

## Love's Basic Definition

### What is Love?

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Given 13-Mar-93; Tape #064

John 17:1 Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.

We are familiar with this as being the *real* Lord's Prayer. The prayer that Jesus prayed just before He was taken by the Romans, put through the trial, and then crucified.

John 17:2 As You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him.

Here is what I am leading to; and this is what this sermon, basically, is going to be about.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life. . .

Here comes one of those succinct and poignant Bible definitions that you and I are so familiar with. What is sin? Sin is the transgression of the law. What is the fear of God? It is to depart from evil. What is the love of God? It is to keep the commandments of God. Do you want a brief, succinct description of eternal life? Here it is.

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they may know You. . .

Is that not a strange description of eternal life? Eternal life is described, by your Savior and mine, as knowing God. That is kind of interesting in light of the subject that we have been going through.

I John 4:8 He who does not love does not know God.

He might as well of said that, if you do not have love, you do not have eternal life. Because if eternal life is to know God and he who does not love does not know God, then the two are almost equal to one another. Not exactly the same thing; but there is a close enough relationship that I think we can put the two together and say that they are very close to being the equivalent, one to the other.

Do you really "know" President Clinton? You do not know President Clinton. You know *of* President Clinton. You know what you have been told about President Clinton. You know things that are written about him in newspapers and newsmagazines. You have heard him speak. You have seen him on television. But you cannot honestly say that you *know* President Clinton. You only know *of* President Clinton.

Now, what about God? Are you one of those people who knows *of* God, or are you one of those people who *knows* God? You see, there is a very great difference between knowing "of" someone and "knowing" someone.

The only way that you can know someone is to live life with that person. How often have you heard someone wail, "I never knew what he (or she) was like until I had to live with him (or her)"? Maybe this is after the divorce has occurred. But when they were going together and they were not married, everything was lovey-dovey, hunky-dory. Everything was peaches 'n cream. Everything was smiles. Everything was beautiful, wonderful, and bright. They were going to conquer the world together. They were going to charge off into the sunset; and everything was going to be beautiful forever after. And then they had to live with one another, know one another. And it was not long before they were at one another's throats. The bloom was off the rose.

That makes sense, does it not, when John says and I read that unless you have love—the love of God—you do not know God! And if you do not know God, you do not have eternal life because God is love. It is a simple equation. This is what Christianity is all about. This is its essence. This is its heart. This is its core. Unless we have the love of God, we do not eternal life. If we want to have eternal life, then we had better know God. We had better get close to Him. We had better live with Him. He had better be a part of our lives. We had better be walking with Him. We had better know His mind. We had better be communicating with Him. We had better be fellowshiping with Him.

How many different ways can I put it? We had better be studying His Word. We had better be talking to Him on a daily basis, very frequently. We had better be-not like those people are described by God, in Psalm 14: 1, where it says only the fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." God had better be a reality; and He had better be such a part of our life that He is with us all the time, in everything.

During the early part of last week's sermon, I was reviewing love's importance; namely, that it is shown in the Bible as being the greatest of all virtues. Remember how Paul made the comparisons in I Corinthians 13? He compared love with other qualities. As he was concluding the chapter, beginning with verse 7 and to the end of the chapter, he compared love with other things. He said love never fails, love never ends, love endures all things, and love bears all things. And by that he was saying, in effect, love is complete. He also showed that it is permanent. You see, it never ends. Prophecy ends. Knowledge comes to an end; that is, it is no longer needed. But love never ends. It is absolutely permanent.

He concluded it by linking it together with faith and hope. And, incidentally, it shows there by the use of the word "abide" in the singular that he is saying that these are a unity. Faith, hope, and love are a unity. They are all tied together, but yet they are not of equal importance. The greatest is love. Even though the other two are essential so that there will be the love of God, yet they are not as great as love, because love is the aim of faith and hope. And so it is to be the dominating influence in a person's life.

Then he concluded in the first verse of chapter 14 by telling us to pursue love, indicating that we never have enough of it. Even though we have some of it, we did not just get one big glob of it and that is the end of God's dispensing of His love (if I can put it that way). Rather, it is to be something that we are constantly to be, in a sense, "after" God for, so that we can have

more of it; and, of course, be more like God then.

