

Sufficiency Completed in Love

By Bobby Schuller

Well today I'm going to be finishing our series on a life without lack. In quick review, we've been talking a lot about this image that is given by King David in Psalm 23: the idea that I can live right now a life without lack. I don't lack opportunity, I don't lack love, I don't lack resources, I don't lack time, I have everything I need. I am under the shepherd's care. And this is indeed the world that Jesus is trying to invite His disciples into the kingdom of God. That the kingdom of God is not just something you're going to get some day, the kingdom of God is nigh; it's here, it's at hand, it's all around us. And it's when we live in that kingdom that we receive in its fullness everything we need from the Lord, amen?

So it is Satan's work, then to try and undo the sufficiency that we get through the kingdom of God by lying to us. And this is the source of all evil in the world is the deception of the enemy. The kingdom of hell is based on deception, and just like a good chess player, Satan always has the same opening move. And it's the lust of the flesh, that is the obsessive desire about what am I going to eat, how am I going to, you know, what am I going to do tomorrow? Am I safe? Things, you know sexual things and it can even cross into drugs so that the lust of the

flesh, lust of the eyes, right? I need to look good, I need to be the best looking person out there, I need to be a success, I need to wear all the right clothes, I need people to say all the right things about me.

And finally, the pride of life: how dare they say that about me. How dare they offend me. It's the pride of life that leads to envy, it's the pride of life that leads to victim thinking, it's the pride of life that leads to brokenness in families. You see it in all sorts of aspects but people just elevating themselves. They're the most important thing in the world. They no longer ask the question what do I owe the world, but they start asking what does the world owe me. And so it's this three lies that bring us to a place of insufficiency; a place where we feel like we don't have enough.

Now if you have bought into those lies don't feel judged or guilty or shame because it's human. We all struggle with these three things. We all do. And if you don't struggle with them, you're a saint, all right? You are just a living, breathing saint and I want you to pray for me later.

So this is how Satan tries to rob us of our sufficiency is to get us obsessed with all of our needs. And Jesus teaches us God knows you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

And then last week I introduced you to one of the parts of the triangle of sufficiency, the first part is faith, and then today we're going to talk about death to self and agape love, which are tied. You can't have

agape love without death to self. So put your thinking caps on today.

Today's going to be very meaty. I had two weeks to prepare this sermon instead of one, because I was sick, which also means this is going to be a little professorial, so forgive me.

Let me ask you a question: have you ever been annoyed by someone trying to help you? Have you ever been annoyed or even wounded by someone attempting to love you? If you have a mother, the answer is yes. Right? You can't spell smother without mother, can you. There are so many times in life where people have tried to love you or help you, but have actually caused you harm. At the very low end, they're just being a little annoying, but at the very high end, actually hurting you; actually causing you long term wounded-ness, shame, anger, frustration, even bitterness and un-forgiveness. And it's weird how blind sometimes others are to their attempts to love or help us when in fact it's not received as love.

We all do this, as well, in our own way to others. You may not think you do it, but you do. How many men out there say the way I love my wife and kids is by obsessively working and making money to provide for them. For sure that's a loving thing to do for your family, but what if your kids and your wife are not receiving love in that way? Wives, elbow your husband's for me, right? Just listen to the preacher. Nobody's elbowing, right? Because it's a little true, it's a little too true, isn't it?

How often do we in our attempt to keep people we love from doing something stupid, or from doing something that we know will harm them, do we attempt to sort of circumvent that through whatever: talking, texting, calling, and we only expedite; we speed up their process down the road of perdition. There are all sorts of ways in which we think we are helping other people, we are just trying to help, we're just trying to love, but it's not being received as love. And in fact it's not doing the ultimate purpose of love in action, which is to will the good of the other, right? The whole purpose of love is that the object of love is helped, is bettered in some way.

