

Faith, Hope & Love Part33

1 Corinthians 13:13

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

We are in part 33 of our study on the building blocks of the kingdom of God. We have been learning some amazing things about our God. We spent 22 weeks studying faith and understanding the reason why faith is not a leap into the darkness; rather, it is a solid decision to bet our lives on the proven character and nature of God, as revealed in His name. If you know His name, then you know He is everything you could ever need all the time. It does not matter what the issue is, from loneliness to physical provision to victory over your *flesh*, He is the answer. He gives us everything we need to live and do what He has called us to do; even the desire to obey Him comes from Him. He is both our source and the means through which we live. And, keep in mind, **Hebrews 11:6** says, without faith it is *impossible* to please God—impossible; thus, we must always live by faith in every area of our life without exception. This is the first building block. To live in the Kingdom of God you must live by faith. All else—yes, all else—is just an expression of your *flesh* (even your religious *flesh*) which is an enemy of God.

Next, we spent 10 weeks studying the second building block of the Kingdom of God, which is hope. We have learned that hope is an assurance of what is because true Biblical hope is tethered to the person of Jesus Christ and is found in Him. In

other words, we can be absolutely assured that He will always live up to His name and fulfill each and every promise He has ever made us, including the promise that we might be called “children of God.” Thus, our living hope has everything to do with God living up to His word and making us like Him—making us like God. All true believers share His blood and share His Spirit, and He is transforming us into sharing His very being—His character and nature. Thus, He brings us through fire to purge from our souls all that is not Him. He takes His knife and circumcises us from all our connections to the Kingdom of this World. And He is faithful to do this for every true child of God so that one day we will be as He is.

This transformation however starts in our now; hence, you must endure trials and tribulations and all manner of suffering necessary to effect this transformation. This is why you can rejoice in suffering because you can be absolutely confident that in all things God is merely living up to His name and fulfilling His promise to make you like His Son. He is removing and putting to death all that is not Him so you can declare: “It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me.” This is why I keep encouraging you that when the fire comes and the knife starts to cut deep into your soul, press into them and let this transformative work get accomplished sooner than later. Be one of those who knows what it means to live in hope and can say: “We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one” (**1 John 5:19**).

This brings us to the third building block and that is love, which is the greatest of the three. We are not talking about “love” in its generic definition, but this passage speaks exclusively of God’s divine love which in the Greek is the word “*agape*.” Divine love is understood to be expressions of love that are entirely without self-

interest and impure motives. This form of love is not to be confused with anything which originates from within the realms of humanity which is always tainted with self-interest and impure motives; again, it is divine love. The Spirit tells us that God's love is greater than faith and hope; but the Greek word that is used for "greater" does not mean greater as in the strongest, mightiest, or most powerful, but as in the most significant. I believe the Spirit says this because this form of love is the ultimate proof of one's actual inhabitation by God. There are currently an estimated 2.18 Billion Christians around the world—or 32% of the world's population claims to be Christian. Many people hold to the name, many people practice the religion, but the only real question is how many of these people are actually inhabited by the Spirit of God—for without this divine habitation a person is not actually a Christian despite their allegiances, oaths, rituals, prayers, and confirmations (**Romans 8:9**). And the only way you can truly tell if a person is inhabited by the Spirit is if their life expresses God's divine love; which is the very proof. Let me explain.

First, we know from Grecian history that to capture the idea of a God who loves people with divine love (which was an entirely new concept introduced by Christianity), the term *agape* was adopted. The Greek "gods" did not love humanity but toyed with humanity for their own interests and pleasures; which you would expect since they were actually demons (**1 Corinthians 10:20-21**). Prior to Christianity there was no cultural concept of a genuine unselfish relationship between the divine and man. In fact, this word "*agape*" had no origin in other contemporary Greek writings, but was almost exclusively utilized in the realm of Christianity beginning with the gospel writers.

Second, this form of love was understood to be a love that comes only from the divine and not from the realm of humanity because it was understood that God is love. *Agape* love is the very fabric of God's character and nature; all that He does and all that He says is an expression of His great love. He can never act outside of His love since it defines Him. **1 John 4:7-8, 16** explicitly states: love (*agape*) is from God for God is love. Again, this is a love that has no human origination but exclusively comes from and through the divine.

Third, the goal of true Christianity is the "*Design Point*" explained in **Galatians 2:20**: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, **but Christ lives in me**; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." Said another way, if we live by the Spirit then we are to walk by the Spirit and follow the Spirit's leading in all things (**Galatians 5:16; 25**). This is a reality that is so often missed within the realms of the "Religion of Christianity" where people are so busy trying to be good for God and trying to serve and please God that they never understand what it is to actually live in the Spirit of God and walk according to the Spirit of God. The *Design Point* of true Christianity is absolute possession; it is how mere humans can be like God. Jesus wants to live so completely in and through our lives that when someone meets us they know they have had an encounter with the divine because they have experienced the undeniable: *agape* love.

