educated love have given us a world with rights and freedoms that make us the richest and most blest of peoples.

Abraham Lincoln was opposed by many Christians with kindergarten love, but those who had abounded more and more in knowledge gave him their support, and he came to appreciate the church as his strongest ally in the fight to end slavery. The same thing happened to Albert Einstein in Germany. There were so many baby Christians who supported Hitler that Einstein hated Christians. But then he found out there were also mature Christians with a degree in discerning love, and he came to treasure the church as the key ally in fight against Hitler. He wrote, "I'm forced to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly."

There were Christians who loved Hitler; Christians who loved slavery, and there have been Christians who loved every form of folly in history because their love was feelings without knowledge. In a previous message we saw that Paul was an affectionate Apostle, and the ideal Christian is one who, like Jesus, was full of affection and deep feelings that can be expressed. But now we see those feelings have to be guided and controlled by knowledge. So we have in the Bible the wedding of the heart and the head. Christians are forever trying to separate the two, and when they do they put asunder what God has united, and they create a

monster.

Christians who stress emotion without the mind, and say that the heart is to lead, produce fanatics. Those who see this as folly, and reverse the focus so that the head leads without the heart, produce dead intellectualism which is an equal curse. What God has put together we should not separate. Just as God made it so that your body cannot be alive and well if both the heart and head are not functioning together, so he has made the body of Christ the same way. The heart of love must abound in the knowledge of the head, or there will be a very inadequate expression of the love and wisdom of God.

I love the suffering people of the world. I have some degree of pity and compassion, but my love is mere kid's stuff of feelings. But there are Christians such as the World Relief Organization who have abounded more and more in love with knowledge, and depth of insight, on how to choose what is the best way to meet the needs of these people. I give my money to them because I have not done the research to make a wise choice as to how to show love. I could go off and try something based on mere feelings, and give my money to someone who will spend 10 cents on the dollar to meet the need. I could give my money to con men all over the place, and be a sucker, and support evil rather than good. I would be operating on my feelings of love which is good and noble, but because it would not be informed love, it could end up being very ineffective in achieving the goals of love. By supporting a well-known, and reliable Christian organization, my love will be making a wiser choice.

The point is, my love has to be more than a feeling. It has to be informed by facts and knowledge of what is truly a wise way of loving. I can love foolishly or wisely, and the only way to love wisely is to abound in knowledge more and more. Love cannot just feel its way to right choices. It has to study and learn, and get educated as to what is the best way to love. The issue is not, do I feel right about people and needs, but do I care enough about people to find out what is the best way to express love. Do I take a hundred dollars in ones and throw them off the roof of an inner city building, or do I buy one hundred dollars worth of books on poverty, or do I give it to the Union Gospel Mission where they can get nearly two hundred dollars worth of goods and services to needy people. The first is a heart plan; the second is a head plan, and the third is the heart and head combined to do what is best for the people you claim to love.

Paul made it clear in I Cor. 13 that love is the greatest of all values, and without it nothing else is of value. But he does not intend us to conclude that this means that love needs nothing else as if it alone can be sufficient without all the other things that would be nothing without it. He says in 13:2, "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing." This is not to say that prophecy, knowledge, and faith, are of no value. It is to say that their value comes from their being linked with love. But love which has not the gifts of prophecy, faith, and knowledge, is puppy love, and will not be able to make mature choices for the glory of God. Knowledge without love may be nothing, but love with knowledge is more than something-it is the best.

The history of medicine is full of examples. Doctors have always loved health and hated

disease. They love to see people get well, but if this love is not coupled with knowledge, they can very lovingly kill the people they seek to help. In 1837 four out of every ten women died in child birth. Ignaz Semmelweis, a Hungarian lad at the University of Vienna, the most advanced center of medicine in the world of that day, was determined to find the cause for this fever that took so many lives. He gave his life to get the facts, and spent all his time seeking for an answer. What he learned was that doctors were spreading the disease by not washing their hands. He was thought to be a fool and a madman, but he persisted in his crusade to get doctors to wash. It took a generation to change things, but in 1906 his home town in Hungary erected a statue in his honor. His love had abounded in knowledge more and more so that doctors could choose what is best.

