

What Is Love

by Phil Beach Jr.

God's love is demonstrated by laying one's life down for others, and we must do the same if we are to be like Him.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, John 13:34, Romans 5:8, 1 Corinthians 13:1, Galatians 5:13, Ephesians 5:2, Colossians 3:14, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:16, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Selfless Love", "Sacrificial Service"

Description

Phil Beach Jr. preaches on the profound meaning of love as demonstrated by Jesus Christ laying down His life for us. He emphasizes that true love is selfless and sacrificial, not merely defined by words but by actions. The sermon delves into the importance of laying down our lives for others, denying our own desires, and humbly serving those in need. It challenges the notion of love without deeds, highlighting the necessity of embodying God's love through practical acts of service and compassion.

Transcript

"This is how we know what LOVE is- Jesus Christ laid down His life for US!" 1 John 3:16

Many of us may ponder what love really is. Our culture defines love in many ways.

However, love is defined by Jesus laying His life down for US. This love cannot be defined or seen in any other way. To claim to love but fail to lay our lives down for those we love is to possess a false love. We show God's love by laying our lives down for others. To lay our life down demands that we deny our own natural likes and dislikes. If we have faith without love, we are empty. If we have great teaching skills but are without love, we are empty. If we give all we have to the poor and offer our body to be burned, but do not have love, we are empty. If we point out the faults and sins of others but fail to lay our lives down for them, then we are nothing. The love of God is not a love of word but of deed and action. We cannot say "I love you" and remain distant! A father's greatest gift to his children (both spiritual and natural) is not to simply

point out to them their faults and sins, but to lay his life down for them. Limitless love does not emotionally cut itself off those who fail, but dresses up as a servant and washes the feet of the failed persons, crying with them, weeping with them, all along loving and serving to show them, not tell them, how to be healed and restored by putting love and truth into action.

God saw our sins and failures but did not sit on his throne, harshly judging us from afar by showing us all our sins and faults from the distance of His holy throne. He left His throne in the person of His Son and became one of US, washed our feet, and freely loved us even though we do NOT deserve this love. He went as far as being punished for and ultimately crucified and murdered for OUR sins. He corrected our sin problem by getting dirty with our dirt, yet always remaining free from personal sin, and walking among us, and with His loving heart and hands, stroking our wounds and healing our scars of sin and selfishness. Our tendency is to be loveless in our attempt to help others by keeping at a distance from their hurts and pains, judging them as unworthy of God's love because of their failures. At the same time, we love to point out their faults to them and others. By doing this, we reveal that we think ourselves to be in better shape than they are. We suppose that our right standing before God is based on our self-perceived righteousness derived from how good we think we are compared to those we look down upon and view as so much worse than ourselves. This proves our eyes are blinded by the damnable sin of pride and we cannot clearly see either the Sinless Saviour or our true condition.

Only when we repudiate our pride and love for ourselves and turn from our sin in deep humility and repentance can we hope to know the true love of God. Only then can we be found, even as He is, laying our lives down for our brothers, sisters and family--instead of elevating ourselves, in pride of heart, above them. When this happens, we will, as our Lord, in meekness walk along their side, not above them or at a distance from them on our pedestals where we love to pontificate and judge. When we walk along side of them, we will serve them, love them, cry with them, and earn a place of entry into their hearts. There we become the fragrance of Christ for their help, healing and hope--knowing all the time that we are much more in need of mercy and help than they are--because our sins exceed theirs! May the Lord give us a true revelation of

His love and free us from our stinking pride and love for our own selves so that we are desperate for deliverance .

In this state of deep desperation over our own sins and pride (and not the sins and pride of others) we become eligible candidates for the full baptism of God's marvelous love. When this happens, we will be most effective in being His body and making Him known to the world. But as long as this lacks in our lives, we remain nothing more than empty Pharisees in spirit. We remain self-deceived, believing we are helping others by pointing out their faults and sins, when in truth, we are trying to make ourselves look good by exalting our own righteousness.

God says that those who exalt themselves shall be ashamed and brought down to the dust! May we seek to humble ourselves before we are humbled by God. It is better to fall on the rock and be broken than for the rock to fall on us and crush us! Many of us have never seen God's redeeming love in another person. Some of us may have grown up in homes where love was not understood in its deepest sense. This may be why we are so prone to live and act in such a loveless way. But our hope is not in our upbringing, but in our Father's love in heaven which He will freely give to us if we will beg Him to show us how deeply we are in need of it.

