

## Lesson 2

# Living and Learning Agape Love

*Coming to Appreciate What You Have Been Given in Christ*

## Think On It

1. What do you think the church would look like if the church more fully exhibited the type of love Christ did? Take a moment to describe it.
2. If the church loved the way Jesus does, how do you think the world would be impacted?
3. What holds the church back from loving the way Jesus does?

## What the Savior Said

John 13:34–35 (CSB)

<sup>34</sup>“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. <sup>35</sup>By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

4. What identifying mark should characterize the true disciple? What is the identifying mark that characterized Jesus?

Unending love. That is a good way to describe the brotherly love every Christian should possess. Satan often details our pursuit of love. He helps us grow content with cliques, division, and differing groups. Some are even ready to take out anyone who disagrees with them with little or no patience to work through things. Others are apt to gossip, backbite, talk about, or criticize. Most of the time, bitterness in the church is not generated over doctrinal differences . . . it is through a lack of love. So, it is imperative we learn and practice the principles of biblical brotherly love.

There are two ways to facilitate this type of love. The first is seen in our readiness to apologize. We must do so with urgency, especially if we know we have offended someone. In fact, this is so urgent, making things right is more important than participating in worship. Jesus says:

So if you are offering your gift on the altar, and there you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled with your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift, Matthew 5.23-24.

We often have many excuses for putting this off, but we must take Jesus' words seriously ... even if the situation we face with the offended party will be intense. How strong is our faith?

The second way to facilitate the type of love Jesus speaks of is seen in our readiness to forgive.... *whether we are asked or not*. The way we treat our brother or sister is the way we treat Jesus. It is impossible to separate Jesus from His people.

Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child—this one is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one child like this in my name welcomes me, Matthew 18.4-5.

Later Jesus will instruct us to *not despise* other believers in the kingdom. We must never think others are below us, look at them with indifference, or treat them as having no value, being useless, or worthless.

Read Psalm 15.4. The one who gets to live with God is the one who *honors those who fear the Lord*.

5. What are some things that hold us back from being eager to apologize when we have hurt or offended someone else? How can we eliminate those things so that we can more effectively follow Jesus?
  
6. What are some things that hold us back from being eager to forgive when others have hurt or offended us? How can we eliminate those things so that we can more effectively follow Jesus?

## A Passage to Explore

Philippians 1:9 (CSB)

<sup>9</sup> And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment,

Just before this Paul has expressed his great love and affection for the Philippian church. Writing from a prison cell, he made sure to thank God for all the pleasant memories he had with this local church. He directed his prayers to God on their behalf and took great joy in the relationship he had had with them

since the beginning. He knew that the work God had begun in them would be brought to completion. He rejoiced greatly in their partnership as they stood behind him while he was imprisoned and while he preached the gospel to the Gentiles. He *deeply missed them with the affection of Christ Jesus*.

Beginning in Philippians 1.9 and continuing through verse 11, Paul lists five spiritual essentials that he prayed these Christians would possess in perpetual growth. He prays for their spiritual progress in love, the pursuit of excellence, their integrity, good works, and bringing glory to God. These five things constitute five foundational building blocks for spiritual life. As we think of these essentials, we are always growing into them. In this life, we will never reach them in perfection, but each one of them should become our unwavering goals. Each of them is sequential, building on the foundation of the previous one. When we abound in love, it leads to the pursuit of excellence, which leads to a life of integrity, good works, and ultimately, glory to God.

What does Paul begin with in 1.9? *Love*. The love of God and His people is at the very heart of Christianity. It is the most surpassing value. It is the distinctive of our faith. Why is it foundational?

7. Paul is asking God to supply them with more love. What does this tell us about the source of love? When did we receive this love? See Romans 5.5; 1 John 4.19.

The word for *love* in Philippians 1.9 is from the word *agape*, which is the highest and noblest love. It is a love of choice or will. It is not a love based on impulse, emotion, sentiment, or attractiveness. It is a love that engages whether its object is a friend or enemy. It loves regardless of the object's goodness or evil. It responds even if a person can give you something or take it away.

8. Read John 15.13. How would you describe this type of love?

When Paul prays for more and more love in Philippians 1.9, he is asking for more of love of the unlovable. *I will choose to love you no matter what you do or say, or how much you have hurt me or others*.

9. What are some reasons we typically justify choosing *not* to love others the way Jesus does?

This is our most distinguishing mark.

10. What makes the expression of *agape* love different from the way the world loves?

11. How much different do you look from the world?

The love in Philippians 1.9 is *dynamic*. Paul prays that it might *keep on growing*. The wording here means to “overflow.” Think of the waves of the ocean or the water that goes over a waterfall. Our love is to be growing, progressing, expanding, and enlarging.

12. How can you keep the love you have been given from God from growing stale? List out a few things below.

## Life Application

This week, make some time each day to spend a few moments alone with God. Every day, we will consider the need for us to put the *love* we have been given into practice. Take your time with each passage(s) so you can concentrate on what is being said. Use the questions as a springboard for your positive thoughts throughout your day.

### Monday

13. Read 1 Corinthians 13.4-7. Circle the verbs in these verses. How are these defined?

14. Now, think of someone you are in a difficult relationship with. Pray for that person. What are some things you can do put 1 Corinthians 13.4-7 into action today ... and for the remainder of this week?

### Tuesday

15. Read Matthew 22.39. Who is your neighbor?

16. Now, read Luke 10.30-37. How did the Samaritan demonstrate *agape* love? Write down some things you need to remember so that you can become more effective in demonstrating this type of love.

17. What types of attitudes characterized the priest and the Levite? How can we avoid those attitudes?

### ***Wednesday***

18. Read Matthew 5.44-45. What decision must be made here?
19. What can you do for those who don't like you or are your enemy? Does Romans 12.17-21 coincide here? If so, how?
20. When we choose to love our enemies, what does it reveal about the depth of our spiritual character? Explain. What are some things you can pray about today in asking God to strengthen your character?

### ***Thursday***

21. Read Colossians 3.12-14. How does Paul identify or describe Christians in v. 12? *A Christian is God's \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.*
22. Because of this relationship with God, what actions should characterize the way we handle relationships with other believers (and generally all people)?
23. What does it mean to *bear with one another*?

24. To what extent are we to forgive? See also Ephesians 4.32-5.2. In your prayer today, ask God to fill your heart with tenderness.

25. What brings us together?

### **Friday**

26. Read 1 Peter 1.22. What is the natural result of *purifying yourself by obedience to the truth*? To what degree are we to love each other? What do you think *earnestly* means in v. 22?

27. Is there any excuse never to love another brother or sister? Explain. If you have things that are holding you back from having a good relationship with someone, what are some things you can pray about to do to make things better?

28. Is there a relationship between the depth of our knowledge of the truth and the depth of the expression of our love for a brother/sister? Explain.