

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Implementing Christlike Love in the Johnson Grove Baptist Church

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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Month and Year Here

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This research project was paramount, the title expressed the vision and purpose of the researcher as an under-shepherd of Christ. Implementing Christlike Love was not just designed for this church, but the key principle that was used in this project can inspire others. The problem addressed was a lack of true Christlike love in this church. Believers assumed that loving others would be automatic but loving like Christ requires God's help.

The purpose of this project was to appraise and resolve the perceived lack of Christlike love within the Johnson Grove Baptist Church. This researcher sought to provide a remedy for the perceived lack of love within the church. The project resulted in evidence that the church lacked love. Christlike love was difficult to project without biblical training and the help of the Holy Spirit.

The researcher provided ten training modules on Christlike love, ten sermons focused on Christlike love and two questionnaires consisting of the same content, one before and one after the training, to determine if the training influenced the participants to love more like Christ. The participants scored higher on the second questionnaire after studying the modules on Christlike love and listening to the Christlike love sermons. They also realized the need to depend on the Holy Spirit to help them love like Christ.

Hatred promotes racism and its ugly tentacles held captive many church members and had a paralyzing effect on some members in their attempt to love others. It crushed their confidence and hindered cross-cultural racial relationships. However, all churches can improve and love like Christ and demonstrate to an evil world, what it means to love everyone like the Savior.

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DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

LUSOD *Liberty University School of Divinity*

Chapter 1

Introduction

The Johnson Grove Baptist Church traditionally sought to be a bulwark within the black Hephzibah community and pillar of social achievements. It had a rich history and never-ending dream of helping the impoverished, championing civil rights, and being a place of refuge for those wounded by racism and oppression. However, within the last few years, the church lost its luster and appeal. Families moved away to find greener pastures. The youth went off to college and settled in distant locations. Outreach into the community was placed on the backburner. The church membership declined.

The remaining members focused their energies on the shortcomings of one another instead of seeking to reach the lost, by the grace of God. Their love for one another waxed cold and clicks within the church demanded loyalty and gleamed with superficial love. The members were more loyal to their traditions above the Word of God. Many of their traditions contradicted God's Word and promoted Pharisaic legalistic attitudes. This lack of a solid biblical heritage encumbered their commitment to biblical truth. This researcher believes that knowing Christ as Savior and Lord and having knowledge of his will as it relates to love and depending upon Him will enable believers to love like Christ.

Johnson Grove, and other African American churches, historically were filled with the overwhelming influence of terroristic and institutional racism that knocked them to their knees and true deliverance could only be found in Yahweh. Many neighborhoods felt unsafe not only from gang violence but from policemen, who didn't value the life of black citizens. How could the black youth find relief, when neighborhoods were rocked with violence and more youth were in prison than in college. The church was a quasi-place of refuge because many lacked sound

biblical preaching and teaching. Therefore, opinions varied in providing solutions to the troubles within the black community. Within the church there were liberal, conservative, and cultic views of deliverance that clashed and struggled for preeminence. The Jehovah Witnesses a Christ without divinity, The black Muslims rejected Christ and offered their version of Islam, the Shrine of Black Madonna offered a black Mary and a black Jesus that would deliver blacks from oppression. Many predominately African American seminaries taught liberation theology and demoted Christ from the Anointed One of God to an ordinary man. Thus, the church was divided in its understanding and in providing a remedy. Without a true relationship with Christ and a biblical foundation of the Holy Scriptures, the church fell short in representing Christ and walking in his love.

Ministry Context

The site for this research was primarily Johnson Grove Baptist Church, located in Hephzibah, Georgia. Hephzibah was a symbolic name used by the prophet Isaiah for Zion, or the City of Jerusalem. Hephzibah is located near Augusta, Georgia

Johnson Grove Baptist Church has been in existence for one hundred and three years. It has a rich cultural heritage. However, the church was dying because it had no youth and 85% of its membership was between fifty and seventy years old. The church was dying and necessitated a swift paradigm shift, with outreach into local community. It was also vital for the church to perform self-assessments and examine how far they have allowed their traditions to drift them away from God's truth and spiritual growth. This likewise affected the church's numerical growth.

The church building required updating and repair. The church lacked a central heating and air conditioning system and yearned for modernization. The building needed a fresh painting

from the inside to the out. The parking areas lacked pavement and the grounds cried-out for landscaping and beautification. When these matters were addressed, the Johnson Grove Baptist Church was more welcoming and appealing to visitors. The members also helped change the church's situation by demonstrating a humble attitude towards visitors and one-another.

This African American churchman sought to address and change the diabolical image of blackness. Gayraud S. Wilmore pictured blackness as a symbol used by whites to identify sub-people who were evil inhuman savages. Blackness became the image of a slave destined to servitude and a life of ill-treatment.¹ Shaken by the treacherous winds of racism, buffeted by the terrorism of lynching and deprivation of humanity, the church sought to find solace in Christ. However, deeply embedded within the church as an iceberg partially revealed on the surface is its fleeting ability to love itself.

The membership of Johnson Grove sought to help themselves and find consolation in music. There were some famous and talented blacks, who used music and song in efforts of alleviating their pain. They sought to transform their minds and uplift their souls from shame and bigotry. Aretha Franklin was a legendary singer and the daughter of the great orator of the gospel and liberation theology, and champion of civil rights, Rev. C. L. Franklin. She wrote a hit song about respect and honor that inspired and gave enthusiasm to a nation in darkness, seeking light to illuminate their black world.² She sang about respect and demanded everyone to respect themselves. James Brown was another famous singer and dancer, who wrote and sung about appreciating blackness. He inspired the black populous to announce to a world that rejected their

¹ Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 217.

² DeNeen L. Brown, "How Aretha Franklin's 'Respect' became an anthem for civil rights and feminism," *The Washington Post*, August 16, 2-18, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2018/08/14/how-aretha-franklins-respect-became-an-anthem-for-civil-rights-and-feminism>.

blackness, to affirm it with pride and sought to give dignity and worth to black skin.³ He demanded that each one announce to the world that it's okay to be black and proud. Brown encouraged this researcher to appreciate being black. Blackness was not a curse, but important enough to the Creator that he created people black. The prophet Jeremiah acknowledged that blacks could not change their skin and implied that it was by Yahweh's design.⁴ Christians at Johnson Grove wrestled with affirming and appreciating the skin that God had placed them in. How can they truly love others without loving themselves? The dehumanizing effect of racism short-circuited their perspective of viewing themselves as created in the image of God, to a view of themselves as humanity's dark and unloving problem child. The music lifted their spirit, especially spirituals and gospel music. Music provided relief from the constant dehumanizing voices that played in the minds of black members which shattered dreams of equality and hopes of justice for all.

The black church in the Southern United States has found it difficult to appreciate being black because of the hatred of discrimination, oppression, and whites making it a symbol of evil and being less than human. How could the members of Johnson Grove overlook the face in the mirror, when dark skin and curly hair had become targets and death traps by police? Members of Johnson Grove did not understand why they lacked the support of their white brothers and sisters in Christ in standing against the ill-treatments of racism. The black members wondered if their blackness could ever be beautiful in the eyes of all people. Can blackness ever become an emblem of love and equality with all humanity? Historically slavery, oppression, Jim Crowism,

³ "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud) Meaning," Shmoop, accessed March 28, 2020, www.shmoop.com/say-it-loud/meaning.html. In some respects, James Brown's "Say It Loud (I'm Black and I'm Proud)" is a musical version of Stokely Carmichael's "Black Power" speech of October 1966. Some of the very same ideas are there; only Brown's message is more concise, less intellectualized, and, well, easier to dance to.

⁴ Jeremiah 13:23; Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the Authorized King James Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994).

institutional racism, nullification of humanity, and a failure to depend on YHWH had weakened the African American church's ability to love like Christ.

The black church has allowed self-hatred to be entrenched down within its soul for over four-hundred-years. The church of Jesus Christ failed to stand together as one body in Christ when faced with racism. The sinful pride of white supremacy crippled relationships with black and white believers in Christ. Besides, the black church allowed the negative influences of racism to hinder its love for itself and others. However, this should not be used as an excuse or scapegoat. The Black Christians' requirement to be witnesses to the lost around the world has not diminished because of the evils one race perpetrated toward the other. African American believers can be effective witnesses to whites and all nations, if their spiritual focus is not lost in the muddy waters of fear of rejection. The church can pray and love all nations with the love of Christ and gently reach them with the gospel. Besides, their hearts must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit of God to know that no man is superior to another. Any attitudes of supremacy, white, black, red, or yellow, is sinful as well. No man or nation is supreme before God. African American children grow up with a distorted view of their personhood and appreciation of God's gift of skin color. This researcher recalls the blackness of African American childhood in the Southern United States and desired to change the face in the mirror to be white.

Most attendees at Johnson Grove Baptist Church saw blackness as a sign of rejection, while the lighter-skinned blacks were deemed the extra privileged and more tolerable. Alton B. Pollard III and Carol B. Duncan sought to not only encourage blacks to appreciate their blackness but to also appreciate the fact that they were Africans.⁵ Many blacks in the American experience failed to fully understand the implications of being African Americans. The identity of

⁵ Alton B. Pollard III and Carol B. Duncan, *The Black Church Studies Reader: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 6.

African Americans as Africans has elements of a disconnect, even though it is true that they originated from Africa. Africa was deemed uncivilized and the land of savages, when in actuality, great world leaders and even all nations originated from Africa. Black church members felt detached from their roots, history, and culture while trying to make sense of what it truly meant to be an African American.

African American church members have been traumatized by white supremacists. When they looked at the history of American slavery up to the present hour, the black churchman bears the invisible wounds of terroristic traumatization. Due to the rise in multimedia devices, thousands of blacks can now see how one of their members is killed with no regard for human life. Therefore, seeking to love like Christ is difficult. Church members seek to work through painful images in their minds of their sons and daughters being slaughtered by a white racist in a police uniform. Where was Christ when the child was murdered at the hands of those who were supposed to be upholding the law? Victims of traumatization find it hard to learn to trust again. But God provided hope that one day justice will prevail. One day the Sovereign Lord of glory will render justice for all. The Black church members wrestled with the deep wounds of traumatization, both emotionally and mentally, even as they attempted to muster the intestinal fortitude to walk in Christlike love, while shaken by the internal wounds of injustice.

The churchmen at Johnson Grove Baptist Church learned to hold on to God's unchanging hand. They knew that without hope in the Lord, they would be consumed by the jaws of death. The bottom-line was that the members kept hope alive, and trusted Almighty God, the Great and Powerful Liberator, who broke the chains of injustice and provided freedom and equality for all. The under-currents of hope helped black members make it and inspired them to hold on to see what the end was going to be. When the storms of racism raged, they knew that Jesus was the

Captain of their souls and he could calm all trouble waters. Therefore, when this researcher looked into the eyes of each member, there was a story to be told. Each one had learned to endure hardness, hold their minds intact, calm their emotions, and hold on to God's unchanging hands.

The members of Johnson Grove hold to the spiritual belief that God would make a way. God would make a way through all the pain, sorrow, and hard times. God would make a way, even from rock-bottom. God would make away because trouble doesn't always last. God would make a way, even though it's exceedingly difficult to show love from a place of heartache. God would make a way in the face of great loss. Through it all God was in control. Through it all Jesus was trustworthy. Through it all Jesus would make a way, and everything would be all right.

Therefore, it is Christ, who each member must trust with their souls, and he will help each one grow in his love from above. The members were like abused children that the Lord healed and illuminated with love. Their abuse came from both near and far. Their abuse came from the office, the classrooms, the courthouse, the political arena, and even the church. Someway, somehow, reaching deep from within and with confidence in the Lord, the church member had an opened heart to love. The seeds of Christlike love would germinate and flourish, with divine help from above.

The African American church struggled to exhibit Christlike love and many within the church failed to appreciate blackness. Karen D. Zscheib sought to help blacks understand that God's nature is to love, and it reflects his mission for the church in promoting healing, justice, and easing suffering and pain.⁶ The Lord God of heaven and earth, the Lord Jesus Christ

⁶ Karen D. Zscheib, "Love as a Starting Point for Pastoral Theological Reflection," *Pastoral Psychology*, 63, no. 5-6 (2014): 705-717.

promoted a new appreciation within the African American church of its humanity in love, dignity, and upmost respect.

Johnson Grove Baptist Church has a heart to grow and change to meet the needs of the local community. The church highlighted their desire to grow and reach out to the community as a key priority. This researcher serves as the Senior Pastor. The calling to serve this church came during the onslaught of the Coronavirus. The dynamics of ministry immediately changed. The church was shut down for several weeks and worship services and Bible study were provided through Zoom meetings and Conference Calls. The older and sickly members of the church were afraid to attend worship services in person. They became virtual members only.

Johnson Grove Baptist Church embraced God's vision and secured itself on a biblical trajectory for the glory of God. This researcher started worship services again, in the church building. Not all members felt safe to return, therefore, worship services continued to be provided through Zoom meetings and Conference Calls.

This researcher has been committed to preaching and teaching the gospel and the full counsel of God. Christ is Lord of the church, and this researcher serves as Christ's servant and under-shepherd. The church was ready to move forward in the power of the Holy Spirit and make positive changes for Christ. Johnson Grove Baptist Church sought to display Christlike love among its membership and inspired others to come and join the church. This researcher trusted that each member would be led by the Holy Spirit and love others by his power.

Therefore, the church could be confident that the Lord would add to the church according to his will and it would grow in his love. The church could be multiracial and sensitive to the needs of other cultures, with a heart that inspires everyone and possesses a welcoming attitude towards all nations. If Christ is the Lord of the church and the Holy Spirit guided the

church, everyone would feel welcomed, loved, and cared for. This would be the true essence of Christlike love that's demonstrated in the lives of believers daily and used to touch everyone present, or close enough, to feel its effects.

Problem Presented

The problem this project addressed was a lack of true Christlike love in Johnson Grove Baptist Church. There was an underlining assumption among church members that Christlike love was automatic and took no effort. However, the church fell short of loving one another as Christ loves and missed the mark. The church needed help from above to fulfill Christ's command to love as he loves. There is hope that this church will fulfill its mission and calling from the Lord and truly represent him amid a corrupt and evil world. It must rise with God's help from the quicksand of its troubles and pain and learn to truly lean on Jesus. Christ departed and the Comforter or Holy Spirit came, and He is the source or only true means through which loving like Christ can be accomplished. God made a way for the least of these to experience and walk in his love.

There is reason to believe that this is not just a problem at Johnson Grove. Other churches may be struggling with this issue. How can a church be biblical, fundamental, evangelical, or traditional without welcoming everyone in love? How can church members truly love God without loving one-another? Johnson Grove's problem is perpetuated throughout America and throughout the world. This problem is greater than first imagined. Since Johnson Grove members can receive positive resolve for this issue, other churches can benefit as well.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry action research was to evaluate and remediate the perceived lack of Christlike love within Johnson Grove Baptist Church. This researcher focused

this project on this problem to alleviate the perceived lack of love within Johnson Grove Baptist Church. This issue falls short of pleasing Christ and hindered this church's mission in the world. It also testified to what God required of all believers and validated their love for their Creator.

When Christlike love is consistently demonstrated in and through the church, the world will know that the favor of God is upon the church and that the church is faithfully representing Jesus Christ. God's family on earth will look more like God's family in heaven,

Thus, the church could grow spiritually and numerically because everyone who enters it would feel loved, self-worth, and that God cared about them because believers would see people as God does, without bias feelings, but with true love from heaven. This love was given to all believers by the Holy Spirit and was available every day and throughout each day. If the church used this resource, God's love would be evident and empower all believers with agape love.

This researcher will make an assessment Johnson Grove churchman to discover if the perceived lack of Christlike love is evident and explore key factors that attribute to it. After examining and understanding why the members lack or have a perceived lack of this love, the researcher will seek to provide a way to help resolve the issue. The researcher views the problem as one with spiritual implications that necessitates divine intervention or reliance upon God's help in solving the problem. Therefore, spiritual means will be utilized which include the Bible, study of God's Word, self-examination, prayer, and trusting Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit to produce His love within each participant.

Basic Assumptions

This researcher had an underlining assumption that the Johnson Grove Baptist church membership would be cooperative and fully supportive of the research project. The participants' responsibilities included completing ten training classes facilitated by the researcher and ten

sermons on Christlike love. These classes and sermons would be designed to enhance the members' understanding of Christlike love and encourage them to walk in it. The participants will complete a questionnaire prior to the training, which will assess their attitudes, understanding, and practices concerning personal relationships. The researcher assumed that after the training, group interactions, and completion of all tasks, the members would have an increased understanding of Christlike love and have a greater commitment to practice it daily. Tom Nelson argued that the gospel had both compelled and empowered a robust love of saints for their neighbors.⁷ This researcher also assumes that the members would willingly participate in all details of the group's requirements and be present at each meeting. The alternative plan for completing the project during the Coronavirus Pandemic may require the participants to refrain from group meetings and the participants will complete the questionnaires and the training modules individually. Many church members were afraid to come to church for a meeting and even worship. This researcher trusted that the members would effectively be participant in all aspects of the project and complete it.

Definitions

Antichrist: This term refers to the man of sin who will exalt himself as God. He identifies with Satan and all that is sinful and evil. He will not only be against Christ, but he will also stand as Christ or in place of Christ.⁸

Biblical Justice: It is God's standard of the right according to the Scriptures. Biblical justice is the impartial and indeed unbiassed application of the rule of God's moral law in

⁷ Tom Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love: Investing in Your Community's Compassion and Capacity* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2017), 15.

⁸ DeJonge C. Haas and J. L. Swelengrebal, *1 John: A Translators Handbook on The Letters of John* (New York: United Bible Society, 1973), 24.

society. It demands accountability, equality, responsibility in the application of the Holy Scriptures in every aspect of society.⁹ Micah summed it up well in Micah 6:8 KJV, “He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

Black church: The black church, or the African American church, refers to the black American church from slavery to the present and includes a host of denominations. The black populous in America originated from Africa and became independent because it rejected the white church’s subhuman treatment.¹⁰

Black Power: It is the spirit of Jesus Christ in the black-white dialogue that enables the emancipation of African Americans from self-hatred and frees whites from racism. It gives worth to blacks and whites are forced to recognize their humanity.¹¹

Black Theology: It is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to make the gospel relevant to the struggles of black people from oppression. God’s revelation through Christ’s incarnation is a message of liberation.¹² Black theology emphasizes the black experience of suffering, degradation, and pain is where Christ is revealed and is the ultimate religious authority. Therefore, Christ identifies with and is on the side of blacks, who are suffering. His redemption delivers blacks from suffering and shame. Black Theology declares that God is the Liberator

⁹ Evans, Tony. *Oneness Embraced: Through the Eyes of Tony Evans*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2011) 262-263.

¹⁰ Pollard and Duncan, *The Black Church Studies*, 6.

¹¹ Cone, James H. and Gayraud, Wilmore S. *Black Theology: A Documentary History, Volume 1 1966—1979*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993) 66.

¹² Gayraud S. Wilmore. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of the Afro-American People*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983) 192.

who acts in history to deliver those in bondage and being treated less than human.¹³ Therefore, God's revelation is focused on liberating all those oppressed and subject to bondage. James Cone was its chief advocate.¹⁴

Christlike love: This refers to what it means to love as Christ himself in the power of the Holy Spirit; a selfless concern for the needs of others and does not seek to harm.¹⁵ This kind of love cannot be worked up by human effort, it requires divine intervention. The person that desires it must be born-again because the Holy Spirit produces this love in the lives of Christians.

Eurocentric: This term refers to Europe or Europeans. It emphasizes Anglo values and concerns. It has a European worldview.¹⁶

Jim Crowism: This word suggests a policy of racial segregation and marginalization of African Americans through a political system of hatred in America, after slavery ended.¹⁷ State and local laws were passed to oppress and dispossess African Americans. They were deemed second class citizens.

