

New Life in Christ

Lesson 21: Love One Another

Key Verse: “³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:34-35

Just before His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, the Lord Jesus spent one last evening with His disciples. He used this time to comfort and instruct them. He also gave His disciples this command: *"Love one another."* The Lord Jesus said,

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." John 13:34

This command is found in many places in the Bible. Here are a few:

"This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you." John 15:12

"For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Galatians 5:14

"For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." 1 John 3:11

"This commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also." 1 John 4:21

"Above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins." 1 Peter 4:8 NKJV

This command that we love one another is given special importance by the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus said that obedience to it would be the identifying mark of His disciples. He said, *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:35*

What the Lord's Command Means

The command of the Lord Jesus that we love one another means two things:

1 - Loving one another is not optional.

Christians are commanded to love one another. It is not a question of whether or not we want to love other believers. It is our Lord's command. Not to love another believer is to disobey Him. The Lord Jesus said,

"These things I command you, that you love one another." John 15:17

2 - Loving one another means loving every believer.

Loving one another does not mean loving only those believers to whom we are naturally attracted. It means loving every believer. The Apostle John said that loving one another is the proof that we have been truly born again. John wrote, *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." 1 John 3:14*

The Different Kinds of Love

Since love is so important to the life of a believer, we need to understand what the Lord Jesus means when He commands us to love one another. The Greek language has several words to express the concept of love:

- 1. EROS**—The word "*eros*" is used to describe the love of pleasure, the love of that which pleases me.
- 2. PHILIA**—The word "*philia*" is used to describe the love of attraction. It is the warm love and affection that we have in a close friendship.
- 3. AGAPE**—The word "*agape*" is used to describe the love of God. **AGAPE** love is that love which the Father has for His beloved Son. Jesus said to His Father, "*You loved [AGAPE] Me before the foundation of the world.*" (John 17:24) **AGAPE** love is also the love which God has for the human race. The Bible says, "*For God so loved [AGAPE] the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*" John 3:16

Amazingly, this **AGAPE** love is the very same love that Jesus commanded us to have for one another. Jesus said, "*This is My commandment, that you love [AGAPE] one another, as I have loved you.*" John 15:12

What is Agape Love?

It is not easy to define AGAPE love. It is something inward which shows itself in its actions. AGAPE love is most clearly seen in God's giving His Son to die for us while we were yet sinners. The Bible says,

"But God demonstrates His own [AGAPE] love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

"In this is [AGAPE] love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation [sacrifice] for our sins." 1 John 4:10

These verses help us to understand what AGAPE love really is. **AGAPE love is that love which gives and sacrifices for the highest good of another person.** The main characteristic of AGAPE love is that it is utterly unselfish. It does not seek its own interests but always seeks the best interests of the other person.

Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians is called the "*love chapter*" because it tells us how love acts. Here is the way AGAPE love expresses itself:

(**NOTE:** The Greek word used in 1 Corinthians 13 is "**agape**" (pronounced *a-ga-pay*). It is best translated "*love*" rather than "*charity*" as in the King James Version.)

God's Provision of Love

In ourselves we do not have the kind of love that the Lord commands. But God never commands us to do something without enabling us to do it.

How does God enable us to love one another with AGAPE love? He gives us the indwelling Holy Spirit. The same Spirit that dwells in the Father and in the Lord Jesus now dwells in us. That AGAPE love which is in God's heart flows to us and through us to others by the power of the Holy Spirit. The Bible says, "*...the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.*" Romans 5:5

AGAPE love does not come from our self-efforts or anything in us. It is the *"fruit of the Spirit."* The Bible says, *"The fruit of the Spirit is [AGAPE] love..." Galatians 5:22*

God's love flows through us to others as we yield ourselves to Him to be channels for His love. We can say to someone, *"I love you because God has placed within me His wonderful love for you."* This AGAPE love is so powerful that it can enable us to love even our enemies.

It was **AGAPE** love that enabled the first martyr, Stephen, to pray for the very men who were stoning him to death.

How to Love Someone you don't Love

Though we are one with all other believers in our spirit, we are entirely different from others in our souls or personalities. Because our personalities are so different, we are naturally attracted to some people and not attracted to others. This is not sinful. God made us different from one another, and therefore we have different likes and dislikes. Jesus did not say that we must like every believer; He said that we must love them. To not love a fellow Christian is sin. The Bible says,

"He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him." 1 John 3:14-15

Right now, God may be speaking to you about someone you do not love. It may be a relative, a fellow church member, or someone else. You may be saying, *"I know that I should love that person, but how do I do it?"* Here are the steps:

STEP 1: I must confess my lack of love as sin.

That lack of love in my heart, which we will call *"unlove,"* is sin. When my heart attitude is wrong, I must acknowledge it and confess it to God as sin. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses me from all sin confessed as sin, but it does not cleanse me when I excuse myself.

Next, I must exercise my will and choose to be delivered from the sin of unlove. Love is not just a matter of the will, but I will never be delivered from the sin of unlove unless I exercise my will and choose to be delivered. I must say, *"I choose to be delivered from this sin of unlove."*

STEP 2: I must count on the fact that, in Christ, I died to the sin of unlove.

