# CHAPTER 9

# The Crowning Achievement of Biblical Love

Biblical Love Produces Fulfillment in Relationships.

Relationships of Fulfillment Require and Attitude of Servanthood.

The upper room discourse in John chapter 13 begins with Jesus demonstrating *agape* to His disciples by performing the function of a servant by washing their feet. It was merely preliminary to the service He would render a few hours later by dying on the cross for them. In chapter 13 *agape* is commanded and is permanently bound to servanthood[[1]](#endnote-1). No one can claim to be expressing biblical love, nor will they ever achieve the level of fulfillment in a relationship unless they first see themselves as servants in that relationship. Relationships of fulfillment begin with an attitude of servanthood on the part of both partners in the relationship.

Relationships of Fulfillment Require an Obedient Heart

We have already seen that John chapter 14 introduces the idea of obedience to God into the meaning of *agape*. Along with obedience is the promise of the Holy Spirit. We are not supposed to search within ourselves to find the will to obey. A heart of obedience is a gift from God and instilled in us by His Holy Spirit.

Any relationship, whether it begins as a relationship of circumstance or as a relationship of purpose, has the potential of becoming a relationship of fulfillment if both parties possess a heart of obedience that originates from and is empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Relationships of Fulfillment Accomplish Great Things for God.

Jesus made a startling disclosure when He said:

Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, shall he do also; and greater [works] than these shall he do; because I go to the Father.[[2]](#endnote-2)

What an awesome promise! It is difficult to conceive of any work that would be greater than what Jesus did during His time on earth. Perhaps He will tell us what He meant during the great wedding feast of the Lamb. We will all be seated around His table dressed in white garments, the garments He has given us identified only as “*the righteous acts of the saints*”.[[3]](#endnote-3) Without a doubt, our ability to reach the level of fulfillment in our relationships will have something to do with those works because it is in the relationships of fulfillment that we most glorify Him.

Relationships of Fulfillment Enjoy an Enduring Peace.

Before we leave John chapter 14, we need to notice one more truth that identifies a relationship of fulfillment. After Jesus taught about the coming Holy Spirit, Who would enable His disciples to obey Him, and after He promised that they would do greater works than He did, He said, “*Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful*”.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Following the topic of peace throughout the Old and New Testaments provides a rewarding study. Mankind is longing for peace, but there will never be peace without a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul, when counseling two women involved in a conflict at Philippi, instructed them:

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things; and the God of peace shall be with you.[[5]](#endnote-5)

James instructed Christians to consider God’s wisdom:

But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.[[6]](#endnote-6)

Relationships of fulfillment are opportunities for God’s children to enjoy His peace as they relate to each other in the Body of Christ. It is a sad commentary today that many in the world appear to be enjoying a greater degree of peace than those in the family of God.

Relationships of Fulfillment Bear Fruit to the Glory of God.

In John chapter 15 we have the metaphor of the vine and the branches of fruit. Many stumble over the passage because they want to read into it the concept of initial salvation. Perhaps what leads many astray is their view of branches. Study a grapevine. Where does the vine end and the branches begin? There is no distinct separation. The branches on a vine are part of the vine, not appendages. The same is true of the clusters of fruit. This is why Jesus used the metaphor. He was resting His expectation of glorifying the Father upon His relationship with His followers. We cannot bear fruit without Him, and, in a real sense, He cannot bear fruit without us.

The vine metaphor is a perfect illustration of relationships of fulfillment. Fulfillment involves mutual effort in the relationship so that both parties enjoy the fruit of that relationship to the glory of God.

Relationships of fulfillment involve genuine intimacy.

We do not have many relationships in which we would want to, nor it would be wise to, divulge our inner thoughts. This is especially true in relationships of circumstance. Why would we want to entrust such a precious possession to someone who might tread it under foot like a pearl before a swine? Yet we live in a society where individuals are encouraged to do this everyday.

Full self-disclosure is usually not wise in relationships of purpose as well. While we should never misrepresent the truth about ourselves, neither are we required to tell all in every situation. It is like wearing clothes. Parts of our bodies need to be seen and parts of our bodies do not. The circumstances determine the amount we reveal. In a doctor’s officer, we might need to show more than in the swimming pool.

