

Love in Jesus

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Introduction.

- A. One of the most well known passages in the Bible is Galatians 5:22-23. Many of us who were raised in the church had to memorize this Scripture as children; in fact, to this very day, I can still recite it, even though I always reverse gentleness and faithfulness for some reason. I can remember my mother decorating my Bible class room with a picture of a tree with each one of these fruits hanging from it. We know this verse.
- B. At least, we know what this verse says, but do we know what this verse means? Sometimes, with these lists from Scripture that we know so well, we just mentally rattle them off without thinking about what they really require of us, like a girl in Bible class who can sing the books of the New Testament song without making a mistake, but in her actual Bible, couldn't tell Matthew from Revelation if her life depended on it.
- C. So. . . what does it mean? What's the difference between the Holy Spirit telling us to be loving and telling us to be kind, or what sets either one of those two things apart from being gentle? Clearly, there's some overlap here, and the Bible gets at that when it says that the fruit of the Spirit IS rather than the fruits of the Spirit ARE. However, there are still subtle, significant differences between all of these attributes, and as Christians, if we are to be pleasing to God, we need to understand both what they mean and how to apply them.
- D. In our quest to do this, we can have no better guide than our Savior, Jesus. He exemplifies the fruit of the Spirit just as He exemplifies every other godly attribute, and if we imitate Him, we need have no doubt that we are doing what is right. For the next few weeks, then, we're going to be spending our Sunday mornings looking at the way the fruit of the Spirit appears in the spirit of Christ, and that begins with love in Jesus.

I. Teaching Others.

- A. Interestingly enough, the Bible has very little to say about the love that Jesus has for the Father, I suppose because it goes without saying. What the Scripture does focus on, though, is the love that Jesus has for others, and that begins in Him with **TEACHING OTHERS**. What motivated Jesus as a teacher was not His great righteousness or His great wisdom, but His great love. We see this, among other places in Mark 10:21-22. This, to me, is a fascinating passage. It comes in the midst of Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler, who has just told Jesus that he has obeyed all the Law from his youth up. Jesus looks at him, loves him, but instead of choosing to be non-confrontational about the rich young ruler's spiritual problems, He gently but clearly tells him what separates him from the kingdom of heaven. Of course, this loving warning is not met with the response that Jesus wanted to see, but it was love that moved Him to speak.
- B. There is nothing exceptional about Jesus' actions on this occasion. In fact, the opposite is true. Look at what Jesus says in Revelation 3:19. Here, He's speaking to the church in Laodicea, a congregation racked with spiritual problems, yet a congregation that Jesus loves. Jesus really socks it to them for quite a few verses. Among other things, he calls them wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, which is not the sort of thing that any of us want to hear from anyone. But then, in v. 19, we see the reason why He speaks this way. He rebukes and chastens not in spite of His love for the Laodiceans, but because of it.
- C. Friends, there is a hugely important lesson here that all of us need to learn. Except for a few really weird people, all of us like pleasure and dislike pain, whether on a physical or a mental level. As a result, we assume that anyone who loves us is only going to tell us nice things about ourselves that make us happy, rather than unpleasant things about ourselves that make us sad. We think in turn that if we love someone else, we won't tell them the things that make them sad either. We think that love keeps its mouth shut.
- D. That is absolutely not the case. Friends, there are more important things in life than pleasure and pain, and Jesus' loving willingness to speak the truth, even when the truth was painful, shows that very thing. What's best for our friends and loved ones is not that we coddle them and protect them from the unpleasant realities of their lives and ours. What's best for them is that we tell them the truth, especially if they are doing something to endanger their souls. If we really love them, that's exactly what we will do. Friends, it's never loving to let someone else live a lie. It's never loving to allow our friends and family members to be lost because we don't want to have a difficult conversation. Let's be like Jesus. Let's speak the truth in love.

II. Protecting, Mourning, and Exalting Others.

- A. Just as the love of Jesus expressed itself in teaching others, so too it did in **PROTECTING OTHERS**. Once a soul commits itself to Jesus, Jesus loves that soul too much to ever let it go. Paul discusses this in Romans 8:35-37. The love of Jesus brings His people safely through any spiritual conflict imaginable. Obviously, this is not something we can imitate precisely, but we still have much to learn from the loyalty that Jesus displays to His beloved. If we truly love someone, we should be just as loyal and steadfast as Jesus is. When a brother needs our help, we need to be there to give it. This can be especially important in our dealings with Christians

on the fringes of the congregation, those who fall through the cracks sometimes. Too often, brethren in that condition fall away because there isn't anyone else looking out for them. Friends, we need to be those who ARE looking out for them. We need to be aware not just of the spiritual needs of our friends and family members here, but also of the needs of those who do not naturally draw us. That's how Christ was.

