

Love's Importance And Source

Where Love Begins

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I think that, without a doubt, the world was never in a more violent condition than it was during the Second World War. But I also think that, when all things are considered, the world is in worse shape now than it ever was during the Second World War simply because of the accumulation of other things that are occurring, besides war. There is still a great deal of war that is going on, in many parts of the world. In addition to that, there are all kinds of terrorist activities, which the United States experienced just a week ago in New York City. Added to that, there are all kinds of violence in the streets—especially in the Western nations, and maybe most especially in the United States. In addition to that, there is a great deal of anger and frustration right inside our homes as well.

“What the world needs now is love, sweet love,” went the beginning of a popular ballad a number of years ago, and it is certainly true. But what is love? What is this thing that the world needs so badly?

If what the world is experiencing is any indication, then I think what the song says is certainly true. I think it is also true that, if the words of that song are true, then the world must not have but the foggiest idea of what "love" really is—because whatever this world is doing, it must not be love.

Love is a much-abused term. As the result of our past experiences, we all have somewhat different ideas regarding what it is. The most prevalent concept out in the public today is that it is some kind of a warm, topsy-turvy feeling—a thrill that one gets in the pit of his stomach; a tingle that runs up and down one's spine. It is seen by some as a warm sense of regard, a desire to be with, or to be satisfied by somebody else or some thing. I have heard it equated with a caring, benevolent giving. I have also heard it equated with what is nothing more than sheer emotionalism.

On occasions, even we use the term very loosely. I have heard people in the church express their "love" for liturgy that they had, or experienced, let us say in a certain church of God congregation. People will say they just "love" ice cream. They just "love" a certain beer, pizza, a style of a house, a color, an automobile, a certain type of fashion in clothing, a certain performer on an athletic team, or maybe even a particular team. The list of things that a person can say that he "loves," I think, could be almost endless. But those statements are ridiculous once one begins to understand what love is from a biblical perspective. What these people are stating is an opinion regarding a preference, not love.

To care about a thing is not of and by itself love, but caring must be a part of true love. Let us say the right kind of caring must be a part of true love. However—again, to reiterate—that feeling of caring, of and by itself—that preference—is not love.

We are going to begin this sermon in probably the most famous chapter in all of the New Testament, maybe in the Bible. Maybe the only chapter in the Bible that is better known than this 13th chapter of I Corinthians is the 23rd chapter of Psalms. But certainly I Corinthians 13 is a chapter that anybody familiar with the Bible is somewhat familiar with. We are not going to be going through the whole chapter. We are only going to pick up in verse 8 and go through verse 13, because we want to see a certain aspect about love.

I Corinthians 13:8-13 Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. And now [that is, in conclusion] abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

What we are seeing stated here is love's supreme importance to life. In no way is Paul belittling the things that are contrasted here with love. I am talking about prophecy, about tongues, about knowledge. Despite all of their usefulness and despite all of their great qualities, neither prophecy, knowledge, nor tongues can even begin to compare in importance with love.

Prophecy, tongues, and knowledge—all of them—are, in the context of I Corinthians, gifts of God. You can see this stated in I Corinthians 12, which leads into I Corinthians 13. The Corinthians took great pleasure in their gifts, even as we might. But their relative importance, when compared to love, is shown in that they will all end. That is, that there are times when these things are of no use. But, you see, love will never end. There will never be a time when love cannot be used. It will always be of use.

Indeed, the receiving of these gifts from God, unless they are accompanied by and used with love, has a very powerful tendency to corrupt the ones to whom they are given. Do you realize that? When God gives us these gifts, in one sense He is actually taking a risk that the gift might corrupt us. And, indeed, that was one of the problems in the Corinthian church. They were being corrupted by the fact that they had these gifts but they were not being used with love.

I know that you have heard the cliché that "power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Now think of these gifts in terms of being "a power"—a power that God gave in order that these people could serve the church. He gave these people the power—the gift—to be able to prophecy. That means not necessarily telling something before it occurs, but actually the forth-telling of something—that is, telling something with truth; telling something with conviction; telling something with power; speaking out forthrightly and letting people know that this or that is sin, or this or that is wrong, or this and that is right and good and that people ought to be doing it. He gave these powers to speak powerful and influential and motivating sermons to people, but it was corrupting them. And it was corrupting them because, as we would say, it was "going to their heads."

