

THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (20)

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Loving The Church (continued).

The church in the Old Testament is Mt. Zion. The church in the New Testament is Mt. Zion. In *Heb.12:18-29* the new covenant Mt. Zion is described as the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem; the general assembly or the festal gathering; and the church of the firstborn ones who are enrolled in heaven. We saw the Lord loves the old covenant Mt. Zion. And the Lord loves the new covenant Mt. Zion.

We saw in our last study that God's love for the church began in eternity, it is continuing with unabated force in time and it will continue with unabated force for all eternity. **Why does God love the church?** The answer in *Eph.1:5, 11* that it is the kind intention or good pleasure of His will and purpose to love the church. You who are in Christ, why does God love you? He loves you because it is the kind intention or good pleasure of His will and purpose to love you.

Secondly, we saw that just as the old covenant Mt. Zion was the habitation of God, in the same manner the new covenant Mt. Zion is the habitation of God. We saw in *Heb.12:22* that Mt. Zion is the city of the living God or the habitation of God. We saw from *1Cor.3:16 & 2Cor.6:16* that we are the temple of the living God. As the temple of the living God, God dwells in us. Thirdly, we saw that like the old covenant Mt. Zion, the new covenant Mt. Zion is glorious or distinguished or splendid. The church is adorned as a bride and has the glory of God.

These points brought us to the question : **Why must you love the church, be a part of the church and become actively involved in the church?** The primary and most important answer to the question is that God loves the church with an eternal love. We

saw that God's love for the church is revealed in giving His Son to die in order to redeem all those He chose in Christ and predestined to adoption as sons.

We saw that God's love for the church is revealed in the fact that the church is His most prized possession upon this earth. We looked at the price that was paid for God to redeem the church. The price was far more than silver or gold. We saw that all the wealth in this world could not redeem one sinner. The price that was paid is the precious blood of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The salvation we received freely from God's hand is described as "so great salvation" (*Heb.2:3*); as "the unfathomable riches of Christ" (*Eph.3:8*); as "the riches of His grace" (*Eph.1:7; 2:7*); as the riches of His mercy (*Eph.2:4*); as "the riches of His kindness" (*Rom.2:4*). The word "**riches**" speaks of an abundance that exceeds the norm. The word "**unfathomable**" tells us that the abundance of this "**riches**" cannot be fully known.

I want to add something here. In the O.T. God's chosen people were described as "His treasured possession." (*Deut.26:18*). The Hebrew word used here is used again in four other places. In *Exod.19:5* God described His chosen people as "My own possession." *Deut.7:6* says, "the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession." *Deut.14:2* says, "the LORD has chosen you to be a people for His own possession." *Psa.135:4* says, "The Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, Israel for His own possession."

The Old Testament Word Study Dictionary tells us that the Hebrew word used here gives us one of the most memorable depictions of the Lord's relationship to His people. The word means Israel is God's own special treasure, His own treasured possession, or His own unique possession. In *1Chron.29:3* David used this same Hebrew word to describe the treasure he gave as a gift to the Lord for the building of the temple. David said that in addition to his other gifts, he also gave with delight **3,000** talents of gold and **7,000** talents of refined silver. According to **Wikipedia**, today one talent of gold would be worth approximately three million US dollars. And a talent of silver would be worth

approximately **\$300,000.00** US. If my calculations are correct, David's personal gift in gold and silver for the building of the temple was over eleven billion US dollars.

In *1Pet.2:9* Peter wrote, quoting from the O.T., "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession." Peter took four major descriptions that was used in the O.T. to describe God's people and used them to describe the new covenant church. Now you, the people redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, the people who have received a salvation of unfathomable riches, you are God's own special treasure, His own treasured possession, or His own unique possession. This most memorable depiction of the Lord's relationship to His people is now given to you. This is why you are God's most prized possession on this earth. Since all the wealth in this world could not redeem one sinner, your worth as the temple of God is far more than eleven billion US dollars. Yet there are those who believe, teach and want us to believe that God can lose you. If the God who redeemed you at such an infinite price can lose you, then He is no better than Mike Tyson.

