

The Household of God (Contd)

How to Deepen Your Love for People

What is a Church? Part 11

1 John 4:7-8, 5:1-2

Summary: Deepen your love for one another by realizing love is from God (should be eagerly desired), and by loving God. Loving God increases love for His people because 1) Your affections for Him spill onto those He loves, 2) You will delight in those who honor Him, 3) You will seek the grace He gives through His people, 4) When God is the source of your joy, giving amplifies instead of threatens your joy.

1 John 4:7,8 Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1 John 5:1-2 ... everyone who loves the parent also loves his child. ² This is how we know that we love God's children when we love God and obey His commands.

Introduction

This lesson will conclude this series on what a church is supposed to be. We have examined the five main metaphors God gave us for what He expects the Church to be, and in the last lesson I introduced the fifth one – the church as the household (family) of God. As God's family we are to relate to God as Father (honoring Him through submission to and gratitude for His plan), asking for grace from Him, and trusting Him to love us as a father. And we must relate to one another with unity (having the same attitude, goal, and purpose) so our praise will be unified, and we must relate to one another with love – reconciled relationship and ever-deepening fondness and affection for one another.

I think this is an area where the church in our day has really struggled. There are millions of people who go to church every Sunday and who have no sense of belonging to a family – no familial love with anyone there. There are millions who do not really have anyone in the church who is a brother or sister to them – who would walk with them through thick and thin and who really knows them and watches out for them and would do anything for them. Someone they could call day or night with a crisis.

If your only relationship with someone is that you sit in the same auditorium with them during the sermon and the singing time, there are two kinds of relationships you can have with that person: stranger or acquaintance. But I can assure you that the Bible does not use the imagery of family love – brothers and sisters and parents and children – to describe the acquaintances. We have to find a way to make this church move beyond that.

I don't know if I could possibly say anything to overstate how important this issue of love is. The statements in Scripture about love are so colossal and huge and sweeping and comprehensive in their breadth and scope it is just amazing. What statement could ever be made about any topic that is bigger than this statement: "God is love"? That is huge! Or how about Jesus saying all the Law and the Prophets hang on the one command: Love God? That is Jesus' summary of the Old

Testament. When Jesus read the Old Testament His conclusion is, “All that book really ever talks about is love. It is just a big, giant book about love.” In Matthew 25 Jesus described Judgment Day in very simple terms: Those who loved Christians will go to heaven and those who did not will go to hell. 1 Corinthians 13 says if you give everything you have to feed the poor and die as a martyr but do not have love it is all worthless. James said if you do not love the brother in need your faith is dead and you are lost. Paul said love is the greatest of all virtues. Love is a one-word summary of everything we are about at this church, which is why we chose the name Agape, which is the Greek word for love.

We left off last time asking the question of how to become more loving. We could easily do an entire series on this question of how to increase your love. In fact, I have done that – twice. One is called “How to be more loving” and the other is called “The Greatest Commandment.” I strongly urge you to get those two series and really study this subject of love. I don’t know if they are on TreasuringGod.com yet. If not, they are the next two we will put up so you can have them for free.

And another study from the past that is also crucial is the Forgiveness and Reconciliation study. Jesus made reconciliation of strained relationships as urgent a priority as it can be – even above worship! The study I did on that is also available – you can listen to the sermons, and it is also in book form. The book is called “Forgiveness and Reconciliation” and it explains from Scripture how to forgive and how to reconcile a relationship. It is also available free on TreasuringGod.com on the articles page.

I am not going to take the time now to review anything from those studies. This study is new material that is not in any of those studies.

The Command: Love one another

7 Dear friends, let us love one another¹

You give basic love to unbelievers – meet their needs, show compassion and mercy, pray for them, give to them, etc. But for our family in the church there is a much greater love. We have deep affection and a fondness and a warmth in our heart toward even the most unlovely people among us, that goes way beyond the way unbelievers feel about their friends and family. So, what can we learn from this text about how to do that in greater measure? The first step is to realize the simple truth of verse seven.

