

# THE CHRISTIAN & THE CHURCH (21)

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## Loving The Church (continued).

The church is people. The church is people chosen in Christ from eternity for salvation. (*1Thess.2:13*). The church is a called out people, called out from this world into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. (*1Cor.1:9*). The church was called to eternal life through the gospel and by the grace of Christ. (*1Tim.6:12; 2Thess.2:14; Gal.1:6*). The church was called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. (*1Pet.2:9*). The church is called "with a holy calling" that is, "to a holy life." (*2Tim.1:9*).

## A). Why Must You Love The Church?

In our previous studies we saw that every Christian must love the church. In our last study the question was asked : **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. The Bible also states very clearly that the Lord Jesus Christ loves the church. (*Eph.5:25*). We saw that the church is God's most prized possession upon this earth. The church is His most treasured possession.

We looked at the infinite greatness of God's love for the church and saw that the infinite greatness of God's love for the church says you must love the church. John wrote, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (*1Jn.4:11*). God has placed upon us a holy "ought", a divine moral obligation to be carried out for the rest of our lives. We saw that "love one another" is inclusive of all the saints generally

and very specifically all the saints who are a part of the local church you belong to. We saw that Paul thanked God that the Colossian believers loved “all the saints.” (*Col.1:4*). And Paul thanked God because the love the Thessalonian believers had for one another was growing greater and greater. (*2Thess.1:3*).

## **B). Loving God, Hating The Brethren.**

The apostle John made it clear that we cannot claim to love God and hate our brethren in Christ. The church has a habit of coming up with categories that do not exist in the Bible in order to compromise with those who are not obeying God’s word. And so, over fifty years ago the church came up with the “**carnal Christian**” doctrine that was used to describe people who claim to be saved but who are worldly and fleshly. The word “**carnal**” is not found in modern translations of the Bible. But it is found in older translations like the **KJV**. Now note what the **KJV** says in *Rom.8:6*, “For to be carnally minded is death.” *Vs.7* says, “the carnal mind is enmity against God : for it does not subject itself to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” How can a Christian be carnally minded if to be carnally minded is spiritual death, enmity against God and rebellion again God?

Peter said that God “has called [us] out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (*1Pet.2:9*). Paul said, “you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; walk as children of Light.” Paul added, “the fruit of the Light consists in all goodness and righteousness and truth.” (*Eph.5:8-9*). Finally John wrote, “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” (*1Jn.1:5-6*). For the apostle John, who is writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, there are no unbiblical categories. If you are claiming to be a Christian but the conduct of your life is characterized by spiritual and moral darkness, you are a liar.

In *Matt.28:20* Jesus said we must teach Christian disciples to obey all that He has commanded. *1Jn.2:3-4* says, “By this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments.” The one who says, ‘I have come to know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.” What is John saying here? Let me give you a paraphrase translation that is plainer : *“By this we know that we are saved, if our lives are characterized by obedience to Christ’s commandments. The one who says, ‘I am saved,’ but his life is not characterized by obeying Christ’s commandments, that one is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”*

In this last trip to Jamaica we discovered a new category. Time and again we were introduced to people who were described as **“turn-back Christians.”** For John there are no carnal Christians, no worldly Christians, no backsliders, no turn-back Christians. As far as the inspired apostle was concerned, all these people were liars and the truth of the gospel was not in them.

This brings us 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.” Note the word **“cannot”**. It speaks of that which is impossible. Now we try to get away from the serious implications of this verse by saying, *“I do not hate So & So. I just do not love him / her.”* This unbiblical category is utterly nonsensical. The verse equates “hates his brother” and “does not love his brother”. Both statements express the same wicked fact. John is clearly saying that if you do not love **“all the saints”**, you are a liar.

I want you to note that **“he is a liar”** is emphatic in this text and in *1Jn.2:4*. What John wrote in both verses is, **“a liar he is.”** Now note carefully : John is not saying that this person is making a false declaration or assertion. The expression, **“a liar he is”** focuses on the nature of this person’s moral character. There is a very serious moral flaw in this person’s character. That moral flaw is : he is a liar. This is exactly what Jesus said about the devil in *Jn.8:44*, **“a liar he is.”** The focus is on the nature of the devil’s moral

character. Brethren, this is why the formation of compromising unbiblical categories are so dangerous to the eternal welfare of your souls. People who are placed in compromising unbiblical categories believe they are saved when the evidence says they are lost. This deception is utterly and frighteningly dangerous and can be eternally fatal.

