

No Real Love Without God

Agape Love: The Greatest Spiritual Gift

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There have been many songs written about love, probably starting with the first man and woman that ever fell in love on the earth since the creation. In my memory, I can recall "Love is a Many-Splendored Thing," "Love Makes the World Go Around," and "What the World Needs Now is Love, Sweet Love." Perhaps the young people will not know any of those songs, but looking out here today, most people know what they are because they were alive during that time. Indeed, love does not make this world go around. It is a nice thought, but what makes the world go around today is Satan's way of living exemplifying greed, hatred, lust, self-seeking; in short, the way of get, the way of self.

It is true that what the world needs now is love, sweet love—not the love mentioned in the song of the world's idea of love, not the exciting love of a young man and woman as they find themselves entwined with each other, engaged, but the true love of man reflected in all of mankind. This is what the world needs and this is the only thing that will bring peace, harmony, joy, happiness, fulfillment, purpose, brotherly love, and a fresh, clean help to this entire world.

We, brethren, are called to have that love and to reflect that love in our dealings with each other and with those in the world around us. As Jesus said in Matthew 5:13-16, we are called to be the salt of the earth and light of the world—not just salt but *the* salt; not just light but *the* light. We have been called individually to imitate and take on the exact nature of the One who specifically, with great forethought, invited us into His Family to eventually become His sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ.

How is that One identified? We will be spending quite a bit of time in I John this afternoon.

I John 4:8 He that loves not knows not God, for God is love.

That is the definition of God. Quoting from the *Complete New Testament Word Study Dictionary* by Dr. Spiros Zodhiates, we read the following explanation: "This word *agape* means 'love, affectionate regard, good will, benevolence.'" With reference to God's love, it is God's willful direction toward men, and it involves God doing what He knows is best for men—not necessarily what man desires.

All of you who have raised children understand this principle. Little Bobby wants to run into the street; you give him a swat on the bottom and say, "No." He does not consider it love, but perhaps you have saved his life. We understand this if we raise children. John 3:16 states, "For God so loved the world, that He gave. . ." What did He give? Not what man wanted, which was the way man is living now, but what God knew men needed, i.e. His Son to be a sacrifice for man that man might have reason to be justified upon repentance and be able to come before His Father.

Mr. Armstrong used to always tell us that love is an outgoing concern for our fellow man, for the other person. One of the words used to describe God's love was *benevolence*. I would like to amplify its meaning. In the *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary*, benevolence is "the disposition to do good." The synonyms are kindness, philanthropy, charity, implying sympathy or generosity in a person's dealing with his fellow man.

Benevolence is a subjective disposition of the mind that results in the doing of good deeds. Kindness is like benevolence but it has more sympathy and consideration for others and it is manifested in particular actions. Philanthropy and charity refer to the giving of time and money for the care of the poor and needy or destitute; but charity is often individual or small scale, while philanthropy is large scale, organized and purposeful. In short, one who is benevolent is disposed to do good for others.

Indeed, God's love is individual and His dealings with us are in sympathy, understanding, kindness, and generosity. At the same time His overall plan is philanthropic of the largest of scales in that God's purpose is to promote the happiness and elevation of mankind that they, as we, might all participate in the Kingdom of God. This is a gigantic plan.

A man's idea of love is far less complex than God's. Man sees love as having a deep devotion or affection toward another person or persons. He sees strong sexual passion toward another person as being love, or just sexual passion—period—as loving. He would say, "I love to ski." He sees love as interest or enjoyment in something. "I love to ski." "I love to fly." "I love to ride my motorcycle."

The dictionary definition does include the mention of God's love toward mankind, and the love that man should show toward others, but since man, for the most part, does not truly consider God, the above definitions are about as far as that goes. There is a great principle given to us by the apostle John, and we will get to that in just a moment. First, go back to I John 4.

I John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loves is born of God, and knows God.

"Love is of God"; its true origin is God. It reflects His Spirit in us, and as we exhibit it we more fully take on the nature of our Father. This is exceedingly important, as you will see. Hatred, animosity, greed, and wrath all have another source: the prince of the power of the air. However, for those who reflect the love of God, it shows that they are born of Him.

