

Love is costly

Love costs everything

When the Father sent His Son into the world, His love cost Him deeply.
“*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son.*”

John 3:16

When the Son came to take our place and become sin so we can live, it cost Him everything. *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. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*

Phil 2:6-8

Those who believe in Jesus follow His example of sacrificial love. *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.*

Eph 5:1-2

When people wanted to follow Him, Jesus told them that the cost to follow Him was everything. See the clear teaching He gave.

Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who observe it begin to ridicule him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ Or what king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and consider whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So then, none of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. Luke 14:25-33

The nature of God is that love is of great value and this means it is very costly. To follow Christ is to love like Christ, and He tells us that cost is our life. *“If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.”* Luke 9:23

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 1 John 3:16

From God's perfect example of sacrificial love we learn that love is possible only through self-forgetfulness. If we are to be able to love as we should, we must deny ourselves and take up our cross daily.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Eph 6:12

Self-denial begins at home, *Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.* (Eph 5:25) The home is where we learn most intently how we are to put others first and love others as God would have us love.

The follower of Christ is to be a lover who willingly suffers for the good of others. *“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. You are My friends if you do what I command you”.* John 15: 12-14

We tend to think that love is like a wedding feast. But before the wedding in the kingdom of God comes a cross. The wedding is for those who have suffered by dying to self in order to love others. They do this because of their love for the Christ of God who loved them enough to deny His majesty and die for them. Following His example, the lover of Christ wears their heart on the outside, in the same manner of Christ. His love is never hidden, so it is always vulnerable to suffering.

“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 neighbour as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets” Matt 22:36–40

If loving God and our neighbour fulfills the law, then Jesus's command to deny ourselves and take up our cross daily in order to follow Him is the only way we can receive the ability to fulfil the command to love in a way that pleases God. If we are in Christ, loving God with all we are and our neighbour as ourselves should be obvious to the world. *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”* John 13:35

We are dependent on our relationship with the Father and the Son if we are to love as children of God. For this purpose, the Spirit is given to those who obey Him. (Acts 5:32) He makes love possible the way God desires for His children. *The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.* Rom 5:5

The love of God for us, and in us, is sacrificial

No greater love is there than this, that we lay down our life for a friend. (John 15:13) If the will is obedient to God, it is always consistent with His desire for our sanctification and His glory, so we can be loving as He is loving.

Therefore, we must make determined choices every day according to the will of God for our good and His glory. We are to love even if others don't care for us. For instance, we are to love our enemies. (Matt 5:44) Even if our enemy is in our household. (Matt 10:36) We love because God first loved us, even when we were unloving. Therefore, husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, (Eph 5:25) no qualifications, just do it in obedience to God, because we have placed His will before everything else.

Love is affectionate and tender hearted

Loving God and loving others is not just an act of the will, it involves the whole person, mind and heart, it is therefore affectionate.

We need to understand that love is not only effectual in doing something, it is also affectionate, the emotions are involved, for we are made with feelings towards God and others. In the unredeemed state these feeling are not loving in the way of Christ.

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. 1 Peter 3:8

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honour. Rom 12:10

In Christ love is first an effective decision of the will, and then affectionate feelings follow, but the will comes first. Jesus never hesitated in His will to love, and He was affectionate with His disciples.

Our human affections can rise and fall, like the weather, so they are often unreliable. But the love of God never fails.

The reason the command to '*love one another*' is the most repeated in the New Testament is that affectionate love so often escapes us because of our self-interest that hasn't been sanctified through personal mortification by putting to death what is earthly in us. Col 3:5

John Piper says some important things in a message on: 'Love One Another with Tender Affection.'

Teaching from Romans 12:9–13

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honour; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer.

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love." "Be devoted to one another," doesn't quite get the sense of the original. The RSV says, "Love one another with brotherly affection." But the word for "love" or "be devoted" refers to a special kind of love. It's used only here in the whole New Testament. But it is not a rare word outside the New Testament. It refers to "tender affection, particularly family affection" (C.E.B. Cranfield, Romans, vol. 2, p. 632). So what the verse is calling for is that Christians have "tender affection toward each other in family love."

Again:

The fact that our hearts are so distorted by sin that we don't feel what we ought to feel does not mean that God cannot command what is right and good and fitting for us to feel. We

are responsible to feel what God commands us to feel. So I plead with you, be more serious when you read these commands than you might be if you thought God has no right to tell you what you should feel toward others, and that you have no accountability for your emotions.

Why Is This So Important?

Now why is this so important? It's important because tender family affection among believers witnesses to the truth that God is our Father. The church is not primarily a human organisation. It is primarily the family of God. To be a Christian means that you were born a second time into the family of God. You were born the first time into a human family. You were born the second time into God's family.