I think that you are aware that knowledge puffs up. It says that in I Corinthians 8:1, in part of the same book that leads up to I Corinthians 13.

The knowledge that God gave them—the ability to accumulate, research out, and use—was actually going to their heads. They were becoming puffed up. They were becoming proud as a result of it, and it was corrupting the recipients of it. Thus, Paul begins chapter 13 by contrasting love with the other gifts of God, in order to press home love's importance, love's completeness, and love's permanence and supremacy over all other qualities of life.

Prophecy ends, because it is fulfilled. Tongues are not needed—even as today, they are not needed as they were in that ancient world. The reason is because the English language is virtually the universal tongue of business. In order for people to do business with the most powerful consumer nation in the world, they have to learn English. So, these other nations, then, instruct—teach—their people how to speak English, so that their country will be benefited. And so, through the English language, then, the gospel can go out to other nations. So being able to speak in another tongue is not necessary—not as necessary as it was back in those days, when that was not the case. And so, being able to have the ability to speak in another language is not useful anymore in the same way that it was at that time.

Knowledge becomes obsolete because new developments arise. The world does change. There is some knowledge that never changes, but other knowledge that a person might have becomes unusable anymore. It used to be common knowledge where people, let us say, in frontier times, in colonial times—virtually everybody knew how to make soap or candles. The quality of life depended upon one being able to make those things, because you could not just walk down to the store (as we can today) and buy a bar of Camay. And so, the knowledge of something like that has slipped away, and we no longer have that as common knowledge. And thus it is in other areas as well. The use of knowledge becomes obsolete as new developments arise.

Paul also admonishes through his reference to children and putting away of childish things, as well as the reference to a mirror in verse 12, that love is something that one grows into. It is something that must be perfected. It is part of a maturing process. What we have now is partial. It is, therefore, not something that one receives in one huge portion from God to be used until one runs out of that supply. So, in one sense then, we always have to look upon ourselves as being somewhat immature. There is more to life, more to

love, than we have ever tapped or ever used. But there is coming a time when love will be perfected, and we will have it in abundance—like God. In the meantime, while we are in the flesh, we are (according to I Corinthians 14:1) instructed to pursue love.

We are going to look at another scripture, also written by Paul, which shows love's importance to Christian life. Paul writes:

Romans 13:8-10 Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

In this context, it is shown by Paul that love is the sum of all duty. It is the sum, the epitome, the peak. It is the sum of all duty.

It is interesting to note, first of all, its relationship in context with what immediately precedes it. It appears in the context of a Christian's response to government. We understand that the Christian is to submit to and honor human government as being God's agents to manage human affairs. So, in submitting to human government, we are also submitting to God, because God has given these people authority to rule over, or to manage, the human affairs in the area in which we live.

Now, to those governments, the Christian is indebted. I am picking up here on what Paul switches over to in verse 8, because what he wrote in verses 1-7 leads directly into verse 8. Verse 8 is a contrast to what Paul is writing is required of a Christian in the first seven verses. To those governments the Christian is indebted to pay tribute (verse 7: "render therefore to all their due: taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs," and so forth). So the custom is rendered "tribute", in other Bibles, and "taxes," we have there.

We are all familiar with taxing systems. We may not be so familiar with the paying of tribute, but tribute was what was normally paid by a captive nation to their captor for the privilege of being allowed to live and continue to operate under the government of the armies that defeated them. And thus, you see, when the Romans defeated Judah, Judah became tributary to Rome, and Judah had to pay tribute to the Roman government.

In order for the Jewish government to pay that tribute, the Jews in turn taxed their own people. The tribute was collected from the people and then paid, in a lump sum, to the Romans. The Romans then, in turn, gave the Jews certain privileges and protected them from other people.

In like manner, the people in Judea (we will use them as an example) undoubtedly paid taxes. They paid the temple tax, and, indeed, they may have had to pay taxes to the Roman government as individuals as well. What normally occurred is: the taxes and the tribute were paid and then there was no indebtedness until the taxes or the tribute became due once again. You are familiar with that. On April 15, the tax is due to the United States of America—the income tax. Once you have paid that, it is not due again until next year. In other words, once you pay the tax you are out of hock, you are out of debt to the government for one year. Have you got that picture now?