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

He who does not reflect God's love in his life does not know God, no matter how much Bible knowledge he has. I have seen many over the years in the church that have tremendous Bible knowledge, but they find it easy to pick on their wives or beat them. One man was choking his mother, yet he felt that he was a Christian because he understood Bible knowledge.

God is love and this is not readily seen by the world around us as they see the turmoil plaguing the nations today. They look at history and see that the ways of war and greed and power over others have continued unabated for ages. They say, "Where is God in all of this? If God were love, would He allow this?"

Mr. Armstrong had the correct idea when he said that he felt that every nation had the opportunity in the time frame of 6,000 years to rule, and every one of them has collapsed and failed. As Mr. Armstrong so often said, and I have repeated, probably way too often, "Man must learn that he cannot rule himself apart from God, and we must, as individuals, learn that we cannot govern our lives and ourselves apart from God either."

God, because of holding a higher future in store for man, must let him learn this lesson that he might be fit to live forever in the future. The reason for all of this trouble, in which it seems that God does not love His creation, is that He loves them tremendously and He must let them learn this lesson.

I John 4:9 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.

We have heard a great deal of that today, but in short, we can see proof of God's love toward mankind by the world He has given us. The rain falls on the just and on the unjust, by the patience that God exhibits toward us. The most convincing proof is made evident to us by the fact that God sent His Son into the world as a sacrifice that we might have the opportunity to be reconciled with God and that we might live by following His life. As was discussed this morning, God took a tremendous chance because He loves us so greatly.

I John 4:10 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.

He is talking about the highest expression of love: the sending of His Son to be payment for our sins. The interesting part in all this is that, while we hated God—and we did—and His way of living, while we were ignorant of God's way and did not want it, He loved us and He wanted the best for us when we did not know what was good for us. Keep your finger here because we are coming right back after we go to some good Passover scriptures.

Romans 5:6-9 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

This is what Christ's blood did for us. Go back to I John. Here is the principle that God wants us to understand—at least, this is one I am after; there are many more.

I John 4:11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

He expressed the same thought here as in I John 3:16, that we perceive the love of God because He laid down His life for us. In like manner, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

I John 4:12 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.

If we love one another, if we love others in the church and out of the church as God loves us, in the same manner, then, we take on the very nature of God and His love is perfected in us and we grow in the nature of using it and the application of it toward others. This is called "going on to perfection."

Our love is made perfect as we actively use that love in our relationship with others. Tertullian, regarding early Christians said, "Behold how they love one another. They are ready to die for one another." Eusebius says of the early Christians that in a time of plague they visited one another, risking their lives—in some cases, actually losing their lives in their zeal to preserve the lives of others.

I could not help but think of Matthew 25, when God selects those whom He wants to be in His Kingdom. One of the criteria by which they are judged is they went to visit the sick and those in prison. This reflects what Jesus said in John 13:35, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Just as the keeping of the Sabbath is a sign of God's people, so is loving one another. It identifies those that belong to God

I John 4:13-17 By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world.

I want you to get the full import of this. "In this manner is our love made perfect." This does not mean that we are perfect, but the general thought is that in this manner of serving and loving others, our love is made complete and we can be bold because of that. As our Father is, we are. We have taken on His nature. In the Greek it literally says, "Because even as that One is, so also are we in the world." Because we are like Him in nature, we can be bold when we stand before Him. This is how important having godly love is.

I John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.

I think Mark was talking about fear today a little bit here. A lack of confidence shows lack of love. If we have perfect love toward God, we have no fear. Many of us do fear at times; I wish I could say that I did not. We fear job loss. We fear illness. We fear the economy. We fear wars. We fear the unknown. We fear what is around the corner or at the end of the age. If we do, this shows our love and trust in God is not as complete as it should be. The angels who resisted Satan had no fear. As spirit beings, we will have no fear because perfect love casts out fear.

In this world, because we never know what is around the corner, we can indeed be apprehensive. Brethren, we all need to work on perfecting our love, faith, and trust in God. He is going to help do it for us.

