

Melva's Corner



A Life Without Failure (Learn To Love) Part II

September 3, 2007

Central Truth: God has an unending supply of His divine, supernatural, agape love for you. It is for you to claim, to grow on, to spread to others, and thus to reach hundreds and thousands with the love that counts, the love that will bring them to Jesus Christ.

Love is the greatest power known to man. It changed the course of the first-century world and God is using it to bring a great revolution in the twenty-first century. Nothing can overcome God's love.

In the first century there was a wedding of love and faith resulting in a great spiritual revolution throughout the known world. Then both were lost during the Dark Ages. The realization of Martin Luther and his colleagues that the "just shall live by faith" ushered in the Reformation and another mighty movement of God's Spirit. But there was little love. In fact, there was often great conflict.

Today, God is bringing back to our remembrance the biblical wedding of the two - faith and love. Through faith, that supernatural, divine love of God will reach out where nothing else can go to capture men and women for Jesus Christ. The love which results from that faith will captivate people everywhere so that, as we live and love by faith, we will spread God's love throughout the world. This love is contagious, attractive and aggressive. It creates hunger for God. It is active - constantly looking for loving things to do, people to uplift, and lives to change.

Last week we discussed the first great truth about love, "God loves you unconditionally." Today let me share with you the three remaining truths about love:

1. God loves you unconditionally.
2. You are commanded to love others - God, your neighbors, your enemies.
3. You are incapable of loving others in your own strength.
4. You can love others with God's love.

You Are Commanded To Love

A certain lawyer asked Jesus, "Sir, which is the most important command in the laws of Moses?"

Jesus replied, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. The second most important is similar: 'Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself.' All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets stem from these two laws and are fulfilled if you obey them. Keep only these and you will find that you are obeying all the others."

At one time in my Christian life I was troubled over the command to love God so completely. How could I ever measure up to such a high standard? Two very important considerations have helped me to desire to love and please God.

First, the Holy Spirit has filled my heart with God's love, as promised in Romans:

"We know how dearly God loves us, and we feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love."

Second, by meditating on the attributes of God and the wonderful things He has done and is doing for me, I find my love for Him growing. I love Him because He first loved me.

How could God love me so much that He was willing to die for me? Why should God choose me to be His child? By what merit do I deserve to be His ambassador to tell this good news of His love and forgiveness to the world? On what basis do I deserve the privilege of His constant presence and His in-dwelling Spirit, of His promise to supply all of my needs according to His

riches in glory? Why should I have the privilege - denied to most of the people of the world who do not know our Savior - of awaking each morning with a song in my heart and praise to Him on my lips for the love and joy and peace that He so generously gives to all who place their trust in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ?

The one who has not yet learned to love God and to seek Him above all else and all others deserve compassion, for that person is missing the blessings that await all who love God with all their heart, soul and mind.

It is natural for you to fulfill the command to love your neighbors as yourself if you truly love God with all your heart, soul and mind. If you are properly related to God on the vertical plane, you will be properly related to others on the horizontal plane. I call it 'Horizontal Grace.'

For example, billiard balls, rolling freely on a table, naturally bounce away from each other because of the nature of their construction. But if we tie strings to several balls and lift them perpendicular to the table, the balls will cluster together.

When individual Christians are vitally yoked to Christ and related to God and are walking in the Spirit, loving Him with all their hearts, souls and minds, they will fulfill God's command to love others as themselves.

The apostle Paul explains:

"If you love your neighbor as much as you love yourself you will not want to harm or cheat him, or kill him or steal from him. And you won't sin with his wife or want what is his or do anything else the Ten Commandments say is wrong. All ten are wrapped up in this one, to love your neighbor as you love yourself. Love does no wrong to anyone. That's why it fully satisfies all of God's requirements. It is the only law you need. It is love for God and for others that results in righteousness, in fruit, and in glory to Christ."

Also, you were commanded to love others because such love testifies to your relationship with the Father. You demonstrate that you belong to Christ by your love for others. The apostle John practically equates your salvation with the way you love

others when he says that if you don't love others, you do not know God, for He is love.

John says:

"If someone who is supposed to be a Christian has money enough to live well, and sees a brother in need, and won't help him - how can God's love be within him? Little children, let us stop just saying we love people; let us really love them, and show it by our actions."

