

## Love's Emotional Dimension

### God and Love

John W. Ritenbaugh

Given 20-Mar-93; Tape #065

The second sermon in this series was titled "Love's Importance & Source", that is on love's completeness, permanence, and supremacy as compared to other attributes of personality. You can recall we went through the last several verses of I Corinthians 13, and compared love to other things. So we see there that love is supreme. Love is permanent, when compared to other things. We saw that the Bible shows that God is a loving God. All of His acts are done out of love. It is His nature to act in that way, and so everything that He does is done out of love.

We also saw that God is the Source of this attribute. Although mankind has a capacity to love, it does not have the kind of love that we are talking about here by nature. It is something that has must be given to him by God.

Last week, we focused on the fact that this love is always going to have a cost associated with it. There is always going to be some effort, or work, or, we might even say, sacrifice that is going to be involved if one is going to do acts of godly love.

The epitome of this love is manifested in God's giving of His Son as the sacrifice for mankind's sin. Jesus followed this up by saying that His disciples would be known by the way that they would express themselves in their fellowship with one another. The way that they would express themselves would be with this 'agape' love.

We saw clearly that God's love—and, therefore, His nature—is manifested by His acts. This is very important to understanding what this love is. God's nature is manifested by His acts. God's nature is love. Everything that He does is in love.

Love, therefore, is something that is done. It is the act. It is an action that is directed toward the well-being of others. This is understood to a very great extent by those in the world too. However, they also largely say that all one needs is love. I might paraphrase and say, "Just do good. Follow the Sermon on the Mount; and you'll be alright." That is what they say; and there is, in a sense, an element of truth to it. It sounds good. But, in practical fact, what it does is produce a purposeless and directionless pseudo-Christianity.

This is the very reason why John's statement is necessary. He said:

I John 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome [grievous].

The commandments tell us how to express that love. They tell us what form our effort is to take to express this love, how it is to be directed towards both God and man. The first four commandments are primarily directed at God. The last six commandments are directed at man. Therefore, what we see in love is a channel that love is supposed to take. In one sense, this is

where love begins in a human being. I mean, the love of God-when he begins keeping the commandments.

A person may have a thought to do good or, let us say, a thought (on the other hand) to refrain from evil. A person may have a feeling of compassion, or pity, or mercy. A person may even have a feeling of revulsion against something that is evil. But it does not become 'love' until the thought, or the feeling, motivates the person to act. Love is an act.

Then comes another aspect of love. It can be done coldly. It can be done reluctantly. It can be done, we might say, out of dutiful obligation. It can be done in joyous wholehearted submission, with a great deal of enthusiasm. It can be done warmheartedly, with thankful devotion, or anywhere in between. But we have to ask the question, "Which is more attractive?" Something that is done in warmhearted enthusiasm or something that is done coldly, reluctantly, or we might say, dutifully?"

It is far better to do the act of obedience regardless of the feeling than not do it at all. But, if we cannot get beyond the feeling that it is right, the right feelings will never be formed. This is an important part, an important focus-of this sermon. If we do not *do* what is right, the right feelings will never be formed, because emotions are largely developed by our experiences. Thus, the right emotions will never be formed without experiencing the right actions with the right spirit—God's Holy Spirit.

I John 2:3-6 Now by this we know that we know Him, 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. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

This section plays a major role in helping us understand how we can have the right attitude, the right emotions in our obedience. The key here is *knowing God*. How does one come to know God? To the Christian, coming to know God is accomplished by fellowshiping with God.

To understand what is behind what John wrote here, we have to go back to hundreds of years before John wrote this, to about five or six hundred years before Christ. That was the Golden Age of the Greek philosophers. Most of us are familiar with the names of Plato and Socrates and Aristotle. They come to mind because when we were in school we were even taught about some of their philosophy. Well, that is the period of time that we are thinking of right here.

