

The Greatest of These Is Love Part 2

Love never fails. When everything else in this world has passed away, when everything that is held us such high esteem is gone, when knowledge and gifts no longer matter, love will still exist. It is the great constant throughout eternity. There are times when love may lose a battle. There may come times when the object of one's love may never return that love. Yet, while it may lose a battle here and there, love has already won the war. The idea here is not on success. The idea is on endurance. When other things have been removed from view, there will still be love! It does not give in, give up or give out. Love that is real is love that lasts!

In his discourse on spiritual gifts, the Apostle Paul praised the value of love. At the end of chapter 12 he introduced *“a more excellent way”* (1 Corinthians 12:31). He then tells us in 1 Corinthians 13:13 [RSV], *“So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”* Yet, Paul pointed out that faith and hope are encompassed inside of love in 1 Corinthians 13:7. Therefore, the greatest of all things a believer can possess is love! If our love is right, then faith is no problem! If our love is right, then our hope is in the right place. When our love is right, then we are right!

What makes love so great? Well, love is the defining characteristic of Who God is. When John the beloved disciple wanted to describe God in one sentence, the Holy Spirit inspired him to define God as, **“God is love”** (1 John 4:8). God does not have faith! After all, in whom would God place His faith? God does not have hope! For what would One Who controls everything possible have to hope? Yet, God is love! Therefore, we are never more God-like than when we learn to love like God.

To be like God, we need to learn to love like God! When we can do this, our world will be altered for His glory!

Many lonely sailors have been cheered by the flashing signal from Minot's Ledge Lighthouse. It is not the tallest or the oldest lighthouse in Massachusetts, and few would claim it is the prettiest, but this rugged, wave swept tower has probably sparked more imaginations – and possibly more romances – than any beacon in the state.

Minot's Ledge – located about a mile offshore near the line between the South Shore towns of Cohasset and Scituate – is part of the dangerous Cohasset Rocks, formerly known as the Conyhasset or Quonahassit after a local Indian tribe. It is said that the Quonahassit people would visit the ledges to leave gifts of arrowheads, beads, and various trinkets, in an effort to appease the spirit they believed resided in the rocks. If the spirit became angry, they thought, it would bring destructive storms to the tribe.

On May 1, 1894 a new flashing lantern was installed in the lighthouse whose characteristic one-four-three flashes spells "I love you" in nautical code, Minot's Ledge Light soon became known up and down the coast as the "Lover's Light." Several years ago the Coast Guard decided to replace the old equipment. They announced that for technical reasons the new machines would not be able to flash the "I love you" message. The public protested and the Coast Guard weakened. The old equipment remains and continues to send its message of love to the passing ships, they young and the young at heart.

The greatest message you can ever hear is this: "God loves you." The message that should be on the lips of every Christian as they move about their world is "God loves you." The entire Bible can be best expressed as God's love letter to mankind, the fullness of His love being expressed in the gift and Person of His Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

We cannot capture God and study Him in a laboratory. We cannot put Him under a microscope, probe Him, and measure Him. The only way we know God is through what He has chosen to reveal of Himself to us in His word and through our personal relationship with Him once we become His adopted child when we come to Him in obedient, saving faith.

God's word describes Him. He is holy. 1 John 1:5 declares that "***in Him there is no darkness.***" He is Holy. He has no sin. No evil exists with Him, and there is no darkness. He is the Lighthouse sending out the clear message, "I love you."

God is Spirit (John 4:24). He is boundless, infinite, and He is invisible, although He reveals Himself through His creation. David wrote some 3,000 years ago after gazing upon the wonders of the nighttime sky, "***The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims His handiwork***" (Psalm 19:1 [RSV]). Some 1,000 years later the Apostle Paul joined with David by stating in Romans 1:19-23 [RSV], ***19. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely, His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; 21. for although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. 22. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23. and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles.*** So God may be invisible Himself, but He has revealed Himself through that which He created and that which He has preserved in His word. Even as I was writing the previous sentence in my preparation for this lesson, word arrived on FOX News that two 1,300 years old Biblical manuscripts separated by continents have been discovered and reunited. These two manuscripts contain the Song of the Sea

the Israelite people sang in Exodus 15 as the armies of Pharaoh were drowned as the Red Sea swallowed them up. Isn't God amazing? God loves you!