And the reason I mention these examples, and I could go on and on for hours of ways that I have done this to others, the ways that we've all thought about in our past we've done it to others, or its been done to us is that very simply agape love, that is the love that flows freely from the kingdom of God through us to others, from God to us, that that agape love is not a love that comes from a place of selfish desire. I think that most of the time when we love others, it's kind of like mixing paint where we have this color but we take a little bit; like where everything you're doing, it's mostly loving, but when you contaminate it with a little bit of desire, something about it moves it away from agape love and makes it something else where even though it's loving, there's this unconscious thing inside this loving action that's actually harming the person we're trying to help.

And that's why the only true way to have agape love towards your neighbor, even towards your enemies, is to crucify yourself. So death to self. Crucifixion of the flesh. And it sounds very dark and we're going to talk about this.

Now there are two things. The church, I think, makes a mistake of always making love a thing you do. And though love is mostly a thing you do, really the love that Jesus talks about is first, before talking about what you do to others, it's about who you become – becoming a loving person that your posture towards your neighbor is loving always. That in all circumstances, whether it's stressful or relaxed, whether you're close to the person or far, whether they love you or hate you, that there's a natural loving posture you take towards others.

So that's where the church often messes up this idea of love. And the world oftentimes messes up the idea of love by confusing it with lust or desire. I'm just so infatuated that this person, I love them. All I can do is think about them all the time. Well is that love? Love is not desire, and we use that word a lot, don't we. I love chocolate cake! Right? I just love it. Well the chocolate cake might disagree with you. Right? It's been eaten. So this is what love as desire can do to the object of love is harm it because we objectify the thing that is supposed to be loved.

So true agape love only wills the good of what is being loved. Are you guys with me still today? We're putting our thinking caps on. This is why death to self is necessary because we cannot taint our love with our

own selfish desires; with what we want to get out of this loving action or loving posture.

Luke chapter 9, Jesus talks about the crucified flesh, and taking up your cross and following. This is a very common theme throughout all the gospels and all the letters of Paul. It comes over and over this idea that we need to be crucified with Christ. Jesus says it plainly, and He confuses His disciples because He hasn't been crucified yet. He says in Luke chapter 9:23, "Then He said to them all whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for me will save it." This is like an irony. In other words, if you're obsessed with your life, it's all about your life, you're going to lose your life. But if you can crucify the obsession you have with yourself, you're going to receive life in the kingdom of God.

And He finally says, maybe the wisest thing anyone's ever said, "What good is it for someone to gain the whole world and yet lose or forfeit their very soul," or very self. Very smart.

Now when we talk about death to self, it's the "to" that's important, right? Very often the church talks about death to self, it's not death "of" self, which is how it's often framed. Death "of" self looks like this, very often: I don't matter. I'm not loveable. I shouldn't share my opinion. I shouldn't have any thoughts on the matter. I have to be a doormat. This is not what death to self means. That's death "of" self.

Death “to” self is a death of.. it’s like a type of death of selfishness; that when we have taken our obsessions or our desires and enthroned them, made them the most important thing in our lives, death “to” self is the action where I say no matter how much I want this thing or that thing, I choose that it will die on the cross so that not my will but His be done.

And this is at the heart of Christian discipleship. It’s undeniable and it is the thing that frees up our life into this world of total sufficiency. It’s the ways in which we become totally obsessed with our power, with our glory, with what people say about us, what people think about us, what we want to do with our lives. And though we all have dreams and desires, and those are good things, we shall never enthrone them lest they kill us. And they will.

There’s only one thing that can fulfill our every need, only one thing that can truly make us happy, there’s only one person that can really lead us to who we’re supposed to be, that can help us find ourselves and His name is Jesus Christ. And when He is first in our lives, then all our other desires and all the other things that we want in life, they become blessed. Our work becomes blessed, our charity becomes blessed, our kindness towards our neighbor becomes blessed, and this is why we must do the brave thing to crucify the flesh.