We then went on to Colossians 3:12-14, where he listed a number of very fine qualities. But he admonished us there that these are necessary for fellowship and being part of a community; and then he concluded by saying that on top of all these things, add to these "love." These other things, these other qualities that he mentions, he mentions as aspects of love. And yet love is to be added to them. He did that so that we would understand that love is not limited to the qualities that he listed.

As we grow in understanding, some of those qualities that may be a part of love would be courage; but he never mentioned courage in that section at all. There are many qualities like that that may be a part of love, and so that is why he said add to all of these love. So, love is not limited to the qualities that he listed there in Colossians 3, in that particular context.

Then we used Romans 13; and we saw there love given as the sum of all duty. Love is shown in that context as being a debt that is owed to others every day. And no matter how much payment on that debt is made in one day; when we wake up the next morning, we owe just as much as we did the day before. It is a never-ending obligation. So, we are beginning to see that this is a multifaceted quality that includes an awful lot of other qualities that we might consider to be very fine. But, you see love in its overall sense is the glue—it is the bond—which ties these all together and enables these other qualities to be used in the right way. A person could be very courageous and yet use it destructively, could he not? Certainly. So it is entirely possible to have qualities that might ordinarily be thought of as kind and good but not used in the right way.

I John 4:7-12 Beloved, let us 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.

We also went into some of these verses in order to show that this love—the agape love the Bible is teaching us of—is not something that is normally a part of man's attributes. Man cannot be described, like God, as being "love." Instead, the Bible describes man as being self-centered, deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. We are described as being carnal, that is, fleshly. And so, by contrast, God is love.

Now, God is love means that God is a loving God. You might recall that I told you that the construction of the sentence here, in Greek, puts the emphasis on the word "God," not on the word "love." Because it is constructed in that way, it means that the two words are not interchangeable. "God" and "love" are not interchangeable. The emphasis is on God. God is God. Love is not God. Let us make that clear. Because, if the words are interchangeable, then we could turn them right around and say "love is God." But love is not God. God is a Personality, not an attribute. God is a Personality, not His nature. And so, God is God—*not*, love is God.

But, on the other hand, love is God's outstanding, His underlying motivation for everything that He does. So it means, then, that God is a loving God. What this means in practical fact is that, when God created, it was an act of love. The reason is because love motivates one to share. We begin to see why God created. Because He is love, because that is the nature that is driving Him, love has to share with somebody. It cannot live in a vacuum. That would be self-centered. God is driven, if I can use that word, to share what He is, His life. Not just the fact that He lives forever, but the kind of life, the quality of life that He lives.

He has to share that with others, because love motivates somebody to do something. Anybody who has the love of God is going to be motivated to do the kind of acts that God does. We are going to see how important this is, in just a bit. When God provides for His creation, He does so because love motivates Him to care for and to maintain what He is responsible for.

We will put it into practical terms. If God, by whatever the circumstance or situation that would arise, were put into a dirty hovel to live in, it would not be long before that would be the cleanest, most orderly hovel that anybody would ever live in. You see He would be driven to make the area clean, neat, without confusion. He would begin to care for whatever it was that was His responsibility.

And so we see, whenever God created Adam and Eve, one of the first things that He told them was, "Hey, you've got to dress and keep what I have given you. If you are going to be in the image of God, you are going to take care of things like I take care of things. You're going to embellish it (dress); and you're going to guard it from destruction and disintegration and degeneration (keep)."

These things begin to reach out into areas of life. We can begin to examine ourselves in practical situations to see whether we are being responsible to God and responsible to the love that He has given. Are we dressing and keeping what is part of our responsibility? Or, do we allow things to degenerate and deteriorate? Now, do not get overly concerned, because things—because they are physical, because they are natural—are going to degenerate more rapidly than we can possibly maintain them. But still, we have that responsibility to make the effort to try to keep things in good condition.