Realize Love’s Source

¹ The command is for Christians to love one another. This is talking about the family love we have for one another in the Church. That’s always the emphasis. But please don’t take that to mean we have no responsibility to love unbelievers.

Galatians 6:10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, we must work for the good of all, especially for those who belong to the household of faith. Don’t let the “especially” part make you ignore the first part. We are to work of the good of all men. Jesus said if you love only your brother how is that different from what unbelievers do?

Luke 6:27-35 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. ... ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ...³² "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

Those are strong words. We are not just to love one another. It’s crucial that we love enemies and people who are striking us on the cheek and persecuting us and hating us and taking things from us and who are ungrateful and wicked. So don’t let this emphasis on loving one another in the church make you think loving unbelievers isn’t important. It really is

7 Dear friends, let us love one another because love is from² God³

Love is from God. One of the biggest hindrances that keeps me from loving people as I should is thinking that love is from me. When you love someone, that love did not come from you; it came from God.

So John's logic is simple – if something is from God you should want it. Psalm 36:8 speaks of God's river of delights. When I see some dried up soul in need of love, if I position myself in between God and that person, that river of delights from the heart of God will wash right through me onto this person. And that makes loving people a delightful experience.⁴ If you think your love comes from you, you will not appreciate the experience of what is happening when you love. But if you are aware that it is coming from God you will actually be undergoing a personal encounter with God.⁵

And beyond that, it makes you realize the value of your love. Some people are reluctant to be involved in ministry to others because of a sense of inferiority or inadequacy. They think, "What I have to offer is not worth anything." But the question is not whether what you have to offer is worthwhile. The question is whether what God has to offer through you is worthwhile. If love comes from me, it is probably not something people need. But when I realize that my love is from God, I will realize how much people need it. So just realizing that love is from God will help us love people.

Then John goes on to describe the absolutely indivisible unity between your relationship with God and love for one another.

Love People by Loving God

7 ... love is from God, and everyone who loves has been⁶ born of God and knows God. 8

2 The word translated "from" is the Greek preposition *ek*. John loves that little word. He used it 34 times just in 1 John. And when John uses that word and talks about being from God or being from the world or from the devil, it points to more than just origin. If someone is from the devil that doesn't mean that person originated with Satan. It means they are on Satan's side. They are sanctioned by him, cooperating with him, allied with him, in step with him, led by him, etc. So what v.7 is saying is love for believers is identified with God. It characterizes what God is doing, so that anyone who has it is on God's side, is sanctioned by God, approved by God, in step with God, allied with God, led by God, etc.

3 Literally it says "the love is from God (*ho agapon ek tou theou*). The definite article is there to specify that he's talking in particular about the love for one another that he just mentioned. So he's saying, "Let us love one another because that kind of love is from God."

4 Imagine God sent us a prophet who was standing right here with us this morning, and the prophet got up and started handing out free tickets for a 20 minute session where you could walk through that door and on the other side of the door was the favorable presence of Almighty God. So by grabbing one of these tickets you could have a personal encounter with the Creator where you actually, literally experienced His presence. Would you take a ticket? Experiencing the love of God in such a deep way that it flows through you to another person is a direct, personal experience of God. It's not like an experience of God. It is an experience of God.

5 Someone may ask, "What if I love someone with the love of God but just don't realize it? If I see someone in need, isn't it enough that I have compassion on that person and show kindness to that person – even if it doesn't occur to me at the time that it is the love of God that is actually flowing through me? Why do I have to take the time to think about that?" Here's why – it's because your interactions with God the interactions of a *personal* relationship. It is not just the carrying out of religious duty. God is a person with whom you are cultivating a love relationship. And you cannot deepen a love relationship with someone if you ignore that person during the times of personal interaction.