Jim Crow: This word was a slap in the face to African Americans, who had provided free labor through their enslavement. However, once emancipated, whites developed systematic racism through the politics and social segregation to continue hating and marginalizing the poor

¹³ Evans, James H. *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 152.

¹⁴ James H. Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2018), 46.

¹⁵ John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-10; 13:8-10; 1 Corinthians 13.

¹⁶ "Eurocentric," Merriam Webster Dictionary.com, Merriam-Webster, accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Eurocentric>.

¹⁷ "Jim Crowism" Dictionary.com, accessed March 29, 2020.

black slaves, who were freed.¹⁸ It was the systematic practice of segregating African Americans in the United States.

Institutional racism: This word implies that the various institutions foundational to America, developed policies of discriminatory and racial practices against African Americans. The political, economic, and education systems developed policies of hatred and segregation against blacks. It is a system that marginalizes of all non-whites, while extending privilege and exalting whites. It also prized segregation, to keep Blacks in their place and on the slippery slopes of nullification.¹⁹ America's institutions were instruments of oppression and injustice against its black citizens.

Kingdom Agenda: Tony Evans described it as the visible indication of the comprehensive rule of God over every area of life.²⁰ The Lord Jesus Christ preached in Matthew 4:17 KJV, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." The King that ruled God's kingdom was present.

Radicalism: This word implied action and inspired advocates of civil rights to demand justice and racial equality. Gayraud S. Wilmore argued that radicalism signified that race and color were the root of the problems of Western civilization and that the only lasting resolve would require a transformation of human relationships that respected the dignity and equality of African Americans.²¹

¹⁸ "Jim Crow" Encyclopedia Britannica.com, www.britannica.com/event/JimCrowlaw accessed March 29, 2020.

¹⁹ "Institutional Racism" Urbandictionary.com, accessed March 29, 2020.

²⁰ Evans, Tony. *Oneness Embraced: Through the Eyes of Tony Evans*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2011.

²¹ Gayraud S. Wilmore. *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of the Afro-American People*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), xii.

Multicultural: This word implies different cultures. It relates to various cultures in the world.²² Multicultural relates to diverse cultures or ethnic groups within a societal setting.

Race: A people group divided base on their physical traits as common among people of shared ancestry. According to the 2020 US Census, race categories are based on social definitions in the United States does not define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically.²³ This word is frequently used to identify African Americans because of their distinct skin color, which is referred to as black. African Americans, who are light-skinned or almost as fair skinned as Caucasians, even with a black father and white mother, are labeled black.

Glen Usry and Craig S. Keener described race as a socially determined category that is relative to physical characteristics. In the United States the categories distinct and highly inflexible, a person with any hint of African ancestry is considered Black. One who looks completely white or Caucasian but acknowledges some African ancestry are classified as Black.²⁴

Racism: This word indicates that one nation deems itself superior to other nations. Therefore, the nation despises, hates, and treats with dismay all those deemed inferior. Racism is sinful and blinds its advocates to a life of hate, bitterness, guilt, and shame.²⁵ Racism is a corrupt form of faith that alienates and divides people from one another. Racism contradicts what God's

²² "Multicultural," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/multicultural>.

²³ "Race" Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20supremacy>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2021.

²⁴ Craig S. Keener and Glen Usry. *Black Man's Religion: Can Christianity Be Afrocentric*. Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996). 59.

²⁵ "Racism," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, accessed March 28, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>.

word says about human beings. Some are rendered superior and others inferior. Therefore, it is an expression of the will to believe and suprarational. Racism assumes that black people are defective, which contradicts the Holy Scriptures and indeed God Himself.²⁶ Racism is the doctrine of devils, because it contradicts the word of God and is false teaching.

Oppression: It is the unjust and cruel exercise of authority over people.²⁷ African Americans have endured over 400-years of oppression and saw their deliverance as Moses' deliverance of the Children of Israel from Egypt. This word indicates abuse of power by whites over non-whites.

Social Justice: This word indicates a belief that all people should be treated equally and have the same rights. Everyone should be treated with dignity and respect and not deprived of human rights. Indeed, everyone's wellness should be secured with justice for all. Social Justice also includes the fair treatment of everyone in society, respecting their rights, and the unbiased distribution of resources to members of a community.

Victimology: It is embracing a victim's attitude as the core of one's identity. It is a pessimistic outlook that some African Americans possess under the oppressive thumb of whites in America that their situation or plight in life will never change. It is a self-defeating mindset that hinders racial reconciliation. Victimology views the world primarily through the lens of black suffering.²⁸

²⁶ Evans, James H. *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992) 104-106.

²⁷ "Oppression" *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20supremacy>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2021.

²⁸ Bradley, Anthony B. *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2010) 19-22.

White supremacy: It is the belief or conviction that the white race is inherently superior to other people and that white people should dominate other races.²⁹ The Nazis, Neo-Nazis, Ku Klux Klan, Proud Boys, and other hate groups lean on this view. This erroneous view based on pride, hatred, and satanic self-exaltation according to Isaiah 14:12-15, is supported by false scientific theory and unbiblical white churches.

YHWH (Yahweh): It is a tetragrammaton that consist of four consonants representing the ancient Hebrew name for Yahweh, Jehovah, or God. YHWH was deemed too sacred to pronounce, subsequently Adonai (Lord) was substituted.³⁰ God revealed his name to Moses in Exodus 3:14. God identified Himself as “I am.” God’s existence is not dependent upon anyone, yet everyone depends upon Him to exist. His name implies that God is the Self-Existent One. God is supreme and has all power in heaven and earth in his hands, and He was ready to deliver the children of Israel out of Egypt.³¹ Yahweh is Creator and Sustainer of all the has come into being. He is the I am that brought everything into being.

Limitations

This researcher trusted that the Johnson Grove Baptist Church participants would be forthcoming and honest in how they responded to the initial and final questionnaires. There was an apparent limitation in how the participants would respond to the training that was focused on enhancing Christlike love. This researcher could not control how the participants responded to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in response to biblically based teachings. The facilitator cannot

²⁹ “White supremacy.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/white%20supremacy>. Accessed 16 Nov. 2021.

³⁰ Douglas J.D. and Tenney, Merrill C. *The New International Dictionary of The Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.

³¹ N. D. Osborn and H. A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus* (New York: United Bible Societies,1999), 68.

force any of the participants to apply God's Word to their lives and love like Christ. There are unknowns in the background and spiritual development, or the lack thereof, of the participants. Older participants in the church are often sickly and may miss meetings. The researcher hoped that the participants would desire to grow spiritually and display a positive attitude to the program. Besides, there was optimism that the participants, who have not learned to appreciate their skin color, would learn, and grow through this program. When people learn to love and appreciate themselves, they would be more apt to love others. Real change in the hearts of each participant can only occur by the grace of God. The researcher trusts that the participants are disciples of Christ, based on their profession of faith. However, there is no way to truly verify that they are his disciples. This point is critically important because only Christ's disciples possess his love, and the presence of the Holy Spirit and Christ's love is only available through the Spirit.

This researcher expected growth and change. But understands that God is the only one who can change anyone. The researcher trusts that the participants will participate in the total process from beginning to ending. It is essential for participants to faithfully complete all tasks and make an honest assessment of themselves and explore opportunities to grow, change, and be more like Christ.

Loving like Christ is a choice for those who have been empowered by the Holy Spirit through Christ to do so.

Delimitations

This research was set up within the boundaries of the Johnson Grove Baptist Church of Hephzibah, Georgia. The Coronavirus Pandemic significantly affected some participants availability. Many participants were afraid to enter the church building. Thus, the researcher

assistant mailed the project's requirements to some participants or arranged for them to be dropped off.

This researcher did not seek data from all African American churches in the local area. This research serves as a sampling of African American churches and is relative to other Christian churches. It was difficult to assemble all participants because of the Coronavirus. This researcher was concerned about the safety and well-being of each participant and considered safety as a top priority.

This researcher used twelve attendees or affiliates of Johnson Grove Baptist Church as a sampling of the total membership and sampling of the African American Church. The period for gathering research was four months. The meetings were held weekly with flexibility for holidays and special occasions. The duration of the meeting or training was fifty-minute sessions. However, all the participants didn't feel safe to gather weekly at the church. Therefore, the researcher allowed the participants to complete requirements individually. No names or personal information was paired with data received. The responses were anonymous. The participants freely participated in the research without fear of any unauthorized disclosures.

The researcher connected with the life stories of the attendees at Johnson Gove Baptist Church. The stories varied but the general themes were concurrent. The participants opened the doors to their private world and shared what stuck them as important, revealing, and relative toward the current African American experience. The researcher cannot verify every detail of each story but trusts the accuracy of each participants' recall.

The stories of the African American churchmen at Johnson Grove are duplicated across the United States and connects in spirit with African Americans who experience oppression

throughout America. These Southern and Baptist church attendees can represent the African American experience, dreams, future played out in a dramatic fashion on the stage in America.

This researcher has hopes that the participants from Johnson Grove will display the true light and love of God that came into the world. This project is limited to them and their representation of Christlike love or lack thereof.

Thesis Statement

If the Johnson Grove Baptist Church truly loves one-another as Christ loves, then the local community and others will know that they are following Christ.

Christ's disciples influence the believability of his incarnation. The genuine validation to the world that Messiah came and accomplished his mission is the church walking in his love. When Christ's body is one in his love; it testifies to the world that these are indeed his disciples.

The Lord Jesus Christ said in John 13:35 (NIV), "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Therefore, believers around the world from different cultures and ethnic groups are challenged to prove that they are following Christ through their love for one-another. Love is the key to the church accomplishing its mission as Christ's representative in the world. Evangelism without love will not produce true disciples. Church growth without love will not produce a flourishing church and Christ pleasing church. Believers of all cultures will not delight in the professionalism, competence, and knowledge of their leaders, if they do not demonstrate that they care for the members through love.

The ministries within the church will never truly be effective as they could be before God, without walking in his love. The church would appear counterfeit if it offered ministry services for the Lord without love.

The church cannot offer true spiritual worship in God's presence without loving people, even people from diverse cultures and backgrounds. God does not accept a professed believer's love for him, without the professed believer loving his brothers and sisters in Christ. The Apostle John said in 1 John 4:21 KJV, "And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The key themes that are identified in the literature review were designed to examine the African American Churchmen and identify the root causes of its lack of love. The external and internal factors that affected the church were under consideration and how they impacted the contemporary community of faith. The African American Church was viewed in its historical cultural settings in association with current perspectives and issues facing the black churchmen.

Jesus Christ, the Deliverer, gave hope to the African American church member. But theological clarity was needed as church leaders clashed with dissenting liberal and conservative views on how Christ would deliver the black churchmen from the horrendous currents of racism, poverty, and the lingering effects of Jim Crowism. The members were often struck in the valley of decision, trying to ascertain which path was best.

The black churchmen dreamed of being one body in Christ and experiencing fellowship with their Caucasians brothers and sisters. But how could the church both support and speak against the evils of racism and yet be a unified body of believers? The Messiah, no doubt, would have the solution to this problem for the black churchmen.

The key themes were developed to be building blocks which lay the foundation and provide the synergistic support, like pieces of a puzzle for the thesis. The key themes discuss the shortcomings of the African American local church and white congregations alike, and their disunity in declaring to a dark world that Jesus Christ is the answer.

The black churchman wants to know: how black is the gospel? And where is Christ amid his pain, struggles, and sorrow? If Christ has provided supernatural love through the Holy Spirit, why is it lacking in the church?

Literature Review

Christlike love

Christ loved the world with unselfish and sacrificial love. He loved those who hated him; and he looked beyond their faults and saw their needs. Agape signified a selfless love centered on the needs of others. It described the very nature of God. Since the African American church experienced a deficiency in loving themselves, it explained why agape among the local fellowship of believers was deficit. Therefore, the character of Christ or the essence of his person concerning love was lacking in the African American local church.

The heavenly virtue of love was expected of believers.³² Christ's disciples possessed the very nature of God. God enabled his followers to display his character as his representatives in a dark and evil world.³³ But, the African American church assumed that loving others would be the natural outcome of being Christians without fully understanding the nature of the flesh, nor their need to depend on the power of God. The saints received orders from above to walk in the divine mandate of love. This charge was required of all citizens of the new kingdom, over which, Christ reigned. Therefore, the African American members were expected to love one another and those outside the church with this new supernatural love. Love was truly a gift from God and all believers were endowed with power from on high to love everyone.

The Holy Spirit endowed believers with a supernatural ability to love. John MacArthur affirmed that love was the first distinctive of the Holy Spirit's fruit and the ultimate virtue of saints' lifestyle.³⁴ The Holy Spirit's presence empowered Christ's disciples with divine love,

³² 1 John 4:19; Roman 5:5.

³³ Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, 10.

³⁴ John MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 165.

grace, and mercy for the nations of the world. He combined a world vision with a local vision that simultaneously manifested Christ's love at home and abroad. The Holy Spirit produced agape within believers and lifted his saints out of hatred and ill-treatment of others, to a spiritual realization of sisterhood and brotherhood in Christ. Jesus' followers had a heavenly obligation to love, as his representatives in an ungodly and corrupt world. Simon C. Ponsonby emphasized that believers have a responsibility to love others, and no one can please God without loving others.³⁵ The African American church's love for one-another was hampered by members failing to walk in the Spirit. These church members could have been the most welcoming in the nation. They were blessed with the presence of God and his ability to love others but lacked Christlike love.

The Lord Jesus Christ instituted a new obligation for his disciples to love. Cochran and Calo underscored that Jesus' teaching about love was erected on a foundation laid in the Hebrew Scriptures and recapitulated the Mosaic Law as the love of Yahweh and any other human being.³⁶ Christ's love implied a much greater love than human beings can muster up on their own. Tony Evans asserted that biblical love was centered on the wellbeing of others.³⁷ Love at its best flowed from the heart of a believer filled with the Spirit of Christ. This was a supernatural love that extended to all people, regardless of culture, race, or skin color.

Jesus Christ gave believers the message of the gospel that changed evil hearts from vessels of hate into vessels of love. Klaus Issler emphasized that the Old Testament word for

³⁵ Simon C. Ponsonby, *Lover Mercy: How to serve a tender-hearted Savior* (Grand Rapids: Monarch Books, 2012), 21.

³⁶ Cochran, *Jesus, Agape, and Law*, pg. #.

³⁷ Tony Evans, *Tony Evans Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Holman Publishers, 2019), 1048.

heart included one's thoughts, feelings, and will.³⁸ While Jared C. Wilson affirmed that the gospel of Christ was the only message that effected genuine change and any other message only resulted in behavior adjustment, without eternal value.³⁹ The power of the gospel broke racial barriers and opened the hearts of all believers to love one another and those from different cultures. Nelson recognized that the gospel had the power to break sin's grip of hatred and fill believers with God's amazing love.⁴⁰ Believers were empowered with the gospel of Christ and must love others, regardless of any differences.

The African American church developed a complacent attitude of liking others, but Christ commanded believers to love one another. Evans had a heart for the gospel of Christ and his love. He encouraged believers to make an impact for Christ, rather than falling short in displaying Christlike love, because it hindered the gospel.⁴¹ When believers missed the mark of love, the power of the gospel was short-circuited.⁴² Christ was concerned that the church had genuine love for all people, all the time. The church was never commanded just to like people. God called his church to love. The African American churchmen felt good that its members liked one-another, and that some loved. Christlike love was the key factor of God's requirements for his children. The church's fulfillment of its mission was centered on its ability to love people like Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ raised the standard of love and did not deviate from it. Church members presupposed that God accepted their lack of love, but God never changed his

³⁸ Klaus Issler, *The Formation of Christian Character: Living into The Life of Jesus* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2012), 26.

³⁹ Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015), 150.

⁴⁰ Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, 15.

⁴¹ Evans, *Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 1048.

⁴² 1 John 4:20-21.

benchmark. Christ's new commandment required his church to truly love others with his love, but it was taken lightly and even with contempt, by many in his church. However, John MacArthur surmised that all genuine believers have God's love; and all those who possess it are true believers. This kind of love cannot be invoked by human will, but it is produced in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit of God.⁴³ Therefore, all believers can love everyone. The saints must not allow their cultures to set boundaries for their love. God's saints must love everyone. Loving others is not optional but a requirement if one loves God.

Loving the Neighbor

Did the African American church love its neighbors? Loving a neighbor could have been the joy of God's church. All believers live in a world with neighbors. Neighbors are viewed more by church members through the lens of their culture rather than through the God's lens. Most members within the African American church lacks twenty-twenty spiritual vision and requires corrective lenses. The church has fallen short in loving its neighbors, which has given rise to the non-Christian and liberal groups seeking to fill the gaps. Most churches missed the mark and failed to speak out against the inhuman treatment of their black family in Christ. This displayed utter hypocrisy and disdain for personal responsibility. Christ's disciples are accountable for one another. All of God's family are brothers and sisters in Christ. However, some professed believers question their accountability and possess the evil attitude of Cain after killing Abel.⁴⁴ This same attitude was present within the African American church and other churches. It hampered Christlike love among its members. Some members are unkind and use Cain's infamous question concerning denying accountability for his brother or sister before God.

⁴³ MacArthur Jr., John. *The Love of God*. Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), 32.

⁴⁴ Genesis 4.

In recent days, the ungodly attitude that denies responsibility for brothers and sisters in Christ despises Christlike love. Nelson knew that believers had this God-given responsibility and sought to encourage believers to clutch human responsibility and neighborly kindness in the same hands, while gently touching and loving others.⁴⁵ Neighbors can be found anyone near believers. The African American church had ideas about loving neighbors, within and outside the church, but the church fails to fully implement Christlike love for others. The real question was how much love did the church show its neighbors? The issue here often had to do with what side of the railroad track the members occupied. The segregationist historically insisted that the African American church members reside on their side of the tracks and demanded that they didn't let the sun go down with them present in certain locations. John Piper challenged the saints to make their love visible to the world, that they may see that Christ's disciples are different, and their love is not selective or partial but for everyone.⁴⁶ The world is full of people who are neighbors to one-another. No one should be rejected from any neighborhood. The churchmen attempted to work through rejection, while praying that God would soften hostile hearts with divine love. Some Johnson Grove attendees have not been welcomed in certain neighborhoods. They felt the pain of rejection and prejudice and knew that they were rejected because of their skin. However, some neighborhoods were welcoming and kind. They understood that God sent them their neighbors and required them to show them love. God's commandment to believers to love their neighbor is his kingdom was his kingdom or sovereign law. This law carries the authority of the King (Jesus) and to break it is to destroy the whole

⁴⁵ Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, 17.

⁴⁶ Piper, John. *Contending for Our All*. Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2006), 164.

law.⁴⁷ Therefore, if an individual does not show love to his/her neighbor, he/she violates the whole law. The neighbor is visible and may be culturally different, but the King commanded his servants to love them, just like they love themselves. The African American churchmen has neighbors that must be loved, regardless of historical factors, painful memories, or ill feelings.

Racism and Being Black

The African American churchmen were not immune to racism, neither was any other church. Some members allowed the wounds of racism to separate them and hindered them from developing a significant relationship with people of other races. Humans were created as image-bearer of God. This likeness differentiated people from animals. It also gave every human being worth, significance, and reminded them that they were brilliantly made. William Dwight McKissick, Sr. and Anthony T. Evans affirmed that based on the challenge of racism, African Americans should declare what God says about their identity from a biblical framework, rather than submit to what any man says about them.⁴⁸ Some interracial relationships were pushed aside out of fear that white people and others did not desire friendship. America was supposed to be the home of the brave and land of the free, but many church members were offended by elements of injustice that permeated their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities. Some Europeans used deceit and stamped Africa as a dark uncivilized country. They encouraged the idea that being civil indicated that Africans would have to behave as Englishmen. African Americans were considered less than human by Anglo-supremacist. The Anglo-supremacist denied the truth of the Holy Scriptures that man or the black man was created in the image of God. They sought

⁴⁷ Davids, Peter H. *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1982), 114.

