

LIFE PRINCIPLES SERIES

THE LOVE OF GOD

I Corinthians 13: 4-8 *“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bear all things, believes all things, hope all things, endures all things. Love never fails.”*

Tonight we are going to look at the Love of God and we are looking at life principles. Last week we talked about patience and it's important for us to have patience. Another ingredient that we need to have in life is what I call love. Love in the bible and in God is not exactly what the world conceived to be love. A lot of times when people talk about love, they are not talking about love. They are talking about lust, which has selfishness involved. The love of God is completely different. As we look at love the way God meant it to be, God's kind of love, the Greek word 'agape' is a sacrificial love. It's a love that will cost something. In the world when people say they love each other, they may not be willing to pay the price or they may not be willing to die for each other or sacrifice for each other. Although in parental love, we see parents sacrificing for their kids and that is a small illustration of what God's love can be. But the true essence of love involves a sacrifice. Love is not doing something that is convenient. In the bible love means giving of our best. Sometimes people say they love each other, they don't actually give their best. But in the bible when we talk about love, love give the best and then love has a cost. In sacrifice there is a cost involved. Love would want to see the best that I given all these things.

In order to understand love, we need to look at God's love, Jesus' love and the love of our Father. The one from whom love flows. Many people have the impression of God that God is a God of judgment. He is always waiting there to seek what wrong you have done and waiting to weigh whether you are good or you are bad. It has a wrong impression of what God actually is like. God is a God of love. He has a tremendous compassion for humanity. So let's look in the bible to try to understand God's love as expressed here in the bible by Paul. We need to look at some scriptures in Romans 8, look at the extent of His love.

In verses 37-39, *"Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depths, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

That is how great His love is. So great that there is nothing that can separate us from His love.

Romans 5: 8 *"But demonstrates His own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

A lot of times when we talk about love, our love is conditional. It is conditioned by the quality of that person. Most of the time when somebody likes another person or when he or she loves another person in a natural, they will love that person because of something they see nice in the person. Or something they like about the person. Something good about the person then only they are able to love. That's not God's love. God's love is unconditional. That kind of love we just described is conditional. It's conditioned upon a person being good. A person being lovable or likable. Having something that you could admire or that you could really take delight in. But the bible says in Romans 5: 8, *while we were still sinners*. While there is nothing lovable about us. There is nothing good in us. We were sinners in God. In Romans 5 it says God loved us and He sent His only Son to die on the cross for us. In fact the bible even tells us something stronger here. In

verse 10, "When we were enemies of God", when we were separated from God. Doing things that were disobedient to God. God extended His love towards us. That's what we call unconditional love. We need to practice in our life this kind of love in our life. That's a tremendous life principle we need. For most of the time when you hear parents bringing up children or a loved one talking, you could hear that their love is conditional. A parent will tell the children if you do good then I will love you. That's not God's love. We do not want them to do bad but they must know that if they did badly we don't approve of the evil that they do. But we still love them. That would have been totally different. So God's love is unconditional. There is nothing that you could earn that love because He does not ask for any condition. He loves us because of who He is. The bible declares that God is love. His love comes from the depths of His very being. It is dependant upon His nature and not upon the one receiving. Human love is dependant upon the one receiving. If we were able to renew our mind and let our love grow to the level of God's love, we would be able to do far more things than we have been able to do because of His nature, because of His being that love that He has inside wants to be expressed. You could give without loving but you cannot love without giving.

Paul himself makes that statement in I Cor.13: 3 it tells us that you could give without loving. Verse 3 *"Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."*

He says that love is sacrificial. You cannot love without being sacrificial and giving. Yet you could be giving and not loving. They are not the same thing. It is interesting that it says here you could take everything that you have of your possession and you could give them all away and if you don't have love, the bible says, there is no profit. There is no gain. If you study very carefully, of course if you sell everything you have and you give to somebody else, somebody else did profit. But he is talking about the one giving. There is no profit in us. Our nature has not been changed. So we could give without loving but could never love without giving. Without wanting to sacrifice of our being. So there is Almighty God above looks down upon His planet earth and here we are living our own selfish life. The root of sin is self. The word 'SIN', if you take away the S, take away the N, you have the I in the middle. All sins arise from selfishness and from a selfish nature. The sin nature. Only when that sin nature dies and when that sin nature is removed by that Christ life we cannot fully understand the love of God.