I John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

For the fourth time, John tells us that we love Him because He first loved us. The important thing to remember is that this love is not our love but God's love in us. As the Father loves, as the Son loves, so are we to love—so are we to work to love our fellow man with this type of love with which the Father loves us. This is where we are going; this is what is important. John concludes this section with a spiritual yardstick by which we might measure progress.

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.

If we hate our wives, our husbands, or our fellow workers, we do not have the love of God. The world around us does not understand the depth of what Jesus wants from His disciples, from each one of us today.

Romans 10:1-4 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. [They want to do it their own way.] For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Just as Paul desired that all Israel might be saved, it is our desire today for Israel here—for modern America and all of Israel. Paul was especially conscious of the Jews. He had been an exemplary Jew, and he could indeed bear record that they had a zeal and a passion for God and things in His law,

but not with true understanding and discernment. Being ignorant of what God was all about, they set forth to establish their own righteousness their own way, with their own thoughts and their own ideas, not submitting themselves or placing themselves under the righteousness of God.

What Israel and the world do not understand is that Jesus Christ is the end. He is the goal, the objective, the aim, the ambition, the purpose, the target for the final desired result of the law. In other words, our job as disciples of Jesus Christ is to become just like Him. In all we do, we are to have His patience, His kindness, His longsuffering, His wisdom, His courage to stand up for what is right, His thoughtfulness and concern, and His willingness to serve others. In doing this, again, we reflect the true love of God.

Revelation 2:1-4 "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, 'These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love."

Jack Bulharowski gave a fine sermonette showing that the Ephesian era of God's church let down in their first love. They had works of labor, of patience, of technical understanding. They hated those who were evil and tested those who said they were apostles and found them to be false; they labored for God and they fainted not. To us that might sound wonderful, and it was. However, it would seem that they were caught up in the details of their calling, and somehow, over the years, they drifted from imitating the heart of Jesus Christ in relation to their families and church members and neighbors. They left off having a humble, serving attitude that is absolutely essential in those whom God is selecting for His Kingdom.

We have a warning given to us in Matthew 24:12: "And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold." This is in the end time—the time in which we find ourselves. Because iniquity, or lawlessness, shall abound, the love of God will grow cold. The term *iniquity* here seems to

include the cruelty of those around them, their persecutions, and the betraying of one another, as well as false teachers and prophets. Their world, as our world, was crumbling.

This attitude—coupled in our time with perhaps 100,000 of our brethren leaving our fellowship, with others letting down around us, with different groups with different focuses meeting in small groups, or sometimes just one being on the phone hook-up alone—puts pressure on us to not have the zeal of our first love. Perhaps to some it might even seem "old hat." It was a long time ago, and time is going on and it is somewhat quiet and it is somewhat easy. We should not be that way.

In Hebrews 2, Paul was trying to awaken a church that was going through the motions; he was trying to rekindle the flame of excitement.

Hebrews 2:1 Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away.

As times go along, things we have heard tend to be old hat and we can tend to let them slip. Whenever I read this, I think of the boat that was tied up at the end of the pier, and the rope came loose. At first, the boat just sat there and did not go anywhere. It was a tiny rowboat. In maybe half an hour, the tide started to go out, and the boat, when next you looked at it, was two or three feet out. After talking to somebody for awhile, when you looked for the boat, all of a sudden it was on the horizon. Where did it go? The boat lost its mooring. That is the sense of this.

Hebrews 2:2-3 For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation [all that has been given to us], which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him.

Today, those who have heard it are confirming it to us. In John 17, the Father was asked to bless those who would prosper from the written Word of those who had been with Christ. With us, it should not be a lack of knowledge; it should not be a lack of understanding. The danger at this time can be a lack of application of what we know and what we know we should be doing.

What are the first steps we must take? This is going to sound rudimentary, but I would like for you turn to Luke 10.

Luke 10:25-28 And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" So he answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

Going back over these scriptures, one of the scribes said, "Which is the greatest commandment of the Jews?" They are said to have divided the law into greater and smaller commandments. Perhaps they did not consider this to be the greatest. Some felt the sacrificial laws were the greatest. Others felt circumcision was exceedingly important. Others thought the washings and purifyings. The term *law* here referred to the first five books of the Bible.

