

UNDERSTANDING THE LOVE OF GOD SERIES

THE QUALITY OF LOVE

We look at the quality of love and the agape love of God in this message. In the last message you have seen the love of Jesus Christ. We are going to talk about the quality of this agape love and what it does.

Col. chapter one, there is an interesting verse inside that speaks about this love but in a manner which sometimes would boggle our theological minds. Col. 1: 24 *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church."* Paul says I fill up the afflictions of Jesus Christ. I fill up in my flesh right now. He refers to the suffering that he is going through for Jesus Christ.

The next phrase is the part that really shakes your theology and some times you need to be shaken. In saying this phrase, he says *in what is lacking in the affliction of Christ*. Paul says that I am suffering now to fill up. Notice the word *fill up*, in my flesh what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. We know that in our theology that Jesus' death, burial, resurrection is complete and that means He does not need to suffer anymore. He does not need to die for our sins anymore. He does not need to take our sicknesses upon Himself anymore. We all realized that Jesus has a completed work.

Now here is where we have to broaden our theology understanding a little bit. It is sound theology when we say that the work of Christ is complete. There is nothing you can add to it. There is nothing you can take away from it. When Jesus declared it is finished that means it is finished. He meant what He said and He said

what He meant. He has completed His work in fulfilling the law in dying for our sins, in taking the curse of the law upon Himself. Jesus' work is completed.

Then there must be a meaning when the apostle Paul says *I am now filling up what is lacking in the affliction of Christ*. The key is not in the work of salvation. The work of salvation where Jesus bought our redemption, spirit, soul and body has been completed. But here Paul is talking about being Christ like, being Christ to the world. Jesus needs witnesses today. That is the part of His work that is not completed. Jesus needs a witness in every nation of the world. Jesus told His disciples as the Father sends me so send I you. Jesus requires all His believers that just as we read in John 3: 16 *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."* In the same way I John 3: 16 is for us which says, *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."* This verse talks about how when we love one another, we will go to the extent that we are willing to lay down our lives for each other.

So let me put it this way, the other part of the ministry of Jesus is this, that Jesus so loved the world that He has sent His witnesses, He has sent His instruments into the world, instruments of love, instruments of power so that whoever believes in the message of the Gospel that they carry will have everlasting life. When we go and bring the message, the message has to be two fold. It has to be in precepts and it has to be by example. Jesus did not just come to preach a great sermon but He came to live a great life. Jesus did not just come with His word and says I love you but Jesus says it with His action I love you. It was love in action. In the same way we should not just love people in word but in deed also as apostle James wrote, *Let us not love in words alone but in deeds*. That doesn't mean that you don't love in words. You do still love in words but you love in words and in deeds.

Now that word here in Col.1: 24 speaks about the love of God that suffers long. This is the quality of the love of God. In Col.1: 24 Paul says I am filling up the sufferings of Jesus, I am suffering. In verse 24 *I now rejoice in my sufferings for you*. Notice the direction, the object of his sufferings. He says I am suffering for you. Thank God he did not say I am suffering because of you. They were not the cause of his suffering but because of his love for them. He says I

suffer for you and verse 25 of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God, which was given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generation but is now been revealed to His saints. In the next verse it says *Christ in you the hope of glory*.

So when we talk about agape love, we have touched a little bit on that last Sunday when we said that Jesus loves us greatly. He suffers greatly. Let me tell you that when you love greatly you have to be prepared to suffer greatly because love will have to bear the weak. The Bible principle is that the strong always bear with the weak. All the things that are hurtful in your life, all the things that are unpleasant in your life, the strong always have to bear the weak. We don't expect the weak to bear the strong. In Romans 14 it tells us very clearly in the doctrine where he talks about certain people who don't understand about the Sabbath day and about food. Those who are weak in their faith we should receive them without doubt. We should bear up with them. The Bible principle is that the strong bear the weak. So when somebody whom you feel is lesser than you in the faith, whom you feel has not been renewed to the extent that you have been renewed, who is causing hurt because of their ignorance their unbelief or their sin, you have to bear with them. But many times the opposite is done. We try to get them to change to bear with us instead of we bearing with them.

