

CROSSING ATTITUDES

Study Guide

Lesson Eight – Grace Inspires Love

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We've seen through every topic in this study that love should be what motivates us. Jesus said that all of the law and prophets (meaning the whole Old Testament) hang on the commandments of loving God and loving others. We've also seen that our selfish desires are always getting in the way. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life can be very subtle and yet powerful temptations. The impact of sin brings confusion and heartache. God, however, has called us to peace. He desires our lives to be full of joy (John 15:11, Romans 15:13).

All of us want the blessings of joy and peace that God desires for us. Yet, if we seek after the experience of joy and peace, it seems to allude us. The more we chase the experience, the more it becomes an idol. The goal is not to experience joy and peace but to worship our Creator and live for Him. Joy and peace are the natural result of a worshipful life. The more we draw close to God in our daily activities, the more His love will fill our hearts and the more we will be able to express that love to others.

- 1) Read the words of Jesus in John 15:1-15 and answer the following questions:
 - a) From verses 1-4, who is described as the vine? Who is described as the branch?

 - b) Can a branch grow without being attached to the vine? What can we do apart from Christ (see verse 5)? What happens to branches that don't abide in the true vine (see verse 6)?

Note: Christians often get the idea that abiding in Christ means to strive to be obedient to Him. However, Jesus used a plant to describe the idea of abiding in Him. A branch doesn't strive and struggle to grow. It grows naturally because it is attached to the vine that gives it nourishment. The branch lives in the vine and the vine lives in the branch. Furthermore, a branch doesn't prune itself. The vinedresser prunes the branches to make it bear more fruit. God the Father is the vinedresser.

The dictionary says that synonyms of the word "abide" are ageless, continuing, dateless, enduring, eternal, everlasting, immortal, imperishable, lasting, ongoing, perennial, perpetual, timeless, and undying. Related words are ceaseless, endless, permanent; changeless, constant, stable, stationary, steady, unchanging, and unvarying.¹ Those who belong to Christ are permanently attached to Him. That's good news!

- c) The New Living Translation clarifies verse 3. It says, "You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you." Think back through the past few weeks of this Bible study. In what ways has God "pruned" you?

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/abiding>

- d) Connecting the idea of verse 5, “for apart from Me you can do nothing,” to verses 7-12, how do we keep His commandments (see verse 10)? Many Christians read verse 10 out of context and believe that they must strive to keep His commandments in order to abide in His love. From your own knowledge of scripture, why does this misinterpretation lead to discouragement rather than joy? If you know of other verses that support your thoughts, write them down.
- e) What is the fruit that God brings out in our lives from verses 12-13? Specifically, how has He called you to “lay down your life”?
- f) Look back at verse 7. Christ said, “Ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.” In context, the fruit of abiding in Christ’s love is to love others. With this in mind, what kinds of things should we ask for? Take a moment and ask God to prune out the dead branches and help you to bear the fruit of love in specific situations in your life.
- 2) All of the Old Testament law is summed up in loving God and loving others and yet our sin nature fights against these commandments. Slowly read the Apostle Paul’s words in Romans 7:14-8:4. Describe in your own words the struggle we, like Paul, face from verses 14-23.
- a) What is the answer to Paul’s dilemma in verse 24-25? How are we set free in Romans 8:1-4?

Note: The concepts presented in this portion of Romans can be difficult to apply to our lives on a practical level. The Law, or the commandment to love, is extremely hard when my selfish, sinful desires want to rule me. When you think about it, love cannot be commanded. Someone can’t force you to love him or her. When you deeply love, you are driven to action even though you may have to sacrifice your comfort, your time, your money, or your pride. You are obligated out of compassion rather than fear of punishment or rejection. You set all fears aside and do what is best for them. Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18-20).

To help explain, I’ve developed a little chart (see page 4) showing our daily walk of God’s grace and peace. It begins with our humility over our sins, leading to repentance. Repentance isn’t “getting right with God,” it is simply confessing our daily sins. When I do this, I’m aware of His loving mercy, His forgiveness, and His grace. This leads to incredible peace that humbles me all over again. Out of this daily walk of humility and awe of His grace comes my attitude towards others. I find that as I abide in His love, He prunes the dead branches and produces attitudes that are humble, loving, merciful, forgiving, full of grace, and peaceful.

DAILY WALK OF GRACE AND PEACE

