

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD SERIES

THE CAPACITY TO LOVE

I Jn. 4:7-11 Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Rom. 5:3-8 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. While we were yet helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Why, one will hardly die for a righteous man – though perhaps for a good man one will dare even to die. But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.

We have been talking about walking in love and walking in the Spirit. You cannot walk in the Spirit without walking in love. We have shown in the last message how that when you walk in the Spirit, all the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness and temperance, all relate to I Cor. 13 with regards to love. Walking in the Spirit will help us to walk in love. Walking in love will help us to walk in the Spirit. The two are one. They are not separated. When you move in an anointing of God; when you move in the things of the Spirit, the Spirit of love will determine whether you are in the Spirit or in the flesh.

In the same way when you are walking in the will of God you would also be walking in the boundaries of His love. When you stop walking in love, you stop walking in the will of God. The will of God is covered under the umbrella of His love. When you are no more loving then you have got out of the will of God in your attitude. And when you move out of the will of God all the other consequences will follow. So the bible in Gal. 5 when Paul was talking about the fruit of the Spirit the context was walking in the Spirit.

This morning we want to talk about the capacity that God has given to all of us to love and to be loved. In all of our life God has created us human beings as creatures in His image with a capacity to love. That capacity to love is also the capacity to be loved. You will notice that all of us need fellowship. And none of us can live by ourselves without being loved or to give love. We would not be able to develop in our character; we would not be able to develop in our maturity in God if we do not give or receive love. A person who lives on a mountain and never sees nor relates to any human being, spends all the time in prayer may feel that he has developed a very great height of spiritual maturity. But when that person is taken out of that mountain and placed in the city where the hustle of life goes on, where the circumstances and the time pressure comes forth, that person began to get irritated; that person began to walk in the flesh and lose his temper. All these reveal that actually that person was not matured although he looks matured.

The test of your character and the test of your maturity is in the crisis time. Not when you are surrounded by beautiful scenery, and you are having a nice contemplation of God; meditating with no care on your life. That is not when you demonstrate your character. Demonstration of your character is when they put you in an iron box and all the pressure come upon you. Then it tests whether you are truly matured or not. What happens is that many people who are good in living a hermit's life are no good when it comes to living a Christian life out there in the valley. They are good in the mountains but they are not good in the valley.

How many believe that God is both God of the mountain and of the valley. He is

God both in the field and in the city. He is the God both in your circumstances of life when the pressure is there and when there is no pressure. He is God onto us both of the mountains and of the valley of life. In Christian life many times I have come across those who have developed a spiritual life of prayer, they have developed their spiritual life and hunger in the Word. They have developed their spiritual life in the goal that they have in their life. But they never develop their horizontal relationships. They developed only the vertical relationship. And as a result they don't actually reached that high in the vertical relationship, as they actually should. There is no possible development of a vertical relationship without a horizontal relationship. It's a self-deceptive spirituality. Jesus Christ did not come to live a life of a hermit. Jesus came to demonstrate to us that the love of God and the character of God is possible to be lived out where the hustle of life is. Right there on the streets, right there where the pressure is happening. He has experienced all kind of things that you and I could experience in society. He came and lived right in the middle of sinful human society to prove to us that it is possible to be perfect in pressure. Many Christians have the concept of the vertical relationship without realizing that the vertical relationship has to be backed by a horizontal relationship.

Lets look at I Jn. 4:7-11 *Beloved, let us love one another; for love is God, and he who loves is born of God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him. In this is love not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* John is saying, "Hi Christians, hi fellow brothers, hi beloved, you need to be developed in the horizontal relationship." He is saying if you say you love God you have to love your fellowman.

Look at I Jn. 3:13 *Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.* So John is saying the proof of your vertical relationship is actually the horizontal relationship. He is saying that if you say that you abide in life that you love God. He says because we love the brethren we have passed from death to life, which is the vertical relationship. This is a book on love and he emphasizes on love.