Jesus says:

"I demand that you love each other as much as I love you." As a Christian you should love your neighbor because your neighbor is a creature of God made in the image of God; because God loves your neighbor; and because Christ died for your neighbor. Following the example of our Lord, you should love everyone, even as Christ did. You should devote your life to helping others experience His love and forgiveness.

Jesus also said:

"There is a saying, 'Love your friends and hate your enemies.' But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust too.

If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that."

When Christians begin to act like Christians and love God, their neighbors, their enemies and especially their Christian brothers - regardless of color, race or class - we will see in our time, as in the first century, a great transformation in the whole of society. People will marvel when they observe our love in the same way people marveled when they observed those first century believers saying, "How they love one another."

I counsel many who are not able to accept themselves. Some are weighted down with guilt because of unconfessed sins; others are not reconciled to their physical appearances. Still others feel inferior mentally or socially. My counsel to one and all is, "God loves you and accepts you as you are. You must do

the same. Get your eyes off yourself! Focus your love and attention on Christ and on others. Begin to lose yourself in service for Him and for your fellow man."

God's kind of love is a unifying force among Believers! Paul admonishes us to "put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity" that our "hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love." Only God's universal love can break through the troublesome barriers that are created by human differences. Only a common devotion to Christ - the source of love - can relieve tension, ease mistrust, encourage openness, bring out the best in people, and enable us to serve Christ together in a more fruitful way.

You Cannot Love in Your Own Strength

Just as surely as "those who are in the flesh (the worldly, carnal person) cannot please God," so in your own strength you cannot love as you ought.

You cannot demonstrate agape, God's unconditional love for others, through your own efforts. How many times have you resolved to love someone? How often have you tried to manufacture some kind of positive, loving emotion toward another person for whom you felt nothing? It is impossible, isn't it? In your own strength it is not possible to love with God's kind of love.

By nature people are not patient and kind. We are jealous, envious and boastful. We are proud, haughty, selfish and rude, and we demand our own way. We could never love others the way God loves us!

You Can Love With God's Love

It was God's kind of love that brought you to Christ. It is this kind of love that is able to sustain and encourage you each day. Through His love in you, you can bring others to Christ and minister to fellow believers as God has commanded.

God's love was supremely expressed in the life of Jesus Christ. You have a perfect, complete picture of God's kind of love in the birth, character, teachings, life, death and resurrection of His Son.

How does this love enter your life? It becomes yours the moment you receive Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit comes to indwell your life. The Scripture says, "We feel this warm love everywhere within us because God has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." God is Spirit and the "fruit of the Spirit is love..." When you are controlled by the Spirit, you can love with God's love.

When Christ comes into your life and you become a Christian, God gives you the resources to be a different kind of person. With the motivation, He also gives you the ability. He provides you with a new kind of love.

But how do you make love a practical reality in your life? How do you love? By resolutions? By self-imposed discipline? No. The only way to love is explained in my summary.

Summary

Everything about the Christian life is based on faith. You love by faith just as you received Christ by faith, just as you are filled with the Holy Spirit by faith, and just as you walk by faith.

If the fruit of the Spirit is love, you may logically ask, "Is it not enough to be filled with the Spirit?" This will be true from God's point of view, but it will not always be true in your actual experience.

Many Christians have loved with God's love and have demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit in their lives without consciously or specifically claiming His love by faith. Yet, without being aware of the fact, they were indeed loving by faith; therefore, they did not find it necessary to claim God's love by faith as a specific act.

Hebrews 11:6 says, "without faith it is impossible to please Him." Obviously there will be no demonstration of God's love where there is no faith.

If you have difficulty in loving others, remember that Jesus has commanded, "Love each other as much as I love you." It is God's will for you to love. He would not command you to do something that He will not enable you to do. In I John 5:14, 15, God promises that if you ask anything according to His will, He hears and answers you. Relating this promise to God's

command, you can claim by faith the privilege of loving with His love.

God has an unending supply of His divine, supernatural, agape love for you. It is for you to claim, to grow on, to spread to others, and thus to reach hundreds and thousands with the love that counts, the love that will bring them to Jesus Christ.

In order to experience and share this love, you must claim it by faith; that is, trust His promise that He will give you all that you need to do His will on the basis of His command and promise.

This truth is not new. It has been recorded in God's Word for two thousand years. But it was a new discovery to me that early morning some years ago and, since that time, to many hundreds of other Christians with whom I have shared it. When I began to practice loving by faith, I found that problems of tension with other individuals seemed to disappear, often miraculously.

