

Victory in Love

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PALM SPRINGS DRIVE
CHURCH OF CHRIST

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Victory in Love

Sunday morning class

Love for God

Sunday morning worship

Love for Others

Sunday evening worship

Love for Brethren

Monday

Love for Enemies

Tuesday

Love for the Lost

Wednesday

Loving Our Mates

Thursday

Loving the Truth

Friday

Love NOT the World

Victory in Love Love for God

Intro: PSD theme: More Than Conquerors (Rom 8:37). There are many elements to this victory, but a fundamental one is here stated: “*through Him who loved us.*”

1. But conquerors over what? In this context, condemnation for sin – 8:33-34. God justifies us and Christ intercedes. Secondly, no temporal circumstance can drive Christ from us – 8:35.
2. In short, no force earthly or heavenly can separate us from God’s love – Rom 8:38-39.
3. So, as the main thesis of this lesson is our love for God, such ability and motivation to love Him rests on His prior love for us: “*We love Him because He first loved us*” (1 Jn 4:19).

1. God Is Love

A. So John declares – 1 Jn 4:7-8. God is not *only* love, but true love springs from His nature. He embodies and defines love. Thus, we must learn love from Him.

1. But the love explained by and taught in the NT (primarily in the verbs *agapao* and *phileo*) is a fruit of the Spirit. It is an attitude and action that is not natural to us.
2. True love is deeply misunderstood by the world. It is often selfish, emotional, romantic. “Love” labels every affinity from things (house/pie/sports) to nature (mountains/sunsets/animals) to arts (poetry/paintings) to people (children/mates/friends/“humanity” – philanthropist = “lover of people”). How do we distinguish the true meaning of love?

B. Vine: “Love can be known only from the actions it prompts. God’s love is seen in the gift of His Son, 1 Jn 4:9-10. But obviously this is not the love ... drawn out by any excellency in its objects ... It was an exercise of the divine will in deliberate choice, made without assignable cause save that which lies in the nature of God Himself ...” (381-382).

1. Thus Rom 5:6-10 – “*Without strength ... ungodly, still sinners ... enemies.*”
2. God’s wrath is against all ungodliness (Rom 1:18). But God’s love triumphed over judicial condemnation. We now have peace and hope which “*does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*” (cf. Rom 5:1-5).

2. The Greatest Command of All

A. A loaded question seeking incrimination, not information – Mt 22:34-38.

1. Note Jesus answers from *the law* – Dt 6:5; 10:12. Love for God is not a NT concept; it is what God wants from man in every age, under every covenant.

2. Only man is a free-will creature with the capacity to rationally examine the character of God and *choose* to love, honor and respect Him.

3. Note also this love is not mere duty or drudgery. It is the devotion of our entire being. It is not hypocritical, convenient, occasional – it is *all* our heart/soul/mind.

B. But why should we love a God we cannot see, whose nature is unfathomable, who holds us accountable to His laws, who insists we surrender our own will to His?

1. What God *has done for us* is the key: He gave the best He had in order to save us – 1 Jn 4:9-10. “*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us ... made us alive together with Christ ...*” (Eph 2:4-5, 7).

2. **Illus:** Nicholas Winton, established a refugee system in Prague for Jewish children to escape from the Nazis. Saved 669 children, enabling safe passage to Great Britain.

C. We walk – and love – by faith, not by sight – 2 Cor 5:7.

3. What Does It Mean to Love God?

A. NOT: A superficial, self-serving reaction.

1. Transforming God into an idol, thereby worshiping our own lusts. The Greek god Eros deified the principle of fertility; sexual activity thus perverted into “worship.”

2. An emotion-based, warm regard for God. Some feel emotions more acutely than others.

3. Verbal regard without true submission: “*Not everyone who says ... Lord, Lord ...*”.

B. IS: A decision of the will to honor, submit, serve God because we respect who He truly is.

1. To love God’s manifestation of Himself – Jesus: Jn 8:42.

2. To obey Christ’s commands – Jn 14:21; cf. 1 Jn 2:5; 5:3.

3. To be transformed into the very character of Christ – Gal 2:20.

C. Promises:

1. To love God is to be *known by* God – 1 Cor 8:3. **This is victory!**

2. To love God is to receive a crown of life – Jas 1:12. **This is victory!**

3. To love God is to be blessed no matter what happens – Rom 8:28. **This is victory!**

Conclusion: We are at war; our eternal welfare is at stake. Victory begins with *loving God*.

Victory in Love Love for Others

Intro: Evidence abounds of man's hatred for man; it hardly needs documentation. We read of murder, assault, robbery, rape, terrorism and the anger, greed, drunkenness, lust and militant fundamentalism that drive it. Today's headlines are continuation of ancient pattern of inhumanity.

1. And the Second Like It – Mt 22:39-40

A. Jesus was asked about the “greatest” commandment, but He couldn't narrow it to only one. Loving God is certainly foundational but inseparable from loving our fellow man.