⁴⁸ William Dwight McKissick and Anthony T. Evans, *Beyond Roots II: If Anybody Ask You Who I Am: A Deeper Look at Blacks in the Bible* (Wenonah: Renaissance Production, 1994), 8.

to change the Word of God into a lie and act as though God made the black man closer to an ape on the evolutionary scale. Black became a symbol of hatred, evil, inhumanity, and disdain. However, the prophet Jeremiah understood that skin-color was a gift from God.⁴⁹ Blackness, whiteness, redness, and yellowness are equal. Tony Evans highlighted racial subjugation, which was worldly and false doctrine. This errant theology was reinforced by pseudoscience, which also joined hands with pseudo-theology, and white supremacist to justify slavery, render blacks inferior, and objects of oppression, hate, and pain. Being black meant being a target of racism and an emblem shame. The black churchmen had to dig deep for the right response and to find love amid the depths of troubled caverns. The only glimmer of hope would be the faintest light of Christ that permeates the darkness and yet provides a sense of direction out.

Therefore, all nations are encouraged to love one another, regardless of their skin color. Only God can change an evil and racist heart. Christian brothers and sisters were called to love one another without question, with the supernatural love of Christ. African American church members should certainly treat all people with dignity and respect, but no doubt many have fallen short. All human beings bear the image of the Creator.⁵⁰ Therefore, the African American church can assertively reach out to shake somebody's hand, especially those who are of another culture or race and truly love them like Christ.

All Christians are members of Christ's body and members of God's family. The African American church should be sensitive to the needs of all people and confident in reaching out to others with Christ's love. Tony Evans asserted that the great catastrophe is that the church is just

⁴⁹ Jeremiah 13:23.

⁵⁰ Genesis 1:26-27

as divided as the world. And that this lack of oneness provides Satan with his most powerful weapon for paralyzing the church's influence and invalidating Christ's coming and his mission.⁵¹

Influence of Black Theology

The gospel is neither black, white, red nor yellow, but multicultural and for everyone, because all have sinned.⁵² The Black church lacked love for others because some black pastors were not standing truthfully on God's Word. Cone closed his eyes to the truth of the gospel when he replaced it with black power.⁵³ Kortright Davis thought of the God of the Bible as someone who had delivered those that were oppressed and marginalized by whites.⁵⁴ Therefore, God was limited to the role of a Liberator for blacks and other non-whites. However, the gospel message is not limited to one geographical location, church, or ministry. It is not controlled by man but by God through Christ and through his Holy Spirit.

Black theology asserted the idea that Christ identifies with the oppressed, the marginalized, and those suffering. Christ was the Liberator of all those that were oppressed. Therefore, black theology was born for black liberation. It seeks to make the gospel of Christ relevant to the black experience and deemed it as the source for breaking every chain of bondage. God's revelation was highlighted as message of deliverance and designed to set all captives free. James Cone, in error, assumed that when black people suffered, this was the final religious authority.⁵⁵ He placed black suffering above the authority of the Holy Scriptures. This

⁵¹ Evans, Tony. *Oneness Embraced: Through the Eyes of Tony Evans*. Chicago: Moody Press, 2011.

⁵² Romans 1:16; 3:23.

⁵³ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 9.

⁵⁴ Kortright Davis, *Compassionate Love and Ebony Grace: Christian Altruism and People of Color* (Lanham: Hamilton Books, 2012), 76.

⁵⁵ Davis, *Compassionate Love and Ebony Grace*, 76; Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 46.

was false doctrine indeed and far from the truth of God's Word. It was refreshing to many African American church members that Cone was not afraid to address the social evils of society, which were clearly sinful before the Lord. Cone was correct in denouncing racism, oppression, lynching, and other evils committed against African Americans. However, he viewed Jesus as the black Christ, who reconciled and justified others by becoming black, which meant that he was utterly identified with blackness.⁵⁶ Cone wrongfully downgraded the biblical meaning of reconciliation from man being reconciled to God, to God identifying with the dispossessed. He dismissed the spiritual focus of Christ's incarnation, death, suffering, and resurrection, and focused exclusively on Christ as the Deliverer from oppression. Christ came not only to deliver the oppressed but to die for the sins of the world. Christ's redemption sets all people free, who will trust him as Savior and Lord: the oppressor, the oppressed, and anyone in between.

The black theologians and Black theology have some good points, but when it contradicts the Holy Scriptures, it should be rejected. However, it helped to awaken the conscience of Anglo Americans to the evil and horrors of racism. Sadly, some of its long heretical tentacles have remained stretched through the church and have paralyzed the loving influence of some members. Black theology was beneficial because not many white theologians addressed their issues. Most white preachers, seminaries, and churches ignored the horrors, pain, and death inflicted upon African Americans by white supremist and other oppressors. Their silence validated the perpetrators cause. This was a hindrance to the truth of the gospel and authentic Christlike love.

⁵⁶ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 47.

Relational Factors

The local black church's love was hindered because of a lack of relationships. Members were not connected to one another as they should have been. God used metaphors in the Holy Scriptures that illustrated unity and oneness, such as the "Body of Christ,"⁵⁷ the "Household of God,"⁵⁸ and a "Family in heaven and earth."⁵⁹ Believers share a special relationship with one another forever. The church was inspired to recognize its oneness, enhance its love for one another, and to build strong family relationships.

Many church members followed the culture's way of individualism, rather than staying connected as one body or family in the Lord. Stand-alone Christians easily embrace feelings of loneliness and discouragement because they are out of touch with other believers, who could have provided spiritual and emotional support during difficulties and crises. God did not call his saints to be loners or separate Christians, but to be one in Christ. It makes no difference about a person's background or cultural differences; all disciples of Christ are one and should share in social relationships.

Lord Jesus Christ prayed an intercessory prayer on behalf of his disciples.⁶⁰ He prayed for his disciples and future believers, who would believe in him through their witness. The Lord Jesus Christ prayed that believers would be one, as he and the Father are one. This was the true essence of oneness and provided a picture of what the church should be in the Lord.

The believers' oneness or unity in Christ was an opened declaration and testimony to the world concerning Christ being truly sent by the Father. All believers share a mutually

⁵⁷ 1 Corinthians 12:27.

⁵⁸ Ephesians 2:19.

⁵⁹ Ephesians 3:15.

⁶⁰ John 17: 20-26.

encouraging relationship with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.⁶¹ We have fellowship or share with one-another a special relationship with the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, and with one-another. Therefore, the African American local church is one body, and shares with all believers in a mutual relationship with God. Christ's love should be a natural outflow of this relationship. Robert M. Franklin asserted that the African American church was a gift of God to a nation that ignored, closed its eyes to, and disregarded its sins, ungodly ways, and destructive behavior to a people created in the image of God.⁶² If the church acted the way Christ said they should, everyone would truly love one another in Christ.

Love did not originate in an ungodly cultural setting. True love was not found among the unwise and rebellious. True love was not produced from hate groups. Genuine love, true agape, only exists in a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, where racial pride cannot abide, and self-exaltation is wiped out by humbleness and doing God's will and pleasing him is the dominant commitment in life. True Christlike love is manifested through the Holy Spirit; he provides guidance and help for Christians according to God's Word. Paul Pettit emphasized that the ability to love others like Christ happened only when the saints understand the width, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ.⁶³ This kind of love could never be worked up in the flesh. Many failed to walk in love because they do not have the God of love living within them. Besides, the believer's faith is only rendered efficient and pleasing to the Father, when mixed with and motivated by love. P. Adam McClendon affirmed that faith persistently operated in the believer's

⁶¹ 1 John 1:3.

⁶² Robert M. Franklin, *Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 71.

⁶³ Paul Pettit, *The Foundations of Spiritual Formations: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 173.

life through agape, or love.⁶⁴ God operated in their lives by his Spirit and inspired them to love more like Christ. Therefore, the African American churchmen's relationship with the nations of the world is best demonstrated through saints, who submit themselves to God's will and dedicate themselves to walk in love for his glory. Christlike love came from Christ, through the Holy Spirit, into the lives of his saints and endows them with his supernatural love. The African American churchmen have not fully understood nor manifested fully Christ's love in response to the challenges faced by racism. And the perpetrators have not been humbled into complete repentance and love. But Christ's true disciples will follow him in his love for everyone.

The Myth of Inferiority

Since the days of slavery in America African Americans have struggled with inferiority. The black churchmen's inner thoughts are in constant conflict with the idea of inferiority today, because there are still people who treat them with disdain, or there is a black man murdered by the police or some vigilante, or some other public display that rejected and despised black people. When will the mental anguish cease? How can a black person find peace and relief? God help, does anybody really care? The black churchmen must find hope in the midst of a world of naysayers and Christ is the only hope. Tony Evan expressed his struggles dealing with the inferiority myth. He explained that he recognized how it affected him in his adolescent: he thought that maybe it would have been better for him to have been born white. He experienced a love/hate relationship within his self. He loved the personality that God gave him, while at the same time questioning package of skin it was wrapped in.⁶⁵ The list of African Americans with a similar story, no doubt includes most members of this group.

⁶⁴ P. Adam McClendon, *Paul's Spirituality in Galatians: A Critique of Contemporary Christian Spiritualities* (Eugene: WIPF & Stock, 2015), 113.

⁶⁵ Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Through the Eyes of Tony Evans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2011), 88.

No African American is truly black, and no Anglo-American is truly white. Racial titles such as black or white are cultural and can be used to exalt one culture above another.

The mental and emotional scars from slavery, lynching, police killings of African Americans, poor living condition suggest that there is a problem, but it does not mean that inferiority is the culprit.

The social status of black compared to whites is worthy of concern because the black man is near the bottom of the food chain. The economic status of white Americans far exceeds African Americans, no doubt because of 400-years of free labor that contributed to their head start. The prison population of black men is far above the number of black men in college. Worse of all the Sunday morning worship hour is still deemed the most segregated hour of the week. Therefore, these challenges along with along with ill feelings, frustrations, and despair intensifies feelings of inferiority.

However, the most efficient way for African American churchmen to overcome feelings of inferiority is to refuse to allow others to define who he or she is? True personhood is designated by the Sovereign Lord of all, who is also the Redeemer. Before God, no group of people are superior or inferior, because every individual is an image bearer of the Creator. The Lord Jesus Christ created the man and woman, from which all nations proceeded. Therefore, if one group claim superiority over another, it is deceptive and counterfeit doctrine. Thus, God's truth requires believers to reject the lies of the world and claim God's Word of truth. And the black churchmen can be free at last.

This total process of review of literature was a collaborative effort to support the thesis statement. It revealed gaps in the literature. Some themes need to be addressed and added to the process. However, these key themes targeted the underlining problem of a lack of love within the

African American local church. They facilitated and illuminated why the problem exists and stipulated variable solutions. The specific themes within the review of literature were not exhausted but represented literature in progress in support the thesis. The African American churchmen seem to have a heart to love, but there were indications that the love within the church was shallow and required restructuring and developing. Christ's biblical mandate for all believers is to love one another as he loves them. No one can truly claim to know God without walking in His love. It makes no difference how much theology he or she knows, nor what works are administered on behalf of man.

Theological Foundations

Some within the African American church thought it was proper to dislike or even hate a person. They used loathsome words and disregarded the feeling of others. However, God spoke in the Law against hatred. Mark F. Rooker observed Leviticus 19:17 and acknowledged that believers should not hate one another.⁶⁶ Some professed Christians exalt their cultures while viewing the cultures of others with contempt. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:11 ESV, "But whoever 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." Daniel L. Akin emphasized the impossibility of a person loving God without loving his/her brother or sister in the Lord. Indeed, love for God and hatred of others cannot coexist in the same person's heart.⁶⁷ The church had a serious spiritual problem because some members rejected true love for others.

⁶⁶ Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, vol. 3A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 258.

⁶⁷ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, vol. 38, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 187.

The African American churchmen should indeed embrace Christ's love and practice it in daily their lives. Love described the nature of God.⁶⁸ Love is more than just a feeling; it is also concerned about the well-being of a person.⁶⁹ Evans surmised that God's love involves a decision to respond appropriately in righteousness and truth concerning the well-being of others.⁷⁰ Jesus commanded his church to love one another as he loved. Jesus' love was pure, perfect, sacrificial, unselfish, and of utmost concern for others. Christ offered the gift of salvation and eternal love.

Some members of Johnson Grove Baptist church lacked a genuine heart of concern toward their neighbors. God called Israel to himself to be his holy people and a witness to the Gentiles, or its neighbors. God announced his oneness to the children of Israel and commanded that Israel love him with all their being.⁷¹ The Lord also commanded Israel to love their neighbor as they loved themselves.⁷² This was a horizontal relationship based on their vertical relationship with God. Therefore, if a person loved God, they were required to love their neighbor as well. The neighbors included their fellowmen, aliens, and strangers.⁷³ Johnson Grove members had some understanding of this concept of love, but this idea needed development.

The Lord Jesus Christ declared that the first and great commandment in the Bible was to love God with all their inmost being and the second was to love their neighbor as themselves.⁷⁴

⁶⁸ Jeremiah 31:3; John 3:16; 1 John 4:8.

⁶⁹ Romans 13:8-10.

⁷⁰ Evans, *Tony Evans Bible Commentary*, 1048.

⁷¹ Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

⁷² Leviticus 19:18.

⁷³ Leviticus 19:13, 33-34.

⁷⁴ Matthew 22:36-40.

Craig L. Blomberg emphasized that these two commandments were paramount because all other commandments sprung from them; truly the complete Old Testament was summed up in these two.⁷⁵ Therefore, if a person had their vertical relationship with God right, it would likewise affect how they treated their neighbors. If a person loved their neighbors as themselves, they would help and not hurt their neighbors. This individual would be concerned about the welfare or well-being of his/her neighbors. Leon Morris affirmed that anyone who genuinely loved God with all his being, likewise, must love others.⁷⁶ Therefore the Lord requires all believers to love everyone.

Jesus Christ instituted a new requirement for his disciples and put loving others on a deeper and higher level. Morris asserted that Jesus' emphasis to his disciples to love others as he loved them was the new element of his requisites.⁷⁷ When his disciples displayed this new love, the world knew that they were his disciples indeed.

The Lord Jesus Christ required a greater degree of love from believers. This measure of love is where the African American church often misses the mark. Christ required believers to love one another on a new level or degree. D. A. Carson understood this love as a new standard from the Lord, where the Christian is required to love like Christ loves the saints.⁷⁸ The Lord Jesus said in John 13:34, "A new commandment I give unto you. That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Andrew T. Lincoln considered Christ's

⁷⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 335.

⁷⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Inter-Varsity Press, 1992), 563.

⁷⁷ Leon Morris, *Reflections on the Gospel of John* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2000), 484.

⁷⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 485.

commandment a new requirement of love and an example for all believers.⁷⁹ Christ's commandment to believers to love as he loved seemed to be taken likely by the church. G. L. Borchert asserted that Christ's new commandment was a new obligation of the community of faith to love everybody as he loved them. Thus, the fulfillment of the law and prophets. The people of God were witnesses to the nations, neighbors to all in the world, and called to bring them from darkness to the light.⁸⁰ Lincoln emphasized that the disciple's love for one another would be the distinguishing mark for them as his disciples.⁸¹ Therefore, Christ's church was called to love one another like Christ and make disciples of all nations.⁸² The African American church's love for one another required an inward reach before it could effectively reach-out to other people from different cultures.

Christ's love cannot be worked up by the flesh; it requires the new birth and the Holy Spirit's help. Morris underscored that this outpouring of God's love into the hearts of believers was accomplished by the Holy Spirit.⁸³ This divine enablement gave all believers a supernatural ability to love everyone. The supernatural ability of the Spirit produced miraculous changes in the personalities of his saints. They were able to love those deemed unlovable by some. Therefore, they had no excuse for a love deficiency. The Spirit's enablement provided everything saints needed to love like Christ. The apostle Paul wrote to the believers at Galatia and informed

⁷⁹ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Black's New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Saint John* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), 388.

⁸⁰ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 100.

⁸¹ Lincoln, *The Gospel according to Saint John*, 388.

⁸² Matthew 28:19-20.

⁸³ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity Press, 1988), 221.

them that the first and all-encompassing fruit of the Holy Spirit is love.⁸⁴ The fruit of Spirit represented the character of Christ being formed within believers. Therefore, love cannot not be worked-up by human efforts alone; it requires the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures indicated that when God's people loved others, they did not harm nor take advantage of them, but treated them rightly and justly according to God's will. R. K. Harrison surmised that justice must not be debauched through deliberations of social or economic circumstances.⁸⁵ God required his saints to treat everyone as they would have like to have been treated, indeed, with dignity and respect. Yahweh was concerned about justice.⁸⁶ Moses wrote in Leviticus 19:15, "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor." God required his people to treat everyone with love and justice. Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey surmised that the prophet Micah was repulsed with Israel's empty sacrifices and worship void of true spirituality, and lacked justice in personal relationships with one another.⁸⁷ Michael Bentley concluded that their acts of love and fairness were to cascade like a never-failing stream.⁸⁸ J. Daniel Hays surmised that Yahweh was exceedingly solemn about the issue of social justice, especially because of the blatant disrespect and disregard for the rights of the poor and needy.⁸⁹ The prophet Amos declared in Amos 5:24, ESV "But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream."

⁸⁴ Galatians 5:22.

⁸⁵ R. K. Harrison, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 198.

⁸⁶ Psalm 37:28, 106:3; Isaiah 1:17, 30:18.

⁸⁷ Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 114.

⁸⁸ Michael Bentley, *Opening up Amos* (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006), 74.

⁸⁹ J. Daniel Hays, *The Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 289.

Micah 6:8, ESV states, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” The God of heaven was concerned that his people represent him among the nations. This indicated that the saints should treat everyone justly and with love.

The Lord Jesus Christ’s commandment to his church to love one another as he loves them serves to validate the church’s genuineness as his followers. Carson asserted that the church’s faithfulness in obeying this command will truly test its mission effectiveness and validate its calling.⁹⁰ It is truly the acid test of discipleship. Lincoln clearly understood that the community of faith’s testimony of being Christ witnesses is demonstrated by the church loving one another as Christ has required it.⁹¹ Believers have an awesome responsibility to rise-up and be Christlike in love, even if despised by the world and rejected by family and friends.

The witness and integrity of the African American churchmen are hindered when they lack love. Johannes Eurich considered love indicative of God’s character, his calling of the church, and it enhances healing, justice, and restoration amid suffering.⁹² The church must love everyone as Christ loves for the world.

Believers in Christ possess a heavenly ability to love everyone. The apostle Paul encouraged the hearts of the believers at Rome. He said in Romans 5:5, ESV, “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given unto us.” God’s church today has the power of the Holy Spirit to help

⁹⁰ Carson, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, 485.

⁹¹ Lincoln. *Black’s New Testament Commentary*, 388.

⁹² Johannes Eurich, "Love as the core of the diaconal dimension of the church," *Hervonde Teologiese Studies* vol. 71, no. 2, (2015): 1-6.

it love everyone. Timothy George asserted that God's transforming and sanctifying work within saints through the Holy Spirit resulted in divine enablement of his children to love like Christ.⁹³

All human beings originated from the same family. The Scriptures indicated the oneness of the human family. All nations originated from the same two parents: Adam and Eve.⁹⁴

Besides, all nations are of "one blood."⁹⁵

David G. Peterson surmised that the Greeks assumed that they were superior and other cultures were barbarians, but Paul clarified the issue and asserted the unity or oneness of all mankind, derived from Adam.⁹⁶ John P. Polhill asserted that God created all mankind, indeed, all nations from one man: Adam.⁹⁷ Satan used pride to divide the human race and deceived many to think of themselves as superior and ill-treated their neighbors, instead of loving one another like Christ. Many churches suffered from spiritual blindness and exchange God's truth for a lie and held to a perverted racial heritage. While overlooking their biblical heritage as truly one nation, one people, and one race under God. The African American church struggled to find its identity because of being rejected a seat at humanity table.

Christlike love knows no boundaries in loving humanity. No one is rejected because everyone is an image-bearer of the Creator, who placed each one in proximity to the other. Blacks were considered savages picked up from the dark country of Africa. Both white and black

⁹³ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Holman Publishers, 1994), 401.

