

1 INTRODUCTION

Thank you for inviting me to share God's word with you this morning.

1.1 Living in end times

In the latter part of Jesus' earthly ministry, the disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of His second coming and of the end of the age. In response Jesus gave them many signs to look for that would indicate that His second coming is near. Jesus divided those signs into 2 main periods of time – the beginning of sorrows and the 70th week of years, making reference to the Prophet Daniel. The signs that Jesus gave for the beginning of sorrows time frame have all occurred or are in the process of occurring. Thus, I believe we can safely conclude that we are living in the beginning of sorrows time period. In fact, I believe that we are living at the very end of the beginning of sorrows. So the next major event in God's timetable would be the 70th week of years, which I believe could start at any time.

1.1.1 Most people's love will grow cold

One of the signs that Jesus said would occur early in the 70th week of years is found in Matthew 24:12:

Matthew 24:12 (NASB) ¹² "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

This is a very serious statement, and I want to focus on the last part of that statement this morning: most people's love will grow cold. What does that mean?

1.1.1.1 Most People's

First, the Greek word that is translated most people's in the NAS could also be translated much, multitude, many, numerous, or great. It is found over 350 times in the NT. For example:

(Matthew 4:24-25) And the news about Him went out into all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, taken with various diseases and pains, demoniacs,

epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. 25 And **great** multitudes followed Him from Galilee and Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

Great multitudes followed him. And we can imagine the multitude of people from all over following Jesus. When Jesus said that most people's love would grow cold, unfortunately, He is not referring to a few people or an isolated case.

1.1.1.2 Will Grow cold

Second, the Greek word translated will grow cold in the NAS is only found in this verse, and it means to cool by blowing, or simply waning love. This indicates a progression. It is not like one moment love is there, and then the next moment it is totally gone. It is something that wanes or decreases over some period of time. I would even suggest that this waning process starts during the beginning of sorrows and culminates in the early part of the 70th week of years when Jesus mentions it.

1.1.1.3 Agape Love

Third, the word love that is used in the Greek text is the word agape. The same Greek word, is used in the following verses.

“For God so **loved** the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

This speaks of God's unconditional love in giving Jesus Christ to pay the penalty for all humanity's sins so that whoever believes in Jesus Christ would not perish in the lake of fire, but have eternal life. That is the Gospel or the good news!

At the last supper Jesus said this to his disciples:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you **love** one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have **love** for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

The apostle Paul mentions love as the first fruit of the Holy Spirit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23)

The apostle John mentions love as a tangible evidence of living as a Christian.

The one who **loves** his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. ¹¹ But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:10-11)

To summarize, when Jesus said that most people's love will grow cold He specifically means that the agape love of most Christians will decrease or wane just prior to His second coming.

1.1.1.4 This has serious Implications

1.1.1.4.1 First, we are no longer obeying Jesus' commandment to love one another

1John 3:23-24 (NASB) ²³ This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. ²⁴ The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

1.1.1.4.2 Second, it compromises our witness

I just read from John 13:35 where Jesus said that “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” If that love wanes or decreases we will have compromised one of our major witnesses to the world that we are followers of Jesus Christ. This will have eternal consequences.

1.1.1.4.3 Third, it will be harder to endure to the end

“And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. ¹³ “But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. (Matthew 24:12–13).

Since love endures all things (1 Corinthians 13:7), if love grows cold, it will be harder to endure to the end. Agape love is one of the ingredients that will help us endure all things, including the difficult times that are coming. If agape love wanes cold during this period, it is not surprising that believers will find it more difficult to endure, thus leading to more people falling away as Jesus and Paul indicated.

So, indeed this is a very serious statement that Jesus makes – one that will have eternal consequences. So it is something we need to consider carefully.

Matthew 24:12 (NASB) ¹² "Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold.

1.1.2 So, What do we do?

At least part of the answer is found in **Heb 10:23-25**.

Hebrews 10:23-25 (NASB) ²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴ and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The “day drawing near” is a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ. Often times we quote verse 25 by itself, but in the text verses 23-25 are all one sentence which ties all those concepts together:

hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering
consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds
not forsaking our own assembling together
encouraging *one another*

Notice the group effort here of one anothering. There are no lone rangers mentioned!

1.1.2.1 Stimulate one another to love and good deeds

What I want to focus on is: consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds

First, the word consider means to observe, understand, consider attentively, fix one's eyes or mind upon. This means there is some effort on our part – it is not something that happens naturally. Requires active role, not passive.

Second, the word translated stimulate in the NAS means an inciting, incitement, or irritation. It is translated provoke in the KJV, and spur in the NIV. It might be a little difficult to get a good, practical understanding of what that word means from that definition. But, this word is found in one other place in the NT that might shed some more light on the subject:

(Acts 15:36-39) And after some days Paul said to Barnabas, “Let us return and visit the brethren in every city in which we proclaimed the word of the Lord, and see how they are.” 37 And Barnabas was desirous of taking John, called Mark, along with them also. 38 But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had not gone with them to the work. 39 And there arose **such a sharp disagreement** that they separated from one another, and Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus.

This was probably one of those passionate “heated discussions” with each one firmly believing that they are right and want their way to prevail. We can all relate to this in our own interactions with our fellow human beings!

We should take the same passion and zeal, and use it in the positive way to stimulate, provoke, spur, or incite one another to love and good deeds.

To summarize what we know thus far: the love of most Christians will wane or decrease just before Jesus returns, and we are to stimulate, provoke, spur, or incite one another to love and good deeds, especially as we see the day drawing near.

Now I want to spend some time talking about what it means to love, agape style. Let's consider several Scriptures together, grouped in different categories.