1. Note again that He quotes *the Law* – Lv 19:18 – to establish this. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had said, “*You have heard ... ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy’*” (Mt 5:43), but even amid a time when men were used as God's instruments of divine punishment He did not counsel hatred.
2. Most theologians note that the love described in the NT was truly a revolutionary concept. Vine: “*Agapao* and the corresponding noun *agape* present ‘the characteristic word of Christianity, and since the Spirit ... has used it to express ideas previously unknown, inquiry into its use, whether in Greek literature or in the Septuagint, throws but little light upon its distinctive meaning in the NT’” (381).
3. “*On these two commandments hang all the Law and the prophets.*” The overarching purpose of God's law is to foster our love for Him and by extension develop a love for our fellow man that He, Himself, possesses.

B. Paul echoes this in Rom 13:8-10: “*for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.*”

1. Some take this out of context and say that love is all that is necessary. But Paul earlier established comprehensive obedience – Rom 6:16-18. He also elaborated on being spiritually minded (8:5-7, 14).
2. Paul merely affirms that loving properly captures the ultimate aim of the law relative to human relations: “*Love does no harm to a neighbor.*”
3. Jesus gave a proactive version of this in the “golden rule”: “*Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*” (Mt 7:12).

2. Agape Love

A. Most who have studied the Bible are aware of the two basic Greek words translated by our word “love”: in verb forms *agapao* and *phileo*. We'll not go into elaborate definitions, but some observations may be helpful.

1. Vine: “Phileo is to be distinguished from agapao in this, that phileo more nearly represents ‘tender affection.’ ... Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Rom 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to ‘all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith,’ Gal 6:10” (382).
2. Vine: “In respect of agapao as used of God, it expresses the deep and constant ‘love’ and interest of a perfect Being towards entirely unworthy objects, producing and fostering a reverential ‘love’ in them towards the Giver, and a practical ‘love’ towards those who are partakers of the same, and a desire to help others to seek the Giver” (382).

B. What does this practically mean?

1. Our love for God is inseparable from our love for those whom He created in His image (Jas 3:9-10). Hatred often based on differences that have no validity to God: ethnicity; skin color; wealth/poverty; political views. We are all equals in tarnishing that image.
2. This love is a *decision*, an act of the will, not an outgrowth of feelings. It doesn’t come *naturally* to all (introvert; intellectual; etc.). It takes root by deliberate choice – or not.
3. It is shown not in word only but in action – 1 Jn 3:16-18.

C. The biggest threat to our soul may not be doctrinal corruption/materialism/unbridled lust but failure to properly love our fellow man.

3. Loving the “Unlovable”

A. Love as a *principle* is easier than love as a *practice*. State the obvious: people are not very “lovable”: selfish, rude, unkind, hurtful, ignorant. This can cause withdrawal/indifference.

1. The more we mature spiritually, the more we understand the filth of sin and the value of a pure life. This can create a sense of moral superiority that leads us to despise others.
2. Remember, they are “lost”; do not have our spiritual insight, moral foundation. Paul’s description of Gentile mind – Eph 4:17-19. But all cut from same cloth – Eph 2:1-3.

B. What is the value of *one lost soul*? Paul sacrificed personal comforts/concerns to *save some* – 1 Cor 9:19-23. To truly love our neighbor will make us stand out from the world.

C. To do right – to decide to love the unlovable – affirms our faith. True faith does not skirt the unpleasant or difficult; it rolls up its sleeves and seeks to accomplish the will of God.

Conclusion: To truly love others is **victory over self**. It eradicates pride, self-centeredness which make ourselves into our own worst enemy.

Victory in Love Love for Brethren

Intro: As we begin to narrow our focus of the objects of our love, we turn to the people with whom we share the deepest of all relationships – fellow saints. We have a general relationship with all humanity, but a special relationship with those who deeply value the same things we do: God, His word, developing in godly character, heavenly hope.

1. Some Thoughts on *Phileo* Love

A. We have all experienced brotherly love on a variety of levels:

1. An immediate affinity for strangers whom you may worship with or meet unexpectedly.

Illus: Judean Christians praised God for Paul – Gal 1:22-24; Paul met by Roman brethren on way to trial – Ac 28:14b-15.

2. Deeper relationships: Ephesian elders – Ac 20:36-38; Philippians – Ph 1:3-8.

3. Such deep affection can surpass physical family ties.

B. These feelings describe the *phileo-* words; i.e., *philadelphia*.

1. 1 Pet 3:8-9 – Related traits: compassion; tenderhearted; humility (courteous – NKJ).

The term for compassion – “bowels” – is of interesting origin. Ancients associated deep feelings with the intestines/stomach. Lest we think that odd, what do we say?

a. “I feel like I’ve been kicked in the stomach”; “I don’t know if I have the guts ...”; “I don’t think I can stomach it.” We feel great stress, excitement, passion in abdomen.

b. We should work to develop heart-felt connection/concern for brethren. The opposite: indifference; apathy; detachment.

2. Rom 12:10 – “Kindly affectionate” = *philostorgos*. This is a natural affection of family. Also *philadelphia*. The idea is to see each other as spiritual family.

3. 1 Th 4:9 – Here we have a fusion of terms: *philadelphia* and *agapao*. It is not enough to rely merely on brotherly feelings or family affinity. Love among Christians must take on the higher quality of reasoned choice and decision of the will, i.e., “agape” love.