Then we see that God's nature is manifested in what He does. Love will manifest itself, because there will be acts, if I can put it that way—actions—that will follow in its wake. If the love of God is really there, it will begin to do something. This is very important because what God does provides us with evidence that He is working in His creation. He has not gone way off somewhere. He is not an absentee landlord. Because He is love, He is taking care of what He has created.

Now, this has two facets to it. There is the maintenance of His spiritual purpose; and there is the maintenance of things physical. So what do we find about God? He loves His creation so much that He provides for the unjust as well as the just. He causes His rain to fall, Jesus said (in Matthew 5), on the unjust as well as the just. So He is maintaining. He is a God of providence. His love, you see, motivates Him to do that.

So, we can begin to see the very existence of life is evidence that God is. He is beginning to share what He is. He is Life. There is one Life Giver. We have life because God is what He is. Then He maintains. That is another evidence of His love.

God's redemption of mankind is evidence of His love. If God had been interested only in justice (we will call it), then what would have occurred? He would have let man die in their sin. But the love of God motivated Him to find a way to pay the penalty for sin and allow us to continue to live. That is an evidence of His love.

The very fact that we have free moral agency is evidence of His love. Did you ever stop to think that of all the things that God has created physically—as physical beings—we are the only ones who have "will"? We are the only ones who can reason a way to go, make the choice, and then set our mind to accomplish. Everything else merely reacts to stimuli. Unfortunately, too many of us merely react to stimuli. It is the carnality that comes out.

We are beginning to see another facet of love. Love is reasoned. We are going to see this. It is a reasoned action that will follow a specific course; and that course is evidenced by the works of God; and you will see that it is evidenced by something else as well.

Here is another important one. The very fact that we have the hope of eternal life is an act of love on God's part too. He has given to us—made available to you and me—a reason to live that is so great, so awesome, so inspiring, so mind-boggling. It is almost, you might say, beyond reason to think that He would be willing to do this. And it should become, eventually, as we grow, more important than anything in our life. Anything! Did not Jesus say, Seek you first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness and all these other things will be added?

Jesus did what He did because of the joy that was set before Him. He said that the work of God consumed Him. It was His "meat"—which motivated Him, fed Him, strengthened Him, energized Him, and made Him move in what He was doing. He was endued with the love of God as well. And so, it brought out in Him certain action. It was what (to use a common term) was driving Him. I do not mean that He was a hopeless victim of it. I do not mean that at all. But it was, nonetheless, what drove Him.

Now, because of this, because we have this hope, there can be verses like Romans 8: 28. You see, "All things work together for good to those who are the called, and to those who love God." The two go together. Did you notice the tag line? *To those who love God*. And so we know then, because of what God has revealed in His love that He is in control of what is going on in His creation!

There might be some awfully bad things that are going on—terrible things, traumatic things, and painful things going on—as this whole thing begins to wind towards its climax. But yet, to those that God has called—to those that He has given His love—and to those who love Him in return, they can live life knowing that things are going to work out right. Because this God of creation, who loves His creation and who loves us, is going to make it work out that way, if we just give Him half a chance. If we just leave the door open a crack, His love is so great that He is going to wedge His way in, as it were, in order to secure our salvation.

All of these things help us to see that God cares, that God has feelings (even as we do). But God's acts are seen in the Bible as always done for the good of those for whom the acts are done. That is an important distinction, because His caring is always supported by a specific range of acts. His nature makes Him to this.

By way of example, the Bible says that eventually God is going to gather all things to Himself. But the Bible also shows that, when He does this, it will be because He wants to share what He is with others. On the other hand, we know that Satan is trying to gather everybody to himself. But why? It is not to share what he is, but to destroy. That is why God named him that. He is a destroyer; and so his (Satan's) acts will always be channeled in a direction that is diametrically the opposite of God's. So Jesus described him, in John 8: 44, as a liar and as a murderer.

So we see these two great spirit beings: One who is love makes His actions channel in one direction; and another, who is self-centered, whose nature is destructive. In fact, it even says that he will always act according to what he is (This is still John 8: 44.), because he cannot help himself. And he will gather things to himself for the purpose of destroying.