We must also be willing to turn from our pride, which deceives us into thinking we already have God's love working in our lives. As we gaze upon the Son of His love and study HIM, pondering Him alone as the source and true example of sacrificial love, it will slowly dawn on us how little we know of this love! Oh, God bring to us a revelation of your great love and do whatever is necessary to empty us from our own love and pride! Only then can we be filled with your amazing, limitless love to freely share with all people--a love that knows no boundaries and has no end!

This kind of love always embraces truth. Any truth divorced from God's love is nothing more than the spirit of a Pharisee. We must pray that God's love will begin to show its true nature in our lives, among our families and grow out from there into our church family and into the world we live in! It must begin in our families, toward our husbands, wives, and children! We must not pretend to love others when we cannot love our family with the love that lays its life down for the sake of others.

We love to have our own way, rule our home like a despot and seek to be served instead of serve! Why? We know nothing of God's love working deeply in our hearts! We fight, argue, quarrel, allow seeds of resentment and bitterness and an unforgiving spirit to smolder deep in our lives! Why? We know nothing of the limitless love of God as seen in Jesus working in our hearts. We love those who love us and honor those who honor us but despise those who despise us and dishonor those who dishonor us.

Why? We know nothing of the love of God that empowers Christ to love those (you and me) who hated him and to bless those who curse Him (that's us again). We gladly surround ourselves with those whom we like, who agree with us, who make much of us and speak highly of us, but stay clear of those who are different from us and who may try to correct or criticize us. Why? We know nothing of the love of Christ that pursues those who hurt Him and walks with those who misjudge him--seeking to serve and by example, lead to the living God!

Jesus rebuked Simon Peter because his love was for himself more than for the Lord. Before he was emptied from the love affair he had with himself, he sought to save his life instead of lose it. Peter along with a few of the others disciples wanted to call fire down from heaven to destroy those they thought were the enemies of the Lord. But they were unwilling to lay their lives down for those enemies, like their Lord did! Christ said that the Son of Man did not come into the world to destroy lives but to save them.

Lives are saved by the limitless love of God that was demonstrated when Jesus Christ laid His life down as a sin offering for all. God saves lives in the same way today by demonstrating this sacrificial love in those who are controlled by its amazing power! Most of us like to equate trying to save lives by showing people their sin or by pointing out their faults, supposing that this is our mission to them. This was the misguided ideas of the followers of Jesus. Yet all the time, we are lacking the love of God to lay our lives down for these very folks we are attempting to save!

To cry out against another's sins warning them of impending judgment without laying our lives down for them, in very practical ways, is to commit a dreadful sin and misrepresent the gospel of God. Steven prayed for God's grace to forgive those who were stoning him and this proved that he was preaching with a heart that housed the love of God for those for whom he was prepared to die! Are we prepared to die for those we wish to help or are we only prepared to preach at them and warn them of the consequences of their sins?

When asked the question, "Who is my neighbor?", Jesus told the story of a man who had been beaten and wounded and left almost dead by the road. Two religious people passed this dying man and had no love of God in their hearts--not even enough to lift a finger to help him. But then a Samaritan passed by, someone who was not perceived to be a good follower of God. The Samaritan cared for the dying man, at his own expense! The two religious people would have loved to point out the sins, wounds, faults and failures of this dying man, accusing him of sinning against God and in danger of hell, but they were a million miles away from God's love and heart for him.

However, they were quite sure that their assessment of this poor victim was God's assessment. Although, they most likely prayed for him during their religious gathering that evening with those like just like they were. However, God's heart was to help this man and to heal him, and the way to do this was by His redeeming love working in the Samaritan. Compelled by this love, the Samaritan laid his life down for the dying man and cared for his wounds and bleeding body, at his own expense.

Those who seek to help others but do not lay their lives down to heal the wounds and comfort the bleeding, broken body are not properly representing God's way for His body, the church. The church is to be in this world as HE is. We must be emptied from the cold, uncaring, self-righteous ideas we have about how to help others and start looking to Jesus as the One who alone shows us the way! In this story, only the Samaritan showed us the true nature of God's sacrificial love we are called to share with others.