Now this word in Col.1: 24 is interesting. The word *affliction* and the word *suffering* has nothing to do with sicknesses or troubles or the things that are not in line with the will of God. Some people say I am having this cancer, praise God I am suffering for Jesus. No way, God did not send you the cancer to suffer for Jesus. It says *the suffering of Christ*. That means anything that Christ suffered you can suffer too except for the redemption of God. I did not see Jesus suffer sicknesses; I don't see Jesus carrying leprosy on His body. How can you say that is the suffering for Christ when Christ Himself never had that? It's not the suffering of Christ at all. It's your own suffering. It's the devil's sickness on you and I won't term it in the biblical word suffering. We teach clearly that God does not want us to suffer poverty, God does not want us to suffer sicknesses, God does not want us to suffer things that are not in line with His words but at the same time we have to consider that there are Bible passages on suffering. So we have to dig into the Word of God to look at what the Word of God says about the area that is require of us. Suffering for Jesus, in fact Paul says in Phil.3: 10 *"That I may know Him and the*

power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings.” We like the first part. We say that I may know the power of His resurrection but don't miss out the second part. Know the fellowship of His sufferings and that's the part that will conform you to His image.

There are certain things that will not be perfected in you until you suffer. For tribulation lets read Romans 5: 3 *“And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance and perseverance, character; and character, hope.”* There is no way you are going to have a Godly character without tribulations. Look at it very carefully, tribulations produces steadfastness or the Bible calls it perseverance and perseverance that is being patience throughout the suffering produces character, and character, hope. That means you have great vision. Your vision becomes bigger. We see very clearly from the word of God there is no way you can be conformed to the image of Christ unless we understand the fellowship of His suffering. See there are two aspects to the Word of God, His power and His heart seen in the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Without suffering there is no perfection of character. You may be living under the same roof with somebody but you have withheld your love from him or her – how can your love be perfected? After all the love of God has been shed in your heart, but you have not allowed it to be expressed and shown to others – how can that love be perfected?

Rom.5: 5 *“Hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”* So you already have the love of God in you. You were born into love; your nature is to love. When you withhold your love, when you withhold your relationship with others, when you chose to relate to those who do not cause you sufferings, whom it's easier to get along with, do you know you are the loser in the end? Your character remains undeveloped. You are only able to love a certain category of people. If God were like you, most of us wouldn't be saved. Because God put up with all of us, all our weird character, all our sharp edges, God loves all of us, He did not just love a certain group of people. Thanks be onto God. His love covers all of us. If you choose to love some and not love others, you choose to withhold the love of God in your heart, you are robbing your own self. Your character will not be perfected. For tribulation produces perseverance, perseverance character. In other words, tribulation will produce character. If I am not used to loving certain types of people, if I withhold

my love from them, I am robbing myself. But when I chose to keep loving them, not only something happen to them but something happen in me. My character is being changed. That is what the suffering is. There is nothing to do with sicknesses or diseases or poverty. It has to do with choosing to love when it's difficult to love. Choosing to walk in agape love when it's not easy to love. Why do you think that in I Cor.13 that love suffers long? Because God knew that love has to suffer long.

Lets look at Col.1: 24 and see Paul expressing himself as he does in the Greek. Lets look at verse 24 "*I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.*" The word affliction is from the word '*thlipsis*'. The word *thlipsis* of Christ that is the afflictions of Christ is the same word translated tribulations in Romans 5. So he is still talking about the same affliction, the same tribulations. It is the normal word that is translated for tribulation. It is the same word Jesus used when He said in the world you shall receive tribulations. In the world you shall receive *thlipsis*. The root of this word is the word '*thlipbo*'. The word *thlipbo* means pressure. When I put pressure and press on your muscle that is *thlipbo* in the Greek. The noun for the word *thlipbo* is *thlipsis*, which actually means pressure. So the word tribulation has nothing to do with sickness. It has nothing to do with poverty. It has nothing to do with all the wickedness and the evil that happen in your life. The word just means the pressures of life. I can tell you if you put some people under the same roof it's high pressure and Paul knows what he was talking about when he say this love that helps him bear the pressure. See there is pressure upon you not to love. There is pressure on you to withhold your love. There is pressure to react and yet this love could contain and flow and take the pressure. What you are is what you really are under pressure. It's nothing if you are not under pressure and say I love God. But when the heat gets stand on and you still can say I love God then we know it's from your heart. It's nothing to say I am going to follow God all the way when times are easy but when the pressure is hard on you and you say I am going to follow Jesus. That is when it's really from your heart. See it's what you are under pressure that proves your real character. The rest of it is just camouflage. It's not real. The real part of you comes out under pressure.