It’s this flesh that Paul talks about in Galatians, when he says, look at this image of this person. “The fruit of the spirit,” of the Holy

Spirit, the Holy Spirit is in you and dwelling in you, “the fruit of the spirit is love and joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Against such things there is no law.” Amen, right?

But then Paul finishes by saying “for those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” Its passions and its desires. The flesh is our.. it’s our power and our desire to have the kingdom of Bobby, the kingdom of whatever your name is, that it’s my way or the highway, the things I want to be achieved, and it’s when we crucify those things that we open up the floodgates for heaven to be poured out in our lives.

All this to simply say crucifying the flesh is only something you can do with the Lord. I can’t tell you what that means; only the Lord can tell you. It’s not as much about your behavior and your actions as much as it is your heart. It’s what you desire most that is above the Lord. Even the best most wonderful, special things, when they become above the Lord, they can be harmful.

Very often the church likes to play games when it comes to crucifying the flesh. And I’ve been to churches where crucifying the flesh looks like no makeup. Anybody have that? No dancing! No cowboy boots. That was one I heard. I’m fine with that one. You can’t drive a certain car. You can’t wear certain clothes, and etc. And it goes on and on, right? And whole denominations have been built around defining crucifying the

flesh as these one, two or three things you don't do, like go to the movies. And those types of things make the Lord angry. The irony is that you can't really crucify yourself very easily, could you. I mean you might be able to get one hand, you're certainly not going to get both. And this is important because we need the Holy Spirit and we need godly mentors in our life to help us see our heart; what is it that our heart is really geared towards?

So here are some examples of ways people have crucified their flesh according to the Holy Spirit. What's good for the goose is not always good for the gander. That all of us have unique ways in which we can see that we've enthroned something in our life that is damaging our ability to love our neighbor.

So for example, Joan Chittister tells a story, I think it was either her or a friend she had, and this woman, it was a nun, an amazing nun, a Mother Teresa type figure who just daily was working with the poor, serving and caring for the poor. It was very frugal so that everything she had could be like Schindler's List or something, to save one more. It's a very godly person.

And one day she was invited by other people in ministry, nuns and priests, and they're gathered together and they were invited to a very fancy restaurant. And it was at this restaurant she began to look at the price of the steak and the hors d'oeuvre and the wine and the things that the priests and the nuns were ordering. And in this sort of righteous

indignation, she got upset that all this money that could have gone to help more poor people was going to this sort of flamboyant display, and so she just got up and stormed out.

And out in front of the restaurant, she began to say Lord don't you see. Look at what they're spending hundreds of dollars on this meal when this could go to care for John, who needs a wheelchair, or Jane who needed help with her rent or something. And God said go in there and celebrate with them. She felt very clearly from the Holy Spirit that what she was doing with her ministry, though it was helping people, and though it was noble, and though it was godly, and though it was loving, it was tainted by her own need to be needed. Her own need for her life to have value. And because it was not achieving that end, she was beginning to judge and project her righteousness on others because well they're not like me. God's command to her, her need to crucify her flesh wasn't to serve the poor in this case, it was to go in there and order a filet mignon with a side of lobster and a glass of expensive wine. That was how she had enthroned the flesh. And God, who has a cattle on a thousand hills and lacks no money whatsoever, said go in there and be joyful and celebrate with them. You've all worked so hard, you deserve a good meal.

That's not something I struggle with. I have no problem ordering the filet mignon. So someone like me, the Holy Spirit might say the exact opposite to me. There might be a meal where I'm eating and I'm laughing

and I'm having a good time, and I feel convicted from the Lord to go help some homeless people. See this is why it's not an issue of behavior, it's an issue of the heart. Where is your heart? In fact that's a true story, by the way.

