

LOVE

Lesson Number Five

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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."

Romans 13:8 says, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."

I John 4:11 exhorts us, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

And I John 5:1 says, "Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the Parent loves the child." Now turn to I Corinthians 13:7 on Page 1000 in your Bibles. By now, I imagine you've figured out my normal opening Procedure and have realized that I'm starting on Page 1000 each Sunday. Today though I want to stop and consider I John 5:1 for a moment before going on. I've just read it in the Revised Standard Version. In the King James Version, it reads, "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him."

This verse tells us who our brother is. Our brother is another christian; another child of God. There are those who will try to tell you that the commands to love our brother mean that we are to love everyone in the world. They point to the story of the good Samaritan illustrating the second commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and claim that this indicates that our neighbor is anyone in need; thus anyone in the entire world. Thus, to love our brother is to love everyone. But this is not what I John 5:1 tells us.

I John 5:1 specifically tells us that our brother is another christian. "Brother" and "Neighbor" are NOT the same. This does not mean that we are not to love the neighbor; the second commandment says that we are to. But it does mean that there is a difference between neighbors and brothers. Galatians 6:10 says, "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." This explains it. We are to love all men but other christians come first. Now that seems logical doesn't it; other christians are family. If you have just enough to save one starving person and you see two starving people, which do you save. That is not an easy decision. But if one of the two is your own son or daughter, the question is moot. You may agonize and cry that the other can not be saved but the food still goes to your own child. In Mark 7:27, Jesus said, "it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." Yes, it's true that the context says that even the dogs are allowed to eat the children's crumbs and that reinforces the concept. We ARE to love the stranger and the non-believer. They are our neighbor. BUT! BUT, our brother, the member of our family in Christ, comes first.

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Now, on to I Corinthians 13:7, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

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Love bears all things. Here is another category. I

John 5:1 tells us that we are to love God first and foremost and then our brothers and sisters in Christ next. After that, the second commandment tells us that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. And now, I Corinthians 13:7 tells us that love bears all things. This is amplified by Matthew 5:43 & 44 which say, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy'. But I say to you, Love your enemies and Pray for those who persecute you." And the forty-fifth verse tells us why, "so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Love bears all things; we are to love everyone; God first, our brothers and sisters in Christ second, our neighbors third, and finally, even our enemies.

Now this is all really an aside. It is a take-off on one of the English meanings on the word "bear". But in the original Greek, the word is STEGO which literally means to roof over or to cover. The concept of bearing up under persecution is not totally foreign to this definition because it includes the idea of not taking offense. But the main idea of this word is one of providing shelter and protection. When Paul says Love bears all things, he is basically contending that Love is a retreat which shelters people from the storm. When a brother falls, what do you do? Do you lift him up, or cast him aside? Do you cover his faults, or whisper about them? Do you engage in character assassination, or do you try to work directly with the one in trouble. Unkind talk hinders the work of God a thousand times over. Critical tongues close church doors to hundreds of people. A person whispers, "Did you hear the awful story about Mr. Smith? I was so sorry!" He lies! He was glad! If he was really sorry, he would have kept it to himself and tried to quietly help Mr. Smith out of his difficulties.

The gossip, the slanderer, is worse than the biggest thief in the world. The thief steals your money, but the slanderer steals what money cannot buy - your reputation.

Matthew 7:1 says, "Judge not, that ye be not judged." A great aide in helping us accept the failures of others is remembering that God has covered all of our sins - sins of long ago and sins of today, sins of the body, of the soul, of the spirit, sins of omission and commission. An unforgiving spirit blocks the forgiveness of God. Booker T. Washington once said, "I will not permit any man to narrow and degrade my soul by making me hate him."

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Love believes all things. This does NOT mean that love is totally credulous, that it will accept as true any wild statement that is made. Quite the opposite. I John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world." No, love doesn't just believe anything. What this passage actually means is that love takes the kindest view possible of people and circumstances. Love searches for what is good and gives the benefit of the doubt.

If someone says, "God is a myth. I don't believe in him and, if he did exist, I would hate him and destroy him if I could.", even love isn't going to be able to come to any conclusion other than "Here is one on his way to Hell."

