

# GOD'S PLAN FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE

## Lesson THREE THE LOVE LIFE — OBEDIENT TO GOD

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# GOD'S PLAN FOR CHRISTIAN SERVICE

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### I. INTRODUCTION

As children and offspring of God, our lives are to exemplify the character of God. God put His character (love) within us when we were born again. *"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us"* (Romans 5:5). *"As He is, so also are we in this world"* (I John 4:17). Since we have been born again into the very likeness of God (Ephesians 4:24), our new nature is nothing less than the love nature of God Himself. All the supernatural love and compassion which we witness in Christ throughout the gospels is residing within us, in our recreated inner man.

We must acknowledge the fact that the love of God is within us, and that we have a capacity for God's kind of love. But with this acknowledgment must come *action*. According to the apostle John, the new birth should always be accompanied by a change in *behavior* (I John 4:7,8). We are new creatures, born in the image of love; and the scripture calls upon us to be children of our Father by imitating Him. *"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us . . ."* (Ephesians 5:1,2).

We are to walk in love. This means that our lives must be patterned after and our actions governed by the love of God which is within us. Walking in love means preferring others above ourselves (Philippians 2:3,4); it means forgiving others when they wrong us (Ephesians 4:32); it means loving others even when they don't return that love (Matthew 5:44,45). No one will walk in the love of God until he makes a *quality decision* to do so. Making a half-hearted decision to obey the law of Christ will only lead to compromise, when emotions don't bear witness to the love of God within. But a quality decision, one from which there is no reversal, will enable a believer to walk on in love, even when emotions don't bear witness. Then we will be imitators of God, manifesting His love to those around us.

And hope does not disappoint because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

*Romans 5:5*

By this, love is perfected with us that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is so also are we in this world.

*I John 4:17*

And put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.

*Ephesians 4:24*

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

*I John 4:7,8*

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

*Ephesians 5:1,2*

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

*Philippians 2:3,4*

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.

*Ephesians 4:32*

"But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

*Matthew 5:44,45*

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### II. WALKING IN GOD'S FULLEST BLESSINGS

As believers under a New Covenant, we are to walk in obedience to the commandment of that covenant. That commandment is the "law of Christ," that we love one another as He Himself loved us. We saw in the previous lesson that this is not a suggestion or an option. It is a *command* which must be obeyed, if we are going to walk in the fullness of God's blessing. God is more interested in our obedience to His commands than He is in anything we can *do* for Him or *say* to Him. "*Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams*" (1 Samuel 15:22).

Under the Old Covenant, the children of Israel were told the curses and the blessings which followed disobedience and obedience to the law of Moses. If they would be obedient to follow and observe what Moses had told them, then they would be blessed in every way. But if they did not follow the law, then they would be vexed with curses (read Deuteronomy 28). Under the New Covenant, we have been redeemed from the curse of the law (Galatians 3:13); the devastating effects of sin have been laid on Jesus, so that they might not come upon us. But this does not mean that we can wantonly flaunt the command of the New Covenant without any repercussions. The active practice of sin and disobedience in the life of a believer will stop the flow of God's blessing, and bring about the curse. "*For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap **corruption**, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life*" (Galatians 6:8).

Although our obedience to God's command is not a means by which we *earn* the blessings of God, obedience is a necessary part of receiving and walking in God's fullest blessing for us. God cannot bless those who are not obedient to the command of love. The condition under which the blessings were granted in Deuteronomy 28 remains the same today: OBEDIENCE! *If* we will obey what God has told us to do (i.e. love one another), *then* we will be blessed in all that we do (Deuteronomy 28:1).

and Samuel said, "Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams."

*Samuel 15:22*

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us — for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE."

*Galatians 3:13*

For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life.

*Galatians 6:8*

Now it shall be, if you will diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth."

