

WCCC 1995

Brother Kaung

Brotherly Love (3)

I John 4: 19 – ‘We love, because He first loved us.’

I Corinthians 8: 3 – ‘But if anyone loves God, he is known of Him.’

Let us bow down and pray:

Lord, we thank You and praise You. You have given us another chance to gather before You. Lord, we thank You and praise You, because You indeed love us. For us, You gave up Yourself. Lord, we hope we can love You. But we know that love is not something we can have by talking merely about it. We need You to inspire us with Your own love, so that we can indeed love You. Therefore, we commit the time this morning into Your hand. We look up to Your Spirit to pour down the love of God into our hearts, so that You may get the love You so deserve. In the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

This time we gather before the Lord. What we have been sharing about is brotherly love. But from the first day we said that brotherly love does not come by chance. We cannot just talk about brotherly love from the beginning. We have to go back to the source of love. So, at the very beginning, we said that God is love. In my heart, I have not been able to put aside the verses in I John 4: 7 – 8. ‘Beloved, let us love one another; because love is of God, and every one that loves has been begotten of God, and knows God. He that loves not has not known God; for God is love.’ Here, it shows us very clearly that love is of God and from God. He who has love is born of God. He who loves not does not know God. For God is love.

When God created man, He made man according to His own image. God is spirit. Therefore, when He made man, He also gave man a spirit. But man’s spirit is not God’s spirit. Man’s spirit is a capacity which God has given. It is some measure of capacity, a vessel so that man can receive the spirit of God and that God’s spirit can dwell in man’s spirit. Thus, in the spirit, man can be one with the Lord.

God is life. Therefore, when He made man, He gave man life. The Bible tells us that God breathed into the nostrils of man. Then man became a living soul. In other words, man now has a created life. But this created life is not the life which is of God. God's life is an uncreated life. The life God gave man when he was made was a created life. Given this created life, man now has the opportunity to receive the uncreated life of God, so that in life, man can be one with God.

God is love. When He created man, He also created in man this capacity to love. But this love in the created is not the love which is of God. It is only a reflection of God's love. Because God has given man this capacity to love, then he is able to receive God's love, and His love can fill him.

So, dear brothers and sisters, the fundamental thing we need to know is that man did not have this love of God when he was created. As regarding this genuine love, only God's love is the true love. Only this is the reality of love. Besides God's love, no other love is real. This love is not something we have in the beginning. Therefore, it says in the Bible that he who does not have love does not know God. He who has love is born of God and knows God.

The command of God to man is only one. The requirement of God to man is only one. He wants us to love Him with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. He also wants us to love one another as we love ourselves. For God Himself is love. So, what He requires of us is only love. But, inside of us, there is no love. When God gave men His ten commandments, or the law, these ten commandments actually declared God Himself. So, as far as these commandments are concerned, or, as far as God is concerned, this law was His testimony. But when this law, or these commandments came to us, they became the law that we have to abide by. God expresses Himself through the law and the commandments. But to us, these became the law and the statutes. We need to observe these commandments. But here, difficulties arise, because we do not have the kind of love that God wants. So, the law now condemns us. But, thank God, as explained in Galatians chapter 3, since the Scripture has shut up all of us under sin, the law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we can receive from the Lord this love.

Now that we have this love, then we can love God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength. Therefore, when we believe in the Lord, there is within us a great change. Originally, we were dead in sin and transgression. Formerly, we were just going along with the flow of this world,

according to the prince of the power of the air. We indulged in our own lusts. We walked according to our own wishes. We were the sons of wrath. But thank God, because of His mercy and grace, He gave us His own Son, so that we can receive this grace. We are saved through grace and by faith. Romans 5: 8 tells us that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. When we were still weak, and when we were still enemies, Christ gave Himself to us. Here, God displays His own love towards us. Not that we love God, but He loves us first. Because He first loved us, He planted His love in us. Then, we can begin to love our God. I think we can all recall how we were saved. When we were helpless and weak, when we remained in sin and under His wrath, and when we were His enemies, with no heart for Him, but fear and hate towards Him, yet one day His salvation came upon us who are not worthy. God's love was displayed to us through His Son Jesus Christ. When we believed in the Lord, we believed in His love. When we received the Lord, we received His love.