Suppose you are trying to build a friendship with another person. But every time you have the opportunity to experience that person directly - whenever you are in the same room with your friend you never look at him, never listen to him, don't have any awareness that he is even there, you are not going to build much of a friendship that way. You don't deepen your love for God by doing things for Him while your back is turned to Him. You deepen your love for Him by experiencing Him and enjoying that experience.

This is not to say showing love apart from conscious awareness of what you are doing is a bad thing. It is not. It is a wonderfully good thing. And it does a lot of good – a whole lot of good. It's just that it does *more* good when you are aware of what is going on, because on top of all the other good that is being accomplished, you also have the good of deepening your relationship with God.

If you are trying to teach someone to appreciate aspirin, but whenever you give it to him you crush it up and mix it into his food so he doesn't even know he's taking it, then when his headache goes away he's not going to attribute it to the work of the aspirin.

6 In English it sounds like a simple past tense. You should do this thing, because everyone who does that thing has been born of God. Verses like that always strike me as sounding odd. He's telling me to do something today because if I do that thing today then something will have happened in the past. As though what I did today could somehow determine what already happened in the past. I read that and think, "The past is past. Either I was born of God and became a true Christian in the past or I did not – whether that took place or not is not going to change based on whether I make an effort to love now." Most commentators explain this by suggesting that it's a test. So John is really saying, "Love one another, because if you do it will *verify* that you have been born of God." So the point John is making is, "*Try* to love one another. If you succeed, that proves you are genuinely saved. If you fail, that shows that you are lost." I don't think that interpretation is correct. For one thing, it doesn't say that. I don't think John is saying, "Try it and see if you fail." What he's saying is, "Do it."

So what are we to make of this past tense? First we need to realize that it's not just a simple past tense. It's a perfect tense, and the Greek perfect tense is not the same as the English perfect tense. The Greek perfect points to a continuing state of affairs that is the result of an action in the past. And sometimes it's that past action that is emphasized, (If a Greek person said, "My friend was in an accident that was so severe that he died instantly," and he used the perfect tense for the word "died," the emphasis would be on the action of him dying – not so much the fact that he continues to be dead.) and other times it's the continuing results that are emphasized. If a Greek person said, "The reason I'm calling you right now is because last week I discovered you have

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.⁷

You cannot separate love for God's people on the one hand, with life from God and personal knowledge of God on the other. It is very simple: loving God's people is a function of loving God. And no one can claim to truly love people unless their love for people rises out of love for God.

1 John 5:1-2 ... everyone who loves the parent also loves his child. ² This is how we know that we love God's children when we love God and obey His commands.

The world can produce feelings and actions that approximate Christian love in some wonderful and amazing ways, but for something to qualify as true love in the most genuine sense, it has to be a product of love for God.

Mt.10:42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

Love them because God loves them

I have noticed that when some couple becomes especially dear to Tracy and me, there is automatically a deep affection in our hearts for their children. We love their children just because we love them. When you love someone – when you are kind or affectionate or you offer some self-sacrificial service, or you even lay down your life and die for that person, it is not really love unless you are doing it as an expression of your love for God.

And I don't wait for their children to become adults before I start loving them. I love them when they are without any knowledge or understanding at all. I love them before they have any ability to do anything for me at all. When they are first born they are entirely self-centered and care nothing about me, yet they are precious to me.

Love God's children that way. If someone is mixed up in his doctrine, confused in the way he lives the Christian life, weak in faith, weighed down by sin, faltering in his effort to forsake the world, selfish, unloving toward you, don't despise them for being babies.

Even if it is necessary to rebuke them and admonish them, do that, but do it in the same way you might take a moment to teach something to a dear friend's little toddler – out of tender love and earnest desire for that little one's growth and development.

Acts 20:28 Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.

something against me," and he used the perfect tense for the word "discovered," then the emphasis would be on the continuing results. The main issue isn't so much the moment when I discovered this so much as the ongoing current state of affairs in which I know this information. And I think it makes the best sense in a context like this to take it as what they call a resultative perfect (a perfect that emphasizes the continuing result).

