

THE GREATEST IS LOVE

- Today I want to share a few thoughts on the greatest is love
- In a world with much hate and strife where we are seeing more and more radical acts of terrorism, we both as a body of believers and individually can make a great difference in this world at this time in history through our agape love for others
- **Jesus Himself said,**
“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see you good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)
- **It is the agape unconditional love of Christ flowing out of our lives as believers that has the potential to change the lives of those around us**
- **I will begin by looking at three Scriptures in relation to love**
- **The Apostle Paul wrote,**
“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Corinthians 13:1-3) **All that we do in life must be motivated by love – Loveless Christianity will have no real affect on the lives of unbelievers**
- **Jesus Himself said,** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35) **It is our love for one another as believers that is our greatest witness to the world that we are Christ’s disciples**
- **Jesus made it clear what was most important for us when one of the scribes asked Him “which is the first commandment of all?” Jesus said,**
“‘And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment.” (Mark 12:30) “‘And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:31)
- **Our ability to love others unconditionally flows out of our own love for the Lord (The first commandment)**

- **The closer we get to the Lord the more we are able to love people the way Jesus did, even our enemies. Jesus Himself said, “But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father 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.” (Matthew 5:44-45)**
- **In the book of Romans the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” (Romans 5:5)**
- **Because God’s love has been poured out in our heart by the Holy Spirit we have the potential to freely love others**
- **After two years as a new believer in the nineties trying to work out what it was to live as a Christian the Lord spoke very clearly and simply to me, that it was simply “to love Him and to love others”**
- **After hearing many messages and teachings over the past 22 years I realise more than ever that right NOW what matters most is still that “I simply love the Lord and love others”**
- **AS CHRISTIANS WE SHOULD BE DIFFERENT TO THOSE IN THE WORLD – That we are in the world but not of it**
- **As Christians we are pilgrims in this world, Christ’s ambassadors, called to help reconcile people to Christ and that true joy and purpose for a believer only flows out of having intimate fellowship with the Lord and in pursuing His plan for our life**
- **The moment I came to Christ I had a complete change of heart and new desires**

- **WHEN WE HAVE A GENUINE LOVE FOR THE LORD AND FOR OTHERS IT AFFECTS THE WAY WE LIVE IN A NUMBER OF WAYS**

i) We have a greater sensitivity to the needs of OTHERS (life becomes about helping and encouraging others)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.” **(Philippians 2:3)**

ii) We begin to live with eternity in mind (focussing more on storing up treasures in heaven)

Jesus Himself said,

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” **(Matthew 6:19-21)**

iii) We have a real heart to help lead others to Christ (We have a great awareness of how precious every soul is to God),

The Apostle Paul wrote, “to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” **(1 Corinthians 9:22) and**

iv) We are prepared to make sacrifices and to reach out into the world of others to help point them to Christ

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.” **(2 Corinthians 8:9)**

Jesus Himself said,

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - 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 20:25-28)**

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us.” (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8)

The Apostle Paul not only preached the gospel to people, but also got involved in the lives of others as he demonstrated God’s love for them

- AS BELIEVERS WE HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO MAKE A GREAT DIFFERENCE IN THIS WORLD – TO BE A SHINING LIGHT IN THIS WORLD

- However as believers we are ALSO in a very real spiritual contest. The Apostle Peter wrote,

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” (1 Peter 5:8-9)

- The enemy will continually try and discourage us and distract us from living for the Lord and for OTHERS

- The enemy will try and steal our intimacy with the Lord and to get us consumed again with our own life and problem

- Everything in our life as a Christian flows out of our intimacy with the Lord

- Jesus Himself said,

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:4-5)

- SO WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT CAN BEGIN TO STEAL OUR AFFECTIONS FOR THE LORD AND TO STOP US REACHING OUT TO OTHERS WITH THE UNCONDITIONAL LOVE OF CHRIST

i) Being too busy with our own agenda's

(People must take precedence of Projects and Programs) —

Allowing the busyness of life to steal our time with the LORD

In the gospel of Luke we see an example of this:

“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.” And Jesus answered and said to her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:38-42)

ii) Allowing the things of this world and the cares of this world to crowd into our heart

Jesus Himself said in His Explanation of the Parable of the Sower,

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred.” (Mark 4:14-20)

iii) Allowing critical and judgemental attitudes to develop in our heart

Jesus Himself said,

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.” “And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:1-5)

iv) Our choice of friends and who we spend time with

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Do not be deceived: Evil company corrupts good habits.” (1 Corinthians 15:33)

v) Our fears and fear of being rejected by others

The Apostle John wrote,

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” (1 John 4:18)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

vi) NOT PROCESSING OFFENCES QUICKLY,

Jesus Himself said,

“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.” (Mark 11:25-26)

In the book of Hebrews

“Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord; looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled;” (Hebrews 12:14-15)

We must be continually vigilant to not allow any offences to enter into our heart, lest any root of bitterness spring up in us and defile us.