Their love and caring was just as real before their knowledge, but because it was ignorant love it hurt rather than help. It was knowledgeable love, or educated love, that made the difference. History is full of such examples, and so is each of our lives. We cannot know what is the most loving choice to make in many areas of life without a head that is willing to get all it can to help our love be informed. Christian education is simply helping Christian love know what is the best choice. The more you know, the more likely your love will make the best choice. The bottom line is, Christians are never done with their education. Christians are to be students all of their lives, and ever learning so they can be intelligent and effective lovers of the world, the church, their families, and themselves. Love motivate us to care; knowledge helps us care wisely.

Why did Paul have to pray that good Christians like the Philippians would abound in knowledge? Because there is nothing automatic about this. You don't pray for what is inevitable. You don't pray that sun will rise in the East, or that the river will run to the sea. You pray for what will not happen unless people choose to let it happen, or make it happen. If Christians say, I am loving enough, and I am content with the level I've reached, they will plateau right there, and growth is over. If 4th grade love is your bag, and that is what satisfies your ambition, you will stay right there the rest of your life. But it is a rejection of the biblical goal of never ending growth. We are to love God with all of our mind, and that means love is to grow in knowledge forever, for there is infinite room for growth.

Jesus healed a leper, and then told him not to tell any man of his healing, but the man was so happy, and so convinced that Jesus was the best thing that ever happened to him that he went out and told everybody. It seems like a loving thing to do, and it came from a grateful heart, but it was foolish love, for Mark 1:45 tells us that because of the publicity of this grateful man Jesus could no longer openly enter the city. His love was real, but it was self-centered and ignorant. He hindered the ministry of Jesus, and deprived others of the very healing that he experienced. The man was not bad. It was just that his love was not educated. An educated love would have recognized that Jesus had good reason for His request for silence. Educated love would have obeyed the Master, and would have been a blessing instead of a hindrance.

Paul does not teach that love is the greatest thing in the world. He teaches that educated love is the greatest thing in the world. Love alone is not enough. It is not enough in marriage; it is not enough in medicine; it is not enough in Christian service, and it is not enough anywhere. Men of God in the Middle Ages loved the people they served, and so

when the great plagues struck they urged people to assemble in the churches to pray. The result was that infection spread with a greater rapidness. It was uneducated love, and it did great harm to the people. Love has to be educated, or it can be harmful, and that is why Paul prays for the Philippians, and why we need to pray for each other, that we will be a loving people whose love is abounding more and more in knowledge.

The reason the love of money is the root of all evil is because it is stupid love. It is immature love that does not grow. It is like a small child that loves a toy, and all of life revolves around that toy. But the child grows up and discovers there are greater things to love like God and people. The lover of money does not grow up, but goes on all his or her life locked into infant love. Any love that loves things more than persons is stupid love. Educated love is love that loves according to God's value system. Things are loved according to the measure of their value. Creation deserves to be loved, for it is God's gift, but when men love the creation more than the Creator they become fools. They are like one who falls in love with the pretty jewelry box, and throws the ring away, or one who falls in love with a letter, and rejects the writer of it.

If I love my car, that is fine, but if I love it to the point where it is more important than my mate, child, or even my neighbor, it is stupid love. It is uneducated love that does not go on to higher learning, but got to the 3rd grade and stopped. Smart love is ever moving on to be loving on a higher level. The degree to which your love grows in knowledge is the degree of your Christian maturity. The goal is to get love so smart and well educated that you can choose the best, and so be pure and blameless. The way to Christlikeness is the way of educated love. Educated love is love that loves everything and everyone with a measure of love that it deserves. That is wise living, for it puts all of reality into its proper perspective, so that God is loved supremely, and then mate, family, church, country, and things all fall into their level of priority where the best gets your best, and the lesser gets the lesser commitment of your life.

If we link love and learning we will have life with a capital L, for it will be the abundant life Jesus came to give us. Educated love will love according to priorities. If number 47 on the list of loves gets 80% of your time, that is stupid love. The purpose of every sermon and Bible study, and every discussion of Christian values is to educate our love so it can lead us to make the best choices in all areas of life. In heaven we will all get our doctor's degree in love, but in this life the goal is to get as many degrees as possible. We are to be love scholars for life, and that is why Paul prays that God will motivate us to be such.

Why? Because life is not a matter of choosing the good or the bad. Christians think that when they can do that, they can quit learning and growing in knowledge, but this is a major mistake. Choosing the good is not the goal of the Christian life, for there is also the better and the best. Having the knowledge to choose the best is to be our aim, and the only way we can ever get to love on this level is to have a love that abounds more and more in knowledge and depth of insight. Educated love is "more and more love." It is not content to just grow. It abounds in more and more knowledge, and more and more insight, so it is more and more able to choose the best, and be more and more pure, and more and more blameless, and thus, more and more fruitful, and, therefore, more and more productive of glory and praise to God. Paul prays for the Philippians, and we need to pray for one another, and for ourselves,

that we might be abounding in educated love.