*Deuteronomy 28:1*

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### A. FORGIVENESS

In order to walk in love, one must learn how to forgive others. We live in a world where people wrong us and hurt us, and so we are daily faced with the decision of whether or not we will forgive those who sin against us. If we are going to obey God, then we will have to forgive people when they wrong us, no matter what they have done. **Imitating God means walking in the footsteps of His forgiveness.** God is a forgiving God, full of compassion and mercy. He forgave us our sins when we didn't deserve that mercy (Hebrews 8:12). Our enmity with Him didn't stop Him from moving in our behalf, and forgiving us. God calls upon us to act in the same way toward others: *"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful"* (Luke 6:36).

*"See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled"* (Hebrews 12:15). When unforgiveness is allowed to remain, there springs up a *"root of bitterness."* It may not seem harmful at first, while it is yet a root. But if it is allowed to grow, it will become a large tree of resentment and hatred, which will be hard to uproot. Not only will the person harboring the resentment be affected, but those around that person will also be defiled. We are to give diligent attention to see that no root of bitterness springs up in us through unforgiveness. And indeed no root of bitterness will spring up if we will consistently imitate our Father God, and forgive when we are wronged.

#### 1. The parable of the unforgiving servant

Read Matthew 18:21-35.

When Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive his brother who had offended him, he volunteered the number seven (perhaps he felt this was far beyond the call of duty). But Jesus replied that he was to forgive him seventy times seven. This doesn't mean that we are to keep a record, and when the number reaches 491, then we don't have to forgive. It means that as many times as we are wronged or hurt, that is how many times we are to forgive the offender.

**"FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR INIQUITIES, AND I WILL REMEMBER THEIR SINS NO MORE."**

*Hebrews 8:12*

**"Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."**

*Luke 6:36*

See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled.

*Hebrews 12:15*

Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?"

Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.

"For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves.

"And when he had begun to settle them, there was brought to him one who owed him ten thousand talents.

"But since he did not have the means to repay, his lord commanded him to be sold, along with his wife and children and all that he had, and repayment to be made.

"The slave therefore falling down, prostrated himself before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will repay you everything.'

"And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him and forgave him the debt.

"But that slave went out and found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and he seized him and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay back what you owe.'

"So his fellow slave fell down and began to entreat him, saying, 'Have patience with me and I will repay you.'

(over)

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"He was unwilling however, but went and threw him in prison until he should pay back what was owed.

"So when his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were deeply grieved, and came and reported to their lord all that had happened.

"Then summoning him, his lord said to him, 'You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.

'Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?'

"And his lord, moved with anger, handed him over to the torturers until he should repay all that was owed him.

"So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart."  
*1 new 18:21-35*

"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."  
*Matthew 6:14,15*

"And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation."  
*Luke 11:4*

"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."  
*Matthew 6:12*

(cont'd.)

Jesus went on to relate this parable about forgiveness. The man who had been forgiven the ten million dollar debt refused to forgive his fellow servant's debt of twenty dollars. This action so angered the master of the house, that he had the unforgiving servant turned over to the tormentors. Jesus made this sobering statement: "*So shall My heavenly Father also do to you, if each of you does not forgive his brother from your heart*" (Matthew 18:35).

For a believer to be unforgiving toward an offender and hold resentment, is an abomination to God. God has forgiven us a monumental debt. We therefore have no right to withhold forgiveness from those who owe us miniscule debts. As God forgave us our enormous debts, so we too are to forgive the much smaller debts of our brethren.

### 2. To experience victory

It is essential that believers walk in forgiveness if they want to experience victory in their lives. Unforgiveness and resentment stop the flow of God's blessings and cut off the flow of His power in a believer's behalf. Jesus made it plain that those who refuse to forgive their brethren will not experience forgiveness from God (Matthew 6:14,15). He taught His disciples to ask forgiveness conditional upon their forgiving others (Luke 11:4). "*And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors*" (Matthew 6:12).

One very common reason that believers' prayers don't get answered is unforgiveness. In Jesus' great lesson on faith and prayer found in Mark 11:22-26, we see this same principle explained. When we go to pray, we are to forgive those who have wronged us. Again, Jesus says that if we don't forgive, God won't forgive us. Prayers will not get answered, and faith will be impotent if a person harbors unforgiveness or bitterness in his heart against anyone.