- B. Likewise, our love should express itself in **MOURNING OTHERS**. This is equally important whether we are grieving over someone in our circle of care who is the victim of tragedy, or helping those who are left in the wake of disaster. We see Jesus mourn in both these senses in John 11:33-36. This sort of grief can be quite painful, but it is a necessary part of love. We need to learn to invest ourselves in other people, particularly brethren, so that we mourn their absence and feel their losses as though they were our own. It should never be, friends, that we listen to the announcement of the death of someone's mother and start thinking about what we're going to eat for dinner or how the Bears will do this afternoon because those things interest us more. The church is a family, and we need to care about our Christian family as much as our earthly family.
- C. In the opposite direction, just as was true for Jesus, our love should involve us in **EXALTING OTHERS**. We see this presented in an interesting way in Revelation 3:9. Jesus is telling the Christians in Philadelphia that they're not just going to come out on top, but that they're going to be seen even by their enemies to come out on top. Why? Because Jesus loves them and wants them to be honored. This is actually quite a familiar impulse to all of us. It reminds me, actually, of graduation ceremonies. My mother made me go to all four of mine, so I guess I feel like an expert. During the actual ceremony, as each graduate walks across the stage, typically, you see polite applause from 99% of the audience, but then there's the other 1% that is whooping and hollering. Who is that 1 percent? Just some random people who thought the graduate was doing a great job walking across the stage? Of course not! It's the friends and family of that graduate, who are making sure that the one they love is being honored. That's the attitude, friends, that we should have toward one another. In the Lord's church, it should never be ourselves whom we lift up. It should never be our achievements that interest us. Instead, we should rejoice in the glory of our brethren, because that expresses the love of Christ.

III. Dying for Others

- A. The love of Christ, though, and our love as we imitate Him, reaches its greatest expression in **DYING FOR OTHERS**. Consider Jesus' comments on this subject in John 15:12-14. This, of course, is not idle speculation. Jesus is actually saying this as He and His disciples are en route from the location of the Last Supper to the Garden of Gethsemane. Dying for one's friends is the greatest expression of love because, as Jesus is experiencing right now, it's really, really hard. He knows that in less than 24 hours, He is going to be hanging on a cross, and that's almost the last thing in the world He wants to do. He's going to do it anyway, though, because He loves His disciples so much that He would literally rather be crucified than let them be lost.
- B. The love of Jesus that caused Him to give Himself for us is the standard of *agape*. We cannot know what love is unless we know what the cross is first, and the more time we spend looking at the cross, the more it changes us. Some preachers say when they really want to guilt-trip the audience that we put Jesus on the cross. I know what they're getting at, but that's not true. Jesus put Himself on the cross when none of us could have put Him there, completely of His own free will, to take our sin upon Himself, because of the greatness of His love for us. Once we get that, we can't ever get over it. It changes everything.
- C. The first thing that happens once we come nose to nose with the crucified Christ is that suddenly, living for ourselves doesn't seem so important. We want to live for Him instead. Look at how Paul expresses himself on this point in Galatians 2:20. He says that he has been crucified with Christ. This is a profoundly complex statement. It means that Paul's sins were nailed to the cross, but also that the part of him that was OK with sin was also nailed to the cross. Christ lives in him now because he wants to be exactly like Jesus in everything and serve Him in everything. Paul no longer sees anything desirable in being Paul, because the death of Jesus has shown him what life is really meant to be about. This is where we need to be too, brethren. Our love for our dying Lord should motivate us to surrender our lives to Him, because when I understand that Jesus died for me, how can I dare hold anything back from Him?
- D. Likewise, just as love should move us to die to ourselves for Jesus, so too it should move us to die to ourselves for others. John discusses this in 1 John 3:16-17. It's not coincidence that we have these two ideas juxtaposed here, brethren. John is telling us that this is one of the ways we need to imitate the love of Jesus. Thankfully, I will never be called upon to die for the sins of mankind. I may never be called upon to die for other Christians at all. But friends, I am called upon to live for other Christians. Each one of us is called to live for other Christians, because that's what being a disciple is. Being like Jesus is daily living for others, especially our brethren, because that's what Jesus did. This can express itself in a thousand different ways and at a thousand different times. I don't have the faintest idea what most of those ways and times are, because learning how to love is the greatest work of a Christian's lifetime, and even when we die, I suspect that we will not have begun to explore all the nature and the expressions of love. But we need to try. We need to live for love, so that we are remembered not as people who were rich or hardworking, but as people who loved.

Conclusion. If you are not living the love of Jesus, you are living a selfish life. Change today.