

Faith, Hope & Love Part36

1 Corinthians 13:13

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

I hope we have all settled on the truth that God is love and the reality that since He is the Lord everything that ever happens, every teeny, tiny thing, is an expression of His great love. This is a truth that is intended to settle your soul, give you unmeasurable peace, and release you to be a vessel of love. This “reality” means you are always safe and cared for; thus, you can be confident that you are always being loved in your now, regardless of what the Lord is taking you through. Whether you are now experiencing a time of blessing or a time of trouble, it is all for the purpose of you 1) experiencing more and more of His mercy, love and power; 2) learning to live as an alien and stranger in this world; and 3) being conformed into the image of Christ. I hope you have settled and cloaked yourself with this truth: God is love. Therefore, let yourself be enfolded in His love. Let’s continue with our exploration of the love of God and pick back up in **1 John 4:16**.

1 John 4:16-17

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of

judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

It is one thing to say that God is love and another thing entirely to be convinced that you are presently, in your now, loved by God. You would think these concepts would be synonymous, but sadly they are not. People world over will confess that God is love, but very few people are truly confident that His love is personal, is for them, is being experienced right now, and that they have been and are loved all the time. This is why we spent the last two weeks discussing all the horrible things that happen in our lives (and all throughout this world) and reconciling the terror of it all with the truth that, as the Lord God Almighty, every single thing that has happened has been an expression of God's great mercy and love toward us as He has predestined all things in our lives with the goal of conforming us into the image of His Son. However, this gap to which many of us still hold, which exists between our own judgment of our experience (which we usually think is very bad) and this statement about God being love, is the gap that prevents us from abiding in His love. This is such an important concept for spiritual maturity. The Lord wants all of us to bridge this gap with the confident assurance of His love. We simply cannot be secure and steady, and confidently live as aliens and strangers, unless we come to know and have believed the love which God has for us in every moment of our now—whether past, present, or future.

When John says, "We have come to know and have believed," he uses the *perfect active indicative*. The *perfect* means he has wrestled with this truth, wrestled with all the things that occurred in his life and in the world around him, including the fact that Rome had him and his people in a death grip, and he

concluded once and for all that that God is love and that he is loved by God. And since “know” and “believed” are in the *indicative*, these are statements of fact upon which John never again ever waivered. For John, it had been *perfectly* decided.

Let’s think a little bit about John’s life and what he had to overcome. We really have no idea what his family life was like, so we don’t know what wounds he endured at the hands of his parents and siblings; but we can be confident that he had his share, just like all of us. When we are first introduced to John he is fishing with His brother James (and they were actually business partners with Peter). This means John had already been rejected by the local group of rabbis for personal discipleship. Like all Hebrew boys, John grew up in Hebrew school studying the scriptures hoping to have their family’s religious and social dreams fulfilled by being chosen by a Rabbi for discipleship. This is our equivalent to getting accepted into Harvard, Yale, or Stanford. But John had been rejected and so he resigned himself to the family business. You know that had to have stung and been one big disappointment; especially considering the cultural pressure to succeed. But then Jesus comes along and calls both James and John and immediately they left their boat, their nets, and even their father, and followed Jesus. The reason their father did not try and restrain them from leaving is because now their family would have the social honor they had all dreamed about. The Rabbi chose their sons. And keep in mind, it is likely that John was probably between 14 to 16 years old when he left his family; he was still just a boy and is believed to be the youngest of the disciples.

For three years John and the other disciples were the center of attention. Sometimes that attention was good and they received a lot of glory and other times it was intense and filled with all manner of threats. But the ride they were on was

fast and furious. Then after three years, their leader, their master, their teacher, their Rabbi, the one they believed was the Messiah of God, was arrested, beaten, and taken away by the authorities. This had to have scared John to death and totally traumatized him. It is clear from the gospels that even through Jesus warned them this would happen, such warnings had no place to fit in their brains. The one they faithfully served and followed was beaten to a pulp, lied about, chained, whipped, and was dragged away to be crucified. Then two of his best friends, including his former business partner whom he spent the last three years on the road with ministering to the masses, betrayed and denied the Master. This breach of trust, friendship, and brotherhood must have destroyed John. If Peter would deny the Master, who could he trust?