In I Jn. 2:9 *He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still.* That means his vertical relationship is nil. The vertical relationship is life. God is love, God is life and God is light. He says, he who does not have a horizontal relationship their vertical relationship is only false relationship. It is a false form of spirituality. Now the world has a concept of being spiritual as that someone who is a hermit. Now the bible does not advocate that. The bible tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ came to relate to us. He says God demonstrates His love to us in sending His Son. If God sat in heaven and say I love you it doesn't mean anything. But when God send His Son to die, to bear the pains of sins, to take all turmoil of human beings, to suffer as a human being, to die on the cross for us, then we can say, "God thank You. You love me." We understand because He has a horizontal relationship with us. He relates to us through Jesus Christ living as a man to relate to us horizontally. If God did not come in human form then we can only look to the Almighty God without being able to relate to Him in a closer way. That is why to understand the Father you have to understand Jesus. See through Jesus we can understand God.

I Jn. 4:17-20 *In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as He is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because He first loved us. If any one says, "I love God" and hates his brother, he is a liar.*

John is saying that there is no real vertical relationship without a horizontal relationship. You won't get away by hurting people. You won't get away by not relating to people. I wish some one has taught me this in my early ministry. See when I first went into the ministry I was just concentrating on my relationship with God. I didn't realize the importance of relationship with another human being. Whether they are lovable or unlovable, whether they are likeable or unlikable, I did not realize the importance of my horizontal relationship. B

eing young, going into the seminary at the age of 18, all I focused on was my

vertical relationship. And all I wanted was to know more of God and to know of the things of God. And I found that I have not developed my horizontal relationship. So always I have difficulty when it comes to my horizontal relationship. I found it hard to relate to those who don't think like me; those who don't believe like me. Now I can, praise God by His grace. I found it difficult to relate to those who don't flow with the Holy Spirit. See I was zealous. I wanted revival. And so here was I sent to a dead Baptist Church. And my zeal was to bring revival to the church. And usually when a church is dead there are always dead leaders too who need resurrection. I did my best to resurrect them but I found I could not.

But there were others who were still having light and most of the time in that old traditional churches are those young fellows who are just fresh in the Lord. So we formed a prayer meeting in a small town in Bukit Mertajam. I found that I had a hard time with my horizontal relationship because I concentrated solely on my vertical relationship. So those who don't pray as much as I do I found it hard to relate to them. You see to have a vertical relationship with God you have to take time. You have to spend time with Him privately in prayer, in the Word and in worship. You spend time so you get to know God. And to develop a horizontal relationship you have to spend time. And that was the time I neglected to spend. I did not spend time. I did not take all those deacons out and relate to them. I did not sit down with them and understand their problems. I did not do all these things because I found it difficult. Most of them were carnal. I remember Jesus lived among carnal men including His disciples.

Then when I moved to another church in the north in Kangar, Perlis. When I was there it was the same thing repeating itself. I focused on the vertical relationship; I did not pay attention to the horizontal relationship. I could never get away from that. Time and again I always had to come down to the fact if you say you love God you must love your brethren. And your brethren include all those who were born again whether they have their shoulder blades sticking out at you or not. Some people their shoulder blades stick out longer than others. When you fellowship with them their shoulder blades start poking at you. It is not easy to love some people because they bite you, they devour and they will say some bad things about you. Let me tell you it is not easy to love some one who doesn't like you, especially if he doesn't agree with your doctrine. Or they don't agree with the way you do things.

Then through the years God began to teach me. And especially I must confess my marriage helped me to realize the need to develop horizontal relationship. Whether you are called to be single or called to be married there is an importance to relate to other human beings especially the family of God. You must relate to them. You cannot run away and try to be spiritual and say I don't care about all these things. I don't need any church to go to. Because every time I go to a church the church is not perfect. And so some people are that way and say I don't want to go anywhere else because nowhere else do I seem to be able to find a relationship. A church is a family. You find all kinds of people inside. And in the family you did not ask for the other guy to be in the family. They chose God and they got brought in. In a physical family you did not choose your brother or sister. Your parents chose them.

Our heavenly Father begot all of us. Our heavenly Father is the One who chose all of us. John says in I Jn. 4:20 *If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.* John is saying your vertical relationship is false. Because your vertical relationship is actually checked and judged by your horizontal relationship. How do we know Jesus really love God? Because He loves us He is like God. Any one who loves God becomes loving like God. Look at the life of Jesus Christ. Look at His horizontal relationship. He could love everybody even Judas who betrayed Him. Jesus gathered Himself in a towel and He washed all His disciples' feet including Judas. Then when Peter and John were asking Him who is the one who betray you, He took the bread and He fed Judas. He literally was feeding him from His hands. And He washed Judas' feet. I am sure He washed it as lovingly as He washed John's feet. He did not wash all His disciples' feet one by one but when He came to Judas's feet He took the hardest brush made of steel. No, He didn't do that; He washed all their legs as lovingly.

