

Walking in the Love of God

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[0 : 00] Help us again, we ask, to hear your word in a way which is wholesome and helpful. We come to you with the promise that those who meditate on the law of the Lord will be like trees planted by streams of water, whose leaf does not wither, and bring forth fruit in due season.

We pray that that might be applied to us now by the power of your Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen. Amen. We haven't read a passage of scripture because we've got quite a number of scriptures to look at.

We have been looking in the series about the love of God. And my target really is the idea of saying to everybody, God loves you.

And saying we have got to be quite careful in how that's understood and what it is conveying. Because the subject of the love of God is not simple. It is rich. And it is deep. So the first thing that we looked at was the way that God loves creation.

[1 : 19] And Lindsay had a verse, and I can't remember what it was. Was it His compassion is over all his works or something like that? That was the one that you read out? Can you remember? When was that? When was that?

It was three weeks ago, I think. You were sitting there and that was... Yes, I think it was something like that. Yes. So we sort of went in that direction and looked at the way that there's a sense of God's care and benevolence over everything.

You know, He makes the grass grow. He makes the sun shine on good and bad alike. He gives food to the cows and He makes places for the rabbits to live and all those sorts of things like in Psalm 104.

And then, if I remember correctly, you've got me worried now, Lindsay, whether I remember this properly. We looked at the love of God in the Gospel, in the fact of the message of Jesus Christ coming to everybody.

And we saw that, as the Bible looks at it, there is a step change when the Gospel comes, when the good news of Jesus Christ comes, it is a revelation of God's kindness and goodness that presumably wasn't there before.

[2 : 45] So there is a sense that just the fact of the Gospel, the preaching of the Gospel, is an expression of God's love towards this wicked world.

And we also saw that that doesn't remove the fact of God's wrath against sin. So in that very, very famous verse, God so loved the world.

Help me. God so loved the world. He gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. So the should not perish, that's the other side of it.

It's a revelation of love. Faith is the thing that brings us so that we don't perish. But if we don't have faith, then we would perish. So the love of God in the Gospel.

And then, for those who do turn to the Lord in faith, that's somebody looking indifferent. But here's somebody in faith. And we saw there's a particular sets of teaching about the love of God to believers.

[3 : 58] And that was last week. And we said that there's a choosing love in which God chooses the people who are going to be His.

And there was a steadfast love in which God sticks with His people through thick and thin. And there's this sacrificial love which is measured by the cross of Jesus Christ.

That's how much God loves His people. And I have to say, we dealt with it in a very only scratching the surface sort of way. Because that's a very deep subject and a very powerful subject.

So anyway, had a go at it. And we're going to have a go this evening at this question of walking in the love of God.

As God helps us, walking in the love of God. So this is a subject for believers. For people who are Christians. If I'm a believer, how do I walk in the love of God?

[5 : 00] And I'm talking not about a particular crisis experience. I'm talking about what should be a regular, our regular day by day, week by week involvement in the love of God.

An experience of the love of God. Okay, so I'm just talking about ordinary things really.

I started doing some statistics but I didn't finish doing the statistics. There's two particular words for love in the New Testament. Agape, which is the noun.

And agapeo, which is the verb. So if you add those up, 109 uses of agape and 106 uses of agapeo. That's about 215, isn't it?

So that's the favourite word and that's a well used word. Interestingly in the Gospels it doesn't crop up that much. Apart from in John. John says quite a bit about agape.

[6 : 06] He also uses the other word phileo, which doesn't crop up very much. The father loves the son, he uses agape. And in another place the father loves the son, he uses phileo.

So it's interesting. Agape is definitely the favourite New Testament word. So I've got, so I did actually look up most of the uses of that and try to put them into some sort of order.

And this is what I've come up with. I've got five sort of headings which I hope will help us to think about what an attainable, realistic, spiritual walk in the love of God.

So here's my first heading. Love is the given context of all Christian self-understanding and experience and activity.