I realize that an illustration of clothing may seem a little overdone, but consider what is happening today. The natural inhibitions of people are being dismantled under the guise of personal freedom. As individuals walk about with more and more of their bodies exposed, they are also calling in to talk radio and television and going on stage to reveal more and more about themselves for the purpose of titillating a drooling public. Even Christian radio and television is promoting the public exposure of intimate details of relationships that serve only one purpose—satisfying the curiosity of those who have no right to see and hear what is presented.

If we are ever to achieve fulfillment in our relationships, we must learn what to share, when to share it, and with whom to share it. Only those who know how to share themselves properly with their partner will experience true fulfillment in that relationship.

A few months ago, while sitting in a doctor’s office, I saw a portion of a daytime television program. I had never seen the program before—and I hope I never see it again. The program had to do with forgiveness. The format consisted of an individual who had a secret to share that they had never shared with their partner. The individual was supposed to share the secret to a live television audience with the partner in another room and a caption of his or her face shown simultaneously as the secret was revealed. On that program, a wife revealed something she had never told her husband even though they had been married for several years. The secret was that she was still married to another man. The wife then moved to a large elaborate doorway and waited to see if her husband would step out and offer her his forgiveness.

I cannot imagine anything more destructive to a relationship, nor anything more horrifying than such a blatant disregard for the feelings and rights of the partner in the relationship. This couple probably received a lot of money to entertain the audience with this act of exhibitionism, but how could the relationship ever be restored once it has been so degraded? If we are ever to achieve fulfillment in our relationships, we must learn how to share intimacy so that it builds the relationship and does not violate it.

Relationships That Can Experience Fulfillment:

What kinds of relationships are there in which we can expect to reach fulfillment? The most obvious relationship is our relationship with the three persons of the Godhead. Next would be a marriage relationship. But these do not exhaust the possibilities. We should be able to reach a level of fulfillment with almost anyone who is born again and with whom we share biblical love.

A Relationship of Fulfillment with God

We must start this list with God. It is God who makes possible any relationship of fulfillment. It was popular a few years ago to speak of the “*I/Thou*” relationship, which meant that we needed to identify who we are in order to identify who God is. This was the call of the existentialist who claimed to be a Christian to a world blinded by angst or dread.

The Bible, when properly understood, presents the opposite view. When we see God as He has revealed Himself to us in His Word, we will be able to discover who we are. When we begin with a relationship of fulfillment with God, we will then be able to establish relationships of fulfillment with each other.

A Relationship of Fulfillment in Marriage

Moses said that Adam and Eve would become one flesh in the Garden of Eden. We were never told in the Old Testament what the one-flesh relationship was like. The next time we find the concept is in the Gospels, where Jesus taught about divorce. While there is still much disagreement on the exact implication of His teaching, one thing is sure, adultery and fornication destroy a one-flesh relationship.

Ephesians 5:22-33 is the only place where we find an explanation of what a one-flesh relationship is. We can see that the one-flesh relationship is like the relationship between Christ and His church. The reason why it was not explained before was because the relationship between Christ and His church had never been revealed before. Just as the relationship between Christ and His church requires obedience and serving, so the one-flesh relationship requires obedience and serving. In a God-honoring marriage, the one-flesh relationship is the ultimate expression of a relationship of fulfillment between human beings in this life.

Now that we have the full revelation of the relationship between Christ and His church, one would think every Christian marriage would achieve this level of fulfillment. Yet statistics show otherwise. Why is it that divorce among Christians is almost as frequent as among non-Christians? It is because Christians are building their marriages on the failed philosophies of the world and the false love of fallen man instead of upon the Word of God and biblical love. Because of this families are torn apart, society lacks a clear witness regarding the truth of Christ, and the Savior is not receiving the glory He deserves. We need to tune out the false philosophies of the world and return to the Bible for the patter for our one-flesh relationships. Then marriage will reach the level of fulfillment made possible by Christ.

Relationships of Fulfillment Between Individuals of the Same Sex

Not only do the false philosophies of the world prevent individuals from enjoying a relationship of fulfillment with God and fulfillment in marriage, they prevent individuals from enjoying relationship of fulfillment with members of the same sex. Homosexuality has been around since the beginning of time, and the Bible clearly condemns it. However, now that absolute truth has been dispensed with, now that society dictates what are acceptable relationships rather than the Word of God, and now that behaviorists have determined to their satisfaction that homosexuality is merely an acceptable alternative lifestyle because individuals are born that way, having a relationship of fulfillment with a member of the same sex is very difficult.