⁷ The implication of what he is saying is that only Christians are capable of love. If everyone who loves experiences God as his Father, that means no unbelievers can ever love. And if that's true then love must be something other than what unbelievers have. So what is true love? What is this love that only Christians have? The world has affection. They have kindness. There are many non-Christians who have loyalty and fidelity. Unbelievers frequently devote themselves to helping the poor and oppressed. They have commitment, self-sacrificial service – even to the point of giving one's life for another. Liviu Librescu gave his life last Monday (April 16, 2007) to save the students in his classroom when he held the door shut to keep the gunman out while his students escaped out the windows. (I don't know if Librescu was a Christian or not, but I do know that many non-Christians throughout history have laid down their lives for the sake of others.) How can anyone say that isn't a loving act? Especially considering Jesus' words in **John 15:13 No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends.** So how can John come along and say that only Christians are capable of love? The answer is in 1 Jn.5:1,2. You don't truly love a person unless you love that person as an expression of your love for God. Notice also that John connects love with keeping God's commands. You know you love the brothers when you love God and keep His commands. His commands are all about doing what is in the highest interests of people to do what is best for them – to give them something valuable. And what is in their highest interests is to receive more of God's grace. That's the only thing you can give that is of any real value. So the central core of love is the bringing of people into God's presence and the delivery of His grace to them. Unbelievers can't do that. They have neither the desire nor the ability to bring about anyone's greatest good. There is only one source of life, and by rejecting that source of life, by refusing to drink of the only true fountain of living water, they in so doing deprive those around them of it, because they will not lead people to a spring they themselves reject. And that is not loving no matter how many poor people they feed or how many lives they temporarily save. When you seek to love one another, make sure your love for people is a constant bringing of them to God. That is love. Don't ever let your love disintegrate into the mere affection that the world has for the objects of their worldly love. Never deal with your family and friends and acquaintances in the way the world deals with theirs – enjoying their company, enjoying a few laughs, some companionship – but not leading them into God's presence or delivering to them His grace. The more we love God the more we will value His grace above all, and when His love is, in our minds, the highest, most precious treasure, loving people, for us, will always mean desiring nothing more than the joy of seeing them step closer to God

The preciousness of the Church to Christ should be the measure of the preciousness of the Church to you – if you love Him. And the measure of the preciousness of the Church to Christ is the price He paid for her. He shed His blood to purchase her for Himself.

Imagine there was an outbreak of a deadly, flesh-eating virus like Ebola. And imagine a scenario where your dearest and closest friend had to pass through a room that was contaminated in order to save the life of his only son, who was immune from the virus but who needed to be rescued from some other danger. So your dear friend exposes himself and rescues his son. And as your friend lay dying in agony while the virus devours his very organs, he lifts the child to you and says with his very last breath, “Take care of my boy.” Would that move your heart? The more love you had for that man, the more moved you would be to love that child for whom he died.

Oh how great should be our love for those Jesus bought with His own, precious blood! Let us never despise His blood by taking one of His children lightly. May we never trample the precious blood of our Redeemer by being slack in our love for those that blood was spilled to purchase. When a needy brother in Christ comes to me with a need that I can meet, and my heart is not moved with compassion for him, how can the love of Christ be in me? That person was worth Christ’s blood but he is not worth my time? To the Lord Jesus he was worth laying aside His eternal glory, but to me he is not worth laying aside a few dollars? To Jesus he was worth enduring the infinite wrath of the Father for sin, but to me he is not worth the energy and effort it would take to enter into his struggle with him and to pray earnestly with him and to think of ways to encourage him from God’s Word? To the Father his soul was worth sacrificing His beloved Son; but to me he is not worth sacrificing an afternoon? When will we see the Church as that which He bought with His own blood?