“Our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:29 [ESV]). God is holy and cannot abide with sin. He will judge.

Yes, God is love, but not love in the fleshly sense, as Hollywood would define love. Not love in the gooey sweet sense. These are both false notions of love based on feelings. God is love as in **agape** love, meaning a demonstration of good will and concern for the other.

Love is what He is, and we can see God's love demonstrated in what He is. He is the Creator. It is a loving God that created you with the capabilities to appreciate the gifts of creation. When you look at the starry sky on a clear, moonless night, or as you peer at a snowcapped mountain vista, or as you find yourself gazing upon the flaming crimsons and deep scarlets, the burnished and bright oranges, and the brilliant yellows and gold-hued leaves of autumn on a brisk, fall day with a brilliant blue sky as the backdrop, you can witness for yourself the Creator's love as His handiwork and artistry are put on display. What young bride has received diamonds with more sparkle than that which appears in Orion's Belt? What man mined for gold any lovelier than the gold which covers the elm and the aspen trees in fall? What garnet stone ever carved by man shone with more beauty than the fiery scarlet leaves of the maple trees dancing in the cool breeze bathed in October sunshine? Even as nature's destructive fury is unleashed as the storm cascades down and cleanses the Earth and the thunder peels and resounds echoing throughout the hills and valleys, humbling man in its wake, the rainbow soon follows upon its heels and appears in the sky, affirming once again how God's merciful love is shown to all of mankind. What a God of love we have!

Our God is also our Sustainer. **“Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life”** writes the psalmist in Psalm 54:4 [RSV]]. When you read Philippians 4:6, Paul gives some excellent advice: **“Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”**

Think about lifting a heavy load. It might be awkward in shape and throw you off balance. But, when someone else helps you carry that load, it does not seem so heavy and you can regain your center. God is a lot like that person who comes along to help shoulder the load. The difference being that instead of carrying the load itself, He carries you.

How does He carry us, you might ask? It is through the power of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus was preparing for His crucifixion, He told His disciples that when He went away God would send them a Comforter. That is the Spirit of God that

inhabits every believer when they ask Him into their lives by submitting to the Lord in obedient, saving faith.

The Comforter is God's promise to you of His presence always and that He will see you through every problem that you face. People have described the Spirit as a "still small voice" or a kind of "knowing." However God manifests Himself in your life it is first and foremost an act of faith. Without believing in His care and love, He could do nothing to enhance your life. As the Hebrews writer tells us in Hebrews 11:6 [RSV], ***"And without faith it is impossible to please Him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."***

In Hebrew, ***Jehovah Jireh*** means "Lord God, Our Provider." Abraham coined this phrase when he was given a ram in the bush to sacrifice instead of his son, Isaac. In your life, there has been more than one "ram in the bush" that God has provided – you just did not know it. When you give your life to Him, the reality of all that God does in your life is revealed. You will wonder how you ever lived without Him.

God is love in that He is our God is our Redeemer. His love is proven in that His plan for the reconciliation of man is foolproof. In Romans 8:5-39 [RSV], Paul writes, ***35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36. As it is written, "For Thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loved us. 38. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor Angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39. nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.***

God's love is perfect, which is yet another reason that ***"the greatest of these is love."*** God's love is complete. It needs no further ingredients to make it any better. Here is but one example demonstrating the perfection of God's love. Paul states in Romans 5:8 [RSV], ***"But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us."*** This is perfection. This is completion. There is nothing that we need do to be loved by God. God loves you. Even while you are in the mist of committing heinous sin, God loves you. God's love is complete on its own and needs nothing to be added by the one He loves.