I often feel that the greatest sin in the world is to refuse the love of God. There is no sin greater than this. He loved us so much, but we refused Him. This sin condemns us. But we thank and praise our Lord. We are constrained by His love. We are moved by His love. We have accepted what He had prepared for us in His love. We accepted our Lord Jesus to be our Savior. The Lord then came into us. Then love came into us. So, the letter to the Romans says that the Spirit pours down the love of God into our hearts.

From that moment on, naturally there was a love in us towards God. This is not something that we can make ourselves. This is not something that we can fake. When one receives the Lord Jesus, very naturally in him there is a love towards God. If he has not received the Lord Jesus, he may say with his lips that he loves God, but in fact there is no such love in him. This love starts to move in us. This love is nothing other than the love of God. Then God's love starts to work in us. From that day on, we start to live the life of a Christian. For the life of a Christian is a life of love. It is a love relationship between God and us.

When we first believed in the Lord, I believe we all had this pure love in us. We all had this single love. We also had this love to the extent that we were prepared to abandon all things for the Lord's sake. We even had a heart to suffer for the Lord because we loved Him. This love in us at that time was indeed living and true. We call this the first love. This is indeed the love we had at the beginning. In terms of time, this is the love when we first started to have a relation with God. This love does not come from us naturally. This love is born into us. This love is none other than God's love. Therefore, the nature of this

love is the same as the nature of God's love. God's love to us is single. The way we love God is also that single. God loves us unconditionally. We love Him without condition. God loves us absolutely. We love Him also absolutely. God loves us selflessly. We also love Him selflessly.

If we can abide in this first love, then we abide in God. This love leads us to walk forward. But besides this love, we had in us another love. That is the love given to us when we were created. We call that natural love. In us, there is natural love. Because of man's sin, this love has become corrupted and fallen. It is a selfish love. It is not an absolute love; it is divided and changing. It is not one that abides forever.

Therefore, there are two different kinds of love in us. One is a natural love, given to man when he was created. This love has since fallen because of man's sin. But, on the other hand, when man receives the Lord, he receives love from God Himself. This is called supernatural love. This supernatural love is God Himself. It has the nature and character of God Himself. The will of God is for us to abide in this supernatural love. In other words, we are to let this supernatural love leads us to walk forward, in our daily lives, in our worship, as well as in our service.

We must constantly abide in this love. In other words, we have to maintain this first love. Indeed, this first love grows continually. We know that life grows. Whenever life stops growing, death comes in. Therefore, this love also grows continually. This first love should grow continually. At the beginning, probably we may have a larger portion of emotion in that love. At the mention of the name of our Lord, we might be moved to tears. We really had a compassion for our Lord. But, when this love grows, it deepens gradually. We can say that, to a certain extent, this love becomes one with God in our will. This we can see in the Song of Songs.

The Song of Songs is a love story. Here is a virgin who has tasted the love of the Lord; she has been saved by grace. Since she has tasted the love of the Lord and found it so sweet, she is stirred up inside because of this love. So she cries out, 'Kiss me. I want to be closer to You. I really need to be by Your side.' Because of such strong compassion for the Lord, her husband brings her all along the way. Towards the end of the Song of Songs, we see that Shulammitte

and King Solomon become completely one. By that time, her love is one with the Lord completely in her will.

So, this first love is not something that remains stationary in us after we have it. This first love is living. The more we love, the deeper it becomes. As time goes by, we come to know the Lord more. But, regrettably, because originally there was this natural love in us, in ignorance, we were unable to distinguish between the natural love and the super-natural love. From the outside look, it is almost impossible to distinguish between them. But we know these two kinds of love come from two different sources. They are different in nature; their fruits are different too. But because we are ignorant in spiritual matters, when we were first saved, our love for the Lord was truly this pure first love. At that time, if the Lord required of us of anything, we would say 'yes' without any hesitation. At that time, we were willing to suffer for Him. We did not even feel any pain, because we knew the Lord was with us. But, oftentimes, such a period is not long. If such love can be maintained until we see the Lord, how wonderful it will be!