Sadly, the other two men only revealed their loveless hearts and empty, meaningless religion, which always go together quite well! Yes, at times we are called to lovingly rebuke, correct, teach and, at times, sternly warn others of their sins. Jesus demonstrates this when He wrote to the seven churches in Asia Minor. Paul too had some strong words to say to the believers at Corinth. But look how Paul did this! He was willing and did, in fact, lay his life down for the believers in Corinth--so much that he lost everything for their sake.

He was a true spiritual father, living among them, praying and crying with them, and praying for them night and day. He truly loved them proving it by laying his entire life down for their good and spiritual benefit! He boldly proclaimed to these dear saints that he would gladly be utterly spent for their souls. Only those who love deeply enough like this, to lay their lives down for the sake of others, have the right from God to come along side of them and correct them, rebuke them and point out their sins and faults.

Paul repeatedly demonstrated that his mission was not to pontificate at the church, constantly attempting to show them how much sin was in their lives and to point out all their faults and failures. Rather, he loved them so much he lost everything in his service for them, holding them in his hearts as a father does his own children and never abusing them or taking advantage of them. Paul never calculated the cost of love and held back because he was unwilling to pay the high price love demands.

This is the example our Lord has set that Paul was so vividly exemplifying. One man once said that looking by the eyes of God's love is risky. How true! If we see through eyes of love then we must be moved by compassion for those we see and be compelled to help them. However, when we view others without love, we want to point out their sins and maybe even pray for them, but are not moved with compassion for them. Paul was able to clearly see the needs of others and move with compassion to lay his life down.

Hearts void of God's love like to tell others what they should do to correct their wounds and bleeding hearts brought about by sin and wrong choices. But they will not lift a finger to help bear their pain. They will not show them the way to be helped and healed by example-by laying their lives down for them. It is noteworthy that against this sin Jesus most violently brought condemnation when he saw it in the Scribes, Pharisees and Lawyers of His day. Whenever we help an infant to dress or come to their rescue after they fall and skin their knee, we have to lower ourselves and come down to their level.

We bend down so we are eye to eye. A loveless heart, such as many of us struggle with, loves to seek to help others without bending down to their level. We like to remain distant, above them, feeling better than they are, not realizing that we are called to bend down to their level of hurt and need. This is because deep in our hearts we see ourselves as better than they are, and our actions prove it! However, when we see Jesus, we see the One who bowed lower than any person and came right down to our need, to our level.

In His love and mercy, He healed us and treated our wounds and sins with His nail-scarred hands by laying His life down for us. We must do the same if we are to be like Him. The truth is, we are all a mess and in deep need of the love of God to come down to where we are and to help us! No one is better off than anyone else. None of us can claim to be a "step above" another. If not for the grace of God we all would be lost and either in hell or fast on our way there! We must clearly see this truth and deeply repent from the idea that we are just a bit better than our neighbor (...or more than just a bit better, as some of us think!).

Only then can we know the love of God that will empower us to lay our lives down for others. When the love of God is abundantly working in our lives we will love, not in word but in deed. It is quite possible to see the needs of others with a loveless but religious heart. In this state we love to pray for such needy people, wish them the best, ask God to meet their every need, but fail to lift a finger to help them, even though we have the resources. God does not accept such prayers.

If we pray for someone with a need and have the ability to help them, even in a small way--but refuse to help and instead, simply pray--we are empty sounding cymbals in the ears of God. Our prayers do not reach God's heart when they are prayed from loveless hearts. Could it be that this is the reason why so often our prayers seem to be unanswered and many suffer much lack? Perhaps some suffer because we are unwilling to help them. Hearts filled with the limitless love of Christ's magnanimous heart will never pray without laying their lives down to be as much as possible the answer to their prayers.

If we see need in our families lives, we will not only pray for them but offer ourselves to help. If we see lack in our brother's family, we will not only pray for our brother, but offer what we have to help make up his lack. If we see our neighbor never mows his grass, we can pray for him or we can mow his grass for him! If our sister has a hard time keeping a clean kitchen, we can pray for her or even criticize her. But if the love of God is deeply in our hearts, we will offer to clean her kitchen for her!

If our friend has no shoes and we have many pairs of shoes, what is the point in praying for God to meet their need? God's love in our hearts would move us to give them a pair of shoes. God will not hold us accountable for what we cannot do but for what we could have done but refused because of loveless hearts. If we say, because I cannot do much to help my brother therefore I will do nothing, we are deceiving our own hearts, and one day will be held accountable before God. When we only pray but do not lay our lives and belongings at the feet of Jesus to be used to help others, then our prayers are empty and meaningless to God and will never go further than the roof of the house we are praying in!

