

Love - The Crowning Fruit of Discipleship

"A new command I give you, that you love one another, even as I 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 13:34-35

The Greek word used for *love* in this verse is *agape*. This is the love that comes from God and is the heart of His divine nature. Jesus said *agape* love is the primary evidence that we are His disciples. Note that Jesus did not say ministry or spiritual gifts were the evidence. John wrote of *agape* love, "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 (1 John 4:7-8)." Paul described *agape* love this way: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)."

Whereas God's love is pure and unselfish, man's love is soulish and based on mutually beneficial interests. For example, people who belong to the same club have natural affection for one another. We might call this "club love" or even "neighborly love." This can also be true when people belong to the same church. However, affection that is based on belonging to the same neighborhood, club or church is not the same as true Christian love, which is based solely on our belonging to Christ. Furthermore, it is one thing to love your neighbor, but what if your neighbor is your enemy? Jesus taught, "You have heard 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... if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them (Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:32)." The goal of the gospel is to produce a

people who have God's *agape* love. Paul said, "The goal of our instruction is *agape* love that comes from a pure heart (1 Timothy 1:5)." Does this kind of love sound difficult? It is not just difficult, it is naturally impossible. Yet this is the *agape* love of God that Jesus told His disciples they must have.

Some people are naturally more patient and kind than others, but this does not mean they have God's *agape* love. Since *agape* love is the essence of God Himself, it can only be expressed as a fruit of His Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22), and not as a natural attribute produced by our human efforts (Galatians 3:3). We cannot express God's love by trying harder to be more patient and kind. How then can we have God's love? There is only one way. We must abide in Christ (John 15:4-5). How do we abide in Christ? We must believe and act on what Christ accomplished for us on the cross. When we were born again, God spiritually included us in Christ's death in order to remove our sinful nature and replace it with Christ's holy nature (Romans 6:3-11). This is the full provision of the cross of Christ. However, we must remember that although our sinful nature was removed when our spirit was made alive in Christ, our soul (*our natural personality with its attitudes, affections and abilities*) was not automatically converted into Christ's likeness. But now that we do not have a sinful nature and Christ's Spirit indwells us, our soul can be transformed so we can love others with a pure heart as Christ loves us.

Peter wrote of this: "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently from a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22)." This is the divine truth: carrying your own cross and losing your *unconverted* soul-life is the way that God has ordained to purify your soul so you can express His *agape* love. Jesus said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his soul-life will lose it; but whoever loses his soul-life for My sake will find it (Matthew 16:24-25)." If you know (and believe and act on) the Biblical truth that God destroyed and removed

your sinful nature when you were saved, then you are able to carry your own cross and lose your *unconverted* soul-life daily for Jesus Christ.

God does not want to destroy your soul; He wants to restore it to His original, eternal purpose. Therefore, when you lose your *unconverted* soul-life for Christ, you will find your soul restored into Christ's likeness. What does it mean to carry your own cross and lose (*or lay down*) your soul-life for Christ's sake? It means that each day you "put to death" your old soulish way of thinking and acting and put on Christ's way of thinking and acting. Paul said, "If you are living according to the flesh (*your unconverted soul-life*), you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live... put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your soulish nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed... now those who belong to Christ Jesus have put to death on the cross the flesh (*their unconverted soul-life*) with its passions and desires (Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5; Galatians 5:24)."

Jesus said the foremost law is to love God and love others (Matthew 22:36-40). And Paul taught, "Do everything in love... love is the fulfillment of the law... walk in love just as Christ loved us (1 Corinthians 16:14; Romans 13:10; Ephesians 5:2)." The Bible says the only faith that counts for anything is faith expressed through love; otherwise it is worth nothing (Galatians 5:6; 1 Corinthians 13:2). Just as true faith can only be expressed through love, true holiness can only be expressed through love. If we do not love others, our holiness is worthless (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). The extent to which we love Christ's body shows how much we love Christ Himself (Matthew 25:34-46). "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his soul-life for us; and we ought to lay down our soul-lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16)." Just as Jesus was motivated by love to lay down His soul-life for us; if our love is godly and true, we will lay down our soul-life for His body.

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his soul-life for his friends." John 15:13

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