⁹⁴ Genesis 3:20.

⁹⁵ Acts 17:26

⁹⁶ David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 496-497.

⁹⁷ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 374.

churches in America allowed this lie to influence their behavior towards one another. Now, both are challenged to remember that each one is called by Christ to love the other as Christ loved all. Each person in the world is a neighbor to someone and everyone are neighbors to all.

Brothers and sisters in Christ are members of God's family and compelled by God to implement neighborly Christlike love. Nelson affirmed that the Lord Jesus Christ taught that believers could not love God without loving one another.⁹⁸ Many have questioned with dismay and without compassion whether they have a neighbor. Robert H. Mounce asserted that love must never be used as a disguise for ulterior aims. True love is free from all deception and hypocrisy.⁹⁹ True love transcended words and was expressed in deeds and in truth by the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ commanded his disciples to demonstrate their love for one another through their actions. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 3:18, KJV, "Dear children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and truth." The African American church was enabled by Christ through the Holy Spirit to walk in his love, but they were challenged to do it.

The African American churchmen experienced oppression, but necessity was laid upon these believers to avoid being oppressive. Yet some have crossed this line and failed to remember how God delivered them from oppression. Christ is Lord and King; he never authorized any man to oppress another. True Christlike love does not abuse authority. Oppression was never appropriate for the Kingdom of the Lord. Believers in Yahweh were commanded to avoid oppression. Solomon declared in Proverbs 14:31 (ESV), "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors him." The individual that oppressed the poor directly insulted the Lord, his Maker. H. D. M. Spence-Jones

⁹⁸ Nelson, *The Economics of Neighborly Love*, 10.

⁹⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 236.

asserted that those who oppress others insult God in his providence; strength given to one does not mean it should be used to harass and oppress another person. God did not bless a nation to exploit and oppress another nation.¹⁰⁰ Stephen Lennox surmised that any oppression was treating the oppressed Maker with contempt; whereas, loving the person in need, honors their Creator.¹⁰¹ The strong in any relationship was never authorized by God to oppress the weak. Any member within the church who loves their brothers and sisters in Christ, provides a deterrence for the oppression of the weaker member. The apostle Paul warned believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:6, NKJV, "That no one should defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified." The oppressors ignored Christ's lordship and usurped his authority over other human beings. The church is required to submit to God's authority and walk in His love.

The African American churchmen underscored lessons from Philemon on how another brother or sister in the Lord should be treated. The apostle Paul provides a keen example and amazing insight into this type of relationship. Onesimus was a runaway slave, who was led to Christ by Paul and deemed worthy to assist him in the ministry. However, Paul was aware of Onesimus' status and his relationship with Philemon. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon with a letter in hand and requested that Philemon no longer treat Onesimus as a slave, but as a brother in Christ.¹⁰² Douglas J. Moo asserted that Paul informed Philemon that his relationship with

¹⁰⁰ H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Proverbs* (London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1909), 275-276.

¹⁰¹ Stephen Lennox, *Proverbs: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998), 142.

¹⁰² Philemon 15-16.

Onesimus would no longer be doctoral or master and slave, but spiritual: brothers in the Lord.¹⁰³ Paul encouraged and admonished Philemon to treat Onesimus as a beloved brother and to receive him as he would receive Paul himself, and charge any wrong that he did to his (Paul's) account.¹⁰⁴ Christians are commanded to love one another, even as Paul loved Onesimus and Philemon, pleaded with him to receive him in the Lord, just like believers should love and receive one another, today. Believers should use their spiritual influence to encourage and even challenge other believers to accept and defend other brothers and sisters, from different cultures in the Lord. Saints should insist that everyone be treated with the love of Christ, thus being a true neighbor and accountable before God. Saints should help dispel ungodly myths concerning other cultures, especially those who are brothers and sisters in the Lord. The African American churchmen's church doors should swing on welcome hinges, and once inside, everyone should feel welcomed and loved.

Jesus Christ was the Messiah of Israel and the redeemer who gave hope to the world. He manifested the love of God through the sacrifice of himself on the cross and paid the price for the sins of the world. Thus, he provided God's way of salvation for all. Luke 4:18, ESV reads: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed."

The Lord Jesus Christ declared that he was the Liberator of those spiritually bound and oppressed. He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy in Isaiah 61:1. He was true, the Anointed One or

¹⁰³ Douglas J. Moo, *The letters to the Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 422.

¹⁰⁴ Philemon 16-18.

Messiah. He was the One through which all the nations of the world would be blessed.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, oppressed people looked to him to deliver them. They looked to him to set them free and render justice for all. Since Christ was head of the church, believers depended on him to work through his church to accomplish his mission. Lewis Foster asserted the Christ was indeed the Chosen One, or Servant of God, who would bring relief to this corrupt and evil world.¹⁰⁶ He was the Mighty Deliverer from God. Ken Heer surmised that the Redeemer, or Messiah, was sent by God to set free the oppressed.¹⁰⁷ Therefore Christ was viewed as the Great Liberator who would deliver all oppressed people from Satan and evil men. Christ is the true hope for the oppressed. He is the only One that can set all captives free.

Theoretical Foundations

The African American churchmen has addressed in a general sense, the necessity of self-love and appreciation through social justice pursuits. Johannes Eurich affirmed that love is actualized in the social ministry of the church as part of the fellowship of believers.¹⁰⁸ However, social justice has its place, but social ministry alone leaves a voidness in the soul, without a true relationship with Jesus Christ. The overarching emphasis in the African American church for many years has been social justice and the need for civil rights. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and his dream for America, rang supreme in the hearts of blacks in America and beyond. Ponsonby took to heart the fact that God is a just God, true to himself, and that God is concerned about

¹⁰⁵ Galatians 3:14-16.

¹⁰⁶ Lewis Foster, *Luke: Unlocking the Scriptures for You* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1986), 89.

¹⁰⁷ Ken Heer, *Luke: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2007), 78.

¹⁰⁸ Johannes Eurich, "Love as the core of the diaconal dimension of the church," *Hervonde Teologiese Studies* vol. 71, no. 2, (2015): 1-6.

justice and does not take it lightly.¹⁰⁹ Justice has been overlooked by many white fellow-believers for hundreds of years, since the days of slavery. However, God had some white brothers and sisters, who stood up for justice and freedom for all.

The African American churchmen cried out to God for justice daily in the streets of America and wondered where was love? Davis surmised that Dr. King creatively connected the significance of power and the demands of justice coupled with love, which enabled him to maximize power while demanding justice.¹¹⁰ The prophet Micah gave hope, help, and encouragement to a hurting community, when he declared in Micah 8:6, NKJV, “He has told you, O man, what is good: and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” Fighting for justice equals fighting for humanity and appreciating one’s personhood. Evans illuminated the issue of justice and supported the idea that biblical justice does not show partiality and did not derive from man.¹¹¹ It is concerned for the poor and the rich, the Jew and the Gentile, blacks, whites, and any other man or woman. In the faithful words of Rev. William Holmes Borders, which he declared in the Sunday morning worship services at Wheat Street Baptist Church, Atlanta, GA: “I am Somebody, I am somebody, I am somebody, because I am a child of the King.”¹¹² This was a cry to encouraged black members to appreciate their blackness through Christ and a cry to the nation that God cares about his black children.

¹⁰⁹ Ponsonby, *Lover Mercy*, 27.

¹¹⁰ Davis, *Compassionate Love and Ebony Grace*, 69-70.

¹¹¹ Tony Evan, *Oneness Embraced: Through the Eyes of Tony Evans* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2011), 263.

¹¹² Edward A. Hatfield, "William Holmes Borders (1905-1993)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed March 29, 2009, [need the URL.]. Between 1937 and 1988, the Reverend Williams Holmes Borders served as pastor of Wheat Street Baptist Church in Atlanta, where he campaigned for civil rights and distinguished himself as a charismatic spokesman for the city’s poor and dispossessed.

Many Black preachers used black theology to eradicate disenfranchisement among church members and to fight the pandemic influence of white racism. Raphael G. Warnock acknowledges that King was indeed a drum-major for justice and saw social transformation as the essential mission of the church.¹¹³ Besides, Anthony B. Bradley was crystal clear that black liberation theology was sanctioned by the church to deliver blacks from racism and oppression by whites.¹¹⁴ However, the spiritual element, which is at the heart of any true change through the Holy Spirit, was neglected and replaced with a social gospel in many black churches. The Blacks' experience of injustice, racism, and white supremacy became paramount and substituted for the true mission of the black church. Cone understood that God created something deep in the souls of blacks that no man could remove: the black man has worth before God.¹¹⁵ Every man bears the image of the Creator. God loved the world so much that he sent Jesus Christ to die for its sin and arose again for its justification.¹¹⁶

Black theology has some good points that addressed issues that the mainstream evangelical church ignored or buried. White theologians, for the most part, had left social issues completely off their radars. However, these issues were at the heart of Christ's message.¹¹⁷ There is a sense that some of its writers were overwhelmed and traumatized by the evils of racism, and it seemed that black lives did not matter. Racial hatred included police brutality and the blatant and unnecessary taking the lives of multitudes of African American men. The American church

¹¹³ Raphael G. Warnock, *Divided Mind of the Black Church: Theology, Piety, and Public Witness* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 27.

¹¹⁴ Anthony B. Bradley, *Liberating Black Theology: The Bible and the Black Experience in America* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 19.

¹¹⁵ Cone, *Said I Wasn't Gonna Tell Nobody*, 164.

¹¹⁶ John 3:16; Romans 4:25.

¹¹⁷ Matthew 25:34-46.

failed exceedingly short in standing up for justice for their brothers and sisters in Christ and much less for those who never knew the Savior. Evans asserted that Cone's black theology, for the most part, placed too much emphasis on the black experience of oppression to the point of overlooking biblical truth.¹¹⁸

Black theology exalted the black experience of oppression, discrimination, and racism; including devaluing and the careless murders of blacks by law enforcement, as the focal point of the gospel message. Therefore, many African American churches lost their spiritual vision of saving souls. The social gospel became preeminent and dominated the landscape in black seminaries and within the church. The European version of Jesus was substituted with a black version. Liberation theology was paramount. Christ was deemed the Black Liberator, who was automatically on the side of the oppressed and disenfranchised. Therefore, the church lacked love because it lacked a solid biblical foundation. Besides, the African American church lacked receiving what Paul declared in Acts 20:26: "the whole counsel of God." This lack of hearing and receiving the total truth of God has negatively affected believers' understanding and application of his Word concerning Christlike love.

The black church not only experienced a deficiency of God's Word; it also discounted the role of the Spirit helping it love. The Holy Spirit's endowment of believers with Christ's love received little emphasis. This work of the Holy Spirit was placed on the backburner by seminaries, pastors, and both white and black theologians. This lack of emphasis upon the Holy Spirit left churches dry and shallow in their love for one another.

The African American church necessitated a revival, with emphasis on the Holy Spirit's empowerment of believers with the love of Christ. George surmised that the Holy Spirit

¹¹⁸ Evans, *Oneness Embraced*, 193.

transformed, sanctified, and empowered believers with the divine love of Christ.¹¹⁹ Evans asserted that this love was the believer's ability to pursue the ultimate good for others despite their response.¹²⁰ However, since the church was deficient in its biblical focus and failed to depend upon the Helper from God, it failed repeatedly in loving others.

The churchmen necessitated trusting God's Spirit to help them love others. D. Stuart Briscoe asserted that God's Spirit entered the lives of his redeemed people, he opened visionless eyes to the amazement of divine love and showed the saints that their future would be guided by this love and God's loving purpose.¹²¹ The Holy Spirit's supernatural agape love required his presence to be manifested through believers.

Therefore, the believers' hope was beyond manmade hermeneutical principles, mesmerizing homiletical skills, and fleshly achievements, but was rather dependent upon the Holy Spirit's divine enablement. The apostle Paul wrote, "And my speech and my preaching *were* not with persuasive words of ^hhuman wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."¹²² Therefore the church was enabled to love like Christ through the Spirit's power.

The African American church and all other Christian churches genuine witness to the world and its validation was based on loving one another like Christ.¹²³ Jesus informed his disciples that if they truly loved one another as he loves them, it would be a testimony to the

¹¹⁹ George, *Galatians*, 401.

¹²⁰ Tony Evans, *The Promise: Experiencing God's Greatest Gift—The Holy Spirit* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 253.

¹²¹ D. Stuart Briscoe, *The Communicator's Commentary: Romans* (Waco: Word Books Publishers, 1982), 115.

¹²² 1 Corinthians 2:4, NKJV.

¹²³ John 13:34.

world, that they are truly his disciples. The church's love for others was the acid test of Christian discipleship. This proved whether the church was real, and whether it really belonged to and followed Christ. John MacArthur surmised that Christ's example and standard of love must be followed by believers, to validate to the world that they are truly his disciples; orthodoxy of doctrine and enthusiastic proclamation of God's word did not supersede nor invalidate Christ's requirement that his church's love for one another like he loved.¹²⁴ Johnson Grove Baptist Church, and all other churches that belong to Christ, must not only love Christ, but truly love one another as he loved. The church was called to stand as a beacon of love, before a corrupt and evil world that abides in darkness. Love was not void of action; it was a bulwark of justice, grace, forgiveness, and compassion for all. It represented Christ and manifested his character among all nations and sought their highest good for the glory of God. The church was ordered to love as Christ and should lead the world in rejecting all ungodliness and all unlovely acts perpetrated against any man or woman, boy or girl, regardless of race, culture, or skin color. Christ's disciples were called to disciple the world and build up one another in love, even as Christ.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: John 12-21* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 91.

¹²⁵ Matthew 28:19-20.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The intervention plan was designed to evaluate and remediate the perceived lack of Christlike love within Johnson Grove Baptist Church in Hephzibah, Georgia. It was critical to evaluate the issue of a lack of Christlike love because should be the heartbeat of the church. The church is called to represent Christ. It is an incarnational representation of him to the world. Therefore, no church should take this depiction likely, but faithfully submit to his will.

The participants participated in the worship services of Johnson Grove Baptist Church. Some attended in person and others engaged through Zoom. The Coronavirus pandemic hindered church attendance and in person ministry. Most of the older members had high blood pressure, kidney disease, diabetes, or other chronic diseases, but they pressed ahead to help and serve the Lord, despite their health challenges. This researcher realized that it would be a challenge for the participants to meet weekly in person and that some training requirements may need to be completed online or through email, because of the present health crisis.

The participants professed to be Christians. Most of them expressed that they have known Christ as their Savior for several years. Some were leaders, while others considered themselves faithful church attendees.

This researcher sought to examine the issue of a lack of Christlike love within the church. After this process was completed, the researcher explored solutions to the problem. The evaluation consisted of a survey of the participants concerning attitudes and actions in interpersonal relationships. The researcher desired to discover where they were in their walk of love or lack thereof.

The second part of the intervention plan consisted of Ten Lessons on Christlike love. The ten training modules were focused on understanding and applying biblical principles on Christlike love. The researcher also provided ten sermons on Christlike love to aid and inspire the participants farther along in the process.

The Training Modules and the Ten Sermons on Christlike love were designed to support the key themes supporting thesis. The Ten Modules and Ten Sermons were also focused on intervention and alleviating Christless loving relationships among believers. The modules were based upon the Scriptures and building a biblical foundation in loving interpersonal relationships.

In addition, the training modules and sermons also included the biblical exposition of various texts were focused on the ministry of the Holy Spirit in helping believers love like Christ. This supernatural love is impossible without the Spirit's help.

After training modules and sermons were accomplished, the participants completed a second survey or questionnaire, which was synonymous to the first. This was an important part of the researcher's tools in understanding whether growth had occurred. The first questionnaire and second questionnaire were compared and examined throughout to discern where the participants had improved, learned, or grew.

The researcher developed graphs to chart growth and distinguish difference in the participants' first responses on the survey compared to their second response after all training was completed. The researcher believes that the participants scored higher on the second survey, after being trained in the ten modules on Christlike love and viewing and listening to the ten sermons. This showed their new understanding, spiritual growth, development, and their

willingness to apply biblical principles learned in Christlike love. It also that the Holy Spirit could indeed change hearts and minds, and help believers love more like Christ.

Intervention Design

This researcher started the project Sunday, February 7, 2021, at Johnson Grove Baptist Church in Hephzibah, Georgia, after receiving approval through the Liberty University Institutional Review Board. This project took five months to complete. The researcher's assistant met with the participants on Sunday mornings at 10:00 a.m. The participants committed themselves to voluntarily participate in the project. They understood the process, expectations, and responded appropriately to all questions. The initial meeting with the participants occurred during the Sunday school period, which started at 10:00 a.m. The assistant explained the project requirements and distributed all forms to the participants. She also answered questions and collected the completed forms and secured them.

The participants received a project package, a welcome, and an introduction. The research assistant explained to the participants what was expected to successfully complete the project. The participants were required to complete the survey that was designed to examine their attitudes and responses to interpersonal relationships. After completing the questionnaire, the participants completed ten training modules and ten sermons designed to encourage each participant to love more like Christ. The research assistant provided handouts for each module before all meetings. In the first session, the participants responded to the questionnaire. In the second and third sessions, the participants completed the assigned lessons in advance and the facilitator allowed the participants to respond to the questions and they shared their insight from each session. This process continued through all the training classes. The participants also heard the sermons on Christlike love too. The final questionnaire was completed by the participants.

The researcher and research assistant thanked the participants for participating and helping with this project.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The researcher's criteria for evaluating this project consisted of two questionnaires: one taken at the beginning of the project and the final one was taken after the participants completed all training. The two questionnaires consisted of open-ended questions that assisted the researcher in evaluating the participants' understanding, attitudes, and behavior in interpersonal relationships and their love walk, or lack thereof. The first questionnaire gave the researcher data in determining how the participants perceived and applied their understanding of love. The second questionnaire was designed to reveal learning, growth, inspiration, and the heart attitudes of the participants, after they completed the ten lessons on Christlike love and ten sermons focused on Christlike love.

The researcher preached ten sermons with the theme "Christlike Love" on February 14, 28; March 14, 28; April 11; 25; May 9, 23; June 13, and 27. Some participants worshipped and viewed the sermon through Zoon because of health reasons and the effects of the Coronavirus.

The participants completed ten training modules that were based on the key themes of "Love, Christ's Command," "No One Can Truly Love God and Hate People," "Supernatural Love within You," "Love, The Fruit of The Spirit," "Evidence of Genuine Love," "Love is Harmless," "Love and Spiritual Gifts," "Faith Works by Love," "Loving the Least," and "Walking in True Love." The training classes were also focused on providing a biblical approach to developing Christlike love. The training modules required the participants to respond to questions and provide discussions for each session, thus allowing the participants to share their learning. Each training class focused on the key themes of the project.

The first training module was: “Love, Christ’s Command.” It was based primarily on John 13:34-35, where the Lord Jesus Christ gave a new commandment to his disciples that was a paradigm shift in their thinking about love. He commanded them to love one-another as he loved them. This kind of love was supernatural in origin and beyond human invention. It is called Christlike love because he commanded his disciples to love one another as he loved them.

This love far exceeded the idea of just liking a person or having feelings of fondness towards them. God never told Christians to just like people. He commanded his disciples to love others. Any professed Christians, who only likes people falls exceedingly short of God’s standard and violates his commandment.

God requires believers to love one another. The Holy Scriptures state in John 13:35 (ESV), “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also love one another.” This was a new requirement that he gave to his disciples. It is the heart of Christ’s teaching concerning love. Jesus commanded them to love one another as I have loved them. The way that Christ loved his disciples became the new norm for their love for one another. The Bible states in John 13:36 (ESV), “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” Jesus Christ informed his disciples that the everyone will recognize them as his disciples when they love one another. This became the acid test for discipleship. This was one way to distinguish a follower of Christ from world or people that don not know Christ as their Savior and Lord.

If all saints loved one another like Christ loved his disciples, all Christians around the world would feel loved, regardless of their culture or nationality. Thus, the church would be the one place in the world where true love could be found, and the Johnson Grove churchmen could experience true love and there would be no question about its love nor any lack thereof.