C. Why? Because any local church will be comprised of people with various ethnicities, cultural traits, family history, intellectual development, maturity of faith, opinions, preferences, etc. There will inevitably be clashes and friction. Natural affection may be lacking for some brethren; therefore, the higher form of love must govern our relations.

2. Agape-Love Defined: 1 Cor 13:1-8

A. Context: Paul rebukes immaturity (3:1-4), arrogance (4:6, 18; 5:2); selfishness (6:6-8).

1. “*Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies*” – 8:1.
2. “*Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being*” – 10:23-24.

B. These anticipate his poetic and inspiring description of *agape*-love in 13:1-8:

1. Suffers long (*makrothumia*) – Long-tempered, controlled emotions so that difficult circumstances can be endured.
2. Kind (*chresteuomai*) – The word “kind” hardly needs defining, but the Christian should be gentle and easy in his dealings with others; they should feel safe.
3. Does not envy (*zeloo*) – Here is a jealousy over the abilities or position of others which becomes resentful. The Corinthians with the lesser gifts had no right to become envious.
4. Does not parade itself (*perpereuomai*) – Bragging on oneself is unloving. Sharing good fortune is not the same as boasting at the expense of others.
5. Not puffed up (*phusioo*) – This is the attitude behind the parading: arrogance/conceit.
6. Does not behave rudely (*aschemoneo*) – Acting with decorum, the ability to consider the feelings of others. To trample on the thoughts and feelings of others is not loving.
7. Does not seek its own (*ta heautes*) – Selfishness again defines the Corinthians. This brother has tunnel vision and cannot see beyond his own desires or judgment.
8. Not provoked (*paroxuno*) – The proverbial “chip on the shoulder.” Easily irritated; overly sensitive; explodes over the smallest matters.
9. Thinks no evil (*logizomai*) – Most translations emphasize the practice of keeping a ledger on injuries. This is the first step toward bitterness and resentment. Love “cuts slack.”
10. Does not rejoice in iniquity (*chairei epi te adikia*) – There should be no glee or pleasure when wrong is done. We are sometimes happy when someone “gets what was coming to them.” While divine justice is legitimate, a sinful solution to a problem is never joyful.
11. Rejoices in the truth (*sugchairei de te aletheia*) – Interesting contrast between sin and truth. Sin deceives, leading to suffering. Righteousness rests on truth, leading to joy. Truth may hurt sometimes, but if sin makes us feel better we are being deluded.
12. Bears all things (*stegei*) – Two possibilities: love is a strong foundation that can bear any load, or love conceals the faults of others and abides their vulnerability.

13. Believes all things (*pisteuei*) – This is not a naïve view of the world that ignores reality but a desire to believe in and hope for the best in others.
14. Hopes all things (*elpizei*) – Love does not resign itself to the worst in people; it does not lead to pessimistic despair and the extinguishing of hope for better things.
15. Endures all things (*hupomono*) – The Christian is not exempt from disappointments, failures, injuries, abuse or other traumas. What quality **brings victory**? Stubbornness? Raw tenacity? Self-confidence? Vengeance? Bitterness? It is **love** that endures.

C. We probably each sense our failures in living according to such noble principles.

1. These are high standards, but God is calling us to *transformation*. He can create a new way of thinking, a new order of priorities that bring balance and harmony.
2. We must trust Him and commit to such a change.

3. Three Applications of Love Among Brethren

- A. *Active* service – 1 Jn 3:16-18. True love is known by *actions*. We live in a “don’t get involved” society. But love serves when expensive/inconvenient/unappreciated.
- B. *Courageous* correction. “Courageous” because parents often fail it; churches often neglect it; friends rarely venture it. God/parents care enough to correct – Heb 12:5-11. We must correct each other to help overcome sin (cf. 1 Cor 5:1-2, 5, 11-13; Gal 6:1-2)
- C. *Genuine* forgiveness – Col 3:12-15. When we do get crossways with each other, we must be quick to forgive and restore our feelings of fraternity and closeness.

Conclusion:

1. Analogy: Car assembly. Individual components look flimsy, but when assembled there is structural integrity. In the same way, each Christian is weak as a separate component, but when joined with others in love we have strong constitution.
2. Brotherly love brings victory to all because none of us will get to heaven alone. We need each other – supporting correcting, serving – in humility of spirit. Competitiveness, pride, anger, agenda-pushing, backbiting will destroy the structural integrity of a local church.

Victory in Love Love for Enemies

Intro: Nowhere is the quality of love more tested than our attitude toward our enemies.

1. We *Will* Have Enemies

- A. An “enemy” is not someone who inadvertently harms us or disagrees on some issue. Our enemy is someone who deliberately hurts/mistreats, perhaps persecuting us for faith.
1. Paul: “*If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men*” (Rom 12:18). Yet, has anyone had more enemies than Paul?
 2. Death threats; false accusations; attacks of Judaizers; some preached “*supposing to add affliction to my chains*” (Ph 1:16); stoned in Lystra; beaten/jailed in Philippi.
 3. Called insane by Festus (Ac 26:24); his speech called “contemptible” (2 Cor 10:10); maligned as a hypocrite who wrote strong letters but wilted in person (ibid).
- B. We could make a similar list of attacks against Jesus. But this highlights a key concept: “*For everyone practicing evil hates the light ...*” (Jn 3:19-21). We cannot avoid enemies. We accept values that the world rejects. Persecution assured: Jn 15:18-20; Ac 14:22.
- C. When I started preaching the subject of persecution was theoretical. Not now. It is happening globally; our own society is increasingly hostile to free exercise of faith.
1. Sometimes opposition is *generic*. People take issue not because of their personal knowledge of us but because of a viewpoint or value we hold.
 2. But sometimes enemies are *personal*. They may feel threatened, resentful of success or happiness. They may slander us, gossip about us, actively seek to destroy reputation.