But, if another says, "I just don't see how a loving God can allow all the awful things that are happening in the world? How can I believe in such a God?", Love will not condemn him but will rejoice that the Lord has allowed an opportunity for witness to one who is searching and who is hopefully destined to become a brother in Christ at a later date.

It is easy to shy away from men who are "down on their luck" and assume that they are just after a handout and a free ride. But, a few years ago, a Prayer experiment began in Pittsburgh. A group of Christian businessmen saw very practical results of this expression of love - this believing in people - as they got under the burden with some men who were unemployed. As they became willing to spend time with these men who were out of a job, they began to love them, to pray for them and with them.

One of the most interesting results of this communication of love through prayer lay in the response of the two hundred men who found employment during a nineteen-month period. It became apparent that most of them were finding their own jobs as this fellowship of love gave them increased confidence in themselves and renewed faith in God's personal concern for them. As a result of Christ's men believing in them, they were able to believe in themselves and move ahead.

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Love hopes all things. Turn with me to the twelfth chapter of Mark on page 880 in your Bibles. This is the classic story of hope: the parable of the vineyard. Hope is the antidote for gloom and despair. I am an optimist. I don't mean a Pollyanna who just naturally assumes that all things will just naturally work out great. I am an optimist chiefly because I recognize that God is sovereign and His triumph is sure. Optimism is that cheerful frame of mind that enables a teakettle to sing, even though it's up to its nose in hot water. In the King James Version, Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." God is in control! Hallelujah!

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Now, Mark chapter twelve, beginning with the first verse and continuing through the eighth, "And he began to speak to them in parables. A man planted a vineyard, and set a hedge around it, and dug a pit for the wine press, and built a tower, and let it out to tenants, and went into another country. When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, to get from them some of the fruit of the vineyard. And they took him and beat him, and sent him away empty-handed. Again he sent to them another servant, and they wounded him in the head, and treated him shamefully. And he sent another, and him they killed; and so with many others, some they beat and some they killed. He had still one other, a beloved son; finally he sent him to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But those tenants said to one another, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours. And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard.'"

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Now, if you had sent a dozen employees to collect a bill and had seen them all either beaten or killed, would

you send your own son in to try to make the collection. I don't know about you but, unless my son were the Incredible Hulk, I certainly wouldn't.

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Love endures all things. And it is the endurance that makes hope possible. Turn with me to Romans 5:1-5 on page 980 in your Bibles. Love definitely has an enduring quality. Through good times and bad times, glad days and sad days, through doubt and darkness, love is persistent.

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Romans 5:1-5, "Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us."

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In John 16:33, Jesus said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." God IS in control. The tribulations that befall us build our endurance and thus our hope. Olives and grapes are fruits which produce oil and wine but they are not oil and wine themselves. In Palestine we find olives and grapes that have never fulfilled their true destiny. The olive shrinks and is wrinkled. A hungry man will eat such olives, and the poor people put them into their food; but the richness has evaporated. Grapes that remain on the vine harden, and after a time are pulpy and dry. They will keep for months, dry all the time, and will be nourishing, but the wine is gone, and the raisins excite a thirst for the juice that is not there. Such olives and grapes are better than nothing, but they are not substitutes for oil and wine.

Are you satisfied with olives and grapes? Be sure they will dry up in your storehouse and will never furnish the shining face or the merry heart. Oil and wine bring joy, not olives and grapes. And surely you can see that it is not possible to have oil and wine unless olives are pressed and grapes are crushed. Even the finest fruit will not yield its essence without this process. Indeed, the finer the fruit the firmer the skin, and the heavier the pressure that must be put upon it to burst its surface that the juices may spurt. If you are to be splashed with joy, you must be crushed.

I used to live in California. I had occasion to visit the site of a recent forest fire once while I was out there. The marks of the conflagration were thoroughly depressing. As I walked through the forest I doubted if anything had survived the inferno. All looked hopelessly dead. Blackness prevailed. Six months later I went again and witnessed the miracle; Nature, with a lush mantle of green, had covered the darkness, overflowed the wounds, and hidden the scars.

The Christian does not go out of his way to seek trouble, for he is not the victim of a martyr complex or a delusion of persecution symptomatic of paranoia. But when

the crushing load of life comes down upon him, the true believer faces it with calmness and equanimity, knowing that God means it for good and that out of it will come rejoicing and the possibility of glorifying afresh in God.