God has the last word in everything. Even death (Romans 8 says) is not anything that impedes Him, because He can resurrect. Famines, wars, storms of the century, it does not matter what it is, God is in control; and we are the very apple of His eye. And so things can work out right. They will work out right.

I John 4:10-11 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.

It has not been our love for God that has made this relationship—this fellowship—with Him possible; but His love for us. Therefore, our love is merely a response to His. Now this is an important distinction. There is a human love, but that human love is not the love of God. That human love, we will find (not in this sermon, but later on), is essentially self-centered. But God's love, though it benefits the self, is essentially others-centered. That is not natural. If it were natural for man, man would not be described as being carnal, self-centered, and deceitful. So what we are talking about here, then, is the love of God. And, if we do then love God, it is merely a reflection of the love that He has given us.

God's own act of love is defined in the giving of His Son. Now, we understand that God did not 'act in love' only once; but John is bringing it down to a specific act so that we can understand things more clearly. God is always acting in love. But John describes God's supreme act of love as being the giving of His Son.

What we are beginning to see here is, you might say, the opening wedge of what the love of God requires. What it requires we can, maybe, sum up in one word (We are talking about basic things here.) and that is sacrifice. In a way, I do not like to use the word "sacrifice" because it is a strong word to you and me. I think I would rather use a couple of words, rather than the word sacrifice. He is saying that if love is going to be present—if it is going to be used—it is always going to cost us something. The cost sometimes may not be great. It might be minor. But yet

the cost can go all the way to being willing to actually give up that which is most precious to you and me, or the most precious to you, for the well-being of somebody else.

As we are going to find out, not just somebody that you happen to love, but somebody that you do not like at all! That makes the cost much greater. We will see that very clearly in just a minute.

So then, just taking this principle, we can be able to see that, in practical situations, we must understand that godly love is always going to cost us something. Do you remember (in II Samuel 24: 24, very easy to remember) David had it in his heart to build a Temple for God? This took place after the numbering of Israel, whenever God was really chastening Israel very badly for the mistake, for the sin of David. What was it? 70,000 people died as a result of that sin; and as it was ending David wanted to make a sacrifice to God. It just happened that he was in the area of what is now, of course, Mt. Zion, just at the high point in the city of David.

At that time, the piece of land was owned by a man named Araunah. Here is David, the king; and he says to Araunah, "I want to make a sacrifice to God here on your land." And Araunah said to him, "Here are my oxen. You can use them; and you can use the wood from their yokes to make the sacrifice, to burn it." And David said, "No! I will make no sacrifice to God that cost me nothing." David knew if love was going to be involved in this sacrifice; it was going to cost him something. Otherwise, it would have been a sacrifice at somebody else's expense. David understood that is not love. It was not going to cost him a thing.

So understand this! The love of God is going to involve a cost to the individual who does the act—whatever it might be. We might say, then, that this 'costliness' is its vital, or essential, part. Now, it is not the only one. There is another one that has to be fit into this, if the love of God is going to really be there.

John 13:31-35 So, when he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and glorify Him immediately. Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

Even as God is manifested by what He does, His children will also be manifested by what they do, because they will be doing acts that are similar. Maybe not in scope, maybe not in size, but in kind—in terms of they will be things that will be done for the benefit of others—acts that will cost them something.

We also find, from this series of verses, that what the Father did and what the Son did—most specifically, what the Son did here in John 13—is going to be the standard against which all acts of love are to be measured. I am not thinking specifically here of what Jesus specifically did in that period of time right after this episode in John 13 took place, that is the crucifixion. I am talking about Jesus' entire life being the example, the standard, against which all acts of love

are going to be measured.

Maybe if we could begin back in Philippians 2, how Paul begins to show that though He was rich He became poor. It cost Him something. Though He found Himself in the likeness of God, in the form of God, it was not something that, He said, needed to be grasped at. In other words, He did not hang on to it with all of His being; but He humbled himself. There was another cost paid.

Then He found Himself in the form of man. He did not give up being God in the sense that He gave up all of His power, because we find that He did some awesome things on earth. But He did become subject to death. He did become subject to the possibility of sin.

