

Love

Love is a strong motivating factor in our life because true love comes from our heart and therefore has an overwhelming impact on our thoughts, emotions and will. When we love something we are willing to regularly commit our time and effort to it. When we love someone we are willing to do, and keep doing, things for them due to the level of commitment we have to them. Our thoughts and feelings towards the person make it easy to apply our will to keep doing things that they may ask us to or what we believe they want us to. It is this way in every good marriage, every good parent/child relationship and it is the same in our relationship with God.

A person may try to live a Christian life from their knowledge of God, His law and the consequences of disobedience, but this way of living the Christian life is not what God wants for us. God wants to be our greatest love. He wants us to love Him with our entire being for then He can be at the center of our heart and the Christian life flows easily and naturally from the close relationship we have with Him. John says that if we love God we will keep His commandments. In fact love makes it easy for us to be obedient to God.

1John5vs2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

God wants believers to draw near to Him so that we can come to know Him, love Him and be obedient to Him. He desires that we put Him first and has given us free will so we can individually decide the form of relationship we have with Him. He is already spiritually closer than we could ever appreciate but He leaves it up to us to open the door of our heart so that He can enter in and be with us. After Jesus rose from the dead He said that He desired to enter into our life and be with us but He would only come in if He was invited and the door was opened by us.

Revelation3vs20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.

God desires to enter into our life and desires to be the focus of our life. He is ready to enter in and commune with the believer 24 hours a day, if we will hear Him knocking on the door of our heart and let Him in. God must be our greatest desire and the one we long to be with while living here on earth and for eternity. There is nothing and no one more important in our life in heaven or on earth than Him.

Psalms73vs25 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.

God loves us and has showed us that love clearly by sending His own only beloved

Son to suffer and die for our sins. As John said We love Him because He first loved us (1John4vs19). The Psalmist tries to express the intensity of the love he has for God in the verse just quoted. We must seek to love God above all else in our life.

Jesus said that God's greatest commandment was that we must love God with our entire being.

Mark 12:28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, " Which is the first commandment of all? " 29 Jesus answered him, " The first of all the commandments is: ` Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. ' This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: ` You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ' There is no other commandment greater than these. " 32 So the scribe said to Him, " Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. 33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. " 34 Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, " You are not far from the kingdom of God. "

When Jesus answered the scribe He ordered His response in a deliberate way. First, through the spiritual relationship we build with God, we are able to enter into a deep and powerful loving relationship with Him. This then, secondly, enables us to give up more and more of the self-filled life we have lived so that we are able to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves. Jesus made it clear that our neighbors are all people we come into contact with or have the ability to help in this world. We love our neighbors not because of who they are or how they are but simply because God loves them and commands that we love them. Therefore, if we are unable to love God, it means that we are unable to love our neighbor in the selfless way required.

In the Scribe's answer, which pleased Jesus, he recognized the importance of love in stating that it was more important to God than all the burnt offerings or sacrifices that a person could make. Although we are commanded by God to love Him so completely, for many who have been separated from Him and who know little about Him, this is a seemingly impossible commandment to obey. Their love is for perhaps their family, career, possessions, various pleasures in life and their plans for the future. Some may claim to obey it but there is little evidence of it in their daily lives by their words, actions, thoughts and the time they commit to developing their personal relationship with God.

When we initially come to know about God through our mind we can be awestruck by Him and perhaps grateful for what He has done and the eternal life that He offers. However, until we move past knowing about Him and His promises with our mind and start to come to know Him in a deep spiritual and personal way, we will always find it difficult to truly love Him and live the Christian Spiritual Life. However, as we know Him more we love Him more and the more we love Him the more we spend time with Him and come to know Him more. This cycle keeps repeating and a result

of this process is the increasing ability for us to start to see ourselves from God's perspective.

For some, a love for God comes immediately once we recognize our sinful life and

have a heart-sourced belief in Jesus. For others the intense and complete love that God wants will only come gradually through establishing a personal relationship that is built with Him as we commit to and live daily for Him. As the Holy Spirit teaches us about God and we obey, the relationship is built up, trust and commitment grows and a deep love is formed for God. The love comes and intensifies as the Holy Spirit increasingly reveals God to us and we come to know God.