The Greek philosophers believed that they could arrive at knowing God through intellectual reasoning and argument. Their conclusion (the conclusion being that they could come to know God this way) had a very simple premise. That is, that man is curious. It is his nature to ask questions. God made him that way; so God would be forced to reveal Himself if men ask the right questions and reasoned them through.

The flaw in this is shown in its fruit. It did produce a great number of right answers. The apostle Paul even acknowledged one of them there in Acts 17, where he said, "One of your own poets has said that we are God's offspring." They had reached that conclusion. So it did produce quite

a number of right answers; but it could not make men moral! Just being intellectually attuned, let us say to God, did not make men moral. So religion, to them, came to be something very similar to higher mathematics. It was a mental activity. It gave intellectual satisfaction; but it did not produce moral action. Plato and Socrates, for instance, saw nothing wrong with homosexuality.

This is reflected in the Greek gods of mythology. If you know anything about them (anything about their characteristics and personality), you will understand that those gods were really nothing more than reflections of greater men. Those gods (Zeus, the whole pantheon of gods that they had) were not very nice beings to be around. They were spiteful, irritable. They got terribly angry. And when they got upset with men, bad things would happen. They were vindictive. They told lies! Some of them were very sexually amoral. They copulated with women—human women—these gods. And on and on it went.

So we see higher Greek thinking reflected in the gods that they had, or that they came up with. And these gods, indeed, were really just the imaginations of men. But you can see reflected in their gods what the upper crust of Greek academia thought like and acted like. And so all of their reasoning could not produce moral people.

Much the same is true today. Some of the most gifted people intellectually are also some of the most amoral people alive. Perhaps they are held even more responsible by God because of their gifts. Their immorality tends to take a sophisticated approach in the corporate, political, and academic world. And so we come up with people like the Michael Milken—nice looking guy, but he would rob a corporation blind to get rich. How about Charles Keating—an intellectual giant in the economic world; but he did not think anything at all about stripping very many elderly people of all of their savings so that he could get rich.

We have the Rhodes Scholar, who is now President of the United States—a man of great intellectuality but also a philanderer. Who knows how many philanderings he has done? Look how many campaign-promises have already been broken. Candidate Clinton said things far differently than what President Clinton does.

In the past we have had people like the Huxleys, Mark Twain (who ran God down, ridiculed the belief in God; and yet he is a man held in very high esteem in the literary world); but there is a whole host of movers and shakers like this in society. And some of these people may even give an intellectual lip service to God; but, at the same time, they are raping society for their own gain in some fashion. And so we have the apostle Paul's statement there in I Corinthians 8:1 that knowledge puffs up but charity—love—builds up.

A few hundred years later in the Greek world, but closer to Christ, the Greeks pursued becoming one with God in a different way. They pursued becoming one with God through the Mystery Religions. The Mystery Religions' distinctive feature was a passion play. There were a lot of these Mystery Religions; but all of these passion plays had the same general theme. There were variations on it, of course; but pretty much had the same general theme. Now see if this sounds familiar. The story was generally about a god who lived, who suffered terribly, died a cruel and unjust death, and then rose again to life. Sound familiar? Guess who was on the job?

Before being allowed to see the passion play, the initiate was given a long course of instruction. At the same time, he was made to practice an aesthetic discipline. As he progressed through the religion, he was gradually worked into a state of intense expectation. Then, at the right time, he was allowed to see the passion play, in which everything was done to heighten the emotional impact. They used cunning lighting, sensuous music, incense, and a marvelous movement of liturgy. And as the story played out, the initiate was generally moved to a state of emotional involvement. You see he began to identify with the god, until many of them got to the place where they said, "I am you and you are I." They were so identified with the person the story was about that they had actually transferred themselves as being one with the god. And so then they shared his suffering, and they shared his victory, and they shared his immortality.

Do you think this is strange? You have experienced it in your own life. Not maybe in a religious sense, but you have experienced the principle. I think everyone of us, in the sound of my voice who is adult enough to have gone to a movie where the combination of attractive people, music to fit the mood, living color, and a gripping story moves you emotionally until you feel identification with the main characters and sympathy for idolaters, fornicators, adulterers, murderers, and the covetousness to the place to where you actually feel that they are justified in breaking the commands of God, in the movie. Same thing.

