

[IN GOD'S IMAGE 72 – THE CHURCH - LOVE]

Our focus has shifted to the role and function of the church.

- ◆ We are looking at the role of the church through five virtues, faith, hope and love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13, and worship and service.
- ◆ The church as the body of Christ needs to be people of faith, people of hope, people of love, people of worship, and people of service.

Last time we looked at the subject of hope. This time our focus is on the subject of love.

- ◆ There is the old expression, "Love makes the world go round."
- ◆ Just imagine what the world would be like without the emotion of love in its various forms.
- ◆ No budding romances for young lovers, no parents cuddling their offspring, no grandparents bragging about their grandchildren, etc.
- ◆ But love doesn't just make the world go round; it is the very lifeblood of the Triune God.
- ◆ ***1 John 4:7-8 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.***
- ◆ Notice the source and origin of love is God.
- ◆ We see this process in the Godhead itself as the Holy Spirit that is the divine love of the Father and the Son flowing from the Father to the Son and is returned in the Son's adoration of the Father.
- ◆ And astoundingly, way back before time existed, this God whose very nature of love is so generous and overflowing, decided to lavish the very existence that permeates the Trinity on others.
- ◆ As we learned at the beginning of this series, this amazing four-dimensional world in which we live has been carefully created to bring about God's purpose of sharing with humanity that one most important characteristic which makes God, God, and that is divine love.
- ◆ I have used the word "divine love" purposely so as to distinguish it from the distorted meaning the word love conjures up in today's world.
- ◆ The secular world has distorted the meaning of the word love to revolve around the narrow dimension of one's feelings towards another; usually it is in relation to one's own self-gratification or benefit.
- ◆ Not only do we see the media's distorted image of love presented each night on TV, but also the daily diet of horrendous news stories about humanity's total lack of love and disregard for human life.
- ◆ It used to be car accidents and house fires that made the news. Now it is domestic violence, predator priests, mass shootings, beheadings, car bombs, etc.
- ◆ Jesus predicted a time when our societies would become so self-centred and self-absorbed we would become callous to the needs of others.
- ◆ ***Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.***
- ◆ So it's important for believers to guard against this growing tendency in our societies.

When we look at the subject of "love," we need to view it from the perspective of the One who is the source of divine love and describes Himself as such.

- ◆ It was God the Father who initiated His purpose of creating a community of people, His children, who would share in the life and love of the godhead.
- ◆ The Father also provided the means by which there was a direct connection between the Trinity and humanity so we could share in the love of the godhead.
- ◆ When scripture, in Matthew 1:20, says Jesus "was conceived by the Holy Spirit," what it is saying is this same self-emptying love that is the lifeblood of the Trinity now flows into humanity through the incarnate Jesus Christ.
- ◆ Jesus Christ becomes the pathway through which the eternal life of God becomes available to humans.
- ◆ The apostle John expressed the magnitude of this honour the Lord God Almighty in His love has lavished on mere men.
- ◆ ***1 John 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!***

So let's step back for a moment and look at the tangible ways God has lavished His divine love on us. We do this with the intention of learning to imitate the love of God.

- ◆ Hopefully one of the things we have learned through this series is the ends to which our loving God has gone to "make us children in His image" so we can join Him in sharing His divine love.

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- ◆ The supreme act of divine love towards humanity is God's gift, His only Son, Jesus Christ.
- ◆ **1 John 4:9 *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.* ¹⁰ *This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.***
- ◆ If we want to know what divine love is like, we need to examine God's gift to us, Jesus Christ.
- ◆ It is quite remarkable when we address what Christ's work has done in respect to saving mankind from his fallen condition.
- ◆ As we have seen through this series, Jesus through His incarnation and atonement has achieved the following.
 - He has redeemed us from our enslavement to sin.
 - He has justified us in relation to God's holy law.
 - He has established peace through reconciliation by moving us from being God's enemies to God's children.
 - He has birthed us from above and adopted us as His children.
 - And one day He will glorify us with a new spiritual body.
- ◆ And He achieved all of this not from the safety and security of heaven, but from within the midst of His hateful and rebellious children.
- ◆ What we see revealed in Jesus Christ is an uninhibited display of the divine love of God, it's as though God is opening up His heart to us revealing His innermost longing to be in relationship with us.

As we have spent quite a bit of time already in this series focusing on these issues, I would like to focus on another very important aspect of godly love that is crucial to understanding the love that emanates from the Trinity.