Then add to it the clear disillusionment surrounding John's understanding of the Messiah as he had been taught in Hebrew school. John believed Jesus was the Messiah; thus, he believed the Jesus would organize a revolt and save the nation from the clutches of Rome. Instead, John had to watch his Messiah suffer, bleed, and die nailed to a Roman cross. It all happened so fast and you must assume that his emotions were tearing him apart. Did Jesus lie to him? Did Jesus mislead him? Who was He really and what did everything mean? He could not deny what Jesus taught, he could not deny the miracles, he could not deny the power, but he saw Jesus die just like any ordinary man. I have to imagine that John put up some serious walls of self-protection to deal with all this relational trauma.

After all, these are some deep wounds which John had to reconcile with the truth that God is love. Peter stuck around and it seems they eventually reconciled and were able to deal with and get past the damage (the resurrection probably helped

a lot), but we really don't know. We do know that John was never able to confront Judas and deal with Judas' betrayal of their friendship and brotherhood; so that had to stick in his craw for quite some time. Thus, for John to give us the instruction in **4:7**, "Beloved let us love one another," it is clear that John reached down deep in his soul and confronted and settled with this truth that everything that ever happened to him, no matter how painful, was an expression of the Father's love and was critical if he was ever going to realize and live out the *Design Point*.

It seems clear that John learned that he had to be circumcised from this world and his *flesh* had to burn, as it kept him from loving others with God's *agape* love. Like with us, we can be confident that this was no easy task. John had some pretty serious wounds, was likely extremely self-protected, and there was probably so much that he never ever really understood. But he made the choice to trust; he made the choice to believe; and he made the choice to rest in what he knew to be true about the character and nature of his God, regardless of what happened to him and what was happening to him.

We must keep in mind that things did not get any easier for John after Jesus' death. The Jews hunted down and persecuted the believers; even Rome turned against Christianity and had a hand in trying to crush the believers any chance they got. Early on, John, along with Peter, was thrown in to prison. Then later in his life the authorities threw John into boiling oil in a human size wok; and with that having failed, they sentenced him to internment on the desert island prison of Patmos, which was a dreadful place. So from a practical perspective, life was not good. But John learned what it means to live like an alien and a stranger in this world, he learned what it means to go through the fire and under the knife, and he became

convinced that it was all necessary if he ever hoped to abide in God and be filled with the Spirit of God. Accordingly, John could say, “We have come to know and we have believed the love which God has for us” and for him it was a statement of indisputable fact.

I find it interesting that when referencing the love which God has for us, John used the *present active indicative*. Being in the *indicative* we know it is a statement of fact: God loves us. But being in the *present* tense, John is saying that he is convinced of this love not in some theological way, and this is definitely not a religious pleasantry; rather, with his heart, mind, soul, and strength, he believes. Again, being in the *present* tense, we know that even his body had been submitted to this truth that God is love and he was loved by God. I believe the Spirit uses John as an example for us to know that it is possible to rest in this truth that we are now, and every moment of our now, whether past, present, or future, loved by God.

God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. Right now, no matter what you are going through and no matter what is happening in the world (all for which God takes full responsibility), God is love. It is rendered in the *present active indicative*. He wants you to keep this truth fresh in your heart, mind, soul, and body every moment of your now. It is your key, the secret even, to make it through all that transpires in this life. It is how you keep the proper perspective on the affairs of your life, stay in touch with reality, and not dwell in the defeatist victim mentality. He is now love and you are now loved and this has been true every moment of your life from birth to death.

The one who now abides and keeps abiding [*present active participle*] in love, now abides in God (and that is a statement of fact) [*present active indicative*], and

God now abides in him and that is also a statement of fact [*present active indicative*]. Think about what this is communicating? This speaks directly to the *Design Point* and the reality that at any point in time either our *flesh* is directing our life or the Spirit. Understand, God's ability to abide in you and possess you is subject to your willingness to believe in His love for you and your willingness to let Him possess you. Yet, because we do not fully trust Him and because we do not rest in His love, we are very reluctant to let Him possess more and more room in our soul. Sadly, we self-protect from the God who is love. It is ridiculous but it is what we all do. Accordingly, if you don't trust in His love, you will not volitionally yield control to Him, and He will not now abide in you. This does not mean that He does not live in you (although it might), it means you are not looking to Him to be the source of your strength and nutrition (as a branch abides in a vine); therefore, you have neutered his power and resource in your life. And remember, His love demands that He does not force you to abide in Him; He always gives you a choice.