Jesus Christ said to him that the greatest possible thing you can do is to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your faculties and powers. You shall love Him supremely more than all other beings or things with tremendous ardor and zeal. That is the meaning of Deuteronomy 6:5: "with all your soul." In other words, be willing to give up your life for Him, devoting it to Him in service; to love with Him with all your mind; to submit your intellect to His will; to love His law and gospel more than you do your own decisions and thoughts. We are to be willing to submit all our faculties to His teaching and guidance (and that is a big one), to devote to Him all our intellectual abilities. We are to love Him with all of our physical and mental strength. We are to labor to truly please Him, to glorify Him by our being like Him in all that we do.

What are the commandments that show direct love to God? So many people think the Old Testament is old hat.

Exodus 20:1-3 And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me."

The first four commandments are how we show direct love toward God. Anything that we hold to be more important than God is an idol and a god to us. The principle is that we commit ourselves to whatever we value. We can turn to Mark 7:7 and Matthew 15:9 where it states, "In vain do they worship Me, teaching the commandments of men." We could go to Romans 6:16 that tells us, "Whosoever we serve, his servants we are, whether of sin unto death or obedience unto righteousness." Can we have one foot in the world and one foot in the church? The answer is that we had better not.

What God is saying here is that there are to be no other gods besides Him—period!

Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

You shall not make any graven images is talking about artwork; indeed, God is talking about physical idols. In this nation in which we live, we have many physical idols that men serve. Most notably are the statues and icons related to religious worship. We have prayer beads, St. Christopher medals, statues on the dashboard. We can make idols, as well, of lifestyles, of our intellect, our beauty, our strength, our IQ, our wealth. We can make idols of our escapes to which we run when we are feeling weak, and the vices that go along with them.

God tells us that to show our love toward Him, we must fight to rid ourselves of these idols.

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

For years, many thought that just taking God's name in vain simply meant we could not say "golly" or "gosh" or "gee." I remember that my Grandmother, when she wanted to swear, would say, "Cheese and rice got all muddy." That was her euphemism for taking God's name in vain.

However, it means much more than this. We call ourselves by His name; therefore we are to represent Him in all we do: in our marriages, in our childrearing, in our business practices, in dealing with those around us, in what we allow into our minds. In everything we are to carry His name properly and with honor. I know that we all slip and it is a difficult thing, but that we have to strive for it.

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it."

We are not to treat the Sabbath day as the world around us treats Sunday. Sabbath is holy time from sunset Friday evening to sunset Sabbath evening. It is not only a time when we rest but it is also a time to stop. That is what it means: to stop what we are doing, our ordinary duties. We are not to work, cook, or carry burdens.

We are to become spiritually refreshed. It is a time for a little extra meaningful Bible study. It is a time to visit the sick. It is a time to encourage one another, and a time to be encouraged by them while attending services. By keeping it properly, it is a sign that we honor and that we love God and that we are obedient to Him.

The first four commandments, in brief summary, are how we show our love to God directly. There is more to it, though.

Luke 10:27-28 So he answered and said, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your

strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.'" And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live."

The second great commandment is like unto the first. It resembles it in importance, dignity, purity, and a fulfilling of God's purpose for mankind. The lawyer had not asked about the second commandment; he asked, "Which is the greatest?" Jesus Christ took this opportunity to present it to him. He said, "This is the second greatest commandment that there is. The first is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself."

Luke 10:29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

He was saying that it could be a difficult thing to know who his neighbor was. Perhaps for the Jews it was difficult because the Pharisees and the Jews could not associate with anyone outside their own race to speak of. They were a clandestine group. However, Jesus was about to expand his horizons.

Luke 10:30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead."

It is a tender story. Jesus made the lawyer judge the case and it teaches the lawyer and us today whom our neighbor is. With His teaching, He is pointing to the future when all mankind will become our neighbors and we theirs; He points out to whom the last six commandments should be applied. He starts out, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem . . ." He does not mention the race. The man was attacked by thieves and severely wounded; not only was he robbed and wounded, but his clothes were taken as well. He must have been some sight to see, lying there by the side of the road.