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### 3. A matter of the heart

Forgiveness must come from the heart, because that is where the love of God has been poured out within us (Romans 5:5). In our hearts there is a power which supercedes any power of resentment or bitterness which we might experience in our minds or emotions. But we must choose to govern our actions by our hearts, and not by our emotions. When forgiving someone for wronging us, the battle is in one's mind and emotions. The enemy will always bring back a mental image of what the offender has done, playing it back to us again and again. We cannot afford to reflect on these mental images; we must reject and repudiate them one at a time as they arise.

When God forgives, **He forgets!** *"I, even I, am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake; And I will not remember your sins"* (Isaiah 43:25). If we are to imitate God in forgiveness, then we are to forgive in the same manner in which He forgives. We are to forget what the offender has done, as though it had never happened, because this is the way God forgave us.

### B. AVOIDING STRIFE

The church at Corinth was an active congregation, where the gifts of the Spirit were in full manifestation. Paul said of them: *"That in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge . . . so that you are not lacking in any gift . . ."* (I Corinthians 1:5,7). This church knew much about the moving of God's Spirit and the anointing of God. And yet, to this very church Paul said, "You are fleshly," because they had allowed jealousy and strife to enter in among them. *" . . . For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?"* (I Corinthians 3:3). He called them spiritual babies, because they were walking in strife and quarrels, rather than in the love of God (I Corinthians 3:1,2).

And Jesus answered saying to them, "Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says is going to happen, it shall be granted him. Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.]"

*Mark 11:22-26*

And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

*Romans 5:5*

That in everything you were enriched in Him, in all speech and all knowledge.

So that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*I Corinthians 1:5,7*

For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

*I Corinthians 3:3*

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men. but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able.

*I Corinthians 3:1,2*

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In the Bible, the sin of strife is listed among such sins as carousing, drunkenness, sexual promiscuity, and sensuality (Romans 13:13). Paul's list of "*the deeds of the flesh*" includes "*enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envying*" (Galatians 5:20,21). In fact, in this list of the deeds of the flesh, nine out of sixteen of the sins listed have to do in some way with bitterness and strife. The Bible says that those who live according to the flesh (i.e. according to the *deeds of the flesh*) will die (Romans 8:13). ". . . I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things [the deeds of the flesh] shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

**Strife is dangerous!** When a believer walks in strife, he is walking according to the flesh. The Bible admonishes Christians to put to death the deeds of the flesh by the Spirit, so that they might live (Romans 8:13). Whenever strife or bitterness arises within a believer, it must be put to death. "*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh*" (Galatians 5:16). The desire of the flesh is to get upset with people, and to stay bitter with them. The desire of the flesh is to get into strife and contention with others. But if we will walk by the Spirit, and allow the fruit of our recreated spirit to be manifested, we will not carry out these fleshly desires. The fruit of the spirit is love, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts. If we will put strife to death, and walk by the Spirit, then the fruit of love will begin to develop in our Christian walk.

### 1. Control your mouth

Strife is generated and fueled by the tongue. Therefore, putting to death this deed of the flesh begins with our controlling the words that we speak about others. It is with the mouth that strife is stirred up, and so it is by controlling the mouth that it can be stopped. "*Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth*" (Proverbs 26:20 KJV). A talebearer (or whisperer) is one who goes about telling what a certain individual has said or done to offend. This type of backbiting and gossip is the fuel which keeps strife and contention alive. ". . . *He who repeats a matter separates intimate friends*" (Proverbs 17:9).

Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy.

Romans 13:13

Idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:20,21

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:13

Envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:21

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Romans 8:13

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh.

Galatians 5:16

For lack of wood the fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down.

Proverbs 26:20

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates intimate friends.

