

LOVE

Lesson Number Three

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John 13:34 & 35 says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

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

And I John 3:10 says, "By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother." Turn with me now to I Corinthians 13:5 on Page 1000 in the Bible.

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I Corinthians 13:5, "it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;"

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We are living in the last few years of the twentieth century. Our civilization is sophisticated and our social conduct conforms to proper rules for a highly polished way of life. We order our lives to follow the preferred forms of etiquette; we congratulate our friends on their promotions; we stay cool when we're crossed so no one will think we are disturbed by the idiots around us; and we smooth over the weaknesses of our loved ones. We smile at people we dislike and exchange greetings with our enemies, invite the new neighbors in for coffee, and make contributions so Thanksgiving and Christmas baskets can be given to poor families in the city. Then we pat ourselves on the backs for being so friendly, charitable, and loving!

Well...the "charity", the "love" that the Apostle Paul is talking about in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians is a considerably more difficult way of life than that!

Love is neither selfish nor rude. Now, we all know that it is the polite thing to do to say thank you for a gift. We know that a gentleman removes his hat when he enters a house and that well-bred children hop up to offer their seats to adults entering the room. But many of these things we do merely out of a feeling of social responsibility. And sometimes we wish we didn't have to do them. They become a chore, a duty, and there is little joy in the gesture.

What a difference when we truly love someone! How we jump to do the little things that are signals of our loving attention! To do little things for others, in a way that is genuine, is to prove one's love. Love just does not behave in a discourteous manner. Greed does; selfishness does; fear does - but not love.

Take stock the next time you get stuck in a traffic jam and lean on the horn. Ask yourself what's going on in your mind the next time you hurry past the woman with the overloaded shopping cart to get to the cash register first with your bread and milk and hamburger. What is pushing you? Courtesy does not push other people around; love expresses itself by making the way easier for someone. It kneels to serve another.

Once upon a time, there was a husband who had entered into a new relationship with Christ. He wanted to share the

new joy he felt to his wife but he had difficulty trying to figure out how to begin. Years before he had decided that one chore he would not do around the house was to carry out the garbage - he would do anything else gladly, but not that. Now, as he began asking the Lord how he could get through to his wife, there seemed to be no approach that was not prefaced by that garbage sack sitting by the back door. So finally he stooped down, picked the bag up, and carried it out to the alley. His love for both God and his wife had grown past the point where he had to prove his superiority. He was free to become a garbage carrier in love.

Turn with me to Romans, chapter five, verses six through eight on page 980 in your Bibles. Love is not selfish. It goes out of its way to perform a service for another. Love doesn't ask whether the loved one is worthy of being loved; Love just loves. Let's look at the greatest example of all time.

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Romans 5:6-8. "While we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man - though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."

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Out of these three verses, we can glean three pictures of love. The first picture is the contrast between human love and divine love. The second is the oneness of the love of God and Christ and the implications of that oneness. And, the third picture is the amazing fact that God commends His love towards us.

Human love almost always has a selfish motive. The highest degree of human love was described by Christ in John 15:13, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Now, you may think that the evening news broadcasts and the newspapers are full of stories about people dying for others but, if we analyze the motives behind the acts, we will see that cases of truly dying for others are extremely rare.

First of all, we can eliminate all cases where Christians have died for others by going to places of danger or infection. In those cases the motivation was not human love at all but rather divine love shed abroad in their hearts, and was the outworking of that inflowing love. What we are looking for is the natural reaction of human love.

Next we can eliminate general acts of heroism which include soldiers dying for their country, firemen and policemen dying in the line of duty, and those who rush into burning buildings or jump into freezing waters and die trying to save others. I do not count any of these deaths as voluntary. There was a calculated risk involved. They thought they could make it; others have tried and made it before - they could too. Such people are very brave but they are not voluntarily giving their lives for others. They did NOT intend to die.

When you have eliminated sacrifices based on reckless bravado, calculated risk, and emotional unbalance, you are left with very few cases indeed. It is these few remaining

cases that send shivers UP our spines as we consider what really happened. Many years ago there was a mine disaster in Pennsylvania. One of the survivors had a wife and three children. He related how he was trapped in the mine at a spot where gas was accumulating. In the falling debris his gas mask was torn. Another young man took off his own mask and forced it on his friend saying, "You have Mary and the children; they need you. I am alone and can go." When we read about such an act, we almost feel like we are treading on holy ground.