In that same verse Paul mentions the many tears he shed for the people he was talking to. Where are our tears? Take a moment and look around. Take a quick look around the room until you have glanced at every single person in the room. Now let me ask you this - what would be different in your ministry here at Agape if you had shed a great number of tears for those people you just looked at?

Love them because they love God

Loving God and loving His people are connected because of how much God loves His people. They are also connected because God’s people honor Him. And if you love God, you will be delighted to be around people who honor Him.

That is Paul’s point in Romans 14 where he teaches us how to love each other in the midst of our differences.

Ro.14:6 He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Realize that Christians are doing what they are doing to honor the true, living God. If you love God that fact will thrill you, because you so desire to see God honored. When you see a Baptist, who holds firmly to water baptism because he is convinced God commanded it, it should thrill your heart that the Lord should be obeyed and honored that way. When you see a Presbyterian, even if you are distressed over their infant baptism, let it thrill your heart to see people who are eager to commit their children to God and who desire the benefits of His covenant and grace for their little ones! When you see a Charismatic, even if you question their emphasis on the miraculous over the providential and what may be faulty understandings of the definition and purpose of miracles, let it thrill your heart that they are zealous to serve the Lord Jesus in the

ways they believe His power is most wonderfully exhibited! When you see an Arminian, toiling and laboring and working hard for Christ's name, even if you are concerned about his understanding of God's sovereignty, let it thrill your heart to see Christ earnestly served. And when you see a Calvinist, even if you're concerned about his understanding of human responsibility, let it thrill your heart to see Jesus honored by one who stakes his whole life on the truth of His absolute sovereignty!

Love them because it brings you grace

Another reason why loving God and loving His people are so inextricably connected is because God dispenses His grace through His people. (1 Pe.4:10, Mt.24:45) If you truly love God, you will be thrilled to be around any dispenser of His grace.

Acts 11:23 When Barnabas arrived [in Antioch] and saw the grace of God, he was glad

Psalm 101:6 My eyes will be on the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me; he whose walk is blameless will minister to me.

I love the people of God because it is mainly through them that I receive God's grace. If you do not love the people of God, and if you do not have a powerful desire to be with them, you are despising the grace of God. It is a failure to love God because it is a failure to desire His grace. If God's children reflect God's nature, how can we claim to love God and not desire to be around the greatest reflectors of His nature that exist in this world? The degree of our delight in our brothers and sisters is the measure of our delight in God's grace.

Psalm 15:4 [Who can dwell in God's presence?] He who despises the one rejected by the LORD, but honors those who fear the LORD,

Psalm 119:63 I am a friend to all who fear You

A godly man or woman is marked by who he or she delights in, because delighting in the righteous happens only when one highly values God's grace in his affections. I may claim to love education, but the real test of whether that's true is in how delighted I am to be around good teachers and books. If I claim to love good food I will rejoice to be invited to dinner by a good cook. The one who considers himself a lover of art will prove that when the prospect of going to an art museum brightens his face. If my claim to love God is to be proved true, my heart must leap at the thought of being around the dispensers of His grace. The world's desire for and delight in their loved ones is not real love, because it is not a desire for God. It is idolatry because it is a desire for something instead of God. For them to be indifferent about whether or not they receive grace from God is to despise God (to think little of His grace) and that is evil.

And we can take this even a step further. If I love God I will not only have a strong desire to be around You because you reflect His nature, because you honor His name, and because you dispense His grace, but also because the mere act of showing you acts of love in His name brings me even more grace.

Love them because it will increase your joy

Another text where we see the indivisible connection between loving God and love for man is when the man asked Jesus for the greatest commandment, and Jesus answered by giving Him the greatest and the second greatest.

Mt.22:36-40 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" ³⁷ He said to him, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the greatest and most important commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commandments."