Let us lead it into verse 8 then. It says there then, “Owe no one anything except to love one another.” Paul is not saying that the Christian should never owe anybody any money. The reason that I know that what I have just said is true, is because Jesus (in Matthew 5:42) said that there are going to be times when the Christian may need to borrow. But the Christian should not default on his obligation because that could be stealing, and it, of course, would then not be a good witness of a child of God.

The contrast here is that there is a debt that we owe every man, every day. Reflect for just a moment on the principle Jesus taught us in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. The lesson in that parable is: Who is your neighbor? Anybody who needs help. Anybody who comes across your path who needs help. What we have here is a debt then that we owe every man, every day.

And regardless of how much a payment on that debt we pay one day, when we wake up the next day, the debt is restored, and we owe just as much as we did the day before.

Did you get that? This debt of love that we owe can never ever, really, be paid in full. You see, love never ends. It is always useful. There is never going to be a time when love is not needed. That is why it is the sum of all duties. And it is the Christian's duty to give help where it is needed.

So, you may give help one day and think that your payment to mankind is ended. No, it is not, because the next person that we come across who needs help, we owe that person a debt of love too. I know that I am speaking here in terms of an ideal and that we cannot help every single person that comes along. Paul is not concerned about that here, and neither am I concerned about it here. We are just looking at a principle, because in almost everybody's life there comes a time when they can reach out a hand and help. Nobody is ever completely powerless all the time to help somebody. And so we have to learn to take advantage of the opportunities to extend help, to extend love, when those times come across our path. That is what Paul is getting across here.

This sets up an interesting paradox because we must owe everyone more than we could ever hope to pay. But this paradox is more apparent than real because the paradox is not what Paul is teaching about. What he is teaching is that love has to be the driving force—the motivation—of everything we do. That is the real lesson.

What Paul's statement does is to help us understand something else, and that is the weakness of law in terms of righteousness. Law, of and by itself, does not provide enough motivation nor the right motivation for one to keep it. Did you hear that? Law, of and by itself, does not provide enough motivation nor, I should put in here, the right motivation for one to keep it. Now look back at verse 3.

Romans 13:3 For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil.
Do you want to be unafraid of the authority?

Notice that word "unafraid," because it has very much to do with where the power of government resides. "Will you not be afraid of the power?" is what it says in the King James. Laws are stated and laws have penalties, but that does not keep people from breaking them (in most cases) almost with impunity as long as nobody responsible for government is looking. The government's power largely lies in coercion. "Coercion" means forcible constraint or restraint, whether it is moral or physical. In other words, government is largely by force—power. "Will you not be afraid of the power, of the government?" Paul is saying.

Think about this simple illustration. Most people flagrantly disobey the 55-mile per hour speed limit on freeways and interstates, especially when they are not crowded. It is very easy for the mind to say, "Hey. The way is open and clear. Why don't I just go faster?"—until one spots a patrol car with a trooper or two in it. Then suddenly 55-miles per hour becomes the norm—until the trooper is out of sight. Do you see what I mean? What are we afraid of? The power! Because that man in that automobile has the power to pull us over to the side of the road and fine us. And so, because of the fear that enters into our mind—because suddenly we see the representative of the government—we slow down and go 55. Why do we not go 55 anyway, whether the trooper is around and looking, or not?

You see, the power of the law, all by itself, is not enough to motivate us to keep it, even though we know the law well. It is common knowledge, common understanding. We know that there is a penalty connected to that law. And yet we will still flagrantly disobey it, until someone from the government is watching. Then, we are very conscious of the government's power to hurt us.

You see, the law on the books is not, of and by itself, enough to motivate us to obey it. But—and this is what Paul is getting at—love towards God and man *can* motivate one to do what the law says. It can make us do what the law cannot do.