You start there and you go through the life of Jesus Christ; and you will find that He "spent Himself" for mankind in everything that He did. Therefore, then, all of His acts become the standard, or the measure, against which we can compare ourselves. It is not just in the crucifixion, because you may not ever be called upon to crucify yourself in the way that He was. And yet, on a day-to-day basis, we are called to make those payments—the costly payments—in acts of love.

Consider this in the context of the last Passover then. This is kind of interesting, because Jesus tried to reconcile with Judas before Judas did this thing. I do not know if you are aware, but there is enough indication in the context here that we can, at least get an idea of where two of the personalities (besides Jesus) were seated. They did not sit at tables like you and I do. A table was there; but it was really a low table. And they reclined on pillows and things on the floor. So, here they were sitting around the table on the floor. John was close enough to Jesus that he was able to turn his head and his body and whisper something to Him. "Who is it?" He got a signal from Peter; and all John had to do was to turn his and body a little bit, and he was right in Jesus' breast. So you know that he was awfully close to Jesus on one side or the other.

The logical deduction is that Judas was on the other side, probably Jesus' right. I think that we can assume that Jesus arranged it that way, because He knew who was going to betray Him. And He wanted this man, who was going to betray Him, to be in the position of honor where Jesus could talk to him and see if it be possible for Him to reconcile with him. Even Jesus, with all of His love, could not reconcile with Judas—because Judas would not let Him. So, He gave him the sop; and then Judas ups and went out.

And when he went out, that is where this episode took place. You see, Judas' leaving and that which occurred just prior to that, is what motivated this instruction from Christ: That if you are going to love, then you will be My disciple. Obviously, Judas did not love Him—even though Christ loved him right up to the end. Yet Judas did not love.

There is one more thing that I could put in here. It is supplied by the other three—Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And that is, we know that just prior to this they were arguing over which of them was the greatest. So, what is He saying? Considering what Judas did in that episode and considering the argument that the disciples were having amongst themselves as to which one was the greatest, Jesus was saying, "Look, there is one thing that is going to hold you together so that you can fulfill the commission that I have given to you; and that is that you love one

another. And if you are going to be dominated by rivalry, by carnality, if you are going to be dominated by "Who is the greatest?", this group is going to fly apart and My commission to you is not going to get done. "

It will accomplish then the other thing. It will not only hold them together; but the witness would be made before mankind as to where the disciples of Jesus were, because they would be doing the same kind of things as Jesus did. That is how the witness is made. We need to meditate on that. "Selah."

Let us go on. He said He gave a new commandment. This word "new" is the Greek word "kainen." It means "fresh," rather than new in point of time. I give you a fresh commandment. It means something enhanced, rather than something different. So He is enhancing something.

The old commandment said you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Now, what is there that is fresh about this one? What is fresh about it is that we not only have to include that as part of our *modus operandi*, but we have to go much further in keeping it than was ever required under the Old Covenant. That is what is fresh about it, because we have to take our love into the spirit, the intent, and the motivations that are behind the acts.

This is what is going to 'separate the men from the boys' as we go along here, because Jesus said, "Even as I have loved you." Now we are to love others, not because we like them, or because we are bound to them by family ties, social ties, racial ties, national ties, nor because they are our neighbors because they live in the same geographic area that we live in, but simply because they are redeemed sinners, like you and me.

[Some wording may be lost when the tape is turned over here.] The thing about loving the world, He is talking about loving one another. So it is the love that is expressed to the fellowship that God is especially concerned about—the fellowship of His people, the fellowship that includes Him, God. We are going to tie all these things together; because knowing God is directly tied to this. So then, what is 'new' is the quality of the motive—the breadth, the depth, and the length of what it costs to do it.

Now applied to them directly again, in the context, is that we cannot operate out of a spirit of rivalry. Unfortunately, there is far too much of that going on in the world and even amongst us. It even takes place in families, between husband and wife, with one or the other, or both, fighting for domination and control of the family.

I John 4:12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us. . .

Do you know what the word "abides" means? Remains, continues. If we love one another, God remains in us. Do you see any importance to love? You want to maintain your relationship with God? Then we have to love one another.

