

DIVINE LOVE

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Let us read from John's gospel, chapter 13 verse 31 to 35.

"When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in Him. If God is glorified in Him, God will glorify the Son in Himself, and will glorify Him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for Me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another."

Prayer: Father, we ask again in our short time together that You would minister to us through Your word. We can receive nothing unless it comes from Heaven. So we ask You, Lord, that You would minister to each one of us in our hearts and You would strengthen us to do Your will and crown our gathering with Your joy and Your peace. We ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

A New Commandment of Love

So now, the Lord Jesus is alone with His disciples - Judas has gone out - and the hour has come. He gives to them this new commandment. In one sense, it is not a new commandment. To love one another is something that the Old Testament also said. The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself is in Leviticus. But here, Jesus says it is a new commandment.

So in what way is it new? He said: "A new commandment I give you. Love one another as I have loved you." So this is a different sort of love. There is nothing earthly about this love. "As I have loved you." And then He says *by this*, "*By this* all men shall know..." You think about Christian history. How much has been added to "*by this*"! You know the big cathedrals, the high steeples... *By this* all men shall know, or by this program or that program. But the Lord Jesus made it absolutely clear. The true testimony is *by this*. If there was nothing else, this alone would focus us and give us our direction. We want to be His witnesses. We want His name to be known in the earth. How can it be? *By this*.

Man Created in God's Image

So, we go back and think how God created man. He created man in his own image. A unique creation! We have so much that is common with the animals. You know that we eat and sleep just like an animal. Just like an animal we have a body. But we are not animals. We are people. We are persons, not a "thing" because God formed us in His own image. And even though we are fallen, yet still we can see, we can hear, the echo of His footsteps. All of us have it in us. Even though we are fallen, still that evidence that we are made in His own image is there.

Now we can say so many things about that. One thing is that we have a sense of purpose and destiny. The world tells us that we are just an arrangement of a few chemicals. I looked it up on Google. Our chemicals are worth, I don't know how much in Indian rupees, but it is about \$160. So that is the world's estimation of what we are - an arrangement of chemicals that will be shortly recycled to some other use. But God created us in His image and we have this sense of purpose and destiny. This life is not going to be over just like that. We know it is more than that.

It is Love That Matters

We also value love very highly, and you see that when somebody is dying. You know that when we are dying what really matters comes to the surface. They say that no one on their death bed ever wished that they spent more time in their business. What matters is love. When people are dying they often write notes. What do they write on their notes? "I love you... Please forgive me... I am sorry..." It is love that seems to be the only thing that matters when you are at the end. Why is this? Because we have been created in God's image, and we have this sense that love is everything. When a young person falls in love nothing else matters. Everything is good because they have that one thing.

Essence of Love

When we think about love, what it is, we think of many things. Where there is love, the desire is there for oneness. What is the essence of love? It is union. So we look at humanity and say they are created in God's image, they have a sense of destiny where love is everything. And the ultimate purpose of love is union.

Natural Love

Created in God's image, yes, but we are fallen creatures. What we know about love is a dim reflection of true love. Even our natural loves can easily turn bad. You know that a mother's love is wonderful, and the Lord said, "Can a mother forget her child?" And then He said, "She may forget." A mother's love just gives and gives, but a mother's love can also be very possessive. Even though we know something of love, our love is often damaged and can turn bad.

But now something happens. Now through *another* birth we have received *another* life. And the Lord Himself has come to live within us. So what has come to earth? Love. We have been loved. But more than that, love has taken residence in us. So even though we are in our own nature fallen yet through the new birth there is something more. Now there is a divine love, a heavenly love, that has come into us. But, of course, we stand here and say, "Well, I don't feel it,"

To say to believers, "You should love one another" is not new. Sometimes it is discouraging to hear that because we know that our love falls so far short. And so when we say to somebody, "Love one another" that is like saying to them, "You have failed." Who here will stand up and say, "I love as I ought to love". None of us is going to say that. But the important thing is that we don't leave it there.

I know a brother in Sydney. Once when I saw him I asked him, "How are you going?" He said, "Oh, I need to spend more time in prayer. I need to love the Lord more." And 6 months later I saw him and again asked him, "How are you going?" He said, "I need to spend more time in prayer. I need to love the Lord more." So I asked him, "What are you doing about that? What strategy do you have to spend more time in prayer, to love the Lord more?" He looked at me blankly. He had none. It sounded so good. When somebody says, "I don't have love, I am not a loving person, I don't spend more time in prayer, and I don't love the Lord as I ought to" – Oh, these are lovely thoughts! But what are you doing about it? So we need to be little bit violent - merciless - towards ourselves. We can put up a sign on the wall in our homes. Only for us! It says **No Excuses**. Not for anybody else - this is only for ourselves.

We have been called to grow in Christ, so let us grow in Christ. Let us not go on year, after year, after year, after year, the same.