Jesus' vertical relationship was revealed in His horizontal relationship. For example if you say you are some one who spend a lot of time in the Word, it will come out from you. The way you talk it will come out with the Word. The way you confess you come out with the Word. And the way you could sit down and share and talk about the things of God you will talk about the Word. Even though you were not called to teach publicly you were in some way in one to one relationship the Word

will come out of your life. It is proven in your horizontal relationship. The same way if you are some one who says, "I love God a lot. I am full of God's love," prove it in your horizontal relationship. If you can't prove it the bible calls you a liar. Those who don't love their brothers and say they love God they are liars. Your vertical relationship is judged by your horizontal relationship.

To develop and say you love one another we are going to touch on what it means to love another person. But basically all of us are created with the capacity to love and to be loved. We get encouraged when we are loved. Because it's the capacity that God has created in us. We get discouraged when we are not loved. It is because that need of love is not met. Some times as you grow up you did not receive love and there when you grow up you are not able to give love. But God has changed all that.

The bible in Rom. 5:5 it says that when you were born again God poured His love into your heart. Your capacity to give love is restored because God has poured into your heart His love. And we are obligated to love one another. In I Jn. 5:1 *Every one who believes that Jesus is the Christ is a child of God, and every one who loves the parent loves the child. (Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and every one who loves Him begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.)* I used to think that the one that the "him" who is begotten of him refers to Jesus the begotten of the Father. But as I read it carefully I realized that it is not referring to Jesus being begotten of the Father. But it is referring to every other one who is born again into the family of God. It says he who loves the one who begot, the one who gives new birth will love those who are given new birth by him. In other word its just like in the physical relationship, physical family. You did not choose your brothers and sisters. Your parents chose them. If you love your parents very much you will definitely love their choices. And if they chose your brothers or sisters you love them because you love your parents. See it flows and you develop your love towards them. In the same way the bible says if you love God who gives new birth you will love everything and every one that He gives new birth to. The reason He gives new birth is because He loves. And because you are part of the family you will love what He loves. And if God loves all His family you should not draw a circle and say I am going to love only these people and the others outside the circle I am not going to love. It would be very wrong. You should love those who are begotten of God, which means the family of God.

Jesus says a new commandment I give you that you love one another as I have loved you. So all of us need to develop our horizontal relationship in love. And this is the part where we are saying our capacity to love is the test in all circumstances. In other words when some body hurts you or when some imperfection occurs in your horizontal relationship it does not reveal the fault in the other person as much as it reveals the fault in you. Every time you come to the point where you feel you cannot love the other person the way God loves him or her, it reveals your own lack and the lack in the other person.

For example we have this pulpit here. It is structured to take a certain amount of pressure. And supposed I were to put some heavy stuff on this pulpit. And I keep on piling them up one after the other. There will reach a point where the pulpit cannot take the pressure any more. Then it begins to crack. When it begins to crack what does it reveal? It does not reveal the pressure so much as it reveals that the pulpit has only a certain point of capacity. It reveals the weakness in the pulpit more that it reveals the external pressure. Example if this building that they have built. The first thing they will do is the piling work. You some times see them on the road you see a huge pile of heavy stones. What are they doing? They are testing whether there are any weaknesses in the soil. If the soil sinks then they know how much piling need to be done in the soil before they could build a high super structure. So the higher they want to build the more they must make sure that the foundation is strong. And the pressure that they put on the ground reveals the weakness of the ground more than it reveals the external circumstances.

And when you reached a point where you cannot love another person, and you complain because they are this way they are that way, it does not reveal their lack as much as it reveals yours. It does not reveal their weaknesses more that it reveals yours. It reveals that you are not able to love them. It reveals that you cannot love them. It reveals that there is a crack in you that say I cannot take this pressure anymore than it reveals the pressure.

So every time you are not capable of loving it reveals that your capacity to love has

been weakened structurally by some thing. It reveals more your own character than it reveals the character of the one you talk about. See when you talk bad about another person it reveals more your own character than the person you talk about. Look at the Lord Jesus Christ everything that He did was in great love. When they put Him on the cross and put Him under pressure, you know what He did? He loved. He showed no structural weaknesses in His being. When they crucified Him on the cross, they rejected Him, they mocked at Him and they did all kinds of things to Him, He says, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." What was He saying? "Father I still love them." Love was pouring out through Him. His capacity to love was without measure. He could love all kinds of people. It was *agape* love the love of God.