The divine requirement is to love everyone. When Jesus was asked in Matthew 22:36-40 (NIV), “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the law? Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and prophets hang on these two commandments.” The Lord Jesus summed up God’s requirements in the Law and prophets as loving God with one’s in most being and loving one’s neighbor as oneself. The bottom-line of God’s requirement in this text is to love God and love others.

God requires his servants to love those in need. The Lord Jesus Christ was questioned in a similar story by a lawyer to test him in Luke 10:25-38. He asked What should he do to inherit eternal life? Jesus knowing his heart and his need, referred him back to the law and asked him what it requires. The Scriptures state in Luke 10:27 (ESV), “And he answered, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus informed him that he had answered correctly and if he do it, he will live. The man was convicted at his point and knew that he fell short of God’s law. Instead of repenting and asking Christ to forgive him. The Bible states in Luke 10:29 (ESV) “But he willing to justify himself, said to Jesus, And who is my neighbor? Jesus told him the story of a Jew that was travel and overtaken by thieves, who robbed him and left him barely alive. A priest and a Levite came down the same road and passed by him without helping him. The Holy Scriptures says in Luke 10:33 (ESV), “But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to way he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. The Samaritan did not avoid the injured man noy pass him as the others. He came down where he was, saw his needs, and had compassion upon him. He cared for him and helped him. He comforted him with and placed oil and wine on his

wounds. He also put him on his own house and brought him to an inn and took care of him. Finally, Jesus asked the man, in Luke 10:36 (ESV), “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? In verse 37 the Holy Scriptures says (ESV), “He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.” The Samaritan was a neighbor to the injured man. He was not worried about his culture, race, or religious affiliations, he had compassion upon him, he helped him, and he had mercy upon him. Jesus told him to go and do likewise. Jesus’ requirements have not changed. The church should go and do likewise and be a true neighbor to those in need.

Jesus admonished his disciples in Matthew 25:35-46 to be concerned about others and to help those in need because he identifies with them in their suffering, shame, and pain. The Bible says in Matthew 25:40 (ESV), “And the King will answer them, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” Whatever is done for those in need is the same as doing it for Christ. Therefore, believers should show true love to their neighbors, and it will be as doing it to the Lord. The Johnson Grove churchmen and other churchmen should take heed and walk in Christlike love.

The second part of this training module included God’s love for the world. Christ’s love was pure, sacrificial, and centered on providing for the needs of others. The Holy Scriptures stated in John 3:16 (ESV). “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” God loves everybody, he loved the people of the world so much that he sent the Lord Jesus Christ to provide atonement for the sins. He was the Lamb of God and God’s unspeakable gift.

Jesus Christ is the Redeemer and Creator, who left heaven and came as God’s sacrificial offering upon the cross. The only begotten Son paid the penalty for man’s sin and provided life

through his name. God's love is amazing, he gave favor, grace, mercy, forgiveness of sins, new life in Christ, a new body, and a new home in glory through the gift of his Son. When churchmen begin to understand God's love for others and his love for them, their attitude toward one another should change and they will begin to love one another like Christ.

The second training module was focused on: "No One Can Truly Love God and Hate People". This module began with a study of 1 John 4:20-21. The Holy Scriptures state in this text in verse 20 (ESV), "If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." No one can claim to truly love God without loving his brother and sister. If anyone makes this statement without loving them, he or she is a liar. How can a person love God whom they have not seen and cannot love the brother or sister, who were created in the very image of God? If a person does not love the person created in God's image, how can they love the person (God) that the image represent. It's like saying your shadow is loved, but your person or real substance that represents the shadow is rejected, how foolish! No one can love God and hate his brother or sister in Christ. If a person can hate anybody, they are darkness and blind. The apostle John continued in 1 John 4:21 and declared, (ESV), "And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother." If a person loves God; they must love their brother or sister in Christ There is no way to love God without loving others.

If a person can hate anyone they are walking in spiritual darkness. The apostle John stated in 1 John 2:11 (ESV), "But whoever 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." A person who hates indicates that they do not know the Lord, they are separated from him, and they abide in darkness. John stated in 1 John 3:14 (ESV), "We know that we have passed out of

death into life, because we love the brothers.” If a person does not love his brother and sister in Christ and indeed hate them, he or she is a murderer. John stated in 1 John 3:15 (ESV), “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” A person who hates others is a murderer and does not have eternal life. Therefore, there is no way for true believers to hate anyone. It is time for time for believers to share this message with any family or friends who hate people. The churchmen must love everybody, hate no one, and warn those who do.

The church ascribes worth and love to God in solemn worship services. The church choirs and praise teams sing about how much they love Jesus. But God is not pleased with empty professions and heartless praise and worship; its lip-service only. The true disciples of Christ cannot hate anyone and does not praise those that do hate others. The churchmen must be honest with themselves before God because God knows those who are hypocritical. Therefore, believers of various cultures must love everyone from other cultures, no believer can hate anyone in God’s kingdom. God commanded saints that love the Lord to also love others. No deviating from this command is allowed. Therefore, it behooves the white, black, yellow, and red churchmen to love one-another in the Lord. This applies to Johnson Grove members and church members around the world.

The second part of module two was focused on Genesis 1:26-27 concerning man being created in the image and likeness of God. The Scripture state in Genesis 1:26, (ESV), “Then God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heaven and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” This verse indicates that everyone is equal and an image bearer of the Creator. All human beings originated from the household of Adam.

God created man in his image and likeness. The Holy Scriptures states in Genesis 1:27 (ESV), “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” Man was created in the image and likeness of God. And God created man: male and female. Therefore, all men from all cultures, backgrounds, and locations bears the image of God, regardless of skin color, hair texture, or any other physical feature. This makes man unique from animals and he was the crown of God’s creation. All men are related to the first man and one with him. Therefore, no man is inferior or superior to another man. Sinful pride causes some to deceive themselves into believing that they are superior.

During slavery within the United States slave owners sought to justify their cruel actions and slavery itself, by denying the humanity of their black slaves and they denied the biblical truth that the black man was created in the image of God. When an individual denies the truth of God’s Word, they plunge deeper into darkness.

The third training module was focused on: “Supernatural Love Within You (Romans 5:5)”. The key to the believer walking in Christlike love is the presence and power of the holy Spirit working in and through each disciple. The Holy Scriptures in Romans 5:5 (ESV) state, “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” The Holy Spirit is the divine Enabler or Helper that gives believers the ability to walk in Christlike love. He pours God’s love into the hearts of all believers. He gives saints a supernatural ability to love others.

God gives the gift of the Holy Spirit to individuals who have received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. The Bible states in 1 Corinthians 12:13 (ESV), For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” The Holy Spirit baptizes believers into the Christ’s body, when they receive salvation.

The apostle Paul stated in Ephesians 1:12-13 (KJV), “That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.” The Holy Spirit’s sealing of the believer signifies that the believer is a child of God and that the individual belongs to God. He helps the believer and guides and empowers the person to live the Christian life. He is the source of the believer’s new endowment with divine or supernatural love.

The Holy Spirit’s presence in the life of a Christian is way makes the believer unique. God’s presence by His Spirit never departs but helps the saint in personal sanctification and with living a new life in Christ. A key mark of the Holy Spirit’s presence within the believer is supernatural love. The apostle Paul said in Romans 5:5 (ESV), “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” God’s love has been poured into all believers’ hearts. All Christians have God’s love in them and with this new love, they can love everybody. It makes no difference of their culture, skin color, economic status, where they are from, nor their spiritual condition. God did not place any of these, But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” God loved everyone and placed his love within Christians to love others. Therefore, God’s children should love everybody and hate no one. The church should be the one place that everyone can feel loved and cared for. Johnson Grove Baptist Church may lack Christlike love, but God wants this church and every church to display Christ’s love.

The fourth training module was focused on: “Love, The Fruit of The Spirit.” The Holy Spirit indwell all believers and produces the fruit of the Spirit. This fruit parallels the character of Christ and is manifested in Christians. The primary fruit of the Spirit is love. This supernatural

agape is provided abundantly through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, God's children should not hate anyone, but love everybody by the Spirit's power. No man from any culture around the world should ever feel unloved by God's saints. The local church should be an example to the local community of what it means to love like Christ. Everyone in the community should feel loved and welcome in God's church and the members should love one-another.

The fruit of the Spirit includes several characteristics that should be manifested in the lives of all Christians. The Bible states in Galatians 5:22 (ESV), "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such there is no law." The first and all-encompassing fruit of the Holy Spirit is love. The Holy Spirit indwells all Christians, and his fruit should be present in their lives. God's love should flow through the lives of his saints. This love gives the believer the ability to even love those deemed unlovable by the world. Christians can love everybody because of fruit of the Holy Spirit is within them. Therefore, the Johnson Grove churchmen has no excuse to lack Christlike love. The question that one might need to ask is: Does salvation abide in this house or church? Did the members truly experience God's new birth and redemption through Christ? Regardless of the present state of the Johnson Grove churchmen, God can save anybody and change any heart and fill it with his love.

The fifth training module was focused on: Evidence of Genuine Love (Romans 12:9-10) and Romans 12:13, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19-21 and 1 John 3:18. The apostle Paul admonished believers to love one-another in sincerity and truth, without partiality or corruption. God's children should love their sisters and brothers in Christ with genuine agape from the Lord. The one place that a troubled person should be able to go and experience true love is in God's church. Physical differences or cultural variations should not matter to believers. God requires Johnson

Grove churchmen and all other churchmen to be real in their love for one-another. The apostle Paul admonished believers to love one with real agape. He said in Romans 12:9-10, (ESV) “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.” Believers in Christ should allow the Spirit of truth to guide them in being genuine in their love to others. Saints should not quench the Holy Spirit in these matters, even when their human nature desires to revert to their old fleshly ways of not being true in their love.

God commanded his children to hate evil but to hold on to what is good. Christians should be spiritually alert to their surrounding and their situation, and hate the evil that they see and hear, but cleave to the good. Believers should honor those who do right and not praise those that do wrong. When saints walk in genuine love, they will be attentive to God’s will in all situations and represent Jesus Christ. The Holy Scriptures state in Romans 12:14 (ESV), “Bless those who persecute you: bless and do not curse them.” This kind of love works against the old nature of believers, which was in control prior to salvation. But the Holy Spirit’s presence within empowers them to be able bless those who persecute them and not curse them. The churchmen in Christ and with the Spirit’s help has a choice now, whereas before they were directed by the devil and the old ungodly nature of man. Thus, the Christian can choose wisely and love others like Christ.

When Christians respond to others with the love of Christ; it improves their relationships with them. The Bible states in Romans 12:16 (ESV), “Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” Paul encouraged the saints to live in harmony with one another. No one should think that they are better or above other people. Saints should avoid the proud look and make a connection with people or be

sociable. The believer should not allow pride to deceive them to think that they are the voice of wisdom, because all wisdom come from the Lord. True love is humble, does not overlook others, and listens to their opinion, even if they disagree with it.

When saints walk in Christ's love, they do not seek revenge. The apostle Paul admonishes believers in Romans 12:17 (ESV), "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all." Christians should never repay evil to a person that commits evil against them, but always take the high road of honor. God forgave those that trusted him as their Savior of all their past sins and he forgives saints today, that fall-short and confess their sins to him. How much more should Christians forgive evil committed against them and not repay evil with evil. The Holy Scriptures state in 1 Peter 4:8 (NIV), "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins." When believers love like Christ, they will forgive and seek reconciliation instead of revenge or getting even. This lessons clearly is of great benefit to the Johnson Grove churchmen, who struggles with loving oppressors. Paul said in Romans 12:19 (ESV), "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." God is the righteous Judge. The Lord will take vengeance upon all that commit evil as appropriate. No one will get away with evil because God will take justice upon all. Therefore, it behooves all churchmen to avoid committing evil and let God be God to bring justice upon all.

Saints are called upon by God to love, even those considered enemies. Paul said in Romans 12:20 (ESV), "To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him, if he is thirsty, give him something to drink for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Christians are called upon to give their enemies food and drink if they are thirsty or hungry. God does not need the Christian's help in bringing vengeance upon anyone. God will ensure that justice is served in

every case, absolutely no one will escape his wrath. When believers are kind to their enemies, they will experience the grace and mercy of God, which leads to shame and repentance, or they will not appreciate it and remain a worthy recipient of the wrath of God. Paul admonished believers in Rome in Romans 12:20 (ESV), “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Christians should not be overwhelmed by evil, but trust God and leave all vengeance in his hands. The believers’ responsibility is to overcome evil with good. Christlike love indicates that his disciples respond to evil actions with good, like Christ. Therefore, the Johnson churchmen can avoid ill feelings of vengeance and find joy in walking in the love of the Savior.

The sixth training module was focused on: Love and Spiritual Gifts (1 Corinthians 13). The apostle Paul warned believers at Corinth that if they claimed to operate in spiritual gifts without love the true purpose and effectiveness of the gifts would be severely hindered. Christ never ministered to anyone without loving them and God’s nature is love. Therefore, true ministry must be accomplished through the Holy Spirit with love.

Genuine ministry in the Spirit must be coupled with love. God requires believers who claim to represent him in preaching and teaching his Word to love people. The apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 13:1 (ESV), “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” The preacher or teacher, who utters the word of God without love is a miserable noise in the ears of the hearers. This kind speaker makes irritating noise with no melody, nor orchestral beauty because they lack love.

True competency in ministry requires the Holy Spirit’s presence, power, and love. The apostle Paul asserted in 1 Corinthians 13:2 (ESV), “And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.” Any leader or churchmen that claims to have the anointing, and

even great prophetic utterance, knowledge, understanding, and mountain moving faith, but no love is nothing. The church and others may assume that the preceding individual was faithful and an amazing witness for the Lord, but Paul gave a true spiritual assessment, without love they are nothing.

Philanthropy and literal self-sacrifice that is not motivated by love for Christ and others is nothing. All acts of service for God should fall under the banner of love, otherwise they are acts of futility. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:3 (ESV), “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” If a professed believer submits to the ultimate persecution of being burned to death without love, there is no spiritual benefit before God. If the act of giving is detached from the giver’s heart and minus love, it would profit nothing.

The characteristics of genuine love are concerned about the well-being of others. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (ESV), “Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irrational or resentful.” True love is graceful towards others; it allows space for change and growth. When a believer walks in love, they are caring and sympathetic to needs of others. They do not despise their success or blessings, neither do they boast in their own accomplishments. And this individual does not have an exalted view of themselves, nor offensive or ill-mannered. But they sensitive to the Holy Spirit’s guidance to truly love others. The apostle Paul added in 1 Corinthians 13:6 (ESV), “It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.” True love in Christ does not celebrate evil or wrongdoing, but it finds joy in the truth. Too many churchmen celebrate the evil deeds of individuals within their culture rather than reproofing them. Christ’s love does not

rejoice over sinful acts committed against other human beings. But supports all believers and others in love.

True love has a sustaining affect upon all lives touched by it. The apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:7 (ESV), Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” Christlike love is supportive of people; it is an extension of God’s grace into their lives. Love helps people, even amid their struggles and troubles. It believes that God can deliver anyone from their sins and give them a new and better life in Christ. It believes that all Christians can grow in the grace of God. It has a positive expectation that God’s plan will be accomplished in their lives, and it never gives up on anyone. Love expects God’s best upon everyone and desires harm to no one, without respect of persons.

Love will never cease to exist. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:8 (ESV), “Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away, as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.” God’s love and the true love from the Holy Spirit that is within all believers will never cease. But all prophecies will come to pass, tongues will end, and knowledge about God or his revelation will be fulfilled completely, with the culmination of believers forever in his presence and beholding his glory. However, God’s love for believers and the love that believers have for one-another, though perfected at that time, will continue to be manifested forever.

Paul understood that their present knowledge and understanding was limited. However, when all saints are changed and forever in God’s presence in glory, they will fully understand. He said in 1 Corinthians 13:9-10 (ESV), “For we know in part and we prophecy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.” God’s children will understand the Bible or God’s revelation more fully, when eternally in his presence. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:11 (ESV), “When I was a child. I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child.

When I became a man, I gave up childish way.” Paul admitted that he was limited in his understanding and ways because he was childish. But when he became a man, he gave up his childish ways. He said in 1 Corinthians 13:12 (ESV), “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part: then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” Paul acknowledged that he and other saints did not fully understand God’s revelation at the present hour. But he and all saints will clearly understand it in that future date of his coming and saints are forever in his presence. All saints will know even as they are fully known, all things will be revealed.

Love will continue forever along with faith and hope, but love is the greatest. Love is not a fleeting virtue; it will remain present in Christ’s bride or church throughout eternity. The apostle Paul concluded in 1 Corinthians 13:13 (ESV), “So now faith, hope, and love abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.” Therefore, the Johnson Grove churchmen and other churchmen require a major paradigm shift that fully implements walking in Christlike love. The church is missing the mark but walking in love is one of God’s top priorities and requirements of believers.

The seventh training module was focused on: “Love is Harmless (Romans 13:8-10). True agape does not harm others, but it fulfills God’s law. It does not seek to please self, but to please and honor God and to respect, honor, and avoid harming man, regardless of culture, background, or national origin. The apostle Paul said in Romans 13:8, (ESV), “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Clearly, all saints should pay their debts. But the debt that all saints owe everyone is to love them. Christ’s disciples owe everyone love. This includes black people, white people, red people, and yellow people. These colors apply to no one, but man uses these inappropriate physical labels to separate, categorize,

and distinguish human beings. When God's children love others, they fulfill the law because when others are loved, they will not be harmed or injured. Paul quoted from the law in verse 9 (ESV), he said, "For the commandments, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet, and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." God's word in this scripture commands his children not to harm others through committing adultery, murder, stealing from them, coveting against them, or anything that violates this principle: you shall love your neighbor as yourself. If a Christian honors, respects, and avoid harming his or her neighbor, he or she will fulfill the law.

God's requirement for believers to love their neighbor as themselves includes not the just fellow saints, but people in their neighborhood or community. Jesus' story of the helpful Samaritan that ministered to the Jew that was robbed and injured, revealed that a neighbor was not limited to geographical boundaries but included anyone in need. Therefore, the church should not bypass Samaria or other undesirable locations, to find a neighbor, as the Jews did in Jesus' day.

God commanded his disciples to love their neighbors as themselves. A neighbor should be loved just as much as a believer loves himself or herself. It is a given that a saints commanded to love themselves, but God requires that they love others the same way. This was a huge problem for the Johnson Grove churchmen because they were bombarded with messages that suggested that they hate themselves, because being black was seen as a curse and most undesirable by many African Americans from the greatest to the least. The churchmen still need help to truly love self, then they will be more adequately prepared to genuinely love others. This training module has implications for how the whole church can help heal itself in love through Christ.

True love avoids offending, harming, or doing wrong to its neighbor; therefore, it fulfills the requirements of law. God's love within believers helps them to treat all people with dignity and respect. God's children will refrain from hurting a person or needlessly taking a life without cause, nor celebrate anyone or who does, but rather reprove them. Paul said in Romans 13:10 (ESV), "Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law." Christlike love is a guiding principle for wellness within the walls of the church and a way for saints to impact the local community.

The eighth Training module was focus on: Faith Works by Love (Galatians 5:6; James 2:8-9, 14-17, 26; 1 John 4:8). True faith must go hand in hand with God's love. No one can truly claim to have genuine faith without loving others. Believers have a relationship God through Jesus Christ, the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and the impartation of divine love through faith. This faith indicates the believer trusts in the Lord and acts on his word or obey him. The apostle Paul stated in Galatians 5:6 (ESV), "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love." The ritual of circumcision is not what makes an impact in the kingdom of God. But only faith that works through love. Faith in God must be accompanied by love for humanity. Faith is not genuine unless the recipient has love from God for others. The only way faith works is through a heart that trust God through Christ and loves others.

