

Well, brethren, the Bible is full of very, very good topics, many topics that we could study at this time of year, or virtually any time of the year. But there is one in particular that I'd like for us to dwell on at this time, and in our present circumstance. In other words, considering the fact that we are approaching Passover, and considering the fact that the church is in the state that it's in today.

Now, we each have something that is indisputable; we each have a reputation, don't we, whether we like it or not. We have a reputation. We're known by our fruits. And, of course, the beauty of a reputation is, that it's something that we can change, over time. It's something that if we've got something there that we don't like, we can do something about it. So that's a good thing. But the spring Holy Days remind us to, you know, grow up, to mature, to be adults, and to deal honestly, even though it's sometimes painful to deal with the real person that God sees and the real person that other people often see more clearly than we do ourselves.

And, so we need to ask ourselves, and I think it's good for us, if God or others had to bring it down to one word that describes us best, what would that word be? If there were just one word they could bring it down to?

But the subject of tonight's study isn't specifically about our reputation, it is indirectly. But more specifically, it's about God's reputation. What we want to think about tonight is how we measure up to the reputation God has.

Let's go to I John to begin. I John, chapter 4. We'll begin here in verse 7. You know, there are many approaches to Bible study and tonight I would like to, instead of leaning toward the academic side, lean to the application side of things. Both are excellent ways to go, both are good.

**1 John 4:7** *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*

**Verse 8** *He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

And so we see that, based on the inspired word of God, if we could reduce God's reputation to one word, it would be love. Everything about our Father and everything

about our elder Brother exudes this very expansive quality. It identifies who and what the Father and Jesus Christ both are. Love also defines who among mankind are His begotten children. A very important thing. That's one of the things we want to be thinking about at this time of year. Now, there are many Hebrew and Greek words that are translated as love, but my purpose tonight is not to look at all those words, there are many words that are used, and I don't want to look at those words, and I don't want to look at their meanings. What I want to do is look at the one that defines God and one very, very closely related.

In verse 7 that we just read, it says *Love is of God* and in verse 8 where it says *God is love*, that love comes from the Greek word *agape*, which is the highest form of love. Now, this is not new knowledge to us, but it's very necessary for us to go over it and remind ourselves. It's the highest form of love. It's not sensual love, it's not the love of money, or many, many other types of love that are described in the Bible. *Theyer's Dictionary* defines *agape* as affection, good will, love, benevolence. And, of course, that word benevolence that one we're all familiar with, means to be filled with good will or a disposition to do good to others. And, of course, we can remember Mr. Herbert Armstrong and how he would define love. And, it was based on, you know, this word that we just talked about, this thing of benevolence.

In other words *agape* is outgoing concern, isn't it, for other people. It flows out from God – there is no selfishness in it, there's no bottling it up, it's just something that flows out from God. Now, *agape* is a noun. It is a thing. It literally is what God is. If you could put it down to one word, that is what God is; He is love. And it is the thing that constitutes the being of God.

Now, *agape* comes from the Greek word *agapao* and whereas *agape* is a noun, *agapao* is a verb, and of course we know what verbs do; verbs are action words, aren't they? They describe action. *Thayer's* says that concerning people, it means to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of and to love dearly. So the other references to love in these two verses are that verb form *agapao*. So, we've got *agape*, and we've got *agapao*. And those are the only two words that are translated as "love" in these verses here.

So to recap here, God's thinking, His focus, His action that He takes is always outgoing concern for others. In other words, God is selfless. He is very unlike the

society we live in, the world we live in, God puts others ahead of Himself. And for those of us who've committed ourselves to think and therefore act as He does, means that we have committed ourselves to overcome throughout life, because we're not perfect like our Father is, or like Jesus Christ is. But that's the direction that we're working, we're committed to becoming love, like He is.

Equally important in these first two verses that we've looked at is the fact that, if we don't love as God does, if we don't do that, then we don't know Him. And that's an easy thing to read right over because we just assume naturally that we love, just like God loves. We can't afford to assume like that. We need to really think about it, and to get to the bottom of it.

But now for the remainder of this study, let's make it our aim to go over several points, three points in particular, that illustrate very clearly for us the outgoing nature of God's love and what it looks like in practical terms. What it looks like in everyday life. The action form, the *agapao* form of the word.

And, as I said earlier, this is important for us to dwell on at this time of year and in our present circumstance as God's church, because we are in a very, very scattered condition as God's church, aren't we. To begin with, the first point, if you want to look at it in this study, is that:

1. **Love is spiritual**

Love is spiritual. We're going to combine several verses here, and come up with proof of this particular point. First, let's look at John, chapter 4. John, chapter 4. Now, we've already read that God is love, haven't we.