### **13. LOVE'S LIMITATIONS    Based on I John 2:15-17**

"Atlanta's Race" is the title of Sir E. J. Poynter's most successful paintings. The story behind the painting is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Atlanta was the daughter of Schoenus of Boeotia, and she was famous for her matchless beauty. She was also so swift of foot that none could outrun her. To everyone who asked for her hand in marriage she gave the same answer. She would be the prize of him who could vanquish her in the race. Defeat, however, would carry the penalty of death. Many lost their lives in trying to outrun her. After a lull there appeared a youth by the name of Hippomenes who challenged Atlanta once more to race. He knew he could not conquer her by fleetness of foot, so he carried with him three golden apples, for he had received this advice from Venus:

When first she heads the from the starting place  
Cast down the first one for her eyes to see,  
And when she turns aside make on apace.  
And if again she heads thee in the race  
Spare not the other two to cast aside,  
If she not long enough behind will bide.

The race began, and he followed these instructions. As Atlanta was about to pass him he dropped the first apple. She looked down, but ran on. He dropped the second apple and she seemed to stoop, and when he dropped the third she did stoop to pick it up. It was only a few seconds lost, but it was enough, for Hippomenes had touched the maple goal, and Atlanta had at last been defeated. Poynter's painting pictures Atlanta at that decisive moment when she turned her eyes from the goal and stretched her arm toward the golden temptation which brought her to defeat.

The painting is an illustration of the danger that faces every believer in the race toward the goal of Christlikeness. We must be looking always unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, but along side of us runs the world competing for our love, and John says it also has three golden apples to cast in our path: The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The world casts these down before us hoping we will take our eyes off Christ and stoop to gain these earthly prizes and forget the goal.

All of life is a competitive battle between the love of the eternal and the love of the temporal. One or the other must win, for one excludes the other. You cannot have your cake and eat it too. Atlanta must either win the race by keeping her eyes on the goal, or she must sacrifice the race to gain the golden apple. A choice must be made, and John says the Christian must make this choice as well. He cannot love God and the world, for love must be limited to one or the other. John knows that Christians will be tempted to stoop and pick up the golden apples of the world, and that is why he warns them and commands them to love



not the world.

He had just written about love being the very essence of the Christian life, and that to be without it is to be in darkness. Now, however, he makes it clear that love must have its limitations, for it cannot be indiscriminate. The object of one's love must be God, and if this be so there are some things that cannot then be loved, and they are called in one word-world. Fortunately John goes on to tell us just what he means by the world. He names the three golden apples of the world's appeal, and he thereby defines the worldliness that we are to avoid. It is important that we see this clearly lest we misunderstand and pervert the statement, "Love not the world." Many have done so.

St. Bernard would spend days by the shore of Lake Constance and keep his eyes glued to his book lest he raised them and see the beauty, and be seduced away from God. John did not mean the creation when he said we are to not love the world. Jesus loved the world in that sense, and He said, "Behold the lilies of the field and the birds of the air." The heavens declare the glory of God and all of nature shows forth His handiwork. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. It is not the work of the devil. It is legitimate for us to love the world in the sense of delighting in God's creation. It can be excessive to the point of worshipping the creation rather than the Creator, and this of course is folly. But to love and enjoy nature is a part of our appreciation of God's nature.

Not loving the world does not mean we are to not love the people of the world. This would be a denial of what is commanded. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to die for them. We are to love the world in this sense of loving the people. We must see that the world in this context is what we call worldliness. It is that order of fallen society, and the attitudes of fallen people. It is the lust, pride, and all that is opposed to the light of God's righteousness. The world is that realm where darkness reigns. David Smith says the world here equals, "The sum of all the forces antagonistic to the spiritual life." This is the world we are not to love.

John does not just give a command and leave it at that. He says love not the world, and then he goes on to give reasons for command. God expects man to use his intelligence and to weigh values. He does not compete with the world by brute force. He offers reasons for choosing His way rather than the way of the world. We want to examine the 2 reasons that John gives us here for not loving the world. First-

## **I. IT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE LOVE OF GOD.**

The Christian cannot love the world, for to do so is to forsake the love of God, since it is impossible to love both. Paul said, "Demas has forsaken me having loved this present world." Demas had no choice but to forsake Paul if he was going to love the world, for loving it and serving God are opposites that cannot be reconciled. He had to forsake Paul if he was going to love the world, just as he would have had to forsake the world to truly serve God with Paul.