Proverbs 17:9

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### 2. Stay away from gossip

If a person will avoid gossip, refuse to engage in it, strife will not be a problem in his life. But if someone continually gossips and backbites, always speaking evil of others, that person will be a source of strife wherever he goes. One cannot walk in love, and yet at the same time speak evil of others. Walking in love begins with the words which we speak about others. *"Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear"* (Ephesians 4:29). One doesn't minister grace to the hearer, if all that he talks about is negative things about other people. Gossip does not minister grace and life; it only ministers *death!*

Stay away from gossip, and from those who engage in it. If you can't say something good about a person, then say nothing! To be sure, there are times when a person must be confronted with the truth. Love is not always "sweet" and "nice." When the truth is spoken in love, it always ministers grace to those who hear it. But gossip is the pastime of busy-bodies, and not of those who sincerely desire another's good.

### 3. The mark of maturity

One mark of maturity in a Christian is his ability to control his tongue. *"... If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect [i.e. mature] man, able to bridle the whole body as well"* (James 3:2). The Biblical standard for believers is to speak evil of no one (Titus 3:2; I Peter 2:1; James 4:11), and this can be accomplished only by learning to control our tongues. James said that it is unnatural for blessings (toward God) and curses (toward men) to come from the same mouth. *"Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?"* (James 3:9-11). In the same way, it is unnatural for a born-again believer, who has been filled with the love of God, to speak evil and slander against other people. Strife is not normal for a Christian; it is abnormal.

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.

*Ephesians 4:29*

For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well.

*James 3:2*

To malign no one, to be uncontentious, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.

*Titus 3:2*

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.

*I Peter 2:1*

Do not speak against one another, brethren. He who speaks against a brother, or judges his brother, speaks against the law, and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law, but a judge of it.

*James 4:11*

With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessings and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way. Does a fountain send out from the same opening both fresh and bitter water?

*James 3:9-11*



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### C. ASSURING OUR HEARTS BEFORE HIM

Walking in obedience to God's commandment (the love commandment) will release the blessings of God into our lives. These may not be immediately manifested, but they will come if we remain obedient. God's earnest desire is that His children obey the command that He has given, so that His blessings can be manifested in their lives. God set the choice of obedience or disobedience before the children of Israel. "*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So **choose life** in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, **by obeying His voice**, and by holding fast to Him . . .*" (Deuteronomy 30:19,20). We are faced with the same choice today. God desires that we choose life and blessing, by obeying the commandment of Jesus and walking in love toward one another.

#### 1. Results of strife

Faith will not work properly, and prayers will not be answered if one is not walking in love. The blessings of God do not come upon those who are disobedient. We have already seen how Jesus linked the prayer of faith with forgiving those who have wronged us (Mark 11:24-26). The apostle Peter told husbands to live in harmony with their wives, lest their prayers be hindered (I Peter 3:7). Very often, believers' prayers are hindered because they are walking in strife. When Christians do not walk in love, they can have no real confidence before God, because they are not obeying His command.

A common exhortation by the apostle Paul to the churches was that they walk in love and live in harmony together (Romans 12:16; I Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 5:2; Philip-  
pians 2:2). He knew that if a congregation were to get into strife and bitterness, there would be nothing but disorder within that group. This is exactly what was happening in the Corinthian church. "*For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work*" (James 3:16 KJV). Thus, a person who walks in strife and unforgiveness walks in confusion, and cannot exercise faith toward God because he has no assurance before Him.

"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they shall be granted you. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your transgressions. [But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions.]"

*Mark 11:24-26*

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

*I Peter 3:7*

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

*Romans 12:16*

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree, and there be no divisions among you, but you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

*I Corinthians 1:10*

And walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

*Ephesians 5:2*

Make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.

*Philippians 2:2*

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### 2. Choose life

*“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight”* (I John 3:22). Our confidence before God and our ability to receive from Him stem from our keeping His commandment, which is that we believe on Jesus and walk in love (I John 3:23).

We assure our hearts before God when we love in deed and in truth (I John 3:18,19).

When we walk in love, obeying the command which Jesus gave, we place ourselves in a position where God can bless us. *“If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the best from the land”* (Isaiah 1:19 NIV). It is apparent from this and many other scriptures that obedience is a prerequisite to our receiving God's best. So many experience much less than what God wants from them, because they simply do not obey the law of Christ. But when we are obedient to Jesus' words, then God can bless us with the abundance which He desires to give us. We can *choose life*, and all the blessings of God by choosing to obey the commandment of the New Covenant, the commandment of love.