I John 4:12 . . .and His love has been perfected in us.

God's love, then, originates in Himself. It was manifested in His Son. And it is perfected in His

people. (Interesting little formula there.) Now, we can use "perfected" in two ways here. One is that when it comes into His people, then the cycle completes itself—God, to His people, and back to God. God, to His people, out to others—especially those who also have the Spirit of God—back to God. The cycle then is perfected. And so we see something that is similar to the analogy that we get from electricity, that it only flows through a completed cycle.

We begin to see there, then, that when God sends forth His love in an act, He expects that it is going to come back to Him. And it is not completed until it does come back to Him. And it will come back to Him, because He says when He sends it out it always accomplishes what He sends it forth to do. He sends it forth in His Word, and by means of His Spirit; but, look at you, you have responded. And it begins to come back to Him and then out to others.

Also, "perfected" can be used in the sense that it is "brought to maturity." In this case, it is indicating that. When God begins the cycle and, by His Spirit, He gives us His love; then it only becomes matured in us as we use it. If we do not use it, then it is almost as if it bounces off us (like a laser beam) and nothing is accomplished. So, love then is something that must not only grow, but it also must be sharpened, honed, made better, and increase in those kinds of ways.

I think that you can understand this in the sense of whenever we begin to do something that we have never done before. Ice-skating comes to my mind. Probably very few of you have ever ice-skated here in Portland, because you just do not have the opportunity. But if you ever had the opportunity to get up on ice-skates, where the blade is only about an eighth of an inch wide, you would begin to think that your legs had turned into rubber bands. Your ankles would bend; and you would be staggering all over the place, even trying to stay up. But, if you kept at it, the first thing you know, your ankles would begin to strengthen. You would be able to glide about on the ice a little bit.

That is what God is talking about. It is this principle of putting something to use; and, as you begin to do it, it become easier and easier. Or, it becomes something that you do with more and more skill. It is beginning to be "completed." It is beginning to be "perfected."

So, if we are going to grow in the love of God, it means that once God has made the connection, we have to use it. Use it or you lose it. And if we use it, it will not only begin to grow, we will become better at it. And it almost begins to take on the form of being a skill. Not a skill to 'show off' though. Not a skill to make ourselves look good. But, rather, a skill that is used for the benefit and blessing of others.

The beautiful thing about it, the wonderful thing is that when we use it, it comes back at us as a blessing for us as well. That is what is so wonderfully good about it. Even though it is the most costly thing in all the world, on the other hand, it gives us the greatest benefit as well. So it is a wonderful thing.

Let us go to I John 5. But, before we go there, something I want to pick up here while we are still on verse 12. That is, this whole section here (verses 7-12, and actually a couple of other places in 1st John as well), at least partly explains John's intense concerns about fellowship. If you would go back to the first chapter and just read through that, like in verse 3:

I John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father.

Fellowship is one of the major themes of this epistle. Now, why was he so intensely concerned about fellowship? Because, the way John was looking at it, fellowship was not just an optional blessing. Remember this in light of what we just said about John 13. God intends that the primary outlet for the love He gives to each one of us is to be within the group, you see, within the fellowship. It is not to the world. It is to the fellowship.

What this means in practical fact is that, if we are going to do acts of love, it is primarily going to be within the church. That is where God wants it primarily expressed. Why? Because love strengthens the Body; and the stronger the Body is, the better the witness!

"You are My servants," He says in Isaiah 43:10, "whom I have chosen. You are My witnesses." Where did ancient Israel fall down? They were never prepared to be a good witness for God, so they could not carry out their responsibilities.

Now, if the church of God is ever going to follow through on what God has called us for, it is going to be because the love of God is active in the life of His people. And that they are strengthening one another within that fellowship.

This leads me into another area that I had not planned on. But, when do you think the most effective witness was ever made in the history of the church of God? It was not in the 20<sup>th</sup> century under Herbert W. Armstrong. The most effective witness that the church of God ever made was in the 1<sup>st</sup> century! There was not any central headquarters, like we have today. They had no radio, no television, no telephone, no automobiles, no airplanes, no telegraph, and no satellites. They had nothing but the Spirit of God and the love of God.