To love is to give someone a supreme and central place in your life. You cannot have two supreme loves. It must be either God or the world on the throne, for neither of them will

share the throne with the other. If you love the world you are electing to lose the love of God. Show me a man who is lustful and proud in an evil sense, and I will show you a man who may be very kind, helpful, and even religious, but a man in whom the love of God does not abide. I believe, however, this can even happen to a Christian. John is wasting his time and ours if he writes to warn Christians about what they can never be tempted into. Who needs to watch out for what is impossible. It is possible for a Christian to lose the love of God, and cease to be a servant of Christ by letting the love of the world overwhelm their hearts.

Each of us must constantly examine our hearts lest we end up as castaways, and no longer worthy contestants for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. We are not talking about losing salvation, but about losing one's usefulness for the kingdom of God. Our love and loyalty must be continuously examined to see if its object is Jesus Christ or some selfish and worldly object. Just as a person can get a dishonorable discharge from the army and still be a citizen of the country, so a Christian can be set on the shelf and no longer be an active member of the soldiers of the cross, and yet still be a part of God's family. But this is a terrible demotion.

When two people get married they limit the expression of their romantic and sexual love to their partners. So it is in the spiritual realm. When a person is saved and enters into a relationship with Christ as Savior, he becomes a part of the bride of Christ. From that point on his love and faithfulness is to be to Christ alone. To love the world is to commit spiritual adultery. This was the most common sin of the Old Testament people of God, and it is doubtless in first place also in the New Testament dispensation. The message of the prophets is the message needed today. We need to forsake all other gods, and be loyal to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Set your affections on things above and not on the things of the earth, for these things are incompatible with the love of God.

The challenge of John is for believers to be loyal to the Lord in their love, and not corrupt it and diminish it by allowing the world to gain their affection. Young put it, "Let not the cooing of the world allure thee, Which of her lovers ever found her true?" E. J. Poynter, whose painting we earlier considered, painted another well known picture called "Faithful Unto Death." It is picture of a soldier at his post during the great volcano eruption that buried Pompei in hot lava. All the people were fleeing for safety, but the soldier grasped his spear firmly and stood erect. His eyes revealed terror, and one can sense the struggle that rages in his mind between duty and the desire to save himself. Obedience wins, however, and he remains at his post faithful unto death.

The Bible nowhere says it will be easy to be a Christian, but if a pagan soldier can be faithful to his superior even unto death, then any Christian should be ashamed to do less for his Lord who died for his eternal salvation. The world desperately needs Christians who will love Jesus supremely, and forsaking all others keep themselves to Him alone. To love the world is incompatible with God's love, and so the degree to which you love the world is the degree to which you suffer the loss of God's love. Let our decoration then be that of F. W. H. Meyers:

Who so has felt the Spirit of the Highest

**Cannot confound nor doubt Him nor deny;  
Yeah, with one voice, O world, tho' thou deniest,  
Stand thou on that side, for on this am I.**

## **II. IT IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE WILL OF GOD.**

**Not only is it impossible to reconcile the love of the world with the love of God, but it will be impossible to do so in eternity, for the things of the world have no part in God's will for the future. These things will not last is what John is saying. They will pass away, for they are temporal and transient, and will have no place in God's eternal plan. To love them is to trade the solid diamond of eternity for the melting Popsicle of time.**

**The love of the world, which is really lust, is centered around pleasures that are purely a matter of the flesh, and do not go deep and affect the soul. The lover of the world has only surface pleasures. They are real, but not lasting pleasures. They do not produce joy and a sense of ultimate purpose and meaning.**

**Fading is the worldling's pleasure,  
All his boastful pomp and show.  
Solid joys and lasting treasure  
None by Zion's children know.**

**This is why it is of no profit to gain the whole world if one loses his own soul. You can never come out ahead by trading the timeless for the temporary. The world throws down its golden apples of present pleasure and say enjoy yourself, for its later than you think. The world appeals with the same urgency as the Gospel. The world says today is the day to satisfy the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, and so let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die. Now is the time to live.**

**The Christian, however, with the eyes of faith looks ahead and sees the world and its lusts pass away. We claim the promise of God that those who do His will abide forever. John fights worldliness, not by shouting and getting angry, but by the calm appeal to the believer to consider how incompatible it is with God's purpose and will. He appeals to their sense of values and makes it clear that to choose the world is a poor investment, for the world and its lust are going to go out of style for good, but those who are in God's will have a style that will last forever. Omar Khayyam wrote,**

