

149. The Gospel of John—15:9-14

“The Cure for Toxic Love”

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(7/25/21)

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This morning in our study in the Gospel of John I'd like to back up a couple of verses and start with verse 9.

I believe that this was such an important issue on the heart of our Savior the night before his crucifixion that He repeated Himself several times just to make sure His disciples understood how important this subject was.

Remember this was His farewell address—and as we have said numerous times already, when someone addresses their loved ones for the last time—they don't waste words on meaningless subjects. They focus on what are the most important issues to them that they want to pass along to the people they most love in this world.

So, you might be thinking, what was the subject that most dominated our Savior’s thinking that night? **The answer is love.**

Let's read verses 9 through 14:

John 15:9-14, 17 (NKJV)

⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full. ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you...¹⁷ These things I command you, that you love one another.

As we have already said in our series *“The Vine and the Branches”* (verses 1 thru 8), the whole goal of the Christian life is to bear fruit for the glory of God. When we think of spiritual fruit, we automatically think of the *“fruit of the Holy Spirit”* that Paul listed in Galatians 5 verses 22 and 23—the first one on the list being *love*.

In fact, the word *“fruit”* is singular, causing some to believe that Paul only had in mind **love** as the fruit of the Spirit—and the others (‘joy, peace, longsuffering...’) being the ‘fruits’ or the by-products of love.

In an ultimate sense this *“fruit”* is simply the life of Christ being produced in a Christian (verses 1-8).

As we have already said, loving people as God commands with His agape love is *impossible* for us—it is beyond our ability because it’s a supernatural, divine love! This is not a love I can *generate* or manufacture thru hard work and raw determination.

It is not a love that can be produced in the fallen heart of men—in other words, it is not in me to love like this—God’s love has to be *given* to us.

Romans 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It is through our abiding in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit flowing thru us that this kind of love can become a reality in our lives to touch others around us—

John 15:4 (NKJV)

⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

If agape love is to be produced in our hearts and exercised thru our lives on a practical level—it first of all requires a change of *mind*. In other words, you have to really *want* to walk in agape love (God won't force it upon you). Since our natural *human* love dominates our hearts and minds—we need God's grace to have a change of mind in this regard.

We must start looking for opportunities to exercise agape love and *embrace* them. In other words, we need to look for opportunities to deny ourselves what we want to give to others what they want or need.

Let me say this—our natural human love is often counterproductive to the life God wants us to live—in fact, I'll go as far as to say that our human love is often *toxic*.

By that I mean if left unchecked it will slowly destroy us and every relationship in our lives starting with our marriages. The reason is because our natural human love is inherently selfish and self-centered (not always but most of the time)—it usually loves those who love us or who can benefit us in some way.

In that regard, even though it may seem virtuous—at its core it is often destructive/toxic.

I personally have known people whose spouse adored them when they first got married but over the course of time as they kept putting themselves first, pursuing their own selfish desires and agendas and even committing adultery on them—they slowly destroyed their relationship with their spouse and turned a once beautiful love relationship into a hate relationship all because of self-love.

God's love on the other hand is the exact opposite—when practiced through His strength and grace, our lives become healthy, strong, and fruitful.

And our outward relationships with others also become healthy and strong and beautiful—starting with our marriages.

The reason being is because we are now focusing on others putting them first and our desires last—even as Jesus illustrated thru His Own life:

Philippians 2:3-8 (NKJV)

³ Let nothing *be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. ⁴ Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. ⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, ⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross.

As we die to self, putting others needs above ourselves, making them the focus and seeking to serve them with all our heart—our marriages especially will blossom and in the process the joy of the Lord will fill our hearts (verse 11).

And so, Jesus after having given them an illustration of where spiritual fruit (God's agape love) comes from and how it *grows* in our lives—He now emphasizes the importance of *abiding* in God's love on a continual basis.

Of course, the Lord says in verse 10 that the main way we abide in God's love is by *keeping His commandments* each and every day. Not the 613 listed in the Old Testament—but the two main commandments the Lord Jesus reduced those 613 into:

Matthew 22:37-40 (NKJV)

³⁷ Jesus said to him, "*You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" ³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment. ³⁹ And *the* second is like it: "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

So, these two commandments are the greatest of all.

But then earlier in the evening while still in the upper room the night before His crucifixion in emphasizing the importance of His disciples loving one another—the Lord Jesus officially gave them (and all His disciples) a new commandment for the New Covenant in John Chapter 13:34-35—

John 13:34-35 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

This is the command of which the Lord Jesus is speaking—the command which He repeats in Chapter 15:12-13:

John 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² **This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.** ¹³ **Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.**

The Lord tells us in verse 11 that we will receive great joy when we love others as He has loved us. In fact, the Lord goes on to say in verse 13 that there is no greater love in this world than God's sacrificial agape love.

The dictionary defines love (human love) like this:

"A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person; a feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection—as for a parent, child, or friend; sexual passion or desire."

Notice how the dictionary defines *human* love in terms of feelings.

God's love isn't just words and feelings—agape love is *action* based not *feelings* based—*"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son"*. (John 3:16) God's love is unconditional, universal and non-discriminating—as the Scriptures say, *"God so loves the world"* and *"is no respecter of persons."*

Human love is limited and can diminish over time—we are seeing this in our own culture today, especially in marriage.

The love of many husbands for their wives and wives for their husbands has grown cold toward the person they vowed they would love for better or for worse, in sickness and in health—for the rest of their life.