### III. MANIFESTING THE LOVE OF GOD

When we walk in love towards others, we are outwardly manifesting the work that God accomplished in us when we were born again. It is when we walk in the love of God that those around us can see the character of God in our lives. Jesus calls upon us, His disciples, to act like our heavenly Father, and emulate Him in the way that He deals with men. *“. . . For He causes the sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”* (Matthew 5:45). God's love for mankind is not conditional upon their love for Him, and so our love for others cannot be based on their love for us. When we act in this manner, we show ourselves to be children of God, manifesting His goodness and mercy to those around us.

And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

*I John 3:22*

And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us.

*I John 3:23*

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. We shall know by this that we are of the truth, and shall assure our heart before Him.

*I John 3:18,19*

*“If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land.”*

*Isaiah 1:19*

In order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

*Matthew 5:45*

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*"Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love . . ." (Ephesians 5:1,2). We imitate God, our Father, by walking in love toward the brethren and towards the world. God is love, and His actions are love motivated. So too, our actions must be motivated out of love, and not from anger, or self-seeking. Every time a believer pays back good for evil, he is imitating God. Every time a believer freely forgives when he is wronged, he is acting just like God the Father. When we give to others, expecting nothing from them in return, we are walking in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, who freely gave His life for us when we had nothing to offer in return. "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16).*

### A. WALKING BY THE SPIRIT

God wants the love which He has placed on the inside of us to be manifested outwardly in our day-to-day dealings with other people. It is one thing to tell people about the love of God; it is quite another to be a living demonstration of that love. The apostle John said, ". . . *Let us not love with word or tongue, but in deed and in truth*" (I John 3:18). By walking in love, we shine as lights to the people with whom we come in contact. This will only happen, however, when we make the quality decision to guide our actions according to the new creature which God has made us to be. If we choose to walk according to the flesh, then no one will see the love of God in us. But if we walk according to the spirit (i.e. according to our recreated spirit), then the fruit of the spirit (the primary of which is *love*) will be evident in our lives.

#### 1. The point of decision

*"For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please" (Galatians 5:17).*

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

*Ephesians 5:1,2*

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

*I John 3:16*

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

*I John 3:18*

For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.

*Galatians 5:17*

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The desire of the flesh is to walk in strife and anger and bitterness. The flesh does not want to forgive, neither does it want to love those who don't return love. The flesh wants only those things which gratify self. If we walk according to the desires of the flesh, then strife and selfishness will be evident in our lives, instead of the fruit of love. "*But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh*" (Galatians 5:16). In order to walk in love we must put to death the deeds of the flesh (Romans 8:13), which include enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, and envyings (Galatians 5:19,20) and walk according to the new creature that we are on the inside. Our actions must be governed by the new creature within, and not by the flesh.

When confronted with a situation in which we have been wronged or hurt, there is often a desire within to lash back. This desire does not come from the spirit, but from the flesh. This is a point of decision for the believer, one which is faced daily. Will you react to that situation according to what the flesh is saying ("Why don't you lash back at him?"), or will you react according to what your recreated spirit is saying ("Walk in love and forgive him right now!"). The scriptures tell us that if we will walk according to the spirit, we will not carry out the flesh's desire to retaliate.

### 2. Act by faith

Walking by the spirit means that we cannot always walk according to our emotions. Emotions will often side with the flesh and not the spirit, so that one may feel a very strong emotional urge to lash back or be bitter. But the love of God is not an emotion, and is not manifested primarily by emotions. The love of God always manifests itself in *action* (Romans 5:8; I John 4:9). Here again, we see that a decision must be made as to how we are going to act: according to emotions or according to the love of God within our spirits.

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh.

*Galatians 5:16*

For if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

*Romans 8:13*

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outburst of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions.

*Galatians 5:19,20*

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

*Romans 5:8*

By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.