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Be angry, and do not sin”; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.” (Ephesians 4:26-27)

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.” (Proverbs 4:23)

We must be quick to forgive all people that hurt us and let us down

If we do not quickly process offences in our life we will invariably open ourselves up to allowing things to enter into our heart. Jesus also warned that in the last days many would be offended. Jesus said,

“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. (Matthew 24:10-11)

What is in our heart will affect our attitudes and what we speak, because out of the abundance of our heart the mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45)

We must simply CHOOSE to be quick to forgive others

vii) Not winning the battle for the mind

(We must QUICKLY take captive all wrong thoughts and bring them in line with the Word of God)

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.” **(2 Corinthians 10:4-5)**

The real battle ground is the mind

The Devil will always try and divide and conquer by putting wrong thoughts in people’s minds, especially when they are feeling tired or discouraged, to cause them to make wrong and rash choices in life and to stir up strife. The Devil is continually trying to bring division into families and churches and to break up friendships to destabilize the lives of all people, but particularly Christians.

We must simply continually choose to look for the best in others.

We must refuse to allow negative, critical, judgemental and wrong thoughts to stay in our mind. We must continually take all wrong thoughts captive and bring them into line with what God says in His Word and choose to love people as best we can. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.

Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” **(Romans 12:17-21)**

We must also learn to quickly take captive all ungodly and worldly thoughts that the Devil would try and continually put in our mind to pull our affections away from the Lord. We must be continually vigilant in leading a disciplined thought life

Jesus Himself said, “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved.”

(Matthew 24:3-13)

SO QUICKLY HOW CAN WE MAINTAIN OUR PASSION FOR THE LORD AND A FERVENT LOVE FOR OTHERS

- 1) **We need to focus our effort on getting to know Jesus more and more (That Jesus is our first love) – WE MUST PURPOSELY MAKE TIME TO SPEND WITH THE LORD (It's about Relationship with the Lord not religion and tradition)**

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height - to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:17-19)

“But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.” (Philippians 3:7-8)

“that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.” (Philippians 3:10)

King David wrote,

“O GOD, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for you; My flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You.” (Psalm 63:1-3)

“**Delight yourself also in the Lord**, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.” (Psalm 37:4)

- 2) **That we continually renew our mind with the Word of God (That we develop Kingdom attitudes and mindsets)**

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” (Romans 12:2)

As we live in a very ungodly world we need to continually renew our mind with the Word of God to maintain godly mindsets and heart attitudes

As we are constantly bombarded by ungodly influences in this world more than ever before we need to be continually feeding our minds with the word of God

What the Apostle Paul wrote is now more than ever true of the times that we are living in now. The Apostle Paul wrote,

“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

We need to also heed the counsel that the LORD gave to Joshua before he was about to lead the Children of Israel into the Promised Land

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.” (Joshua 1:8)

3) That we are quick to deal with offences and to FORGIVE those who hurt us. This helps us to have a healthy and loving heart

We must also allow the Lord to remove the hurts from the past from our heart, because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks – We must ensure that are hearts are always full of God’s love and that we do not allow any offences or past hurts to remain in our heart so as to poison our attitudes

In the book of Proverbs we read, “For as he thinks in his heart, so is he. “Eat and drink!” he says to you, but his heart is not with you.” (Proverbs 23:7)

4) We must have healthy friendships and be connected to other believers

In the book of Proverbs we read,

“Make no friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul.” **(Proverbs 22:24-25)**

“The righteous should choose his friends carefully, For the way of the wicked leads them astray.” **(Proverbs 12:26)**

WE NEED TO ENSURE THAT OUR SIGNIFICANT FRIENDS IN LIFE ARE GODLY AND LOVING PEOPLE. WE BECOME LIKE THE COMPANY THAT WE KEEP

HAVING FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHER BELIEVERS IS A KEY TO GROWING IN LOVE AND CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER AS A CHRISTIAN

In the book of Hebrews we read,

“Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” **(Hebrews 10:23-25)**

5) WE MUST SIMPLY CHOOSE TO LOVE OTHERS – The feelings will follow

The Apostle Peter wrote,

“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for “love will cover a multitude of sins.” Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.” **(1 Peter 4:7-9)**

I will finish with the words of the Apostle Paul,

“Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us...” **(Ephesians 4:31-32, 5:1-2)**

WE MUST SIMPLY JUST CHOOSE TO LOVE OTHERS

6) FINALLY THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CONTINUALLY FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Apostle Paul wrote,

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,” (Ephesians 5:18)

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

As Christians we can go through many challenges and disappointments in life

How important it is that we are continually FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Disciples were all baptised in the Holy Spirit in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost and their lives were transformed

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

Then Peter prayed for the lame man at the gate of the temple called beautiful and the man was miraculously healed (We see this in Chapter three of the book of Acts

They then experienced great persecution for their faith, so much so that they went to prayer to seek God for boldness and for the miracles to continue

We see this in chapter four of the book of Acts:

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ‘by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the Name of Your Holy Servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:29-30)

“And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:31)

AFTER PRAYING FOR BOLDNESS THEY WERE AGAIN FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT – How important it is that we are continually filled with the Holy Spirit to enable us to continually keep loving, those who would even try and persecute us