2 LOVE (Agape) ONE ANOTHER

2.1 Who Do I Love?

Romans 13:8 (NASB) ⁸ Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the* law. (Luk 10:25-28)

Matthew 5:43-45 (NASB) ⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁴ "But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous.

Today it is estimated that there are ~200 million Christians being persecuted for their faith around the world. So far, we in the states have been pretty sheltered from that, but we can see signs even in the US where Christianity is not looked upon favorably. Many segments of society here, including the government, are becoming more hostile toward Christianity.

It always amazes me to read accounts of our brothers and sisters being persecuted, and showing love to even those who persecute them.

2.2 In What Way do I Love?

Romans 12:9 (NASB) ⁹ Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.

1 Peter 1:22 (NASB) ²² Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,

The word fervently means earnestly or intensely and reinforces the concept that we discussed in Heb. 10.

2.3 What Is Love?

This famous passage is quoted a lot at weddings, but here Paul gives us a 16 point definition of love.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NASB) ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, ⁵ does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷ bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

This is the way Christians should be living their lives, in increasing measure, by the power of the Holy Spirit. But, what does this look like in the end times when Jesus says that the love of most Christians will grow cold?

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NASB) Most Christians are not patient, they are not kind *and* they are jealous; they brag *and* are arrogant, ⁵ they act unbecomingly; they seek their own, they are provoked, and take into account a wrong *suffered*, ⁶ they rejoice in unrighteousness, and not the truth; ⁷ they do not bear all things, they do not believe all things, they do not hope all things, and they do not endure all things.

We cannot totally stop what Jesus said would happen, but we certainly can examine our own hearts and cry out to God for the grace and strength to practice what Scripture says so that we do not fall into this category.

2.4 Tangible Expressions of Love

2.4.1 Love in deed and truth

1 John 3:14-18 (NASB) ¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. ¹⁵ Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. ¹⁶ We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. ¹⁷ But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? ¹⁸ Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

2.4.2 Give our enemies something to eat and drink

Earlier we mentioned that we are to love our enemies.

Romans 12:20-21 (NASB) ²⁰ "But if your enemy is hungry , feed him, and if he is thirsty , give him a drink ; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (vs 20 quoted from Pro 25:21)

2.4.3 Romans 13:10 (NASB) ¹⁰ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the* law.

That reminds me of the story of the good Samaritan.

Luke 10:29-37 (NASB) ²⁹ But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" ³⁰ Jesus replied and said, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. ³¹ "And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³² "Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ "But a Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴ and came to him and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ "On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.' ³⁶ "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' *hands*?" ³⁷ And he said, "The one who showed mercy toward him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same."

2.4.4 Do not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way

Romans 14:1-23 (NASB) ¹ Now accept the one who is weak in faith, *but* not for *the purpose of* passing judgment on his opinions. ² One person has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables *only*. ³ The one who eats is not to regard with contempt the one who does not eat, and the one who does not eat is not to judge the one who eats, for God has accepted him. ⁴ Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. ⁵ One person regards one day above another, another regards every day *alike*. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶ He who observes the day, observes it for the Lord, and he who eats, does so for the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who eats not, for the Lord he does not eat, and gives thanks to God. ⁷ For not one of us lives for himself, and not one

dies for himself; ⁸ for if we live, we live for the Lord, or if we die, we die for the Lord; therefore whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord both of the dead and of the living. ¹⁰ But you, why do you judge your brother? Or you again, why do you regard your brother with contempt? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. ¹¹ For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, And every tongue shall give praise to God." ¹² So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. ¹³ Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather determine this—not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother's way. ¹⁴ I know and am convinced in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but to him who thinks anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. ¹⁵ For if because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ Therefore do not let what is for you a good thing be spoken of as evil; ¹⁷ for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ For he who in this *way* serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men. ¹⁹ So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another. ²⁰ Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are evil for the man who eats and gives offense. ²¹ It is good not to eat meat or to drink wine, or *to do anything* by which your brother stumbles. ²² The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because *his eating is* not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.

This applies to various gray areas in life, and we should not judge our brother or sister for their convictions between them and the Lord.

2.4.5 1 Corinthians 16:14 (NASB) ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love.

2.4.6 Ephesians 4:15 (NASB) ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ,

2.5 Through Prayer

Ephesians 3:14-19 (NASB) ¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power

through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Philippians 1:9-11 (NASB) ⁹ And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰ so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; ¹¹ having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which *comes* through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 (NASB) ¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; ¹² and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

2.6 Miscellaneous

1 Timothy 1:5 (NASB) ⁵ But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NASB) ³ We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater;

Colossians 3:14 (NASB) ¹⁴ Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

John 15:9-10 (NASB) ⁹ "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. ¹⁰ "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

As you can see, there are many Scriptures that deal with the subject of agape love, and how we as believers and followers of Jesus Christ can live a life of agape love by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3 Last words of Apostle John according to church tradition.

I have quoted several times from the writings of the Apostle John. Indeed, he mentions agape love many, many times. Let me close with this thought.

Scripture tells us that the Apostle John was exiled to the isle of Patmos. Church history says that when he was released from exile about 18 months later, he returned to Ephesus and lived till the time of the Roman emperor Trajan.

There is also a church tradition, which says, that when John was evidently an old man in Ephesus, he had to be carried to the church in the arms of his disciples. At these meetings, he was accustomed to say no more than, "Little children, love one another!" After a time, the disciples wearied at always hearing the same words, asked, "Master, why do you always say this?" John replied: "It is the Lord's command. And if this alone be done, it is enough!"

Agape love is very powerful. Let us purpose to love as Christ did and the Scriptures teach, especially as we see the day approaching.