Lets look at Paul loving the Corinthians. In II Cor.2: 4 Look at the word *thlipsis* and we can understand what Paul is saying here about the quality of his love for them. After you have looked through his love, you will understand that he

really went through something in his Christian life. Paul says in verse 4 *For out of much thlipsis affliction* (that is out of much pressure, he is undergoing a lot of pressure) *and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears not that you should be grieved but that you may know the love which I have so abundantly for you.* I tell you love suffer long. Love puts up with pressure. See Paul was referring to his first epistle. This is II Cor.2: 4 He was referring to first Corinthians. First Corinthians reads about how there is a group from Cleopas that tells Paul about all the terrible things that happened in Corinth, for example, the immorality happening, the confusion and some challenging his apostleship and remember it hurts Paul because he founded that church. He founded it with his sweat, with his blood and with his tears. It took effort to start that work. And here was the news, it broke his heart. I mean he really loves them. Do you know that the more you love, the more you put yourself in a position to be hurt? Do you know that those that hurt you most are those you love most? It is nothing if the world tells you, you rascal. But when your husband or wife tells you, you rascal. Which one hurt more? The one you love. The more you love, the more you put yourself in a position to hurt. That is why the agape love of God, the quality of this love will help you to withstand the pressure. Paul says because of his abundantly love for them, abundant agape, he put up with all the sufferings, he put up with all the pressure and he wrote to them with tears. You may not realize it but I Cor. 13 and I Cor. 1 right on to the end in chapter 16, all were written with tears. When Paul was writing love suffer long, the tears were trimming from his eyes. Love is patience and love is kind. He was crying and weeping away. It was from the depth of his heart that came the revelation of the love of God and you will agree I Cor.13 is one of the most beautiful definitions of love. It came under pressure. Love came out and flows out.

II Cor.4: 17 *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”* Paul considers that all those things that are pressing him. Now look at the pressure he went through before you understand what he call light affliction. I think that is an understatement. You know the greater your love is the greater you can take the pressure. Although you put yourself in a position to be really hurt and under pressure, yet the more you love the more you can take the pressure. The more you love the more you can put up with somebody. Have you ever seen lovers put up with each other when they are deeply in love. They really put up with each other. The love flows out. And Paul call it this is light affliction. It is nothing and it is bearable.

II Cor.4: 8 *"We are hard-pressed on every side."* The illustration is like those seeds that are going through the mill, where you are being crushed to bring out the oil. You are being put through the mill. You see how they put one round stick of sugar cane through one side of a rolling machine and the other side the sugar cane comes out flat and the juice is drained to a glass. Paul says we are *hard pressed and he says on every side. We yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed.* You know what kind of quality is that? Love never fail, life or death, tribulation, heaven, hell, angels, devils, nothing can separate you from the love of God. The quality of God's love is a quality that it can go through anything and it comes out the same.

In verse 10 *"Always carrying about in the body of dying of the Lord Jesus."* I never understood what he meant by the dying of the Lord Jesus until I understood love. See love puts up with people. Love bears with them, that the life of Christ may also be manifested in our body.

Verse 12 *"So then death is working in us, but life in you."* That is what he meant by filling up the affliction of Christ. What did Christ do? Christ died for us so that we may live. What did Paul do? He lived his life and gave his life even onto death that others may live. See we need Christ. Those great boosters throw an object into orbit; there is a great propulsion force. Paul talks about the constraining. See when the pressure is outside is great but the pressure within is greater, the pressure within will overcome. And the pressure inside is love. The pressure from within is greater than the pressure outside, and then you don't feel the pressure. Don't you know why you feel the pressure, because the pressure outside is greater than the pressure inside. Then you sensed the differential of pressure. But when the pressure inside and outside is the same, you don't feel it. Right now you don't feel air that much unless you swing your hand or the wind blow on you. But when you get into water, you began to feel the pressure on your body. And the deeper you go into the water the greater you feel the pressure. That is why even those divers that dive very deep up to a certain feet, when they come up, they cannot come right out into the air. They will have a condition where all their body will form bubbles because the pressure in their bodies gets adjusted to the pressure under there. When they come up, they have to be slowly adjusted to the presence. See the pressure within must be greater than the pressure outside. Then you will say it's

light. It's nothing.

II Cor. 5: 14 *"For the love of Christ constrains us."* Verse 15 *"and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves."* Do you see what agape does? Chapter 7: 5 *"For indeed when we came to Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were troubled on every side. Outside were conflicts, inside were fears."* Do you know that Paul had the opportunity to fear? Some of you think that Paul walk about like Superman. I want you to realize that Paul is a man like you. Paul is like you subject to fear but Paul chose to confess the Word. See he chose the Word. He says in verse 6 *"Nevertheless God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us."* How when Titus came brought the good news. See the man who wrote I Cor. really know how to love. He was not just writing a sweet poem. It was not just a poem written in ease and flowery bed of ease and feathers. He was writing from rocks, under pressure.