Now sometimes a person says I love you with the love of the Lord. We are not sure whether it's the love of the Lord because sometimes people have motives behind. If you have lived long enough, you will realize that not everyone who says alleluia is a believer. I know you read the scripture where it says not everyone who says Lord, Lord, know the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is other things like not everyone who says alleluia, alleluia is necessary a believer. They could just mouth it. Only recently I was talking to a minister and his wife. I love to help ministers and pastors in the ministry. They knew me for about ten years. The Lord has finally led our path to cross each other. They were just beginning to want to move into a new realm of ministry. They knew all the past. All those up and down and everything that had happened. They have been to some of the places where I have pastured. As they sat in my office, we fellowshiped and they were talking about seeing whether there is a place in our church where we could employ them or help them.

So I told them this, I said, I know what it was like when you are just starting off. I know what it is like when everyone persecutes you. You are just a reject. I said these early years have not been easy. Through times there had been easy time and there had been hard time. The cycle goes on. I said now the ministry is successful and I find that a lot of people coming who want to be friends and whom last time were not friends. Sometimes you feel frustrated because when nobody knows you, they would say watch out for that guy. False prophet. I was so frustrated. Frustrated because I teach something from the bible and they said wrong teaching. But a foreigner would come and teach the same thing and they said good. It's like local durian doesn't taste as good. See there is something wrong in the kind of make up that we are in our church if that is the way it is. So those are trying times that we went through. Then I told them I am very careful now because I know who are my friends. I know they are those who are just being diplomatic. I know who are my friends because those who have been through the thick and through the thin. They have proven themselves. You see a minister friend was sitting in my office, when times were difficult they were not around. They will keep a distance from me. So I said, those who work closely with me, they must prove themselves. Not when it is easy but it is when it's tough that you hang on. Many times when you start having success, people will come and say, o brother, we have been with you all the way. You wonder where they were. When you need encouragement

they were not there. That's very sad.

We need to really learn to love with the love of God. We need to learn to love a person, not because of what the person did. That's very difficult. Most of the time people have bitterness, hatred and unforgiveness because of what a person did. Think about that. All of us came into this world from the womb that taught us to hate. Who taught us to have enemies. A baby does not have enemies. How come when we live to forty, fifty we got lots of enemies. Where did we get all that? We realized that all of us came in the same way. Here as we began to grow up in life, we sometimes began to let bitterness and unforgiveness come into our heart without allowing God's love to touch our hearts. Why do people have bitterness and unforgiveness because of what somebody did to them? Unforgiveness, bitterness, resentments or anything that is in our hearts shows that God's love has not been established in our hearts. It's not possible to have the love of God and unforgiveness at the same time. Why? The love of God is unconditional. Forgiveness is not placing condition. Unforgiveness is placing condition. Because that person did that, I am not going to forgive. That is our love and acceptance. It's based on somebody else's action.

All those aspects that we know as part and parcel of human life fall short of the love of God that He desires for us to operate in. The love that He wants us to operate is unconditional. That's the love of God which says while we were still sinners He died for us. While we were enemies He died for us. In fact when the Lord Jesus Christ died, everyone of His disciple forsook Him. Sometimes when we think about the Lord Jesus we only think about the six hours He died on the cross. But we forgot one thing that Jesus coming into the world for suffering. Coming to live with us in the mud of life. In the mud, the death and the clay of life. He is perfection, Jesus Almighty God, Word of God, perfect in holiness, perfect in righteousness, perfect in every way, coming down to live among imperfect men and women for thirty years. He bored up with all that. For thirty years He lived among sinful men. We may not appreciate the fact because we know sin from our past. But Jesus had never known a single sin. Sin to Him was horrible yet He lived among sinners for thirty years, lived with people with sinful thoughts, sinful words, sinful actions all around Him. That's suffering for Him. He ministered for thirty years. I would consider the time when He went to the cross as the climax and not the only time He suffered. He suffered through out His thirty-three years on this

earth. He suffered in the presence of sin. He can't tolerate it. But the climax of God came when He went on trial. We want to see how His love for us was without condition.