In **John 15:4**, Jesus says, "Abide in me and I in you." This is a command to always abide in Christ and He in us as a matter of lifestyle (*aorist active imperative*); but I think many of us are confused about what it means to actually abide in God and obey Him in this manner. According to **John 15** and **1 John 4:15-17**, abiding is expressed in a number of ways but all these expressions are rooted in our being convinced that God is love and that we are even now loved and have been loved in every moment of our now, whether past, present or future. This is a belief that transcends practical and physical circumstances. Knowing—being fully convinced—that you are loved is such a powerful emotion. The soul of a child, a teenager, even an adult, who knows and is confident that he or she is fully loved by their Dad, is

secure and steady. You see the same thing with a woman who is full-on convinced she is loved by a man—her mind and her soul are both secure and stable. Furthermore, this knowledge brings rest, excitement, and joy in her body. It is such a powerful feeling and you can see it all over her.

Jesus wants us to experience His love in this same way; He wants others to see it all over us. He wants us to be swooned by the power, constancy, and intimacy of His love. He wants us in turn to be excited, thrilled, and overcome with His love. He wants this knowledge to practically stabilize and secure our minds and our soul and to filter down to every part of our body. He wants His love to quiet the longing, the loneliness, the want and desire. He wants His love to be the buttress which enables us to confidently do the work which the Father has assigned us with joy and enthusiasm. He wants the knowledge of His love to change how we see everything in this life and how we feel about everything in this life. He wants His love to have a louder voice in our heart, mind, soul, and our body than does our self-love or the love of any other person. He intends for His love to dominate and rule our thoughts and our emotions. Consider Jesus' words: the one who continually abides in love abides in God and God abides in Him. Clearly, this concept of abiding in love is critical to our personally realizing the *Design Point*—God in us. Therefore, we are going to look at **John 15** because there are some aspects of abiding that we have to understand and embrace before we can be confident that we abide in Him and He abides in us.

John 15:4-6

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides

in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned.

The first thing about abiding is that we must literally cling to Jesus for our very life. Those of you who have struggled even considering your need for God in the day-in-and-day-out affairs of your life, you have missed this point. With this illustration of the branch and the vine, Jesus confirms that we are this needy for Him all the time. Like a branch that clings to the vine so are we to cling to Him. We are to always be receiving from Jesus everything we need to live: all our nutrition, all our stability, in fact all our life comes from our physical connection to the vine. Without Him we are useless when it comes to living in the Kingdom of God—entirely useless. We can only live, be healthy, and bear the fruit of the Spirit when we cling to Him for everything.

This is a big practical challenge. Think about it, when you hide behind your walls of self-protection, you cling to yourself and not to Jesus. When you think anything in this world can offer you joy, satisfaction, peace, and fulfillment, you cling to an illusion and a deception of the Wicked One, and not to Jesus. I could come up with many, many illustrations, but you get the point. We must look to Him to be everything or else we will be useless regardless of our good intentions, our best attempts, or any of our myriad of religious Christian activities.

The reality is that apart from clinging to Jesus in this crazy desperate way, you

can do nothing. This means that your goodness is worthless, your charity is worthless, your sincerity is worthless, your religious deeds are worthless, even reading your Bible, going to Church, serving God, meeting with people, etc., is worthless if it does not come from this place where you are practically, emotionally, and spiritually clinging to Jesus. Do not be fooled, all else is worthless and considered to be nothing; such things will not follow you into eternity (**1 Corinthians 3:13-16**). In fact, it is all thrown away as a dried up branch and cast into the fire and burned. I know we are not all gardeners, but don't miss the imagery. Dried up branches from a vine are entirely worthless. They cannot be burned for fuel or warmth, they are consumed too quickly in the fire. They cannot be used for furniture, for making anything of use, or to reinforce anything; they are actually practically quite worthless. So it is with all that we do which does not derive from our clinging to Jesus and Christ fulfilling His Father's work in and through our lives. We must cling to Jesus for our very lives if we ever hope to abide in Him.