2. Jesus’ Standard for Dealing with Enemies

- A. Mt 5:43-48 – “*You have heard ... but I say*” – Contrasts misguided Jewish traditions.
1. Love your enemies – Not warm feelings but *agape*-love that blesses, does good, prays for. To hate in return is to *become* the enemy, continue cycle of violence.
 2. Paul concurs – Rom 12:20-21. Quotes Pr 25: “*If you enemy hungers, feed him ... for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*” Hatred *justifies* our enemy. “*Do not be overcome by evil ...*” (12:21).

B. What makes this difficult to do? To be cursed, hated, used and injured (or to see loved ones so treated) provokes a host of evil impulses.

1. To act impulsively in retaliation is what the world does – Mt 5:46-47.
2. But we aspire to something higher: “*sons of your Father in heaven*” (5:45); “*you shall be perfect*” (5:48). Jesus practiced what preached: “*Father, forgive them*” (Lk 23:34).
3. **Illus:** Golf tournament at Congressional; pro hits wayward tee shot and is heckled.
Response: “If this was easy, anybody could do it.”

3. Further Responses to Our Enemies

A. What we *must not* do:

1. Seek vengeance – Rom 12:19. David refused to kill Saul; Joseph: “*Am I in the place of God?*” (Gn 50:19). “*We do not war according to the flesh*” (2 Cor 10:4). We must not slander, injure or otherwise do harm. Look for higher purposes; pray for God to resolve.
2. Soften the gospel – Jeremiah to Zedekiah: “*You shall be delivered ...*” (Jer 37:17). John to Herod: “*It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife*” (Mk 6:18). Paul spoke to Felix of “*righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come*” (Ac 24:25).
3. Deny Christ – Mt 10:33. Many have confessed Christ *knowing* they would be killed.

B. What we *may* do:

1. Remove ourselves from the situation – Jesus (Mt 12:15); Paul (Ac 9:25).
2. Appeal to civil government for protection, justice – Paul (Ac 22:25; 23:17ff).
3. Let ourselves be defrauded – 1 Cor 6:6-7.

C. What we *must* do:

1. See our persecutor as a lost soul, someone whose values are warped.
2. Silence, shame our enemies by honorable conduct – 1 Pet 2:12; 2:15.
3. Be prepared to give a reasoned answer for our faith – 1 Pet 3:15-17.

Conclusion: Through the process of injustice, torture and crucifixion, Jesus handled Himself in such a way so as to cause a grizzled warrior to exclaim: “*Certainly this was a righteous Man!*” (Lk 23:47). Once again, **love gives us victory** over sin that may arise because of mis-treatment. We must not let Satan pull us down to his level.

Victory in Love Love for the Lost

Intro: In evangelism we often search for the “magic bullet,” the method that will make converting the lost easy. I don’t have that bullet. Evangelism is essentially love for lost souls.

1. A Heart for the Lost

A. What does it mean to be “lost”? Maybe we have forgotten ...

1. “Dead in trespasses and sins; children of wrath” (Eph 2:1-3); “no hope and without God” (Eph 2:11-13); “foolish, disobedient ...” (Tit 3:3). Minds blinded by the “god of this age” (2 Cor 4:3-4). Taken captive by the devil (2 Tim 2:24-26).
2. Tom’s story: Alcoholism, drug use, internet pornography, physically abusive to wife, jobless. Briefly studied, but he quit. Ignorant of Bible. “Going back to Catholic roots.”
3. Sometimes the lost, too, want a quick fix for their emotional suffering. Yet they remain unwilling to heavily invest in their quest for God.

B. But the question is: How do *you* respond to this? Dismissive? “They made their bed; they can lie in it.” But this is not God’s attitude who has done so much to save them. Jesus:

1. Compassion for sheep with no shepherd – Mt 9:36-37 (laborers are few).
2. Associated with tax collectors/sinners because they were “sick” – Mt 9:12. He loved the rich, young ruler who was steeped in materialism – Mk 10:21.
3. Jesus spent His life enduring controversy, slander, inconvenience, weariness, murder plots, hypocritical questions “*to seek and save that which is lost*” (Lk 19:10).

C. Paul likewise shows us what it means to love the lost:

1. Sorrow and self-sacrifice for Jews – Rom 9:1-3. How easy for Paul to have become calloused toward them after so many episodes of violent opposition across the Empire.
2. Nurturing, parental love for the Thessalonians – 1 Th 2:1-12.