**John 4:24** *God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*

So, God is love, we've already read that in I John 4, and He is spirit. And from this we know that love is therefore spiritual. But let's add some other verses to this as we reason together. Let's go back to I John, but this time we'll go back to I John, chapter 5 and in verse 2. I John 5 and in verse 2. John writes,

**1 John 5:2** *By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.*

**Verse 3** *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*

You know, they are a blessing for us. But love is the keeping of His commandments. You know, this could not have been written, I think, any plainer than John wrote it. And God inspired it. *Agape* is that we keep the commandments. So we see that the commandments are spiritual as well as the keeping of them defines what love is. And in Romans 7, we don't have to turn there, Paul said that the law was spiritual, didn't he. But let's go ahead and turn to Matthew chapter 5, and in verse 17 we begin. Matthew 5 and in verse 17, Christ talked about the law:

**Matthew 5:17** *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.*

**Verse 18** *For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled.*

So, Christ didn't come to do away with something that was spiritual. Spiritual means, it's enduring. It never goes away. It is something that always is there. But Christ did come to live it, in its spiritual intent, didn't He? He came to fulfill the law. He didn't come to destroy love—you know, that'd be crazy, wouldn't it, Jesus Christ coming to destroy love, when we understand what the keeping of the Commandments is. But He came to show what it looks like on a spiritual level, so that we can apply it. Let's go to **Verse 20** *For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*

And, of course, the scribes and the Pharisees knew the letter of the law. They knew what it was they had to do on a physical level. But in essence, what He's saying here is that just thinking, just thinking that we're truly loving people does not mean that we'll enter into the kingdom of God.

Love is of the spirit. This is what the Pharisees didn't have, and the scribes didn't have. They did not have the Holy Spirit. Love is of the Spirit. It's one of the fruits of actively using the Holy Spirit. The emphasis, personal emphasis here, is on using the Holy Spirit. You know, when we're baptized, we're given access to the Holy Spirit. It's given to us. But, we have to use it. As Paul said, we to stir it up.

In another place, Paul writes that the Spirit is a spirit of power, and a spirit of love and of a sound mind. When we yield to it, it actually gives us the power to keep God's law at the spiritual level, which, of course, is love. That's what love is. And, of course,

we know that we don't do it perfectly, we don't do it to the level that Jesus Christ did it, but that is the thing that we continually improve toward. And Christ went on to explain what it looks like in day-to-day life.

**Verse 21** *You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'*

You know, we're speaking about the letter of the law. You know, in this particular instance, there is no love in just refraining from killing somebody. In keeping the letter—there is no love in that at all, is there?

**Verse 22** *But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire.*

So, the spirit of the law very clearly from what Christ says, spoken here, the spirit of the law involves attitude, doesn't it? And attitude is generated either by the spirit of this world, which is obviously what the scribes and the Pharisees were utilizing, or, it's generated by the Holy Spirit. So, love involves taking action at the spiritual level.

**Verse 23** *Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you,*

**Verse 24** *leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.*

So, getting together face to face, you know, in kindly communication. That's what Jesus Christ is talking about. It's open, it's honest, so that we can reconcile and be of one mind. That is what He was talking about. That's the spirit of the law. And that's what the action—you know, we talked about *agapao* being an action word—that's that the action of love working looks like. Love is doing what's impossible, or at least very distasteful, to the natural, in other words to the carnal mind. Love is able to do that thing, but obviously it's by utilizing the power of the Holy Spirit. Which again points to the fact that love is a spiritual thing. Let's go to verse 43.

**Verse 43** *You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'*

**Verse 44** *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,*

You know, this is what, you know, this is what love really is—it's being able to do the impossible. Makes no sense to the carnal mind to do what Christ just said to do here.

Having outgoing concern for somebody who views you as an enemy? Somebody who curses you, somebody who hates you, who uses you or persecutes you. You know, that is what *agape* looks like in action. And that's the standard, the standard of Jesus Christ is the One we want to look at, and compare that in our own lives.

And we need to realize, it's nothing more, what Christ is telling us what love is, we need to realize that it's nothing more than what He did for us while we were still in our sins. The very thing that He did. And, of course, the incredible thing is that we can love in the very same way, on the spiritual level through the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Verse 45** *that you may be sons of your Father 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.*

And so again we see that loving as our Father loves is what identifies us as His children. So again, is that what people see? Is that our reputation?

**Verse 46** *For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?*

**Verse 47** *And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?*

You know, just loving those who think the way we do—That's pretty simple to do, it's pretty easy to do, isn't it—it's no different than those without the Holy Spirit. That's the same thing that's done; we have to go beyond that point. We have to go through the Spirit.