The problem with that is that the Greek system was not 'knowing God', because the passion plays (like the movies) were full of lies and distortions. The results were not 'knowing,' but 'feeling'. It was like a religious drug whose effects were very short-lived. It was an abnormal experience, somewhat like a modern Pentecostal meeting where they pray down the spirit and speak in tongues. Its aim was really an escape from the realities of ordinary life.

Is that not why we go to movies? We go to plays; and, for an hour and a half, to two hours, reality is suspended. The producers and the writers and the directors depend upon that—for you to suspend reality. If they can get you to do that, they will get you identifying with the characters in the story until you are sympathetic with them.

The Greeks were not dumb. Not many people could see through this; and, as a result, many got caught up in it.

Contrast that to the Bible's concept of 'knowing God'. Knowledge of God comes not by speculation or by emotionalism; but it comes because God chooses to reveal Himself. In other words, God initiates our knowing Him by beginning our relationship with Him. You can tie this right into I Corinthians 2: 10. "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit." Knowledge of God begins when God begins to reveal Himself.

Now, what God reveals is equally important to this as well. He reveals Himself to be a holy, loving, and giving God. I will not go through the details at this point; but this should bring the person who is worshipping God to an obligation to also be holy—to also be loving, to also be giving—as God is.

What John is saying here in I John 2, beginning in verse 3, is that there is no real knowledge of

God without obedience to Him. You cannot 'know God' without obeying Him.

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

So John is saying then that obedience is the vehicle, it is the means, by which we begin to experience God life. It is the means by which we begin to experience eternal life. It is the means by which we begin to experience knowing God.

Now the word 'know' when applied to human relationships in the Old Testament implies intimacy all the way to sexual relations. Adam 'knew' his wife and she conceived. That is very plain. When it is applied to our relationship with God, the sexual dimension disappears; but instead it becomes an intimate devotion to and a loyalty of life together. This is very important. Eternal life is to know God. The sexual dimension disappears and the sexual part becomes intimate devotion and loyalty of life together.

Let us turn back to John 15: 9-11. Again, remember the context here. It is immediately after they took the last Passover together; and Jesus is giving final instructions to His disciples before being taken and crucified.

John 15:9-11 "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

One of the key words here is the word 'abide.' It means 'continue in,' or 'remain in.' "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; continue you in My love or, remain in My love." Now, what are we to remain in? We are to remain in a relationship, a fellowship. This relationship is kept going by a combination of mutual respect, honor, concern for, and goodwill toward. It is two-sided. On the one side there is God. On the other side there is us. And it is kept going by mutual respect, honor, concern for, and goodwill toward. The existence of the relationship is shown on our part by our obedience.

How does any relationship grow? How does a relationship become more and more intimate? If we are ever going to be in God's Kingdom, it is because we are intimate with God. Not sexually, but there is warm devotion, mutual respect, concern for. There is loyalty of life. There is goodwill toward one another.

I want you to think of how any relationship grows more and more intimate. It grows more and more intimate by giving it time and attention, and *conforming to the other person's preferences within the relationship*. The reason I say that last one is because we are primarily thinking of a relationship with God.

But, to some extent, what I said also applies to human relationships. I want you to think of this primarily between a man and a woman. What I have just said is what brings two people together into marriage. Giving time and attention to and conforming to the preferences of the other in the relationship. If time and attention is broken off, the relationship begins to wither and at some point it will come to a complete end. Right? That is right.

What Christ is explaining here in John 15: 9-11 is that there is a mystical union between God and us. We really are united to Him. There is a union there. He is in us. We are in Him. We are commanded though to continue in Him. And the way we continue in Him is by conforming to His likes and dislikes. Otherwise, what happens is that the relationship begins to break off, because the intimacy begins to become dissolved.