This is a bit of a long sentence, fairly unwieldy. But what I'm trying to say is that's where Christians are at. So absolutely fundamental that for real Christianity the swimming pool that we're in is not a swimming pool of guilt.

[7 : 30] And it's not a swimming pool of condemnation. The swimming pool that we find ourselves splashing about in is the love of God. It's the given context of all Christian self-understanding and experience and activity.

It's not the only thing, but it's the, you know, that's one of the bases, if you like, where we're at. So here are some verses. That's what we're just going to look at some verses this evening.

Romans chapter 5. Romans chapter 5. And we compare these two ways of looking at it.

So Romans 5 verse 5. So what we usually do is people read a verse. I think everybody here would be reasonably happy with this.

So we start over this side. I'm going to go for Jack. Could you read us Romans 5 verse 5, please? Now hope does not disappoint us because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

[8 : 43] Thank you. So he's talking about hope and he's saying it doesn't disappoint us. Why not? Because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

So hold on to that thought. Now we need to read verse 6 to verse 8. Jan, could you read us those, please?

Thank you very much.

There are two sides to a coin there. Let's take the verse 8 side. Here's the objective. Outside of ourselves, Christ died for us.

And Paul says it's a very rare thing for somebody to die, even for a good person. But while we were sinners, Christ died for us.

[10 : 01] And he says, what conclusion do you draw from that? Well, that's God demonstrating the depth and the extent and the genuineness of his love for us.

It's love demonstrated in what is done on the outside of us. And then you compare it with what he already said about love being poured inside us by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us.

And you've got two sides of this, haven't you? You've got something on the outside to look at and think about and try and get our heads around. And then on the inside, the Holy Spirit taking that and multiplying it and making it not just something that you see, but something that sort of wells up and is poured out.

So I think this is a fundamental text. It's saying this is where a Christian is at. Seeing the love of Christ demonstrated and miraculously being able to take that in and say, that's for me.

Isn't that amazing? That's for me. You know, that's where the hallelujah comes, isn't it? That's totally brilliant. That Christ should love me and give himself for me.

[11:21] I'm getting ahead of myself. Right, John 13. We'll come back to these verses, so we might as well do the whole lot of them.

John 13. Jesus himself speaking. 34 and 35. Julia, could you read us those, please? John 13. 34 and 35. Thank you.

Okay, some of those bits we'll come back to in a moment. It was just the central phrase that I was thinking of. As I have loved you. So that's the assumption part of it, isn't it?

He's going to build something on that assumption, but the assumption is this is the bit you come back to. This is the context of all the other things I'm going to ask you to do, tell you to do, tell you about.

[12:46] I have loved you. Absolutely fundamental. Absolutely fundamental. So that's my first point. Love is the given context of all Christian self-understanding and experience and activity.

As I have loved you. You go and do something else. Christ demonstrates his love for us in this. The love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

So I'll just stop and make that point. Please, Christian, grab a hold of that. Please, Christian, don't let yourself be swimming around in a pool of, which is fundamentally anxiety, insecurity, guilt, condemnation.

That's the wrong swimming pool for you to be in. The swimming pool is the one you've been given, and the swimming pool that you've been put in is the one which immerses you in the love of God.

That's, maybe you have to get your head around that. Maybe you have to remind yourself of it. Maybe you have to pray to the Lord to give you the sense of it, as we shall see in a moment.

[13:59] But that's the given, okay? You don't have to work yourself into God's love. If you're a Christian, that's where you already are. Secondly, love is the increasingly realised reality of Christian growth.

I'm not even quite sure whether that's a sentence. See what I'm trying to say here. It's the reality not just of where you are, but of how you progress, of what you go on in.

And it's something that increases. So, the first one was it's the given, and then the second one saying, this is the area in which increase happens. Perhaps looking at the text, we'll make it a bit clearer.

So, Ephesians chapter 3. Ephesians 3. 17.

Something like verse 17. Through to verse 19. Now, ask Sema, have you got a verse 17 that says, and I pray?