**Verse 48** *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

You know, loving as God loves. This is what Jesus Christ did, this is the standard that He set. Loving as God does is what perfection looks like. And, it is what God is. And, brethren, that's what we want, that's what we want to see in our lives. Let's look at Philippians chapter 3. Because we are physical, love is spiritual. We do have the Holy Spirit, but we realize that is something that we grow in. It's the perfection that we work toward. Let's begin in verse 3. Paul says,

**Philippians 1:3** *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,*

**Verse 4** *always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy,*

**Verse 5** *for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,*

**Verse 6** *being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;*

You know, Paul was confident in his prayer for the brethren in Philippi, because he knew that God was faithful—just like He is in our lives—to complete the spiritual work that He had begun through them. And, we know what it is like, don't we, in our own lives, sometimes we take two steps forward and sometimes we take a step back. That's how it is! We all do that, don't we? But Paul knew, just as we do, that if they didn't give up in the process, they'd come to perfection in the end, because God doesn't quit. What He has begun, He will not quit! Unless we do. And again, this goes back to, what is love? Love never fails. That's what Paul said in I Corinthians 13, love never fails! God won't quit working with us.

Verse 9, and this is really the verse that I wanted to focus our attention on. He says:

**Verse 9** *And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more—your love just grow and grow—in knowledge and all discernment,* Now I read that from the New King James, and lots of translations say judgment—knowledge and judgment.

**Verse 10** *that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ,*

And so, you know, this thing that Paul is praying, this is an incredible prayer. And, you know, by extension, Paul prayed it for all of us, but certainly it was specifically for the brethren in Philippi. But the point of it is, brethren, the prayer is, that our love can grow more throughout the course of our lifetime. And, that's what it's about. It takes time, doesn't it, to gain a knowledge of what God's love is actually like. There are many concepts in the world, many concepts that we have from within our own family life, the environment that we grow up within. But it takes time to develop that knowledge about what God's love is actually like. It takes time to learn, to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit. You know, that's a subject all in itself, isn't it? We have to learn to follow the lead, to be sensitive to the proddings and the nudgings of the Holy Spirit, so that we can begin to actually see ourselves as we really are. We have to become spiritually

discerning. In other words, we have to come to righteous judgment in our own minds if we are to grow in God's love, and I'm speaking about righteous judgments in regard to ourselves, as to how we really are. Let's look at Matthew chapter 20, and in verse 20. Begin there. You know, one of the reassuring things is that John, the one we certainly do think as the apostle of love, the one who write the most about love, you know, here Paul was talking about it in Philippians, but John is the one who really we consider as the apostle of love. And John, who you know became a very close and dear friend of Jesus Christ, I mean, you know, like David and Jonathan, that type of a relationship. You know, John had to grow more and more in love, just as Paul was talking about here, through his lifetime. He wasn't always that way, and that's encouraging to us, because we understand, we're in the same boat.

Let's pick it up here. You know, John grew up in a family where, it would appear, that they liked to be noticed.

**Matthew 20:20** *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him, to Christ, with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him.*

**Verse 21** *And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."*

You know, it's possible that this was their mother's own ambitious request. That's possible, I mean certainly, that that's not without the possibility. But at the same time, she and her sons came together, they came together to Christ on this particular occasion. And, what we do know about her sons is, these were adult sons, these weren't children. These were adult disciples of Jesus Christ, who came with their mother.

One commentary that I read on this particular exchange held this particular view, that they, meaning James and John, appeared to be making this request to Christ through their mother. And that's also very possible, isn't it? And so it would appear to be less than an outgoing concern that drove this particular request. It was something born of pride. You know, these men were growing as disciples, I can't imagine that any of us would not have grown in the presence of Jesus Christ, if we stayed with him, we endured with him, et cetera. We would have been growing just as John and James were, but they needed the Holy Spirit to be able to change their naturally selfish nature. Let's go to



Luke, chapter 9. We'll look at one more incident concerning James and John.

**Luke 9:51** *Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, near the end of Christ's physical life, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,*

**Verse 52** *and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him.*

**Verse 53** *But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem.*

**Verse 54** *And when His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?"*

You know, Christ, in Mark 3, called these two fellows, the sons of thunder. You know, both of these men were somewhat rash, somewhat bold, you know, with that particular kind of a zeal—not necessarily the kind of zeal that we really want to have.

It would make you think of a gun fighter from the American West, maybe a Bible-toting gun fighter, who is ready to draw and shoot, just at the drop of a hat, you know. It was not a right spirit; it was not a right frame of mind. These men were ready to consume these Samaritans with fire.