Nobody can really know one another without spending the right kind of time with each other. Are we spending quality time with God in prayer—talking with Him more openly than we would our closest human friend? Think of this: we can spend hours talking to one another on the phone, in a coffee klatch, fellowshiping with one another in each other's living rooms. We will spend hours with one another developing a relationship, will we not? Giving it time and attention. Drawing closer and closer. You think the same principles are not at work with God? They are absolutely at work with God! This is how the relationship with God is made intimate. How the devotion is developed. How the loyalty of life is developed. How the concern for one another grows. And God is, let us say, moving us towards a certain end (which we will get to in just a bit).

Do we spend the same quality time with God? Of course not. How much time does He get during the day? And when we do talk to Him, are we doing it on the run while we are actually giving the greater part of our attention to something else? Ask yourself this: Do you appreciate having a serious talk with another person while they are really giving their attention to somebody or something else? Maybe they are doing a chore.

Now, I am not saying that one cannot talk to God under those kind of circumstances; because we can talk to Him under any circumstance and be assured that we will have a better audience than we would get from another human being under a similar circumstance. But I am saying that there must be frequent times of introspection and heart-to-heart talks with Him, even as there would be between two human beings that are going to marry.

The same principle applies to Bible study. Is the television set blaring in the background while you are, supposedly, studying your Bible? How many distractions are there to your concentration while you are allowing God to talk to you? How could a human relationship develop under those circumstances?

What we are beginning to see here is a major portion of love's cost—the sacrifice. Love is always going to cost something. It is going to cost us something, in relation to God, to really get to know Him. Even as you would willingly give your time to some other person (that you thought there might possibly be the chance that you might marry, or whatever, or to a husband or a wife already in a marriage), if that union is going to grow, it is because the two people are paying the cost to make it grow. They are giving their time and attention to it. We are never going to know God unless we do the same kind of things with Him! The same principles are involved.

It is so interesting that this cost is one that we will willingly pay for another human being that we find attractive and want to develop a relationship with; but here we find one of the major

causes of Christian failure. We just do not find God attractive enough to give of ourselves to develop the relationship! We find other things more suited to our interests.

Do you remember John's warning in I John 2:15-17, where he said to "love not the world"? He concludes that section by saying that the world is passing away and the desires (or the lusts) of it. He is telling us that, if we really want a permanent relationship, God is the One to pursue.

Now remember earlier that I mentioned mutual respect, honor, concern for, and goodwill toward? These are the elements of the Bible's statement "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If the respect for God is followed through on, the fruits will be obedience and joy.

John 15:11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full."

If we are working on the relationship with God (giving it our time and attention), then God's love for us (since He is the source) will be reciprocated back to Him in the form of obedience. We might say love. We might say keeping the commandments. We might say conformity to His will. And our lives will then be enriched by joy. Is that a good deal? The psalm says that there is joy evermore in His presence. Jesus is confirming this. If we will abide in God (in His love), then what it is going to do is produce joy in our lives.

What I mean here is not the hormone-driven, passionate, and emotional roller coaster that we call "falling in love;" but a deep, stable sense of well-being. Now a word of caution here: this is not something that happens in a flash, just because two people know one another. Or, two know one another—God and us. It develops because the two experience a wide variety of events together. Anyone who is thinking of marriage had better be willing to spend a great deal of time with their intended and experience quite a number of things together; so that you can see whether or not your lives are really going to be compatible, one with another.

That is what we are talking about here. What is it that is produced by experiencing a great number of things together? This is what I meant when I said before that something is going to be produced here. What is produced is a trust in each other. God begins to trust us. We begin to trust Him more and more. We might call this trust "loyalty". We might call it "faithfulness". That is its fruit. Is that not what happens humanly? That is exactly what happens humanly; and the same principle is at work in our relationship with God.

