

**THE FORGIVEN LIFE ... THE LOVING LIFE:
THE CONTINUAL WORK OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH**

**What is Love
Matthew 5:43-48**

Matthew 5:43-48~ ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (ESV)

I. Introduction

The values of the Church, how Jesus and the apostles do ministry, can be summarized into four words ... the A.C.T.S. of a forgiven life:

1. Authenticity
2. Compassion
3. Team Work
4. Simplicity

The mission of the Church, what Jesus and the apostles do in ministry, can be summarized into one statement with three actions:

Love God, Love One Another,
and Share this Love to the World

Let us be clear, Brothers and Sisters, the mission is about LOVE. The goal is to LOVE. The end result is LOVE. The Christian faith is about LOVE. And if we do not love ... and I am talking about authentic love ... we miss what the forgiven life is all about.

Listen to some of the exhortations in the Bible concerning love in the New Covenant.

Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 16 verse 14:

1 Corinthians 16:14~ ¹⁴Let ALL that you do be done in love. (Emphasis is mine).

“All that you do” ... “be done in love.” Why, Paul? Well, because he pens three chapters earlier:

1 Corinthians 13:8~ ⁸Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

And a few verses later, Paul sums up all things with these words:

1 Corinthians 13:13~ ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide [or remain], these three; but the greatest of these is love.

Love will abide. Love will remain. Love is the greatest. Please look with me at Colossians 3:14:

Colossians 3:14~ ¹⁴ And ABOVE ALL THESE [that is, all these virtues: Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Meekness, Patience, Forgiveness] put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Emphasis is mine).

If we want harmony in the Church ... “put on love”. If we want unity in the Church ... “put on love”. Why is there dissention in the Church? Or why is there dissention in my marriage? Why is there bickering and blaming? Well, let me just put it bluntly ... you have not put on love.

The greatest virtue that we strive toward is to love ... “ABOVE ALL THESE,” Paul says. And Peter agrees with Paul that love is to be above all.

1 Peter 4:8~ ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

And in Peter’s second letter, he says that we have “become partakers of the divine nature” of God (2 Peter 1:4). Now that “divine nature” that we partake in does not mean that we are little gods, as some people erroneously teach. That “divine nature” is talking about become partaker in the character of God, namely love. Peter goes on to talk about this divine nature in verses 5 to 8.

2 Peter 1:5-8~ ⁵ For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, ⁶ and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, ⁷ and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. ⁸ For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, I love this next verse here. For those who want to be teachers, or pastors, or evangelists, they need to memorize this verse in 1 Timothy 1:5. Paul, writing to his young protégé on how to build the Church, puts this on paper.

1 Timothy 1:5~ ⁵ But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart [that is, authenticity] and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (NASB).

The goal of our instruction is authentic love. It is love from a pure heart. It is NOT hypocritical love, but authentic love ... a love that springs from a pure heart. What’s the difference between authentic love and hypocritical love? Well, let me just tell you right now instead of waiting to get to today’s message. So Spoil Alert!

Authentic love is this: “I am doing good things for you to benefit you. I am doing good things for you for your good.” That is authentic love. That is love from a pure heart.

Hypocritical love is this: “I am doing good things for you to benefit me. I am doing things for you so that I can get something out of it.” Sure, you might benefit from me doing something good for you, but ultimately, it is about what I can get from it. That’s not love. That is hypocritical love because the second that I do not get anything out of this doing good for you, I am checking out. I am gone. I cut my lost investment and move it somewhere else where I can get some kind of return.

But authentic love ... the God-kind of love ... is me keep on doing good things for you, at my expense, for your good. That is what Jesus did. And that is what the apostles did.

Let me read one more verse by way of introduction about the goal and mission of our Church is to love. This is another verse that I just absolutely treasure.

Galatians 5:6~ ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Wow! It does not matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile. That does not mean anything. What only matter is faith working through love. And if I may take some literary license and add a few more contrasts here. It does not matter if you are rich or poor. What only matter is faith working through love. It does not matter if you are a pastor or a parishioner. What only matter is faith working through love. And it does not matter if you are young or you are old, or male or female. What only matter is faith working through love. And it is not faith alone. It is faith working through love.

That is the mission of Forgiven Life. That is the mission of Christ and His Church. Say it with me:

Love God, Love One Another,
and Share this Love to the World

That is it.

II. What Love Is

Now that we know the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, the next question is, “What is love?” A good place to find out the meaning of love is in Matthew 5, verses 43-48. Look with me at verse 48. This is another one of those often misunderstood and misquoted verse.

Matthew 5:48~ ⁴⁸ You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Jesus is not talking about perfection where we are to be perfect without sinning. That is not Jesus’ point. In this lifetime and on this side of the earth, we strive to be righteous day by day,

but will never reach perfection until Jesus returns. Jesus is not talking about being perfect without sin in this passage. Jesus has something more specific in mind.