### **C). A Most Difficult Task.**

Now here is the plain fact : if you do not love the brethren, a liar you are. If you do not love the church, a liar you are. There is no questioning the fact that the command to love the brethren or the church is a difficult one. There are many members in the church who are quite unlovable. There is no questioning the fact that they are true Christians. But for one reason or another, loving them is not an easy task. If I may add, loving some of them is a downright difficult task. This task, like all other Biblical tasks God has given to us, are not only difficult, they are well nigh impossible when we look at them from a human perspective. But what happens when we look at them from God's perspective? Jesus said, "with God all things are possible." (*Matt.19:26*). And He set the example by loving you when you were most unlovable.

There is a truth to be found in the Bible that you need to learn once for all : whatever God requires of you to do, He gives you the grace, the power and the necessary equipment to do it. This is why Paul declared in *Phil.4:13*, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me." To paraphrase, Paul wrote, "*I have the ability to do all things through Him who is continuously infusing strength into me.*" Within the context Paul was speaking about living his life with contentment.

In *Col.1:9-11* Paul prayed for the Colossian believers. In these verses we find that Paul's list of prayer requests was very demanding and intimidating. But in vs.11 Paul also prayed that the Colossian believers would be "strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might." A literal translation of this prayer is : "May you be empowered with all power according to God's majestic power." Note two things :

firstly, the three-fold repetition of the word “**power**”; secondly, the word “**all**”. The omnipotent God whose power is majestic and glorious is continually empowering us with maximum power, with the fullness of power, with power in the highest degree in order for us to do what He requires of us to do.

### **D). The Flood of Love.**

Now, God requires that we love the church generally and one another specifically with **agape** love. God loves us with **agape** love and He wants us to love one another with **agape** love. To love one another with **agape** love is impossible because **agape** love is not a human generated love. But we saw in our last study that God has abundantly supplied to us this **agape** love we need to love another. *Rom.5:5* says, “the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” “**The agape of the God has been poured out...**” The source of this love is God. And God has poured out His love within our hearts. 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 will be no abating of this overflowing flood of God’s love in your heart.

I want you to note also that you did not seek God with prayer or with prayer and fasting for this love. God did this for you by His own sovereign will. To use Paul’s language in *Eph.1*, God did this for you in Christ according to His purpose, after the counsel of His will, according to the kind intention of His will, according to the riches of His grace and to the praise of His glory. (*Eph.1:5, 7, 11, 14*). This is a part of the unfathomable riches of the so great salvation God has given to you freely in Christ.

If you are a Christian, your heart is a river. The dam of God’s love has burst open and it has flooded your heart and overflowing the banks of your heart. This overflowing **agape** love has taken possession of you and has kindled in you love for God and love for

one another. This flame of love that has been kindled in you will never go out. The fuel this love needs to keep burning brightly is being continuously and abundantly supplied.

Before I make my point, consider the following illustration : since some of you are not parents as yet, I want you to think of yourself as a parent. As a parent, you go to the grocery, buy foodstuffs, come home and lovingly prepare a meal for your child. You call your child to the table and set the food before him / her. But your child begins to throw a tantrum and adamantly refuse to eat. Any responsible parent would describe that as inexcusable rebellion and proceed to deal with it.

Now here is the point : God has abundantly supplied to you the **agape** love you need to love one another. God has provided for you the maximum ability and power to use this **agape** love to love one another. If you are refusing to love one another with **agape** love, is that excusable rebellion or inexcusable rebellion? What will be God's response here? If you are a Christian, *Heb.12:4-11* says God will discipline you. But *vs.8* warns that if you are without discipline, of which all God's children have become partakers, then you are not a child of God.

### **E). A Brief Description of Agape.**

The questions ought to arise in your minds : what exactly is **agape** love? What does **agape** love look like? The answers to these questions are very extensive. Today all I will do is briefly survey what the Bible says about **agape** love. Let us begin with *1Cor.13:4-8a*. (**read**). Firstly, "Love is patient", that is, love is long-tempered. Love does not retaliate nor does it seek revenge. Secondly, "love is kind." The word "**kind**" conveys the idea of pleasant and comfortable. It is the quality that causes you to render gracious well-disposed service to others. Thirdly, "love is not jealous", that is, does not boil over with jealousy. Jealousy leads to rivalry and strife. A love that is not jealous wants to see others achieve, helps them to achieve and celebrates with them when they achieve.