For many couples it isn't until *"death do us part"*—it's until *"divorce do us part."*

Again, such is the nature of human love rooted in the fallen, selfish heart of man—it often has an ‘expiration date’ attached to it. But **God’s love (agape) never diminishes**, and it **never expires** because **God is the source of this love and God never diminishes or changes**—“*He is the same yesterday, today and forever.*” (Hebrews 13:8)

Human love (the love of the world), “*loves its own*” (John 15:19)—its own family, its own friends, and those in its own sphere of influence who can benefit them in some way.

God’s love, loves all—even His enemies:

Matthew 5:44-45 (NLT2)

⁴⁴ But I say, love your enemies...⁴⁵ In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike.

When people hear Jesus say we are to “*love our enemies*”—they immediately respond, “*How can I love (have feelings for) my enemies!*” Well, you probably can’t—but again, God’s love isn’t about feelings.

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-8, Paul the apostle gives us the best definition/description of God’s love in all the New Testament—using all verbs, because God’s love is not feelings, it’s actions! That’s how we can love people we have never met and have no feelings for personally—by helping them in tangible ways and meeting their needs (pick up medicine, groceries etc.)

Of course, God’s agape love needs to be demonstrated first and foremost among Christians in the family of God.

John, in his first epistle, tells us that true Christians love other Christians—but not just verbally—they love them tangibly.

1 John 3:16-18 (NKJV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

Look, loving people as God commands with His agape love is impossible for us—it is beyond our natural ability. Again, this is not a love I can manufacture or produce out of my own fallen human heart. It is not in me to love like this because agape love is a divine, supernatural love that only flows from God Who is its source.

God’s attributes are intrinsic to His nature—and to His nature alone.

That means that unbelievers (what the Bible calls the “natural man”) cannot duplicate the attributes of God from a fallen heart—which means he can ‘fake’ but cannot ‘make’ the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

The only way for a person to experience the attributes of God in their life (which are exclusive to His nature)—is to have the God’s nature *planted* within them—

2 Peter 1:4 (NKJV)

⁴ by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature...

God’s love is an all-encompassing and unconditional love that loves freely regardless of how that love is returned—if returned at all (see John 3:16)!

Which is different from human love which is *reciprocal* (“I love you *because* you love me.”) and *conditional* (“but I only love you *when* you treat me right.”).

**God’s love is not like human love.
God’s love is a supernatural love
that is not inherent to our human nature—
in other words, it is not of this earth—
it is a fruit of His nature!**

But for the fruit of love to really grow in our lives we need to abide in Christ on a daily basis. This is exactly the point Jesus was making in the “*Vine and Branches*” discourse.

John 15:1, 4-5 (NKJV)

¹ "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser...⁴ Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. ⁵ I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing...

In these verses Jesus tells us that God’s love is a fruit that grows in our lives as a by-product of our union with Him. As we just said, agape love comes from God (and only from God). It is planted in our hearts at the moment of salvation and becomes a supernatural testimony to the presence of God within us as His children.

The more we remain connected to Jesus in daily fellowship (abiding in Him)—the more God’s love grows in our lives in a supernaturally, natural way.

Of course, when we’re talking about exercising God’s love—first and foremost it must be directed at Him.

I am always asking God for the grace to love Him with His agape love—because I know my human love is often selfish and my prayers often tainted by self-interest. (Comment)

If we don’t love God with His sacrificial agape love—it will never flow into the horizontal relationships of our lives—

John 15:9-10, 12 (NKJV)

⁹ "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love... ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

The Greek word for ‘**abide**’ is *meno* and it means “*to continue*” or “*to remain*”. It is the mark of a true disciple of Jesus that they continue in the faith—that they remain in fellowship with Him every day.

John 15:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and *that* your joy may be full.

If your joy has diminished in your Christian life, know this—it’s because your relationship with Jesus has diminished Who is the *source* of your joy (verse 4).

The answer is not to ‘try harder’ (i.e., ‘more Christian activities’)—it is to abide longer.

In the Book of Revelation to the Church at Laodicea, Jesus said to them—***“Behold I stand at the door and knock—if anyone opens the door I will come in...”***

Notice *The Lord didn’t say, “Behold I stand at the door and kick it open.”* He said, ***“Behold I stand at the door and knock”***—it’s up to us to open the door and let Him in (salvation and/or daily fellowship).

There was an English artist named Holman Hunt who attempted to capture this scene on canvas—the painting now hangs in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. He pictured Jesus standing at the door of a neglected cottage knocking to be let in.

When he first painted the picture, he invited his artist friends to come over and critique it. After gazing at the painting intently one of them said to him, *“Holman, you have made a terrible mistake! You left off a very important part of the door!”* Holman replied, *“What are you talking about?”*

“The handle, Holman—you left the handle off of the door!”

“Ah,” Mr. Hunt replied, *“That was on purpose. You see this door is a picture of the human heart, and the handle of the door is only on the inside, for it’s up to the one within to respond to the knock of Jesus.”*

Jesus will not force His way into a heart—He won’t barge in where He’s not welcome.

He’s a perfect gentleman who knocks and says, *“If you’ll respond to Me and open the door of your heart to Me, I’ll come in and dwell (abide) with you—but the choice is up to you.”*

In the same way, daily fellowship with Jesus is something we must choose to pursue—He’s knocking the question is are we going to answer and let Him into our lives each day?

This is the only way ‘toxic’ human love can be replaced with God’s divine, supernatural love!

If you would like to know more about what it means to be a Jesus-follower— please, reach out to us. It would be our greatest privilege to lead you into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reach out to us [here](#).

Want to know more? Click [here](#).