One conclusion that we can reach here, then, is that it is Paul's claim that if one does this—that is, is motivated by love—then he will automatically keep all the commandments. A somewhat different conclusion is that Paul is

saying that if one does not break the commandments, then he is acting out of love. You can take it either way. That is why he lists those commandments. I think that the second one that I gave is the weaker of the two. So, within this context then, he is saying that every phase, every facet, of our responsibility to God and man is covered if we make sure that love has its proper place as the motivation for all we do.

Romans 13:10 Love does no harm to a neighbor

If we really love another person, we cannot possibly injure him. You see, love would stifle at birth the thoughts that lead to adultery, theft, any form of covetousness because love cannot hurt another in those ways. Therefore, it cannot break the laws designed to protect the other person. You see, love provides the right kind of coercion. Think about that.

God coerces people too, but He does it with love. That could be the subject of another sermon. But there are times in our life when our fear of God's power, and what He can do to us, is a very positive force in our life. But the overwhelming force, or power, that He uses is love, and we will see more of that as we go along here.

Let us look at one more verse in this section, that is, on the necessity and importance of love.

Colossians 3:12-14 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things [It could be worded "on top of everything else." See? At the very peak—at the very sum of everything else.] put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

Again love is seen as an epitome. Its importance here is seen as "the bond of perfection." We might reword that as "the perfect bond of love." A bonding agent is something that ties together, and that is Paul's concern here: something that ties together, something that unifies.

Sooner or later, it is the tendency of all groups to fly apart. I do not care whether it is a marriage, or whether it is a family, a social organization, a fraternal organization, a church, or a government, or a nation. Look what is happening all over the world. Nations are flying apart. Look at what happened in the Soviet Union. Look at what is happening now in Yugoslavia. That is going to be repeated more and more as we move toward the end. (We will tell you why in just a bit.) This is something that always is going to have to be dealt with—whether it is on the smallest scale of two people, or a family, or whatever. Love is the one bond that will hold a group from flying apart into separate pieces.

I wonder if you noticed, in verses 12 and 13, those virtues that were listed there. There are virtues that are considered by the world to be manly, honorable virtues like "drive." We talk about a person who has a lot of drive. We talk about people who have a lot of determination. We talk about people who are assertive and aggressive and have a great deal of courage.

I wonder if you noticed that not one of those things which the world holds in such esteem, is on this list. Do you know why? Because it is those kinds of characteristics—those qualities, or virtues we might call them—that, without a person having a strong spiritual control, tend to descend into anger, wrath, malice, dissembling, slander, and foul talk—which is really nothing more than an unashamed self-seeking. And those traits split and divide.

Incidentally, I want to interject here that those things that I just said (courage, determination, and so forth) are not evil. I am not saying that. But they are the kind of qualities that play right into the human ego, and what they are likely to produce is nothing more than crass individualism. Individualism is not what Paul is aiming for here, because individualism produces division.

It is the virtues that are listed by Paul—all of which are manifestations of love—that make possible living in a community. Incidentally, there is nothing weak or (as we might sneeringly say) there is nothing effeminate about them, because it takes a strong person to resist what comes naturally and to do what is right, rather than what the carnal feelings are urging them to do.

The reason Paul listed love as a separate attribute is that it is not limited to the qualities that are given in verses 12 and 13. Indeed, when we come to understand it, those qualities too (like courage and aggressiveness) can be aspects of love. But it takes a very strong person to rightly control and use them. Otherwise, they have the tendency to divide.

So love is seen here as the bond of unity, the bond of perfection. It is the glue that will hold groups together. I just thought here of that song, "What the world needs now is love, sweet love." The world is flying apart, even as it seems to be coming together. I say "coming together" in that gradually the world seems to be becoming a global village. Nations are flying apart, and yet nations are also forming new groups. Yet, slowly but surely, the world is dividing itself into one of three different camps. There is the western hemisphere. There is Europe and its satellites. And there is the Far East, the Orient, and all those people. And so individual nations can fly apart, and yet they can all become unified if they have common interests with others. And that is what is occurring.

If anything is going to hold the world together, it is going to have to be love. But, as we can see, we know from prophecies that love is going to have to come from Someone outside the earth.