In the book of Matthew 26, as His last days came during His ministry, in Matthew 26: 36-39 *"Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, 'Sit here while I go and pray over there.' And He took with Him Peter and two sons of Zebedee and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me. He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Your will."*

Now this is one of the greatest climaxes in Jesus' ministry. The cross started here in His prayer. Why should the Lord Jesus be struggling? Holding the cup before the Father and saying, 'Father, if it be Your will, let this cup pass from Me.' Why is there a struggle? He knew that He would be raised from the dead in three days time. He even prophesied that to His disciples in Matthew 16, He says that the Son of Man will be betrayed and He will be delivered to the gentiles and they will crucify Him. After three days He will be resurrected from the dead. He knew He would be resurrected from the dead. That was not the problem but as He took that cup in His hand, that cup represented the cup of sin. Love does not mean doing what you like. Love means doing what God like and God's will. This is the beauty of God's love. There was no beauty in anyone of us. We were all sinners. There was no beauty in men. We were called enemies of God yet Jesus Christ held the cup that represents our situation, deliverance from sin. He is going to become sin for us. Why did He struggle? He prayed three times and this is very unusual of Him. He said, 'Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me.' Why the struggle? He knew He was going to be resurrected in three days time when He died. If you know that when you are killed you are going to be raised after three days, you won't be bothered about being killed. Jesus knew it but there was something else.

As He held that cup in His hands, that cup represented sin that He is going to partake upon Himself. That was the struggle. He knew no sin. He has never told a lie in His life. He has never committed any sin. Not in His thoughts, not in His

words, not in His actions. Now He was going to take sin upon Himself. That cup represented the sins of the world that He is going to take upon Himself. The death on the cross. Him becoming sin. So there was a tremendous struggle in His life. He was not afraid of physical pain. There were many other people who had died on the cross before Jesus. Crucifixion was a normal execution process of the Romans Empire. Many others have been crucified before Him and after Him. During the Roman Empire, it was a normal execution process. So Jesus was not afraid of the physical pain but it's one thing that He has never ever tasted in His entire life. He never knew sin. His struggle was the struggle to take sin. I mean He is so holy. Sin to Him is awful. His struggle was to take sin upon Him. Something that turns His entire being against what He wants. That was His struggle when He was praying. He never wanted sin but every time He looked at that cup, He saw you and I. That cup of salvation for us. Every time He looks at it, it represents all of creation that has fallen into sin. Finally love won. He loves us so much that He would take that cup and drink it. Love has stickability. When you love you love to the end. What a lot of people call love that is temporary. It has never been God's love. When you love, you love right to the end. He saw all of us there and He took that cup and drank it. He was determined to become sin for you and I. When He went back into prayer to see all His disciples, everyone of His disciple was sleeping; there was no one who encouraged Him. When the Lord took the cross He had to take it alone. Now Jesus has a cross for each one of our life in the sense of His will but His yoke will be easy and His burden will be light. One of the most difficult things for a person to do is to die to selfishness. Jesus Christ when He had prayed, the moment He finished Judas led all the soldiers to Him. When all the soldiers came, they took him but just before they took him, His disciples tried to fight and Jesus asked them to put away the sword.

Matthew 26: 53 "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to the Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?"

In the Old Testament, one angel could slay a whole army. He had at His disposal twelve legions if He wanted to. The Lord spoke and said, put away the sword. It tells us something. When they took Jesus, they tied Him up and led Him to Caiaphas the high priest. He was not there because He couldn't help it. He was there because He wanted to be. It's a different thing to take someone who don't have the power and do what you want with that person. It's another thing to take

the Lord Jesus Christ who has the power to be free and chose not to be free. So they took Him and they brought Him to Caiaphas who has a false trial on Him. Brought false witnesses. Finally delivered Him to the gentiles who hung Him on the cross. While He was hanging on the cross, all those who were His accusers came. Look up at the cross where He was hung and said, 'come down if You are the Son of God.' I want you to know He had twelve legions of angels but love kept Him there. It was not the nail that hung Him to the cross. It was His love. While all these people were mocking Him down at the cross, it certainly didn't make His suffering easy. He had one word to pray for them. He says, 'Father, forgive them for they do not know what they have done.' How could He do it?

The only response of a perfect person is love. Jesus was perfect. That means that whenever anyone of your words, actions or deeds are not responding in love, it is not just the circumstances that are imperfect, it is you who are imperfect. When we are not able to love, it does not just show the difficulty of the people who we find difficult to love, it shows a flaw in our life. That is our imperfection. Jesus because He is perfect, the only response is love. The only thing that flows out from Him was love. When He was on the cross, one of those things that He did was to pray for His people. When He was carrying the cross up the hill and all the women were crying, He said, weep not for Me but for yourself. All the selfishness of Jesus Christ was not there. Love has stickability. It endures forever. Jesus love was so great that even after all those things that they had done to Him; the only thing that came out of His love was pure love. His love was unconditional.

Even in His most difficult situation, when the Father has turned His face away from Him because of sin that was placed on His life for us. Our sins were placed on Him and when the depths of His spirit cried out, My God, My God why have You forsaken Me, yet He hung on to the cross because He loves us. Love is unconditional. The degree and ability of our love should not depend on circumstances or the actions of the person. The degree of our ability to love depends on how transformed our nature is into God's nature. We are talking about love over here.