The Sovereign Lord requires the citizens of his kingdom to love people. King Jesus commanded his subjects to love one another. The apostle James said in James 2:8 (ESV), "If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself, you are doing well." God's command to love others should not be overlooked by those who profess faith in him. Christians must love their neighbors as they love themselves. In doing so

they fulfill God's royal law. This indicates that Christians must love themselves and love their neighbors. Therefore, hating others, self-destruction or suicide has no place in the hearts and lives of God's children and should be steadfastly avoided with all diligence. But when saints love their neighbor as themselves, they are doing well and pleasing to the Lord. All neighbors should be loved without regard to culture or background.

True Christlike agape, loves everyone. James declared in James 2:9 (ESV), "But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." All believers must be very careful to avoid the sin of racism in this matter. It is easy to discriminate or stereotype one group, while highly regarding another, but not so in Christ. All Christians must love one another and learn to get along well, with one another in Christ. No believer should ever be rejected and unloved in this matter because it is contrary to God's nature and his purpose for believers.

James further admonished believers in James 2:14 (ESV), "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a person makes a profession of faith that is not accompanied or verified by works, what good is the profession. It is like thick dark clouds that don't produce rain. James continued his argument in James 2:15-16 (ESV), he stated, "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed, and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?" James warned believers that to pronounce empty words and blessings upon someone in need, but not aiding the person is null, and no love was demonstrated.

A stand-alone profession of faith without corresponding actions or works is inappropriate and void. True faith goes hand in hand with loving actions. James said in James 2:17 (ESV), "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Faith must be followed by works of love

that validates that it is genuine. Therefore, a profession of faith without works is meaningless. True faith must operate with works of love towards others. James reinforced his point as he concluded chapter 2, he stated in James 2:26 (ESV), “For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.” The body cannot live without the spirit. The spirit is essential for life. Likewise, faith without works is not real because works testify to the genuineness of faith. The churchmen of Johnson Grove must examine their faith. Faith must be demonstrated by works of love.

God’s nature is to love; it represents who he is. Therefore, those who represent him must be like him and walk in his love. The apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:8 (ESV), “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” No one can truly claim to know God without walking in his love. There is a serious problem in churches today if they are lacking in love. The real question is: Does the church truly know God? If the church knows God is must love everybody, without excuse.

The ninth training module was focused on: Loving the Least (Philemon). Believers love relationships as brothers and sisters in Christ, sets them apart in a special love relationship of oneness with God and one-another. The apostle Paul admonished Philemon concerning the new status of his former slave: Onesimus, who ran away from Philemon. But met him and led him to salvation in Christ, by the grace of God. Afterward, Paul alerted Philemon of God’s work in Onesimus life and how he needed to change his attitude towards him. The apostle Paul stated in Philemon 10 (ESV), “I appeal to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment.” The seasoned Apostle appealed to Philemon through the grace of God in Christ, on behalf of Onesimus who was faithfully serving the Lord and assisting him in the ministry. Paul determined to send his runaway slave back to him with his letter in hand that he should no

longer regard Onesimus as a slave but as a brother in the Lord. Paul said in Philemon 16 (ESV), “No longer as a bondservant but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but now much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.” Paul commended Onesimus and admonished Philemon to no longer treat him as a bondservant, but as a brother in the Lord and dearly beloved. Likewise, this is the same the church should treat one-another: i.e., as brothers and sisters in Christ. All Christians are God’s family of faithful on earth and indeed one family in the Lord. The Johnson Grove churchmen and all other churchmen should treat all Christians as brother and sisters in the Lord and family. This includes all nationalities around the world.

Christians should use their influence to help their brothers and sisters in Christ and commend them to others that they might treat them with dignity and respect. And plead with those who would ill-treat them because of any feeling of animosity toward them to charge it to their account, to enhance a more peaceful relationship with between the brother or sister in Christ and person that speaks evil of them or desires to do them harm. Barnabas was one who helped reconcile relationships bring peaceful solutions among believers. The Scripture state in Acts 4:36 (NIV), “Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabus (which means “son of encouragement”).” Barnabas was a peacemaker, encourager, and he help reconcile relationships among brethren in the Lord. When Paul first became a Christian and attempted to meet with the disciples and join them, no one trusted him, and everyone was afraid him and did not believe hi conversion story. The Bible states in Acts 9:27 (ESV), “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.” After Barnabas commended Paul and confirmed his commitment to the Lord, he was welcomed and received by the apostles and other disciples in the Lord. There are certain individuals within the church who can demand

that their family members and friends treat others in the family of God with love and use their influence to help believers be reconciled among those that assume the worse of them. Paul did this with Philemon concerning Onesimus. He said in Philemon 18 (ESV), “If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything charge that to my account.” If more Christians had this attitude, there would be less pain, ill-treatment and death among believers and others. Paul also stated in Philemon 17 (ESV), “So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.” If saints will make this demand of family and friends, more people from different cultures will be accepted and loved. Believers can influence their family members and friends to receive believers as they would themselves. Paul encouraged Philemon to receive his brother in the Lord: Onesimus, just like he would receive the Apostle himself.

The churchmen at Johnson Grove could significantly benefit from this kind of support from a fellow-believers. Thus, all believers around the world could benefit as well. This kind of love embraces all members of God’s family, speaks on their behalf, and pleads for them, when necessary.

The tenth and finale training module was focused on: Walking in True Love (1 Peter 1:22, 4:8). Believers love for others should be genuine, not artificial or based on hypocrisy. The apostle Peter admonished the saints in 1 Peter 1:22 (ESV), “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” If saints love one another out of a pure heart before God, the quality of their love will be wholesome, true, and more pleasing to God. The apostle Paul admonished believers in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 (RGT), “So that no one oppresses or defrauds his brother in any matter. For the Lord is the avenger of all such things, as we also told you previously, and testified.” Paul warned Christians not to oppress not take advantage of one another. The Lord will avenge this

kind of treatment of believers. The believers' economic status, country of origin, or culture does not matter, no believer in Christ should be oppressed or taken advantage of by saints of God nor any other individual. Jesus takes it personal when believers are mistreated. When Saul was attacking and persecuting Christians, the Lord met him in route to Damascus. The Bible declares in Acts 9:4 (ESV), "And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Christ identified with his church in suffering; if anyone persecute the church, they are persecuting him. Believers should treat one another in love as unto the Lord.

Believers are called upon to love one another sincerely. Christlike love within Christians helps them to graciously forgive trespasses and sins, and to even forgive those that don't request it. Peter declared in 1 Peter 4:8 (ESV), "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins." Since God loves believers and has been exceedingly gracious and merciful to them; believers ought to love one another and extend God's grace and mercy as well. Because love covers a multitude of sins. Agape in Christ is full of forgiveness and mercy, ready for reconciliation.

These ten training modules on Christlike love were designed to challenge, inspire, rebuke, and correct inappropriate attitudes and behavior concerning love. Christians walk by faith and love one another in Christ, by the grace of God. These training modules were also designed to encourage believers to depend more on God's Helper, the Holy Spirit, to enable them to love more like Christ.

Chapter 4

Results

The researcher in this Doctor of Ministry action research project was focused on the perceived lack of Christlike love within Johnson Grove Baptist Church. The researcher developed this project to alleviate the perceived lack of love within Johnson Grove Baptist Church. The researcher was concerned because the Johnson Grove Baptist Church needed to examine itself and uncover any possible hindrances to it walking in the love of Christ.

When the church displays or demonstrates Christ's love in their daily lives; it is a testimony to the world that they are followers of Christ. Jesus Christ mission and ministry in the world through his local churches will also be more effective.

The researcher gave each participant a survey or questionnaire to complete at the beginning of the project. The survey was designed to explore the participants' interpersonal relationships. The data would reveal how the participants were treating people. What were their attitudes as they shared personal relationships with others? How did they view other people? And how did the participants understand God's heavenly view of people? The researcher desired to get a sense of the participants' hearts in their interpersonal relationships.

The researcher asked questions of the participants that would indicate how they felt toward loving people in a general sense, indirectly, and directly. The following questions were included in the survey or questionnaire.

The first question was: Do you consider it okay to just like people? Circle one: Yes or No. The participants' response to this question would give the researcher a sense of the participants' understanding of God's requirements of believers to love others. If a participant responded yes to this question; it implied that the participant did not fully understand God's

commandment concerning love. Which could contribute to their lack of showing love to others. God never commanded anyone to just like people or just be fond of them. Perhaps, this view originated out of their culture, but it did not come from God. God commanded his children to love people. The apostle John declared in 1 John 3:11 (ESV), “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.” God never told anyone to just like people. However, many churchmen speak of people that they like and do not like, which is not pleasing to the Lord. God’s standard of believers loving one another will never change.

The second question was: People from other cultures or racial backgrounds should not expect me to help them? Circle one: True or False. The researcher sought to get a sense of how the participants viewed other cultures or races and their expectations from them. If any person needed help. Why would they care about whether a person is from another culture? And if a person does not mind helping others in need. What difference does it make if the person in need is black, white, or other? If a person has a heart to help, they will help. This question reveals the participants attitude towards other cultures or races. Why would a participant assume that just because the person in need, and he or she is from a different culture, they should not expect help? Some participants answered this question: true. Their response suggests to the researcher that some participants may have hang-ups concerning other racial groups, which may affect their attitude towards loving them.

Any individual in need of help should expect a Christian to help them and Christian should expect to be asked to help. It should not make any difference about a person’s background or where they are from. Christians represent Christ from a multicultural perspective. A believer with the love of God within sees beyond the skin, a person created in the image and likeness of God.

The third question or statement was: I like making friends with everyone I meet. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participants general attitude towards making friends and how open they were with making friend with everyone. Not just making friend with their cultures only but making friends with everyone. God's children should not have a problem with making friends or being friendly towards anyone they meet. The participants responses gave the researcher a sense of their openness to make friends with people from any culture. It also provided as sense of how a churchmen may respond to new visitors, especially if the visitors are culturally different. The churchmen should be friendly and welcome the everyone. The apostle Paul stated in Romans 12:13 (NIV), "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." Christians should be friendly, gracious, and show hospitality. This question should appeal to the participants heart towards helping people.

The fourth question or statement waw: I love my pet more than I love people. Circle one: True or False. The participants response to this question will certainly reveal their attitude about loving people. Some people will do more for their cat or dog than they would for a human being created in the image of God. If a participant responds: True, to this question, it will reveal that they don't fully understand God's love, nor God's perspective on how believers should love one another. The apostle John stated in 1 John 3:14 (ESV), "We know that we have passed out of death unto life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death." If a person does not love other people, this verse states that they are walking in death. But true believers have been passed from death to life because they love the brethren. It is okay to love a pet but loving an animal more than human being in not God's will, and it indicates that this person is out of syncopation with God. Jesus commanded his disciples to love people, he did not

command them to love animals, even though many people do so naturally. However, God's priority for Christians is to love one another.

The fifth question or statement was: I consider myself better than most people. Circle one: True or False. This statement explores any attitudes of superiority or narcissism. If a participant considers themselves better than most people, it's easy to allow self to get in the way of building friendly relationships. Pride hinders personal growth in relationships. The Holy Scriptures state in Romans 12:3 (NIV) "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you." If a person thinks that they are better than most people, pride knocks at the door. The person may not sense a need to listen to others and may become preoccupied with the sound of their own voice and reasoning. And making friends would not be a priority.

The sixth question or statement was: I make friends easily. Circle one: True or False. This question or statement was a slight twist on question 3. This question or statement reveals the attitude of the participants towards making friends. If a participant makes friends easy, they will be open to explore new friendships with everyone, even with people from different cultures and racial backgrounds. This kind of person would welcome visitors. This kind of participant that responds "true" to this question will more than likely find joy in meeting new friends. The Holy Scriptures state in Proverbs 18:24 (NKJV), "A man who has friends must show himself friendly, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."

If a participant makes friends easy, he or she is amenable to learning about different cultures. And this person is assertive in making friends. The person who is the recipient of their friendship will eagerly respond as appropriate to their invitation. Because the person has a

welcoming personality. When a person knows Christ as Savior and Lord. The real source of their connection and opens the doors of their friendship is Christ. Therefore, the participants can allow Christ's love to flow through them and draw people to the Lord. Churchmen can open their hearts and establish new friendships. Proverbs 27:10 (TPT), declares, "So never give up on a friend or abandon a friend of your father—for in the day of your brokenness you won't have to run to a relative for help. A friend nearby is better than a relative far away." When the churchmen truly values making friends, the community can develop new and critical support. And Christian friendships and fellowship can flourish through Christ, and believers can love in sincerity and truth.

The seventh question or statement was: I don't like some people. Circle one: True or False. The participant that responds affirmative to this question has issues that ought to be addressed. If a participant does not like some people, they are on the border of hate. Christians should avoid settling on that border because they may be tempted to cross it. Disliking people can lead to hating them. This is the prevalent attitude in the world of people that do not know Christ as their Savior. Most of them are comfortable with disliking people. This same type of attitude has entered the church. Church members speak of not liking other church members. God never instructed believers to just like people. But the God of love requires Christians to love everybody. John stated in 1 John 4:11 (ESV), "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." God's love for us provided the way through Christ for believers to love one another. The participants can be enlightened in their understanding of God's supernatural love and how it was imparted to them through the Holy Spirit. If a churchman does not like some people, this works against God's requirement of believers to love one another. Since God loves Christians, Christians ought to love one another.

If an individual does not like people he or she is walking in disobedient to God, because Christ commanded his disciples to love everybody. There is no way to love a person and dislike them at the same time. It proves that one is contradictive, hypocritical, and lacks spiritual discernment. The key point concerning love is that God commanded Christians to love everybody like Christ loved. He never requested or authorized anyone to just like people. Church should stick with God's guidelines or commandment and not deviate to the left nor to the right.

Churchmen ought to completely abandon the statement: I don't like some people. Because Christ's love is not a pick and choose operation of man. No one has the right to modify it to make it fit their situation. Rather, Christ's love should change Christians and cause them to make the modifications in their lives and yield to his will. Therefore, the participants and the churchmen should make modifications in their lives to live up with God's Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The eighth question or statement was: If I'm in the grocery line and a stranger in front of me is short a few dollars, I will pay the difference. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participants attitudes towards random acts of kindness towards anyone in need. The person in need culture or nationality did not make any difference. If a participant responded affirmative to this question or statement the researcher would assume that the participant is open to showing kindness to anyone, regardless of their culture, and the participant is open to being a good neighbor with kindness from the Lord. John the beloved disciple and apostle of the Lord, declared in 1 John 4:17 (ESV), "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" If God blesses a Christian with financial resources and they can help someone, they should. consider doing it. If a person has the resources and the Spirit of God reveal to them that the need is valid. The believer

should provide the assistance needed. If a person has true Christlike love; they will help others. The participants will receive a greater understanding of giving as they explore God's Word during these sessions. God will also help churchman appreciate how a little help can go a long way when the benefactor reaches out according to God's timing and plan. The Holy Scriptures state in Proverbs 3:27 "(AB), "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due. When it is in your power to do it." When God desires to bless others through Christians, believers should not seek to avoid being a channel of blessing.

The ninth question or statement was: Homeless people should be ashamed of themselves. Circle one: True or False. It is easy to stereotype homeless people and assume the worse about them. This question explores the participants attitudes towards homeless and hurting people, who do not have home to live in. This situation causes the researcher to recall the Scripture: Luke 9:58 (ESV), "And Jesus said to him, Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head," This Scripture indicates that Jesus was homeless, because he had nowhere to lay his head. Jesus identifies with the homeless, yet he had all power in his hands. If Jesus identifies with the homeless, what should they really be ashamed about? If a participant responds affirmative to this question or statement, it will signal that the participant judged the motives of the person in need and without shelter. However, some people may have become homeless because they lost their job. Others may have become homeless because of mental illness and still others may have become homeless because of alcohol and drug abuse. God knows the truth in each case. Believers must be careful to love them and just realize that they are people, who need help. John wrote in 1 John 3:23 (ESV), "And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us." The participant can receive a greater awareness of the needs within their

community. And the churchman be more resourceful in helping meet the needs of a homeless person. A good starting point would be to greet them like they are people and extend Christ's love to them as his vessel. Therefore the real need of a person that lives on the street is help. It makes no difference how they got there, they still need help, and the church is Christ's helping hands.

The tenth question or statement was: It is not important to speak to every visitor who comes to church. Circle one: True or False. The participants attitude toward visitors was examined through this question or statement. The question was not: You must speak to every visitor who comes to church. But it is not important to speak to every visitor who come to church? If a participant responded to this question with false, it would indicate that welcoming visitors is important to this participant. The visitors can include people who are new to the community or different individuals seeking a new church home from the greater area. It would be good to help them feel welcome. Participants can be more intentional in their support of visitors. All churchmen should care and consider it important to speak with all visitors. Each visitor represents a person that needs Christ as Savior and Lord, needs a place to worship, and needs a place to fellowship and connect with the family of God. The love of Christ within believers will inspire them to speak with and welcome all visitors to the Lord's house. Churchmen with the love of Christ within them will welcome everyone and greet them with love as well. Therefore, visitors will not be just a number, but they will care for and loved by Christ's body.

The eleventh question or statement was: God loves most people. Circle one: True or False. This question explores the participants attitude concerning of God's love. Does God love the world or just most people? Does God love everyone? Yes, he does. If a participant believes

that God only loves most people, they may assume that is okay for them to love only a select group as well. If a participant concluded that God does not love all people. He or she may take the liberty to reject certain people groups as well. Therefore, the participant will feel justified, while assuming its okay, just to like most people. Which may include family, friends, and those within his or her cultural group. Therefore, the participant will have an incorrect view of God and in error respond inappropriately to man. The apostle John clarified the issue when he wrote in 1 John 4:7-8 (ESV), “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” John requested that believers love one another because this is the nature of God: God is love. God loves everybody and demands that his servants love everyone too. Therefore, the participants and churchmen can fully embrace God’s love and extend to the community and beyond that the world may truly believe they are his disciples indeed.

The twelfth question was a multiple choice: Which one is more important? Circle your answer:

- a. Everybody getting along.
- b. Everybody watching their favorite show.
- c. Everybody playing with their favorite pet.

This question appealed to the participants values. The order in which they listed each item was and indication of what was important to them. The researcher was concerned about the participants interpersonal relationships. If the participants selected (a.) Everybody getting along. It indicated that the participant’s priority and focus was interpersonal relationships. And they would be more attentive than a participant who listed items (b.) or (c.) as their priority.

Therefore, the preceding participant would be more in tuned to people, concerned about enhancing their communications skills, and more assertive in building relationships with people.

Oh, if everybody would get along. If the family of God on earth would get along like the family of God in heaven, how wonderful it would be. The participants can learn to avoid being a catalyst for trouble and learn to be an agent of peace. The Lord Jesus Christ spoke of his kingdom and the requirement of citizens, he said in Matthew 5:9 (KJV), “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” Oh, If churchmen would learn to be peacemakers and not troublemakers. Oh, if all Christians would walk according to the words of Christ in this verse and be peacemakers indeed. Oh, if everybody would learn to get along. Oh, if the church would show the world how to be one and get along. The participants and the churchmen must learn be like Christ in love, peace, and unity, and everybody must learn to get along.

The thirteenth question or statement was: If a person does me wrong, I think it's okay to give them something to think about and give them just a little pain. Circle one: Yes or No. This question was a round-about way of exploring how the participants thought about getting even or taking revenge. If a participant's response to this question was yes, it implied that taking revenge was appropriate for this person. However, the intent of this individual would be to make its application minimal. The problem with this scenario is that good intentions does not translate into good results. And God did give the participant that concurs with this question the authorization to apply any amount of revenge. The Bible states in Deuteronomy 32:35 (NIV), the Lord declared, “I will take revenge; I will pay them back. In due time their foot will slip. Their day of disaster will arrive, and their destiny will overtake them.” God commanded believers to leave vengeance in his hands and to stick with loving others. John said in 1 John 4:19 (ESV),

“We love because he first loved us.” Since, God loves believers and graciously forgives their sins, believers ought to be graceful and merciful to others. The Bible states in Hebrews 10:30-31 (ESV), “For we know him who said, Vengeance is mine, I will repay.” And again, The Lord will judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” God loves all people and Christian should love everyone as well. The participants can see the wisdom in holding their peace and leaving all vengeance to God. The churchmen will be able to let go of bitterness and holding grudges concerning the past and leave all vengeance in God’s hands. Therefore, their heavy burdens will be released, healing and reconciliation can win, and the blaming game can end.