No matter how good we may think our life is, to God we are sinners in need of His forgiveness. As we recognize our sin, we can truly humbly turn to God with all our heart and as we receive that forgiveness we can truly love Him for His mercy and grace. This is seen in an experience that Jesus once had and His reaction to it.

Once when Jesus visited the house of a Pharisee named Simon to have a meal with him, a sinful woman came in and while weeping humbly washed His feet, dried them with her hair and anointed them with fragrant oil. We read in the Bible that the Pharisee thought to himself that if Jesus was truly a prophet He would know that the woman was a sinner and not want her touching Him. However, with spiritual perception, Jesus was able to tell not only the thoughts of the woman but also those of the Pharisee. He therefore asks the Pharisee whether a person forgiven for a little debt or great debt would love the forgiver of the debt more. The Pharisee correctly answers that the person forgiven more will love more.

Luke 7vs44 Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, " Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. 45 You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. 46 You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. 47 Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little. "

To Jesus both the Pharisee and the woman were sinners in need of God's forgiveness. The Pharisee, being a person who believed that he lived a good life, could not see himself as the sinner that he was while the woman did and was deeply sorry for it. The Pharisee saw God as a lawgiver and He therefore did his best to follow God's laws through his mental understanding of them. Perhaps this focus made him unable to recognize that no matter how obedient he was his effort could only ever result in a poor attempt to satisfy God. The Pharisee in his self-righteous life did not sufficiently recognize the need to seek or feel sorry for his sins. The woman recognized her total inability to help herself and in her heart she was repentant of her sinful life. She realized her complete dependence on God for His mercy and sought God's forgiveness. Seeing herself as a sinner and recognizing the need for forgiveness resulted in a deep love for God when the forgiveness was received. This deep love could never be known by the Pharisee unless He also saw himself for the sinner that he was and humbly sought God's mercy and forgiveness.

The choices we make each day, our priorities and our passions reflect what we hold

dear in our heart and put first in our life. If we truly put God first and love Him with all our heart, we will put Him above all else, people and things, we will daily choose

to spend time with Him, seek to be obedient to His desires and do our utmost not to speak, think or act in a way that does not please Him.

For those of us who say we love God, do we truly hunger to draw near to Him by taking every opportunity during each day of our life to spend time with Him. Do we regularly choose to turn away from worldly pleasures so that we can spend time in prayer, reading the Bible or perhaps worshiping Him? Are we able to say quiet prayers during the course of the day, as we go to sleep each night and as we wake each morning because we want Him to know how much He means to us and because we are eager to hear any word of instruction He may have? Do we truly sacrifice our money, self-filled passions and personal desires to enable His will to be performed in our life? Does spiritual exercise through our commitment to following the daily spiritual disciplines take priority in our life? Is God's will our will? Is pleasing Him and preparing to be in His presence for eternity the main thing we seek?

If we truly love Him in the way He commands and if we want to obey by seeking His kingdom first in our life, shouldn't our answer to these questions be "Yes". What we are developing through building our spiritual life is of eternal value and it is worth every ounce of effort and sacrifice that we invest in it. However we will also find that as we increasingly love God, we will also come to love His creation and most importantly people.

If there is any one thing that identifies a Christian, other than the person's faith in Jesus Christ, it should be the person's love for God and for people expressed through their daily life. God is love (1John4vs16) and if we have His presence in us our life must start to reflect His presence through the love we show Him and people. Paul said that Christians must have love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith (1Timothy1vs5). An enduring and strong love cannot blossom in a situation where a person has a heart with divided allegiances, a conscience that is stained or a faith that is weak.

In 1Corinthians13 Paul also talks about the enduring nature of love and how important it is in our relationship with God and people. It is one aspect of our life that will leave with us when we leave our body at the end of our life on this earth. So much else that we strive for will pass away with our bodies when we die, including spiritual gifts. Without faith and hope our Christian life will fade and die, but Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians, that love is greater than both of these. In describing love, he tells us what should be reflected in each of us who has God's love in our life.