I John 4:7-12 Beloved, let us [Christians] love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, 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. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

There are those who say that this is the most sublime statement in all of the Bible regarding God's nature. These verses tell us a great deal about Him and also a great deal about our responsibilities if we are going to be like Him. First, that *love is of God*, as it says in verse 7. This love (that we have been talking about in I Corinthians 13, in Romans 13, and in Colossians 3) is of

God. It is the *agape* love that we are talking about here. What this verse is saying is that He is its source. This love which John has written of is from God, and it is not normally a part of man's nature.

This *agape* love means, then, that human love—apart from God—is, at its very best, merely a pale and vague reflection of what God is all the time. Paul said that there are times when a man might give his life for someone else, but it is a rare occasion. But God's love is such that it is always on that level. It is His nature. It is what He is all the time.

John says that *God is love*, in verse 8. Now, I want to correct something here. Even though that is such a sublime statement, it is also misleading. Again, it is misleading because of what we have learned about love in the past. God is not an abstraction. That is, He is not an abstraction, like love—abstraction, in this case, meaning something that we cannot really see in a form or a shape. It is mystical. God is not like that at all. God is living. He is dynamic. He is a powerful being who has multitudes of facets to His personality. He is not just "love." That is not His only quality. God is so much that He cannot be boxed in. He cannot be wrapped up and presented as merely being one attribute.

I John 1:5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light. . .

Ah, God is not just love. God is also "light."

I John 2:29 If you know that He is righteous. . .

God is also "righteous."

That last phrase in I John 4:8 reads in the Greek, "*the* God is love." The definite article is right in front of, precedes, the word 'God'. The emphasis therefore is on God, not on love. The construction of the sentence means, then, that the two words are not interchangeable. The way that the statement is translated into English makes it appear as though 'God' and 'love' are one and the same thing, but in the Greek it makes it very clear that they are not interchangeable. The emphasis is on God. *The* God is love. That is what it literally is saying.

Now, if we were going to expand that, or amplify it in the English, it would read somewhat like this: "The God, as to His nature, is love." What it means, then, is God is a loving God. Most of the gods in the ancient world, in Greek mythology, were wrathful, vengeful, angry, picky things who had the same foibles, the same weaknesses, as human beings. They were not 'loving' gods. But *the* God is a loving God. So it is not to be understood that loving is one of God's activities; but rather that every activity of God is 'loving'. Therefore, if He creates, He creates in love. If He rules, He rules in love. If He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is an expression of His nature.

Now, let us think about this in reference to man. We are still talking about how God is the source of this love, and man, by nature, does not have it. Man was made in the image and the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-28). But, God is described as being "spirit." "God is Spirit" (John 4:24). And we find here that God is love. Now contrast that to man. Man is flesh. You see, the image begins to change. We are not quite in the image of God, are we?

Not only that, but the Bible describes us as being carnal. In this case, I am using it in the sense of being fleshly or physical. We are self-centered, and we are deceitful. What this means in practical fact is that man cannot be what he is meant to be—in the image of God—until he loves as God loves. Until his nature is the same as God's, we will never really be in the image of God. This is the essential thing that must be changed in man. Of course, you understand that, because of receiving of the Spirit of God, we are now partakers of the divine nature, which Peter states there in one of his epistles.

So, if man is to achieve what he is meant to be, then we must love, but we must love with the love of God.

Now these five or six verses here are probably the most thorough statement of what we are talking about here in the entirety of the Bible. There is a second thing now that we can learn from this, and that is how to have this love.

I John 4:7-8 . . . and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

It is only by knowing God that we can have this love. And it is only by loving that we can know God. Now if that sounds like a riddle, it is not really intended to be. If that sounds like it is a vicious circle, it is not really intended to be. It is sort of like which came first—the chicken or the egg? Now, we know that God is Creator—that the chicken came first. But science argues about this. There has to be a beginning of the cycle that we are talking about here, because one is dependent on the other. Knowing God is dependent on loving Him, and loving Him is dependent upon knowing Him. The two cannot be separated.

It is only by learning to love God that we learn what His nature is like, that is, what He is like. But we cannot have that love until we first come to know Him. And it is through having fellowship with Him that we come to know him and receive the love. And then in using the love we come to be like God, and then it is that we really know Him.

