

Amazing Love

Galatians 5:22; 1 John 4:9-12

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Why is love greater than faith and hope (“And now abideth faith, hope, charity [i.e. love—GLP], these three; but the greatest of these is charity” 1 Corinthians 13:13)? Because, dear ones, once faith is fully realized by sight in heaven and once hope is fully realized by fulfillment in heaven, love for God and one for one another will continue for all eternity (never ending but always radiating like the noon day sun).

Why is love the first fruit of the Spirit that is listed (“But the fruit of the Spirit is love . . .” Galatians 5:22)? Because, beloved, love is the chief fruit that manifests the life of Christ (i.e. the DNA of the Lord Jesus) in the life of a Christian, and because love is the fountain from which all the other fruit of the Spirit flow. Where there is not the fruit of Christian love, there is no life of Christ, and where there is not the fruit of Christian love, there will be no Christian joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith (or faithfulness), meekness, or temperance. Although the fruit of love is not the means by which the sinner is declared righteous before God (contrary to the position of Rome, it is by faith alone), nevertheless that fruit of the Spirit that Jesus Christ and the apostles most often declare to characterize the one who trusts alone in Christ alone is Christian love.

I can tell you how important, how significant, and how necessary Christian love is in the life of one who is trusting alone in Christ alone for his/her eternal salvation, but I believe a quick summary from the mouth of Christ and the apostles will give the greatest impact of the supreme importance and necessity of the first fruit of the Spirit, love.

“Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt **love** the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.

And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt **love** thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” Matthew 22:36-40.

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have **love** one to another” John 13:35.

“And now abideth faith, hope, **charity** [i.e. **love**—GLP], these three; but the greatest of these is **charity** [**love**—GLP]” 1 Corinthians 13:13.

“And above all these things put on **charity** [**love**—GLP], which is the bond of perfectness” Colossians 3:14.

“We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we **love** the brethren. He that **loveth not** his brother abideth in death” 1 John 3:14.

“Beloved, let us **love** one another: for **love** is of God; and every one that **loveth** is born of God, and knoweth God. He that **loveth not** knoweth not God; for God is **love**” 1 John 4:7-8.

With such scriptural testimony concerning the supreme importance and necessity of Christian love, let us not simply wade in Christian love (merely getting our feet wet), but rather plunge ourselves into the depths of the ocean of Christian love. In the sermon today, we would seek to know the nature of this love that is identified as the first fruit of the Spirit. The nature of that love may be summarized in the following points: (1) Christian Love Is Of Divine Origin; (2) Christian Love Is Sacrificially Giving; and (3) Christian Love Is Powerful.

I. Christian Love Is Of Divine Origin.

A. Before diving into the nature of Christian love, let us observe some preliminary remarks that prepare us for the delights of such a treasure.

1. As we begin with our text in Galatians 5:22, we are confronted with the word, “but”, which intends to highlight the contrast between the “works of the flesh” just listed (in Galatians 5:10-21) and the “fruit of the Spirit” (in Galatians 5:22-23). The Christian is not to have hanging from his/her branch the works of the flesh (which is the badge of bondage that was part of our old life in Adam), BUT is rather to having

hanging from his/her branch the fruit of the Spirit (which is a badge of freedom that is part of our new life in Christ).

a. Who, having been delivered from the cruel, torturous bondage of one of the death camps of WWII or one of the POW camps at the “Hanoi Hilton” in Viet Nam, would delight to put on the tattered, torn, clothing of that cruel slave camp once again? But that is what we do, dear ones, when we put on the works of the flesh that were once a token of our bondage to Satan, sin, and death. Beloved, the fruit of the Spirit (particularly Christian love) is the royal robe of our freedom and exaltation as the children of God. In the life of the Christian, there should be no question as to which garment we delight to wear (even when we fall into sin, the stinking, foul, torn garment of our captivity makes us sick, but the beautiful robe of the fruit of the Spirit fills our heart with delight and joy). Never forget the cruel bondage of the works of the flesh (the death camp of the devil), so that you delight in with all your heart the freedom of the fruit of the Spirit.

2. The truth that this fruit is declared to be “of the Spirit”, tells us that this fruit is not natural to man, but is supernaturally implanted and grown by the Holy Spirit in the life of all who trust alone in Christ alone as their justifying righteousness before God. These fruit of the Spirit are not personality traits or temperaments with which we are born or which are developed by the mere efforts and strong determination of natural man. The fruit of the Spirit is supernatural fruit for which the Lord receives all of the glory, but He works within the Christian both to will and to do His good pleasure (so that we are commanded to exercise ourselves to godliness according to 1 Timothy 4:7, rather than being negligent, lazy, forgetful, or procrastinating).