**The worldly Hope men set their hearts upon  
Turns to ashes-or it prospers-and anon,  
Like snow upon the desert's dusty face  
Lighting a little hour or two is gone.**

**The Christian does not invest his time and trust in that which is fading and passing away, but in the will of God which is lasting and eternal. Love for both are incompatible. The world has a strong appeal in spite of the fact that it offers only fading pleasures, and the Christian can only refrain from stooping to snatch up its golden apples of temptation by keeping his eyes on Christ. John Henry Newman wrote,**

Unveil, O Lord, and on us shine in glory and in grace,  
This gaudy world grows pale before the beauty of Thy face.  
Till Thou art seen, it seems to be a sort of fairy ground,  
Where suns unsetting light the sky, and flowers and fruits abound.  
But when Thy keener, purer beam is poured upon our sight  
It loses all its power to charm, and what was day is night.

Do not love the world, for it is incompatible with the love of God and the will of God. To love the world is to lose the best for time and eternity, and so limit your love to the Lord. Keep your eyes on Him as your ultimate loyalty, and make sure all other loves are compatible with loving Him supremely.

## **14. THE END IS LOVE Based on I Tim. 1:5**

Someone has said, "You can never win in the game of life if you don't know where the goal posts are." You can't win in any game if you don't have a goal. Great men in every walk of life have been those with a goal, and a determination to reach it. It is difficult to be determined if you are not certain where you are going, and so the end must come before the means. The goal must be established, and then comes the best means for reaching that end. I remember a successful businessman who spoke to the students at Bethel one day, and he said that the very first rule in being successful is to set a goal and then strive to reach it. Studies show that the one thing they all had in common as America's most successful men was the ability to set a goal and pursue it. This principle applies to the spiritual realm as well.

Matthew Henry, the well-known Bible commentator, was not successful in producing the works he did because he was uniquely gifted. It was because he was a man who set goals and persisted in using every means necessary to reach them. He set out in 1692 to deliver a series of lectures on the questions on the Bible. He began with God's question to Adam, "Where art thou?" Twenty years later he finished the series on the last question in Revelation. When he set a goal he persisted to the end.

Paul wanted Timothy to be this kind of a pastor, and he wanted the leaders and teachers of Ephesus to be like this as well. Therefore, he writes to Timothy and tells him to put an end to the nonsense of Christians getting all wrapped up in fables and genealogies. He urges them to make love the primary goal of their ministry. He then gives the three means necessary to arrive at this goal. They are a pure heart, a good conscience, and a genuine faith. Verse 5 in the RSV reads, "Whereas the aim of our charge is love..." Phillips has it, "The ultimate aim of the Christian ministry, after all, is to produce the love which springs from a pure heart, a good conscience and a genuine faith."

Paul is giving a standard by which we can measure the success of our ministry. Whatever else we have done, if we have not aided men to move closer to the goal we have

failed. The end is love, and if teaching and preaching does not make Christians more loving it is an ineffective means, for it is not doing what God intended it to do. If all the lessons and sermons you hear, and all the books and papers you read do not increase your love, then they are all for nothing, for that which does not move toward the primary goal is of no true Christian value. If your Bible knowledge only makes you clever in winning arguments, but does not increase your ability to love the unlovable, you are making no progress at all. The end is love says Paul. The goal of the Christian life is to be a channel through which the love of God can flow.

Paul took very seriously the exalting of love to the supreme place in the Christian life. In all of his letters it is the supreme goal, for to be filled with agape love is to be filled with Christ. To love and to be Christ like are synonymous. In Gal. 5:14 Paul writes, "The whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." The Old Testament is not to be used as a source of material for speculation, but as a source of material to be fulfilled by love. Alexander Maclaren, the famous English Baptist preacher, wrote, "The Apostle here lays down the broad principle that God has spoken, not in order to make acute theologians, or to provide material for controversy, but in order to help us love."

The number of persons won to Christ by argument and condemnation is from small to non-existent, but the number one through love is legion. No wonder Paul said that knowledge, eloquence and sacrifice are nothing without love. None of these things can open a man's heart to Christ. Love alone is the key to the human heart, and so it is the goal of the church's ministry in the lives of its members. Our lack is not power, but love. Paul said you can have all kinds of power and still be nothing without love. Love is the key factor in every situation.