To help you to appreciate, let me look at the opposite side. One of the enemies of man is fear. Hebrew 2: 14-15 says that he has destroyed him that has the power of

death, that is, the devil and releases those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. The weapon of the devil is fear. When we have fear, we become crippled inside. We can look at people who are crippled physically and have compassion for them. But let me tell you there is a crippling in the soul that is far worse than the physical handicap. It is being crippled by fear. If I were to ask you what is the opposite of fear, most of you answer will be faith. One with faith can only come about when love has come. There is no true faith without love. See when love is there faith comes. It says in the bible in I John, perfect love cast out fear. The force that can cancel and eject fear is the force of love. Love in bible is the principle opposite of fear. That is why love can cast out fear. A person who is not secure in love is a fearful person. When we are not loved and we are not accepted and we don't feel accepted by God we are fearful. Sometimes when we do not know God, we look for the acceptance somewhere else. When there is acceptance given here and there we feel secured. But when it does not we are lost. There is only one true security that is God's love. God's love is powerful, it's life changing and unconditional. Love will win in the end.

Why must we love? Look at it this way. The only way that God can transform and change all things has to be by love and by good. For example, if somebody did something wrong to you and you responded an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. So you give it back. Supposing that you win. You have become a greater evil. If a dog barks at you and you bark back. You won. You just become a bigger dog. That is why Jesus has to come and He said, 'Love your enemy', overcome evil with good, overcome evil with love, don't give hate for hate, when hate comes give love. When evil comes let love flow out. Whatever comes let love flow out. Because when love wins, it is a complete win. In doing that you yourself become better. When you do good, when you do well, when you love and you win with love, the whole picture is complete because love triumph. We are not talking about a weak love. We are talking about a strong love that will never let go. God so loved the world that He never gives up us. From the day Adam and Eve fell, His eye was on us. He never gives up. There were many times that we gave Him up. The story of mankind in the bible, men give up God many times but God never give up us.

I want to encourage you in the power of love. It is not weak it's strong. Love can do tremendous things that no other weapon can do. Nothing in the world can

be like love. I mean think about criminals who are locked up in prison. Drug addicts and outlaws, they are behind bars. Why, because we want them to change. We try to rehabilitate them. We want them to change and be a blessing to the society. But somehow something within them is so crooked up that every time they are released they will do more evil. Then you drag them back and put them behind bars again. That keeps on and on. We tried everything we can to change them, to change the evil into good but there is only one source and power that is when that hardened criminal meets the love of God. No prison bars could change them like the love of God. When the love of God comes into a hardened criminal, when God win us over with His love, suddenly what was impossible for man became possible with God. We met many of them who changed and became good. Some of them, they say they keep on doing evil but when they met love, love conquered them and they changed on the inside because love never fails.

We need to develop the quality of love like God. When you have placed your love on an object or on a person in God's way, nothing would shake you from that until you draw them into the fullness of that. We give up too easily. Our love cannot last long. Parents don't give up on your children even though you see your kids this way and that way. Remember this, if your love have been conditioned they will never change. They will only change when your love becomes unconditional where you don't dish out your love because of something in them. You bring it out because your nature is like God's nature then a powerful force will flow when we operate in love. It's life changing. So Jesus took sin on the cross, and He poured His love for us. From the cross of Calvary flows a river of love. Anyone who says they meet Jesus is Lord and Savior and really meet Him face to face will be like Him.

I think of a person in the bible by the name of Paul. He made a very strange statement in Col.1. A very strange statement. If you don't look carefully, theologically it looks wrong. 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."* Here is a theological statement that we have to understand carefully. It says he is fulfilling up in his flesh what is lacking in the affliction of Christ. Correct theology says that everything has been completed in Christ. That's true. Everything has been completed. Who can add to what Jesus had done? Nothing. Jesus had done everything. But Paul says a statement here. We have to take it in

the context, he is not talking about this but rather he is saying, now that he has met the Lord Jesus Christ the same demands are on his life. He now has to go out and love others the way Jesus loves. Christians, we forget that the top commandment from Jesus is love one another as I have loved you. So Paul knows that anyone who meets the Lord Jesus will have to go out and give love.

God's love has a heavy price. To love with God's love may mean you got to lay down your life. To love with God's love you got to sacrifice your time, your talent, your finances and everything. To love with God's love, you cannot love without giving. The same Paul who wrote that statement, let me read some of the things he went through because of love. Remember this love has a free choice. The reason God gave us a free choice is so that we could have respond to Him in love. Where there is no free choice, there is no love.