Or...consider the case of a little crippled girl who lived in the slums. The day came when she was lucky enough to undergo an operation that might enable her to walk again. It was a special day indeed, both for her and her entire family. But after the operation, some complications developed and she urgently needed a blood transfusion. Her fourteen year-old brother, who was a very tough kid used to running the streets, volunteered for the job. He was taken to the bedside of his sister, and watched while the vein in his arm was opened so that his blood might flow into the body of the unconscious girl. Time passed and he sat staring in tight-lipped silence. When it was over, the doctor put his hand on his shoulder and told him that he was very brave. After a moment the boy, who did not understand the nature of transfusions, looked up and said, "Doc, how long before I croak?" As far as his heart and will were concerned, he was dying, drop by drop, slowly and willingly, expecting that her life would mean his own death. There, indeed, is the highest in human love.

This story is so touching that it has the opportunity to present one of the greatest errors that Satan has ever foisted on the human race. Satan argues in this fashion: God is love. This example shows how great love is. Love is the greatest. Therefore Love IS God. If you do it in love, it doesn't really matter what "it" is; just so long as love is your motive. Such reasoning has led to the so-called "love-culture" of today: the contention being that love is the ultimate justification, that anything done in love is okay because love is its motivation. The classic example of this error is the case of an otherwise outstanding Bible teacher who lost a son to enemy action during the First World War. He preached a sermon in which he told all who had lost loved ones in the service that such self-sacrifice would be rewarded by salvation. This shows how relying on emotion rather than the Word of God can unbalance even a keen theological mind. In reply to this error, Dr. Griffith-Thomas proclaimed, "If this were true, then a German bullet would be just as efficacious as the blood of Jesus Christ. If this were true, then the proper procedure would be to empty the prisons and put all the depraved and vicious into the front line where shock troops would be sure to be killed. Thus, we could insure their salvation!" The Bible tells us, point blank, that such human love, no matter how great, is never enough to commend the soul to God's holy love. This is an instance of what love is NOT! Love is NOT God! God is love but love is NOT God! Love, by itself, is just another idol; something else man bows down before in his attempts to avoid having to bow down before the real and living God of Heaven.

The major contrast between the highest form of human love and divine love is the source of the love. Man must have a motive for his love outside of himself. God loves because he is love. Love must flow from God because there is an inner fountain in the heart of God that must flow out to those upon whom he has determined to lavish his love. There was never anything in us to call forth this love; there was everything in us to repel it. In spite of this, the love of God flows.

And we are pressed to the conclusion that Jesus Christ is God by these three verses. The love of God the Father and the Love of Christ are seen to be the same love, and unlike any other love. Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other. The love of Christ is shown by his death on the cross. The cross, then, forms the equation between the love of the Father, and the love of the Son. It is the same love. Therefore the cross is one of the Proofs of the Godhead of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The implications of the oneness of God the Father and God the Son are evident. They determined to accomplish our salvation and they did so! The Father would give His only begotten Son, and the Son would lay down his life. Salvation becomes a fact, so simple that any child can receive it, yet so profound that no philosopher can fathom it.

And that's not all. The Father will not permit so much love to be poured out in vain. He stoops yet further, to commend his love toward us. The Revised Standard Version says he shows us his love. The original Greek is SUNISTAO which literally means to set together, to introduce, or to exhibit. It is in the Present tense in Romans 5:8. God continues to prove his love for man every day by continually recommending the way of the cross. This is the Power of the love: it works! The recommendation confronts us with our need and tells us that our need has been met. God made peace with sinful man at the cross. Peace has been declared throughout the world! Amnesty is available for all who will reach out and take it! God is SATISFIED with the Price that Christ Paid to redeem us! It is SUFFICIENT!

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Some of the aspects of God's love are so overwhelming that I get caught-up in them and have a hard time coming down. Love is not selfish or rude. God's love shows us at the cross what true selflessness is. Going on; consider that love does not insist on its own way. The King James Version says, "Love seeketh not her own" which I think also means that love does not require love in return. Love does not push itself into the limelight; nor does it strive for place or position. The secret lies in surrendering our wills to God's will so that His way becomes our way.