**Verse 55** *But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.*

**Verse 56** *For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." And they went to another village.*

You know, what Christ said to them had to be a stinging rebuke, and I'm sure they learned from it. This was probably one of those ah-ha moments in a person's life, where, you know, John came to realize, I'm really off track. Like Peter did when Christ said to him, "*Get behind me, Satan.*" You know, he was of the wrong spirit. And that's where James and John were in this particular place. Because, in their minds they were driven by what they thought was a proper love of Christ. They were there to promote their man, so to speak. You know, we have sports in this country, don't we. And we always want to promote our team, you know, we want to cheer them on. And this is really more of a thing that these men were doing at this particular point in time. Maybe they had a feeling of superiority to the Samaritans, certainly that would have been true in

their culture. But regardless, it was of the wrong spirit, there was no love in it.

This is a great lesson for us, isn't it, brethren. What can seem to us in our minds like a zealous love for God could be nothing more than a proud attitude toward our fellow man. That's something we need to think about. We can be just like Peter was at that one point, or James and John at this point. What can seem like a zeal and a love for God is really nothing but a rotten, wrong attitude toward our fellow man. Because that's what we see here. James and John had a very selfish and a very loveless attitude toward these other fellows, these other people.

Now, we've already read where Christ said to follow His example and to love our enemies, in other words, those who oppose us. To do good to them and to pray for them. And Christ was speaking of real enemies, not those from among whom God had already begun a good work. There's a difference, isn't there. Looking at real enemies, people in the world who hate us, you know, and they don't have God's Spirit to help them to come into balance, or whatever the case.

But what about those with whom God has already begun a good work? You know, there are those who retain the Holy Spirit in other folds of God's church and we've talked about this, and this is something that of late that we've come to understand. And you know it's a very humbling thing to come to understand how far off track we actually were, for quite a period of time. But there are those who retain, without question, the Holy Spirit, in other folds of the church. And probably some who may oppose us. That's very true, that's very true. It could be true.

It's very helpful, brethren, for us to ask ourselves, "Am I really of the right spirit? You know, if someone were to leave our fold, our little group, our little fold of the flock, and to go to a different one, to go to a different fold of the flock, do they somehow become an enemy to us?"

We need to ask ourselves, what spirit are we of? Our love needs to more and more grow in knowledge and discernment, to be able to see love as God sees it. The good thing is that if the one word that might be used to describe us actually isn't *agape*, we can change it by humbly repenting and yielding to the Holy Spirit because, again, real love is a spiritual thing, it's something we can change, with God's help.

## 2. Love is Corrective

Love is corrective. You know, that isn't a very popular word today, now, is it? Correction. There are a lot of words we could use in place of the C word, synonyms, whatever, because in our society today, it has such a very negative connotation to use that word correction. Because we live in a world that is under the sway of our adversary, and people who love themselves.

You know, Paul told Timothy, in the last days, perilous times could come, because men would be lovers of themselves. You know, there would not be this love, *agape*, which would not abound, and so, love would grow cold. And because of that, we live in a very stressful, we live in a very angry, in a very grief-stricken—you can think of lots and lots of negative words, we live in that kind of a society. Let's go to John chapter 13. God's not looking for that in His people. This is tremendously inspiring, I think, as well as sobering at the same time. This is what God is looking for in His people:

**John 13:34** *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.*

**Verse 35** *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

Now, John has used the word "love" here, numerous times. And, all the verb forms of love are *agapao* and the one noun form of love is *agape*. So it's exactly what we've been talking about. Christ is talking about His and the Father's love and the action that it takes. And we're commanded to do what it takes, in other words, to take the action to express this outgoing concern to our brothers and sisters in Christ. And we are to literally stand out so sharply from the world around us that anybody can clearly see what a difference there is in God's people. We're to be that different, brethren. Not just kind of different, or sometimes different, but that different. We are to stand out so that anybody, somebody who doesn't have the Holy Spirit, can look and say, Wow! Those people love each other.

God's love is perfect, it's comforting, it's reassuring, it's the best possible environment to live a good life in. It's what anyone could ever desire. And we need to ask ourselves, why does Christ have to command us to, in effect, have an abundant life and truly love each other? This is a command, it's *a new command I give to you*. And we know the answer, very simply, don't we. It's because we're involved in a spiritual

battle, the thing we've been talking about. Love is a spiritual thing. It's a spiritual battle. One spirit wants to live outwardly, to give, and other wants to get all it can, to put up walls to hold in all it can for self. And that's the difference between the two.

Let's go to Hebrews chapter 12, beginning in verse 3. We don't have to look any farther than our own children or think back into our own youth or even think into our own present age, whatever age we are, to know the answer

**Hebrews 12:3** *For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*

**Verse 4** *You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.*

**Verse 5** *And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him;*

Our Father speaks to us as to children and works with us just as we work with our own. He corrects us to get us back on track. That's a wonderful thing. It's so natural, if we understand the principles of God's word, it's a natural thing, isn't it. To want to get our children back on track.

