

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

AUGUST 2019

Love

One of the most well-known scriptures is the description of love's character and importance in **1 Corinthians 13**. The chapter ends with the words, "*But now faith, hope, and love remain – these three. The greatest of these is love*" (**verse 13**).

This verse is sometimes explained by the fact that faith will become sight and hope will become reality when the righteous reach their eternal destination, but love will continue. Such an explanation fits the context of the chapter, which compares the lasting value of love with the temporary role of miraculous spiritual gifts given to Christians in the first century (cf. **verses 8-10**).

Regardless, it is clear from verses such as **1 Corinthians 13:13** that love is of utmost importance. Consider some things God teaches about what *He* means when He commands love.

Note first of all that the command for love assumes such love is *properly directed*. Love can actually cause *harm* if it is misdirected.

1 Timothy 6:10 does not teach that *money* is the root of all evil. It does teach that "*the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.*"

In **2 Timothy 3:2-4**, the Holy Spirit identifies "*lovers of self, lovers of money,*" and "*lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*" among the characteristics of those who held "*a form of godliness, but having denied its power*" (**verse 5**). Related to these faults is the fault of Diotrephes, who loved "*to have the preeminence*" among Christians (**3 John 9**).

In **1 John 2:15**, the Holy Spirit commands, "*Love not the world, neither the*

things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (cf. **2 Tim. 4:10**). This verse shows that even *agape* love can be misdirected (more on this term below).

God-pleasing love is directed toward truth (**2 Thes. 2:10**), and is foremost directed toward God and others (**Matt. 22:37-39**).

God's description of loving Him and others is different from how many view this subject.

The New Testament sometimes speaks of *phileo* love, which is more of a feeling. This love has a place in the Christian's life (**Rom. 12:10**). The love typically commanded in the New Testament, though, is *agapao* or *agape* love (*Strong G25 & G26*). This love is deeper than an emotional attachment. It is a *choice* to value someone highly, and selflessly give something in response.

The love we must direct toward God and others is rooted in God's love for us (**1 John 4:7-11,19**). Love is such a primary characteristic of God that Scripture says, "*God is love*" (**1 John 4:8**).

Romans 5:8 says, "*God commends His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*" Though we have grossly mistreated God, He chose to send His Son to die for us so we could be forgiven of our sins, which are foremost against Him.

In consideration of what God has done for us, we have reason to love *Him*.

Love for God is far deeper than just having a good feeling toward Him. In **John 14:15**, Jesus said, "*If you love me, keep my commandments.*" **1 John 5:3** echoes this principle, saying, "*For this is loving God, that we keep His commandments. His*

commandments are not grievous.”

When Jesus said that the first commandment is to “*love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength*” (**Mark 12:30**), He emphasized the need to love God with our entire being. He taught the need to surrender ourselves wholeheartedly to God (cf. **Rom. 12:1**).

One who does this will be led to obey God’s commands, placing God’s will above his or her own. The first verse of the hymn *Have Thine Own Way*, Lord says, “Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way! Thou art the Potter; I am the clay. Mold me and make me After Thy will, While I am waiting, Yielded and still.” These words express an attitude of genuine love for God.

Genuine love for God leads to love for others. Notice **1 John 4:20-21**: *If a man says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who doesn’t love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? This commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.*

Love for others is a *deliberate* choice to serve others as we have the ability and opportunity. It involves putting others’ needs ahead of one’s own desires. It is thus demonstrated in actions.

Notice **1 John 3:17-18**: *But whoever has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, then closes his heart of compassion against him, how does God’s love remain in him? My little children, let’s not love in word only, or with the tongue only, but in deed and truth.* These verses show clearly that the love God commands is not merely an emotion that one “falls” into or out of, but something we must *choose* to do.

Love for others is the root of treating others as we should (**Rom. 13:9-10**). The impact of love for others is seen in the description of love’s character in **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**.

If we love others as we should, we will not be short-tempered with others. We will be kind and not envious when good things happen to others. We won’t be arrogant and boastful, seeking to exalt self above others. Instead, we will lower ourselves for the benefit of others (**verse 4**; cf. **Phil. 2:3**).

If we love others as we should, we won’t treat others rudely, but will be respectful. We will consider others and not just self. We won’t lash out in hasty anger (**verse 5**).

Furthermore, if we love others as we should, we will take “*no account of evil*” (**verse 5**). We won’t keep a mental list of others’ wrongs to use against them. Instead, we will be forgiving.

If we love as we should, we won’t delight in others’ unrighteousness. Instead, we will rejoice “*with the truth*” (**verse 6**).

Love “*bears all things*,” not gossiping about others. Love “*believes all things*,” giving others the benefit of the doubt, instead of assuming the worst. Love “*hopes all things*,” wanting the best for others. Love “*endures all things*,” seeking others’ well-being, even when faced with hardships (**verse 7**).

Jesus perfectly exemplified thinking of others’ needs and doing what He could to serve them. We show our allegiance to Him by following His example of love for others (**John 13:34-35**).

When love is properly directed, it serves as the root of obedience to God (**Matt. 22:40**). May we choose to faithfully serve God and serve others in love.

- Michael Hickox