We know that we should love one another. How can we love one another? What help can we find to love one another?

The Love of Christ

I will mention a few things, but no doubt you can mention many other things. We can contribute just a little.

The first thing is to understand that when we are born again, and that the Lord has come to live within us. There are in Him resources which we do not have in ourselves. You say, "I cannot love." And if you know your own heart you must say that. The only love that we know by nature is the love of ourselves. But we can learn something from that - I will come back to that later. The point is that the Lord has come to live within us. So it is like this - a river of love is in your heart and it is as if it is dammed. But if that dam can be opened a little, then what will flow out of you is divine love. So to answer the question, "Can you love?" I say, "In myself my love is nothing, but I have the Lord so love is possible." Real love, the love the Lord spoke of here, "As I have loved you."

Self-love

So again let us go back and think of the love of ourselves. What does it look like to love yourself? The Scripture says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." So what is our love for our self like?

I could ask you what you think of yourself. Are you thoroughly satisfied with yourself? Do you feel you are a very nice person? Maybe not! Maybe there are things that you have said or done that you are ashamed of. Maybe you wish that you did not do that or you did not say that or you did not act like that. But still you love yourself. So what sort of love is this? It is love which is committed to my own welfare, my own good. Even if I do something that I am ashamed of, I might be angry with myself, but I am still committed to myself, and I still want my own good, my own benefit.

So we can learn something from this. When we say we must love one another, it does not mean we have to like one another. It does not mean that we have to think about others and feel "What a lovely person he is!" It does not mean that. You know that the Scripture says that you have to love your enemies. Do you think that your enemies are going to be nice people? We are not going to think like that. But love is not thinking that they are nice. Love is being committed to their good. So there can be brothers and sisters we may find difficult to get on with. We do not like their behavior. We don't like the way they speak. One brother once said to me, "How can you love a man like that? Look how he stirs his tea!" Small things can trouble us. Can we love a man like that? Yes we can because we can pass over the things that bother us and we can be committed to his good. We can want the Lord's best for him. We can want the blessing of God upon him. So when we think like this, we can love our enemies. No, they may not be nice people. They may treat us very badly. But we can sincerely pray for them and want their good. This is one aspect of love.

For me, this is a great freedom. I don't have to think that somebody is nice. It is not like that. But I can be committed to their good and can desire their good.

Reason for His Love

The next thing the Lord said was, "Love one another, as I have loved you." So when we think about His love for us, what is the reason for His love? Why does He love? What does He love? Does anyone know? What is the reason for His love? I don't know. I have no idea. If I look at the object of His love, I can see no reason to love. He does not love me because of what I am. He loves me because of who He is.

So when He says, “Love one another as I have loved you”, once again we are not using our eyes to decide who to love or using our eyes to give a reason for love. If I look at my brothers and sisters and say, “Why should I love them?” and I simply look at them for the reason, I will not find it.

Of course we will find a few people we can love. They may like us. Maybe we like them, and it is easy to have a nice circle of friends. But this is not the love of Christ. That is the love of publicans and of the Pharisees. So many church fellowships are actually this sort of love. They are all good friends. When somebody very different comes it, he does not quite fit there.

The love of God does not find the reason in the one loved. It finds the reason in God. So this is where we are. We have been loved and we have been called into the fellowship of love. And that fellowship is with the Father and with His Son. The Holy Spirit has brought that fellowship to us. “We love Him because He first loved us.”

This love is a fellowship of love. And we are not alone in this fellowship.

You could imagine a family. The parents love their children. But one of the children says, “I love my parents and I want their love.” But if he were to push his brothers and sisters away, and say, “This love is for me. I am alone in this love,” well, this would not work. This is not the nature of family love. It is a fellowship of love. If such a one pushes away his brothers and sisters, then the love is broken, but when the love is in a family together, then the love is very full.

Love Requires Freedom

Don't you think it is very simple? We can say more about the character of His love. This love never seeks to control. Love requires freedom. So the real love we share with our brothers and sisters is always to set them free. In the world we love mostly so that we will be loved. But the Lord's love is not that, so we can have real joy in leaving people free. We see in the Lord Jesus how He did not heal people and then say, “Now follow me.” He never put that obligation on anybody. He always left them free. So it can be our joy to go and minister to our brothers and sisters and then we can walk away from them with no obligation placed on them, nothing to pay back. They are completely free.

When we find the world's love, it is often like a spider web - love that seems to cling to the beloved - it holds it and keeps it selfishly for itself. This is not the love of God.

Love That Gives

In the same vein, the love that we want to show and live is the love that only gives. Somebody pictured it like a waterfall - it is a one way trip. It just gives and gives. What we are speaking here is the truth. This is the character of love.

How to Love

But there is a problem if we simply say this to each other. We need some guidelines and also some encouragements. So how practically can I learn to love? What can I do? Tell me something now today. What can I do? Well, I will suggest two things.