Fourthly, “love does not brag.” The word “**brag**” describes a self-centered person with an inordinate desire to call attention to himself. True love is more impressed with its own unworthiness than with its merit. Fifthly, “love is not arrogant.” Love is not inflated with its own importance or love does not cherish inflated ideas about its own importance. Love builds. Arrogance blows up the building. Sixthly, “love does not act unbecomingly”, that is, love does not behave shamefully or disgracefully towards others. Seventh, “love does not seek its own”, that is, love is not preoccupied with the interests of self.

Eighth, “love is not provoked”, that is, love is not easily aroused to anger. Ninth, “love does not take into account a wrong suffered.” The point here is that love does not keep a record of wrongs; love does not hold grudges; love does not keep written and / or mental diaries of the wrongs it had to suffer. Such behavior develops in you a bitter spirit and causes you to harbor bitterness in your heart towards others. Tenth, “love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices in truth.” It is not a delight nor a pleasure for love when others suffer evil, wrongdoing, or injustice. Love does not gloat when bad things happen to others. On the other hand love rejoices or joyfully celebrates when truth is established.

Lastly, “love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Note the four-fold repetition of “all things”. “**All things**” convey the absence of limits in love. The verb “**bears**” tells us that love puts up with a limitless load of burdens, covering them with a cloak of love. “**Believes**” and “**hopes**” tell us that loves never loses faith and never exhausts hope. A classic example here is the father in the parable of the prodigal son. The verb “**endures**” tells us that **agape** love is marked by perseverance. Love perseveres when things are good and when things are bad. Paul’s closing words are, “**Love never fails**”, that is, love does not fall apart. Love does not collapse in defeat. Love does not give up and walk away. The wise man said, “Many rivers cannot quench love.” (*S of S. 8:7*).

Next, I want you to note that **agape** love is a growing love. The reality is that you will never love one another with a perfect love. Your love for one another will also vary. You will always love some more than others. But the more important reality is that **agape** love is a growing love. Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers, “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 even greater.” (*2Thess.1:3*). Spiritual growth in Christ means your love for one another will grow. Each day your love for one another will be growing towards perfection. And one day that perfection will be achieved. On that day you will also be perfect in Christ and standing in His glorious presence.

**Agape** love is love without hypocrisy. (*Rom.12:9*). **Agape** love also makes you do many unusual things. At the top of this list of unusual things is that you will love even your enemies. Jesus command is, “love your enemies.” (*Matt.5:44*). I believe if you are obeying Christ and loving and praying for your enemy, you will be able to obey the rest of the demands that the love of God places upon you.

### **F). A Practical Love.**

**Agape** love is a practical love. The apostle John wrote, “let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.” (*1Jn.3:18*). **Agape** love is not feeling oriented. **Agape** love is not led by your feelings. **Agape** love is action oriented. **Agape** love does the right things and in the doing the right things negative or ungodly feelings are corrected and brought in line with the requirements found in God’s word. Jesus said, “love your enemies.” How must you do this? *Rom.12:20* says, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink.” In *Matt.5:44* Jesus said you must pray for your enemies. Other practical illustrations of how **agape** love works is found in *1Jn.3:17; Jas.2:14-17*.

The question I want to answer now is : How must this **agape** love manifest itself in our church? Firstly, we would be earnestly praying that we would love one another. Paul's inspired prayer in *1Thess.3:12* is, "may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another." (*1Thess.3:12*). Note the verb "**abound**". It also means "**to overflow**". It is the Greek verb *perisseuo*. This is the same verb that is used in *Eph.3:20* to describe God. But in describing God Paul used this verb in a superlative form. It is the Greek word *huperekperissou*. It means : super abundantly; far more abundantly beyond; greatly exceeding all boundaries. This Greek word is the highest form of comparison imaginable. The point is this : the God who greatly and exceedingly overflows all boundaries wants you to overflow in your love for one another. He has also given to you that overflowing love that you will need to love one another.