Actually, when I first started dating Hannah, Hannah's dad, who's one of my closest friends and like a father to me, he's like a father-in-law to me, it's crazy. I remember when I was first dating Hannah, he had all these kids at his house. He has six kids, they're all married now, but at the time, they were all just kind of dating and he had other kids that were always at the house. So there'd be just swarms of teenagers always in the house, always making a mess, and when Dr. Presley would come in, he would sort of command everybody to clean up everything and everybody would just sort of do it and they'd clean up.

And I remember I came over to Hannah's house, I just started dating Hannah, and I sat down at the kitchen table and we'd just gotten there and two minutes later her dad comes in and says 'okay everybody, let's go ahead and clean up. We're going to clean up this mess.' And I didn't do anything, I was just sitting and reading my book because I didn't make the mess. And Dr. Presley goes, 'hey Bobby, you want to come along and help us clean up the mess?' And I looked at him and I go, 'no, Doc, I didn't make this mess.' Then I put my feet up on the table and started reading a book and everybody went (GASPS) and that was the day Hannah fell in love with me.

And I remember once that, you know, Hannah and I we always do these New Year's resolutions for each other, so I pick hers and she picks mine. So if you ever want to get in a big fight with your spouse, it's a terrific idea, you should try this. But I remember the first time we did it was actually great for both of us, and the thing she picked for me was, Bobby can you serve more. Like when we have guests, can you like clean the dishes. Can you ask people if they'd like a cup of coffee. Can you welcome people. Can you be aware of the needs of others. And as a pastor, this was a surprise. I never thought of myself as someone who was not hospitable, not serving, but I realized very quickly as we said earlier, it's very hard to crucify yourself. Well sometimes your spouse is very happy to help you get crucified.

And I didn't receive it as judgment at all. I think we both came to this humbly that we want to see our blind spots, and nobody's going to see our blind spot better than our spouse. And so I really did receive that humbly and began to serve more, and saw, by paying attention to it, how neglectful I would be of not only guests, but of my wife, with Hannah, or of our kids. So that was eight years ago and it was a big, good positive change in my life, it's been always working on, but for me that was a way that I needed to crucify my flesh. The way that my heart was not into or available to serve others.

For a lot of you, maybe that's like the first thing you do. You're always doing dishes, but maybe.. we all know the person that serves

everybody, but they kind of make sure everybody knows they're serving, don't they. Maybe if that's you, maybe practice giving in secrecy.

There's a certain type of person, too, that everything needs to be perfect, right? Everything needs to be orderly and done just right. Well maybe for you crucifying the flesh means to be spending more time with some messy people and letting them make your life a little more messy. Or maybe it means just trying to have more fun. I really think there's a type of person that the Holy Spirit is calling you, calling you, chastising you – have some fun! Tell a joke! Relax.

There's a certain type of person maybe that is always achieving and always putting their trophies on the wall, and always accidentally letting pictures of great successful things being out.. oh what's this doing on the table? Let me just put that away. And maybe that type of person needs to focus on loyalty, or letting somebody else get the glory and being okay with not getting the attention or being called the greatest for once.

There's a certain type of person who is always hoarding and collecting things, and feels safe with a large bank account, or with lots of things in the house, or one lady told this story about how she grew up with very little, and so she always obsessively needed her cupboards full of food and canned stuff. And how a part of her discipleship was hearing from the Holy Spirit that she had to be okay having sparse cupboards. That she had to almost practice not having so much food in the house.

A lot of these things can be weird, and that's just the thing. It's a heart thing; it's between you and the Holy Spirit. I can't tell you what it is. But I can tell you that all of us struggle with something. That all of us are tempted to enthrone our children, or enthrone our reputations, or enthrone our finances, or our success, our desires, our obsessive things about ourselves, and until you crucify that, which means to say I die to that. Maybe I still hope for out my life, but I'm going to die to that. If it's not your will, Lord, then I know it's not the best thing for me. It's not going to make me happy, it's not going to make me fulfilled, so I'm just going to die to that. That's such a faithful, good thing to do.