2. What It Takes to Save the Lost

A. Tenacity, and a thick skin – Most of the lost don’t know they are lost (numb).

1. We have more clarity than they do. Festus: “*Much learning is driving you mad!*” (Ac 26:24). “*I am not mad ... but speak the words of truth and reason.*”

2. We must not be intimidated by rejection. **Illus:** Hollywood storyline: Hero sees danger no one else sees (Sheriff Brody in *Jaws*). But he doggedly keeps on until he convinces all and saves the day. We *admire*, but do we *emulate*?

B. Patience – Many unbelievers are skeptical of attempts to “save” them. I don’t blame them!

1. Religious charlatans create the impression that churches are greedy. Further, academia portrays believers as unscientific, naïve simpletons.

2. Must remember that there were false messiahs and false apostles in the first century. God’s people always have to fight against frauds and hypocrites. The only remedy: Earn trust through genuine concern and consistent behavior.

C. Sacrifice – 1 Cor 9:19-23. Context: Chs 8-10 develop concern for welfare of others.

1. Accommodates ethnicity, culture; doesn’t impose his own scruples – 9:20-21.

2. Became “all things to all men, that I might by all means *save some*” – 9:23.

D. For Paul it took the endurance of beatings, shipwreck, exposure, grueling travel, etc. to save a mere fraction of all he encountered in his life – 2 Cor 11:22-29.

3. If I Love the Lost I Will ...

A. Try to avoid assumptions about them (“They probably aren’t interested.”).

B. Reach past fears/inhibitions to speak out. Always a risk to talk on spiritual level to lost.

C. Not be put off by moral filth. Yes, it is uncomfortable, but we must see past it to the soul.

D. Study the psyche of society. Where coming from? Objections? Deal with right issues.

E. Live consistently and thoughtfully so as to remove barriers (1 Cor 10:32-33).

F. Not leave it to the preacher. We all have associations that *no one else can reach but us*.

G. “*Praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word ...*” (Col 4:3-4).

Conclusion: “*Likewise ... there is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents*” – Lk 15:10. Question to Sewell Hall: “How do we reach a city as big as London?” Answer: “One soul at a time.” **One soul** is worth any effort we can make to save them. What effect might that **one soul** have on others in their lifetime?

Victory in Love Loving Our Mates

Intro: Our culture is one of broken marriages, blended families, co-parenting. We've had to create a new vocabulary to describe marital failure and the destruction of families. And what plagues society eventually makes its way into the church.

1. A Lifetime of Love: Is It Possible?

A. A misunderstanding of love, coupled with evolutionary theory, advances aberrant views:

1. Can't control feelings; "the heart wants what it wants." "Just fell out of love."
2. "Evolution has genetically programmed man for serial sexual relationships."
3. "Same spouse for decades is boring; stifles development. Variety of partners enhances life experience." *Conscious Uncoupling* by Drs. Habib Sadeghi and Sherry Sami:
 - a. During the upper Paleolithic period of human history (roughly 50,000BC to 10,000BC) the average human life expectancy at birth was 33. By 1900, U.S. life expectancy was only 46 for men, and 48 for women. Today, it's 76 and 81 respectively. During the 52,000 years between our Paleolithic ancestors and the dawn of the 20th Century, life expectancy rose just 15 years. In the last 114 years, it's increased by 43 years for men, and 48 years for women.
 - b. What does this have to do with divorce rates? For the vast majority of history, humans lived relatively short lives—and accordingly, they weren't in relationships with the same person for 25 to 50 years. Modern society adheres to the concept that marriage should be lifelong; but when we're living three lifetimes compared to early humans, perhaps we need to redefine the construct.
 - c. To put in plainly, as divorce rates indicate, human beings haven't been able to fully adapt to our skyrocketing life expectancy. Our biology and psychology aren't set up to be with one person for four, five, or six decades ... living happily ever after for the length of a 21st century lifetime should not be the yardstick by which we define a successful intimate relationship: This is an important consideration as we reform the concept of divorce.

B. This is demeaning. When man is defined as natural outcome of mindless purposeless evolution, devoid of a God-given spirit, then we undermine dignity, nobility and strength of will. God's design for marriage takes into account the capacity with which He made us – Mt 19:4-10.

1. Jesus reaffirms God's marital blueprint from the dawn of creation: 1 man/1 woman/life.
2. What God joins together – by command/approval – is not to be severed by man.
3. This is not only God's precept; it is pragmatic. Monogamy builds trust, security, self-esteem. It overcomes loneliness, vulnerability, weakness. Maintaining marriage is financially beneficial and promotes mental and physical health.

C. But, *is it really possible?* Is the Bible out of touch, unrealistic? Humans have enormous capacity for love/devotion. Soldiers die for country, rescuers to risk life/die for injured, aid workers risk disease third world countries. Some devote lifetime of research to *animals* – and are praised. *But then we insist that it is beyond our ability to devote to a mate for life.*

2. The Love that Underlies Marriage

A. When we understand the *kind* of love God directs in marriage – that it is a matter of the will – then, yes, it is possible to love for a lifetime.