Again:

So this issue of how we feel toward each other is very important. The issue is whether we will live the truth of God's Fatherhood or not. Will our affections tell the truth about God and what he has done for us to atone for our sins in Jesus and give us new birth and faith and adopt us into his eternal family as brothers and sisters of Christ? This is not a small issue. It's an issue about the truth of Christianity. Will we tell the truth the way God calls us to: "Love one another with tender family affection"?

Love doesn't discriminate

We are not just to love those who love us, we are to show love and compassion for everyone, loving them as we wish to be loved, and caring for them as we would care for ourselves. All people are created by God in His image, and all come under His dominion, either for blessing or judgement. God alone determines the outcome. But: *"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."*

John 15:12

We should love because it is commanded, and we should love and desire God because He gave His Son up for us in love. When what we desire is not trusting in God's love for us and others it is evil desire.

When we don't obey His command to love we don't love God.

1 John 5:3; 1 John 4:20

Love comes from God. (Rom 5:5) If we are in Christ, His love is in us. But none of us have been fully sanctified, and as a result we fail to love like God. It is then that we realise forgiveness a wonderful grace that also comes from God. We need to repent, and we need forgiveness. We need to humble ourselves before the Holy Spirit so we walk with Him to love as we should.

When we, in our broken fleshly heart, desire that all people love us, we are not only ignoring the fact that everyone has at least some level of flesh remaining, and we ourselves cannot love as we should; we have ignored the fact that even if others are born again, they are not yet like Christ. So, our expectations of being loved by people who claim to know Jesus will often, if not always, fall short of our great expectations.

If we are to be loving we are not to react to the darkened behaviour of others who reveal the unloving corruption of the world. We are not to follow our hurt feelings when others are unloving. The less mature we are spiritually, the more easily we will respond to life from the perspective of self-interest and the fallen ways of the world that remain in us.

"But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you." "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?"

Matt 5:39-46

When we take up our cross and give our will to be the servant of God, His love will make up for all that is lacking in our world. When others don't love us, God's love is always with us because He lives in us by His Spirit. When we are misunderstood, He understands everything. When we are empty, He can fill us to the fullness of God. Eph 3:19

We will never be unloved if we are willing to please God and trust in Him to give us the love of Christ. Therefore, we need to be diligently seeking to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we trust in God and don't expect people to be like God.

When we get upset with the failure of others, we are the problem we want God to deal with in others. We take the acts of others to be more important than the word of God that unequivocally announces His love for us.

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures. Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

James 1:17-20

Love is able to listen effectively

We often make assumptions about other people based on our own isolated and limited experiences of the dark reality that exists in the world, and then think we are wise. If our first response is judgmental and negative it ignores the imperative to love others. Then we become part of the blind mass of humanity wanting to lead others according to our personal short-sightedness.

The way to get to know the struggle others are experiencing is to get out of our minds and listen to others with compassion and humility, because we don't have the answers to help them based on our past experience in the world, for our past is only a window for us to discover ourselves.

God listens to us because He hears our prayers. So that children of God who reflect His life should listen to their brothers and sisters. We are

encouraged to take all our concerns to the Father, and the children are supposed to respond to the burdens of their siblings. Love has big ears.

If we cannot listen, we will never know just how best to bear one another's burdens, and how best we can uphold them in their struggles.

When we listen with effect, we can reflect back to others what we hear they are saying. With this kind of reflective listening, we begin to identify the feelings that the person may not have identified that their words and attitudes point to that actually exist. As we listen like this, we can have empathy by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation from a tender heart, but we will only understand their journey to the extent we have walked in their shoes in the valley of despair.

We can only comfort others with the comfort we have received from God when we are prepared to listen with effect. We need to realise that God's love and peace is not ours to give but comes from God who rules over the experience of everyone in the world.

We are not the receptacle of wisdom that we think we are, because our limited understanding arises primarily from our human experience in the world.

Let's be honest: we don't always like to listen

Why is it that there seems to be an unspoken rule that everyone in church is supposed to be happy? This is probably why listening to our brethren is not a strong point in the Church. We don't listen if we don't know we are in conflict with our fleshly minds. *For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.* Rom 8:5

The Bible teaches that we should be aware of an ongoing conflict. *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.* Gal 5:17

God tells us we are at war against the principalities and powers in the heavenly places. Don't we realise the war of the world never ends? Or are we unaware that the devil prowls around looking for people to

devour by enticing them with worldly desires? Have we been taken out of the fight so that we are no help to those who engage the enemy?

Happiness in the world without struggle against evil isn't consistent with belonging to the kingdom of God. The world never stops being opposed to God's kingdom. According to Paul, we can be sorrowful but always rejoicing. We get wounded, but we can at the same time know we have the ultimate victory in Christ.