- ◆ What gives the love that proceeds from the Trinity such powerful influence is the way they wield their power.
- ◆ One of God's descriptions is, Lord God Almighty because ultimate power rests with Him.
- ◆ And although this is true, how God exercises His awesome power is totally contrary to the way we humans view and use the concept.
- ◆ Understanding this difference in the use of and the type of power used is crucial if we are to become loving citizens of the kingdom of God.
- ◆ Power in human terms is something to be exercised over others usually to the benefit of the one exercising the power.
- ◆ We see it used in every aspect of daily life to control, to manipulate, and to subdue others.
- ◆ ***Matthew 20:25 *Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."****
- ◆ Human nature has not changed with the passing of time. Men and women still strive to become president, prime minister, dictator, the boss, etc., because of the power and prestige associated with the role.
- ◆ Yet when we look into the brokenness of this world, much of it is the result of this misguided, perverted use of power.
- ◆ Sometimes we as Christians can also be caught up in this corrupt use of power.
- ◆ Jesus had to chastise His disciples when they wanted to "call fire down from heaven" to destroy a village simply because they didn't provide an appropriate welcome to Jesus (Luke 9:53-55).
- ◆ We modern Christians read the book of Revelation from the vantage point of being the "good guys" who eventually see the wicked finally getting their much-deserved comeuppance.
- ◆ Yet if we are to define the use of God's power through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we may have to re-evaluate our thinking.
- ◆ ***Matthew 20:26-28 *Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,* ²⁷ *and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—* ²⁸ *just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.****
- ◆ Contrary to the conquering Messiah the Jews expected, what we see instead is the self-surrender of Almighty God to a baying rabble under the control of the evil principalities and powers of the cosmos.
- ◆ Instead of exercising His legitimate right to use His power to retaliate against these evil forces, we see at work a different type of power, a willingness to suffer injustice for the sake of another, in this case the future of the whole human race.

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- ◆ The apostle Paul highlights how the world would regard this “crazy” use of power when speaking to the Corinthian church about Christ’s crucifixion.
 - ◆ **1 Corinthians 1:22-23 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, ²³ but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.**
 - ◆ The Jews were looking for an all-conquering Messiah who would use overwhelming miraculous force to free them from Roman oppression.
 - ◆ The Greeks on the other hand prided themselves on their supposedly superior human wisdom and logic to persuade their opponents of their superior culture.
 - ◆ We see Paul’s response to these two claims in v.25.
 - ◆ **1 Corinthians 1:25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.**
 - ◆ It is this attitude of sacrifice by Jesus that gives force to God’s all-conquering power of love.
 - ◆ As the crowd walked away from that fateful scene, one has to wonder how many others besides the centurion and the repentant thief on the cross, recognised they had witnessed something otherworldly in the crucifixion of this man Jesus.
 - ◆ Why had this man who had healed the sick and raised the dead not called on the legions of angels He had at His disposal to end this terrible injustice? (Matthew 26:53).
 - ◆ But it is precisely this unique demonstration of the powerful love of God that causes even the most recalcitrant sinner reason to pause.
 - ◆ Without Jesus, the self emptying, other-centred God, lovingly putting His own life on the line for the sake of sinful humanity, there would be no John 3:16.
 - ◆ A demonstration and use of worldly power would never have achieved this scenario where one is forced to pause and consider what God has done on his behalf.
 - ◆ John acknowledges this in the very next verse.
 - ◆ **John 3:17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.**
 - ◆ The unleashing of the world’s concept of brute power on sinful humanity may force every knee to bow.
 - ◆ But we serve a God who would prefer they kneel because of the conquering power of love rather than all-conquering brute force.
 - ◆ The usual reaction to brute force is to mount your own vicious response.
 - ◆ Nor would it cause them to pause in awe of God’s selfless design to sacrifice His own Son on their behalf.
 - ◆ Humanity has been set up by the love of God to respond positively to His love.
 - ◆ All, whether they want to acknowledge it or not, have been touched by God’s unorthodox love.
 - ◆ The onus is now on them to choose how they respond to God’s gracious act of love on their behalf.
- We can’t leave the subject there though as children of the Kingdom of God are called to emulate their risen King by exercising this same kind of power in this present world.**
- ◆ **Ephesians 4:1-2 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.**
 - ◆ What Paul is urging the Ephesians to do is to be towards one another the way God is towards us.
 - ◆ In other words, the community of believers is, through the gifts of the Spirit, to reflect the life and love of God in direct contrast to the dehumanising influences of the secular society around them (Galatians 5:19-26).
 - ◆ As mentioned earlier, the secular world has distorted the meaning of the word love to revolve around the narrow dimension of one’s own feelings towards another.
 - ◆ In stark contrast, God turns this shallow definition of love to one of self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, the same type of love we have just rehearsed.
 - ◆ Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 profiles this breathtaking total lack of concern for self.
 - ◆ **1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.**

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- ◆ This type of divine love is demonstrated in the words Jesus uttered towards the end of His ordeal on the cross when He said, ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:34).***
- ◆ For Jesus to be able to look past the hatred, the cruelty, the injustice and the grotesque evil perpetuated against Him, to the condition of the poor wretches under the evil influences of their fallen nature and the spiritual forces arrayed against Him, is witness to the divine love determined to free these same wretches from their pitiful sinful state and turn them into sons of God.
- ◆ This same divine love is now available to His followers through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ◆ Christians are to use this powerful agent of change to fulfil the new commandment Jesus gave to His disciples on that fateful night before His crucifixion to go out into the world and ***“Love one another. As I have loved you.” (John 13:34).***
- ◆ As mentioned in an earlier session on the law, we have been given the resources of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit to move from the limited self-love generated by the human heart to the godly love that is generated by the heart of God.

Next time we will look at this powerful form of godly love in action when we look at the parable of the prodigal son.