God has to teach me this. I am not saying and teaching all these things just out of theory. Many times I complained to the Lord and said Lord I wish your ministry was easier. All I could do is just minister the Word and walk off. And God began to show that our horizontal relationship is important. Jesus said in the gospels that if you love your friend what is that? Even the world does that. If you love those who like you what is that? Nothing, even those who are not born again can do that. But Jesus says because you are my disciples you will not only love your friends you will love your enemy. He is telling you that as His disciples your capacity to love has been renewed, has been rebuilt and has been refilled. Such that your capacity to love is so great that you not only love friends you love even your foes. So every time you cannot love another person it does not reveal the other person. That is not your responsibility. It is their responsibility with God. But your responsibility is to love.

Jesus said a new commandment. He did not say a new suggestion. What is a commandment? An order. He ordered you to love. He was not giving a nice suggestion. He was not giving a nice idea. He says it is a commandment. And God has to deal with that in my life. As I grew in the ministry I felt many pressures and all kinds of pressures. Some times you don't understand why people do the things they do. In the early days of my ministry I was a black sheep. The only problem is that my detractors were wearing dark glasses and didn't look very carefully. So I could look back and laugh at that. But I can tell you the number of tears I shed on the way. I was ostracized in the seminary. Then I was ostracized among the whole Baptist churches. Then I was ostracized by the Pentecostals. And some of the stories

they tell about me I myself say that's very interesting. I have never heard of that before myself. The snake was about one foot long became twenty feet long. Tremendous stories, but inside it hurts because they were not true.

During these times God comes and said, "Son it does not reveal their fault; it reveals yours. It is your fault not theirs. It reveals that there are structural weaknesses in you; correct that. And if you correct that I will bring you up to higher ground." So I realize that every time I reached a point where I found it not easy to love or my capacity to love runs out I need to draw from Him. I need to acknowledge my own weaknesses. Most of the time we had the Adam and Eve syndrome. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. We try to put the blame on the other person. We don't want to take responsibility. But after hearing this truth this morning you realize that God has given all of you a commandment to love. God has given you a capacity to love. With the commandment is given the capacity. And as you grow in life you will develop that love. See love is perfected. And there will be many times in your life that you come across some one some where along your path whom you found it not easy to love. And you have to still love; you have to continue to love. When you do so you correct your structural weaknesses within you. Take this attitude it will be good for you. Never put the blame on the other guy put it on your own self. Adam should have told God and say, "God I have sinned not my wife; it is me." Instead he said, "Eve did it," and Eve looked at God and said, "The serpent did it." Adam and Eve syndrome put the blame on the other guy.

Do you know that people who find scapegoats are very insecure in their life? People who have to find others to blame are because they themselves are avoiding the issue of correcting themselves. And there is no such thing as correcting another until you correct yourself. Jesus said don't pull the plank of the other eye until you pull the little splinter out of your eye. And every time some thing is said about some one some where about their weaknesses remember if you participate in that kind of conversation it reveals not only the other person it reveals you. And because every one is accountable directly to God you are responsible for your own weaknesses not the other guy. What the whole world may do or what the whole kingdom of God may do is not your responsibility. It reveals more that you have to take care of your part. If every one of us takes care of our department and responsibility the whole church of God will be a lot smoother. Your responsibility is that you have to

acknowledge that you have failed and you have sinned. People who cannot acknowledge that they have failed and they have sinned are like the Pharisee who came and pray, saying, "Lord thank you that I am not like the other guy. The other guy is a rotten guy." God doesn't like that. The publican came and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He was not even conscious of the Pharisee standing there. If your attitude is to find scapegoats in your Christian life you will never grow. Your vertical relationship has actually been suspended. You are no more growing in God. You are in the wilderness going round and round. And I found this about God that before promotion comes testing and improvement.