However, often we gradually lose sight of this first love. Gradually, we go back to our natural love. We love God with our natural love. We love our brothers and sisters with this natural love. Yet, we think we love God, and we think we love our brothers and sisters very much. We did not realize that we were applying the wrong love. From the appearance, you cannot tell the difference. We need the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. We were fooled. On the one hand, we have fallen away from the first love. On the other hand, we have fallen back onto our natural love. In the past, we loved sin with our natural love. Now, we love God with the same kind of love. But the word of God tells us that the kind of love He requires of us is AGAPE. It is the love of God Himself. There is no place in the Scripture that tells us to love God with our natural love. God asks us to love Him with that first love. If we love Him with that natural love, not only can we not please God but we are condemned by Him.

For example, after Saul became king, he became zealous and killed the Gibeonites. We know that when the Israelites were about to enter the Land of Canaan, God's command was for them to destroy all the seven tribes of the Canaanites. But the Gibeonites lied to the Israelites (ref. Josh 9: 1 – 16). The Israelites did not ask for the counsel of the Lord and made a covenant with them. As a result, the Gibeonites were allowed to remain among the Israelites. Then, when Saul became king, out of his zeal for the Lord who had commanded the Israelites to eliminate all the Canaanites, he put the Gibeonites to death. For this reason, a disaster came to the Israelites when David was king. God showed

him that what Saul had done did not please Him, for he failed to keep their covenant with the Gibeonites. God is a God who keeps promises, but His people had violated their covenant.

Another example is found in this incident. God told Saul through Samuel to destroy the Amalekites, because soon after the Israelites came out of Egypt and when they were defenseless in the wilderness, the Amalekites rose up to attack them. So, the Amalekites became the enemies of the Israelites for generations. The will of God was to eliminate them and blot out their name from under heaven (Exodus 17: 8-16). So, when Saul became the king of Israel, through Samuel, God ordered Saul to eliminate the Amalekites, not only the people but also the animals. But Saul again made the mistake of loving the Lord with the natural love. After he defeated the Amalekites, he destroyed only the weak and the worthless, but spared all that was good. He later claimed that he intended to offer the best of the cattle to the Lord. He also spared the King of the Amalekites.

So, you see, when you love God with your natural love, not only you will not be able to do the will of God, but you will also sin against God. In the New Testament, we have Saul the Pharisee. He loved the Lord and also was zealous for Him. He wanted to serve God. He thought the followers of the Lord Jesus were against faith. So, he persecuted them and put them in prison. He condemned them and caused them to die. He cursed them and tried to get them to blaspheme. He thought he was serving God. But we see that when he served in this way, he was serving God with his natural love. Such service not only did not please God, but also was damaging to the kingdom of God.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us see light in the light of God. Today, while we live before God, walk with Him and serve Him, do we use our natural love, or are we doing it according to the super-natural love? How many times we think that this will please God. Therefore, we do these things to please Him. But we do not seek His will first. We serve Him with our natural love, our intelligence, our plan. We use our natural strength to serve Him and to love Him. The more we use such natural love, the more damages it will do. The result will be the same if we love our brothers and sisters with this kind of natural love. The more we love, the more problems we cause. So we have to learn a lesson before God.