And those people were cut off from their headquarters in Jerusalem. Those people may have had local headquarters, like Paul's headquarters in Asia Minor seemed to be in Ephesus. But all of those people were all tied together—whether they were in Jerusalem, or Ephesus, or Corinth, or up in Macedonia, or over in India. They were all tied together by the Spirit of God, by the love of God. They all basically spoke the same things. And their witness was so powerful. In Acts 17:6 it says these people "have turned the world upside down."

Is it possible that God is now leading the church of God in that direction now, as we approach the end? Where people will be driven by His love, and make the witness by His love. I do not know. We will have to see. It is very interesting what is happening within the church of God, as it begins to break up into small groups.

Think about this. Which would be easier for the Beast to concentrate on and wipe out: one large organization that has its headquarter in one place, or hundreds of organizations with people scattered all over the place? We shall see. But, I will tell you, people with the love of God are going to be hard to stamp out. They will be almost like hitting a little puddle of mercury. Did you ever do that? Spew! It scatters all over the place. Hit the Christians in one place and, bang, they bounce out in a hundred other places. That is *if* they really love God and *if* they love their brethren.

I John 5:1-3 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot [Him] also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

John is telling us here that the love of God and the love of man (again, mostly here within the fellowship) are inseparable. They are inseparable parts of the same experience. If we love the Father, we also love the child. That is the analogy that he is using. We are the children. If we love the Father that begot the children, then we must love the children the Father has begotten. Otherwise, there is reason to question whether we love God. If we do not love the brethren, then do we really love God? (We will get to that one in a bit.)

Now I John 5:3 is very important because a person can take isolated statements about love from other parts of the New Testament; and this can lead those people into saying that the keeping of the commandments is not necessary. The great body of "Christianity" out there says that the keeping of the commandments is not necessary. In fact, we heard one spokesman for the church of God, when asked whether we needed to keep the Sabbath and the holy days, he said, "No." That shows you how far they are drifting away.

So, some will go so far as to say that church and all the rest of the Bible is unnecessary. In fact, I just read a letter within the past two or three days and this person said that all you need to do is keep things (like the Sermon on the Mount) and you do not have to worry about the law of God.

We are going to see the part that the law of God plays in the love of God, because what that other way will produce is a purposeless, directionless way of life. In practical fact, the person will be doing what is pleasing in his own eyes because he will be the lawgiver. He will be the one who determines what is 'right' and 'wrong'. Now, what the commandments do is define. They make it abundantly clear what the basic elements of love are and what direction our specific actions are going to take if there is going to be love.

Now remember that I said before that God has feelings. He cares. He is an emotional Being. And those emotions can motivate Him, just like they do you and me. We begin to feel like we are being put upon, the emotion of anger is likely to rise up and that feeling will then almost make you do something. Probably strike out in anger with your fist. Maybe it will open up your tongue and you will swear a blue streak. I hope not.

But, nonetheless, you see that feelings will motivate. God is a feeling Being. And we are feeling beings as well. And, all too often, our feelings motivate us to go in the wrong direction. This is where the law of God is important, because it tells us what direction we are to take our actions, so that there is no equivocation, there is no doubt in our mind as to which way love is to go. You cannot take away the law of God and still love, because we will start wandering all over the place, in terms of our acts.

When you see this in the context of the whole book of I John, John is saying that obedience to

God is the proof of the love of God. It is proving whether we are following the Guide. Let me give you a longer statement in regard to this. Obedience is an action. Love is an action. But obedience is an action that follows or submits to a commandment of God, a principle revealed by God in His Word, and/or an example of God or the godly. "Follow me as I follow Christ." Be an example.

At this point in understanding what love is—where John gives this definition that the love of God is proved and shown by the keeping of the commandments—we are not considering how one *feels* *feels* about keeping it. God expects us to follow His commandments whether we feel like doing it or not. And so feeling is secondary to the action that is taken, in the love of God. This means, we have to be prepared, maybe, to do an awful lot of things that we do not feel like doing.