Love is not irritable or touchy. Irritability is one of the products of our nervous modern age. We rush here and there; we don't know where we're going but we're already ten minutes late. Stop sometime and watch the shoppers entering a department store. See how excited they get over missing one section of a revolving door. It's truly uncanny. The center of irritability is self. The test of your spirituality is not measured at the Sunday worship service, but at home when your son kicks his pajamas under

the bed instead of putting them in the hamper. We entertain the stranger with smiles, while our loved ones are hurt by neglect and familiarity. The toughest place for love is at home. But, if we can't love those at home, how dare we mouth fancy words about love at church. We become whitewashed walls; as Jesus said of the Pharisees: bright on the outside, but inside - filled with dead men's bones.

Love does not hold grudges. It will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. Love is optimistic; it looks at people in the best light. Everyone has an inner longing to feel important. Would you like to put what we're learning in these lessons to work? Consider this: young people have a terrible self-image. Most of them inwardly and secretly suspect that they are not worth very much. Their parents tell them they're special but that doesn't count. They're parents; they have to say that. At least, that's how the kids see it. Twenty years ago, suicide was the fifth leading cause of death among teenagers. Today, it's moved up to third place. Things are NOT getting better; they're getting worse; much worse. Teenagers are abrasive and hard to put up with some of the time. Everything is "booooooring" as far as they're concerned. And yet, they are crying out for love the only way they know how. They don't dare openly admit their need; they might get turned down and that would just confirm what they already feared: that they really ARE worthless. There are several teenagers and pre-teens right here in this church. How many of them have you ever really spent any time with. Now, DON'T try to make a grand effort or you'll scare them off. But, slowly, gently, and quietly get to know them just a little bit better. Don't be surprised if you don't really seem to be making a lot of progress: the attention will be felt in their hearts even if they don't feel comfortable about letting it show.

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Turn with me to the book of Jeremiah, chapter thirty-one, verse three on page 679 in your Bibles. Today, we are going to spend some time looking at the Hebrew word AHAB and its word family. AHAB is a rather all-encompassing love word. It is used in describing God's love for man, man's love for God, man's love for his fellow men, God's special love for Israel, sexual love, and even the love that is at work when a father spans his children.

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Jeremiah 31:3. "The Lord appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you."

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Now, it is really easy to simply read through these words quickly and conclude that Jeremiah is just mouthing another scriptural truth about love; one that we have heard so many times before - that God's love is everlasting. But, the amazing fact is that this statement is a glaring contrast to every single other thing that the prophet has to say about the subject of love. Compared to Jeremiah's other pronouncements on the subject this statement sticks out like I would at a convention of dwarfs.

Jeremiah 2:2 tells us that God said, "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride." But this love was short lived, as Jeremiah points out in 2:33 when

he replaces this beautiful picture with one that paints Israel as an adulteress, "How well you direct your course to seek lovers! So that even to wicked women you have taught your ways." In 2:25, he puts words of betrayal into the mouth of Israel, "I have loved strangers, and after them I will go." The strangers, of course, are the strange gods, the idols that so fascinated the unstable nation. In 8:2 we see that the people have "loved", "served", "gone after", "sought", and "worshipped" the "sun and moon and all the host of heaven." 5:31 tells us that they love it when prophets prophesy falsely and priests rule accordingly and 14:10 tells us that they love to wander. But the false gods Judah worships, her "lovers" turn out to be a pretty poor lot. In 22:20 and 22:22 it is said that they will be destroyed. Jeremiah 3:1 affirms that they are numerous, "You have played the harlot with many lovers." But Jeremiah 30:14 tells us that among them all there is none that really cares about the fickle nation, "All your lovers have forgotten you; they care nothing for you." And 4:30 says, "Your lovers despise you."

That's it! That's ALL the passages where Jeremiah uses AHAB, the Hebrew word for love. There is nothing in Jeremiah's prophecy to ease this picture; nothing to indicate that deep down Judah may harbor a lingering affection for Yahweh. The nation is wholly set on her idols. When Jeremiah uses the terminology of love, it is abundantly clear that he is telling Judah, "You don't even know what real, true love is. You're nothing but a filthy whore. You're not welcome in polite society; you would turn the stomachs of decent people."