In our study we saw that **the infinite greatness of God's love for you as a sinner and for the church says you must love the church.** The infinite greatness of God's love for the church is summed up in the Greek word translated "so" in *Jn.3:16* & *1Jn.4:11*. And applying the infinite greatness of God's love for us, John said, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Note the word "if". The Greek word translated "if" states the motivating reality as an accepted fact, a reality that lies at the heart of the Christian faith. (Hiebert). What is this motivating reality? "God so loved us." God has loved us to such an astounding degree. The idea is, since God has loved us to such an astounding degree, "we also ought to love one another."

Note the verb "ought". The verb "ought" places upon us a lifetime, daily, ongoing moral obligation. The verb "ought" places upon you a debt, a mortgage that you will be paying for the rest of your life. The verb "ought" says you have something to do that you must do. However, the verb "ought" is not an external compulsion but the inner constraint of conscious obligation. God has placed this divine "ought" in the

heart of every child of God. It is a life-time **“ought”** that draws from you love for God and love for one another. The question was asked : Is your heart conscious of and pressed with this divine **“ought”**?

We saw that God did not only love us. *Rom.5:5* says, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Note the verb **“poured out”**. It means our hearts have been flooded to overflowing with God’s love. The verb is perfect tense and means your heart is in a permanent state of being flooded to overflowing with God’s love. It also means there is no abating of this overflowing flood of God’s love in your heart. When a river starts to overflow its banks, what happens? The overflowing water begins to touch and impact everything within reach.

Your heart is the river. The dam of God’s love has burst open and it has flooded your heart and overflowing the banks of your heart. It has taken possession of you, kindling love in you for God and for one another. Now here are the questions : are you allowing God’s love to overflow the banks of your heart with love for God and love for others? Are you allowing God’s overflowing love in your heart not only to touch others but also to positively impact them for the glory of God? If that kindled love is not manifesting itself toward God and toward one another, the problem is certainly not with God. Then the question must be asked : are you sandbagging the banks of your heart, stopping the overflow of God’s love from within you toward God and toward others?

Now here is the point. You are not being asked to love God and one another with your own human generated love. That would be impossible. Your own human generated love is imperfect, controlled by the too many factors, events and experiences that are a part of your life, and most important your love is negatively impacted by your indwelling sin. Your own human generated love is impacted by your spiritual and moral battles with selfishness, emotional dislike for others, anger with others for one reason or another, the desire to get even with those who have hurt you, an unforgiving spirit, jealousy, envy, oh, we can go on and on with the list. Furthermore, your own human generated love is not

like a flooded and overflowing river. Your own human generated love is like a little drain that is trickling. Some days that trickle may increase. Other days that trickle may dry up completely.

God loves you with **agape** love, that uniquely distinctive gracious love that is found only in the Bible and defined and described for us only in the Bible. God wants you to love Him with **agape** love. God wants you to love others with the same **agape** love. God is the source of that love. God is continuously flooding your heart with the **agape** love you need to love Him. God is continuously flooding your heart with the **agape** love you need to love the church. God is continuously flooding your heart with the **agape** love you need to love every member of this church. If you cannot or do not love the church, the question is : are you sandbagging your heart and stopping the flood of God's love from overflowing? If you cannot or do not love every member of this church, the question is : are you sandbagging your heart and stopping the flood of God's love from overflowing?

If you are sandbagging your heart, you need to repent and repent urgently. The nature of this disobedience is far more serious than you may understand. The Bible makes it very clear that you cannot claim to love God and not love your brother. Please turn to **1Jn.4:20**. John wrote, "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen."