Have you ever heard a parent when they're upset at their children, and a son or a daughter has messed up, and in a fit of passion they say to their child, how could you do this to me?! That is a love that is not coming from a crucified flesh. What they're saying is you are not making me look good. How could you do this to me. It's very revealing that the parenting is coming from a place of needing my child to behave or to be successful in an unconscious need to be valued as a parent.

All of these things, they're human, guys. Don't feel guilty about it. Don't feel bad about it. We all are this way, but the Holy Spirit in His patience and love for us, just waiting for us to see some of these blind spots, to say Lord I'm willing to die to that. So that I can enter into your kingdom. I'm willing to die to that so you can pour out into my life the abundance that only comes through those who have taken the narrow

path. Only a few find that path, by the way, and it takes humility and a desire to truly know what we have enthroned.

So we have to crucify our need for adoration. We have to crucify our need for glory. We have to crucify our need for safety. We have to crucify our need for satisfaction. There's only one who can satisfy, only one who can keep you safe, only one deserving of glory and adoration. And I always know the worry about crucifying our flesh and our desires and all this stuff, I don't want to be a doormat, someone might say, but I'm telling you, the crucifixion of the flesh will not make you a doormat, it will make you a rock.

And this is maybe the most important thing I'm going to say today, and I'm just going to finish with this: God gives faith in measure, but until we have come to terms with crucified flesh, He will not give you the miracle working kind of faith you need to be the person you're called to be. Otherwise you will use your faith to harm others. You may have the faith to move a mountain, but if you have not crucified your flesh, you might throw that mountain at your enemy. And this is something that's real. That faith really is mountain moving, it really can do miracles, can heal people, can do all these things, but if it's about my glory, my achievement, me being a spiritual giant, then it will never work.

And so in order to love others and to do the amazing things God's called us to do, we must be willing to give up the thing we've enthroned

in our life. What's the thing for you? Maybe you've thought of it already. Maybe you haven't. Ask your spouse. They'll tell you.

Well agape love seeks only one thing: the good of the one who is loved. That's what Thomas Merton said. And until we learn to crucify the flesh, our love will always be tainted with some kind of selfish need.

Jesus also doesn't tell us to love everybody, by the way. Did you know that? You're not supposed to love everybody. I love saying stuff that gets people to look up from their pew. Now when I say you're not supposed to love everybody, I mean you're not supposed to love everybody like the whole world, but you're supposed to love everybody that's near you. Very often we think I got to love the whole world. But it's God's job to love the world. It's your job to love your neighbor. In other words, it's not about loving everybody, it's about loving somebody.

And I want to challenge you this week to maybe love someone this week, whoever the Holy Spirit puts on your heart, but maybe somebody that's a little difficult to love. That person might be your spouse. That person might be one of your kids. It might be your mom. Smother, remember her. It might be your dad. Pick one person this week that you're going to think Lord, I'm going to, in the process of crucifying my flesh, do my best to love this person just as they are, not as they should be. And to take a loving posture towards them, which is to dig down deep and to be thankful for that person and to be empathetic towards them.

To think about what their life is like in their shoes and to allow any loving action to come from a place of both thankfulness and empathy.

It's not about loving everybody, it's about loving somebody. And that's what God's calling us to do, to love our neighbor. If we all do that, everybody will be loved, amen?

All right, Lord, we thank you for your word and for your truth. It's not the truth the world gives, it's the truth Jesus gives. The world says live for yourself. Think about, obsess over yourself and how you look, Lord, you tell us to die to ourselves that we would be glorified in you. You're Jesus Christ, the hope of glory. There is hope in that, Lord, but we pray first that we'd seek first your kingdom and your righteousness, and then all these things would be added to us.

Thank you that for many of us it's the last thing that stands between us and our blessing. The willingness to crucify our flesh, our obsessions. And so we dethrone those things, and we put you on the throne, Jesus, and we trust in faith that it'll bear a great harvest, and we thank you, and we love you, in Jesus' name we pray, amen.