I can be delivered from any sin by counting on the fact that, in Christ, I died to that sin. The Bible says,

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" Romans 6:1-2 NKJV

No Christian should continue to live in sin. Why? Because, in Christ, he died to sin. And in Christ, we died to the sin of unlove. Let us make these verses personal:

What shall I say then? Shall I continue in this sin of unlove, that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall I, who died to this sin of unlove, live any longer in it?

Must I be a slave to this sin of unlove the rest of my life? No! God's Word says that I died to this sin. I must step out in faith, believing God's Word.

STEP 3: I must choose to love that person.

I cannot control my feelings, but I can control my will. I cannot make myself have a feeling of love toward someone, but I can choose to love that person. If I make that choice and hold to it, I will find that my feelings will, in time, follow the choice of my will. The important thing to remember is this: ***I am controlled by the decision of my will and not by my feelings.***

You may say, "*But what if that person doesn't respond to my love?*" You can love him anyway. Jesus said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.*" Matthew 5:43-44

STEP 4: I must trust God to do what I cannot do.

Paul said in Romans 7 that he could "will" or choose what is right, but that he could not of his own ability do it. Paul learned that he had to depend on the Holy Spirit within him to enable him to do it.

This is true of us also. I may choose to love someone I don't love but I will discover that in myself I cannot do it. I must depend on the Holy Spirit within me to enable me to do it. He will do this, but I must make the decision. I must say to God, "*Lord, I choose to love that person. In myself I cannot do it. I am trusting You to enable me to do it.*"

God is always ready to enable us to carry out a decision that is in accordance with His Word. But we must choose it. The Bible says, "*You will also declare a thing, and it will be established for you...*" Job 22:28

STEP 5: I must pray that person into my heart.

Sometimes, even after I have asked God to work, nothing seems to happen. What do I do next? I begin to pray for that person. I pray that God will bless that person. I pray that God will bless him and help him. Often, as I pray earnestly and sincerely for God's blessing upon the other person, God works in my heart to change me.

STEP 6: I must earnestly seek to change my attitude toward that person.

To be critical of another believer, or to not love him because he is not like me, is to fail to see God's wonderful plan. God wanted us to be different from each other! He made us all different that each of us might in a special way display the glories of Christ. When I see God's great plan, I will appreciate and esteem every believer because he is precious to the Lord and able in a special, unique way to manifest the glories of Christ.

STEP 7: I may need to go see that person.

Sometimes God works a miracle when we go to see a person and talk with him. We often find, to our surprise, love welling up in our heart for that person. Jesus told the man with the withered arm to stretch forth his arm. As he obeyed the Lord, he found God's power flowing into him, enabling him to do what he could not do before.

STEP 8: I must plan positive behavior.

If you do not love someone, do for him what you would do if you did love him.

You may say, "*But wouldn't I be acting like a hypocrite if I did that?*" No, you would not. You have within you Christ's life and your sinful self-life. You must choose which one you will express. It is not being hypocritical if you choose to express Christ's life and His love to someone even though you do not feel like it.

You do not have to have a feeling of love to act in love. The Christian writer, C.S. Lewis, said,

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we learn one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love them. (C.S. Lewis, "Mere Christianity")

Love Enables People to See the Unseen

How can people "see" the unseen God? There is only one way—they must see Him in His people. The Apostle John said, *"No man has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected in us."* 1 John 4:12

What is John saying here? He is saying this, *"No one can see God with his eyes. If we love one another, other people can 'see' the invisible God as they see His love manifested in us."* This **AGAPE** love is powerful beyond measure.

Out of Russia comes this story of a young girl named "Mary" who was imprisoned for her faith in Jesus Christ. It is a story that reveals the power of **AGAPE** love. From her prison cell, "Mary" wrote,

I am still in the same place of exile. There is a Godless society here; one of the members became especially attached to me. She said, "I cannot understand what sort of person you are; so many here insult and abuse you, but you love them all." She caused me much suffering, but I prayed for her earnestly.

Another time she asked me whether I could love her. Somehow I stretched out my hands toward her. We embraced each other, and began to cry. Now we pray together...Her name is Barbara. (Quoted by William R. Newell in "Romans, Verse by Verse".)

Barbara accepted Christ as her personal Savior and testified boldly of her faith in Christ before all. Because of her fearless testimony, she was beaten and imprisoned.

Mary wrote,

Yesterday, for the first time I saw our dear Barbara in prison. She looked very thin, pale, and with marks of beatings. The only bright thing about her were her eyes, bright and filled with heavenly peace and joy...I asked her through the bars, "Barbara, are you not sorry for what you have done?"

"No," she firmly responded. "If they would free me, I would go again and tell my comrades about the marvelous love of Christ. I am very glad that the Lord loves me so much and counts me worthy to suffer for Him."

Discovered Gem: I can love others because God has put His wonderful love in me.

Questions:

1. What is the command of the Lord Jesus concerning our love?
2. Is it possible to love another without being naturally attracted to them?
3. What does God give us to enable us to love one another with AGAPE love?
4. Can we control our feelings towards someone?
5. God, having put His wonderful love in us allows us to do what?

6. What are the main characteristic of AGAPE love?
7. Is it a sin to not love someone?
8. *"If you do not love someone, do for him what you would do if you did love him."* Is that statement true or is that being a hypocrite?
9. With what type of love does God wants us to love others?
10. What is a martyr and who was the first Christian martyr?