John is saying that it is only in experiencing it ourselves that we come to really know God. This kind of love is something that we have to practice. All this is possible because God (here comes the beginning of the cycle) by His love initiates the relationship with us, and then—by His love—is the primary one in sustaining the relationship. If He was not the primary one in sustaining it, we would not have enough love to continue the relationship. That is why it says in Romans 5 that we are saved by His life. You see, the burden of our salvation is primarily on His shoulders. And brethren, that is very comforting indeed.

So, God calls us. God grants us repentance. Each of those is an act of love. God then forgives us, because we repent. That is an act of love. God then gives us His Spirit, by which we can fellowship with Him. We are now in His presence and that is an act of love on His part. Because He is giving us His Spirit, we begin to have elements of His love in us. Now we can begin to love Him. We are in fellowship with Him. We can begin to give that love back to Him. We begin to experience it, and in experiencing it, we begin to know what He is like. The cycle is working! And, as we give it back to Him, He gives more to us because we are growing and that love begins to be perfected. And that becomes important in verse 12, as we will see.

So God, in His love, begins the cycle. And then God, in His love, keeps the cycle going. But it does require, on our part, a response—in giving back to Him and then out to others (other human beings, our brothers primarily) some of that love that He sheds abroad in our hearts.

Let us go on to another part. A third point involves how God is known.

I John 4:9 In this the love of God was manifested [made known] toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.

Now, what does it say in John 3:16? "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." It is by love that God is revealed and known. This point is very important because it directly impacts on how a Christian is shown—how he makes his witness for God.

God is spirit, and therefore He is invisible. He is also love, but what He *is* is made known by what He does. This statement in I John 4:9 is very similar in intent and meaning as what Jesus said there in John 3 about being "born again"—when He compared one who is "born again" with spirit. What did He say? He said you cannot see the wind. You see, He compared 'spirit' and 'wind'. You cannot see the wind, but we can see what it does.

For example, you may have, at one time or another, seen a tornado—either literally, or you may have seen one on television during a news broadcast. But we are not actually seeing the air in that funnel. What we are seeing is the dust and all of the other debris, and the rain, which the air is carrying along with it. So we are seeing what it is doing. Houses are blowing apart. But we are not actually seeing what it is, that is, the power that is carrying out what we are seeing occur.

That is what he is talking about here. God is revealed by His acts, and so the piece of evidence that John gives is the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God so loved the world that He *gave*... You see, we have a witness of a Man who was also Immanuel, God with us. And even though we did not see Him literally, we see the truthful testimony of those who did see Him literally—God in the flesh.

But God's love is manifested in many other ways—for example, in the creation. And when we begin to examine what man is and what he has done to the earth and to each other, then we can begin to realize—to reason this through and to see—that the only explanation for creation is love—God's love.

He made the creation because of His nature. Love's nature is to share. Love has to share! It cannot help itself. It is generous. It wants to give. It wants to share what it has with others. Love cannot exist in a vacuum. It cannot exist in isolation. It has to share.

This is what is motivating God. And He made this whole, vast, awesome creation and gave life to beings in it, because He is God—He is love. He did not want to live alone. He wanted to share what He is. He wanted to share life, as He experiences it, with others. You see, this nature was driving Him, motivating Him, to share what He is and what He can do and what He can give to others who would be able to enjoy and live life in the same way that He does.

It is the obverse of what Jesus said about Satan in John 8:44. This illustrates the difference between Satan and God. He told the Jews:

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. [Now, what did they want to do? What was in their nature to do?] He was a murderer from the beginning [You see, murder is in the nature of man], and does not stand in the truth [that means he has nothing to do with the truth. But God is truth], because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources [It means that he speaks what is natural to him. It is part of his nature. It is his nature to lie. It is his nature to kill.], for he is a liar and the father of it.

Now *that* is the spirit—the attitude, the mind, heart—that is driving humanity. For anybody whose father is Satan, it is in his or her nature to break the commandments. This is why God says that the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be (Romans 8:7). It is impossible! There has to be a change, a conversion, to the

divine nature. And so Satan cannot help himself. He gathers things to himself because he is self-centered. And he gathers it for the purpose of killing it, of abusing it.

In one sense, it is almost like God cannot help Himself. I do not want us to misunderstand this, but because this nature of love is driving and motivating Him, it is His nature, then, to give and share with others. So therefore, the very existence of life—in others besides Himself—is evidence of God's love.