1. Ask: Can you love your *children* for a lifetime? Do you have lifetime *friends*? Can you love *God* for life? Do these relationships grow, deepen over time? So does marriage.
2. When we make marriage “vows,” we are engaging our wills: “Do you” or “will you” **promise** is the language of the ceremony. And we usually anticipate various circumstances and commit ourselves to caring for our mate for life.
3. Not saying that romance/emotion doesn’t play a role, but not the *foundation* of marriage. Mate may be paralyzed or get chronic disease; commit a crime; display character deficiency previously hidden; etc. The giddy, fairytale emotionalism that Hollywood has promoted so effectively usually fades and life/marriage becomes challenging.

B. Most important ingredient in marital success: loving husband – Eph 5:22-33. Takeaways:

1. Slavish submission of a wife is not the goal. The goal is for man to lead so that his wife gladly submits to the one who protects, supports, loves and sacrifices for her.
2. 3 times husbands are directed to love wives: 5:25, 28, 33. This is *agape*-love. It is a command, a decision of the will. With this foundation in place the relationship is enhanced by romance, sexual intimacy, deep friendship (*phileo*), joy of companionship and shared experiences, appreciation for her service and support. In most cases mutual nurturing of children deepens the love as labor, sacrifice, anxieties of the process are shared.
3. This love is modeled after Christ’s love for the church. It is sacrificial; it sees the deeper value of the soul. Jesus makes us more than we could be on our own by virtue of the relationship He sustains with us. *So it should be in marriage.* Husbands should always have their wives’ potential in mind: “What can I help her become as her spiritual head?”

C. Reexamining 1 Cor 13 in the context of a husband:

1. Though I am a polished speaker at work, am known for my quick-witted repartee, and can cite all manner of sports statistics, but never tell my wife how much I love her, appreciate her and need her, I have become as obnoxious as a clanging cymbal.
2. Though I have a post-graduate degree, have risen through the ranks of my company, have won numerous awards and am handsome as all get-out, but never open up and

share my deepest thoughts with my wife, never make her feel part of my success, never let her know that she is more important than my work, I am nothing.

3. And though I work tons overtime, travel constantly, and am exhausted all the time due to stress, so that we can live in the gated neighborhood, drive a Lexus as a second car, and amass hundreds of thousands of dollars in my children's college funds, but miss out on sharing time and life experiences with my children, it profits me *less than nothing; in fact, it harms all those who mean the most to me.*
4. Jim suffers long and is kind. Jim does not envy and does not parade himself. Jim is not puffed up and doesn't behave rudely. Jim does not seek his own; is not provoked and thinks no evil. Jim does not rejoice in iniquity but rejoices in the truth. Jim bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Jim's love never fails.

D. As they say, this is not "rocket science." The question is less "I don't know what to do" and more "I don't want to do what I know."

3. Where Does the Love Go?

A. In a marriage that is eventually going to die, often the relationship is poisoned early on. It just takes different lengths of time to reach a fatal level. In a word, *selfishness*.

1. One or both enter marriage with immaturity, unrealistic expectations. Reality then sets in: work schedules dominate; daily demands of life must be attended to (shopping, banking, car repairs, etc.). Children bring sleepless nights, feedings, diaper changes, illness/doctor visits, playtime, etc.
2. If not careful, intimacy gives way to exhaustion; conversation narrows to the "nuts and bolts" of life; compliments turn into criticisms; investment in relationship shrivel in the assumption that "it'll all be ok in the end."
3. In recent years I have seen a number of young people not make it to 30 still married. Those who are single should ask themselves some difficult questions about their expectations for marriage and their maturity to be the spouse God expects them to be.

B. Mid-range years intensify the strain on the foundational cracks already present. Material pursuits; frantic pace of life; over-commitment of children to outside activities; never eating together/talking/devotional time; growing dissatisfaction with relationship.

1. This is a time when two Christians ought to be growing together spiritually. They are learning how to respond to each other's idiosyncrasies; preferences; weaknesses. They are building for a future, not just materially, but as leaders among God's people.
2. Many marriages fail in this phase. Under marital stress other options tempt. An attractive workmate/neighbor; personal/intimate conversation; fun to be around, travel together. Throw in a man's preoccupation with (online) pornography, a woman's desire for

fairy-tale romance and the outcome is entirely predictable.

- C. Later-life marital breakdown: More and more we hear of long-time marriages failing. “When the kids left we realized we had nothing else in common.” A man’s libido slows down; signs of aging creep in. Unprepared, panic ensues and choices are made which do nothing but add guilt and failure to the emotional distress of life on the downhill side.

4. Is Marital Failure Inevitable?

- A. **NO!** But there are cultural factors that make it harder to find someone who you have confidence in to build a lifetime marriage. You have to be careful in your search and use legitimate criteria that help identify a spiritually-oriented person who will remain committed.

1. I find myself saying of troubled marriages: “*Why did they marry **that** person?! What did they possible see in them?*”
2. True, some change over time or hide their true character during courtship, but usually the traits were already there but discounted or rationalized away.
3. Some marry against the advice of others thinking that they will change their spouse. Especially do young women fall victim to this mindset. They think they must marry someone in order to save them. Mistake!

- B. **True, godly love brings marital victory over abuse, neglect, indifference and divorce!** Not only *can* such a relationship last a lifetime, it will be richer and more rewarding than spouse-hoppers will ever discover. And it begins with the husband and his leadership.