On the one hand, individuals of the same sex are afraid to draw close into relationships of fulfillment because of the stigma placed on it by society. If two men appear to be enjoying a close relationship with each other, they are automatically labeled gay. On the other hand, by teaching that homosexuality is an acceptable lifestyle, and that it is one a person cannot avoid because he is born that way, those who are entrapped in it have little hope of overcoming it, even if they want to. They have been pre-conditioned by society to think, act, and feel like a homosexual. The false philosophies of Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Behaviorism work together to reinforce an addictive behavior learned either by accident or taught to them by someone preying on them.

The good news is that such falsehood can be refuted with the truth. Sinful sexual behavior is not unique to our society. Individuals can escape enslavement to addictive sexual behavior, whether it be homosexuality, pedophilia, pornography, or any other pattern of behavior inconsistent with God’s revealed will. Those who are born again and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells are declared to be temples for holy service to God.

Many societies throughout history were destroyed by the gangrene of godless uncontrolled sexual behavior. None was more decadent than Roman culture, especially at Corinth where the temple to Aphrodite, the love goddess, was the cultural centerpiece. It is said that there were one thousand prostitutes in the city when Paul visited. To the Christians, Paul wrote:

Do you not know ow that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! Or do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body [with her?] For He says, “The two will become one flesh.” But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit [with Him.] Flee immorality. Every [other] sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Illicit sex was not more addicting then, nor is it any less a sin now. The same Lord, who appealed through Paul to leave off that kind of immorality and join in relationships of fulfillment through God-honoring marriages, can save us and heal our land today. There is power in His blood to save us even from those sins.

We can and should form relationships of fulfillment with members of the same sex. It is God’s purpose and a means of great blessing for us. One prominent example of such a relationship was the relationship between David and Jonathan in the Old Testament. We read in 1 Samuel 20:17, “*Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved own life.*” Later, at the death of Jonathan, David cried, “*I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women*”.[[8]](#endnote-8)

To see the relationship between Jonathan and David as anything but holiness and godliness is to torture the context, to deny God’s revelation, and to make God a liar. What we see here is confirmation that relationships of fulfillment can be achieved between members of the same sex. It should be easier and even more fulfilling among Christians who enjoy the same indwelling Holy Spirit.

Relationships of Fulfillment Between Members of the Opposite Sex Who Are Not Married to Each other

Can members of the opposite sex who are not married to each other form relationships of fulfillment? I believe the answer is yes, when we understand that biblical love can bring fulfillment to any relationship. Since biblical love can only be expressed in a manner consistent with God’s will, it will not involve behavior that is sinful in God’s eyes or that harms other individuals or the relationships of others. Entered into wisely and with the purpose of glorifying Christ, safeguards will be erected to prevent the relationship from being dashed upon the rocks of sinful passion or destroying other God-ordained relationships.

A Christian man and woman who are not married to each other are still members of the same family. They are brother and sister in Christ. There are several passages that teach how to treat members of the opposite sex outside of marriage. Paul wrote:

Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but [rather] appeal to [him] as a father, [to] the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, [and] the younger women as sisters, in all purity.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Not every Christian should automatically assume they can build relationship of fulfillment with members of the opposite sex to whom they are not married. Those who recognize in themselves a lack of self-control should avoid such relationships. Remember that the overall nature of relationships of purpose is that they first serve God and then serve the other person in the relationship. Nothing should ever be done that is not so motivated.

If either of the individuals in the relationship is married, the spouse should be a part of the relationship. He or she should know that his or her interests are being protected and served. It is imperative that limits be set on self-disclosure otherwise great harm will come to many other relationships.

The church should also be involved, so that other brothers and sisters in Christ can help to form a barrier to sin. I have known individuals who, under the guise of serving a member of the opposite sex, have violated the other person, and have done great harm not only to the other person but to themselves and others. If there is even the slightest hint that the relationship is going that direction, it is better to end it immediately for the sake of everyone involved. Fulfillment should be sought in another relationship where such dangers do not exist.