Paul in II Cor. 11: 23-28 *"Are they ministers of Christ? I speak as a fool – I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prison more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and in thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness – besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches."*

Why should Paul go through all these things? He is one of the most educated man in his days. Brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. He could have lived a comfortable life. Besides that he was a skillful tent maker. He could have opened his own business and be successful. Why should he do all these things, because he tells us the love of Christ constrains me. We are not talking about cheap love. We are talking about priceless, expensive, costly love that God wants us to have. Christians, if we are not prepared to love outside our convenience, we are not talking about God's love. God's love pommels us. We are willing to inconvenient ourselves, sacrifice in order to love others. God's love is sacrificial. Paul did all these things because he loves. The marvelous thing is this, like Jesus, at anytime throughout all these things that he went through, he could have stopped, given up

and went back to his comfortable life. He was never forced to do it. God never forced him. He had a free choice. That's true love. If you have to be forced into a situation where you have to face somebody until you love, that's not the way. It's when even though it pains us we would still go on and reach out and love. Sometimes when you reach out and love, your hands get cut off. What to do? Jesus said, give the other cheek. So you give the other hand. It gets cut off too. So give your leg. It's cut off too. Give the other one. That's God's love. We conquered by love. Not with the weapons of the flesh, the power of love is what Christians want to bring to the world. Life changing love. God's kind of love. Same with Jesus. Same with the apostle Paul. Let me close by mentioning something about this love.

Romans 8: 32 we are talking about God our Father, He who did not spare His own Son but delivered Him up for us. John 3: 16 says *"For God so loved the world."* I want you to see the pattern and the key. When God love us, it cost Him His Son. You think it was easy to see the Lord Jesus come down and die. It was not. The Father had to turn His face away from the Lord when He became sin because He loves us. He didn't spare His Son, even when the Lord Jesus Christ was hanging on the cross saying, my God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me. I tell you, everything within the Father heart of God want to come down and take His Son and pull Him up again. But love has stickability. He turned His face even though His heart bled. He was bleeding with love. He said, He will hold on. No wonder even the sky was dark. It was about twelve noon and it was dark as night. The whole universe stopped for a moment of time when Jesus died on the cross. All the angels stopped their singing. Why there is such silence in heaven, because the Lamb of God, the only begotten of the Father is being slain on the altar of the earth. I want you to see that it cost God to love. It cost Jesus to love. It cost Paul to love. We call ourselves the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Are we truly His disciples? Or do we worship a different God? The God of convenience.

What we are saying is this, because there is an imperfect world, it calls upon Christians to exercise a higher greater supreme measure of love than we have ever exercise. All the love that we thought was love when it was compared with the love of Jesus to the love of God the Father, we find that ours is one tiny atom in the ocean and it's time that we change. It's time that we return to God our love and understand that when the Lord Jesus was with His disciples around the table, and

when He says; love one another as I have loved you. He meant that is not going to be easy. There will be the cross that we carry in order to love. We have and that an interesting thing, the free choice to say I don't want to do it. When you can choose to say I still want it and then the love of God will flow through our lives. And we began to transform all those around us.

Let me tell you this, the hardest people on this earth can be touched by love. When nothing else can touch the love of God can. I don't care if you say that is your boss who is nasty to you, or is your office colleague, it's because we have not exercised the level of love God wants us to exercise. We give up easily. But when we begin to really live the type of love God wants us to live in our office, in the places where we are, we would be able to change for the better those who are around us. So that everyone who meet us, even the soldier who was guarding the Lord Jesus at the cross, he looked up and he said, 'truly this is the Son of God.' There was not one bitter word that came from the Lord. There were many others, Stephen when he died in Acts 7, as they were taking stones to throw on him, there was not one word of bitterness. Some of us have not been tested to death but all kinds of foul things come out of our mouth. Stephen was onto death and the only thing that came out was Lord do not lay this charge on them. He was saying I forgive them. You forgive them. That the love of God that we are talking about here. Remember John 17, Jesus says, 'I pray that they may love one another as I have loved them and that they may know that You love them as much as You love Me. The same love that You love Me is Jesus praying that they may know that You love them with. Today God loves all of us. If there were anything you think that God would give to Jesus He would give to you because God loves you as much as He loves Jesus. I used to think that God loves Jesus more than all of us but John 17; you read carefully, He says, He loves us as much as He loves the Lord. Anything that He would never deny Jesus He will never deny to us.