In one instance, I remember having a problem loving a former co-worker. It troubled me. I wanted to love him. I knew that I was commanded to love him; yet, because of certain areas of inconsistency and personality differences, it was difficult for me to love him. But the Lord reminded me of **I Peter 5:7, "Let him have all your worries and cares, for he is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you."** I decided to give this problem to Him and love this man by faith. When I claimed God's love for the man by faith, my concern lifted. I knew the matter was in God's hands.

An hour later, I found on my desk a letter from that very man, who had no possible way of knowing what I had just experienced. In fact, his letter had been written the day before. The Lord has foreseen the change in me.

A young college football player, who had been raised in a community where African Americans are resented, had always found it impossible to love African Americans. One evening he heard me talk to a group of racially mixed folk in Dallas TX about loving by faith, especially in reference to loving those of other races.

"As you prayed," he told me later, "I claimed God's love for African Americans. Then, as I left the church, the first person I

saw was an African American man, and he was talking to a white girl. Now that is about as explosive a situation as you can imagine for a man who hates African Americans. But suddenly I felt a compassion for that African American man! At one time, I would have hated him and probably would have been rude and angry with him. But God heard my prayer."

In the next evening's service a young African American couple approached me. They were radiant.

"Something wonderful happened to me tonight," the young woman said. I was liberated from my hatred for the white man. I have hated whites since I was a little girl. I have known that as a Christian I should love white people, but I couldn't help myself. I hated whites and wanted to get revenge. Tonight I have begun to love whites by faith, and it really works."

The young man added, "It worked for me, too; now my hatred for whites is gone. Thank you for telling us how to love by faith. Whites who have hated African Americans and African Americans who have hated whites have discovered God's supernatural love for each other. Christian husbands and wives who were living in conflict have claimed God's love by faith, and miracles have resulted. Parent-child struggles have been resolved and generation gaps have been bridged through loving by faith. Disputes in working situations have been resolved. Enemies cease to be enemies when you love them by faith. God's love has a way of dissolving prejudice, breaking down barriers and literally changing lives.

A man named Leonard is an example. The night he received Christ as his personal Savior, his heart was filled with love, and a great change came over him. Until then he had hated everyone and everything.

Often when he came home drunk at night, he would kick his dog to get him off the porch. In the process, the dog would bark, growl and try to bite him. Reeling and rocking under the influence of alcohol, Leonard would chase the dog around the table outside.

Soon his wife would get into the fray. They would curse each other and fight. Eventually, he would kick the dog off the porch, scattering chairs and flower pots in all directions.

"But the night I received Christ," he relates, "I was so filled with love I think even the dog sensed I was different. He raised himself on his belly and crawled toward me, then lay down on the same feet that had kicked him all the other nights."

Agape love frequently expresses itself as a flow of compassion. Jesus said, "Rivers of living water shall flow from the inmost being of anyone who believes in me." Compassion is one of these rivers. It is a gentle stream of tenderness and concern for another person's need. Such love compelled Jesus to feed the hungry, comfort the sorrowing, heal the sick, teach the multitude, and raise the dead.

Most of us at some time in our lives have experienced this flow of love toward someone.

Perhaps you felt it while washing the dishes, or while working on the job, or driving down the highway, or sitting in a classroom. You couldn't explain it, but your impulse was to do something special for that person.

I encourage you to take the first step; start loving by faith and follow that flow. It is God's compassion streaming toward the one in need. The tug of love within you means that He is filling you with godly compassion and that He has chosen you to minister to that individual.

Ask God to manifest His tender compassion through you in some way today. As you pray, ask Him to lay someone on your heart. When you sense God's love flowing through you to that individual, find out his need and begin ministering to that need. By following the leading of God's Spirit, you can help those whom the Lord has prepared for His transforming touch, and you will become part of His miraculous provision. When God leads you to help someone, He will enable you to do what He leads you to do.

A Japanese magazine has a picture of a butterfly on one of its pages. Its color is a dull gray until warmed by one's hand. The touch of a hand causes the special inks in the printing to react, and the dull gray is transformed into a flashing rainbow of color.

What other things can be changed by the warmth of your interest and agape love? Your family? Your church? Your city?