This natural love has to be placed under the cross of Christ. If this natural love is not separate from the supernatural love, our life and our service will never be pure. We have to put this natural love to death by the Holy Spirit. When our Lord was on earth, He said, 'If anyone loves Me not more than His own father

and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.’ (ref. Luke 14: 26). Why did our Lord have such a severe requirement? He knows that, if we truly love Him, our natural love has to be dealt with by the cross. It is not to say that we should not love our parents. The first commandment with a promise says that we ought to honor our parents. It is not to say husbands should not love their wives. The Bible tells us that husbands should love their wives as Christ loves the church. But here, the Lord shows us that, if we want to live a life of love, this natural love has to be dealt with. If this natural love is dealt with by the cross, then we can love our God completely according to the supernatural love. Then we can love our parents, our wives, our children and even our lives with this super-natural love. In such love, there is no more ‘self’, no selfishness. Oftentimes, when we say ‘we love’, actually we love only ourselves. But when our natural love is dealt with, then we can talk about truly loving the Lord. Then we can talk about truly loving our brothers and sisters.

Our relationship with the Lord is purely a relationship of love. For this reason, God has planted His own love in us. The Bible tells us clearly that it is love that God requires of us. God does not ask to do this or that for Him. He only wants us to love Him with the love that He has given us. But it is easy to lose the first love. It is easy for us to fall back on this natural love.

For example, Peter loved the Lord. When the Lord told the disciples that He was going to suffer and everyone would leave Him, Peter said, ‘I love You. I am willing to die for You. The other disciples may leave You, but I will not leave You.’ Do you think that Peter’s love for the Lord was fake? When he said so, was he being dishonest? He was indeed honest. He indeed loved the Lord. He indeed wanted to die with the Lord. But he did not realize that this love of his was of the flesh, depending on his natural love. So, the Lord allowed him to deny Him three times. He then was led to see that, when he was mindful of the flesh, he would lose his first love. After the Lord was risen, John 21 tells us that, by the Sea of Tiberias, the Lord asked Peter, ‘Simon, do you love Me more than all these?’ The word the Lord used was AGAPE, meaning, ‘Do you really love Me absolutely?’ Because of his failure, Peter dared not depend on himself. He replied, ‘Lord, You know. I PHILEO You. I have a compassion towards You.’ This was all he could say. But we thank God. When he realized that he did not have love, God’s love was poured into his heart. We know that at his old age, he gave his life for the Lord.

How can we leave our first love? We leave our first love when we love the world. I John 2: 15 says, ‘If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not

in him.’ When we first trusted in the Lord and this first love was in us, we were really able to count the things of the world as rubbish. The world was not attractive to us anymore. But unknowingly and gradually, the world entered into our hearts again. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of this life started to enter into us. As a result, our love for the Lord became divided. A divided heart is a dead heart. So, the Lord says, ‘If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.’

Even when Paul was in prison in Rome, before he was martyred, one of his co-workers Demas left him and went to Thessalonica because of his love of the world. Oftentimes, we leave our first love because we start to be mindful of our flesh. Sometimes, we leave this first love when we begin to love the world. A Christian can even fall to an extent that he would love sin when he leaves his first love. The church at Corinth was in this kind of condition. They were well endowed with gifts, lacking in nothing. They had eloquence and knowledge, but the church fell into sin. The kind of sin they committed was not even generally found in the world. The church did not even seem to care. Brothers went to court against their brothers. Some would even get drunk before they broke bread. Where was their first love? So, when Paul wrote I Corinthian, he said, ‘If anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Maranatha.’ (16: 22). The word Paul used was not AGAPE; he used PHILEO. They did not even have some compassion towards the Lord, not to mention AGAPE. “ANATHEMA MARANATHA.’ It means, ‘Let him be accursed. The Lord is coming.’

Dear brothers and sisters, how can we leave the first love to this extent? The church at Ephesus was a church of love. The reason that Paul could pour out the mystery of God to this church is that this church loved the Lord. Brothers and sisters, we cannot know the Lord through our mind. We know the Lord through our hearts. Because they loved the Lord, He could reveal to them as much as He desired. Paul ended his letter to the Ephesians with these words: Grace be with all those who love our Lord Jesus Christ. The church at Ephesus was a church that loved God.