3. There were a number of Greek words that were used in ancient Greek literature for various facets of love, but it was the most obscure, unused Greek word (*agape*) that God chose to use as the expression of God’s love for guilty, condemned, unworthy sinners chosen

in Christ Jesus before the world began and the chief expression of Christian love that is to be shown for one another. When the Apostle Paul states, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love”, he uses this same transformed Greek word for Christian love, *agape*. What is the nature of this particularly distinctive Christian love (that is known as *agape* love)?

B. The nature of Christian love: **Christian Love (*Agape*) Is Of Divine Origin.**

1. It is specifically this word (*agape*) that is chosen by God Himself to represent the love that is distinctive to His nature (1 John 4:7-8). And because it is distinctive to God’s very nature, this love (*agape*) is like God Himself, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

2. From all eternity, this *agape* love was manifested between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity for one another (John 17:26). From all eternity, this *agape* love was exercised towards us (even before the world was created) for whom Christ was appointed to die (Jeremiah 31:3; Revelation 13:8).

a. Dear ones, it is one thing for a mother to say to her child, “I have loved you all of your life, even from when you were in my womb.” And it is one thing for a husband to say to his wife, “I have loved you from the time I first laid eyes upon you.” But it is absolutely amazing (and beyond our full comprehension) to contemplate that God has loved us, His dear adopted children, from all eternity. He, who knew us before ever He created us, has loved us with an everlasting love. There has never been a moment in time or in eternity that God did not love us with an infinite, eternal, and unchangeable love.

b. With all of the universe to create, the countless stars, the microscopic organisms, with an infallible knowledge of all the motions, movements, and course of all creatures and all events of history, yet God foreknew and loved us (undeserving sinners that deserved His everlasting wrath) with His everlasting love—not nameless,

faceless sinners, but sinners by name and face—who were then chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began (Ephesians 1:4). Note the order. God first loved and then chose us in Christ Jesus. God did not love those whom He first chose, but chose those whom He first loved (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). *Agape* Love finds its origin in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Dost thou know, O saint, how much the Holy Spirit loves thee? Canst thou measure the love of the Spirit? Dost thou know how great is the affection of His soul towards thee? Go, measure heaven with thy span; go, weigh the mountains in scales; go, take the ocean's water, and tell each drop; go, count the sand upon the sea's wide shore; and when thou hast accomplished this, thou may'st tell how much He loveth thee! He has loved thee long, He has loved thee well; He loved thee ever, and He still shall love thee; surely He is the person to comfort thee, because He loves. (C. H. Spurgeon)

3. God's love for you, dear wrestling, striving Christian, is immeasurable and unchangeable because He loves you in His only begotten Son. How much does the Father love His sinless Son? So He loves you, His adopted son/daughter who trusts alone in Christ alone as your Redeemer and Savior. Dear ones, there is nothing lovely about us by nature. We are by nature fallen, depraved, corrupt, and made ugly beyond comprehension in the sight of God. God's love for us, therefore, comes not from us (who knows and ever knew the worst about us), but God's love for us comes from His own nature and from His love for His only begotten Son through whom the Father ever sees us. That, dear ones, is the divine origin of love, and why all boasting in ourselves is vain and contemptible in God's sight. Our boasting is now and for all eternity in Christ, the cross, and the love of God that sent Him there.

II. The Nature of Love: **Christian Love (*Agape*) Is Sacrificially Giving.**

A. What moved God to give up His only Begotten Son to bear His righteous wrath against our sin? His love (*agape*) for us (1 John 4:9-10). What moved Christ to willingly go to the cross to bear our everlasting

shame and condemnation? His love (*agape*) for us (Galatians 2:20; Ephesians 5:2). God's love was manifested by His sacrificing His sinless and perfect only begotten Son for blasphemers, for idolaters, for covenant-breakers, for Sabbath-breakers, for rebellious ones, for haters of God and man, for immoral people in thought, word, and deed, for robbers of God and His glory, for liars and deceivers, for those who lust after what is not ours, and for the chief of sinners (Romans 8:32). And Jesus gave His life for the ungodly who would come to trust in Him. Why? For the joy that was set before Him in bringing His people from the death camp of the works of the flesh into the freedom of the fruit of the Spirit (Hebrews 12:2).

B. In like manner, I ask, what moves the Christian, who has been set free from the condemnation and death camp of sin, to worship the Lord from a joyful heart, to obey the good commandments of God, to cling to the promises of Christ, to defend that truth which is esteemed least in the sight of men, to flee fornication and the lusts of the flesh, and to persevere with patience the trials, afflictions, persecutions, pains, and hardships (in the fiery furnace heated seven times as hot as normal)? It is our love (*agape* love) for God, which willingly sacrifices all to love God and walk in loving obedience to Christ's commandments. The sacrificial love of God begets a sacrificial love in the heart of every true Christian. We love, because He first loved us and sacrificed His Son for us.

