

One of the most expressive analogies to express the nature and function of the church of Jesus Christ is the human body. The scriptures refer often to the followers of Jesus as the “Body of Christ”. My focus into the summer will be to explore the implications of the church functioning like a body and the specific commands related to how we are to interact with each other. Many of the passages we will explore include the words “one another” or “each other”. The emphasis is on reciprocal relationship. The followers of Jesus were to function in a give and take kind of way. God created humans to live in community with each other. Deeply instilled in the soul is the longing to live in community with others as a reflection of the community of the Trinity from all eternity.

The rebellion changed all that.

Selflessness turned to selfishness.

Interdependence turned to independence.

Giving turned to taking.

Ever since the time mankind rebelled God has been unfolding His plan of reconciliation. Christianity is not so much how to avoid hell and acquire heaven but how do we restore a dynamic relationship with God for which we were created in the first place.

Paul clarified our core message as ambassadors for Christ.

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Restored community with the Trinity. It was the topic of Jesus prayer before He suffered and died on our behalf.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21

It is all about restored relationship with God. Not about cowering under an unapproachable God.

Not what we can get from God. (Materialism)

Not even what we can do for God. (Activism)

It is about the privilege of being WITH God in soul-satisfying relationship.

Someone said that if we would be happy in heaven without Jesus, we probably won't be there.

I would add that if we are happy without a vital relationship with Jesus here we most likely would be happy without Him in heaven. The glory of life hereafter is the wonder life with the Trinity. Many of the Bible verses dealing with relationship between the members of the body appeal to the example of Jesus' relational life. Love like Jesus. Forgive like Jesus. Forbear like Jesus. Live like Jesus. Pray like Jesus.

Jesus made the defining proofs of true discipleship clear.

Abiding in His word

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

Embracing His call

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:27

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33

Demonstrating His life

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:7-8

Representing His Love

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

These things draw attention to our connection to God. Christ is the head. We are His body. The body dies when disconnected from the head. The body cannot function to its full potential when direction from the head is disregarded. Paul appealed to the body to teach three essential principles that make a healthy body.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

The principle of **diversity** is clearly illustrated in these verses by the use of the word varieties three times and the use of the words "each one".

The principle of **unity** is clearly illustrated by the use of the word "same".

The principle of **mutuality** is clearly illustrated by the use of the words "common good".

All of the Bible passages dealing with the relationship between the members of the body reinforce the principle of Unity, Diversity, and Mutuality. It seems that a great deal of the letters addressed relational issues plaguing the body. The cumulative corrosive effect of sin and living life without God runs deep in the soul. The majority of the deeds of the flesh and fruit of the spirit relate to relationships. Only a supernatural regeneration by the Holy Spirit and continual surrender to His direction and empowerment can rise above the patterns ingrained in our system. Since nearly all the letters in the New Testament deal with relationships, I want to first focus on what has been called the "one another" commands.

UNITY

In addition to the commands to love each other, the New Testament writers both describe and prescribe unity.

These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:14

Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:46-47

It seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Acts 15:25

And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; Acts 2:44

Unfortunately it didn't take long for such unity to turn to disunity.

Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment. 1 Corinthians 1:10

But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. Galatians 5:15

Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another. Galatians 5:26

Unity is not the same as uniformity. Unity has to do with having essential things in common. The physical body is a unity based on common connection between the various parts. All of the parts make up ONE body i.e. Common blood, DNA, nervous system, memories.

Such unity we really do not have to manufacture. We do however have to do certain things to preserve that unity. The same is true in for the body of Christ. There is essential unity based on God's design that needs to be preserved.

There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:4-6

Every follower of Jesus Christ is part of His body indwelt by one Spirit. We all share the one hope. We all serve the same Lord or Head.

The Church has been established and is unified and empowered by the Lord

He is the DIRECTOR (He heads the church)

He is the DEVOTION (He loves the Church)

He is the DYNAMIC (He empowers the Church)

He is the DEFENSE (He protects the Church)

We have all been baptized (connected to) into the body of Christ.

We are all children of the same Father who rules over us, works through us and lives in us.

This essential unity has tremendous implications for how we relate to other churches, denominations, nationalities. It should affect how we work together for His kingdom. It should eliminate competition and encourage cooperation.

God unifies His church whether we feel it or not. The practical aspects of unity are something God instructs us work hard at preserving unity. Just before the above passage, Paul drew attention to the wonder of God's ability to do far above all that we could ask or think according to the power that works within the members of the body. He called for God to be glorified in the church; the body of Christ.

Then he addressed the need for practical unity among the members of the body.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:1-3

God issued specific commands related to the preservation of the unity of the body.

The majority of the one another commands relate to preserving unity.

PRESERVE UNITY

Such unity with God and each other inspires belief in Christ.