Luke 10:31-32 "Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side."

In the case of the priest, it would appear that he came upon him accidentally. In the case of the Levite, it states that he looked at him attentively and turned and walked away, but did nothing to ease his suffering.

Luke 10:33-35 "But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you."

Here we see that the Samaritan poured wine and oil on him, which was customary, bandaged him up, set him on his beast, took him to a tavern, passed the night with him to make sure he was all right, and gave money to the landlord to take care of him until he came again, offering to pay any additional expenses.

Luke 10:36-37 "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

The lawyer looked at the facts in the case and he had to render a decision. Who was the neighbor? To the one who fell among thieves, the answer was the one who showed mercy. The command Jesus gave: "Go and do likewise."

Not only have we been given the great commandment concerning love, but we are also told of a second great commandment to love our neighbor. Who is the neighbor we are to love? Any person who lives near us is our neighbor.

That is an easy one. Our wives, our husbands, our children, our friends, our relatives, our countrymen, and even our enemies are our neighbors on this earth.

How do we love a neighbor? We should not injure our neighbor physically, his property, or his reputation by backbiting, by betraying confidences, or by telling damaging stories about him. We were sitting here during the lunch break, and a friend of ours said somebody died recently. Somebody had some bad things to say about how his wife died, but it was not repeated here. The individual knew of the story, but he said, "I will not repeat that." That is exactly how it should have been conducted.

We should not be selfish, but seek to do him good. In the case of debt, differences, or argument, we should do what is right. Always do what is right and correct. In order to benefit him, we should deny ourselves, if need be, or do as we would wish him to do for us if we were in his shoes. We are to be tender, giving, and kind toward our neighbor, even though his actions may not warrant it.

Does this mean that if our neighbor sins we should condone it or participate in that sin? The answer is of course not. It means that, in spite of what he does, we should not seek to harm him in any way.

We had a friend in the church that we knew for many years, and he was fighting alcoholism. He finally succumbed to it. He lost his wife, his home—his life, basically—his job and everything. He was on the street. A church family loved him very much and they took him in. There was a room over the garage and they put him in there and said, "You may stay in that room and help around the house for a while until you find a job, but if you take one drink you are back on the street." You might think that was harsh by today's standards, but that man lived there for years and never took a drink because that was true love. They did not condone what he did, but they made him live up to what he should be doing, and he appreciated it. He is probably dead by now, and as far as I know he lived out his life in relative ease, disciplined by true love.

Attaining God's nature and love requires that we all keep His commandments.

I John 5:1-2 Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot 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.

There is much more that is meant here than just an intellectual acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ. There are actions associated with that belief—actions such as faith, trust and obedience in Him, drawing close to Him in prayer, in fasting, and in study. In short, we have a proactive belief, that is, a belief that does something that causes us to move, to grow, and to apply to go on to perfection—to apply the teaching that we have been given.

Because of this active belief, we are begotten of Him. If we truly love God who has begotten us, we will not harbor a grudge or anger towards others whom God has begotten, but will truly work to love them. I know that in the church today, there are angers and squabbles here and there—not a lot, but some go on for years and years and years, and it is hard to believe. Some are over "serious" things like sugar in the cookies as opposed to honey or something.

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

Many in this world profess a love of God but consider His commandments to be "Old Testament," "Victorian," if you will, or "done away." For those who have an active belief, however, they are essential and those people appreciate the boundaries that God sets up for them. I know I appreciate them, and I am sure you do, too.

Love of God produces a desire to live God's way, and these commandments are essential to that. Some feel commandments are grievous or a burden. I told you in years past that I was on an airplane with a man (he was an Indian, I think) who said that God's commandments are negative. I asked, "What is negative about honoring your mother and father?"

"Nothing."

"What is negative about not committing adultery with your neighbor's wife?"

"Nothing."

"How about not killing?"

"Well, no, that is not a negative."

When we were all done, he said, "Well, maybe I was wrong."