1. Obedience, orthodoxy, and suffering for the Cause of Christ that does not spring from love for Christ is absolutely worthless (1 Corinthians 13:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:1; Revelation 2:2-5). In fact, all that we do in the name of Christ or for others will be a great burden to us without the fruit of the Spirit of *agape* love (1 John 5:3). It is love for God and for our neighbor that transforms our service from a heart of outwardly going through the mere motions to a heart of delight and joy in serving God and others (Ephesians 5:25). When is our heart filled with

the most joy as Christians? When our hearts are filled with serving ourselves, delighting in ourselves? Is that not vanity and emptiness? I dare say that the greatest joy for the Christian comes from serving Christ and serving others. Sacrificial love transforms duties into delights, and burdens into pleasures.

2. Christian love is manifested in taking the towel and the wash basin and going about as a servant, washing the feet of the brethren. Instead of being upset that I was not served as I thought I should be served, Christian love is not easily offended and is so interested and delighted in serving others that the lack that I feel in being served is swallowed up by the busyness of serving others. And as we make it our business to serve our wives (husbands), or to serve your husbands (wives), or to serve your parents (children), or to serve one another in the church, the Lord will use that example of Christian love to move others to sacrificial giving (charity from the Latin, *caritas*). Sacrificial love begets sacrificial love.

C. Love is the very motivation for our obedience to Christ in whatever He has commanded. For Christian love rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth (1 Corinthians 13:6). Christian love is a holy love. There is no greater joy in Christian love than in sacrificially obeying God and in sacrificially serving the brethren. We love Him, because He first loved us, and therefore we give ourselves as living sacrifices to Him. We love Him, because He first loved us, and therefore we lay ourselves, our gifts, our resources, our dreams, and our obedience on the altar. We love Him, because He first loved us, and therefore we deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him into the fiery furnace if need be. Dear ones, this love of and for Christ will lead the Christian to do astonishing things (like loving God's approval more than man's approval, as in John 12:43; like loving Christ more than house, property, security, dreams, family and friends, as in Luke 18:28-30; like loving Christ more than life itself, as in

Revelation 12:11). We have nothing about which to boast or for which to take credit, for this *agape* love of God was shed abroad in our hearts by God's Spirit (Romans 5:5). Dear ones, one important evidence that assures our hearts that we are indeed Christians is our sacrificial love (*agape*) for the brethren (1 John 3:16-18). As George Gillespie noted, "It is true love when we love the saints as saints . . . I mean, it is Christ Jesus himself whom we love in his saints" (*Works*, 2:115). We love our Christian brethren not for what they do for us, but we love them for Christ who abides in them (even with their failures, offenses, and need for further sanctification in doctrine and life—just as we pray that we are likewise loved for Christ within us and not for the level of our sanctification).

III. Christian Love (*Agape*) Is Powerful.

A. Christian love is not wimpy or powerless. Christian love is not a mere emotion or feeling. Christian love is not mere well-wishing. Christian love is the powerful love of Christ that was willing to lay down His own life for those He loved from all eternity, in order to redeem them from the curse of the Law and from bondage to sin, in order to forgive them, justify them, adopt them, and conform them into His own image. Remove the love of Christ from the gospel, and you have no gospel. The gospel then becomes impotent and powerless to save, because the power of love is not simply wishing man well, but in actually giving and sending a Redeemer and Savior, and in actually giving the Spirit to recreate and implant within the heart of man faith to trust Christ and love (with every other fruit) to obey Christ.

B. It is the everlasting, unchangeable love of God for us, God's beloved children through faith in Christ, that will powerfully see the purposes of God realized in our lives. And it is that love of Christ implanted in our lives (weak and frail as we are, falling and stumbling as

we do throughout the week) that God will use to work perseverance in us. As the powerful love of God for us begets and grows a powerful love for God within us, we will count all things loss to love Christ, to deny ourselves, to take up our cross, and to follow Him (wherever He leads us).

1. That love of Christ will powerfully sustain us in the most difficult trials (Song of Solomon 8:7; Romans 8:35-39). “All these things” have only made the saints cling the more closely to their Lord, instead of separating them from him. Their persecutors thought they were triumphing over them, but it was the martyrs who were the victors all the while.

2. That love of Christ will powerfully constrain us to follow Him and to obey Him (2 Corinthians 5:14).

The undeserved love of God is beautifully illustrated for us in the biblical account of Hosea and Gomer (Hosea 1:2; Hosea 3:1-3). That is the power of God’s love. Will not such love melt the coldest heart, and crush the hardest heart? Will not such love purify the chief of sinners? Yes, we are all Gomers in the way we have treated Christ, offended His righteousness and His love, but if you hear the message of Christ’s redeeming love today, come as a sinner and pleading no worthiness on your part at all, but rather falling upon the love of Christ and the righteousness of Christ alone, beating your chest and crying out to Him, “Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner”. The Lord promises you will walk away today, forgiven and declared righteous by the powerful love of Jesus Christ.

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