**Verse 6** *For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.*

Why does God do that? Is it because He's bigger and He can do it? Is that why He scourges and chastens? No, that's a silly question, isn't it. Ridiculous. It's because He loves us. That is why He does.

Love here in verse 6 is *agapao*, that's the action word again, it's the outgoing concern for others. God and any sound-minded parent wants his child to live in stress-free environment, they want them to live without anger, without grief, without rebellion. That's what God wants; that's what we should want for our children as well.

Now, notice the result of loving correction here in verse 7.

**Verse 7** *If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?*

And it's a ridiculous thing, isn't it. Why wouldn't you correct your son if you love him? That's obvious; we must do that. But it says, *if you endure chastening*. Endure means to remain, to bear, to have fortitude, to persevere. In others words if we

don't quit the work God has begun in us, He deals with us as His literal sons. That is an incredible thing when you don't just read over it. You really stop and think about that, that we are actually God's begotten sons, His children that He's working with.

**Verse 8** *But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.*

We are spiritually, and I know this is a hard thing to say, but I'm going to say it: we are spiritually bastardizing our children if we don't love them enough to correct them, and by correct, I mean to change their attitude, because that's what God does with us; He changes our attitude. So that we can conform to His image, so that we can become like Him.

**Verse 9** *Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?*

**Verse 10** *For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.*

Now, we know what it's like. Physical fathers are imperfect, and some of us have had very, very good examples, and some haven't. But, as a rule of thumb, a good father is going to do the very best that he can when it comes to correcting his children—or a mother, they're going to do the best they can. Sometimes it's not out of outgoing concern, but that must always be our aim. That is what God wants us to do.

But God, who is literally love, God who is perfect, He does it for our benefit. He does it so that we can have an abundant life, so that we can become just like Him. Live without the stress, anger, anxiety and all those things that surround us in the world.

**Verse 11** *Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; now, again bear in mind that this is the fruit of love, this is not enjoyable, necessarily, right off the bat, is it? Not joyful for the present, but painful, nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

We want to notice this. God's love expressed in correction produces a blessing. It produces a blessing, the peaceable fruit of righteousness. And again, when we think back to what Scripture tells us, it tells us that all of God's commandments are righteousness, that's what David said in the 119<sup>th</sup> Psalm. And since the keeping of the spirit of the commandments is love, love is the end product. Love is the end product of correction.

Incredible thing. Let's go to Psalm 119 and we'll read a different verse. Psalm 119 and we'll read verse 65. David is talking about his experience with God, and all of this ties just exactly with what we've discussed tonight.

**Psalm 119:65** *You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word.*

David knew God's motivation toward him was in David's best interest. David didn't have a question about it, and I don't think any of us do. We know that God, what God does, how He molds and shapes us, is always for our best interest.

**Verse 66** *Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments.*

Now, where does this come in? We just read about this, didn't we? This sounds a lot like what we read of Paul earlier in Philippians. Paul said, when he prayed that the Philippian brethren's love would grow more and more in knowledge and discretion, or judgment. David is essentially saying the very same thing, he's praying the same thing. To believe the commandments in their spiritual intent is to desire to love as God loves. And remember that David was a man after God's own heart. We understand that it was his mind. David was a man who wanted to learn to think just like God. Of course, it's not an automatic thing, but David had to work throughout his lifetime, just like we do. But he, and we, need the molding and shaping that comes through our Father's correction.

**Verse 67** *Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.*

And this is interesting. The *Septuagint* and the Latin *Vulgate* both render the words, *before I was afflicted* as *before I was humbled*. Before I was humbled. Interesting again, isn't it. Because pride results in corrupted knowledge and judgment and therefore is sin. That's what happened to Lucifer, very well known. But God humbled David through whatever corrective action, that we don't know, I'm sure many, many times in his life, it was different pressure. Just like God does with us, He corrects us in one way or another. But it was needed in order to get him back on track.

**Verse 71** *It is good for me that I have been afflicted,* Now again, this is a man after God's own heart and he's learning to think just like God, and he says, *It is good for me that I have been afflicted*. In other words, that you have corrected me. *That I may learn Your statutes.*

**Verse 72** *The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.*

If we put this in modern vernacular, David is simply thanking God from his heart for the correction, because of what it was producing in him. The fruit of the law of God's mouth is what? The keeping of the law is love, so that was the fruit that he was talking about; it was outflowing love. And in that love, brethren, there is peace and there is an abundant good life, despite our circumstances. You know, you can have a good life, despite what you're going through. Now, for many who don't know God and don't have the Holy Spirit, they don't understand the things that we've been talking about tonight. You know, when you're in a difficult circumstance, you really can't have peace, but brethren, we can, and we know we can and David knew it. It far surpassed any amount of wealth God could have blessed him with. Looking at this introspectively, we have to ask ourselves, is this true of us? Do we value God's love expressed in the way that David talked about, in correction? Do we value it as highly as David did? Do we therefore allow it to produce the priceless blessing of God's own love in our lives? Because that's what it produces.