"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. John 17:20-21

Notice the emphasis on "oneness". Such oneness and unity is so powerful in a fractured and self-centered world that, when observed by the word, causes them to realize that Jesus had to be more than just a man. Jesus was truly God's representative on earth to show and empower a whole new way of life.

"LOVE ONE ANOTHER"

By far, the one another command issued most often is to "love one another".

This is a command to mutually express love for one another.

As we saw above, this mutual love for one another clearly confirms true discipleship.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

It is the reciprocal nature of this love that captures attention. Only Jesus can establish such love in His followers so that when it is observed the natural conclusion is that they must be follower of Jesus. God is love. Love is at the core of who God is. Since we have been joined to Him it is the core of who we are.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live (and love) through Him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (satisfaction) for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. 1 John 4:7-13

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

This love for one another is a natural trait to one connected to and living by the Holy Spirit.

Paul listed it as the first manifestation of a Spirit directed and empowered life. (Gal 5:22)

This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. 1 John 3:23-24

By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 1 John 3:10-11

And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. 1 John 3:23

And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning—that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it. 2 John 1:5-6

*Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Rom 13:8
Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Pet 4:8*

Such reciprocal love among the church was cause for thanksgiving and prayer for increase.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. 2 Thessalonians 1:3

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more... 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

This word “love” in our culture and language is used to indicate a host of ideas. Love my parents. Love pizza. Love baseball. Love my siblings. Love my spouse. Love my friend. The Greeks actually employed four different words to clarify what aspect of love they intended.

Feeling Love

Actions stimulates by an attitude based on common pleasure

Family Love

Actions stimulated by an attitude based on common heritage (blood relationship)

Friendship Love

Actions stimulated by an attitude based on common interests

Foundational Love

Actions stimulated by an attitude based on personal strength and commitment

The world can express any of the first three because they are involuntarily stimulated by some mutual benefit. The love of which the Scripture focuses is intentional. It requires a choice; an act of the will. The kind of love so unavoidably commanded by the Lord toward one another is that willful unconditional acceptance and selfless giving which flows out of the character of the one loving to touch the needs of the one being loved.

The supreme model for this kind of love is Jesus Christ who came to demonstrate God's love in terms we could understand.

"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. John 15:12-13

This unconditional love is the music that accompanies the lyrics of the gospel.

***This love begins with a DESIRE to meaningfully connect with people
that stimulates a DECISION to pursue meaningful connection
and manifests in DEEDS that promote deeper community.***

Never think that you have arrived. As we observed above, Paul recognized love among the churches but also encouraged even greater demonstration. The inspiration to pray for both the church at Ephesus and at Colossae came from his observation of their faith in Christ and their love for each other.

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers... Ephesians 1:15-16

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints... Colossians 1:3-4

The love demonstrated in the early church was visible. John encouraged his readers to make sure their love went beyond deeds.

But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 1 John 3:17-18

This love preserves unity because it keeps our focus on ministry to one another.

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8

This love is the core of the Gospel.

Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' No other commandment is greater than these." Mark 12:29-31

Unfortunately, Paul found it necessary to point out frequent failure to demonstrate that love.

Is your love clearly visible? Would your love inspire others to pray and thank God? Or would our lack of love inspire other to pray for us. Prejudice, pride, bitterness, unforgiveness, indifference, anger, rejection, strife are all demonstrations of a closed heart.

Listen to the deeds of one who operates from fleshly impulses rather than the Holy Spirit.

Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 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 will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

Do our attitudes and actions promote and preserve unity or promote disunity and strife?

There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! Psalm 133:1

Let us promote unity by loving one another.

Digging Deeper Suggestions for Healthy Body Part 2

Day One

Invite the God of love to hear your prayer.

Give ear to my words, O LORD, Consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, For to You I pray. In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; In the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch. For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit. But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house, At Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You. O LORD, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; Make Your way straight before me. Psalm 5:1-8

Let all who take refuge in You be glad, Let them ever sing for joy; And may You shelter them, That those who love Your name may exult in You. For it is You who blesses the righteous man, O LORD, You surround him with favor as with a shield. Psalm 5:11-12

Never be afraid to “groan” to God concerning the burdens of your heart and life. We serve a God who loves us.

The first day closest to the message is a great day to review the notes. Listen for any “nudging of the Spirit”, Jot down any questions that come to mind. Jot down any subjects you would like to go deeper on. Any specific direct for your own life that comes to light or issues raised that need to be addressed? Give special attention to the commands to love one another.

Reflect on the three essential body concepts of Unity, Diversity and Mutuality.

Since this week was on unity, reflect further on what unifies our physical body and what unifies the body of Christ. In what ways are we unified no matter what we do or don't do?