This hurting world is hungry for the touch of someone who cares - who really cares! Through God's agape kind of love, you can be that someone.

But what about those who seem unlikable? People with whom you may have difficulty getting along? Individuals whose attitudes rub you the wrong way? I encourage you to make a list of people you do not like and begin to love them by faith. Perhaps you will place yourself on the list. Have you thought of applying the truths of I Corinthians 13 to yourself by faith? Ask God to help you see yourself as He sees you. You have no reason to dislike yourself when your Creator has already forgiven you and demonstrated His unconditional love by dying for you!

If Christ is in you, you are complete because Christ Himself is perfect love, perfect peace, perfect patience, perfect kindness. He is all goodness, and He is in you! Whenever satan tries to attack you by reminding you of sins which you have already confessed or by magnifying your weaknesses and shortcomings, claim in faith the forgiveness and righteousness of God, and thank Him that, on the authority of His Word, you do not have to be intimidated by satan's accusation. Thank God that you are His child and that your sins are forgiven. Thank God that satan has no control over you except that which is allowed by God. Then cast this care on the Lord as we are commanded to do in I Peter 5:7.

Perhaps your boss, a fellow employee, your spouse, your children or your father or mother is on the list of those whom you will love by faith. Pray for each person. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with Christ's love for all of them. Then, seek to express this new found love for them as you draw upon God's limitless inexhaustible, overwhelming love for them by faith. Expect God to work through you! Watch Him use your smile, your words, your patience to express His love for each individual.

Love by faith every one of your "enemies" - everyone who angers you, ignores you, bores you or frustrates you. People are waiting to be loved with God's love.

A homemaker who, through a long cold winter, had seen her family through mumps, measles, a broken nose, three new teeth for the baby and countless other difficulties, reached the

point where these pressures and demands became too much for her. Finally, on her knees, she began to protest, "Oh Lord! I have so much to do!" But imagine her surprise when she heard herself say, "Oh Lord! I have so much to love!" You will never run out of opportunities to love by faith.

One mother shared that the discovery of these principles enabled her to be more patient and kind to her husband and children. "The children were driving me out of my mind with all of their childish demands," she confided. "I was irritable with them, and because I was so miserable, I was a critical and nagging wife. No wonder my husband found excuses to work late at the office. It is all different now - God's love permeates our home since I learned how to love by faith."

A husband reported, "My wife and I have fallen in love all over again, and I am actually enjoying working in my office with men whom I couldn't stand before I learned how to love by faith."

Remember, the agape kind of love is an act of the will, not just an emotion. You love by faith. By faith, you can claim God's step by step, person by person.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love..." Like fruit, love grows. Producing fruit requires a seed, then a flower, then pollination, then warm sun and refreshing rains, and even some contrary winds. Similarly in daily life, your love will be warmed by joy, watered by tears and spread by the winds of circumstances. God uses all that you experience to work His will in your life. He is the one who makes your love grow. It is a continual, ever-increasing process. As Paul says, "May the Lord make your love to grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else..."

Now, how does loving by faith motivate you to engage in aggressive personal evangelism and contribute to the fulfillment of the Great Commission?

When you begin to truly love God by faith with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength and to love your neighbors as yourself, you will begin to see mankind as God sees it - as individuals of great worth, as those for whom Christ died. As a result, we shall be motivated by the same love which constrained the

apostle Paul who said, "Everywhere we go we talk about Christ to all who will listen."

Love, God's kind of love, causes the Great Commission to become a personal responsibility and privilege. When non-Christians observe believers not only saying that they love one another, but also proving it by their actions, they, like their first-century counterparts, will marvel at "how they love one another" and will be drawn to receive and worship our Savior with us.

How exciting it is to have such a dynamic, joyful force available to us! And it all comes from our loving Savior, Jesus Christ, who explicitly promises in His Word all that you need. You need not guess, nor hope, nor wish. You can claim this love by faith, right now, on the basis of God's command to love and His promise to answer whenever you pray for anything according to His will.

Why not make this prayer your own: "Lord, You would never have commanded me to love had You not intended to enable me to do so. Therefore, right now, on the authority of Your commands for me to love and on the authority of Your promise to answer if I asked anything according to Your will, I personally claim Your love - the I Corinthians 13 kind of love - for You, for all people, and for myself. Amen."

Scriptural References:

" Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away."

(Corinthians 13:8 NIV)