By the way, this is the reason why it is necessary that we go through the fire and under the knife. The Lord wants to remove from our being all that is not Him so He can fill us through and through. His goal is absolute possession. Thus, He goes door by door through the rooms of our soul with the goal of disenfranchising the

enemies that have squatted in each room. His desire is to conquer, displace, and possess; He hopes that you have the same goal or else victory will not be had. He will not force upon you victory but He will give it to you if you will take it. Thus, He elicits your involvement. He expects you to open each door and be ready and willing to evict the current residents and allow Jesus to enter into that room and clean it all out, disinfect the room, and kill the stink of it all. If you do, He will do His part and make that room a perfect living space for you and Him to fellowship. And then He moves to the next room and He goes door by door until He possesses all of you.

With each area of your life that He is allowed access, His presence will, by definition, bring His love. **1 John 4:7-9** says, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and **everyone who loves is born of God and knows God**. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” Yes, love is the ultimate proof. If you love with God’s divine love, it means you have been born of God and He has cleared room in your soul for His habitation. But if you don’t have this divine love, then regardless of how much you do for God, you don’t know Him.

The reason why love is the greatest is because it is the only true solid proof of the existence of the other two building blocks—faith and hope. People can fake faith; we have known them and they can be pretty convincing. It is a little bit tougher, but people can also fake hope with the whole “it’s hard but good” type speak. We have known those who have pretended they wanted God to fulfill his word to make them like Him, but really just wanted their circumstances to change. But no one can fake God’s divine *agape* love as He lives in and through a person. Time will always tell. And for His divine love to be exhibited in and through your soul, there must be faith and there must be hope. Love is built upon them, which

is why ***Galatians 5:6*** says all that really matters is faith working through love. So let's consider this idea that love is the only true proof and therefore is the greatest of the three building blocks of the Kingdom of God.

1 John 4:7-13

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

As we go through this passage, I want you understand that every derivation of the word "love" (love, loved, beloved) stems from the root word "*agape*." The context therefore of this entire passage is God's divine love as it is given to us, shared by us, and passed through us. Let's start in ***1 John 4:7-8***: "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." This passage speaks to true believers—to those who have the love of God in them, which is why it starts with the term "Beloved" or "*Agapetoi*." Surprisingly, however,

this is not a command but a suggestion that is based on an argument regarding the one who knows God. It is rendered in the *present active subjunctive* meaning that it is something that we should do, but the *subjunctive* indicates that we have a choice to make in the matter and we just might not do it; it is contingent.

And the object of our love is to be others who are called beloved (*“Agapetoi”*)—others who are of the same kind as we are. I say that because the Greek word *“allos”* is used which means another of the same kind verses another of a different kind, which would be the Greek word *“heteros.”* We have covered this before, but I want to make sure we have a grasp of the language to properly understand this passage. For instance, a banana and a mango are both fruit, but they are *“heteros,”* another fruit but of a different kind. But two mangos would be *“allos,”* another fruit but of the same kind. Accordingly, you can have two people who claim to be Christians, but that does not mean they are the same. If they have the Spirit of God living within them, then they would be *“allos,”* or another of the same kind; and they should be the direct object of our love. But if they are Christian in name, creed, and deed, but do not have the Spirit living in them, then they are *“heteros,”* another of a different kind. All of that to make the point that with regard to other true believers who have the Spirit of God indwelling them, we should love them.

The reason why it is presented as something we ought to do (let us love one another) verses a command (love one another) is because the Spirit is making the point that obedience is not to be our relational motivation. Rather, we should love the beloved because God is love. In other words, if we love one another, it is undeniable proof that we belong to God. If we don't love one another with God's divine love, then it is evident that we love God only in name, creed, and deed, but

have not been born-again of His Spirit. Everyone who now loves and continues to love (*present active participle*) is born of God. Born of God is rendered in the *perfect passive indicative*. In other words, God's divine love is the absolute proof that one has been born-again by the power of God, and it is a done deal—a spiritual act that cannot be reversed or altered. You may have raised your hand at many altar calls, prayed the sinners prayer, have gone to church all your life, you may serve God and do all sorts of charitable things in the name of God, you may even prophesy, cast out demons and perform many miracles in His name, but if you do not love, then you have not been born of God; and that is a statement of fact. Sadly, Jesus will one day declare to you: I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness (**Matthew 7:22-23**). But if you love the beloved, then you have been born of God.