He is talking about love, starting in verse 43 ...

Matthew 5:43~ ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’

... and Jesus concludes this section on love with the statement about being perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. What Jesus is saying is that we are to be perfect in our love as our Father is perfect in His love. The word perfect can also mean complete. So we need to be complete in our love as our Father is complete in His love. How can we be complete or perfect in our love? Look back again at verses 43 and 44.

Matthew 5:43-44b~ ⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies ...

An incomplete love is to love those whom you and I find loveable. An incomplete love is to love those who love you back. That is an incomplete love. It is love to be sure. But it is incomplete. Look at verse 46

Matthew 5:46-48~ ⁴⁶For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

In other words, if you ONLY love those who love you and ONLY love those who you know and feel comfortable around, that is not supernatural love ... it is natural love. We naturally love those who love us. We naturally greet those who greet us. But the God kind of love is to love those who do not love us back.

1. First Point: the God kind of love is Indiscriminate.

The God kind of love does not select who to love and who not to love. The God kind of love values everybody.

I was talking to one of my pastor friends one day over coffee. And he was talking about all his woes raising with his children, how he did this for his kids and how he sacrificed that for his kids. Then he told me that he would do anything for his children. I sat there listening, smiling, and I celebrating the joy he had on his face as he told me his stories of sacrificing and serving his children. Then he told me something pedantic that I heard so often. He said, “Long, God gives us children so that we can learn of His sacrificial love because there is nothing I would not do for my children.”

Do you hear that a lot? I do. That statement that God gives us children so that we can learn to love the way God loves. Well, being a Bible teacher, I had to add my two cents

worth. Without diminishing the severe sacrifice and hardship that parents do for their children (because they do), it is not really children that God will teach us about His sacrificial love (or as some call it, “agape love”). No, it is really the Church that God gives to us to show us what His sacrificial love is about. It is easy, or easier, to love our children. Why? Because they love us back. It is right that we do things for our children because they are a part of us ... they come from us. But God’s perfect love, the God kind of love, is loving someone who does not love you back. It is loving someone who even hates you.

It is the Church that God gives to us to help us learn to practice that God kind of love. The God kind of love is counter intuitive. It shifts our service from self to service of others. The perfect love is a constant battle because we constantly fight our natural behavior to do good for ourselves to doing good for others without gain.

The book of Ruth is one of my favorite books about love. To be sure, it is a love story. But it is not a love story about a man named Boaz to a woman named Ruth. It is a love story about Boaz with his God and Ruth with her God.

The scene opens with a rich land owner named Boaz standing in his grain field surveying his land. What was he doing there? Surely he had trusted servants who could manage his harvest for him. No, it was not that. He was in his field because he knew who would be there ... the Poor. In the Law, the gains belonged to the owner as long as they were on the stalk. But as the workers reaped the harvest and some of the grains fell on the ground, the Law stated that those fallen grains on the ground longer belonged to the owner of the field. Those fallen grains belonged to the Poor. So Boaz knew that was where the Poor were. And in Deuteronomy 15, it states that God loves the Poor. And because God loves the Poor, we should love the Poor. So because Boaz loved God and God loves the Poor, Boaz loved the Poor. He was in the grain field looking at which poor person he could bless. You see, because the Poor cannot give anything back.

As Boaz surveyed his field, someone caught his eyes ... a young woman named Ruth. Now, it was not because of Ruth’s beauty that caught Boaz’s eyes. It was because of what she was wearing ... black mourning clothes. She was a widow. You see, not only does God love the Poor, God loves the Widow.

So Boaz turned to his servant and asked him who this woman was. The servant told him that Ruth was a Moabite. Ah, she was also an alien. The Bible says that God loves the alien. So here in this woman were all the things that God loves. God loves the Poor. God loves the Widows. And God loves the Aliens. And because Boaz loved God, he wanted to bless this woman. She was someone who could not give back what had been given to her.

That is the love of God, indiscriminately doing good to those who are in need.

2. Second Point: the God kind of love is Doing Good to others, even the ones who do not like you.

I had a person in the church one time that did not like me. You can see it in this person's face. In fact one time I said "hi" to this person, and this person gave me the nastiest dirty look. I did nothing wrong to this person at all, but this person just did not like me. It is probably because I did something that this person just had a different opinion. I struggle every week to greet this person. And there are times that I just wanted to avoid this person all together. It would have been easy to just ignore this person. But Jesus is clear ...

Matthew 5:47~ ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

So week after week, I struggle to be kind and loving even to the one who did not reciprocate that loving response. I had to fight against my every natural inclination to protect myself. But week after week, I took a deep breath, braced myself, and approached this person and say "hi". This kind of authentic love ... of perfect love ... is supernatural. It cannot be achieved naturally.