Firstly, people say, "*I do not hate So & So. I just do not love him / her.*" Take note that in **1Jn.4:20** John demolishes this foolish claim. John has made it clear that "hates his brother" and "does not love his brother" are expressing the same fact. **Secondly**, take careful note of the Greek verb translated "**cannot**". It points to that which is impossible. Regardless of the claim you may make, God has said that if you do not love your brother, it is impossible for you to love Him. And if you still make the claim that you love God you are a liar.

Now here is the next extremely important question : are you sandbagging your heart or is that there is no **agape** love in your heart? If God has not poured out His love in your heart through the Holy Spirit then you are not saved. **Rom.5:5 is true of every believer. (repeat)**. Paul wrote, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit was given to you the moment you were saved.

Rom.8:9 says, “if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him.” The **New English Bible** translated this verse very bluntly as follows : “if a man does not possess the Spirit of Christ, he is no Christian.” The Holy Spirit who indwells the Christian, who resides within the Christian, is the One who has poured out God’s love within your heart. The Holy Spirit has acted in the Christian’s heart with sovereign initiative. He did not ask your permission to flood your heart with God’s love. This is an important part of what it means to be a Christian. To be a Christian means the Holy Spirit has flooded your heart with God’s **agape** love.

Being a Christian means you will love what God loves with the same quality of **agape** love that God loves with. Being a Christian means you will love what Christ loves with the same quality of **agape** love that Christ loves with. In **Jn.13:34** Jesus commanded us to love one another “**just as**” He loved us. The Greek word translated “**just as**” or “**even as**” is very important in Jesus’ command. It points to the standard or measure of the love with which Jesus loved us and which we are to imitate. This **agape** love that that Holy Spirit has poured out within your heart will make you love the church, will make you love the members of the church, will make you love sinners, and will make you love even your enemies.

I stated in our last study that we need to take the time to meditate on the greatness and quality of God’s love in Christ for us as individuals and as a church. In your meditation you need to be gripped by two contrasting things. On the one hand you need to be experientially gripped by God’s view of the total depravity of your entire being and your total unworthiness of God’s love. On the other hand you need to be experientially

gripped by the infinite graciousness and greatness of God's love for you. You need to be experientially gripped with the dreadful horror of your heart's depravity and the infinite glory of God's love for you in Christ.

When you are experientially gripped by your own unworthiness and the glory of Christ's love you will begin to understand why Paul declared, "the love of Christ controls us." (*2Cor.5:14*). Paul was being viewed as some kind of mentally imbalanced fanatic because of his love for Christ. (cf. *vs.13*). Paul's response was that he was no mentally imbalanced fanatic. He was the way he was because of Christ's love controlled him. One day Christ's love gripped Paul and Paul declared in a very personal testimony, "the Son of God ... loved me and gave Himself up for me." (*Gal.2:20*). Bear in mind that the epistle to the Galatians was written at least a couple years before the Corinthian epistles. This is the Paul the Corinthians came to know – a man gripped and possessed and controlled by Christ's love. But when the false teachers began to turn the Corinthian Christians against Paul, they began to whisper to one another that Paul was too fanatical and may be mentally imbalanced.

Paul declared the Son of God loved me, Saul the Pharisee, Saul the blasphemer, Saul the violent aggressor against Christians, Saul who was ravaging the church, Saul who was beating up Christians, Saul who was imprisoning Christians, Saul who was murdering Christians, Saul who made many Christian women into widows and many children into orphans. Paul declared, "*the Son of God loved me, Saul, and died for me, for my sins.*" (*Acts 8:3; 9:1; 1Tim.1:13*). Totally unworthy of Christ's love, Paul surrendered his life to the control of Christ's love. Totally unworthy of Christ's love, Paul began to love those who were unworthy of his love and unworthy of Christ's love. He began to love the Christians he hated and persecuted. And wonder of wonders he began to love the Gentiles, the people he utterly despised and hated as Saul the Pharisee.