*I John 4:9*

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In order to walk by the spirit in the area of love, we are going to have to **walk by faith!** We must put faith in the reality of the new creation within. When we put faith in the fact that the power of God's love, His ability to love, is resident within us, then we can act according to that love, no matter what our emotions may be saying at the time. If we will make that decision of faith and act in accordance with love rather than emotions, our emotions will come in line and coincide with the love of God that has been placed in us.

### B. LIVING FOR OTHERS

One of the distinctive marks of the love of God is *selflessness*. Reading the gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, one will find that nothing He did ever had any selfish motivation behind it. All that Jesus did, He did for the glory of God and **for the benefit of others**. And ultimately, Jesus gave up all that He had for our sakes (John 15:13; Philippians 2:5-8). When He went to the cross, He looked not to His own good, but to ours. "*For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich*" (II Corinthians 8:9).

Jesus, our Lord, left this kind of selflessness as an example for us to follow. He didn't live to please Himself; He lived to please God (Hebrews 10:7) and to serve others. "*Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many*" (Matthew 20:28). In the same way, we are to serve the needs of our brethren, and not just our own interests. The love of God eliminates all self-seeking and selfish interest, because its focus is always outward, rather than inward. "*Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others*" (Philippians 2:4).

A person who is walking in the love of God always looks to edify and bless others, and not just himself. "*Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself . . .*" (Romans 15:2,3). Paul used this principle to correct some of the errors which were prevalent in the Corinthian church. He pointed out to them that if they walked in love, they would not practice some of the things for which he chided them.

"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

John 15:13

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.

II Corinthians 8:9

"THEN I SAID, 'BEHOLD, I HAVE COME (IN THE ROLL OF THE BOOK IT IS WRITTEN OF ME) TO DO THY WILL, O GOD.'"

Hebrews 10:7

"Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:28

Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Philippians 2:4

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED THEE FELL UPON ME."

Romans 15:2,3

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### 1. Preferring your brother

One of the problems which Paul addressed concerned the eating of meat that had been offered to pagan idols. Some believers knew enough of the Word to be able to eat this meat in good conscience (I Corinthians 8:4). But others did not have this knowledge, and so defiled their consciences if they ate (I Corinthians 8:7). The brethren with the stronger consciences (i.e. those with more knowledge of the Word) were eating freely around those who did not have strong consciences, and so were causing the weaker brothers to stumble in sin. Paul addressed the stronger and said: "*But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak . . . . For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died*" (I Corinthians 8:9,11).

There is a principle to be learned from Paul's correction. A person who walks in love is willing to relinquish God given *rights* (such as the right to eat meat offered to idols), for the sake of, and out of love for, another brother. Paul loved the brethren so selflessly that he could say, "*Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble*" (I Corinthians 8:13). It is obvious that Paul thought more about the spiritual welfare of his brothers, than he did about his own "rights" to eat meat. The stronger brother may well have knowledge which the weaker does not. However, "*Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up*" (I Corinthians 8:1 NIV). The essence of the kingdom of God is not how much knowledge one has, but whether or not a person walks in love toward his brother.

Therefore concerning the eating of things sacrificed to idols, we know that there is no such thing as an idol in the world, and that there is no God but one.

*I Corinthians 8:4*

However not all men have this knowledge; but some, being accustomed to the idol until now, eat food as if it were sacrificed to an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

*I Corinthians 8:7*

But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died.

*I Corinthians 8:9,11*

Therefore, if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again, that I might not cause my brother to stumble.

*I Corinthians 8:13*

Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies.

*I Corinthians 8:1*

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For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more.

*I Corinthians 9:19*

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

*Philippians 2:3-8*

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

*I John 3:16*

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

*I Corinthians 14:26*

One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church.

*I Corinthians 14:4*

Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.