Conclusion: Fulfilling a life-long marriage covenant is not for selfish; it is for adults who know something of higher love, devotion, honor, integrity. Lack of these things, not length of life, is why divorce occurs. This article cited at the beginning of the lesson is about lust, avoiding guilt, unshackling of responsibility, doing what one pleases – and finding a justification for it. We think we can redefine reality by *changing terms – instead of changing us.*

Victory in Love Loving the Truth

Intro: This lesson moves us away from personal relationships to something that *affects* those relationships in a basic way: our view of the truth.

1. Defining the Truth

- A. Pilate's question – "*What is truth?*" (Jn 18:37-38) – still echoes across the centuries through the halls of Congress, the university campus, and down Main Street USA.
 - 1. Pilate caught in turmoil between Rome's superstitious idolatry and Judaism's unswerving, fanatical – often misguided – devotion to the ancient Law of Moses.
 - 2. Pilate is a "skeptical pragmatist." Though he questions absolute truth, he is certain of one thing: *Jesus is innocent*. But willing to sacrifice that truth to political expediency.
- B. America is rapidly abandoning objective truth in favor of preferences and feelings.
 - 1. Facts/data may still drive science and technology, but most have abandoned moral truth. They are led by their desires. Truth is what they want it to be.
 - 2. Fallout: A "non-judgmental" society; the individual is sovereign. Males pretend to be females in spite of genetic "facts"; babies aborted though alive by objective standards.
- C. Ultimately, by "truth" I mean God's revelation in Scripture. God has given insight into His nature, our nature, core values and principles of fellowship/service.
 - 1. The foundational element of belief in God is the conviction that God has spoken, that His word is accurate/complete/beneficial – 2 Tim 3:16-17. It is "*the truth*."
 - 2. Overview: Ps 119:97-106; 19:7-11. God's word is a GPS in a world of conflicting paths; it is courage in times of crisis; comfort in times of sorrow; confidence when everyone else is in doubt; nourishment when everyone else is starving on junk food.

2. Discerning the Truth

- A. God has allowed a world where contradictory views exist. It is a consequence of free-will, for if there is no untruth, there is nothing to choose between.
 - 1. In Eden Satan approached Eve with contradictions of truth. Eve had a choice long before Satan's temptation, but he weakened her resistance with denial and false promises.
 - 2. What if Eve had said, "So what?" *Error is only empowered when people embrace it.*

B. This is why discerning truth/error is so important.

1. Error is persuasive; it appeals to ego, desire, independence. It often sounds sensible, harmless, even advantageous. Pr 14:12 – “*There is a way that seems right ...*”.
2. Scripture contains many examples of those who were swayed by error, either in their ignorance of truth or desire to follow their own path.

C. The Bereans – Ac 17:11. Intellectual investigation is only part of the process of culling truth from error. Without genuine love for God’s will, we will rationalize error.

3. Loving the Truth

A. “Agape” – A love that is dedicated/devoted by the recognition of what is valuable, important, not just what suits or is naturally attractive. Truth is *God’s word* and our loyalty to and love for it begins with our love for Him.

B. This is crucial, for truth is not merely theoretical propositions. God’s word *exposes* our motives and *judges* our behavior – Heb 4:12-13. **If I do not love the truth ...**

1. Will I respond properly when my faults are revealed? Deny? Harden? Will I resent those who correct me? Hard for Peter/Barnabas to accept Paul’s rebuke?
2. Will I justify my children/friends when they are convicted of wrong by God’s word? God’s word does not play favorites; denial does not solve the problem of disobedience.
3. Will I conform to it when it demands what I do not want to give? (Pharaoh)
4. Will I trust it when it doesn’t make sense or rationalize it away? (Build an ark; flee Egypt by going south; march around Jericho; reduce my army; dip in the Jordan, etc.).

C. Loving the truth means:

1. Learning it – Diligently; with structure, progression, goals – like any other discipline.
2. Enjoying it – Sermons/classes stimulating; reflection; introspection.
3. Embracing it – Even when painful, it is for our good/growth.
4. Trusting it – Not accommodating it to errors of science, history, psychology.

Conclusion: WARNING! Not only are those who do not love the truth susceptible to error, “*God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they may all be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness*” – 2 Th 2:10-12. God allows – even sends – error to those who turn a deaf ear to Him. It is just punishment for rebels. **Loving the truth is victory** over the lies of Satan that lead us away from God.

Victory in Love Love NOT the World

Intro: One thing agree on: We exist on a wondrous planet that strains our credulity. We are privileged to live in and contemplate such a unique place. But that's where agreement ends.

1. The World: What Is It?

A. Two major philosophies:

1. Naturalism: Accidental result of mindless forces. Dawkins: "Biology is the study of complicated things that give the appearance of having been designed for a purpose" (*Blind Watchmaker*). How could random explosions *ever* resemble order/design?
2. Creationism: Our very existence, and the setting of that existence, is purposed by a Supreme Creator. His "fingerprints" are seen from microscope to telescope – Rom 1:20.