If love is going to have a beginning, if love is going to be perfected, our feelings may mislead us. And so those feelings have to be overcome by a reasoned effort based on the truth of God and the setting of our will, by faith, to go in the direction that God's law says to go. Then we will be doing an act of love, whether we feel like it or not.

Some acts of love are very difficult to do, because the cost is so great. What you may consider to be a great cost, somebody else may consider to be minor. So everybody is a little bit different in that regard. The cost to one person in one area may be very great compared to what most other people would be required to pay. To that person it is an awesome thing that they have to overcome.

So then, I John 5:3, in one sense this is where love begins in a human being. Because a person may have a thought to do good, or he may have a thought to refrain from evil. A person may have a feeling of compassion, a feeling of pity, a feeling of mercy. Or a person may have a feeling of revulsion about something—against doing, let us say, an evil action. But it does not become love until the person does the act!

Let us make it very simple. You may see something occur in someone's life that fills you with a great deal of pity, compassion for that person. The feeling is strong; but it does not motivate you to do anything. Now, at the very least, we ought to be able to get down on our knees and pray to God for the person about the situation. Now you have begun to love the person.

If you can take it further and not only pray about the situation but do something to alleviate the person's misery, or pain, the circumstance they are in, now you have turned love up another notch, because you are not only doing, let us say, the least that you can do. Now the cost has risen and it has begun to cost you something. Not just something in time and in getting on your knees, a little bit of energy and thought in making the prayer; but now it has begun to cost you maybe some money, or some time, or some energy to help the person out of the circumstance. And so love has intensified. You see, love is beginning to be "perfected" too.

Love is what you do. Love is an action. The feeling does not become love until the action is taken. And then the feeling undergirds—it gives an added dimension to—the act.

Now the reason feelings have to be evaluated is because our feelings are educated by our experience. Most of our experience has been in the world of carnality, out in the world; and so

most of those feelings are suspect, at the very least, as to whether they are right or wrong. You see the key element in this is that our feelings are educated by our experiences; and our experiences mostly took place in our carnality.

The wonderful thing is that *if* we begin then to bend our will, by faith, to follow the commands of God, to do them, to go through with the act, *then* the feelings begin to become re-educated, by the Spirit of God. And the right feelings begin to become associated with the acts.

This is actually what makes it possible for a person to do an act of love for a bitter enemy and to really be sincere and loving and kind and generous and good and giving, right from the heart—and really mean it. That takes a pretty mature love.

Now we are beginning to see that the love of God—the agape love—is not just the mechanical doing of following the commands of God. The commands of God show us the way. It holds us on course. It tells us the parameters of the love of God in the only way that law, or a word or words, can do. But we are feeling beings. And so the love of God not only is the right act, it is the right feeling too—if it is being perfected.

I John 2:3 Now by this we know that we know Him. . .

There it is. You want to know whether you know God? This is where we began. John 17:3, eternal life is know God.

I John 2:3-5 By this we know that we know [God], if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.

Ah, ha. See? The love of God is perfected in those who keep His Word, I John 4:12. In these people is perfected the love of God. It is the keeping of the commands of God by the Spirit of God with the motivation of the love of God that perfects the love of God. See? We begin to get into one of these cycles.

I John 2:5 By this we know that we are in Him.

What does "abide" mean? It means "to remain in, continue in."

I John 2:6 He who says he abides in [God] ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

There is quite a fairly lengthy story behind what John wrote here; and it would probably be good to just wait for another sermon, to put that in there so that we could understand why John wrote the things that he did. The only reason that I would give it to you is because it might have some impact on you and me understanding whether or not the love of God is really in us, or not. Our emotions are such that we can very easily be misled.

Some of us, maybe, are not quite so emotional. Maybe we would consider ourselves to be more on the intellectual side; and there is something that needs to be addressed in regard to the intellect (and the keeping of the commandments of God and the love of God) as well. There are

those who have intellectually proved that God exists. We might need to look into that as well and to see what part "intellect" has to play in the love of God as well. We will just have to get to that a little bit later.