

Eternity Daily Bible Study No. 294

THE PASSION SERIES – THE GOSPEL OF JOHN CHAPTERS 12-21

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John 15:17 These things I command you, that you love one another.

All of the commandments of Jesus are summed up in this one command “love one another”. In today’s bible study I want to dig deep into what this command means and why it is both so essential and so challenging.

Love is the nature of God (1 John 4:8) so when we love we are showing the nature of God. If we are to be in the image and glory of God we will be loving. To the extent that we are not loving, we fall short of the image of God and of true Christ-likeness.

The goal of the Christian life is not evangelism and its not getting to heaven. They were the goals of the Pharisees! (Now evangelism is important, but not ultimate). Nowhere does Scripture indicate that we will be judged by how many converts we have made or churches we have planted - though that is good and worthy. Everywhere the Scriptures tell us that the goal is love and the commandment and standard is love.

It is only fair that we are judged according to the commands we are given and the one great command, that sums up all others is this: “love one another” (Romans 13:8) And the true test of how spiritual we are is not bible knowledge or tongues or prophecy or great faith - but agape love. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)

The fact that we turn up at a worship service once a week or read our bibles is insufficient, Christianity is not about how faithfully we fulfill certain rituals but is about how we fulfill the commands of Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus puts it this way:

Matthew 7:19-23 MKJV Every tree that does not bring forth good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (20) Therefore by their fruits you shall know them. (21) Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. (22) Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? (23) And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness!

Lawless, selfish preachers will end up condemned by Jesus and cast into the fire. Thus spiritual

performance - even at miraculous levels, is insufficient. Instead the Christian must live with the righteousness of Christ reflected in actions of agape love.

The New Testament demand for agape love is at the same time a demand for the Spirit-filled life.

Agape love depends on the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. To express God's nature - we need God inside us doing the work. Without the Holy Spirit love tends to be inconsistent, misguided, weak or sentimental. Without the Holy Spirit we search for some other command to substitute for the command to love - tithing, prayer, bible reading, witnessing, church attendance or theological correctness. We want a way to please God in our own strength. But none of these things are any good without love and love requires the power of God.

I am about to set off on a ministry trip to the Philippines. This will require great patience with airlines, Customs, immigration and so forth. I know I can only show agape love to these folk by the power of God - otherwise I will be rather irritable. I am not patient "by nature" but I can be patient "by grace".

In countless situations from marriage to raising children, to working with others we need to be able to love others in the power of the Holy Spirit - because our own strength and personal qualities are insufficient. The command to love tests every part of our Christian character to breaking point and beyond.

I am greatly concerned that we are substituting Christian culture for Christian righteousness so that if we go to see The Passion, listen to gospel music, watch Christian TV and have a Jesus Saves bumper sticker we are OK. Where did self-sacrificing love get lost in all that?

Agape love has become lost because the "one-another" bit of the command has become lost, because we no longer live in anything like true Christian community. We can hardly love the empty air! We cannot love "one-another" if to all practical intents and purposes there is no "one-another". And when we do live in community, such as at a residential bible college, we find it highly stressful.

We are matured through loving as well as through knowing - "speaking the truth in love we grow up in all things into Him". (Ephesians 4:15) Christians should BOTH know the Scriptures and be excellent in love. No-one is matured as a spectator in a theater. We need to interact with one another and be stretched by one another so we can grow in our ability to love.

Jesus keeps emphasizing agape love because it is the living center of the Christian life. If we get that right we get everything right. It is also the very hardest thing to get right. Love is an immense spiritual struggle that involves complete death to self and to all selfishness and materialism. Persons become paramount and precious. People go from being a means to an end, a volunteer in the ministry for instance, to being wonderfully precious sons and daughters of God that we are to die for and give this world's goods for. (1 John 3:16-18)

Why not stop and pray that the Lord Jesus will teach and instruct you to love others in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Blessings,

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