There is another aspect to Paul's prayer. In *Phil.1:9* Paul wrote, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." Note the verb "**abound**". It is the same verb and can be literally translated "**continuously abound.**" "More and more" emphasizes that there must be unremitting progress in your love continuously abounding. The "real knowledge" you need is found in God's word. Your love must be guided by a proper understanding of the principles found in God's word. "**Discernment**" refers to the moral and spiritual perception you need to apply the principles found in God's word.

Did God answer Paul's inspired prayer? Yes! *2Thess.1:3* says, "the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater." Paul's inspired prayer for the Thessalonian and Philippian believers is his inspired prayer for you. Paul's inspired prayer for the Thessalonian and Philippian believers is a prayer that must be on your lips for yourself and for every Christian in this church. It is a prayer that God will most certainly answer because it is a prayer that is according to His will. And we learned from *1Jn.5:14*, "This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us." Let me add that we also need to pray

that God's majestic and glorious power would empower us with maximum power to love one another. (*Col.1:11*).

Are you praying Paul's inspired prayers for yourself and for the church? Can it be said of you as it was said about the Colossians that you love all the saints? Can it be said that you are abounding more and more in your love for the saints? In other words, can it be said of you that your love for the saints is a growing overflowing love?

Secondly, *1Thess.5:11* says, "encourage one another and build up one another just as you are also doing." The Thessalonians loved one another. And because they loved one another they were encouraging one another and building up one another. Both verbs are present tenses. They tell us that the Thessalonian believers were already involved in encouraging one another and building up one another. Paul is commanding them to continue in this good work without wavering, without stopping. The verb "**encourage**" also means to exhort, to appeal to, to beseech, to urge. Do you encourage the brethren? Do you encourage them to love one another?

The verb "**build**" also means "**to edify**". *1Cor.8:1* says, "love edifies." Love builds up others. Paul said our ministry is for building up one another, not destroying. (*2Cor.10:8*). Our ministry is for building up one another, not tearing down. (*2Cor.13:10*). In *1Cor.14:12* Paul said we must be continuously zealous to abound for the edification of the church. There is that verb "**abound**" again. *Vs.26* says, "Let all things be done for the edification of the church."

We build up others by our words. *Eph.4:29* says, "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." *Acts 20:32* says it is the word of God that builds you up. Therefore, when we speak, we must speak as those whose hearts and minds are rooted in God's word. We must speak as those whose hearts and minds are rich in the knowledge of God's word. (*Col.3:16*).

If we love one another we would pray for one another; we would encourage one another; we would build up one another. If we love one another we would build fellowship with one another. (*Acts 2:42; 1Jn.1:7*). If we love one another we would be genuinely concerned for one another's welfare. (*Phil.2:20*). If we love the brethren we would see all of them as equally important. (*Phil.2:3*). If we love one another we would strengthen the hands that are weak. (*Heb.12:12*). If we love one another we would encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, and be patient with everyone. (*1Thess.5:14*). If we love one another we would restore with gentleness those who have fallen or straying. (*Gal.6:1*). If we love one another we would bear one another's burdens. (*Gal.6:2*).

If you love one another you would not shy away from your negative responsibilities to admonish, to reprove, to rebuke, to warn, to exhort. (*1Thess.5:14; Rom.15:14; 2Tim.4:2*). You would do so with great patience and gentleness. (*2Tim.2:25; 4:2*). And when it is necessary you would reprove with severity. (*Tit.1:13*). If we love one another we would receive such necessary dealings with humility. In *Psa.141:5* the psalmist prayed, "Let the righteous smite me in kindness and reprove me; It is oil upon my head; Do not let my head refuse it."

*Prov.9:8* says, "Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; Reprove a wise man and he will love you." *Prov.19:25* says, "reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge." *Prov.25:12* says, "Like an earring of gold and an ornament of fine gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear." *Prov.27:5-6* says, "Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

The psalmist said, "I greatly rejoiced when they said to me, "Let us go up to the house of the Lord"." (*Psa.122:1*). Is it your great joy to be here today, to be among your brothers and sister in Christ, to join with them in expressing love and worship to Christ, our elder Brother, who loved us and gave Himself for us?

One final point as I close. Christ loves you. Do you love Christ? Christ loves His church. Do you love Christ's church. Jesus said, "I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it." (*Matt.16:18*). The Lord Jesus has given to all His people the privilege to join Him in building His church. Have you joined hands with Christ in building His church? Are you building His church spiritually and morally? Are you building His church through evangelism, through reaching sinners with the gospel? Let us carefully ponder these things.