And of course, this leads us to our third and final point of the evening. Of course, we've already made the point with this right here. The third point is:

### 3. **Love begets love**

Love begets love. Love is not stagnant. When you think of the word stagnant, I remember on the farm growing up. We would have mud puddles in the farmyard there, after a hard rain. And, after about a week or ten days, those what had been mud puddles turned to green slime, and had all kinds of with bugs and things in it. Stagnant, just stagnant.

But love is not that way. It flows out from the giver, it flows from the giver, and it supplies to the needs of other people. It's very much like a clear flowing river that brings life to the soil wherever it flows. And again from my youth, I remember, we lived on an irrigated farm, and so we had gravitational irrigation; we had water that ran down ditches, and we could run it out into fields to irrigate fields, and we could irrigate fields that were dry as a bone. And it was amazing to see what this flowing water would do. One day, you could flow water out over a patch of alfalfa, let's say, and within two or three days there would be four or five, maybe six, inches of growth in this alfalfa. That fast! Because that's what outflowing water does; it's just like love.

Love cannot be contained in walls. It can't be contained in manmade barriers that are constructed in pride. Walls that are erected of our own image of our own righteousness. Walls constructed by a misguided zeal for what we've assumed was the love of God—we talked about that earlier. We can get really, really proud of our guy, like James and John were of Christ. And it wasn't right, it wasn't right at all. When that happens, brethren, it's like still water inside of barriers, it's like the mud puddle that had barriers, that had a specific zone that it had to stay in, and it could not be fresh and flowing and alive. And love will become stagnant in the very same way. Let's go to 2 Corinthians 10. And we see that pride puts up barriers, in other words, it creates stagnant conditions, which we can easily relate to.

**2 Corinthians 10:12** *For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

You know, we dare not compare ourselves with those who are in love with themselves. And why is it, why would we want to compare ourselves with those? It's because the two are the same. Those comparing themselves base their comparison on their view of their own righteousness. That's the problem, isn't it? Not on God's righteousness, but on their own. And they were therefore very proud of themselves, very satisfied. And they create quite naturally according to the carnal man, to the carnal mind, they create walls of separation between themselves and others. And it's really easy, isn't it? Now, we can spot deficiencies in other people, we can look at people, let's just say, for the sake of continuity tonight, we can look at people in other folds of the flock, couldn't we. And we say, they've got this deficiency, or that deficiency, or this objection, or whatever the case. And we're stuck on our own image, we're stuck on our own image looking at them.

Now, one commentary said this, of this particular set of scripture here. It says, "*The one eyed is easily king among the blind.*" Very dysfunctional. Very dysfunctional. Inaccurate.

Artificial walls prevent reconciliation among anybody: between a husband and wife, between acquaintances, between brothers and sisters in Christ. Artificial walls are not good; they're not wise. Christ is only standard to which we can effectively compare



ourselves, because it is the only standard that has outflowing love. That's why we must look to Christ to compare ourselves. Because it's the wall-less standard and that's where we'll find reconciliation, when the water flows where there's no barriers, there's nothing to hold it back. Let's go to I John 4 and verse 19. This is a scripture that we really utilize in this particular point. Love begets love. This is a very short verse, but frankly it's one of the most powerful, and meaningful and most helpful verses in the Bible, because it tells us so much.

**1 John 4:19** *We love Him because He first loved us.*

Again, I think we all know that the Authorized Version omits the word "Him." It's just that *we love, because He first loved us*. And, brethren, this is the key to an abundant life. To have love in your life and be able to give it, to have abundance in your mind--this is the key. This is the key.

Our Father called us when we were worthy of the death penalty. Jesus Christ gave Himself to pay the penalty we each earned and He did it when we didn't esteem Him as anything. We esteemed Him as nothing. And all this benevolent outflowing was for our good. Think about it. All of this was done, totally despite us. God didn't put any walls up between Himself and us because of our race, because of our gender, because of our intelligence—or anything. He didn't put up any of those walls.