You might be able to clearly see and agree that we have to come to trust God, because we cannot see Him. The Bible says that the just shall live by faith. It also says that we are saved by grace through faith. But God, like a parent, does come to trust us after a fashion. Parents, you know this is true. As you see your children grow, you are willing to extend them more trust. So, when they are a certain age maybe you do not even trust them to go out of the yard. But was they grow a little bit older, get some more maturity on them, and your lives together are experiencing things together, you begin to see that your child is growing. And you let out the leash a little bit further.

As they continue to grow, the first thing you know, they are allowed to go down into town and

wander around by themselves together. As they get older, the first thing you know, they are driving the automobile. Maybe later on they get to the place that they actually move out of the house and they are in an apartment of their own. These things take place because a trust is developing. Because of experiencing things together, the parent sees that the child is growing. Therefore, they are willing to let out the leash further and further.

God is experiencing the same thing with us. There are ample proofs of this all over the Bible; but I will give you one that is most obvious (at least, to me). That is with Job. God allowed, and perhaps even planned, the testing that Job went through. I think that you understand that he went through one of the most (what shall I call it?) awesome, terrible, gut wrenching tests that anybody has ever gone through. (At least that has been that is recorded.) It is apparently something that went through for a long period of time. And we have to understand that Job did not know even what was going on in the background. He could not see Satan. He could not see Satan and God talking together and planning this thing out. But God let Job go through that; and Job's loyalty to God never cracked. It never gave in, even though he was very severely tested.

You can even find, at the beginning of the book, that God taunted Satan in saying, "Have you considered my servant, Job?" It is like God egged him into it. Now why would God do such a thing if He did not trust Job—that his faith, his love, his loyalty to God was so strong that even Satan directly confronting him could not break him down? So, God's trust of Job was vindicated. He had seen Job act over a long enough period of time that He was confident that Job would be able to endure a direct confrontation from Satan, the Devil—the master deceiver, the master tempter, who is able even to strike a person with horrible diseases.

Does not God say, back in I Corinthians 10:13, that "no temptation has overtaken you except such is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it"? God does not want to lose us. Yet God is creating in us His holy, righteous character. In order for that to be done, He has to put us through tests. And He has to, in a sense, take the risk that He will not lose us in that test. And so He will let the leash out, little by little; and maybe increase the intensity of the tests as years go by and we experience life together with Him.

Brethren, herein is exposed the weakness of the Old Covenant. Can you remember in Romans 8:3 that it says that the law was "weak through the flesh"? The marriage between God and Israel was entered into (and we might say, consummated) before the qualities necessary for a successful union were ever developed. God called Israel out of Egypt, spent 40 years with them, and then He proposed to them. In three days the marriage was entered into; and Israel became God's. It was a marriage doomed to divorce from the very beginning. It shows that one person (even as great as God) cannot create a good marriage if the other one does not agree, and refuses to walk with them or conform. Despite God's loving kindness and patience, what was the problem? Israel never trusted God! That is what it says in Hebrews 4:2, where Paul wrote:

Hebrews 4:2 For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith [trust] in those who heard it.

Not so under the New Covenant! These things will be ironed out before the covenant is completed. The New Covenant will not be completed until the Marriage Supper of the Lamb—not until we are resurrected. Then two who are, let us say, 'on equal footing' will marry. And they will have experienced life together over long periods of time. They have come to know one another. They have come to trust one another. They know the actions, the reactions, the mind, the thoughts, and the heart of each other; and there is a trust there that is going to enable the marriage to succeed.

Do you see this, brethren? The true love, the agape love, has an emotional dimension to it; and that emotional dimension is the fruit of the relationship, the fellowship, with God. We will never have the right emotional qualities unless the relationship, the fellowship, with God continues over a period of time because, even as in human life, emotions are developed through our experiences. But they are perverted because they are done, as it were, in sin with human nature, on this earth. But the right kind of emotional quality—the right kind of emotional dimension—will not develop with God unless we continue in the relationship. That is why Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." The emotional dimension, of which 'joy' is put as an example, is the result of continuing in the fellowship, the relationship, with God.