Paul was the greatest theologian of all time, but his goal was not to be a great theologian, but rather, to be a channel of God's love. He wrote to the Corinthians that the love of Christ constrains us. That was the power that drove Paul on and on with the Gospel. It was not some craving for controversy, or desire for adventure, but it was for the end of love that he was motivated. He then gives 3 means by which we are to reach that end of love. If we develop these three things we will be progressing toward the goal of love. Not any love will do, for it must be a love, which issues from these three things.

## **1. A PURE HEART.**

Just as a pure fountain sends forth refreshing water to the thirsty, so the pure in heart bring the refreshing attitude of love into a world of hostility. Jesus said that the pure in heart shall see God, and it follows that the pure heart which sees God will also see the need of men to see God, and so long to express the love of God in Christ that they may have the opportunity to do so. The more I read about love in the New Testament the more I realize how little Christians have moved toward this primary goal. Can it be because we are really not pure in heart? Have we neglected the means to the end to the point that we do not even recognize the nature of the kind of love that is to possess us and constrain us as it did Paul?

The impure heart harbors lust and not love. It is a form of love, which is selfish desire. Have we allowed agape love, which is the selfless love of Christ, to be lost and replaced with

the natural eros love of desire? I think it is so, and so we cannot begin to reach Christian maturity until we become pure in heart. We need to be sanctified, and to learn those truths of God's Word that purify our attitudes and actions. We need to escape the pull of the world in all realms, and purify our hearts if we expect to reach the end of love, which is our goal. A church which is not succeeding to aid its people in attaining purity of heart is a church in danger of having a meaningless ministry of no use to the cause of Christ.

## **2. A GOOD CONSCIENCE.**

A bad conscience is the force behind much of Christian un-loveliness. The Christian who condemns rather than loves is often filled with guilt feelings. His conscience is bothered by his own sin and failure to be what he knows God wants him to be. And so rather than repent and receive forgiveness he lashes out in anger to punish others who are more guilty than he, and he seeks in this way to satisfy his own conscience. It is all futile however, and it only leads to frustration and greater guilt.

If the Christian is ever going to love others as he ought, he has got to love himself as he ought. He can never do this if he has a conscience, which is always condemning him. A Christian that dislikes and condemns himself cannot really love anybody. Therefore, a good conscience is essential in the Christian life. A good conscience is one that allows a Christian the freedom to love himself, and to love his neighbor as himself. This means that the doctrine of forgiveness of sin needs to be taught until all Christians understand fully the ministry of Christ's present intercession on their behalf.

Confession of sin, which played such a major role in the New Testament must be understood by Christians today. The Christian who does not know how to deal with his sin and his bad conscience is greatly handicapped, and he is unable to move along the path to the goal of love. A Christian who is always looking for scapegoats, and always complaining and griping is a Christian with a bad conscience, and he becomes a very poor channel for the love of Christ to be expressed to others. Any ministry that aids believers in maintaining a clear conscience is a ministry that is fruitful for Christ.

## **3. A GENUINE OR SINCERE FAITH.**

That is a faith that is not hypocritical. It is not simply a mask over the real person. There is a certain insincere kind of faith, which oozes piety all over on the surface, but it is only a shallow cover up over an impure heart and a bad conscience. Christians must be aware of the danger of a false faith, which is a faith built up around words they have learned, but which has no basis in experience. A sincere and honest faith will be practical and down to earth. Those who wonder off into myths, and who take adventures into the unknown seek to give the impression that this is a demonstration of real faith, but it is not so. Fantasy is not faith. A sincere faith brings forth love and a devotion to people, and not a devotion to fables and systems.

Any teaching that helps a believer to shed his mask and to live as he really is before God and man in simple trust is a kind of teaching that will be blest, for genuine faith will lead to the end of love. The implication of this advice to Timothy is that if a Christian lacks love the

**reason is because of a defect in one of these 3 areas-his heart, his conscience, or his faith.**

**In verse 6 Paul says that those teachers who have wandered away from these 3 things, and who have lost their sense of direction and goal, have ended up with an emphasis on what is vain. Whenever Christians get into foolish discussions it is because they have lost sight of their goal. The goal is love, and the means to that end are a pure heart, a good conscience and genuine faith. We have a clear goal and a clear revelation as to how to reach it. Our perpetual duty as Christians is to keep this ever before us, for all of our teaching, preaching and discussion is of no ultimate value unless it moves us to reach the end, which is love.**