Christ expressed the Father's intention on that Last Great Day of the Feast—I believe this is in John, I didn't put it down in my notes here—but He said, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*

What God has to offer flows from Him to virtually anyone who thirsts. There are no barriers—there are no barriers. There are no artificial walls. And, what is the result of that? The result is growth wherever that water flows. Yes, we have to respond to the calling, before the water can get in there. We have to go through baptism, repentance and baptism, yes. But wherever the water flows, and where it's received, there's growth. And it keeps on moving if we don't restrict it. God's Spirit just flows and flows. And, so again, the point here is: We love because He first loved us. It's just an outgoing thing that come from God through us and it goes on. Let's go to chapter 3 here in I John, and this time in verse 16. John says:

**1 John 3:16** *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.*

**Verse 17** *But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?*

Because Christ let His life flow out for us, that is exactly what we'll be led to do, brethren. All of us who retain the Holy Spirit, that's what the Holy Spirit would lead us to do; to do the very same thing. Because living waters flows, love flows out, doesn't it? If it's not restricted, and it's easy to restrict.

John speaks of taking care of the physical needs here of others which is clearly, that's an aspect laying our life down, taking care of the physical needs of our brothers. It's a very important thing, and it's something that God's people are very, very good at doing. Something we can do on a physical level. And, of course, we can remember the widow's mite—not everybody has as much to give on a physical level, do they? It's all about the heart; it's about the desire to give, if it's only a tiny amount. But brethren, that is what love looks like in motion—that's *agapeo*, taking care of our brothers' needs.

Let's look at I Peter 3 and in verse 1. You know, there are many needs—we don't have just physical needs, we have other types of needs, don't we? And these have to be met. And in that way we lay our life down. It's the outgoing of love.

**1 Peter 3:1** *Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives,*

**Verse 2** *when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear.*

An unbelieving mate needs to see God's Spirit in action. They need to see *agapao*. That's what they need. From a woman to her husband, it's her respect. OK, we could talk about from a man's perspective, but Peter's talking about the woman in this case. It's her respect, it's her pure conduct, not a worldly, untrustworthy woman in any sense. This is a woman who can be trusted, and the man knows it. All this is love in action, going out, no walls constraining this man, no I'll-do-this-if-you-do-that. That's not the issue here at all—this is just outgoing love.

And so, what she is doing is something that might compel her husband to make a choice of his own. Not to force him, but to make a free choice, because we all are free moral agents, aren't we. Brethren, that's love begetting love—the unconverted won't

always make that choice, we understand that, but that is irrelevant to the one who loves. The person who loves will do this, irrespective. You know, we love in hope, don't we, again this goes back to I Corinthians 13, doesn't it. We love in hope; we do the things—we do the *agapao*—in hope. Just as God did in Christ, for all of mankind—and not all of mankind's going to respond. But some will. But the point is, love never fails. That is what God's people do; we do it. Leviticus 19, and verse 16. Look at another example here.

**Leviticus 19:16** *You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.*

**Verse 17** *You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.*

So here's another example of how we lay down our lives. This is the outflowing of love. It involves going to our neighbor—communicating with them, rather than gossiping about them. As a matter of fact, not even considering the possibility, even thinking about gossiping. Just not doing it. Only considering, finding a way to try to reconcile face to face. By talking. Gossip creates barriers—now we all know this because we've all been the victims of gossip, and we've all gossiped. It creates barriers of mistrust and it creates barriers of ill will, while speaking directly to somebody has the potential of reconciliation.

You know, I can remember, looking back on my life, several different occasions when people have come to me with something they felt that I was deficient in, that I needed to think about, and to overcome. And, you know, in all but one of those cases, they were dead-on right, and I had, and I'm sure it's true for all of us, when you have somebody actually do that, you have a ton of respect for them. Again, it's like an automatic bond, you just—it's a wonderful thing. You want to help them in some way, or help somebody else. And that's what comes of it. And, you have reconciliation. And reconciliation is the thing that flows out to other people.

**Verse 18** *You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.*

Of course, we know what bearing grudges and taking vengeance is like. It's like erecting walls of concrete. If you want to talk about a stronghold, that's what grudges are.

And vengeance. You know, water stagnates. It's like the concrete barriers that we create in this kind of a situation. It just stagnates, in fact, it'll just evaporate and be gone. But, on the other hand, love will choose to suffer long and to be kind when treated unfairly.

Isn't this the example that Christ set for us, the one we look to, the one we compare ourselves to. That water flows freely, doesn't it, because love hopes all things. That's why we bear with them, that's why we're willing to suffer. That's why we do it, even when we're treated wrong. Because love bears all things, it hopes all things, it endures all things. Something good can come from that. Because love begets love, it's the only way it can work. Concrete barriers are just concrete barriers. Nothing gets through.