We are emotional beings; and that is good. Emotions are not only powerful motivators; but they give life a fullness, a quality, an excitement that we otherwise would not have. God created these qualities, this dimension, within us. And He said there in Genesis 1 that He saw everything that He had made and it was good. It is good to have emotions.

And how often the Bible gives us insight into God's emotions. We see His mercy. We see His pity. We see His compassion. We also see His anger. We see His hatred of injustice and sin. But His emotions always move Him along a course that acts for the well-being of all concerned. Whereas our emotions, because they have been developed and trained within humanity and under the influence of human nature, tend to move us along a course of self-satisfaction. They have been educated to do so out of our sense of fear of loss and our concern that something just might cost us. And so we are always striving to protect ourselves from that loss that is potentially there, if we truly love.

People can think of God as being nothing more than an intellectual exercise, ala the Greeks of the fifth and sixth centuries. They might even say, "I know God." They might even say, "I believe in a First Cause" or "I believe that there is a Creator." But they do this without having much moral compunction at all. They can go to church and then live their lives the rest of the week just like their neighbors and coworkers do.

People can be emotional; and they can say that God is in them, and that they are in God. And yet they don't see God in terms of commandments at all. What they see is really nothing more than a celestial fuzz ball, a genie in a bottle, something warm and snuggly, a kindly grandfather who rushes to their aid and blows away all of their problems. They do not see God as purposefully creating.

John unmistakably and without compromise shows that the only way we can know God and show that we know God is by obedience to Him. The only way to show that we have union with Christ is by imitating Him. And the fruit of this will be an incredible sense of well-being which we all want but we are so impatient about being developed. None of this eliminates intellectual effort or proper emotion. But those qualities must be accompanied by obedience to God's commandments.

I John 4:18a There is no fear in love [a tremendous statement]; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.

What we are seeing here, in very simple terms, is probably the major reason (other than the fact that mankind is cut off from God) why we do not love more and better. We are afraid. We are afraid it is going to cost us something. We are afraid we are going to get hurt. We are afraid we are going to lose something. We are afraid we are going to be humbled. We are afraid we are going to look bad. We are afraid our neighbors will not accept us. We are afraid we are going to be rejected. We are afraid we are going to be put down. "Fear involves torment."

I John 4:18b-19 But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. [I guess that shows us pretty clearly where we stand.] We love Him because He first loved us.

Do you know why there is no fear in perfect love? Because there is perfect trust. Think about that. Think about a good marriage. The mates do not fear that the other is going to run off on them, do they? Of course not, they trust one another. You see, this perfect trust is something that is developed by abiding in the relationship. Here is scriptural proof (verse 19) that this kind of love does not come naturally. It is only in anybody because God initiated it and is also the prime mover in maintaining it.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Paul is saying here in so many words, God initiates the relationship. He makes it possible, paving the way so that we can have fellowship with Him so that trust can develop out of a relationship that He made possible through the gift of His Son. Without that gift, without that expression of His love, it never would have occurred.

Romans 5:9-10 Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.

Paul is saying there, God is the one who keeps the relationship going. If God did not do this, we would not have enough trust to trust Him just like the Israelites of old. We would be too impatient, we would not have enough faith to believe what He said, obedience would never be produced, loyalty would never be produced, and devotion to Him would never be produced.

So God keeps forgiving us. God keeps extending the hand. God keeps beckoning us to come back to the relationship. You can see that so clearly in the Old Testament in the way God dealt

with Israel. Over and over and over He forgave and opened up the way for her to come back. It is no different with us.

We have got to see this. The key element in our salvation is this fellowship that has been opened up through the death of Jesus Christ so that through the fellowship, we can begin to conform to the image of God because we are permitted into His presence. And if we do not do what is necessary on our part in giving our time and attention to the fellowship—to the relationship—nothing will happen.

Romans 5:1-5 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Let us expand on verse one somewhat. "Having been justified by faith, we have peace. . ." He is not talking about peace in our life. If he were, then he would not say such things as "through much tribulation you shall enter the Kingdom of God." He lets us know, and he lets us know well, that our lives are going to be rather tumultuous if we sign aboard with Him.