The fourteenth question or statement was: I never show my true feelings. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participants openness in allowing others to enter their world. If a participant answered affirmative to this question it revealed that they were not as open in their relationships as they could be. And true intimacy was on the backburner because did not freely share their true feeling or thoughts, which may indicate some deception. Their smile may not be real but used to camouflage their true feelings. They hid behind a protective wall to avoid detection. This participant allows only limited knowledge about themselves. Therefore, the real person behind the mask is not fully known. This participant must learn to open the window of their heart that others can see who they really are and love them. True love says, Here I am, I’m not afraid to be vulnerable, let’s be friends. The apostle John stated in 1 John 4:18 (ESV), “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” The churchmen can learn to take down the walls, connect with others, and become a friend. And that expressing emotions is part of being human and not a death threat or technique for survival. The churchmen can be healed from within and

learn that sharing emotions is not a sin. Saints ought to grow in relationships with others and avoid the fear of rejection because the Holy Spirit's presence within believers has given them Christlike love.

The fifteenth question or statement was: It's hard for me to treat people like family. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participant's feelings towards treating people like family. If a participant responds affirmative to this question, it indicates some hesitancy to accept other people or even other believers as family. However, the church is the family of God and believers are brothers and sisters in Christ. The apostle Paul declared in Ephesians 2:19 ESV, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." Therefore, believers should commend one another to family members around the world. The participants can learn to appreciate their family in Christ, as they ought. The churchmen can accept them, embrace them with love, and build community with them. The apostle Paul said in Galatians 3:28 (ESV), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." This a unique oneness created by God that binds together his children throughout eternity. Therefore, churchmen should acknowledge and proclaim this oneness in their local, community, state, nation, and around the world. And all of God's family should love every member and treat each one as Christ would treat them.

The sixteenth question was a multiple choice one: If you had to choose a bird that most closely represents you, which would it be? Circle one:

- a. Eagle b. Parrot c. Dove d. Hawk

This question explored the participants overall attitude and disposition. What characteristics of one of these birds' best fits that of the participant? The participants response to this question

provided a general idea of their dispositional preference and operating style. The eagle and hawk are both aggressive predators. While the parrot is mild tempered and known for talking. Whereas the dove is gentle and quiet-spirited. The participants selected one of the birds based on their appeal to them and for their reason. However, the bird that God likened unto the Holy Spirit to descend upon Christ after his baptism in the Jordan river by John was a dove. The Holy Scripture states in Mark 1:10 (ESV), "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove." The participants and churchmen can learn from a dove. The Lord Jesus Christ said in Matthew 10:16 (NKJV) "Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore, be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves." Christians should walk in wisdom from the Lord and be harmless.

The seventeenth question or statement was: It feels good to give people a piece of my mind. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participants attitude about what they say to others and why it makes them feel good after saying it. If the participants respond positively to this question, it implies that they may find joy out of hurting people's feelings. Instead of giving people a piece of their mind, Christians might need to repent of what's on their minds, rather than sharing it with others. Once a person speaks a word, phrase, or sentence good or bad, it cannot be returned into their mouth. Words can inspire, encourage, and uplift a person and words discourage, tear-down, and destroy a person. Proverbs 18:21 (NLT) says, "The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences." Therefore, Christians should be careful about what they say. The apostle Paul admonished believers in Colossians 4:6 (ESV), "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person." Therefore, the participants and churchmen can learn to be careful about what they say and how they say it. The apostle Paul summed it well, he said in Ephesians

4:15 (NLT) “Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.” The churchmen can change but must remember that love in Christ should always motivate speech and behavior.

The eighteenth question or statement was: If a person hurts me, I may forget to pray for them. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participants attitudes in prayer, especially when offended by someone. The believers love for others ought to enable him or her to pray for anyone who offends them. When participants respond negative to this question it indicates growth in the Lord and concern for the one that offended. Christ prayed for his disciples in John 17, knowing that they would deny him, curse, and desert him. The prophet Samuel said in 1 Samuel 12:23 (NIV), “As for me, be it far from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. And teach you the way that is good and right.” When a believer truly prays for someone, it is an indication that the believer is in turn with God, submitted to his will, and desires to please him and see others please him.

The nineteenth question was multiple choice: Put each word in the order of importance to you. (Number each, 1. 2. 3. or 4.) a. Knowledge b. Kindness c. Faith d. Determination. This question allowed the participants prioritize which word appealed to them. And what general theme was relevant to them. The participants choice could reveal their overall focus area of spiritual growth that may need their attention.

Kindness was the one strong relational word. The participants who selected this word was indicative that their thoughts were leaning towards relationships. Kindness falls under the umbrella of love. When Christians walk in love, they are kind to one another. The apostle Paul declared in 1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV), “Love is patient and kind...” Kindness suggests that a person has qualities of being friendly, generous, and considerate towards others. It is listed as

one of the Fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22. True love is kind, not rude and rambunctious. Paul described how they were kind as they labored in love among the believers at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 2:7 (AB), he said, “But we have behaved gently when we were among you, like a devoted mother tenderly caring for her own children.” Participants and churchmen can demonstrate love through intentional acts of kindness. And lead by example in helping the church walk in Christlike love.

The twentieth question or statement was: The people that deserve hell should get it. Circle one: Yes or No. This question explored the participants attitudes towards judgment, mercy, and grace. If a participant responded affirmatively, it was an indication that maybe they had forgotten how gracious and merciful God is. If God gives everyone what they deserved, who can stand? Christians are delivered from eternal damnation and sin’s ultimate penalty because of Christ and God’s amazing grace. Believers should never forget how God has been exceedingly gracious and merciful to them. If a participants or churchmen had the attitude that the people that deserved hell should get it, how much would they pray for the lost and engage in evangelistic efforts to reach them with the gospel of Christ.

Christians received grace and mercy from the Lord i.e., God’s treasure and unspeakable gift from heaven. How can saints want anything less for those lost? It could be that everyone deserves hell but thank God for Jesus Christ. The participants and churchmen can grow in knowledge, understanding and appreciation of God’s magnificent grace and tender-mercies.

The twenty-first question was: I don't think that my community is for everybody. Circle one: True or False. This question explored the participants attitudes concerning community. And how open they would be towards different cultures moving in. If a participant responded affirmative to this question, it indicated that they had limitations about all people groups being

able to move into their community. If a person was not welcomed into a community, it's just as bad as not being welcome on earth. The community is where everyone belongs, and the earth is where everyone lives. Why would a believer think that their community is not for everyone? Did God say it? Did Jesus Christ make an official announcement? Or is that the voice of a culture contrary to the will of God. The prophet Moses declared in Leviticus 19:18 (ESV), "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord." God requires believers to love their neighbors as themselves. Therefore, each participant and all churchmen can put on their welcome shoe and welcome everyone home.

Christians live together, share in community, and are in constant fellowship with one another. The apostle John wrote to other believers to extend and share fellowship with other believers, said in 1 John 1:3 (ESV), "That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ." Believers share fellowship with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit, and with one another. The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV), "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all."

Therefore, the participant, the churchmen, and all believers, everywhere, are in fellowship with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and one another. And the Holy Spirit united everyone together as one.

The researcher analyzed the problem and presented variable solutions. The researcher used two questionnaires, ten training sessions, ten sermons on Christlike love, and an introduction and conclusion session to address the research problem and provide a solution that

would produce a more positive loving attitude and growth in Christlike love, and to inspire all churchmen to love one another in the Spirit's power.

The facilitator gathered data from the final questionnaire and compared it with the participants' responses to the first questionnaire. This gave the researcher data on the participants' attitudes, behavior, and understanding of Christian love and how they behaved in interpersonal relationships.

The data revealed that the researcher's initial assessment of Johnson Grove Baptist Church was correct: the members lacked Christlike love. They had a sense of loving others that fell short of the biblical requirement. The researcher observed that many churchmen assumed that they were fulfilling the biblical requirement without understanding what the Bible says about loving one another like Christ.

The results reveal that 75% of the participants thought that it was okay just to like people, but the Bible never indicated that believers in Christ should just like people. God required his children to love one another, starting in the Old Testament and continuing throughout the New Testament.

The data revealed that 50% of the participants affirmed that they don't like some people. Not only do they fail concerning God's requirement to love others, but they also don't like some people. The Scriptures clearly teach that Christ's disciples must love everyone. However, many churchmen assume that it's okay to dislike some, like some, and to love some.

The researcher discovered that 80% of the participants shared an incorrect view of God's love for people. They asserted that God loves most people. Their view of God revealed that he was limited in his love for human beings. In their minds, God does not love everybody; he only loves most people. Therefore, if they believe that God does not love everybody, then it would be

reasonable for them not to feel compelled to love everyone too. These participants' misconception of God's love can justify a view of love that falls short of the biblical standard.

The data revealed that 50% of the participants confirmed that it was hard for them to treat people like family. This is contrary to God's will for his church. Believers in Christ are one family before God: brothers and sisters. Yet, these churchmen find it difficult to treat everyone like family. How can Christ's disciples demonstrate God's love without treating other believers like family?

The researcher noted that 70% of participants revealed that they made friends easily. This revealed a welcoming attitude toward strangers, regardless of cultural backgrounds. These churchmen were open to developing new relationships and new friendships. Believers, who are friendly, can help change the view of the church as the most segregated entity during the week. Likewise, this group affirmed that it was important to speak to every visitor that entered the church. These churchmen provided hope and an optimistic future.

This researcher noted that 70% of the participants, who thought that their community was not for everybody, changed their perspective on the final questionnaire and noted that they would welcome everyone. All new neighbors want to feel welcome, especially in God's church.

The researcher observed that 50% of the participants responded positively to the statement: 'God loves most people.' This was troubling for the researcher because the participants' view of God's love affects their attitudes of loving others. God does not just love most people; God loves everyone. There is an apparent blindness of heart among some of the participants concerning God's love for humanity. The obvious conclusion of this view suggests that there are some people that God does not love, which is not true of God. If the participants are convinced that God only loves most people, then it would be reasonable that they only love

most people as well. This incorrect view of God's love causes the Johnson Grove churchmen to have an inadequate view of how they should love all people as well.

The researcher noted that 90% of the participants answered 'false,' to the question: 'People from other cultures or racial backgrounds should not expect me to help them?' Most of the participants had a willing attitude toward helping people from other cultural backgrounds. The participants with this perspective suggested that most of them were willing to show kindness and love to people from other cultures. They had an amicable attitude toward everyone. Therefore, their hearts were receptive to loving all people. The 10% of the participants that thought other cultures should not expect their help certainly need spiritual growth in their attitude towards loving people from different cultures.

This researcher uncovered the fact that most participants experienced growth because of participating in this project. Changes were noted in the participants' attitudes, convictions, and behavior. This researcher believes that the ten lessons and ten sermons focused on Christlike love, and the participants' personal study of God's Word inspired change and growth. The churchmen's lack of love can be changed to reflect the Savior's love.

This researched discovered that after the participants completed all training for the project, 100% of the participants, who had previously signified that on the first questionnaire they considered it okay just to like people, changed their perspective. They no longer held that just liking people was fulfilling God's standard because God requires his children to love everybody. The researcher also noted that out of the four participants that expressed that they don't like some people, each one, changed their mind on the final questionnaire and acknowledged that it was the wrong perspective.

This researcher discovered that the participants scored higher on the second questionnaire as compared to the first. The participants received biblically based teaching and preaching on how believers should walk in Christlike love. Church members were inspired to love one another with the help of the Holy Spirit. The participants were admonished to dismiss unloving attitudes. Each participant was reminded that all Christians must give an account unto God for how they treat others. Thus, the participants were more inclined to represent Christ more effectively and to develop a more loving community.

Therefore, the evidence revealed that the African American churchmen at Johnson Grove Baptist Church neglected the divine pattern of loving like the Messiah and settled for a form of love that only partially displayed miniature droplets of messianic love. But the churchmen's confidence of loving like the Lord is not an impossible mission because of the life changing power of the Holy Spirit and God's Word.

Chapter 5

This research project was focused on Implementing Christlike Love in the Johnson Grove Baptist Church. If the church walked in Christ's love the world would be encouraged to believe that believers truly represent Christ and are his disciples. The researcher views Christlike love as the key theme of the Scriptures. God's love was the basis of his plan of redemption. God's love was the reason that he sent Christ into the world. The title of this project is also the burden of the researcher, who also serves as senior pastor of Johnson Grove Baptist Church. Implementing Christlike love in the church is the key to it doing God's will and accomplishing his mission. A church that represents Christ should be a church that loves people.

The researcher is concerned that all churches walk in Christ's love. The problem addressed was a lack of Christlike love in the church. This problem is not limited to Johnson Grove Baptist Church, but other churches seem to lack love. New visitors often discern quickly when a local church lacks love, by the way they are treated. But love is the mark of Christians and their identity with Christ. Without it their distinctiveness would be unknown. Christ's love should unite believers around the world and turn the world upside down for God's glory.

When the world sees that the church is walking in Christlike; it will know that the churchmen are his true disciples. When this love unites the church as one. The world will take notice and be able to believe that Jesus Christ was sent into the world by the Father to redeem sinful man.

When the church loves like Christ, it will seek to make all visitors welcome, regardless of their race or cultural background. The church will offer a variety of Christian music that the other cultures can relate to. The music would not be limited to contemporary Christian music, but gospel music will be included too. The church would not require advertisement and ministry

photos to be only of one race. But other races will be included too. The Church should be multicultural to minister to people more effectively and if the church is multicultural in its worship and ministry, people will know that they are welcome and that the church is sensitive to their needs.

When God's church love people it will seek to communicate with them in their language. If Spanish speaking people live near the church the church should provide worship music in Spanish and English to reach them. Translation equipment or translators can be used in the process of communicating. The church can also purchase ministry resources in Spanish. And acquire Spanish speakers to aid in the ministry.

The purpose of the project was to assess and resolve the perceived lack of Christlike love in the Johnson Grove Baptist Church. If the church lacked Christlike love, what was the problem? Why was there a shortage of love? What were the key issues that contributed to the problem? How could the perceived problem be resolved? Why was there a perception that the Johnson Grove Baptist Church was lacking Christlike love? What's wrong with the church? The researcher is concerned that the Johnson Grove Baptist Church truly loves like Christ and accomplish its mission. Since the church had a problem the research's plan was to be diligent about finding a solution.

Jesus Christ's love was not selfish but sacrificial, graceful, forgiving, kind, everlasting, pure, merciful, and concerned for the needs of others. This is not an exhaustive list. Christ's love included suffering and death on behalf of the world. Love describes the very nature of God. God's love is eternal, and he does not change.

The project revealed that the Johnson Grove Baptist Church lacked Christlike love. The church was not a place where everyone felt loved and cared for. Some members were rude, and

others did not appreciate expressions of love and kindness. Some seemed angry because of family issues. There were several factors that contributed to the problem of a lack of love within the church.

It seemed that some members had forgotten how to bring their problems to Jesus and leave them there. They forgot to cast their cares upon the Lord and believe that God would make away. They were clued to their past like white on rice.

The church struggled with the lingering effects of living in black skin. Nobody really wanted to be black. It was too painful. Many preferred to be white or at least light skinned, but not black. It caused too many issues with loving oneself. It caused feelings of rejection. It was the target of racism and the constant murders of black youth and men. Living in black skin meant being a target of hate. Many blacks desired a white paint job, not for their cars, but for their faces. They did not appreciate being black and it is still an issue today.

The light-skinned African Americans demanded special privileges among other black folks. They thought that they were better than the darker skinned blacks. Their hair was straighter and considered better quality. They seemed more tolerable than dark skinned African American.

The church also wrestled with its own spiritual problems and hypocrisy. Their church traditions were in the forefront even above God's word. Envy and jealousy were welcomed as friends. The churchman assumed that there was nothing wrong with how they treated one another. They didn't think to do a specific study on Loving Your Neighbor, because they felt that they were okay, just the way they were. It didn't occur to them that the Holy Spirit could help them love one another.

Some of the churchman at Johnson did not know Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. Without knowing Christ, they lacked his presence and the Holy Spirit, who is the source

of God's love. No one can walk in Christ's love without experiencing his salvation and the presence of the Holy Spirit. This explained why some lacked Christlike love because they lacked Christ, himself. This kind of churchmen walked in misery and spread it to others.

There were other churchmen who sought refuge from within of Black Power and Black Theology. Jesus was the Black Liberator and black suffering became the only issue that African Americans needed deliverance from. This was deceptive because the black man had sin issues too and only the biblical Christ could forgive sin.

Christlike love originated from a relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, who poured his love into the hearts of all believers. This love enabled or gave all Christians the ability to love one another like Christ and to love their neighbor as themselves. However, if a professed believer did not love himself or herself, how could they truly love their neighbor? This was a problem for the black churchmen. Many did not love themselves. How could the members effectively love others without loving themselves?

There were other issues that lead to a host of questions: How can a black churchmen turn off the negative and racist messages being replayed within their heads repeatedly? How can black churchman erase terrorism from their minds? How can attendees at Johnson Grove overcome traumatic stress disorder, when trauma occurs regularly, and it appears that black lives don't matter, even within the church. What happened to the American dream and Doctor Martin Luther King Jr.'s dream? How can the churchmen be free from it all at last? The only resolve is Jesus. The churchmen must call Doctor Jesus, he can heal the pain and can cause abuse to cease. King Jesus can put the pieces of little black Humpty Dumpty together again and heal Humpty from within. The Johnson Grove churchmen lacked Christlike love, but Jesus Christ can remove the hindrances and cause his church to love more than ever before.

The researcher noted that the Johnson Grove churchmen needed to refocus and seek Jesus in and through all their struggles. And turn their attention back to the Word of God. Since Jesus is the answer, the best way to learn about his solutions are to study the Bible and discover his plan of relief. What does the Bible say about love, injustice, relationships, salvation, spiritual growth, forgiveness, and reconciliation? How is the Holy Scriptures relevant to the churchmen's situation? The churchmen were willing to share their experiences and highlights of their stories with the researcher to help the researcher get to the bottom of the problem.

The Johnson Grove churchmen disclosed their true emotions, pain, frustrations, and anguish concerning their struggles in the Southern United States. The researcher noted that many of their stories and situations are similar, not just to African American in Georgia but throughout the United States. Their journeys seem to follow the same general road, with ascending and descending highways, deserted roads, unpaved roads, and plenty of unexpected turns. However, the churchmen needed to learn the Holy Spirit is his best Navigation from earth to heaven. He knows the past and what's ahead. He knows the short-cuts, backroads toll roads, and every highway from beginning to ending.

However, the African American churchmen at Johnson Grove Baptist Church knew that they were supposed to walk in love and love everybody. They were seeking to worship God and grow by his grace, but they were constantly being rejected and slapped in the face by racism. They admitted that black was still the color of disgrace and shame, and every time they looked into the mirror, they were faced with it. And there were factors that tugged at their efforts and hindered them in their walk in Christ's love.

The churchman felt traumatized. The story of Black History in America was filled with traumatic events. This coupled with a black person murdered and paraded throughout all media

cause terrorism in the hearts of most black families. African Americans were also murdered in the church, while engaged in Bible studies. This resurfaces thoughts of lynching and other horrific events. Therefore, the churchmen were often distracted by these events. It was difficult to focus on loving people when there was a lack of trust. And some of people that the churchman wanted to love were killing their brothers and sisters.

The churchmen revealed that they were discriminated against, and some were overwhelmed by years of oppression. But where was Jesus and where was the white church? They were looking for their white brothers and sisters in Christ to speak up for them, and to tell their family members and friends to stop calling them bad names and hurting them. The churchman felt abandoned by most white churches.