One is, **Be yourself**. Don't feel, “I have got to love, I have got to find somebody to love quickly.” You know that that person may not welcome your attention. So I say **relax**. Don't think that you have got to become some amazing super human person overnight. **Be Yourself**.

The second thing I would say is, **Try to follow the Lord's leading**, and just in little things. If you feel prompted to do something for somebody, to help somebody, to give some little message to somebody,

an encouragement, be bold. Do it! Even if it seems silly, do it, because sometimes little silly things are very wonderful. Don't look for big and heroic things. You know we want to be heroes, that is our nature. Don't look for the big things. It is in little things that you learn. So let us try to listen. How good He is!

If you think of some little things you should do, just little things, do them. Then you say, "If it was not the Lord who led me, what would happen?" Well, of course, what you are doing is not a bad thing. We are not talking about listening to strange voices and doing strange things. What you are doing is not a bad thing. But if it was not the Lord who prompted you to do it, well, if you discover that, say, "I was wrong." And then don't worry about that. Keep going. Our safety is not how clever we are in hearing His voice. Our safety is in being ready to admit that we are wrong. If we are ready to admit that we are wrong, then we are very safe, we are very teachable. So we should have this simple boldness.

And as this becomes our normal life, slowly, slowly we will find that we are able to love and we will find that we do care for others more. We will find that we are thinking of the needs of others more than our own. It is in these little things that we are trained for the big things.

At Home

Where should we practice love? At home. Where should we learn to walk in the Spirit? At home. Where is the hardest place to walk with God? At home. I have said to people, "If you can learn to live in the Spirit at home everything else is easy." If you can be selfless at home then there is a great victory.

Do you remember Graham Staines, the missionary who was burnt to death in Odisha? I met his wife in Australia. She told the story of what had happened. She told us that she was with her daughter while her husband and her two sons were in the place where they died. She said she was with her daughter when she received the news that her husband and her sons had been killed. And she turned to her daughter and said, "We shall forgive them." And her daughter said, "Yes, Mom, we will." I thought, "How could she do that?" Her first response was, "We will forgive them!" So when I was listening to her speaking I knew that it was something. She said in their home they always practiced forgiveness. So in their home over many years with all the little things that trouble us in our homes they were learning to forgive each day. And because of that, when the big thing came, she was ready, and the testimony that arose from that death lay mostly in her forgiveness.

So it is in the little things. How can we love as the Lord Jesus loves? How can we as believers together have this glorious testimony of the love of Christ? Just by learning in the little things to love, just the very small things. And the impact of this heavenly love will last forever.

I will tell you two stories to finish.

I had to make an important decision at one time. So I wrote to a brother and told him about the situation and I asked him to pray. He did not reply. I had to make the decision within a few days. No reply came from him. I thought that he would write back to me say something encouraging, give me some guidance or something. There was nothing. Well I went ahead and made the decision. Then he wrote to me, and what he sent me really surprised me. He had taken my question and my burden and shared it with a whole lot of brothers, and all these different brothers had written to him, responding to this situation and written with wisdom and love. He sent me all their comments, and I was quite struck. I was thinking he did not care at all, but actually he cared much more than I had imagined, and he got all the other people also caring. I was very blessed, very touched by his love.

The second story is that I was in a fellowship some years ago. I was younger than now but still I was considered to belong to the older generation. So the young people in the fellowship once invited all the older people to a dinner. They did not say why, but they said when they invited the older people to the dinner, to the women, "Don't wear stockings." They said, "Nothing bad will happen. But don't wear stockings." There was one young man in that fellowship, and I could tell that I irritated him. I was a thorn in his side, not because of anything particularly that I did, but it was a kind of personality thing. He found it very hard to put up with me.

So we had a nice dinner. They had prepared everything. And when the dinner was finished, suddenly all the young people appeared with basins in their hands. And they said, "We are going to wash your feet." And that young man who had a problem with me came straight to me and he sat on the floor at my feet, and very slowly and carefully he washed my feet. You know he deliberately chose me and said, "I will love you." That young man is with the Lord now. But I will never forget that. He chose to love me. He did not feel it I don't think, but he chose to love me. You know the power of this love is wonderful.

So we have been called to this, to be such a blessing to one another, and to be such a blessing to the world. And you can see the wonderful wisdom of the Lord. If our testimony is love, if the world looks upon us and says, "Look, how they love one another!" then there is no more argument. Jesus is glorified and He is seen, and this is what matters.

Prayer: Father, we lift up our hearts to You. You know what we are. In ourselves our love is nothing. But we know that there is love in our hearts because You dwell there. Lord, let the river flow. Let this life flow out. Teach us to care for one another in simple ways. Teach us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Glorify the name of the Lord Jesus. We ask this in His precious name. Amen.