Second, abiding in Christ also involves loving the beloved—those who are like us; in fact, loving the beloved is presented to us as a prerequisite of sorts to abiding. Consider the following:

John 15:9-14, 17

Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also 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 so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love

has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do what I command you...This I command you, that you love one another.

If you always keep His commandments, as a matter of lifestyle (*aorist active*), you will (*future active indicative*) abide in His love—it is guaranteed. One leads to the other. His commandment however is that you love one another, just as we have always been loved by Jesus. We know that “one another” is a reference to the beloved because the text uses the word “*allos*” for another and not “*heteros*”—referring to another of the same kind as we are. Then in **15:17** He commands us once again to love one another, but this time he uses the *present active*. Every moment of our now we are to obey His commandments by loving the beloved.

These things Jesus has spoken to us so that His joy may be in us, and that our joy may be made full. In other words, our loving the beloved is not actually a burden and a bummer, even though so often it seems that way. Especially when we harbor hurt, anger, bitterness, and unforgiveness in our soul. But making the choice to love those who are like us will bring us joy in such a way that it will be pressed down and crammed into every available space so that we will be literally full with His joy.

With this in mind, now is the time to be honest and face the truth. Now is the time to let go of the pride, the pretense, and all the pretending. How many of you are not filled with joy but are so often sad? How many of you are just making it through day-in-and-day-out? How many of you just wish things would be different? Then I have to say that you have not yet learned how to continually love the beloved with God’s *agape* love. Thus, you have also not yet learned truly how to cling to Him for everything. Rather, you are still content with what you think you

can provide. You are still content living behind your wall of self-protection, living with the selfishness of self-preservation, living with the ill of bitterness and unresolved conflict, and so on. Yet, it is Jesus' command that we love one another and our loving one another—our obedience to this command—is a requirement for our abiding in Jesus. We cannot be fooled like those in religion to think we abide in Him just because we call on His name and do all the wonderful things that we do in this body. If we do not love, we do not abide. In fact, without love all that we do is just like a loud noise or a clanging symbol (**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**). I therefore believe that to the extent we love one another we abide; love is the proof.

Now, our normal reaction to a commandment like “Love one another” is that we try and figure out how to fulfill it; after all, we want to do what is good and right (so we don't get into trouble). But I don't think trying to obey is the point at all. Besides, God's *agape* love has so many faces and is expressed so differently in all manner of contexts that we would do injustice to try and codify it in some scripted set of behaviors. I think this commandment is more of a litmus test as this love is more easily seen and understood than defined. In other words, I may not be able to say that a specific behavior at a particular time expressed in a particular circumstance is love (after all, I cannot judge a person's true motives), but when you are a recipient of God's *agape* love, one way or another you know it. I think this is because of the selflessness of its expression. In **John 15:13** Jesus says that there is no greater love than when one always, as a matter of lifestyle, lays down his life for his friends (*aorist active*). This is not talking about a onetime event of heroics, but a way of life. When a person voluntarily lays down his self-protection, selfishness, goodness, shame, anger, malice, bitterness, judgment, condemnation,

and so on, then that person will be a vessel of love; and when you are loved by such a one I believe you will know it for there is no greater kind of love. Furthermore, according to **15:11**, the person who loves in this way is a man or a woman of joy as Jesus' joy fills and overflows from their life.

Accordingly, if you love, if you obey this commandment, you can be confident that you abide in Jesus and Jesus abides in you. For you cannot love with His *agape* love unless you are desperately dependent upon Jesus (like a branch clinging to a vine) and have come to know and believe that you are even now loved. Yes, this is the secret. No one will on their own lay down their life for another unless they believe and are fully convinced that they are loved by the Lord God Almighty and everything is now, always will be, and always has been safe and secure. Therefore, to fulfill this command to love one another, we each have to once and for all, like John, deal with every little bit of wrong belief and unbelief regarding God's love that still resides in our body—that which keeps us from laying down our life for one another. If we were confident of His love, I believe self-protection and the selfishness of self-preservation would not be an issue in our lives.