Love bears all things. Love believes all things. Love hopes all things. Love endures all things. I Peter 4:12-14 says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

And I John 4:18 says, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love."

And the capstone verse to this subject is the promise of James 1:12, "Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him."

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Today, we're going to examine the Greek word STORGE. C. S. Lewis says that the simplest translation of this word into the English is as "affection." The lexicon formally defines it as "affection, especially of parents to offspring but also of offspring to parents." We can start by imagining the picture of a mother nursing a baby, a mother dog with a basketful of puppies, or a mother cat with a litter of kittens. Think of it; think of a squirming heap of puppies, squeaking and wiggling with the mother licking and nuzzling, baby-talk, milk, warmth, and the smell of new life.

The major importance of this image lies in the paradox it presents when we consider it in the light of the difference between "need-love" and "gift-love" that we discussed last week. You will recall that we described "gift-love" as that which prompts a man to buy life insurance: it provides for the well-being of his family after he is dead. He will not see it or share in its benefits, yet he is willing to expend the premiums because the insurance will help support his loved-ones after he is gone. And, we described "need-love" as that which sends a lonely or frightened child running to Mommy.

But now we are faced with a paradox. With the basket of puppies, the litter of kittens, or the baby, the need and need-love of the young is obvious; so is the gift-love of the mother. She gives birth, gives suck, gives protection. On the other hand, she MUST give birth or die. She MUST give suck or suffer. That way, her affection is a need-love too and not just a gift-love. That's the paradox: it's a need-love but what it needs is to give. It is a gift-love but it needs to be needed.

STORGE, or "affection", is the least discriminating of the loves; it ignores the barriers of age, sex, race, class, education, and creed. It can exist between a sharp young man just graduating from college and a retired dockworker, even though their thoughts and ways are totally different. STORGE even ignores the barriers between species; it is very common between man and dog, and is even sometimes found between dog and cat. Affection has one

major criteria though: its objects must be familiar. The dog barks at strangers who have never done it any harm but then wags its tail for old acquaintances even if they have never been particularly nice to the dog. The child will love a surly old housekeeper who seldom even says hello but will run and hide from the visitor who is making every attempt to win the child over. The secret, of course, is that the housekeeper must be an "OLD" one. At least in the child's eyes; one who has "always" been there.

STORGE is a humble love. Affection doesn't puff itself up. We often exhibit a certain amount of Pride when we "fall in love" and we can also be Proud of certain friendships but Affection is much more modest. You may find affection between a dog and a cat but you can be sure that the dog would never admit it in front of other dogs. This is at least a good caricature of human affection. Appreciative love isn't really involved; Affection takes the object of its love almost for granted; affection is a comfortable, quiet natured feeling. Affection would not BE affection if it were loudly Proclaimed; it lives with humble things; old clothes, soft slippers, old stories, the thump of a sleepy dog's tail on the kitchen floor; things like that.

This, of course, is all true of affection when it exists by itself. While it often does so, it also very often exists in combination with other types of love. To make a friend is not the same as to become affectionate. But when the friend has become an OLD friend, all those things about him which originally had nothing to do with the friendship become familiar and dear with familiarity. As for erotic love: without the homespun clothing of affection to cover it, I think it would become unbearable in very short order.

Affection develops without a need to appreciate but the affection grows to the point where we are ABLE to appreciate things we would not otherwise have been able to. Affection can unite those who most emphatically (even comically) are not suited for each other by any reason other than that they happened to have been plopped-down together in the same family or group. Growing fond of "old Sam", at first simply because he happens to be there, I slowly begin to realize that "old Sam" is a real person with ways and ideas which are intriguing. They are not my ways and I would never consider such ideas but, on him, they sit well and seem to fit. This is not mere tolerance, it is a coming to truly appreciate the ways and ideas that you would never consider for yourself. STORGE allows us to develop a truly wide taste in humanity; an ability to truly appreciate others even when they are widely (and even wildly) different from ourselves.