Look at Matthew 5:44:

Matthew 5:44~ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

In a parallel passage in Luke chapter 6, Luke records a fuller response from Jesus' teaching.

Luke 6:27-31~ ²⁷ "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

Authentic love is about doing something good to others and not just talking about doing something good. And if you want to know what good things you can do for those who hate you? Here are some suggestions:

- Bless them
- Pray for them
- Graciously accept their insult
- Give them the things that they want from you.

When you and I say that we love someone, the next question should be, "What good are you doing for them?" Loving someone is serving them. It is Service before Self. It is a deliberate choice to act on the good of others.

Love-Service is meeting people's needs so that they can be their best. And sometimes love-service can be demonstrated in the smallest ways.

3. Third Point: the God kind of love expects nothing in return.

We do not keep score of how many good things we do to others so that we could make sure we get those good things back.

I have a friend who has this internal calculator. When he takes someone out to eat, he remembers how much he spent on that person. The next time that person takes him out to eat, he must get the same dollar amount of food or something more expensive so that he comes out on top. Do you know someone like that?

It is easy for us to focus on getting our share, getting our return. Learn to get rid of that mental calculator that always adds up the cost to see if we got our money's worth.

True love is to give. True love is to serve. The reward is that we made someone's life a little easier, a little more enjoyable, a little more exciting, and a little more fulfilling. It expects nothing and desires nothing in return.

4. Fourth Point: the God kind of love is about Peace-Making.

When we have this kind of love ... the giving without expecting anything in return, we are "sons of our Father".

Matthew 5:44-45~ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

This is what the Father does, so this is what we do. Interestingly, at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us who the sons of the Father are.

Matthew 5:9~ ⁹"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

They are called "peacemakers". To love someone this way is to try and make peace with them. And if we want to make peace with someone, trying loving them by doing good to them.

III. Conclusion

So what is love? What is the God kind of love?

1. First, the God kind of love is Indiscriminate.

It loves everybody. It does not discriminate.

2. Second, the God kind of love is Doing Good to others, even the ones who do not like you.

Biblical love is not a feeling as it is an action. It is doing something good that will benefit others.

3. Third, the God kind of love expects nothing in return.

Love does not calculate and expect anything in return. Love gives and keeps on giving.

4. Fourth, the God kind of love is about Peace-Making.

We become sons of our Father (or daughters of our Father).

IV. The Blessing

Presider: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May the love of our Lord Jesus Christ be unto you.

Congregation: And also to you.

V. Forgiven Life Living

Read the Marks of the True Christian in Romans 12:9-21.

Romans 12:9-21~ 9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. **10 Love one another with brotherly affection.** Outdo one another in showing honor. **11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.** **12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.** **13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.** **14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.** **15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.** **16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.** Never be wise in your own sight. **17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.** **18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.** **19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."** **20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."** **21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

What are some of your thoughts about the marks of a true Christian? _____

1. Indiscriminant Love

Indiscriminate love is to love our neighbors and our enemies, the lovable and the unlovable.

Matthew 5:46-48 ~ 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

- a. What are some ways you can get out of your comfort zone this month to love someone who may not be easy to love or someone who is different from you, whether in age, position, values and beliefs? _____

2. Doing Good to Others

Love is doing good to others even when they do not like you or even when you don't like them

Matthew 5:44 ~ 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

- a. Do you find it easier to love someone who is nicer to you or who you like? _____

- b. If someone treats you with disdain, brushes you off or treats you unfairly, how would you react differently next time after reading these bible verses? _____

Galatians 5:13-14 ~ 13 For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. 14 For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

c. What are some ways that you can serve one of your church members this week? _____

d. Can you think of a church member this week who is in need (of prayer, resources, encouragement) that you can provide help to? _____

3. Expecting Nothing In Return Love

Luke 6:32-36 ~ 32 “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 35 But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. 36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

a. What is the source of your desire to help others in need? _____

b. Is it out of compassion and sympathy, the desire to be liked, the inability to say no, or is it stemming from the realization that God loves us so much and we therefore want to share God's love with others around us? _____

c. Do you find yourself running out of steam in trying to help others when you are trying to do it from your own strength vs God's strength? _____

d. Have you felt discouraged from helping others due to past experiences of being taken advantage by those who are in need? _____

e. Given our limited resources, we can't help every single person who is in need. Do you help others on a first come first serve basis, or are there certain people that God is putting in your heart to help out? _____

4. Making Peace Kind of Love

Matthew 5:9 ~ 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

a. Is there someone (family member, co-worker, church member, neighbor, friend) that you have a conflict or broken relationship with right now? _____

b. Is God leading you to work out the conflict with this person? _____