You see, they object to God saying, "Thou shalt not." They object to the authority of God. Yet, "thou shalt not" is so important because it gives us guidelines and boundaries that we need and imparts to us the mind of God. They may not want to obey God's commandments, but they want to enjoy the fruit of them. Again, what the world really hates is "thou shalt not." We who love God know that obedience to His Word trains us to become just like Him.

I John 2:3-5 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.

Again, this is further evidence against law being done away. We work to understand what He wants from us and apply it into how we live. John states it, and it is plain for all of us to see. If one is not working to overcome and obey God, even though he may profess belonging to Him, he is not being truthful to himself; the truth is not in him.

As verse 5 says, for those who conscientiously observe and work to be obedient to Christ's doctrine, the love of God is perfected and an intimate relationship truly is set up with Jesus and His Father that will lead to becoming a member of the very God Family. That is how important it is to love His commandments and to love your neighbor. If true love exists in the heart, it will be reflected in the way of living. Because of this, we will know that we belong to Him.

Just how important is it that we have this outgoing concern for others? You know how young men are—they want to advance. In the old church, when we first came in, we wanted to be officers in Spokesman Club; we wanted to be vice president or sergeant-at-arms. It was really important to advance in the organization. One deacon once said, "I think soon we will be fighting to pass out song books." It seemed to be so important to advance.

Indeed, I do not know that it was all wrong. We just recognized the organization, and we wanted to grow in it. In I Corinthians 12, it talks about the gifts that God gives, and people view these as being very important to make the church a body that is wonderful.

I Corinthians 12:28-31 And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. [Look at what God puts in His church to edify it, to carry the message forth.] Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the best gifts. And yet I show you a more excellent way.

Now I am going to paraphrase I Corinthians 13:1-13.

Verse 1: Though I could be able to speak all languages and all dialects that men speak (a truly remarkable endowment), and though I could speak the language of the angels (meaning to have great eloquence and persuasiveness), having the powers of angelic beings when I speak to men (in other words, having the highest ability when speaking to help others), and not have godly love toward my fellow man, I shall be like something that makes a great noise, appearing to be of great importance, or a clattering sound. In short, my messages would be hollow, in vain, not really of any help toward others.

Verse 2: If I understood all mysteries, could explain all the mysteries of religion, things never understood before, and

understood all knowledge completely, using 100% of my brain (they say we use just 20% of our brain; all of a sudden this individual is using all 100% and things just flood his mind); if on top of that, I have the faith to move mountains into the ocean; if I do not have love, I do not have anything. I have nothing.

Verse 3: And if I sold every last thing that I own and gave it to feed the poor; and on top of that, I gave my body to be burned as a martyr; yet had not love for God and my fellow man, it profits me not one bit.

How important is having godly love? It is the most important thing in God's sight. How do you put this love into practice? This is rather interesting. Why did Paul have to go through this with the Corinthians? They were contentious, envious, argumentative, filled with jealousies and wrong motives, and judging one another as you would not believe. Paul wished to approach the subject by teaching them how love should be used, how love should be applied toward others, and what love was. What is love? How is it shown?

You might say, "That was interesting." Do not forget that you will be in the World Tomorrow and you are going to have your cities, however many. You are going to have to show what love is, how it works, what it is for, and all of these things. I am going to continue to paraphrase.

Verse 4: Love suffers long. The phrase denotes a slowness to anger. It indicates patient endurance, forbearance, as opposed to hasty, angry responses. It indicates a state of mind that can bear oppression without being provoked. It is kind, meaning that it is gentle, good-natured, affectionate, and tender toward the feelings of others. It is not harsh but courteous.

It envies not. The word *envies* here actually means "zealous for or against any person or any thing." Love is being zealous for any person or for a wrong penalty to come upon him. In short, loves does not envy the happiness or good fortune of others; it is thrilled about it. Love does not boast or vaunt itself, continually pointing to an IQ or achievements or education or superiority or abilities. Love

would not show this attitude because it would produce a controversial environment and not a peaceful atmosphere where the brethren could grow.