*I Corinthians 14:1*

The focus, then, must be outward — to the need and welfare of others, rather than inward — to how much knowledge and freedom we can exercise. If our liberty causes harm to a brother, then we should relinquish that liberty for the sake of that brother. Paul sacrificed much that was rightfully his for the sake of others. "*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more*" (I Corinthians 9:19). Sometimes walking in love will entail a sacrifice of what is rightfully ours, for the good and well-being of another brother. But we have, as our example, the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up all that He had for our sakes (Philippians 2:3-8). "*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren*" (I John 3:16).

### 2. The motivation for spiritual gifts

Another problem that Paul corrected was in connection with the proper use and operation of the spiritual gifts. All the Corinthians were zealous for spiritual gifts. It appears that many felt they were to use them in a meeting — all at the same time. Paul reminded them that the *purpose* of the gifts is for the edification (the building up) of the body (I Corinthians 14:26). That is why the gift of prophecy excels the gift of tongues. The gift of tongues alone is of value only to the speaker, but the gift of prophecy edifies the whole church (I Corinthians 14:4), because all can understand and be blessed.

Thus, the motivation for operating in the gifts should be love for the brethren. "*Pursue love, yet desire earnestly the spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy*" (I Corinthians 14:1). When a person is motivated by love, his desire will be to see the body strengthened and built up, rather than to *be seen* as "spiritual."

Again, the focus is outward and not inward. The concern is not: "How do I look?" but rather, "Does this edify the church?" In this way, Paul handled the problem of abuse of the gifts. He told the Corinthians to "pursue love." When a believer pursues love and walks in it, he'll do those things that benefit the brethren, and not just those things that benefit himself.

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### C. NOT ALWAYS SOFT

The love of God is not *always* sweet and tender. Jesus walked in love continually, and yet He had some harsh words for the Pharisees. Even Jesus' disciples received stern rebukes from the mouth of the Lord. When Jesus spoke these rebukes, He was not stepping out of love. He was, on the contrary, rebuking and reprimanding them *because* He loved them and wanted them to learn and grow. His motivation in reprimanding them was not selfish anger; He wasn't simply responding out of distressed emotions. He was motivated by love, by a selfless concern for their good.

There are times when it is easier for us to say nothing at all, rather than correct someone who needs it. Often, we fear a negative response or harsh words in return. But sometimes the loving thing to do is to correct that person. Keeping silent may be easy on us, but it can be very hard on the person who needs correction. "*Better is an open rebuke than love that is concealed*" (Proverbs 27:5). If we avoid correcting a brother, because it is more comfortable for us to do so, then we are not walking in God's love! We are only giving "*concealed love*," which is not the love of God.

Walking in love is not simply flattering others or patting them on the back. Sometimes we will have to correct brethren around us in the spirit of meekness. This does *not* mean, however, that we are to go about openly rebuking people every time they displease us. The motivation for *that* kind of activity is not love, but selfish anger! When we see one of the brethren caught up in something which we know will harm them, then we are obligated by love to say something about it. Keeping silent is the easy way out. "*He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue*" (Proverbs 28:23).

**Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed.**

*Proverbs 27:5*

**He who rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with the tongue.**

*Proverbs 28:23*



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### IV. SUMMARY — THE QUALITY DECISION

If a believer is going to walk in all the blessings that God has for him, then he is going to have to make the quality decision to walk in love toward other people. The scriptures are explicit in stating that those who do not walk in love, do not please the Father. In fact, it is hypocritical to say that we love God, if we show no love toward the brethren. *"If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen"* (I John 4:20). Those who love God love the children that are born of Him (I John 5:1).

The path of love is the only path of peace and contentment for a believer to walk. Where there is no love, there is only contention and confusion. Therefore, it can only result in good when a believer decides to put away strife and unforgiveness and to walk in love. It is in the path of love that the blessings of God flow. It is in the path of love that there is harmony for the home. It is in the path of love that there is unity for the church.

God longs to manifest His love to a world that is starved for real love, but He can only do so through us, His people. He has called us to be a people of love who live and move and operate in the kind of love that the world knows nothing about. And as we begin to move in this kind of love, the world will take note that we are the disciples of Jesus Christ. *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34,35).

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

*I John 4:20*

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him.

*I John 5:1*

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

*John 13:34,35*