After a while, when the risen Lord revealed Himself to John on the island of Patmos and told him to write to Ephesus, only thirty years had elapsed in the interval. The church at Ephesus appeared the same from the outside. The Bible says, ‘To the angel of the assembly in Ephesus write: These things says He that holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lamps: I know thy word and thy labor, and thine endurance, and that thou canst not bear evil men; and thou has tried them who say that themselves are apostles and are not, and has found them liars; and endures, and hast borne

for My name's sake, and has not wearied. ...But this thou hast, that thou hatest the works of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.' (Revelations 2: 1 – 3, 6).

The church at Ephesus seemed to have been able to maintain a certain condition for these thirty years. They had works. They had labor. They could endure. They could not tolerate evil. They were able to tell the difference. They could stand up against the world. They could labor for the name of the Lord and did not get weary. They hated the intermediate class. This was also what the Lord hated. On the surface, everything was good. But the Lord said, 'I oppose you.' The word the Lord used was a very severe word. He said, 'Although you have so much good, I am an enemy to you. I oppose you, for you have left your first love. You have to repent. You have to think back and remember from where you have fallen. Then do the deeds you do at first.'

In what way did the Ephesian church fall? They fell, for they had left their first love. Outside, everything remained the same. But inside, the fire had extinguished. Outside, they could get busy working for the Lord. But inside, there was no longer love for the Lord. Outside, there was still the knowledge, but inside, there was no heart for the Lord. Brothers and sisters, what the Lord seeks is that first love. From the first day you believed in Him, He put this love in you. He wants to continually have this relationship with you in this love. These external things cannot satisfy His heart. These outside things originally flowed out of this first love. But, when these things remain while the source no longer exists, in the eyes of the Lord, these things are all dead.

How did the Ephesian church fall from that first love? The Bible did not tell us. Possibly, because the Lord had revealed so much to them and they had also labored for Him, unknowingly, pride came into their hearts. (We call this spiritual pride. But actually, if you are spiritual, you will not be proud). They prided themselves on spiritual things, considering their church higher than the others. They thought they were superior to other brothers and sisters. Because of this pride, they fell from their first love.

In the first love, one element is humility. Brothers and sisters, I often look up to the Lord, asking Him to shine upon me, for I cannot see myself. I think I love the Lord, but it is not necessarily so. I think I do not love the Lord, but it is not necessarily so. I do not know myself. I ask Him to shine upon me. Have I left that first love? I have been saved more than sixty years. When I was saved, the Lord put that love in me. He attracted me to Him. He showed me that He had sacrificed for me. He called me to follow Him. But in the past decades, I

have not been faithful to Him. Oftentimes, on the surface, it seemed that I was serving Him. But when I came before Him, I found that I had lost that first love. I asked the Lord to forgive me. I asked the Lord to restore that first love in me. I have not been absolute to Him. I have not been faithful to Him. I have been mindful of my flesh. There have been other things besides Him that attract me, as if He could not satisfy me. I do not know clearly, but the Lord knows. The Lord says, 'Repent. Do the deeds you did at first.' Indeed, the deeds done at first should continue. These things in themselves were not wrong. What has gone wrong is that the first love is no longer there. We continue to do these works, but not because we love Him. We do not labor because we love Him. We endure, but not because we love Him. Oftentimes, we work for the sake of work. We no longer have this fire of love burning in us. My daily prayer is to put myself on the altar for the Lord to burn me with His holy fire.

Dear brothers and sisters, what God wants of us is only one thing. He wants us to love Him with this first love. Let us not be obsessed by these external things, thinking that it is enough if we have these things. We need to keep that first love.

How can we keep this first love? The Lord says, 'Abide in my love.' How can we abide constantly in His love? The Lord says, 'If you obey My commandments, then you abide constantly in My love.' Whatever commandments the Lord has given us, we should submit to them. Then we can keep this first love. To obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams (ref. I Samuel 15: 22). In our daily lives, we should obey the anointing of the Spirit in us. Then we can abide constantly in His love.