[15:18] Could you start there and take us through to the end of verse 19, please? And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power together with all the saints to grasp how high, know how wide and long and hard and deep is the love of Christ.

And to know this love that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Thank you very much. So, Paul says, what I was concocting this peculiar sentence about, he says, this is where you, this is where you are.

Do you see that? In verse 17, you are rooted and established in love. Okay, that's where you are. You don't have to get yourself there. That's where you are.

The gospel puts you in that place. And he says, but it isn't just a static thing. Okay, this is where I am. Very nice. He says, there's something of increase here. Look, verse 18, I pray that you may have power together with all the saints to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.

I want you to grasp something that you haven't yet grasped. You're rooted and grounded in love, but there's a sense of grasping more deeply, more, I don't know, because I'm still learning about this, but I think what he's saying is more compellingly, more lastingly, more powerfully, to get, to realise that there's more to the love of God and the love of Christ than you've yet grasped.

[17:02] And he says, I pray that you would increase in that, that you would go on and grow in understanding this. And then this is in verse 19, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge.

So I suppose he's wrestling with it as well, isn't he, saying, I can't quite put this into words myself. I want you to know something that surpasses knowledge. Do you see there's something mysterious, something beyond analysis, something glorious, about growing so that we might say again of the love of God, wow, never quite realised before how wonderful God's love is.

Such love. That's what he's saying is on the agenda. An increasingly realised reality of Christian growth. let's look at John 15, 9.

That's where we're rooted and there is growth as well. Now, John 15. John 15, verse 9. Maria, could you read that for us please? As the Father has loved me, so am I not put, now remain in my love. That's it.

[18:33] Okay, so he's, this is the, the task he says here, this is the way he puts it here, is remain in my love.

Stay put in my love. Don't wander off. Don't forget Jesus doesn't say, grow in understanding of my love.

What he says is, stay put in what you've already got. Stay there. I think this is not so far from the idea of walking in love, is it?

It's, you've been put there. I don't know, why did I come up with this idea of a swimming pool? I've no idea, but let's imagine, let's stick with the idea.

you're in the swimming pool, splashing around, why get out? Stay there. Don't get yourself out of the love of God, but remain in the love of God.

[19:35] That's, that's the thought there, isn't it? Remain in my love. Jude, Jude doesn't have chapters, but it has verses.

Jude 20, and 21. So again, not so much a command to grow, but there is a command in here, vis-a-vis the love of God.

Jude, verse 20 and verse 21. Chris, please. But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith and pray in the Holy Spirit.

Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal love. Thank you very much. So there's a growth command, which I take to be verse 20, build yourselves up in your most holy faith.

And here, the command regarding the love is to keep yourselves in it. Keep yourselves in God's love. don't get out of that swimming pool, don't pull out the plug so all the water drains away or something like that, but keep in that place, keep in that position.

[20:55] Does that make sense? I think it makes sense. Notice, please, verse 24, which says, to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy, to the only God, our Saviour, be glory, power, glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ, our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen. God keeps us. Verse 24. But there's a keeping which is incumbent on us. You guys keep yourselves in God's love.

Interesting, isn't it? Ephesians 5, verse 2. The reality of the Christian life which can be increasingly realised kept on in Ephesians 5.

I think we need verse 1 and 2. Ephesians 5, verses 1 and 2. Ray, please. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a great offering sacrifice to God.

Thank you. That's the walk in love verse. Here it's translated live a life of love. I find it very interesting that it is related to God, the imitators of God.

[22:36] It's related to our adoption into God's family as dearly loved children and it's related to the cross of Christ. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

So that's the sort of context in which he says, now guys, you walk in love. Live a life of love.

I think he's got a number of things in mind there, but see how it's all connected. connected. It's connected to the love of God, it's connected to the cross of Christ, it's connected to us following that, observing that, modelling our lives on it and living it, walk in love.

Galatians 2 verse 20 is the last one under this heading. How do we live, how do we walk, Galatians 2 verse 20.

