

Love is from God Sunday 16th February 2014

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” (1 John 4:7-11)

·Beloved in the Lord,

The focus on many people’s minds last week was love. Friday was Valetines day, - The day to celebrate love. If ever there was a concept that has been twisted, distorted, changed, misunderstood - it is love. The word love is used in so many different ways and carries so many different meanings, and sadly much of what is passed off as love, is not love at all.

True love comes from God, because God is love. This is clearly stated in our text today:

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

The word translated love in this passage is the Greek word “AGAPEI”. Agapei is the highest form of love. It is selfless love; it is God’s love. There are other words in the Greek, all of which are translated as “love” in the English language. For example “Storgei” is familiaral love. The love of a family member. “Philos” is brotherly love; “Eros” is sexual love and as we already saw “Agapei” is God’s love.

Agapei love – God’s love – is what we are called to love with. This selfless love of God. When John is writing ***“Beloved, let us love one another”*** the word he is using is Agapei. He is calling us to love with the highest of loves. What then is Agapei love.?How can we describe it? One of the best ways is selfless love. A love that places others first. A self denying love. Paul gives us a great description in 1 Corinthians 13:

“If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part; ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things. ¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. ¹³ But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

As we read these words, we may think: “Man, I need to improve in my love!” That certainly is my reaction. When I use these words as a mirror, I find myself lacking. It exposes my selfishness. How about you?

What we need to understand is that we will not get very far in our own strength. We will probably stumble at the first post after wanting or desiring to be better. We will not get very far with wanting to improve.

If , when we have looked in this mirror and found ourselves lacking, we really want to improve and grow in love, then the key is not in trying to be more loving; but the key is in focusing even more strongly on Jesus. He is love. He has clearly told us that apart from Him we can do nothing: **“I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)**

You see, it is only when we are firmly attached to Jesus; can we really truly love as we ought. It is not our own love; but His love that flows through us. It is the love that honours the Father. His love knows no boundaries. It flows out to all people. He expresses His love to us, when we are not deserving of it. He loved us while we were His enemies.

We read in Romans 5:6-8: **“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”**

This is hard to comprehend. Jesus died for us while we were yet sinners. Through sin, we were His enemies and yet He loved us. I often hear people say: “I will never forgive so and so. “ So many people live with hatred in their hearts; with unforgiveness in their hearts; sometimes even without any foundation.

But Jesus died for us, shed His innocent blood for us; while we were not deserving of it. He died for His enemies. That is God’s love. That is “AGAPEI”. God so loved us, that He did not want us to spend eternity lost in Hell. Jesus took our punishment and died in our stead, so that God’s law would be executed and God’s justice upheld. He died in our place, for us.

This is so hard for us to comprehend with our minds. We cannot really grasp the depths of His love.

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.” John 3:16-17

For God so loved... When we have experienced this tremendous love of God; then it is our duty to show this love to all men. This is borne out in our text: ***“ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”***

Love is not an option, it is our duty. We read in John 13:34-35:

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

Love is a commandment. We are to love one another as Christ has loved us. This is the sign that we belong to Christ. Love is our membership card if you like.

Why do we find it so hard to love? The simple answer is that we are not focused enough on Jesus. We are not abiding in Him enough. The simple fact of the matter is that the more we abide in Him, the stronger our love will be. It is only when we die to self, do we really begin to love as He loved us.

Remember what Paul wrote to the Galatians (2:20) ***“I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”***

When this is our confession, when this is our daily reality, then we begin to love with “Agapei” love. You find yourself loving those who are hard to love; you love those who rise up against you; those who gossip about you; those who make fun of you. You even love your enemies! When you do love your enemies, then you know that Christ’s love is abiding in you.

Last year I met a Pastor in Indonesia, who truly loves with the love of Christ. Years ago a band of Muslim extremists attacked the village where he grew up and killed 31 members of his family, because he had begun theological studies, and had confessed Christ as Lord and Saviour. He testified that not so long ago he came face to face with the leader of the gang that killed his family and not only he forgave him; he shared the good news of Jesus with him. He himself testifies that this is supernatural love; it is the love of Christ.

This is what Jesus is talking about when He calls us, no commands us to love.

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God.

May we humble ourselves before The Lord today and empty ourselves of all unrighteousness, all faithlessness, all hatred, bitterness, envy. Let us pray for God The Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with selfless love, true love, and then let us go and share it with those outside. The ground is arid, it is thirsty and parched. So many people are screaming out for genuine love.

As John writes: ***“Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” 1 John 3:18***

I close with a beautiful illustration of real love. A four year old boy asked his mother why their elderly neighbour was sitting out on his porch crying. The mother told him, that his wife had recently died and so he was crying. The boy ran over to the old man and sat down in his lap. He stayed there a good while and then went back to his mother. His mother asked him what they spoke about. The boy said “Nothing, I just helped him cry!”

May we love with that kind of love.

Amen.

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All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.