Furthermore, everyone who loves now knows God, and that is a statement of fact (*present active indicative*). This means that the one who loves is in an actual relationship with the Godhead. You may not understand or “know” everything about the Godhead, but you have intimate and personal knowledge of Him and can sort through what is from His character and nature and what is from your *flesh*. He literally abides in you (has taken up His physical habitation in your soul); thus, you know Him. But the one who does not now love and continue to love (*present active participle*) does not know God, for God is love. The statement that they do not know God is rendered in the *aorist active indicative*. In other words, the epithet you can say over their entire life, from beginning to end, is that they do not know God, and that is a statement of indisputable fact. They may argue with this epithet based on all they have done for God and all the ways they are good, tolerant, accepting, loving, sacrificing, and responsible Christians; and many others may

disagree with this epithet as well. But from the perspective of the Spirit, it stands. They do not know God; they do not have a relationship with Him because if they did they would love with God's divine love, since God is love and that is a statement of fact (*present active indicative*). Forget the protestations, forget the cultural identifications, and forget the religious declarations, if God is actually present in a person's life, they love. It is what He does in and through a person.

1 John 4:9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." Another way to say the first part of this passage would be: "**By this** the love of God was rendered very apparent or made to shine out from us so that we might always live through Him." And what is "**this**"? That God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. The goal of our Father in asking His Son to humble Himself and take on the form of man and be sent into this world is that we, the "*Agapateoi*" (the Beloved) might find life in Him.

This starts putting some definition around this word "love." God's love is not about what He can get from us, it is not about what we can do for Him, it is not about filling some hole in Him that was missing, but it is about His providing a way that we might have life. Thus, His love by definition is selfless and pure in motivation. It is always about us. Even the fact that the Father searches the world over to find a bride for His Son is about our being complete, fulfilled, honored, and exalted in His love. It is a love that gives not to get, but by nature it gives because it can and because it desires to give and would have it no other way.

His love is manifested or made apparent in us because He sent His Son so that we might live through Him. Think about it. There is no reason we deserve His love.

We did not earn it and in fact it is impossible to earn His love; if so, it would not be gratuitous and selfless. But all true believers live because of Him and this proves out the genuineness, unselfishness, and purity of His love.

What does it mean to live through Him and how is His love actually manifested in and through our lives? I believe we are still all growing in our practical understanding of what this means. But we do know far too well that what comes from our *flesh* is death (**Romans 8:6**), which is why God promised all true believers who choose to fear Him and hope in His lovingkindness that He would deliver their soul from death (**Psalms 33:19**). Our *flesh* literally steals away life, keeps us lonely, isolated, unknown, and ultimately oh so selfish. It is self-seeking, destructive, always wants its own way, and is bent on the preservation of all its dysfunctional coping mechanisms through which we have tried to control our lives. But it always drains our life and dilutes the quality of our relationships. Simply said, life in the *flesh* totally blows, is hopeless, destructive, and always disappointing.

Therefore, living through Him means that we have the ability to function in this world apart and separate from our *flesh*—all the while letting Him dominate our being (our heart, mind, soul, and strength). Therefore, like Him, we can be patient, kind, not jealous, not braggadocios, not arrogant, and we do not have to act unbecomingly. We can refuse to seek our own way, not be easily provoked, and refuse to take into account a wrong suffered. We can refuse to rejoice or delight in unrighteousness, but instead rejoice with the truth. We can bear all things, believe all things, hope all things, and endure all things. And this kind of love never fails— not even at any time ever (**1 Corinthians 13:4-8**). This is true living. It is natural supernatural living. Living through Him is freedom from all the attachments to our

flesh and this world that bind us in fear and keep us from knowing and experiencing His love.

1 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 [atonement] for our sins.” In this passage we find another beautiful aspect of God’s divine love. His love toward us is always existent (always has been and always will be) and is always self-sacrificing. His love remedies our inherent inadequacy. This really comes out in the Greek. Adding the flavor of the Greek tense, voice, and mood, this passage could read, “In this is love, not that we did it right and were able to somehow make this perfect decision to love God—no, not at all, perish the thought; but that He has always loved us and will always love us for His love for us defines His character and nature, from beginning to end, and that is a statement of fact, and He has sent His Son, and will always send His Son, to be the atonement for our sins.”