Love is not puffed up with pride, vanity, or self-esteem. Self-esteem differs from pride and vanity in that it shows the internal expression of pride and vanity. An individual may be very proud and vain and not express it in the form of boasting; this is what is being expressed here. In this case, love would prevent this. Love would teach this individual that others have good qualities, as well. The man with the IQ of 180 might think he is awesome. There might be somebody that is far less in IQ but serves and loves the brethren beautifully, and he recognizes that he did not have it all together. What did he get that was not from God? Therefore, how can he boast?

Verse 5: Love does not allow one to conduct himself improperly. A young man on a date would not put his hands on a young lady in a wrong fashion, and a young lady would not encourage that in the young man she is with, despite what the society around us does and what the peer groups consider to be "cool." I wish the young people were here to hear this afternoon.

Love seeks that which is proper in all situations: in the workplace, in the home, in the school. To sum up the phrase, love promotes all that is correct and fit in life and will work to keep one from all that is wrong and improper.

Love seeks not her own. Love is not selfish. It does not seek its own happiness at the expense of others. If an individual seeks only his happiness, then he does not reflect the love of God toward others.

True love or concern for others will prompt us to seek their well-being at the expense of our own. There is not one particle of selfishness in true love. It always seeks the welfare of others.

Albert Barnes wrote some interesting things in relation to this, especially point number three.

1. Man is not a Christian who lives for himself alone and makes it his main business to promote his happiness and salvation.
2. No man is a Christian who does not deny himself or who is not willing to sacrifice his own comfort and time and wealth to ease and advance the welfare of mankind. [He thinks in a grand scale. Point three is interesting.]
3. Love is the principle that is yet to convert the world. [That is true. With God's Spirit poured out in abundance, godly love will spread around the world and the world will be converted.]

Back to I Corinthians 13, continuing with verse 5:

Love is not easily provoked. The individual who is under the influence of godly love is not prone to violent anger. It is not in him to become uncontrolled; he will remain calm and patient. He may be set upon, but he will control his temper and restrain his feelings. This control is produced by love.

Love thinks no evil. One who loves takes the best possible outlook on the motives and conduct of others. That person under the influence of godly love is not malicious, deposed to find fault or to impute proper motives to others. He always thinks the best.

Love is not only not easily provoked, it is not inclined to think there was any evil intention in cases that might tend to irritate or frustrate us. The *New International Version* says something so wisely that we always quote in marriage counseling: "Love keeps no record of wrong." In marriages, that is really important. We can go back forever and dig up the old dirt and that really makes us stink.

I remember that overseas in Korea, we had what they called *honey pots*. They put the human waste in the honey pots and used it to fertilize their fields. One day I had a four-hour guard duty tour right next to a honey pot. As long as it was not touched, it was fine; but if they broke open the honey pot, I had two hours of pure misery. That is what digging up a record of old wrong does.

Verse 6: Love rejoices not in iniquity. Love does not rejoice with the sins of others, of other men being found out; nor does it delight in their being found guilty. This does not mean that someone who loves is not pleased that hurtful actions have been stopped when the correction comes, but he does not gloat and take pleasure in another's problems. This is not reflected in true love.

Love rejoices in truth. It rejoices in the good qualities or actions of others. It rejoices when it sees anyone in or out of the church doing what is correct. So many times we want to be that special tight group, but other people do wonderful things as well.

Verse 7: Love bears all things. Love puts up with imperfections of others. It also has the sense of covering the imperfections or faults of others. It covers all things. It works to conceal, not make known. In short, it means that in regard to the errors and faults of others, there is the disposition not to notice them but to be patient and to bear with them. How many times has each one of us been pleased that others have borne with our mistakes and our faults? I know I sure have.

Love believes all things. In regard to others, the individual views the conduct of others in the best possible light. Love tends to believe others have good motives, that no harm was intended should the situation not work out as wished. This does not mean that the individual is gullible or foolish but that he views others in a trusting light. Certainly, he should be wise.

Love hopes all things. He hopes that it will all turn out well no matter how difficult things may appear. Love sees them in a positive light.

Love endures all things. He bears up under the difficulties without murmuring. He endures under the persecution or attempts to slander by those against him and is slow to become resentful.

Verse 8: 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.

Whether there be evangelists, or whatever the particular rank someone might seek, the thing that will stand fast is love. Love never fails. Why? Because it is how God lives and it will endure throughout eternity.