So what kind of peace is this? It means that the wrath of God is no longer facing us. It is as though God's wrath has been appeased through the justification process made possible by the blood of Jesus Christ. The law is now satisfied. You see, now we can have entrance into His presence—verse 2, "through whom also we have access." We have entrance to God.

Think about Adam and Eve. They sinned and what did God do? He kicked them out of His presence! He put cherubim with flaming swords symbolically showing that you could not get to where God was anymore. Mankind, personified by Adam and Eve, was no longer in the presence of God. But now through Jesus Christ, we are allowed back. Not into the Garden, but into a fellowship, a relationship with God.

He said, "into this grace." Do you know what he means? A haven, a place of safety, a place of salvation. And he says that we stand there, which indicates permanence. That is God's intention—that we are permanently back.

In verse 3 he says, "Not only that, but we also glory in tribulations." He does not mean that we glory because we are having trouble but rather we glory because of them. Nobody likes to go through trials and God understands that. But now we are able to see them for what God intends them to be and that is an asset for the perfecting, for the completion of God's love in us. You see, He is leading us through experiences by which the mind of God is being developed in us.

If we are going through these experiences and at the same time carrying on conversations with Him, talking to Him, allowing Him to talk back to us through His Word in study, what begins to develop? Slowly but surely, we begin to take on His characteristics. The image of our God begins to become formed in us. We begin to see, then, the trials for what they are. They are schooling to develop the mind of God in us through fellowship with Him.

So we are experiencing things together. What does that mean in terms of attitude? What does it mean in terms of feelings? It means very much because even as our feelings were developed in our childhood and up through our formative years, by the experiences we went through with our parents and with our peers in school and so forth, those things formed the motivation for what we are. And usually our feelings are what motivate us. By the same process—by means of a mystical union with God—His emotions, His attitudes, His feelings about things are added to the obedience quotient so that we are not just learning obedience but what He is emotionally is also being developed within us.

It is a wonderful thing He is doing!

You see, that gives us a perspective on trials that enables us to endure and that is what he says, "knowing that tribulation produces perseverance." That is what gives us the will to endure. Patience begins to develop. "And perseverance, character; and character, hope." This word "character" means "a tried and tested integrity, constancy, stability, approvedness." It indicates someone who is steady, stable, controlled, and not given to extremes of behavior, or emotions, or moods. One who is faithful, loyal, true. That is what develops out of this trust that is being formed between us.

This is very closely related to I John 3:19-21 where it says that our boldness comes because we know things are well with God. Or John 15:9-11 (that we went through just a little earlier), showing that is where our sense of well-being comes from, our sense of confidence, joy, enthusiasm, cheerfulness, even boldness comes from knowing things are right with God, and then, what is the next step? It produces hope. This is the opposite of depression, frustration, despair. A person whose attitude is up!

Can you see why we need to work on this fellowship? It is the mother lode for all the good things in life. And our part is to do what we can to develop our part of the relationship. "Now hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us." He is saying that the experience of seeing what God can do in ones life produces a vitality to go on. It gives the vim and the vigor to life!

Why does this happen? Because the love of God has been poured in our hearts—this self-sacrificing, self-giving, generous, kind, and concerned will to do things for the well-being and benefit of others beginning with God.

Matthew 5:43-48 You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

This love that God has shed abroad in our hearts can be so strong that we can love our enemies

because we now see them from a different perspective. We begin to look on them the same way God does.

To this point in this sermon, I have not given you dictionary definitions of the Greek words for love because the real definition is exemplified by God Himself and by the life of Jesus Christ. But it might prove helpful here so I am going to give them to you. There are four Greek words (they do not all appear in the Bible) to express what the one English word "love" means.

The first is *storge* and it means, family love. The love of a parent for its child, the love of a child for its parent. Brother and sister love. It is family affection.