This is such a powerful statement. He loves us, He loves us, He loves us, He loves us; and so He chose His Son to always be our atonement for all that would otherwise separate us from God. His love is always existent and it is self-sacrificing. He gave up His life, suffered a brutal death, just to ensure that there is nothing which could permanently bar our relationship with God. He took on the pain, the hate, the vitriol, the judgment, the condemnation, and all the darkness that exists within our *flesh*—yes, He literally became sin on our behalf so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. He became a curse for us so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (**2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13**). And what is shocking is that this was always the plan, from before the foundations of the world He set these things in order. The Father sending the Son

was not a reaction to your sin (or the sin of Adam and Eve), this was always Plan A. In fact, He chose us in Him from before the foundation of the world (which is why it was not that we loved God but that He loved us), that we would be holy and blameless before Him—that we would be like Him. He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved (***Ephesians 1:3-7***). His sacrificing love for us has always been and will always be. That is to be the source of our motivation for loving the beloved.

1 John 4:11, “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” It is only right that if we the beloved have been so thoroughly and self-sacrificially loved by God and are always loved by God (in fact, this love defines our life) then we ought to in-turn love one another. The Spirit expresses this as a present statement of fact (*present active indicative*). This what you should do. If you are the beloved, then you should always in your now, love (*present active infinitive*) the beloved.

Does love of the beloved define the way you now live? If not, it means you have not really believed the all-inclusive and obsessive manner in which you have been loved. I am sure you can declare that God loves you and died for your sins, I am sure you can quote me plenty of scriptures, but if your knowledge does not result in love of the brethren, then you are still living in death and do not now know God. And this takes us back to the first two building blocks: faith and hope. You need to go back to the beginning and work through the issues of whether or not God can be trusted and whether or not you actually do trust Him. You need to let Him finish the work He has started with the fire and the knife, removing all that is dead and

dying, so that you might actually live. Remember, you must die to live and you must live to love. If I am describing you, then you have some serious work of believing that you must confront and in believing you must let Him put to death in you all that is not from Him. Faith and hope are essential to love.

1 John 4:12, “No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.” It might seem odd that in the midst of this discourse the Spirit suddenly brings up the point that no man has seen God at any time. But it actually fits in perfectly with the comment that if you do not love, then you have got some serious work of believing that you must do. In other words, we walk by faith and not by sight (**2 Corinthians 5:7**). We don’t choose to love because we have seen God and have had this great monumental encounter with His presence. No we believe God because, by faith, by evidence and proof of His dealings with us, we know we are loved. For example, we know He does not punish us for our sins nor does He deal harshly with us as we deserve, for his unfailing love toward those who fear him is as great as the height of the heavens above the earth. He has removed our sins as far from us as the east is from the west (**Psalm 103:10-12**). And this is why there is **NO** condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death (**Romans 8:1-2**). These are the facts, these have been proven out time and time again; and so we must choose by faith to believe. We must bet our lives on this reality. And if you do you will learn to love.

If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. Let me phrase this a tad bit differently, “if in our now we love the beloved, God now abides in us and that is a statement of fact (*present active indicative*). The *present* tense is

used because if you do not now love then it means that you are not now abiding in God, but by definition are abiding in your *flesh*. That should be obvious to you, but I thought I would mention it. But if we now love, then His love is perfected in us. Or said more appropriately, He completes His love and He continually ensures that it is completed in us, over and over again (*perfect passive participle*). Thus, He is always the source of our ability to love; and, if we now love, He is the one who matures us in His love.

I love the way this is an inverted statement. We don't go and try to love in order to prove that He abides in us. Rather, if He abides in us then by default we love, which is the very proof that He abides in us. He provides Himself—the love—and He completes the fullness of His presence in our lives. This brings us back to all we learned about the necessity of clinging to hope (that we will be like God) while we travel down the pathway of death (through the fire while being cut with the knife). He does it all, we just have to be willing to let Him complete His love in us.

1 John 4:13, “By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.” The point of all this is that if you have the Spirit of God He will not sit idle. But He will always be busy about teaching you how to trust in the Lord with your heart mind, soul, and strength. His activity in your life (the fire and the knife) is the very proof that you are in Him. And if you are in Him you should live in His love and be a vessel of His love, because He abides in you and you in Him. You have living within you the very source of love. If you have His Spirit, then you are one of the beloved and you should love one another. It is just the way it is. If you don't love, then you have a serious issue of belief that needs to be immediately remedied.

In closing, we have learned that the love of God, His divine love, is: self-sacrificing; always existent; selfless; and is always about us. It gives not to get, but because it can and because it desires to give and would have it no other way. It is genuine, unselfish, and pure. We have also learned that He is the source of love— He gives us Himself. And then He is the one who completes His love in us one room at a time. He just wants us to be willing to let Him do His job of purifying us and removing from our souls all that is not Him. Then, like Him, we can love the beloved with His unselfish, self-sacrificing, selfless, genuine, and pure love. Let Him have His way with you and He will complete His love in you and you will love. What a wonderful and marvelous promise. Then you can be like Him, you can be like God and love the beloved with His divine “*agape*” love.

Let's pray