If we see our brother in need and know he is suffering lack and pray, "Oh Lord, help my brother, meet all his needs and provide for him all he is lacking", but fail to offer our own goods and lives to help him, how does the love of God live in our hearts? Simply put, it does not! This not only applies to material need, but emotional, mental and spiritual need as well. Beloved, let us not love in word only, but in deed. Let us not for a moment forget that love is costly. We will suffer many wounds in our heart when we share in God's love.

Love risks all. Love is prepared to give at the risk of being taken advantage of, serve without being recognized, embrace without being reciprocated, and endure when all else fails! Christ's love cost him a crown of thorns, beatings from angry men, the shame of being disrobed and mocked, being nailed by hands and feet to an old rugged cross and ultimately His sacred life. For all eternity He will bear the marks and scars on His heavenly body that love brought to Him. Remember it was not nails that held Him to the cross, but His great love for His Father and us!

We cannot expect less should we live by the same love. Are we prepared to never pray another prayer that we are not willing to be the answer to? Remember when God saw the mess we got ourselves into through sin and disobedience, He moved with compassion to help us. He came right into our world, into our lives and washed us clean through redeeming love that lays its life down. Each one of us must embrace the selfless love of God. If we pray until we can clearly see its full meaning and the vast, radical way we would have to change, it would forever alter the course of our lives and Christian testimony.

We could no longer gather as we do, pray as we do, read our Bibles as we do or point out the failures and faults of others as we do. Instead we will be overcome and compelled by the selfless love of God and lose everything by laying our lives down for all men. We will never seek to pontificate to another human being without being fully prepared to lay our lives down in some way, to help them in their struggles--whatever they may be! This would bring about a true testimony of Christ's love in our lives and prove to all men that

we are truly Christ's followers.

Then, God could be pleased to see His Son's life and love functionally operating in His church. By this alone can we hope to become the mature expression of Christ's fullness and be ready to meet Him in the air. To bypass this for a mere perfect, polished doctrinal profession with optimal orthodoxy together with pious preaching against sin is to miss the mark and become an outward shell of godliness. On the inside, however, we are filled with inward love for self and are void of passion for God or compassion for others.

Such a testimony is rejected by God. May God be gracious to us and give us His heart in these matters. In closing, there is a most critical matter that must be dealt with, especially after seeing the very high standard of love to which we are called. What shall we do with all our failures, and the guilt associated with them? What shall we do knowing that time after time we have tried our "best" to love as we know we should, yet have been met with failure after failure? At times we may have wanted to just give up in defeat, thinking it simply would never work the way we know it should.

Is there really a way for our family to live in the life and power of the Son of God expressed in His infinite love? Can we establish God's order and make His truth a living reality in our homes and in our hearts? The answer to these heart-searching questions is an unequivocal NO, we cannot! As long as we are looking to some kind of inner resources we have within ourselves, we will forever be met with utter failure! To demonstrate the selfless love of God we must learn to live by the power of Christ alone!

Here are some wise words from a man, over a century ago, who learned the lesson of living by the power of Christ, as the secret to express the amazing love of God, not in word only but in deed: "And if, dear brethren, many of us have perhaps never fully realized this holy truth, let us understand that every shortcoming and every failure to live like Christ springs from this one mistake--we have tried to become like Him without having first come to bankruptcy in ourselves and without losing confidence in our own moral goodness, which cannot bring forth Christ.

Until we come to that point, Christ can never, through His Spirit, impart to us miserable, proud, detestable ones His character of love and forbearance. The fact is we have failed before God-- failed in our own eyes and in the eyes of all around us. How truly have all our surroundings failed to reproduce in us the character--the Divine nature of our Lord Jesus Christ! God does not share His glory with us; therefore He is obliged to bring us from failure to failure, not however to end in discouragement, but that we may come to condemn and abhor ourselves.

Then when we have found there is no more anything to hope for in ourselves, we learn to come in a new way-- perhaps after a long career of Christian profession--as undone ones at His feet; ready now, on the ground of our dreadful experience, to be introduced into the divine simplicity of a life like Christ by the Holy Spirit, who never ceases to work even when we are halting at the first steps of Christ's redemption."

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