

Session 1

April 26, 2020

LOVE

John 15:9-14

The building blocks of life are not biological and physical, but social and spiritual. Life is lived and defined by relationships; relationships with God, with others, and with the world around us.

The lesson recorded in John 15 was taught by Jesus between the events of the upper room and His betrayal and arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. The tension of unfolding events is obvious. There is much to say, and little time left in which to say it. In this discourse, Jesus defines the relationship He has with His disciples and unashamedly declares His love for them. The love He describes has three characteristics.

Love abides (vv. 9-10). First, Jesus defines divine love. It is the sacrificial, unconditional *agape* love originating in God Himself (1 John 4:8) with which God the Father loved God the Son. But that kind of love—so appropriate for the perfect Son of God—was now being poured out on very imperfect humanity! While the verb tenses point back to a way God has loved, the overall idea is one of continuity. Hence, the disciples were commanded to remain in that love. Jesus used the word *remain* ten times in the first ten verses of this chapter. It is sometimes translated “to stay” or “abide.” In the first eight verses, the emphasis is on believers bearing fruit by remaining attached to the vine. Here, the emphasis is more inward and more encompassing. Second, Jesus indicated how divine love is demonstrated: through obedience. It’s important to understand that *agape* is unconditional; it isn’t earned *by* our obedience. Rather, it is demonstrated *in* our obedience. Again, Jesus is our role model (John 8:29; Phil. 2:8, et al.)

Love gives (vv. 11-13). There is great warmth and compassion expressed in these verses. Jesus is on His way to the garden, the first step out of the upper room on the way to the cross. In a few short hours His anguish would nearly overwhelm Him, yet here He speaks of the great joy He has and His desire to see the disciples imbued with it as well. What is the source of this great joy? In its closest context, it might relate to the love He experienced from the Father (v. 9). But more likely, it comes from the complete journey these men have made together, from the shores of Galilee, to the temple in Jerusalem, to the Garden of Gethsemane, and to the cross of Calvary and the empty tomb that awaited. The entire ministry of the Lord had been one of self-sacrifice founded on divine love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). Notice the continual downward flow of divine love: from God the Father to God the Son, and from God the Son to the children of God, the disciples (v. 9). Now, verse 12 extends that love from the disciples to one another (see John 13:35). Again, Jesus models that love, explaining that real love *gives*. And the greatest gift of love is one’s life on behalf of others (v. 13).

Love submits (v. 14). This simple verse accomplishes two things. First, it builds upon and applies the truth of the previous verse: “No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends” (v. 13) and “you are My friends” (v. 14). Nineteenth-century British theologian Charles Ellicott is correct in saying, “Stress is to be laid upon the pronoun, ‘you.’ ‘YOU are My friends . . .’ ‘YOU are those of whom I have just spoken, and for whom I am about to give the greatest proof of love.’” Hence, the condition of submission (“if you do what I command you”) is more incidental than required. Like His love mentioned above, His friendship

is not earned through obedience, but rather is demonstrated by it. Nevertheless, the second objective of verse 14 is to remind the disciples that the only proof of their love is indeed obedience to what Christ had taught them.