We must enter the kingdom of God through many trials and tribulations in the world. Happiness now is not a lack of conflict, but knowing that God has secured us in the kingdom of His Son. Our happiness is guaranteed to last forever when we leave this world to live with God, face to face. Happiness is experiencing the peace that only the presence of God provides in the valley of the shadow of death.

For now, we are at war, and the good soldier doesn't involve himself in the affairs of the world. When we begin to listen to others with empathy and tenderness, they will begin to know something of the comfort we have received because God listened to us when His compassionate heart of love reached down through a brother and lifted us up to stand before Him.

1 Cor 12:24-26

But not only do we want happiness now without contesting the war between the kingdom of God and Satan; we want to get people to become Christian by implying that coming to Christ will mean all their battles will be over.

And that is exactly what worldly people desire, they don't want to know that turning to Jesus Christ will mean warfare against sin within and without. They don't want to hear about having to embrace self denial and taking up a cross if they want to follow Christ. So we make it easy for them, and offer happiness in the world, but not salvation from sin and death.

We never got to the point of asking our brethren how they are resisting the devil so we can encourage one another to stand firm in the faith.

We don't ask the soldier of Christ how they are fighting against sin:--

How did you put to death what is earthly in you this week? How did you war against the flesh?

How did you lay down your life for another? How did you deny yourself and take up your cross?

How did you honour someone else? How did you help bear another's burden? How did you use your gift of the Spirit to care for another? How did you suffer with Christ? How did you love someone as Christ loves the church? How did you fight against the forces of darkness?

We don't ask how did you suffer while rejoicing? Or, can you see beyond the darkness to the joy that is already set in place before you? Or, can you see that Holiness is the purpose of suffering? Or, can you welcome the hand of God's purifying fire that transforms us into the image of Christ? Or, do you need a brothers help in your tribulations? How can I help you carry your cross? Is there anything I can do to lighten your burden? How can I love you with the love of Christ?

Remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming sharers with those who were so treated. For you showed sympathy to the prisoners and accepted joyfully the seizure of your property, knowing that you have for yourselves a better possession and a lasting one.

Heb 10:32-34

Lovers serve the interest of God's love

God sovereignly manifests His spiritual gifts to be seen in each member of the body of Christ for their common good as He wills.

1 Cor 12:1-11

God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honour to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

1 Cor 12:24-26

While the church is the body of Christ baptised in love, and intended to reveal the purity of His holiness and love with *the same care for one another*. As a result we must strive to see manifestation of His love working in us for the blessing of others. We are given to serve one another in love as Christ has served us in the sacrifice of His life for

His beloved Church. And by the grace of God they are one family in Christ. Weakness and all.

We are saved to serve one another in the church according to what God has done as an expression of His love for all of us in Christ, and we are not to treat others according to their failure to be perfect servants. We all live by the undeserved grace of God.

Therefore: *‘Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.’*
1 Cor 13:4-7

The relational communion we have with the Father and the Son should be our goal for one another as we share in divine fellowship together. *‘So that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.’*

1 John 1:3

The quality of the intimacy we have with the Father and the Son should give us the determination to foster the same quality of intimate love we want to reveal to each other. As a result of God’s work in us, the works we do for God should flow out of the relationship we have with God in fellowship with each other.

Therefore, we need to see that abiding in the true Vine is the same as having fellowship with God and one another. When the vertical fellowship with God matches the horizontal fellowship with each other we are interconnected by love in the vine, we do our best work with the love of God.

Jesus is our perfect example

With an intimate knowledge of the failures and weaknesses of His disciples, Jesus loved His own to the end, and He took up a towel and bowed down and washed their feet.

This act of receiving Christ’s devoted love is not given as a result of their performance, but because the Father has given them to Jesus. Now

we need to understand that what Jesus did is an example for all His disciples. John 13:3-15

After telling the disciples to love one another, Jesus gives them His example in this verse. *"Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."* John 15:13

By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. 1 John 3:16

And brothers are family who belong to us as much as they belong to God. And He has not left us without the ability to follow His example. *For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.* 2 Cor 5:14-15

Jesus didn't say, when your friends love you, you can lay down your life for them. Jesus knows of the failings of His family, and He is gracious to us, His love covered what was not pleasant. So we, *Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.* 1 Peter 4:8

We follow Jesus' example of sacrificial love as we point others to the joy of Christ that overcomes the darkness of the world.

The absence of love has a purpose

The lack of love we experience in the world is intended by the grace of God to cause us to flee to Him who alone is the giver of life and love in Jesus Christ.

Jesus experienced a great lack of love in the world, and He gave Himself to suffer up to suffer and die for the unlovely, not only for our hope, because of the hope He depended on that waited for Him in heaven.

'Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.' Heb 12:2

People ask us why should we suffer when the goal for life is without suffering. We suffer because its reward is beyond comprehension in the

world. We suffer with Christ for the reward of eternal joy that will never fade or fall away.

The existence of trials we face in the world is a two-edge sword of personal discomfort, because it is often our own lack of love for God and others that cause us suffering. But God always loves us and He uses our trials for our experience of our future joy in heaven.

No one in the world can love us consistently like the Spirit of Christ. God's love always working for our future joy with Him is our motivation to love like Him. *'Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.'*
Heb 12:2

'Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.'
2 Pet 1:5-8

Wisdom is needed

It is wise for us to understand that all the members of Christ's church are not yet made perfect in His loving image. Instead of responding to our feelings, we must look to see the truth of what God has done and is doing in our brethren. Unfortunately, we often have a tendency to make judgments according to our incomplete sanctification thinking we know the real score.

The flesh that remains in us will unescapably take what others might do as a personal affront. And our first judgement will often be according to our own fleshly dysfunction. We need to consider the possibilities that there are other reasons for how people behave. If we were to consider the many other possibilities for the behaviour of others, we would realise that we judge without understanding.

Wisdom comes from God teaching us His truth. However, it is not possible to get water from an empty well. Unless we walk obediently

and willingly under the control of the Spirit, living water will not flow from our mouths. (John 7:38) and we will not have the wisdom it takes to rise above the dictates of the world of self-interest. As a result, we will not be compelled by the love of Christ to lay down our life for others. We will be quick to judge and lack patience and kindness.

Even a blind man knows that believers are not without fault. Whatever remains in our minds of the ways of the world will continue to cause us grief, and inhibit our expression of divine love until we take our failings to the cross to die the death it deserves. This is the purification of the perseverance of faith in Christ.

Our Father uses external causes to make us dissatisfied enough with ourselves, to be desperate enough to die to the flesh we don't want to see in us, so we can be delivered enough to be fully devoted to God who loves us with enduring love that won't leave us alone.

The proof that we have not put off all the flesh that remains is our unloving reactions to external causes. The proof of God's love is that He will not give up on our sanctification. Therefore, in His providence the Lord provides many opportunities for us to learn sacrificial love from the lessons of hard knocks.

'For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.' Phil 1:6

'Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,' Jude 1:24

No one is exempt from daily trials that prove the genuineness of our love or otherwise, for Christ and one another. We are all being sanctified in Christ; we all enter through Him into the presence of our Father together, although entering through the narrow gate is hard.

To pay the cost of love we need to think spiritually

Behaviour follows thought. Feelings tag behind. A high amount of our thought is automatic and unrestrained. This is musings as a time of reflection or thought.

We are to some extent a product of our human experience. We were born of the flesh; we may now be born of the Spirit. But our mind still

needs to be transformed into the mind of Christ. In the natural course of our sanctification, we are to take charge of the renewing of our minds. We are to replace the natural way of thinking according to the flesh with the thoughts of God to bless the family of God we call church. And then the church can better produce the fruit of salvation in the lives of others.

When we are not actively engaged with legitimate activity, we muse. We habitually reflect on what's on our mind. And what's on our minds will be determined by the degree of our conscious sanctification at the time.

We must take charge of this musing. We must create the diligent habit of directing our minds to the things of the Spirit. We can live in the world as if by the flesh engraved on our minds, or we can be renewed and live with the awareness of the presence of God in His bountiful creation.

We can be overcome by the darkness, or we can overcome by the light of the glory of God. We need to redirect our default thinking away from the habitual ways of the flesh, and redirect our default to be engaged with legitimate delight in the body of Christ and His victory over sin and death. Thinking habitually in line with the flesh means we will not love like Christ according to the Spirit, or be willing to pay the price of self denial that results in our transformation in His image.

Anger, judgmentalism, impatience, unkindness, unloving isolationism, private faith, depression and anxiety are generally the product of natural musing. No one is exempt from fleshly musing. None of us have yet put on the mind of Christ. Therefore: *"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you."*

Phil 4:6-9

The born-again life of the believer is somewhat of a paradox. Love is costly. Suffering and rejoicing go side by side. *As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.* 2 Cor 6:10

When we take control of our minds we can think the thoughts of God, and we can know the truth, and the truth will set us free. *Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."* John 8:31-32

'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.' 1 John 2:5-6

Jesus calls us to give everything in our love for Him. *If children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him.* Rom 8:17

The fullness of His love and glory begins now, and in our future is the absolute glory of the kingdom of God.

John Piper calls this future grace. "Future grace is all that God gives us- -of His help and of Himself-from this moment to eternity. Therefore, faith in future grace is always the belief in God's promises and the embrace of God's person. It is a sense of confident security in God's promised gifts, and a sense of contented satisfaction in God Himself."

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Compiled by:

Robert May

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