B. Look up: "*The heavens declare the glory of God ...*" – Ps 19:1.

1. A vast universe of galaxies; sizes and distances are simply too big to process. The beauty and grandeur inspire awe. **Illus:** Gravitational waves created by two merging black holes. Light energy released equivalent of a billion trillion suns (NYT, 2/11/16).
2. Our atmosphere sustains life via gases, protection from radiation/meteorites, rainfall. Also, beauty of aurora borealis, cloud formations, rainbows, sunrises/sets, snowfall.

C. Look around: Mountains, deserts, forests, lakes, rivers, oceans – each with unique beauty.

1. Life inhabits every square inch of the planet, from bacteria to blue whales. From migrating birds to schools of fish to herds of wildebeest. Awed by variety/numbers/beauty.
2. Plants/animals to eat and sustain life; water supply; raw materials to build homes, vehicles, make clothing – making the planet habitable. Unique environment in universe.

D. Look within: "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*" – Ps 139:13-16.

1. Standing above all the wonders of creation is man. Not merely "highest evolutionary form" but qualitatively different – reflecting features of his Creator (Gn 1:26-28): Self-contemplation, conscience, complex speech, rational thinking.
2. With every biological horizon of knowledge crossed there are only more vistas of mind-boggling detail. **Illus:** Each human cell contains genetic information equivalent to full set of Encyclopedia Britannica. DNA on head of pin equals stack of books 500 times distance to moon and back with specific but different content (*In Six Days* 80).

2. But, a Fallen World

A. But our world also bears scars of imperfection, hostile elements.

1. Environment: tornadoes/earthquakes/tsunamis. Diseases ravage both mind and body irrespective of age, wealth, beauty. Behavioral: violence, greed, fornication abound.
2. These imperfections cause emotional distress of despair, depression, fear, lack of purpose/worth. America is among the richest/safest nations on earth, with freedom to live as we wish yet plagued with such ills as emotional instability, drug abuse, suicide.

B. It is my conviction that God has allowed these things to be:

1. As a consequence of free will. Much treachery and tragedy exists due to misuse of free will. God does not override our choices; He honors the power/freedom He gave us.
2. But God also altered Earth's physical properties so that life is hard (Gen 3:16-19). He wants us to keep this world in perspective. The pain, struggle and decomposition bear a message: Earthly life is not the be-all and end-all. Eden is not here. Our value is not defined by earthly standards.

C. But we do not live in a moral vacuum; there exists an enemy, a deceiver, who distorts our view of the world by using our ignorance, desires and selfishness against us.

1. There is enough residual glory in this world, coupled with direct revelation of Scripture, for us to identify the hand of God. The *mistake* many make, however, is to "*worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator*" (Rom 1:25).
2. When we give affection, attention that is due to God to what He has made, we will suffer the consequences of our misplaced emphasis.

3. Love NOT the World

A. 1 Jn 2:15-17 – Obviously, John is showcasing two mutually exclusive "loves."

1. "The world" is sin: lust of flesh/eyes and pride of life. These are "not of the Father."
2. The lusts and selfish ambition are things contrary to the will of God. It is self-indulgence to the degree of sinful imbalance. God is thus neglected or disobeyed.
3. Such things are "passing away." But he who "does the will of God" abides forever.

B. James speaks similarly – Jas 4:1-4. Friendship with world = enmity with God.

1. Neither James nor John are speaking of "loving" a sunny spring day or the joy of work or friends or hunting/hiking/golf.

2. Rather, they speak of inverted priorities, misplaced affections, seeking pleasure outside the bounds of morality and selflessness. These make us God's "enemy." Strong word!

C. This can happen in countless ways:

1. Work is good (Ecc 2:24; 3:13), but to become overly ambitious in work, define ourselves by position or income, to sacrifice time with family or God's work for it is sinful.
2. Sexual intimacy is good (Heb 13:4; 1 Cor 7:2-5), but to immerse oneself in lust, satisfy desires indiscriminately, engage in fornication is sinful.
3. Money and what it can buy is good, but *"those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare ... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil ..."* (1 Tim 6:9-10).

4. A Heavenly Perspective

A. *"Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth"* – Col 3:1-2.

1. The language of discipleship is of death: *"For you died ..."* – 3:3; *"Baptized into His death"* – Rom 6:3; *"Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin"* – Rom 6:11; *"Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* – Gal 6:14.
2. It is also the language of life: *"Raised to walk in newness of life"* – Rom 6:4; *"And He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again ... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new"* – 2 Cor 5:15, 17; *"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me ..."* – Gal 2:20.

B. Keep things in perspective:

1. This world is beautiful; enjoy it, but don't worship it. Let the beauty point to God.
2. The materials of this world are helpful; use them, don't abuse them.
3. The body's senses – touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing – are powerful. They bring enjoyment, enhance relationships. Control them; don't overindulge them so that they rule.
4. Our surroundings will incite our emotions – love, anger, compassion, impatience, frustration, competitiveness, etc. Control them; don't become a slave to them.

C. *"For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"* (Mt 16:26).

Conclusion: Love is a powerful force when properly directed. It is sacrificial, serving; a force that binds us with each other and with God. But love can be corrupted into something selfish, ugly and hurtful. Let us channel our thoughts and passions to achieve the purposes of God.