

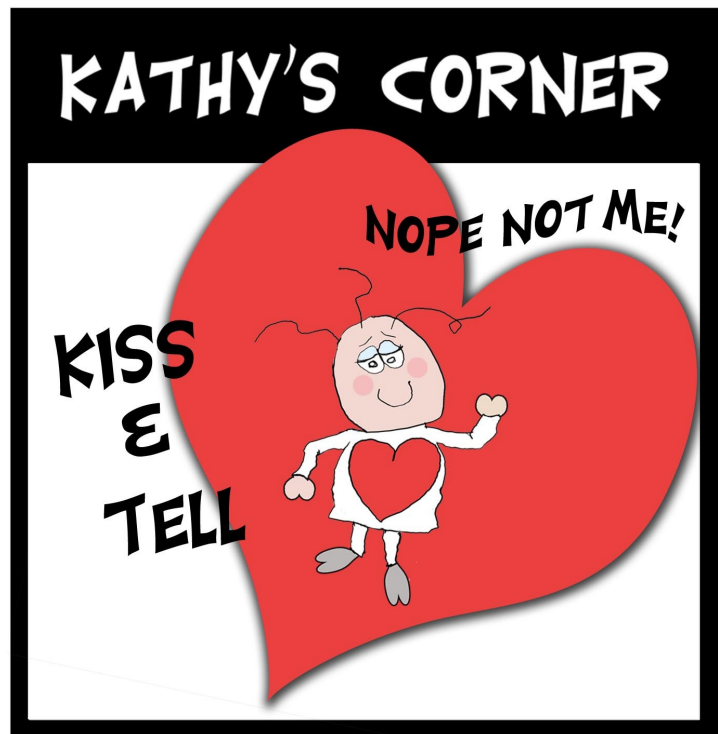
Are you enveloped in the love of God?

Have you gotten past any shame or guilt that satan wants you to live in? Are you tasting the abundant life that Jesus said He came to bring us?

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NIV) There is so much emphasis on faith these days, and rightly so. Faith is the key to receiving all we have been given in Christ. Hope goes right along with it. In hoping, we hold onto the things we desire that are not yet realized, through faith. “But,” Paul says of these three, “The greatest of these is love.”

Even today, the splendor of God can be seen through supernatural signs and wonders, but satan can and does imitate these as he did through the magicians in Egypt as Moses threw down his staff to demonstrate God’s power. The superiority of the power of God was evident as Moses’ staff-turned-serpent swallowed up those of the magicians. The splendor of God is shown in **the most superb way** through the love of God in Christ Jesus. Though the devil has much success in seducing men through their lusts and desires, offering them counterfeits that cannot satisfy and giving them bondage instead; he is incapable of giving them the one thing that will truly satisfy. Satan doesn’t have it. He never will have it. He is totally and forever void of it. He is empty of LOVE. Everything that love is, satan is not. If we could ever grasp the depth of the evil in him and his offers, we would be willing to oppose him with all our being. Language is so insufficient sometimes. Words like evil, bad, wicked, darkness cannot express satan’s total depravity and the corruption he desires to spread to all of God’s creation. Indeed, he has been very successful in spreading corruption. Mike’s message last Sunday was entitled, “Which Side Are You On?” Are you on Jesus’ side—the side of life, or on satan’s side—the side of corruption? You **are** on one side or the other!

1 Corinthians 13 makes it clear that all those good things we do, the sacrifices we make, even the spiritual gifts we are given and use, all mean nothing without love. In Revelation 2:1-4 John writes what the Lord said to the church at Ephesus, **“I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.”** (or “You don’t love me or each other as you did at first!”--NLT) I see this as emphasizing the importance of relationship to our Father, Brother, and constant Companion, as well as to people God has to cross our path. By our being created in the image of God, we—His people, are capable of the very thing of which satan is incapable—LOVE. Unfortunately, in the fall (Adam and Eve) that capacity was greatly diminished, and for it to be completely restored we must be “born again.” Through new birth we then have the life of our Holy Spirit who sheds God’s love abroad in our hearts. (From Romans 5:5) We become capable of a pure and undefiled love for God and for others through our Holy Spirit.



Love begets love. We love Him because He first loved us. As His love in us grows, we find ourselves loving others in the physical realm as well as in the spiritual. James said pure religion was the kind that helped widows and orphans. Paul was instructed to remember the poor. Paul said he was eager to do it. Stephen and Philip and five others were appointed to make sure certain people weren't overlooked in ministry, probably distribution for physical needs. God wants us to meet basic *needs* of the needy. Most of us, including myself, don't know what it is like to be truly needy. We may lack some conveniences or luxuries that others possess, but thanks be to God, our basic physical needs have always been met or we wouldn't still be here. Our emotional and spiritual needs, however, may have suffered greatly over the course of our lives. Jesus wants to fix these also. Jesus is our healer, deliverer and restorer in these areas. The abundant life that He supplies is available! I am one recipient of His ongoing healing, deliverance and restoration. He never ceases to amaze me!

I was recently blessed with a very substantial material gift. (This is not the first time.) Although it is not yet in my possession, I know the givers, and they are solid. I have faith as if I had already received it because their character is so caring and trustworthy. In the same way God is good to His word—His promises, and to His character as shown through Jesus. He will never be untrue to us or Himself. I feed my faith on this as I get to know Him better. Now back to what I was saying about the gift I received. Our God supplies all of our needs according to His riches in Christ Jesus—but this gift wasn't really a necessity, rather, it is a convenience to make my work less frustrating and less time consuming and more exciting. The gift was unexpected, humbling, and a blessing. It filled my heart with love for the givers and for God whose love is so obviously in their hearts. A very pure generosity produced what the following scripture said it would. **“This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of the Lord’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, others will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you.”** (2 Corinthians 9:12-14 NIV) Our actions support the truth of the scriptures. His love through His people are to me “rivers of living water.”

Although I am not the kind to “kiss and tell,” :) I thought to include the immediate response of my heart to God. When I open my heart to others I always feel vulnerable, so I have been hesitant to include this. I wondered if it were appropriate to share the intimacy of special moments with Him with you. Then I thought of the Song of Solomon—the Song of Songs, filled with intimacy. I think it will be okay.

“Ah, Lord Jesus, I just have to worship You. There is no end to what You pour out for us.

As I praise You, fully aware of Your presence, I just love being with You.

To be ever aware of Your love and Your abiding is my desire. You are worth more to me than all else.

To see You and Your wondrous works in those who seek You refreshes my heart. Oh, God, I want this Love—even you Lord, for all my family, friends, and church; and for the lost who don't begin to know what they are missing.

You truly are the one who satisfies every desire of our hearts, every nook and cranny of our beings.

Oh, but You have no God to bless you!
—Just your bride! I love you, Lord!”

During this short time of worship a song came to mind:

*Lord, I want to live my life to please You,
I bring my heart before you to remold.
Make of me a vessel fit for honor,
That I might shine for you as sparkling gold.*

*To be pleasing You, pleasing You,
This is all I really want to do.
To be pleasing You, pleasing You,
This is all I really want to do.*

*Lord, I lift my heart in full surrender,
All that I hold dear I give to You.
Purify my heart and make me holy,
So I might walk the way that's pleasing You.*

*To be pleasing You, pleasing You,
This is all I really want to do.
To be pleasing You, pleasing You,
This is all I really want to do.*

(From Praise 13 – Maranatha Music)