This is how ***agape*** love works. The love does not depend on the one loved. This is so different from our modern concept of love where we fall in and out of love depending on the actions of the one we love. This is how Christian husbands are supposed to love their wives. This is how we are to love one another. We are to do so unconditionally.

God's love is permanent, as well as being perfect. The permanency of God's love is fundamental to the very character of God. It is foolproof in the reconciliation of man and it is fully expressed in the Person of Christ.

700 years before the birth of Jesus, Isaiah wrote of His coming suffering on behalf of the world He loved. He writes in Isaiah 53:3-7 [RSV], **3. He was despised and rejected by men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. 4. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. 5. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with His stripes we are healed. 6. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.**

How much and how deeply does Jesus love. Even while He was hanging in torment on the cross He loved those who were crucifying Him. He prayed, **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”** (Luke 23:34 [RSV]) How much does Jesus love you? He loves you so much that He carried all of your sins with Him to the cross of Calvary.

Jesus tells us Himself in John 15:13 [RSV], **“Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.”** The substitutionary death of Jesus Christ on our behalf is evidence again of how **“the greatest of these is love.”** It is expressed like this in John 3:16 [RSV]: **“For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”**

This one verse is the gospel in miniature, for it encapsulates the nature of God as being love. **“For God”** indicates as how He is the greatest in His capacity to love. **“So loved,”** indicates how He loves to the greatest degree. **“The world”** is indicative of the greatest number of recipients of His love. **“That He gave”** is demonstrative of the greatest act of love imaginable. **“His only Son”** is the greatest gift of all. **“That whoever”** is the greatest and most widespread, all-encompassing invitation ever stated. **“Believes”** is indicative of the greatest simplicity of our response. We simply are asked to believe our God! **“In Him”** directs our belief in the right and true object of our worship, the greatest Person Who ever lived! **“Should not perish”** speaks of the greatest deliverance ever offered to mankind. **“But”** tells of the greatest difference this Gift produces in the life of the believer. **“Have”** is the greatest certainty we hold of our salvation in Christ. He will not forsake us! And, finally, **“eternal life”** is the expression of the greatest possession we have as members of God's own family when we come to

Him in obedient, saving faith. What a great God of love we have! How absolutely true is it that ***“the greatest of these is love”***!

No one loves you as much as Jesus loves you. The fact is that Jesus died on the cross in your place. He died as your substitute. Jesus is the perfect and sinless Son of God. He died to pay the penalty for your sin. Why? Because He loves you, and ***“the greatest of these is love.”***

How do I know this is true? The evidence is supplied by that empty tomb which proved the supernatural resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead was a reality. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the greatest fact in history. There is more hard evidence that Jesus arose from the grave than there is evidence that Mark Anthony or Cleopatra ever lived at all. John tells us in 1 John 4:9-11 [RSV], ***9. 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 through Him. 10. In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins. 11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*** Once again, we can see how ***“the greatest of these is love.”***

Love motivated God to save us. Love motivated Christ to die for us in our stead. It is love that motivates us to live for Jesus, and it is love which motivates us to love one another. Love can and should be a very powerful, motivating force in our lives. We have seen how it prompted God and Christ to express their love for us. The greatness of love can also be seen in how we should express it in our own lives.

The Apostle Paul had experienced the greatness of God's love. He had experienced it in his own conversion, for which he was thankful (1 Timothy 1:12-16). Paul was even able to experience the love of God while enduring persecution and the harshest of treatment, all of which gave him great hope.

Each and every one of us has experienced the greatness of God's love in our own conversion. Are we, like Paul, thankful? Each and every one of us has experienced the greatness of God's love in our daily living. Are we, like Paul, thankful?

Love is indeed the greatest of virtues. When properly understood and manifested in our lives, it serves as the basis for our faith and hope! ***“So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love”*** (1 Corinthians 13:13 [RSV]). Have you responded to the love of God by obeying the gospel of Christ? Are you walking in love, as Christ has loved us and given Himself for us?

May the Lord bless you and your family!