*Eros*—God thought so little of this word He did not even use it in the Bible. *Eros* is passion. This word has been described by the Greeks as being a terrible longing. It is sexual love. There is nothing essentially bad about it but through the centuries it has come to be associated with lust.

Then there is *philia*, probably the one that we are most familiar with of these three. This is the warmest and best Greek word for love. Is that surprising? It means tender affection that one feels for his warmest, dearest, and truest friends.

Lastly, there is *agape*. If you had asked an ancient Greek to name a word that had to do with love, he never would have used the word *agape*, because it did not mean "to love" to a Greek. It meant to welcome somebody, to entertain, to be pleased with. But the writers of the New Testament, under the inspiration of God, took this word and turned it into the word that they felt described God's actions toward man.

In other words, they changed the use of the word. They changed its definition, because up until that time the word *agape* did not mean love in the way we think of the term love. Now *agape* means, to esteem, indicating a direction of the will. To regard with favor, good will, benevolence.

The difference between the other three words and *agape* is this: *Storge*, *eros*, and *philia* all come to us unbidden. They happen automatically. In fact, these are things that we have little control over. But when one sees *agape* used it is in the context in which one is exercising his will to act for the well-being of another.

I gave these definitions here for a reason. Because God says here, it is a command that we have to love our enemies. You cannot do that on emotion. The word that he used here for love is *agape*. The *agape* love is one in which the will—the mind—dominates, not the heart, not the emotions, because if we followed what would be natural in dealing with our enemy, there would be feelings of irritation, anger, and antagonism. We would want to strike out against that person, we would want to retaliate.

So, *agape* is shown by the way that it is used to mean a determination of the mind. But I want to hasten to make sure that I do not give you the idea that *agape* love has no emotional quality connected to it because it does. God is emotional! God is the source of *agape* love. God's *agape* love has the right emotion attached to it and I can prove that to you because the word *agape* is used in I John 2:15 where John said not to love the world. Not to "*agape* or *agapon*" the world. He is saying, "Don't have a warm affectionate regard for the world."

Agape love indeed has an emotion to it but we have to be sure that we do not allow emotion to dominate. With the agape love, the mind—the will—dominates. And it will act regardless of what the feelings are.

Hopefully, if we are developing the relationship with God, the feelings will be such that they will be good, they will be expressions of good will, of benevolence, and kindness even against our enemies. But at the least, agape will always act for the benefit, for the good will of the other.

I also want to add that when we love someone with agape love it does not mean that we allow them to run over us like a truck or treat us like a door mat. But agape love will *always* act for the good of the other person. Let us illustrate this in this way: If a parent really loves his child, he does not let that child do what he pleases. If the parent allows the child to do what he pleases, it might even kill the child. Is that love? Of course it is not. But it does mean that the discipline given by a Christian will not be done merely out of irritation or for vengeance or for retaliation, but always its aim will be to cure the situation. It will always be remedial.

Notice he says here, in verse 44, "Do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." This is often the first step towards getting ones will under control—to pray for the person. Go into the presence of God and pray for them, and out of that fellowship hopefully will come the right attitude toward the other person. That will help to turn our mind back toward the right feelings for that person.

I John 4:20-21 If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.

These verses are presented by John as a challenge, as a test to those who are reading, because there are many who say they "love God" or "I have fellowship with God" or "I know God" and John is saying, prove it by loving your brother. The proof that love is real is the action that it produces. It will *always* help the other person in the long run.

And if a person really loves God, he will honor his parents, he will not commit murder, he will not fornicate, commit adultery, or lie, or steal, or covet. In other words, he will keep the commandments. If a person is really getting close to God, he will not do any other those things in their spiritual ramifications as well.

This verse, then, offers a permanently valid test as to whether our religion is the true one or not. Do we love God? Do we love one another? The proof that we love God is that we love our brother with agape love because that kind of love must have an outlet or it is not reciprocated back to God.

This week we saw that the feelings associated with agape love arise as a result of our fellowship with God by and through the experiencing of life's events with Him as a dominating influence in our thinking.