II Cor. 12: 15 *"And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you souls."* He says I will buy you with my life if I can. This is the kind of love he has for the church. Now this is the tremendous thing he says, *"Though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved."* This guy is really a fan of Jesus. To many people he will be fanatic. He says the more I love you, the less you love me but yet I will love you some more. Sounds like God. Jesus love and love and love until we love Him back and Paul did the same. He walks in love. He lives in love. He says you don't love me, praise God, I love you still. What a character! This is the kind of man that turns the world upside down. If you want God to use you greatly, live the quality of love that He does. Love like Jesus loves. That's the word *thlipsis*, the affliction and the pressure of Christ.

Col.1: 24 having understood all these things that Paul wrote, now you understand Col.1: 24 what he meant. *"I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church."* I tell you Paul loves the church. He loves the church and he loves believers so much. He is willing to spend himself for them. What quality of love do you have? The other word to consider in verse 24 is the word suffering from a different Greek word. I now rejoice in my suffering for you. The word suffering is from the word *'pathema'* which means affection and feeling. Do you know Paul had

feelings too? What was happening were not flowing the way he would like it. In other words, the *thlipsis* was flowing out against his feelings.

When Jesus Christ came on this earth, I can assure you it was a very uncomfortable feeling. Some of you have a small measure of it. If you have been in a church living a good Christian life, praising the Lord, worshipping God, suddenly we take you to a place where everybody curses the Lord. Do you know there is a different feeling? You fell miserable, you feel tortured without even the tortures of a hot iron. You feel the difference because your nature has been changed. I feel uncomfortable every time someone blasphemy God. See it's against your nature. Your nature is to worship and praise God. The more you become like God and know God, the more discomfort you have when people are not living right with God. And this is the suffering of Jesus, yet you put up with the discomfort because you love them and you want to win them to the Lord. That is the internal feelings within you.

See the word suffering has to do with the word feeling, affection. Your feeling of discomfort is there but you chose love and your spirit man came out and says I will love in discomfort. I will love in inconvenience. The love of God will love in season and out of season. When it's uncomfortable with you and when it's comfortable for you, you will still love and love and love. This is the same word that Phil.3: 10 say I want to know the fellowship of his suffering. You know what Paul is saying? I want to know what it is like for the holy Christ who knew no sin to live among sinners. I want to know what that feeling is like and suffer with Him. Now you can pray that prayer with meaning. When you sing that song, To Be Like Jesus, let me tell you, you cannot be like Jesus until you suffer like Jesus. Your character cannot be like Jesus until you have gone through tribulation and put up with all those things and it takes time to change the character. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Character comes by tribulations and tribulations with perseverance. So you know where to get faith. You know where to get Christian character by choosing to love. Whatever situation you are in, whatever discomfort you are feeling, put up with it, let the agape love arise and constrain you. Whether it be your non-Christian parents, partner or spouse, win them with love, put up with them. Don't react. If you keep reacting, the love of God is not coming out. Put up with them. Let the quality of God's love flow through your life. In this world Jesus says you shall have tribulations. You shall

have this kind of suffering. These are the sufferings that Paul went through.

I Peter 4: 13 *“But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s suffering, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. If you are reproached for the name of Christ because of your godly character. Some people suffer because of their stupidity. Some people suffer because of their sins. Some people suffer because of their mistakes. This is not the sufferings of Christ. Christ did not suffer because He was stupid. He was wise. Christ did not suffer because He was sinful. He was sinless. Christ did not suffer because He made a mistake or disobeyed God. Do you know that there are a lot of unnecessary suffering? There is, we are not talking about those. They do not qualify to be sufferings of Christ. There are sufferings of disobedience. The suffering of Christ is when you live a godly life, when you live a righteous life, when you live a sinless life, when you live a holy life and you get persecuted because of that. You get persecuted because you obey God but because of the love of God you are prepared for persecution and tribulations. God says in verse 14, you are going to receive help. God is going to help you when you do that and stand in love. For the Spirit of glory and of God rest upon you. God is going to put His glory on you. The greatest pressure any human being has ever taken was taken by Christ when He went to the cross three days and three nights. He was in the depths of the earth. None of us can understand the fullness of the pressure He went through. Paul prayed actually that I may know that fellowship. And out of the greatest pressure ever undertaken and the greatest reproach ever experienced came the greatest glory, the resurrection power from the dead spirit, soul and body He was raised. Mysteries of the spirit realm are going to be unfolded and revealed, some of the most beautiful things that are going to happen in your life and the greatest revelation that is going to unfold to you, some of the greatest manifestation of God’s glory on your life is going to come when you pay the price and take the suffering as a part of the Christian life. Embrace the sufferings of Jesus because of love. Love suffers long.*