While the world apart from Christ may think they are achieving relationships of fulfillment and parade around extolling them, history tells a different story. Only those who are born again and who express genuine biblical love are able to achieve relationships of fulfillment. This kind of relationship is the crowning achievement of God’s grace and love provided through His Son, Jesus Christ. Learning to build relationships God’s way will overcome the ravages of the false philosophies of Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Behaviorism and enable us to reach the level of fulfillment in our relationships.

Biblical Love Produces Unity

We hear a lot about unity inside and outside the church today. If you listen close, it has the same tempo and the same hollowness that comes from the same false philosophies, Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Behaviorism. The call is to unity, but the message is that there is no absolute truth, so any truth will do. The world is absurd; we are individually at fault, so we must create a new existence. We can accomplish all of this by changing the environment in our churches through contemporary music, creative expression, and new forms of worship. Then the world will see in us the unity that pleases men.

Not everyone who calls for unity among Christians is motivated by false philosophies. Paul commanded individual Christians to ‘*preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*”.[[10]](#endnote-10) However, any unity achieved at the expense of truth is motivated by false philosophies. Jesus said, “*Sanctify them in the truth, they word is truth.*”[[11]](#endnote-11)

The text used by the liberals in the past is the same text to justify the new call for unity, the prayer of Jesus in John 17:20-23. Yet when we keep our Lord’s prayer in context, we see that His prayer for unity flows out of the relationships He desired to have with His church once His work on the cross was complete, He ascended back to the Father, and the Holy Spirit indwelled the church. To see this in the content, we need to go back to the end of John chapter 16. Jesus said:

These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; for the Father Himself loves [*phileo*] you, because you have love [*phileo*] Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.[[12]](#endnote-12)

As John introduced that high-priestly prayer of Jesus, he recalled how Jesus concluded His last few lessons to the disciples. In this one short statement, Jesus summarized what His relationship with His disciples would be like after His ascension and after the Holy Spirit indwells the church. It will be the ultimate expression of biblical love because it will be a relationship in which God the Father singles out as objects of His affection those who have affection for Jesus. This affection will be based on the obedient hearts made possible through rebirth and the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. It will be a relationship of fulfillment because it will involve complete and open self-disclosure by the self-revealing God to His newly transformed creatures.

This is the unity for which Jesus prayed in John chapter 17. It is a unity of obedience, affection, and intimacy. It is the level of relationship that the three persons of the Godhead enjoy with each other. It is the level of relationship that God shares with us, and that we can enjoy with each other here on earth when we learn to love biblically. We will never achieve that kind of relationship by patterning our thinking and our lives after the world. Relationships of fulfillment can only be experienced when we first become one with God through Jesus Christ. John warned against seeking fulfillment elsewhere:

Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. And the world is passing away, and the lusts; but the one who does the will of God abides forever.[[13]](#endnote-13)

Biblical Love Is the alternative to Playing Philosophical Games.

A disturbing correlation between all the school shootings is that, as the shooters were engaged in their heinous acts, they all seemed to be acting out a game. They appeared to be characters in a drama reminiscent of a movie, video game, or some other form of entertainment.

I have chosen to describe the three philosophies of Gnosticism, Existentialism, and Behaviorism in terms of games people play. This is not to be derogatory or dismissive of those philosophies but to demonstrate the correlation between the actions of the youth involved and the philosophies so glibly believed and passed on as truth. It is one thing to sit in an ivory tower debating philosophical nuances; it is another to see the consequences of those false philosophies lived out in bold relief.

It is not surprising that those who promote philosophies that relieve mankind of its responsibilities also refuse to accept responsibility for the havoc their philosophies inflict upon the human race. Once we understand the philosophies and their effects upon human behavior and accept the better way presented in the Bible through biblical love, we as a society will be ready to stop playing such deadly games. Then, through the power God provides, we will be ready to shoulder our God-given responsibilities, to establish healthy relationships, and to take those relationships to the level of fulfillment.

However, we must first stop playing philosophical games.

1. cf. John 13:34-35. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. John 14:11-12. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Revelation 19:8. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. John 14:27. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Philippians 4:6-9. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. James 3:17-18. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. 1 Corinthians 6:15-20. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. 2 Samuel 1:26. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. 1 Timothy 5:1-2. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Ephesians 4:2. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. John 17:17. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. John 16:25-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. 1 John 2:15-17. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)