1 John 4:16-17. It is by this belief (that we are now loved) that love is perfected or completed in us by God. Therefore, if you have to listen to the last two weeks teachings again and again and pour through each and every scripture reference, then do it. If you desire to abide in Christ and have Him abide in you, if you want to fully realize the *Design Point*, you simply must settle this issue regarding all that has happened in your life. You must decide that you have always been loved in everything and through everything, and that even now you are loved with God's divine *agape* love. There is no way you will abide in His love unless you can see His

love over every part of your life. And I know that if you see His love over every part of your life that your heart, mind, soul, and body will overflow with joy. And it will be evident to all, for you will be a person who is filled with thanksgiving, praise, adoration, who simply cannot get enough of God.

Now get this (**4:17**), the presence of God's *agape* love in and through our lives is our present confidence that we are indeed children of God (just like He is the Son of God). For as He is so are we in this world—the chosen ones of God separated unto Him, living as aliens and strangers in the world but existing and thriving in the Kingdom of God. This idea of “confidence in the day of judgment” is rendered in the *present active* and the implications of this are mind-blowing, shocking even. This means that it does not matter if you prayed and asked Jesus into your heart (for all we know it could have been an emotional decision), it does not matter if you have gone to church all your life, and it does not matter if you consider yourself to be a good Christian, what matters is His love. Without the evidence of His love in and through your life, the implication is that you should have no confidence regarding the soon coming judgment day. Our confidence of eternal life with God comes when we believe the love which He has for us; and the proof of our belief is the existence of His divine *agape* love which flows in and through our lives as we abide in Him and He in us. This is what this passage indicates.

I want you to think of this spiritual, but very unpopular, truth. You can say Lord, Lord. You can cast out demons, prophesy in Jesus' name, and in His name perform many miracles and you may still be rejected from the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of the Father will enter (**Matthew 7:21-23**). Further, you can speak in tongues of angels, know all mysteries and all knowledge, have the faith to

remove mountains, give all your possessions to the poor, and even surrender your body to be burned for the sake of Christ, and still gain nothing. For unless you produce God's *agape* love, all your works and deeds, no matter how impressive, profit you nothing (**1 Corinthians 13:1-3**). According to **Galatians 5:6**, all that matters is faith working through God's *agape* love.

This is very difficult. We simply cannot put any stock in the things we do or have done; nor in all our good intentions. We can't. I know I have said that so many times throughout the years, but we have to become convinced that it is true. We cannot believe we abide in Christ just because we belong to Pathway or to any other church; we can't. We cannot believe we walk in the Spirit just because we know the truth about the Spirit and the *flesh*; we can't. We cannot even be confident we are saved based on the prayers we have made, commitments we have uttered, and all that we have done for God; we can't. For all of that means nothing unless we love one another with His divine *agape* love. Hence, there is no way we can justify or excuse living in self-protection and the selfishness of self-love and still think that we abide in Christ. We can't!

You must cling to Jesus with everything and for everything. You must be willing to lay down your life for one another—all of the control of "self" must go. But you are only going to do these things if you become convinced, dead certain, absolutely cemented in stone, that He has loved you every single day of your life and is even now lavishing His love upon you and will always lavish His love upon you in and through every single thing that He directs, allows, and prescribes for your life. Yes, you must be convinced of this truth. It is your confidence of eternity. It is your confidence of reward. It is your confidence of joy.

Therefore, I encourage you to wrestle with these truths and continue to wrestle with them; but let the Word of God have authority over all your emotions and all your thoughts. Stop fooling yourself. If you don't love one another with His love, then you do not abide in His love. He is love and you are loved by Him now and in every moment of your now ever since you were born. In fact, from before time, before you were even created, you were loved. Let His love be completed or perfected in you. Never ever again doubt the reality of who you are in Him. Never again doubt His character and nature of love. Never again accuse Him of just being mean to you. Instead, rest in His love confident that in everything He was and is circumcising you from this world and burning off all the ugly *flesh* that keeps you from abiding in His love. Know you are loved; believe you are love; abide in His love!

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.

Let's pray.