There is certainly nothing in any of his condemnation of Judah's harlotry to prepare us for God's resounding declaration, "I have loved you with an everlasting love!" This declaration certainly doesn't follow logically from what Jeremiah has been saying; it cuts right across it. In fact, the certainty of judgement pervades Jeremiah's prophecy to such a degree and with such strength that we would not be surprised at all if he announced at this point that God had utterly rejected the nation, that he had cast them off and ceased to care about them.

Instead, we come upon this tremendous affirmation of love - and everlasting love at that! Despite all that they have done, God still loves his people and will love them forever. There are those that say that the Old Testament shows a God of judgement while the New Testament shows a God of love. To which I reply "HOGWASH!" God has NOT changed! He is the same; yesterday, today, and forever! He is ever and always the God of love. God does not simply tolerate Judah - he loves them with all the fervor of his holy nature. That is the extraordinary message Jeremiah brings about God's love. When everything else leads us to expect that God will abhor these sinful people, we find that instead he loves them, loves them with an everlasting love.

AHAB and its derivatives here seem to signify love freely given, love given when there is no sense of obligation. When these words are used to refer to God, they imply his grace. God's love is freely given to sinners; it is not irresistibly drawn from him by the virtues of some

group of attractive people. God loves not because the objects of his love are upright and winsome, but because he is a loving God. Again and again the Old Testament draws attention to the absence of merit in those God loves. The constancy of his love depends on what he is rather than on what they are.

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Words from the ANAB word group are most commonly used to indicate sexual love, the love of man and wife. Because that love is so beautiful and important, it also became a useful picture of the Lord's relationship with Israel and it is for this reason that Israel is so often referred to as the Bride of Yahweh in the scriptures. The most outstanding example of this imagery is found in the book of Hosea. Turn with me to Hosea 1:2 on page 776 in your Bibles. The marriage of Hosea and Gomer is probably one of the unhappiest and painful ever recorded in all history. And, this verse shows us the beginning from which the disastrous marriage sprang.

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Hosea 1:2. "When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry, for the land commits a great harlotry by forsaking the Lord.'"

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Hosea was told to go marry a prostitute. He was also told that the children she bore wouldn't be his. He was told that the purpose of this was to demonstrate God's love for his own rebellious bride; the nation of Israel. Hosea obeyed. He took Gomer as his wife. And, he didn't just go through the legal motions; he really loved her. He was a man possessed and dominated by his love. It went to the very roots of his being, and so fully did it absorb him that no sin or folly on her part could shake it. It was no mere explosive flash of strong emotion that had kindled in his life, it was a consuming fire shut up in his bones, which no rejection could weaken and no suffering quench. In all the world's literature there is no record of human love like that of Hosea for Gomer.

Hosea agonized over Gomer. He pleaded with her, he tried to guide her, but it all did no good. Finally she so ruined herself that she was sold into slavery to pay her debts. Did Hosea wash his hands of her at this final insult? NO! He went down to the slave market and bought her back himself! Do you see the picture? We, like sheep, had all gone astray, we had all turned away from God and had been sold into the bondage of sin. Jesus went to the cross to pay the price to buy us back himself! What a love!

Hosea's love for Gomer was about as real as love can get. It was certainly tender and gentle and long-suffering. And that is why it is especially instructive to note that in the midst of such tenderness, Hosea is not outdone by any other prophet in the ferocity of his threats and the savagery of his proclamation of punishment. Love is never harsh but it can and should be stern when necessary. Hosea 2:10 says bluntly, "Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand." The Living Bible puts it, "Now I will expose her nakedness in public for all her lovers to see, and no one

will be able to rescue her from my hand." But, Hosea doesn't just speak of God as physically punishing Israel like a stubborn and rebellious young girl; he also describes sin as having its own built-in punishment. To spurn God's love and bestow one's affections elsewhere is to bring down on oneself an inevitable judgement. Hosea saw with crystal clarity the inevitable consequences of Israel's sin, and it grieved him.

But what he saw with equal clarity was that, though Israel was steadily destroying herself with her harlotries, she was not destroying God's love for her. She could not! God's love is firm and sure and steadfast, continuing no matter what happens.

Hear the reaffirmation of God's love for Israel in Hosea 11:8 & 9. "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboiim! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger. I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy."

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Thank God for such love! Before we get into some discussion, let's go to the Lord together in prayer.