Day Two

Today's Psalm demonstrates how we can move from negative thinking to positive thinking. The Psalmist starts out expressing a sense of abandonment. He pleads for God's intervention in his life. He finishes with a healthy outlook based on the love of God.

How long, O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken. But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me. Psalm 13:1-6

Express how you feel to God today. Ask for enlightenment. Affirm your trust in God's love. Express your intention to rejoice in the Lord for His undeserved blessing.

What are the implications for community that arise with the fact that God is Trinity?

What goes on between the members of the Trinity? I believe that the longing for community is hardwired into the very nature of man. Take some time to contemplate what satisfying community looks like.

Jesus' prayer for his disciples and all who would follow after was community; community with Him and with each other. Take some time to reflect on this most mysterious and marvelous request.

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. John 17:20-21

The most powerful tool of evangelism is the unity between God and believers and between believers and believers. It seems clear that Jesus prayed for the manifestation of that unity as a means to grab the "world's" attention and affirm His commission from God.

Take some time to reflect on the impact of such unity on an unbelieving world.

Spend some time thinking about the following thought.

Someone said that if we would be happy in heaven without Jesus, we probably won't be there. I would add that if we are happy without a vital relationship with Jesus here we most likely would be happy without Him in heaven. The glory of life hereafter is the wonder life with the Trinity.

How important (personally) is your relationship with Jesus. Would you get along in heaven without His presence? Would you just be happy with your heavenly surroundings?

Finally today take some time to reflect on the things that Jesus said demonstrate true discipleship. These are the things that clearly indicate that one is a true follower of Jesus.

Abiding in His word

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." John 8:31-32

Embracing His call

Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:27

So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple. Luke 14:33

Demonstrating His life

If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. John 15:7-8

Representing His Love

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." John 13:34-35

What factors in your life indicate that you are a genuine follower of Jesus?

If you were arrested for being a follower of Jesus, would there be enough evidence to convict you? What evidence would that be?

Day Three

Today's Psalm expresses the wonder of God's love.

Your lovingkindness, O LORD, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; Your judgments are like a great deep. O LORD, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! And the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They drink their fill of the abundance of Your house; And You give them to drink of the river of Your delights. For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light. O continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, And Your righteousness to the upright in heart. Psalm 36:5-10

Take some time reflecting on the images and comparisons the Psalmist makes i.e. heavens, skies, mountains, deep, shadow of wings, drink fill, abundant house, river of delights, fountain of life, light. These are intended to give depth and color to a concept. Use your imagination as you contemplate the love of God today.

Review the four aspects of love.

If you are married, think about the application of each of these four aspects of love in relationship to marriage. The truth is all four have an application in marriage. The most indispensable one is the "Foundational Love". How can each one be cultivated in a marriage.

Today, read through the book of 1 John. Jot down as many thoughts about love as you find there.

The Bible really never defines love, it only describes it. The best description of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13. There we are told what love does and does not do. In the first of the chapter Paul lists a few things that we could do and still not love. Some of those things seem to be loving acts. If we say someone doing them we would assume it was out of love and yet Paul indicates you could do them and still not love people. What appears to be missing that makes the action loveless?

Now, take a piece of paper and make two columns (I have suggest this exercise before). Label on column "What love is or does" and the other "What love isn't or doesn't". Now go through the passage and place the descriptions of love in their appropriate columns. Now go back through and fill in the negative where the passage gives the positive and vice versa.

Finally, if this was a check list to determine the quality of your love, how would you score?

Day Four

As for me, I shall sing of Your strength; Yes, I shall joyfully sing of Your lovingkindness in the morning, for You have been my stronghold And a refuge in the day of my distress. O my strength, I will sing praises to You; for You are my stronghold, the God who shows me lovingkindness. Psalm 59:16-17

Reflect on the demonstration of God's lovingkindness and let Him know how much you appreciate Him.

Paul told the Romans to let love be without hypocrisy. That means love others with genuine love. What follows that instruction is a series of actions that flesh out what un-hypocritical love looks like. In the original language the following actions are “ing” words which connect them to the original instruction.

For example...

Let love be without hypocrisy, abhorring what is evil, clinging to what is good, being devoted to one another in brotherly love...

Take some time to finish the list up through verse 13. Add to that list the items that follow all the way through chapter 15. List as many actions as you can that relate to interaction with people in a loving manner.

Finish by taking inventory of you own interactions with people. This is not to shame you or to depress you but to challenge you to interact with other with a true Spirit directed and empowered love.

Day Five

O God, You are my God; I shall seek You earnestly; My soul thirsts for You, my flesh yearns for You, In a dry and weary land where there is no water. Thus I have seen You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul is satisfied as with marrow and fatness, And my mouth offers praises with joyful lips. Psalm 63:1-5

Your lovingkindness is better than...

I praise You for...

Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer nor His lovingkindness from me. Psalm 66:20

Following are some additional thoughts about love for your reflection.

What is the source of divine love?

- **God is love**

The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 1 John 4:8

We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 1 John 4:16

God always loves. Everything he does is motivated by love. Wherever you see love, you see God. Wherever you see God, you see love.

- **Love is from God.**

In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation (satisfactory payment) for our sins...We love, because He first loved us. 1 John 10,19

Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephes. 6:23

God's love motivates and is the basis of our capacity to love. Because we were created in the image of God who is love, love is at the core of human experience. Even the secular "experts" admit that the core longing of man is to love and be loved. The fall twisted that desire to love and serve others into self-love. Only through a supernatural transformation can that diminished capacity to love God and others be restored to its original capacity. Love is because of God. Love is from God.

- **God floods believer's hearts with His love by the Holy Spirit Rom 5:1-8**

and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out (spilled, gushed out — perfect tense verb indicating a past action with continuing results i.e. poured out and still there!) within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

At the moment of salvation, God filled our empty relational reservoir with his undiminished love. That includes both the personal realization of it and the practical release of it. God gives us all the resources necessary to personally realize and practically release love. The problem lies in our damaged soul that fails to personally perceive the wonder of His love for us and realize the fulfillment of sharing that love with others. We make the choice to share His love or thwart it.

- **Love is the result of surrender to work of the Holy Spirit**

"The fruit of the Spirit is love..." Gal 5:22

When we walk by the direction and power of the Spirit, we love. The self-centered lust of the flesh automatically disappears when we walk by the Spirit.

- **God grants the believer a spirit (nature) of love**

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline (self-control).

- **God causes us to grow in love 1 Thes 3:11-13**

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

Here it is obvious that love is not stagnant. Love grows and develops. God is the cause of growth.

- **God teaches us to love 1 Thes 4:9-12**

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another

Just how God teaches us is not specifically taught. He is active in our learning process. He cause growth through teaching. Even though His love indwells us, there is a learning and growing process.

- **Love is a protective shield**

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. Jude 1:20-21

But since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. 1 Thes. 5:8

God's love is a shelter in a world that desires to destroy anything that is related to good and God's kingdom. No matter what rages around us, we are assured that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

- **Love for God and for others is the central point of the entire Bible.**

And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." Matthew 22:37-40

So do we have any part in this love thing?

- **Obedience purifies the heart to initially love sincerely 1 Pet 1:22**

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. 1 Peter 1:22-23

When we respond to the truth of the word of God there is a new birth. The old heart, no longer capable of genuinely loving God or others, is purified and renewed with a new capacity to love. Peter urges us to develop this new capacity to its fullest extent and fervently love one another not from obligation or forced action but from a heart that sincerely desires to meaningfully connect with others.

- **Obedience also perfects love in the heart 1 Jn 2:3-6**

but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

John indicates here that obedience to the truth not only restores the capacity to love but develops it as well.

- **Love is something we choose to wear or put on**

"Put on love which is the perfect bond of unity." Col 3:14

- **Love may be pursued by us**

But flee from these things, you men of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 1 Tim. 6:11

- **Love is to be the guiding factor in everything we do.**

Let all that you do be done in love. 1 Cor. 16:14

- **Love comes from encouragement by the body**

and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

- **Love is modeled by others 2 Tim 3:10-11**

But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord delivered me!

- **Loves growth depends on intercessory prayer**

Paul continually prayed for the development and manifestation of love among believers even among those who were already doing well.

- **Love can always increase**

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, 1 Thes. 4:9-10

The last days will be filled with those whose love has grown cold. People will be lovers of self even more than God. Parents will be without natural affection. The consequences of a fleshly walk will be evident by deterioration in relationships. The church will lose its first love for God that will affect their love for each other. Carnality will result in internal fighting and disputes and jealousy. Rather than assemble more which the Bible instructs us to do as the end draws nearer, Christians will isolate from one another. Lack of encouragement by the truth will bring about a hardness of heart. The result will be a failure to reflect a true picture of the God of love to a world that no longer finds love at home or in the church.

Much of our interaction is mere tolerance and politeness. We no longer desire meaningful connection with the entire body of Christ. We pick and choose whom we will significantly relate to based on how comfortable they make ME feel or what they can do for me. This, my friends, is not genuine love. This is hypocritical love and God tells us to love WITHOUT hypocrisy.

- **Let us cry out to God for forgiveness.**
- **Let us cry out for significant healing in our soul that prevents us from releasing genuine love to those God brings into our circle of influence.**
- **Let us cry out for a new work in the very core of our souls that we may learn to fervently love one another from the heart.**

Those who do demonstrate genuine love, I urge you to cry out to God that you may excel even more.

The more we demonstrate genuine love the more the world will realize that God is in our midst.