Did Jesus come only for the Europeans? What color is the gospel? Can Jesus identify with the Blackman's experience? Yes, Jesus is relevant to everyone. His gospel is multicultural and includes: red, yellow, black, and white, if that is how cultures describe man? But God sees human beings in need without a need to verify skin colors.

The author of this research learned that the black churchmen at Johnson Grove Baptist Church found it difficult to love the man or woman in the mirror. The black face was an emblem of hate and shame, not because God made it that way, but it was the fruit of some cultures, supremacist groups, ungodly scientists, and even some churches.

Blackness has been a target of hatred and shame for hundreds of years and still weighs heavily on the hearts of the black churchmen. It is challenging to love others when a person does not love themselves.

The black churchmen require healing from within and confidence from God that the black skin he created was not a mistake. The black church needs to be fixed by Heaven. The

black churchman roots must plunge deep into the soil of God's Word, and with the power of the Holy Spirit, the churchman can live out Christlike love.

The participants discovered new learning, developed new attitudes, and opportunities for spiritual growth, while completing this project. They also displayed genuine change and growth in Christlike love. The ten lessons and ten sermons on Christlike love proved helpful. The participants were reminded of God's commandments, requirements, and standards of love. And of God's provision for believers to walk in his love through the help his Spirit.

The researcher identified internal and external factors that hindered or distracted the Johnson Grove churchmen from loving others like Christ. The researcher sought ways to address its issues by reviewing literature, exploring the issues theoretically and theologically, by developing an intervention plan to help solve the problem, and identify results and a solution.

Christlike love was not only lacking in the Johnson Grove Baptist Church, but within other Black churches too. And not just black churches but white, red, and yellow ones. The researcher is aware that churches are not any of these colors, but these are cultural labels. This mantle of Christlike love needs to be picked up immediately by the church. There was very little written about Christlike love, especially concerning the relationship between black and white churches in America. This is not just a concern when it comes to social justice, but it is the heartbeat of the Savior that testifies to true discipleship and oneness as members of Christ's body. Therefore, Christlike Love within God's church should flourish as the church examines itself, humble itself, stand on God's Word, and depend upon the Holy Spirit.

The African American churchmen at Johnson Grove was resilient through prayer, black theology, biblical theology, songs, testimonies, and by depending on the Lord. Through it all they learned to trust in Jesus. The black churchmen have a heart that is open for the Master of

Heaven to mold and make in Christlike love, despite of their pain and sorrow. Tears are temporary, memories fade, but God's joy comes with the break of day. Therefore, the black churchmen understood how to hold on to God's unchanging hand. The Heavenly Father's love was never extinguished, once planted in the heart of God's church. The light of Christ's love was dim, but never put out.

The black church and the white church need to acknowledge its oneness and walk in love with one another in the Lord. The Holy Scriptures states in Galatians 3:28 (ESV), "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." But not church just these two, all churches should recognize their oneness and walk in Christ' love. Love is the acid test of discipleship. Therefore, the church must truly love God and all its brothers and sisters in the world.

All churches can benefit from this project because it reveals the heart of the churchmen, their struggles, pain, and hope in Christ. Their experiences are not only representing the state of Georgia, but also throughout the United States. Therefore, all African American churchmen can identify in some way with what the attendees at Johnson Grove and what they have experienced because they have similar stories to tell. It is also crucial for white brothers and sisters in Christ to understand what their fellow African American brothers and sisters in Christ are going through and support them as fellow members of the household of faith. This project will assist white brothers and sisters in Christ in their comprehension of the needs and concerns of their African American brothers and sisters in Christ: that each will lock arms together and grow in Christlike love.

The results of this project have worldwide implications. Skin color has been used as a distinguishing factor throughout the globe. The black church, white church, red church, and

yellow church no longer should require manmade adjectives to describe itself. The true title is simply the church. The cultural or racial background of people should not be used to downgrade one group of people and exalt another. The only race that is important before God is the human race, which includes everyone. Therefore, Africans, Caucasians, Native Americans, Chinese, Mexicans, and every other nation under the sun can learn about Christlike love and how to walk in it from this project.

Future research should proceed with a global biblical approach of God's churches walking in Christlike love. The whole world needs to see that God's total worldwide church is his disciple and one family in the Lord. The church should identify with all its family members from around the world. No culture or people group should be rejected. The church needs to send out a clear message to the world that church all other people groups in the world that knows and has received Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord are one and family in the Lord. And because of this fact, it will love, respect, support, encourage, and rebuke and correct anyone that seeks to hurt or destroy them. Does the church in the United States love the church in Russia? Does the church in Africa love the church in Europe? The list could go on and on, but the principle remains the same: God's church around the world should walk in Christlike love with one another. This research could be combined with methods of evangelism and church growth. Each one cannot truly reach another without loving them as Christ.

The researcher developed this action research project because the Johnson Grove Baptist Church of Hephzibah, Georgia was lacking in Christlike love. This project proves that if believers are taught how to love as Christ correctly, follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and see themselves as image-bearers of the Creator, then they can truly demonstrate Christlike love.

Johnson Grove Baptist Church will be able to lead the charge in walking in Christlike love. They will be able to encourage other believers and congregations to love like Christ. This will influence other churches to love all people, regardless of their racial identity.

The church in the United States, and the global church, need to love everybody like Christ. Thus, all the nations of the world will recognize that the universal church is following Christ and the church global will be a true witness for Christ. There is a great need for additional study on Christlike love. The whole world cries out for love and racial acceptance; while pride destroys and count itself superior to all. The Lord Jesus Christ commanded his church to love others like he loved the church.¹²⁶ Therefore, any racial hatred, discrimination, and self-hatred rejects the will of God. God loves everyone and requires his church to love everyone too. When the whole church follows this pattern of Christlike love, the church flourishes, grows spiritually and numerically, effectively reaches the world for Christ, and completes his mandate. Therefore, Jesus Christ will be glorified when his church loves like him and does his will. Everyone will feel welcome when they come into the house of the Lord. No one should ever be rejected because of their race. Everyone should love everyone, because of Christ.

The family of God on earth needs to learn to love like the family of God in heaven. The family of God in heaven is one and loves everyone as one. There is no sin there: no racism or discrimination, no oppression, or dispossession, and no disliking or hate.

All denominations and all churches around the world should develop a biblical based curriculum focused on loving one another like Christ. The church should not assume that this will happen automatically on the local level. It has been over 2000-years, and it has not occurred.

¹²⁶ John 13:34-35.

Thus, this kind of study should be required of all missionaries and evangelistic teams. How can they truly be effective if they do not love others?

The church should address issues of suffering of blacks and other oppressed people around the world. The Holy Scriptures states in Jeremiah 22:3 (NIV), “This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or widow, and do not shed innocent blood.” Believers must declare to them that the gospel is relevant to their situation. Christ is the Liberator indeed, but not just from suffering oppression. Christ is concerned about the poor and homeless. The church should be concerned about the poor and homeless too.

Theologians should develop a theology of how to overcome oppression and suffering from a biblical perspective. It makes no difference which theologians accomplish this task. But God’s servants should write concerning that the body of Christ face in general. Theologians should not be dedicated to their cultures; they should be dedicated to the Lord. And unafraid to correct write to correct cultural issues that are outside of their own. Theologians should draw their theology from God’s Word and speak as God’s representatives. And recognize that they’re not a law unto themselves, only stewards of God that must give an account of their stewardship.

Black and white theologians should develop a biblical theology of justice because God is the Lord of justice. The Holy Scriptures state in Micah 6:8 (ESV), “He has told you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” Yahweh is righteous, true, and demands justice for all. The church cannot faithfully represent God without standing for justice. All of God’s church must understand that injustice is wrong and the whole church around the world must stand against it.

Theologians and the total church should also develop a theology of the vengeance of God. The Holy Scriptures state in Romans 12:19 (NIV), “Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge, I will repay,” says the Lord.” Therefore, the Lord will take vengeance on all who oppress and take advantage of this children. The Lord will take vengeance on all acts of injustice. The Lord will take vengeance on all murderers and that defy his word and ignore his provisions of salvation, deliverance, and forgiveness of sin.

Theologians should not just develop theologies in areas of their comfort zone. But they should develop theologies for the glory of God. They should not seek to please men, but God.

Theologians should develop a biblical based theology concerning how everyone family of all races today came from the original family of Adam and Eve. Therefor the human family is indeed one. It has many varieties and variations, but still one. No one can claim true superiority. When any man or group does so, its deceptive and false doctrine, and the church should stand against it.

The second part of this study should not just focus on the first family but how all men are of one blood. God put the same blood in all men. The blood of all men originated from Adam and Eve. All nations came from the first family. The American Red Cross understands this lesson well, they take blood from all people and provide it foe all people. Therefore, all people groups are one, all ethnic groups are one, and all men are one. The Holy Scriptures says in Acts 17:26 (NKJV), “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.” God created people from one blood and one family.

Theologians should consider a study of body and flesh of man. It is unique. No animal is compatible with human beings. Surgeons cannot effectively change a body part of a man with an animal. The apostle Paul spoke of the human body in 1 Corinthians 15:39 (ESV), he said, “For not all flesh is the same, but there is one kind for humans, and another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.” Paul declared that there is one kind of flesh for humans. Therefore, All humans share the same flesh and are indeed one.

There is much work that needs to be done to unite believers around the world. Christ has one church, and the various elements of his church should not ignore this fact for their own convenience, unreasonable doctrinal dogmas, or prideful assertions of grandeur with divisive walls of separation.

Theologians should consider developing a practical theology of the Holy Spirit’s work within believers. He regenerates, sanctifies, glorifies Christ, makes intercession, give illuminations of God’s word, indwells, and fills believers, empowers believers for ministry, gives boldness and pours out God’s into the believers’ heart. Special focus on how he fills believers with Christ’s love would be in order. The Holy Scriptures state in Romans 5:5 (ESV), “And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” This supernatural function or ministry of the Spirit seems to have been put on the back burner with low heat. But this work of the Spirit is pertinent to the church and the key to walking in Christlike love. The church must be clear that the Holy Spirit is the only one, who can guide and navigate believers in Christ’s love throughout the land and over all seas.

The message of Christlike love is basic yet profound. It goes hand in hand with what Christ describe as the greatest commandment: to Lord God and love one another. The Holy

Scriptures in Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV) states, “And he said to him, You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” It is the coin with two major sides: loving God and loving man. It is the central message of the Bible in both the Law and Prophets.

Christ’s love is the key theme of the Bible. It is also the true theme of theology, Christology soteriology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and bibliology. If Christlike love is the theme of the Bible, it should also be the theme of the church.

The Lord Jesus Christ demonstrated his message of love, when endured the cross and died for the sins of the world, He also expressed his love for the Samaritans, by refusing to go around Samaria their city but through it. He met a Samaritan woman at the well and willing to drink from her cup. Jesus delivered her from her sins and gave her salvation. And the whole city came out to him for salvation. Therefore, the message of Christ’s love for humanity should be taught around the world. Christians should teach this message in their homes. It should also be taught schools, colleges, and Seminaries.

The apostle Paul described God’s love in no uncertain terms, he said in Ephesians 3:18 (NLT), “And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high and how deep his love is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God.” Christ’s love should be live out by all believers from all nations around the world.

The leaders around the world could began an international fellowship of believers, who pray, support, and encourage one another to walk in Christlike love. Churches can get to know

one another and become friends. Individual believers can get to know one another too. Perhaps by first establishing an international church website.

This website can also be a way of training church leaders and sharing resources. Churches can share ideas about leadership development, methods of evangelism, principles of church growth and others. This website can be cost efficient. Virtual learning could be implemented and assessable with little cost. Especially, for those who otherwise could not afford academic or professional education.

This site could also connect Christians for in-person learning. Missionaries and other Christians workers could assist churches and utilize their skills by touching more lives and working with international church leaders round the world.

This website could also become a way of filling ministry vacancies in various ministry settings. And networking to personnel.

This could become a worldwide tool to develop fellowship, friendship, training, and walking in Christ like love. When the church loves all its members around the world, it will be a testimony to world that church is Christ disciple indeed.

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

December 29, 2020

Robert Sullivan
Boyd Hatchel

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-193 Implementing Christlike Love in the Johnson Grove Baptist Church

Dear Robert Sullivan and Boyd Hatchel,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects' research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

Appendix A

Project Survey I

Note: Please circle your choice. Do not put your name on this survey.

1. Do you consider it okay to just like people? Circle one: Yes or No.
2. People from other cultures or racial backgrounds should not expect me to help them? Circle one: True or False.
3. I like making friends with everyone I meet. Circle one: True or False.
4. I love my pet more than I love people. Circle one: True or False.
5. I consider myself better than most people. Circle one: True or False.
6. I make friends easily. Circle one: True or False.
7. I don't like some people. Circle one: True or False.
8. If I'm in the grocery line and a stranger in front of me is short a few dollars, I will pay the difference. Circle one: True or False.
9. Homeless people should be ashamed of themselves. Circle one: True or False.
10. It is not important to speak to every visitor who comes to church. Circle one: True or False.
11. God loves most people. Circle one: True or False.
12. Which is more important? Circle your answer:
 - a. Everybody getting along.
 - b. Everybody watching their favorite show.
 - c. Everybody playing with their favorite pet.
13. If a person does me wrong, I think it's okay to give them something to think about and give them just a little pain. Circle one: Yes or No.
14. I never show my true feelings. Circle one: True or False.
15. It's hard for me to treat people like family. Circle one: True or False.
16. If you had to choose a bird that most closely represents you, which would it be? Circle one:
 - a. Eagle
 - b. Parrot
 - c. Dove
 - d. Hawk
17. It feels good to give people a piece of my mind. Circle one: True or False.
18. If a person hurts me, I may forget to pray for them. Circle one: True or False.
19. Put each word in the order of importance to you. (Number each, 1. 2. 3. or 4.)
 - a. Knowledge
 - b. Kindness
 - c. Faith
 - d. Determination
- 20.. The people that deserve hell should get it. Circle one: Yes or No.
21. I don't think that my community is for everybody. Circle one: True or False.

Appendix B

Project Survey II

Note: Please circle your choice. Do not put your name on this survey.

1. Do you consider it okay to just like people? Circle one: Yes or No.
2. People from other cultures or racial backgrounds should not expect me to help them? Circle one: True or False.
3. I like making friends with everyone I meet. Circle one: True or False.
4. I love my pet more than I love people. Circle one: True or False.
5. I consider myself better than most people. Circle one: True or False.
6. I make friends easily. Circle one: True or False.
7. I don't like some people. Circle one: True or False.
8. If I'm in the grocery line and a stranger in front of me is short a few dollars, I will pay the difference. Circle one: True or False.
9. Homeless people should be ashamed of themselves. Circle one: True or False.
10. It is not important to speak to every visitor who comes to church. Circle one: True or False.
11. God loves most people. Circle one: True or False.
12. Which is more important? Circle your answer:
 - a. Everybody getting along.
 - b. Everybody watching their favorite show.
 - c. Everybody playing with their favorite pet.
13. If a person does me wrong, I think it's okay to give them something to think about and give them just a little pain. Circle one: Yes or No.
14. I never show my true feelings. Circle one: True or False.
15. It's hard for me to treat people like family. Circle one: True or False.
16. If you had to choose a bird that most closely represents you, which would it be? Circle one:
 - a. Eagle
 - b. Parrot
 - c. Dove
 - d. Hawk
17. It feels good to give people a piece of my mind. Circle one: True or False.
18. If a person hurts me, I may forget to pray for them. Circle one: True or False.
19. Put each word in the order of importance to you. (Number each, 1. 2. 3. or 4.)
 - a. Knowledge
 - b. Kindness
 - c. Faith
 - d. Determination
20. The people that deserve hell should get it. Circle one: Yes or No.
21. I don't think that my community is for everybody. Circle one: True or False.

Appendix C:

Ten Lessons on Christlike Love

Do not place your name or any identifying information in your responses.

I. Lesson One: Love, Christ's Command (John 13:34-35)

A. What new commandment did Jesus give to his disciples (John 13:34)?

B. How did Jesus command his disciples to love others (John 13:34)?

C. How did Christ demonstrate his love for us (John 3:16 and Romans 5:8)?

D. How can you love like Christ (John 13:34)?

E. What did Christ say was evidence of being His disciple (John 13:35)?

II. Lesson Two: No One Can Truly Love God and Hate People (1 John 4:20-21)

A. Can anyone truly love God and hate other people?

B. If a person confesses to be a Christian and hate someone, what are they before God?

C. Explain in your own words what it means for man to be created in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26-27).

D. No one has seen God in His fullness. It is impossible to hate God's image and likeness in man, while at the same time truly loving God. Circle one: True or False.

E. Do you think it is okay just to like people?

G. What did God command believers?

H. What does it mean to love others?

V. Lesson Five: Evidence of Genuine Love (Romans 12:9-10)

A. Love should be genuine and out of a pure motive (1 John 3:18). Circle one: True or False. Explain your answer.

B. How can you demonstrate true love according to Romans 12:9?

C. Believers in Christ are members of God's family. How should we treat one another according to Romans 12:10?

D. How can we show love according to Romans 12:13?

E. How can you demonstrate love according to Romans 12:14?

F. How can you show love according to Romans 12:16?

VI. Lesson Six: Love is Harmless (Romans 13:8-10)

A. What debt do we owe everyone?

B. What is love’s relationship to the law?

C. How can believers fulfill God’s law by loving others according to verse 9?

D. How should you treat your neighbor? Read Luke 10:25-37 and Matthew 25:34-40.

G. How can a believer fulfill the law according to Romans 13:10?

VIII. Lesson Eight: Faith Works by Love (Galatians 5:6; 1 John 4:8 and James 2:8-9, 14-17, 26)

A. The genuine test of a believer's faith according to Galatians 5:6 is: does it produce love in the believer's heart for all people. Circle one: True or False Explain your answer.

B. Can you truly claim to be saved or a disciple of Christ and not love all people (1 John 4:8)? Circle one: Yes or No. Explain your answer.

C. What is God's nature or character according to 1 John 4:8?

D. What is the royal law according to James 4:8?

E. Why is it important to love everybody according to James 4:9?

F. If you have true faith, how will you respond to someone in need (James 2:14-18)? Faith without works of love is dead or void, it will not please God: True or False. Explain your answer.

X. Lesson Ten: Walking in True Love (1 Peter 1:22; 4:8)

A. How were the believers exhorted to love one another (1 Peter 1:22)?

B. If you love someone, you will be willing to forgive them (1 Peter 4:8).
Circle one: True or False. Explain your answer.

C. Biblical love only forgives the offender three times (1 Peter 4:8). Circle one: True or False.
Explain your answer.

Appendix D

Participants' Responses

- It's okay just to like people
- Don't like some people
- Had incorrect view of "God's love"
- Confirmed that it was difficult to treat people like family
- Make friends easily
- Believed community was not for everyone but changed their perspective to welcome everyone
- Responded positively, to "God loves most people"
- Answered "false," to question, should people from another cultures/racial background, expect me to help them?
- After completion of project, 100% of participants changed their perspective from, "it's okay to just, like people"

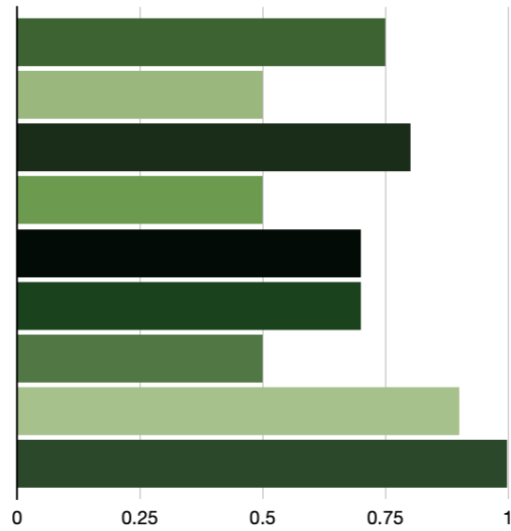


Figure 1. Participants' Responses.