Those two are so intertwined that Jesus could not just mention one of them. Let me show you how they are intertwined. The second commandment is scary. It is threatening. When I think about putting the same kind of energy into the comfort of others that I put into my own comfort, and the same effort toward their happiness and satisfaction as I put toward my own, it sounds like something that is a serious threat to my wellbeing. It sounds like what the Lord is saying is this: "Love your neighbor instead of yourself."

The Lord has created you with powerful longings and desires, and all day long you work hard to fulfill those desires. And that is not bad. It is by God's design. Adam and Eve, before the fall – before there was any sin ate food when they were hungry and laid down to rest when they were tired and got under the shade when it was hot and sought each other out when they wanted companionship or conversation or love or sex. None of that is sin; it is all by God's design. He made you with those needs and desires, and so seeking to fulfill them is not sinful.

So when He commands us to love others as we love ourselves it sounds threatening because I only have so many resources, and I barely get my needs and desires met as it is – even when I put all my resources into fulfilling my own desires. So if I divert some of my resources toward fulfilling the needs and desires of others, that much of my own will go unmet.

God gave you something for that uneasiness and fear. There is a wonderful, marvelous gift that He has given you that will erase that uneasiness and fear. And that wonderful gift – the gift that will protect you from fear when you hear the second commandment is - the first commandment (and not just the first commandment, but the fact that the first commandment is first).

The first commandment is to love God with all my being. The core of love is desire and delight. So we are required to desire God with all our being, so that every desire we have is ultimately a desire for God and we can say with the psalmist "Earth has nothing I desire besides You." (Psalm 73:25) So all our desires are focused on Him and all our delight derives from Him. We look to no other source for joy and satisfaction – only God. So instead of committing idolatry by looking to food for my joy and satisfaction, I will use food for only one purpose – to increase my enjoyment of God's kindness that comes to me through that food. Instead of committing idolatry by looking to my wife or job or sleep or recreation or sex or money or anything else for my joy and satisfaction; I will use all those things only for the one purpose of increasing my enjoyment of God's love that comes to me through those things. That is how I obey the first commandment.

The more I obey that first commandment, so that God is the object of all my desire and all my delight, the second commandment is transformed from being a *threat* to my joy and satisfaction into being a *contributor* to my joy and satisfaction. And here is why: when my joy and satisfaction comes from a limited source, sharing it reduces my joy. But when my joy comes from an unlimited source, sharing it increases my joy. Suppose someone forwards me an email of a spectacular photograph that amazes me and thrills me to look at it. My first impulse is to think of the person in my family who would be most impressed with it and to go show it to that person. "Wow, Faith would love this. I've got to go show her!" In a case like that I am loving my daughter as I love myself, and it is easy! It is so easy to do. And not only is it easy, but doing it actually adds to my joy. When I show her the picture and she gets all excited and really enjoys it, that makes me even happier than I was. If I go out to show it to her and find out she is not home, I am disappointed. The second commandment, in that case, is so easy.

Now let's take another scenario. Suppose there is one piece of cake left – just one. And I

really want it. Faith has even more of a sweet tooth than I have. So as soon as I see that cake I shove that thing into my mouth without it even occurring to me to think about whether Faith would enjoy it. The moment I see the cake I have thoughts like, “Uh Oh – only one piece left. If I don’t snag it now it will be gone soon and I won’t get *any*. I better eat it right now, even though I’m not even hungry. If I don’t, I’m going to miss out on the joy and satisfaction that will come from that cake.”

That is how I love myself. And that is the standard Jesus gave me for how I am to love my neighbor (and daughter). But suppose there is a Bible there on the counter lying next to the cake, and it is opened to the second commandment. And I think, “okay, the second commandment is telling me to think this way: “Uh Oh – only one piece left. If I don’t snag it now and set it aside for Faith it will be gone soon and she will not get *any*. And if that happens, she is going to miss out on the joy and satisfaction that will come from that cake.” It is hard to think that way. It is so hard to think like that, and it is threatening because it seems like a threat to my joy. I am afraid if I think that way I will never get *any* cake.