Now, in addition to that, God's love is manifested by His providence—His care of creation. God did not begin the creation and then just walk off somewhere and let it run on its own. He is so intensely involved that Jesus said that every hair on our head is numbered. All through this Book, the Bible, it is saying (about God) "I care." But then again, remember the caring can be of and by itself just a *feeling* unless it is accompanied by the right kind of acts. The two have to go together. All we have to do is to cry out to Him, "Father, help me!" and He is involved in some way to our benefit.

He is involved in all of the physical means through which life is supported. He provides air, sunshine, bacteria, and viruses, whatever it takes. And Jesus tells us, in Matthew 5, that God sends His rain on the just and the unjust. God provides for everybody, even His enemies. That is how loving His care of His creation is.

Free moral agency is, again, an act of His love as well. We are not robots! You see, God is revealed by these things. It is not just the fact that He has called us; but there is evidence of God. There is evidence of His concern and His love for us all over the place. God, by a deliberate act of "self-limitation". . . Do you know what that means? God restrained Himself. It is like He took a risk in giving us free moral agency. It would have been very easy for Him to create us to be like dogs. He could have ordered us about and we would have responded without sin for all eternity. But that does not produce the right kind of life. That is not the kind of life that God lives, and therefore He limited Himself. He restrained Himself.

He took the risk of giving us free moral agency and maybe losing us, because we make the wrong choices. But He limited Himself because He wants us, in His love, to be able to live the kind of life that He lives—a life

that depends upon making the right kind of choices. You see, He made us to respond in a reasoned way, setting our will and also having the right kind of feeling with it as well. We are not dogs. When a dog reacts, he is just following his instincts. He is responding to stimuli. He is not responding from reasoned feelings.

So, apart from angels, we are the only ones that God has created who can act and react because we can will ourselves to do so. We are the only ones who can commit ourselves to concepts and principles and be loyal and sacrificial because of willing ourselves by faith to do so. Do you understand? This is what makes personal relationships possible—a gift of love from God, our Creator. Life would have no abundance without it. It would not have that edge of excitement, of things well done.

God's love for us is also the explanation for our redemption. It is the fact that there is a Savior who lived a perfect life and died for us. If God had been interested only in law and justice, He could have left us to the consequences of our sin. Now, He did set the penalty for sin to be death. (Incidentally, that too is an act of love.) But His love also found a way to pay the penalty for our sins without our having to pay with our own life.

You know, the hope that we have of eternal life is an act of love on God's part, because He has given us something to live for! God never intended for life to be just a matter of going through the paces. What this hope means, on a daily basis, is that all of the chances and changes of this life are not the last word. Do you understand that? God is in control of what is going on, and therefore we can have hope. God is the last word in His creation, and He has said that He is going to save us. That is why there can be a verse like Romans 8:28, that all things work together for good to those who are the called, to those who love God.

The reason that people are rebelling, all over the world, is that they can see that their governments offer them no hope. So they take the law into their own hands. Their governments cannot provide, but you see God has given us a hope. He is our government. And He has the last word. He has the power. He has the right nature. Therefore everything is going to work out right. That is why we can have hope.

All of those things that God is able to do cause our lives to not to be lived in vain. It is a wonderful gift. So we have hope—another gift of God's love.

I want to conclude the sermon today by going to John 13:34. Jesus said to them, on that Passover night, just before He was put to death.

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you.

We have just seen a brief rundown of just a few aspects of how God's love is exhibited—manifested; made clear to you and me. Everywhere we look in our lives there are manifestations of how He loves us. And the one that God gave Himself, through the apostle John, was the gift of His Son. And so we see here the words of that Son. "As I have loved you, that you also love one another."

John 13:35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

God has manifested Himself, His love, and His nature in the things that He does. That is beginning to become very clear—that love is at its bottom. It is not that feeling. It is what one *does*. Love is an action. As God loves us, He in turn expects us to reciprocate back to Him with love and out to our fellow man, especially to our brethren. And it is by these acts of love that we are going to make the witness for God. Love is an action. Love is what we do. It is our love for one another by which a Christian is manifested—both to each other and to the world.