What kind of sinner are you? *Jer.17:9* says, "The heart is deceitful more than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" Jesus said out of the heart of man proceeds evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, coveting or

greed, envy, slander, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, false witness, pride, foolishness. (*Matt.15:19; Mk.7:21-22*). Paul's list added impurity, idolatry, sorcery, strife, jealousy, anger, disputes, factions, drunkenness, carousing, malice, abusive speech, lies. (*Gal.5:19-20; Col.3:5,8,9*). What are the sins in these lists that describe you? What are the other sins that are not in these lists that describe you? Take some time and complete the sentence in your notes : "The Son of God loved me, a and He died for me."

Here are my questions now. How worthy are you of Christ's love? How worthy is any given member of this church of Christ's love? How worthy is this church body of Christ's love? If you are unworthy of Christ's love and death on your behalf, has your unworthiness gripped you? Have you surrendered your life to the control of Christ's love? Is there one member of this church whom you do not love because that person is unworthy of your love? Is this person unworthy of Christ's love? Does Christ love this unworthy person? If you love Christ you would love what Christ loves. Christ loves the church. Christ loves every member of the church, regardless of how unworthy they are of His love. And He is calling upon you to love the church and every Christian, whether worthy or unworthy, with the **agape** love the Holy Spirit has poured out within your heart.

Can you do that? Can you love this church and every unworthy Christian with the **agape** love that the Holy Spirit has poured out within your heart? If you are a Christian you have all the resources you need to obey Christ and to love. You have a new God-given nature. (*2Cor.5:17*). You have a continuous supply of the strength you need to obey Christ. (*Phil.4:13*). You have an inexhaustible supply of the **agape** love you need to love with. You have the example of God the Father. You have the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have the Holy Spirit in you. And you have the example of the early Christians.

Paul wrote in *Col.1:3-4*, "We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and

the love which you have for **all** the saints.” Note that, not “**some of the saints**”, but “for all the saints.” How did this happen? Note *vs.8*, “he (Epaphras) also informed us of your love in the Spirit.” The **New Living Translation** (NLT) translated this verse, “He is the one who told us about the great love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you.” The word “in” (Gk. **en**) also means “**by or through**”. Here is the practical outworking of **Rom.5:5** in the lives of the Colossian believers. The Spirit who poured out God’s love within their hearts is also responsible for supplying them with the power and steadfast commitment to love with overflowing **agape** love.

In **1Thess.3:12** Paul prayed for the Thessalonian Christians as follows, “may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.” Now note the answer to Paul’s prayer in **2Thess.1:3**, “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater.” Paul is commending each believer for their growing love for one another.

Now I want you to understand that this **agape** love is very practical. The apostle John wrote, “let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” (**1Jn.3:18**). Good words help and comfort and encourage. But words without action are useless. Love, John is saying, is practical. Love must be manifested in deeds that are realistic and rooted in truth as revealed in God’s word. This is in keeping with Paul’s prayer for the Philippians. Paul wrote in **Phil.1:9**, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment.” Love must be rooted in an abounding knowledge of God’s will and moral insight. Note the important coupling of God’s will with moral insight. We can obey God’s will without moral insight.

Was God’s love for us a practical love? Let us see. **Rom.5:8** says, “But demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” **Jn.3:16** says, “For God so loved....” And what did God do? “He gave His only begotten Son.” Concerning our Lord Jesus we read, “the Son of God ... loved me

and gave Himself up for me.” (*Gal.2:20*). *2Cor.8:9* says, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”

God has poured out His love within our hearts through the Holy Spirit. We are responsible to love one another with overflowing **agape** love. Now please turn to *Heb.10:24*. The writer says, “let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.” **Firstly**, I want you to note that “love and good deeds” go together. The good deeds are a direct expression of the love. In other words, love is more than words. Love is practical. **Secondly**, the verb “consider” means to place your mind down upon something and consider it thoughtfully. The verb is present tense and this means this is something you must be doing on an ongoing basis. Do you ever think about how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds? The exhortation goes beyond mere thinking. The exhortation is that you must **continually** and **thoughtfully** consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds.