So why is the second commandment so easy in that first example and so hard in the second? It is because in the first example the source of joy was unlimited. The joy that came from looking at the picture was not diminished when Faith looked at it, so I did not lose anything in showing it to her. In fact, it actually increased my joy. But the amount of cake in the house is so very finite. Whatever she eats is that much less for me. That is why the first scenario is easy and the second is hard.

So God, in His great mercy and grace, gives me the first commandment first, so that God is the source of all my joy and satisfaction. Now, is God like the cake or like the picture – is He a finite source of joy or an infinite source? He is an unlimited source of joy, which means sharing that kind of joy will be like sharing the picture, not like sharing the cake. When I obey the first commandment first, obeying the second commandment will increase my joy rather than decrease it. That is why John said, “**This is how we know we love the children of God: by loving God.**” (1 Jn.5:2)

If the source of my joy is cake, I will never succeed in loving my daughter as I love myself – never. But if I only *use* cake as a means of experiencing God’s love, and 100% of my joy and satisfaction comes from the experience of God’s love, and I fully believe God’s promise that He will find away to get His all-satisfying, joy-producing love to me, then putting a smile on my daughter’s face by giving her the cake is no threat at all to my joy. I know for a fact I am still going to get all the joy and satisfaction that I am seeking and craving with or without the cake, and seeing a few smiles along the way does nothing but increase my joy.

So you can see where faith comes in. Obviously this will only work if your soul is fully convinced of God’s promises to fully satisfy the longings of your soul. Remember what God told David after his adultery in 2 Samuel 12:8? “**David, I gave you so much, and if all that had been too little I would have given you even more!**” God promises that if what He has given is not enough to satisfy you He will keep giving you more until you are satisfied. But He will only do that if we abandon pursuing satisfaction from earthly things. The presence and grace of God is the only thing that can satisfy the deep longings and desires of our souls, and He promises to satisfy us if we simply abandon our pursuit of all those things that can’t satisfy our souls anyway. (Jeremiah 2:13)

So it is all a matter of faith. We are so prone to think that our joy comes from earthly sources, rather than through earthly sources. We think satisfaction comes from cake instead of from God through cake. If satisfaction comes from earthly pleasures, then losing them would mean losing my joy. But if it comes from God, and earthly pleasures are only one of the means He uses to give me that satisfaction of soul, then losing those earthly things means nothing as long as the Source is still in tact and is capable of sending it through some other means. If I lose the cake, is God still in tact and still capable of delivering His soul-satisfying grace through some other means? Yes! So the key to love is teaching our hearts to really believe that God is the only Source

of our joy, so my heart will be freed up to be generous.

Whenever you find yourself hesitating to love because of fear that you might lose joy, use that as a memory cue. Let that thought set off sirens and flashing red lights in your spirit as a dangerous breach of your spiritual wellbeing that must be corrected immediately before it does serious harm. Whenever you are frustrated or irritated or upset with someone because they are taking away your joy, let that alert you to the fact that you were looking to the wrong source for your joy. No one can take away your joy in God, so if they take away your joy your joy was in the wrong thing. Let every instance of exasperation with people alert your mind to that so that other people's failures draw out compassion from your heart instead of anger.

Conclusion to Series

What is a Church?

This has been a study of what the Bible says a church is supposed to be. To begin with there are some things that are a bare minimum, such that a body without those essentials is not even a church.

Sometimes people who can't get along with any part of the body of Christ in any church, or they are too lazy to get up in the morning on Sundays, or for whatever reason decide they don't want to go to church, but they still want to pacify their conscience since Hebrews 10 commands that we not forsake the assembly; will just say that if they are around Christians at all, that is their church. They might point to Mt.18:20 where it says **where there are two or three gathered together in my name, I am there among them**. So they say, "All you need is 2 or 3 believers and you've got yourself a church."