Dear brothers and sisters, may the Lord have mercy on us. May He help each of us individually so that we can abide in His love and, by His grace, so that we can keep this first love. We pray also that the church of God abides in her first love. If we do so, when He comes, we can see His face with boldness. However He was on earth, we shall be the same.

Lastly, to love God is not a matter for our lips or words. It has to be in deeds and in truth. When we say we love the Lord, it does not necessarily mean that we really love Him. We must have real actions. What is the marking of loving God? First, when we love God, we long for Him, Psalm 42: 1 says we love the Lord as the deer pants for the water brooks. When a deer is chased by a hunter, it runs to exhaustion. It comes to a little brook and regains its strength by

drinking the water. When the deer drinks at the brook, the water shows a reflection of its face.

Brothers and sisters, if we truly love God, there will be a longing for Him. We long to be close to Him. Actually, what God wants is nothing but this. It is not how much you work for Him but how much you long for Him. It is not that we long for His gifts but you long for Himself because you love Him. You have communion with Him daily in the hidden place. You are afraid you cannot see His face. There was a time I prayed this prayer constantly, 'Lord, I want to see Your face. If I cannot see Your smiling face, let me see Your face of anger.' A mark of loving the Lord is to draw near to Him and to long to see His face, like John leaning in the bosom of the Lord, or, like Mary sitting at the feet of the Lord and listening to His words.

Dear brothers and sisters, this is the mark of loving the Lord. Are we willing to draw near to Him? Do we feel lost when we are not by His side? This feeling is the mark of loving God. Remember

Mary Magdalene? On the day when the Lord was risen, Peter and John went to the tomb and, when they did not find the Lord there, they went home. But Mary Magdalene had no home to go, for the Lord was her home. So she stayed behind, hoping to find the Lord. Brothers and sisters, do we have this feeling, this mark of love? Are we willing to lay down all for the Lord?

Remember Mary the mother of Jesus? When the angel told her she would be conceived with a child, she said, 'How can this be, since I am not yet married?' She was betrothed, but she was not married yet. The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you. You will give birth to the holy one.' For Mary, this request was more than she could endure. If a woman gave birth to a child without marrying, she was considered to have committed adultery. Her fiancé would be the first to stone her to death. Her reputation would be no more, and she had to pay with her life. But Mary said, 'I am the maid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.'

If we truly love God, are we willing to lay down ourselves for His sake? Oftentimes, we have reservations. We are not like Mary, the sister of Martha, who broke the alabaster vial of costly perfume and let the fragrance come out. Even the disciples said, 'Why this waste?' But, to Mary, nothing for the Lord would be wasted, for the Lord is worthy to receive all. Brothers and sisters, do we have this mark in us?

Paul risked his life for the sake of the Lord and considered all things rubbish ever since the day the Lord appeared to Him on the road to Damascus. His testimony was, as he said, 'I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision.' This is the mark of loving God. Paul said to the Galatians, 'From now on, let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my body the brand-marks of Jesus.' (Galatians 6: 17). The cross was imprinted on the body of Paul. He was faithful until death.

These are all the marks of loving God. I Corinthians 8: 3, 'If anyone loves God, he is known by Him.' Throughout generations, there have been so many who loved the Lord. They were those not known by men. We only know a few of them. Also, we do not know if those who are said to be the ones who love God truly love Him. Men may think you love God. But only God knows if you truly love Him. We thank God that there are so many who love Him. They are not known by men, but they are known by God. It is sufficient to be known by Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, do you love God? Nobody knows if you love God, but He knows. This is good enough.

Let us pray:

Our Lord, You love us so much. You gave yourself for us. Your love cannot be measured. You love us so absolutely and unconditionally. You have saved us and have put Your love in us, so that we may love in the same way as You love. But Lord, we often change our mind. We often have other thoughts. What we say often is not what we mean. We have the appearance but not the reality. You know, Lord. This morning, we open up ourselves to You. May You shine upon us. Examine us to see if we have left our first love. Your love is in us. Lord, we are willing to repent. May we be restored, so that we may please You from now on. In the name of our Lord, Jesus, we pray. Amen.