Thirdly, is this the responsibility of only the pastors of the church? Is this the responsibility of the pastors and the deacons? Is this the responsibility of the pastors, deacons and members who are manifesting spiritual maturity? The words “let us” says very clearly this is the responsibility of every Christian in the church.

Fourthly, note the verb “stimulate”. This is a very strong word of intense emotion. The emotion of anger is usually associated with it. It means to provoke, to irritate, to incite. The writer’s intent in using this very strong word is not to give you room to behave in an ungodly manner. Luke used this same word to describe Paul’s response to Athenian idolatry. Luke wrote, “[Paul’s] spirit was being provoked within him as he was observing the city full of idols.” (*Acts 17:16*). Paul was getting angrier and angrier by the minute. But how did he respond? Did he take up an axe and started breaking down the idols? NO! He plunged into preaching the gospel.

The writer to the Hebrews is saying that loving one another also means we must challenge one another to love and good deeds with intensity, with repetition, yea, even to the point of irritation. But we must do so lovingly. Now, what comes right after *vs.24*? *Vs.25*. Now together, let us all read this verse out aloud. “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” When last have you asked a member in this church : How is your attendance to the gathering of the church on the Lord’s Day? How is your attendance to the mid-week prayer meeting? When last have you sat down with a member of this church and sought to challenge them from God’s word to faithfulness in these two areas? When was the last time that you made yourself a holy loving pest by repeatedly visiting and challenging a member of this church to faithfulness in these two areas?

At the very root of your growth in Christ and godly living is your love for the church, your love for the assembling together of the people of God and your faithfulness in assembling together with the people of God. What is the opposite? Now once again and together, let us read out aloud *vs.26*. “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.” What is this verse saying to us? This verse is saying that the opposite to loving the church, loving the assembling together of the people of God and faithfully assembling together with the people of God is apostasy. Note the words carefully, “there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.”

Am I saying here that you are not allowed to miss a Lord’s Day in church? There are providential reasons and necessities that may compel us to miss a Lord’s Day in church. But when you start missing without good providential reasons and by poor choices, I guarantee you that you already in a spiritual backslide. The book of Hebrews make it very clear that there is no standing still in the Christian life. You are either going forward or backward.

The point is this : if you love the church just as Christ loves the church, it will show. If you love the Brethren just as Christ loves the Brethren, it will show. Your brothers and sisters in Christ will see your love for the church and the Brethren very clearly. And the world will see and take note that you love the church and love your brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus said in *Jn.13:35*, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, of you have love for one another.” Men and women will know because they are seeing the practical demonstration of your love for one another.

Do you love the church? Would you be glad and rejoice greatly if someone were to call you on Sunday morning and encourage you, “Let us go up to the house of the Lord”? Do you pray for peace in the church? Do you pray for the church to prosper, to grow in spirituality, in leadership, in its ministries, in conversions to Christ, in its finances? Do you seek the good of the church? All these questions come to you from *Psa.122*. The blessing pronounced in the psalm is, “May they prosper who love you.” May they prosper who love the church.

The opposite to *Psa.122* is bringing dishonor and disgrace to the church and ultimately to the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do people ever have just cause, as they observe your life, to say to you : what kind of Christian are you? What kind of church do you go to that allows you to conduct yourself as you are doing? Do people have just cause to whisper to others behind your back : what kind of Christian is he / she? What kind of church is he / she going to that allows him / her to behave in such a manner?

In *Rom.2* Paul charged the Jews with boasting about how wonderful and unique their religion was but they were living in the very opposite manner to the standards found in their religion. And Paul declared to the Jews, “the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” (*Rom.2:24*). When God and the church are being blasphemed and dishonored because of you, you are manifesting by your deeds that you do not love God and you do not love His church.

May the Holy Spirit help us to truly love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength. And may He help us to love one another just as Christ loves us. May He help us to love in deed and truth. And may He help our love to abound more and more in the real knowledge of God's will coupled with all discernment or all moral insight.