I claim to be a widely read individual. But if I took you down to my office library, you might look at the many shelves of books and comment, "Yes, but YOU chose these books. They were picked to suit your tastes. That doesn't make you widely read. That only proves that you've got enough money to buy what you like." And you would be right for saying so. What makes me widely read is not my collection of books but my ability to enjoy just about anything that is written, at least to some degree. I am a voracious reader: odd books on odd subjects picked-up at

the library or on the ten-cent tray at the used-book store; newspapers, whatever. I even read cereal boxes while I'm eating breakfast if nothing else is handy. This is what I base my claim to be widely read on: that I suck up the written word like a vacuum cleaner and get some enjoyment out of it almost no matter what it is. The truly wide taste in humanity will similarly find something to appreciate in the cross-section of humanity whom one has to meet every day.

And right here is where affection gets really dangerous. As I said before, affection is humble. In the King James Version of the Bible, the second part of I Corinthians 13:4 reads, "charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up." "Charity" is translating AGAPE love. It is archaic and not used in the same way anymore so we usually use the word "love" instead of the word "charity". But the point is that the passage says that AGAPE love is not puffed up and I have just similarly said that STORGE love is humble. In the same comparative fashion, we can note that affection can love the unattractive: God and His saints love the unlovable. Affection does not expect too much, turns a blind eye to faults, easily comes back to life after a quarrel: AGAPE love suffers long, is kind and forgives. Affection opens our eyes to goodness we could not see or appreciate without it. So does AGAPE. If we were to dwell exclusively on the way STORGE and AGAPE resemble each other, we might erroneously conclude that Affection is not merely one of the natural loves but is instead Love Himself working in our human hearts and fulfilling the law. Is this true? Is affection at its best and fullest development the same thing as the christian life? NO! Most certainly not!

The rivalry between all natural loves and the Love of God is something we must never forget. God is the great rival, the ultimate object of human jealousy. God may steal the heart (at least it seems like stealing to the unsaved) of one's wife, husband, son, daughter, or other loved-one at any moment.

It is common to think of affection as being something we are automatically entitled to: our mothers and fathers HAVE to love us, don't they? We have a right to expect to be loved by our Parents, right? Wrong! It IS normal for Parents to love their children and for children to love their Parents but it is by no means universal. On the one hand, there are those who are incapable of loving anyone, even themselves, and on the other hand are those who are so mean and cruel that even their own mother can't have any affection for them. We all know that there are certain things that we must do to attract erotic love or friendship. Unless we also do something to attract affection (namely being reasonably kind and affectionate ourselves) we are liable to end up with an eternal craving for affection that is never satisfied and never will be. Think of the miserable old hag who keeps her daughter in total subjection for 50 to 60 years, demanding that the daughter constantly tend, obey, support, and carress her until the day she dies. Lewis well uses the term "Maternal Vampire" for such an insatiable lust for affection. The daughter's sacrifice may have something beautiful about it but the old hag who demands it certainly does not.

Affection does not breed well in such an environment. In fact, the same conditions of intimacy which make affection possible also make possible a deep distaste: an outright hatred and disgust.

Affection is a Gift love but one that needs to give and therefore needs to be needed. But the proper goal of the giving is to lead the recipient of the gift to the point where the gift is no longer necessary. Children need their Parents and their Parents need to be needed by them. But the goal of Parenthood is to raise the children so that they can function in the world on their own without leaning on Mom and Dad all the time. Thus a heavy task is laid on the gift-love of STORGE: it must work towards its own abdication.

STORGE desires the good of its object but tends to restrict that desire to only when it can provide the good itself. The hour when we can say, "They don't need me any more," should be a time of joy; more often it is a time of despair. A much higher love - AGAPE love - a love which desires the good of its object no matter where the good comes from must step in and take over or STORGE will sour into something much more akin to hatred than to any form of love.

The temptation of affection is to overwhelm the one for whom the affection is felt and to dominate the object into submitting to the affection. Fortunately, the temptation is often overruled. But the temptation is there. It is not a disease: not unless you call it the disease of being a fallen, sinful man. It is natural. Natural is NOT the same as good no matter what the health-food and granola people try to tell you. Greed, egoism, self-deception, and self-pity are also natural. If allowed to dominate our lives, Affection takes on the aspect of a god; something to worship. The trap is sprung. If we try to live by affection alone, we lose sight of our Lord.

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Let us Pray together before going on.