Verse 13: And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love. Because it is the most important virtue, with the widest scope, eventually affecting everyone, it is love that is the basis and the harmony in the home, nations, world, and ultimately throughout the entire universe. It is the most important gift, and we are to exemplify it as God's people.

What is the result of putting into practice the things we just read in I Corinthians 13? I will tell you a cute little story here. It is about time with this heaviness that we have a cute little story. In the *Reader's Digest* years ago—and I mean years ago—they had this story. At that time, it was customary in China that when a young man married, he would take the wife into his home, which was ruled by his mother. Thus, a young girl who wished to start her own home had to answer to her husband's mother. It was not an easy choice.

In this case, the story went that the young lady came into the home and the mother told her to do this and do that, do this, do that, and it did not go well. She hated her mother-in-law, just hated her. She hated her so much that she wanted her dead. Therefore, she went to a witch and asked how she could

murder her mother-in-law in such a way that her mother-in-law might not know that it was taking place.

The witch said, "Well, all right, you will have to give her tea every afternoon and put this powder in the tea. When you put the powder in there, you have to be nice to her so she will not suspect anything. So sit down and talk with her. Tell her how much you enjoy being with her. Show her kindness and love and so forth, and spend time with her so that she will not suspect a thing."

The daughter-in-law did just that. Four months went by, and all of a sudden, she went running back to the witch, saying, "Give me an antidote. I must save my mother-in-law. She is nice." The witch responded that she had not given her poison, because she knew that by her showing love to her mother-in-law, the dynamics of the home would change.

The lesson for us is that as we show godly love—even in difficult situations—positive change may well come. For those of us who are called, we are to put on the love of God in all of its aspects: patience, obedience to His law, love of others and doing what is right for them, forgiveness, kindness, and on and on—all the aspects of Christ.

This is only possible by living as God lives, and it does not come naturally to us. I do not care what the song "Doing What Comes Naturally" says. It requires conscious thought and effort; it requires that we stop and consider before we act. I wish I could say that I had always done that.

The writings of Paul are thought to be so complicated, yet when it comes to this subject—as in I Corinthians 13—Paul could not have been more clear, as we will see in the next scripture. He is perfectly clear. He is perfectly basic on some of these things so that we cannot make a mistake. We cannot miss what he is after.

Colossians 3:12-13 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering [these are the things we are to put on, and as you can see, it all applies to our dealings with others in the church, family. Sometimes I think the family is the hardest because we see each

other at our best and at our worst in the family. Yet God expects us to do this.]; 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.

In other words, when you have animosity toward somebody else, consider what kind of rotten sinner you were before Jesus Christ and before God the Father called you, and He forgave you. Christ died for the ungodly. I have "John Reid" written in my Bible. You can insert your own name.

Just as Christ forgave you, you are to forgive others. We are not to hold grudges or harbor resentment. We are to forgive because we have been forgiven. Jesus pardoned our mistakes, and He went further than that: He forgot them. Thus, we should do the same to anyone who offends us.

Colossians 3:14 But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.

This will unite all aspects of God's calling and make it complete. This is the catalyst for the glue that cements or brings together or gives understanding to all of God's laws and opens the very mind of God for us to emulate. Above all things, put on godly love.

Colossians 3:15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

Interesting scripture. I am going to read Albert Barnes here:

The word *rule* is commonly used in reference to the Olympics and other games. It means "director or arbitrator of the public games, to preside over them and preserve them and to preserve order and to distribute prizes to the victors." The meaning here is that the peace that God gives to the soul is what the Governor of the games was to those who contended there. It is to preside over and govern the mind to preserve everything in its place and to save it from tumult, disorder, and irregularity.

The sense of this is that our minds can be filled with wrong desires, resentment, and anger, but the peace of God to which we are called in one body, if allowed, will rule over our thoughts and bring our thinking into order. If we read further, it says to be thankful. We should be exceedingly thankful for our calling, for the family in which we are, and for the wonderful future it holds for us as our inheritance. If we are truly thankful, then harmony will be the by-product.

Colossians 3:16-17 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.