The problem with that is that passage teaches the exact opposite of what they are saying.

But if you back up a few verses, listen to what v.17 says: **If he pays no attention to [the 2 or 3 witnesses], tell the church. But if he doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like an unbeliever and a tax collector to you**. There is a clear distinction between the 2 or 3 who are gathered in Jesus' name and the church. Clearly, the two or three are not a church. They report to the church, which means they are not the same thing as the church. So if you have a handful of believers gathered in Jesus' name, is Jesus present there with them? Yes. But are they a church? No.

The implication of that passage is that a church is a significant community of believers who *gather* together.

1 Cor.14:28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God

Does that mean he has to keep silent any time he's around any Christians? No – just in the large gathering.

1 Cor.11:18 I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you

Those people were Christians all the time, but it was when they came and met together as a church that they were a church.

How many do you have to have for it to be a church? The Bible doesn't say. But for a body to be a church it has to be able to carry out church discipline, and for that to happen there must be a group to which the 2 or 3 can report.

Another requirement for a church is that they have pastor/elders who are qualified according to the lists in 1 Tim.3 and Titus 1.

Acts 14:23 they had appointed elders in every church

And another obvious requirement is that they teach the true Gospel and worship the true God.

So that is the bare minimum of what makes a group of Christians a church - a community of worshippers who worship the true God, preach the true gospel, who can practice church discipline, and who are led by qualified pastor elders. But our question is not about the minimum, but about the ideal What does God expect a church to be?

And our method was to examine the 5 main metaphors the Bible uses to describe the Church.

We have been studying what the Bible says a church is supposed to be. The five metaphors are these: The Church is the body of Christ, bride of Christ, Temple of the Holy Spirit, a holy priesthood, and the household (family) of God.

As His body we found two main emphases: 1) we are to properly represent the Lord Jesus, so when people look at us they get an accurate picture of Him. 2) We are to build one another up so the body reaches maturity so we can do His work. And His work is the dispensing of His grace.

As His bride our main responsibilities are 1) To be faithful to Him; 2) To be beautiful and delightful to Him (through righteousness and purity – being faithful to carry out church discipline and restoration); 3) To be delighted by Him (to love Him); 4) To invite others to take delight in Him.

As His temple (sanctuary – the Holy Place) our responsibilities are to be holy; set apart from the world; to function as the primary headquarters for the presence of God in the world; and to be built together as a worship center.

As His holy priesthood our responsibilities are to 1) draw near to God to offer sacrifices of worship (with the utmost reverence and awe and fear), and the sacrifices we offer are praise, prayer, repentance, ministry of spiritual gifts, giving, generosity and good deeds in general, faith, love, and the souls of men and women. Everything we do in life we are asking, not “Is this thing I want to do okay?” but rather, “Can I offer this to God as worship?” 2) To teach God’s Word.

And then finally, as God’s household our responsibilities are to relate to God as Father (honoring Him through submission to and gratitude for His plan), asking for grace from Him, and trusting Him to love us as a father, and relate to one another with unity (same attitude, goal, and purpose) so our praise will be unified and to relate to one another with love – reconciled relationships and every-deepening fondness and affection for one another.

By my count that comes out to 15 primary responsibilities. I spent some time this week trying to group those into general categories, because we need to have a good idea of what we are doing as a church, and no one can keep 15 things in their head all at once. But the more I worked at the more I thought it was a bad idea. They are already those most general and broad summaries. To reduce them down even further would over-simplify the issue.

So let’s just remember the five metaphors, and let’s always be reviewing this study, especially when the time comes to make changes, or big decisions, or adding new ministries. Let’s measure everything by how they fit with our core responsibilities as a church.

Benediction: 1 Co.1:4-9 I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. 5 for in him you have been enriched in every way--in all your speaking and in all your knowledge--6 because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. 7 therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. 8 he will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.