Lets give an example. If for example this pulpit can take about a hundred and fifty pounds of pressure on the top of it without cracking. If that is the maximum capacity of this pulpit and if I put one hundred and fifty one a crack will start. If I put three hundred it will collapse. When they build this pulpit they built it with five sides. So after this pulpit was built I tested it and I shook it. I said no, it is too shaky. It cannot take the pressure some preachers will put on it. I said some preachers will come and they will bang on the pulpit. They are called the pulpit hammerers. Every time they emphasize a point they bang on the pulpit. The structure was not strong enough. So the person added a small little structure here at the bottom and that made it less shaky. So what we are talking about is the structure was improved to take a greater capacity. And every time you reach a point where you cannot love you must restructure yourself. How many times when people reached a point when their personality weaknesses come out. You know what they do. They re-structure the circumstances instead of re-structuring themselves. For example if it is a firm or any organization could be church or be secular work or it could be a family. Lets take it in the church context. In the church the capacity is different from the secular organization because in the church you are commanded especially the love. And you cannot sort of chase people out of the church unless they are fanatics or they are really causing what you call hurt in the scriptural way or they are destroying the body of Christ. But most of the time many people don't have the intention to destroy. But more or less it is their shoulder blades sticking out.

But supposing that a person is insecure. Lets take a pastor to be insecure. A pastor is insecure in his own ministry when another ministry starts coming up. The pastor will begin to run down that guy to preserve his own ministry. And so as a result of

that the pastor cannot change himself. He tries to change the church to flow along to accept his weakness. As a result of that the people will grow to a certain point when they cannot move any more. And when they want to do something he bang them down. After some time of hitting you either have a church of flat heads or you have no more sheep. Because of his own insecurity he tries to accommodate his own insecurity by structuring a place such that the insecurity is protected instead of repenting and changing his own life. And so what happens? People will come to a certain stage where they will go off. Then they come to another stage where they cannot take it any more. They will leave and they will go to another place where they can grow. As the years come and the years go the pastor says I wonder what's wrong. He himself is the problem. And instead he always excuse and say that guy is this way, that guy is that way. None are so blind as those who refused to see their own faults. They are blinder than the blind people.

So its most important for us to realize that in any situation where you cannot love another one it is more your responsibility and your structural weakness than the other guy. If you were like Jesus in every circumstance you will still be able to say love. Has Jesus ever come to the point where He says I cannot love? Never, but many times you and I come to a point where you say I cannot love. This guy is my thorn in the flesh. That guy is a thorn in the flesh. It looks like every one is a thorn in the flesh except you. Let me tell you a thorn in the flesh is never a believer. The word *thorn in the flesh* is used to refer to the devil. So remember that you are responsible for your own reaction. And if anything happens it reveals your own structure more than the other guy. Every time husband and wife rub each other it is always easy to blame the other guy. If you want to start changing, start changing right where you are. Instead saying "It is your fault," begin to see what is my fault. If every body will take the blame for where they fail they will start improving. Husband and wife if you are not having harmony the time has come to stop putting the blame on the other guy's fault. Don't tell them. Pray to God and let God tell them. Who do you think you are taking the splinter out of other people's eye while the plank is in your own eye? Correct your own mistakes and some times when you are correcting your own mistake the other guys will see it themselves. When you correct your own mistakes, it becomes a mirror where the others can see their own faults. Self-correction is important.

Then as it comes to a wider body of Christ, there may be times you find it hard to

relate to some body else. They may have said something that hurt you. They may have done this or they may have done that. And always in most disharmony and strife the first thing people do is put the blame on the other guy. Put the responsibility on the other guy. That's not your responsibility of the other guy. Your responsibility is to correct your own fault. Let me tell you in any disharmony there are always two sides to it. It does not only reveal the other side but it also reveals your side. And instead of correcting ourselves we avoid the issue of correcting ourselves by a red herring. A red herring is a distraction. We make a smoke cloud on the other side so that people forget about ourselves. That's what happens. It's a sort of self-preservation. We don't want to correct ourselves. So we make a lot of noise about the other guy so that every body will turn and see the other guy. In that way we could hide our own weaknesses. We could hide our own structural weaknesses. You go on that way you will continue going round and round the wilderness. You will never get a promotion from God. You will never get promoted to new spiritual heights. Every time you correct yourself God promotes you because to correct yourself and it requires humility. To correct others does not require humility. Correcting others is easy and correcting yourself is most difficult. Paul says about himself, he says, "I judge myself lest others judge me." So from this day forward judge yourself. Keep correcting your self. Every time something happens judge yourself. The first thing people do is to judge others. Don't you dare to correct another person if God never told you and give you the anointing to do it.