I Peter 3, let's go to I Peter 3 and verse 8. Here, Peter is talking about what to do. A very positive verse here:

**1 Peter 3:8** *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous;*

We all need compassion. We all need compassion, we need tenderness and we need courtesy. When that flows from somebody else to us, it's just like I said, and when somebody actually comes and helps us in a Matthew 18 situation, and it's a good thing. It's almost irresistible not to respond, isn't it, in a very positive way.

We want to give it back. Peter is talking about compassion, tender-heartedness, courtesy. We want to give it back. That's because the beauty of love is, it flows out, and if it flows out from us, that just means one thing; it just as easily it can flow back. It's reciprocal, isn't it? It's a beautiful thing.

**1 Peter 4:8** *And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins."*

Now, this is what we need. We each have our own blunderings. We each make our own mistakes, they may be gross, they may be not tremendous errors, but we all make them, don't we. And when we do, this particular need for covering of sins is necessary, maybe it's necessary through the means of forgiveness or through heart-felt encouragement. We go to our brother or sister and say, "Look. I see you've got this problem here. You can get through this thing. I'm praying for you, and a matter of fact, if you'd like, I'll fast with you about this thing. That kind of an approach to get that

person back on track, that's like water flowing into dry ground. It's exactly how it is. The plant life just springs back; it just comes back to life almost instantly.

The outworking of love is a powerful and a miraculous thing because it involves the power of the Holy Spirit, which is a miracle-working Spirit. Let's go to Galatians 5. **Galatians 5:13** *For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

**Verse 14** *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*

That's as clear as it gets. But right after giving this very prime directive, which is, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*, which is a very positive statement, why does Paul go on to say what he does in verse 15? He says,

**Verse 15** *But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!*

Why did he write it? It's because we choose to erect walls sometimes, don't we. And we choose to be self-centered. And when we do that, brethren, nobody will take the first step which will result in mutual death. We want to be people who will take the first step. We want to be people who will provide the environment for reconciliation to take place. So that there can be growth, to break the chain. Love spawns love, and only those who truly know God and are known by Him will faithfully take that first step, time after time after time, without fail. Brethren, we must be those people.

The church is in a fragmented condition today; somebody, and I don't mean just us, I mean all of us as God's people, need to take this first step.

Let's close in Matthew chapter 25. Matthew 25. We'll read a fair amount, to the end of this chapter, beginning in verse 31:

**Matthew 25:31** *When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*

**Verse 32** *All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.*

**Verse 33** *And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. So God's going to make a distinction here in the end, isn't He?*

**Verse 34** *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My*

*Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:*

**Verse 35** *for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;*

**Verse 36** *I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*

**Verse 37** *Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?*

**Verse 38** *When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?*

**Verse 39** *Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'*

**Verse 40** *And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'*

**Verse 41** *Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Now, this would be the goats. 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:*

**Verse 42** *for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; There was nothing outgoing here, right? I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink;*

**Verse 43** *I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'*

**Verse 44** *Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'*

**Verse 45** *Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'*

**Verse 46** *And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.'"*

It's a very sobering, and it's a very inspiring thing at the same time, isn't it, brethren? Because we understand that God is very clearly looking at what we do in our lives. He is looking to see how we show love to others. Judging us by how we show love to others. Believers or among those still in the world, it makes no difference. How we treat other people. And, it's not just people who are kind to us, or neutral. It's how we treat other people, regardless of how they treat us. That's what He is looking at. Regardless of their attitude toward us.

If we really want to know the one word that would best describe us, all we have to do is compare our treatment of all others to the way that Christ would have treated them Himself. That's what we need to stop and think about. Whether it's our mate, whether it's a family member, a brother or sister within our own group, or some other person who has the Holy Spirit. How do we treat them? Is it the way Christ would treat them? This is a great exercise and a challenge for us any time, but especially so prior to taking the Passover. And, I think it's even more meaningful for us at this particular time, and critically important to us in our present circumstance. That we consider, that we compare ourselves to Christ, who has begun the same good work in all of those who retain His Spirit. Think about that. There are others out there who retain the Holy Spirit. Do we view them any differently than we would the person we're sitting next to right now? That's something for us to think about.

Let's remember that love, and this is God's love, *agape*, is spiritual. It's not just a bunch of do's and don'ts, those things don't amount to anything. It's about the attitude; it's about the heart of the matter. We know that love is corrective. A wonderful thing. Because it produces something, doesn't it—it produces love. And again, it's outgoing—love is outgoing. And it produces love. It perfects us and makes us useful in God's hands. And, brethren, that's what we want to be.

In the days ahead of us, we want to be useful in God's hands, we want to be able to accomplish His will in the time that remains. And we know that, and we have to believe, we can see that time is short—we don't have a lot of time. We need to be prepared to serve, and we can't do it, brethren, with our own idea of love. We have to love the way that Jesus Christ loves.

With that, I would bid you all a good evening.