Galatians 2 verse 20. Angela, can you read that for us please? Thank you.

[24:08] Thank you very much. See what he's saying there about walking, going on. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

See how his assumption there is connecting up the cross, Christ gave himself gave himself for me, the love that that demonstrates and brings into my life, the faith by which I lay hold of those things and the life I live.

I now live, this is how I do it, by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. so whether I expressed it particularly well or not, those verses are there or thereabouts on love being

an increasingly realised reality of Christian growth.

That's how we go on, that's how we make progress by remaining in the love, grasping the love, living a life of love, living by faith in the Son of God who loved me.

Third point, love in the Christian is the litmus paper and the thermometer of the spiritual life.

[25 : 49] Litmus, another chemistry illustration here. Tell whether something's acid or alkali by a little piece of paper, which turns blue or red if you dip it in. That's the litmus test.

What am I dipping this piece of litmus paper into? It's acid or it's alkali. Test. Or a thermometer, see whether something's warm or cold.

So it's both those things. Here are three verses in which I think this is what Paul is doing. Ephesians chapter 1 verse 15.

How are the Ephesians getting on? What sort of people are they? Let's do the litmus test and see. Ephesians 1 verse 15.

Aaron, can you please? Just give us the next phrase.

[27 : 04] Okay, thank you. So what was it that he heard about that made him start praying for them? Their faith and their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for all the saints because they showed that they loved the brothers, they loved believers.

Litmus test proves positive for the presence of real Christianity. Colossians 1 verse 8. Colossians 1 I guess we need 7 and 8 to make sense of it.

Colossians 1 7 and 8 John please could you read those? I learned it from the praffest idea of a servant who is a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf and who also told us of your love and your spirit.

Yeah, okay, so what is it that a praffest told Paul that was so crucial? Well, the answer is he told him, I'm sure he told him lots of things, but one of the things was this, that you are people who have love in the spirit.

The Holy Spirit has done something in you by which you are people of love. You love God, you love Jesus Christ, you're conscious of the love of God for you and you love the brothers.

[28 : 29] It's a litmus test for the presence of real Christianity. Christianity and Philippians 2, verse 2, Philippians 2, verse 2, this is jumping right into the middle of quite a lot of things that he talks about, but Philippians 2, verse 2 will say something.

Lindsay, could you say? Thank you. what am I aiming for with you?

What would I like to see on the thermometer? I'd like to see, well, a number of things. I'd like to see you being like-minded. I'd like to see you having the same love.

I'd like to see you being one in spirit and purpose. So that's one of the things on the thermometer.

One of the markings is how much love are they exhibiting? Do you see? That's what I'd like you to be growing in that.

There's lots of other verses I could have quoted. I'm moving on. Number four, love is the basic currency of the Christian community. Colossians 3.

[29 : 49] Colossians 3, 12 to 14. What is the trump card, if you like, in the Christian community, what's the important thing?

So I wasn't going to. Catherine, 3, 12 to 14, please. Thank you. love is the love.

Love is the basic currency of the Christian community. This is all the other things and love sort of tops them all off in the Christian community.

Let's come back to John 13, 34, 35. I want to move through this before I reach the end of your concentration. John 15, no, 13, thank you, 13, reaching the end of my concentration.

John 13, 34, 35. So we had this read before, but it says more than we noticed the first time round.

[31 : 15] So John 13, 34, 35. Jack, please. Yes. Thank you very much.

So the context was I have loved you, but the commandment was to do with the community. This is how the Christian community is to function. A new command I give you, love one another.

And he says it again, you must love one another. And then he says it again, this will be the distinctive thing, by this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

So I think it must be true to say that it's the basic currency of the Christian community. If you don't have this, you don't have a Christian community. And 1 Corinthians 13, which we won't read, because of time.

But if I were to say the main point of that is that Christians should love one another, I don't think I'd be too far wrong. And if I were to go a little bit further and say that was the problem with the