1Corinthians13vs 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; 6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never fails. ... 13 And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

God's love is a different kind of love to the one we come to know in this world for it is a love that loves all whether they deserve it or not. It is not a love based on the characteristics of the other person or what they can do for us but is a love that sacrifices itself for the good of others. It is a love that is able to give to people who do not have the means to ever give back to us. It is a self-less love.

Our love for God helps us lay our sinful self-filled ways aside, and focus on God's will and how He wants us to relate to other people. We should never love God only because of needs or wants that we have in our own life or only because of our desire for eternal life. This is not a sincere love from our heart and means very little to God. When we love God we learn to look away from ourselves and focus on Him. Our love for God must be a pure love from a selfless heart and life. Our love for God must be from a perspective of loving Him for who He is and from a total willingness to let Him have His will for our life no matter what it may mean. Love also opens our heart to God and enables the Holy Spirit to renew us. This is the spiritually sourced love that is far deeper and stronger than any self-focused love we are able to give only sourced from living by our soul.

For the believer, expressing this love through our lives means that love must be the underlying motive for every word and action in our life. The love we show is the love that we believe God would show people. Practically, this means that we must always act in a way that draws people to God with the hope that they will seek God and be reconciled to Him. We are God's ambassadors upon this earth and people will form an opinion of God based on the way that believers live their daily lives.

John goes so far as to say that if we do not love, we do not know God (1John4vs8). John also tells us that we must love not only in our words but also through what we do. God's love in us enables us to be generous with what we have to build His kingdom on earth, and to help the poor and needy in this world. God's love is not just there to comfort us but is only truly in our life when we express it daily in our thought, words and deeds.

1John3vs16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

There are no boundaries in our command to love people, we are commanded to love every man, woman and child that lives on the earth. In the words of Jesus recorded in the gospels, He tells us to love our enemies, do good to those who hurt us, bless those that curse us and give to those that ask of us. In accordance with God's character, we are to forgive those who do wrong against us and seek to save people rather than condemn or judge them. Paul in his letter to the Romans underlines the importance of loving people as a part of obeying God's will.

Romans5vs14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: " You shall love your neighbor as yourself. "

We are saved by grace for while we were still sinners God sent His only Son to die for us. When we see Jesus' life we see the love that God has for us being demonstrated. Jesus said that He always did what He saw His Father doing and this is certainly reflected in the way He loved people. He loved people in a way that was consistent with the way God loved them.

As spiritually maturing Christians, we increasingly understand the love that we receive from God and also the love that God wants us to show all other people. We can gain some understanding of the love we should have for people through looking at the life that Jesus lived. Jesus was compassionate and poured Himself out to teach, heal and deliver people. The sinners that came to Him were not condemned but were shown love and told to sin no more. Jesus told the self-righteous people around Him to look at their own lives and consider their own sin before condemning others. As sinners who have received God's grace, we must show that grace to people around us.

For believers, God is our spiritual heavenly Father and we enter into the special relationship with Him as His children. The Bible tells us that God has unimaginable things planned for His children who love Him. A natural father usually always wants the best for his children and interacts with each child according to their personality, needs and wants. God always wants the best for His spiritual children and therefore we can trust Him by yielding to His will and purpose for our life. No two children will be treated alike for the blessings, tests, experiences and purpose will all differ. Sometimes what He considers best for us is not something that we may particularly want to receive or experience. God loves His spiritual children more than any father could love his children in the natural realm and once we come to know God and the great love that He has for us, we can truly come to love Him with our entire being. Although we will not perfect either our daily living for God or our love for Him in this life, we are able to increasingly move towards this and prepare ourselves for the perfection that will come to believers when we physically die.

God's love is experienced by believers through the presence of the Holy Spirit inside us and God's love is then seen through the same love that believers then express through our lives. Love, expressed through the power of the Holy Spirit, is a mark of assurance that a believer is walking faithfully and closely with God and that the person is safely on the narrow path to eternal life. Peter in his second and last letter to believers before his death, instructs them to "give all diligence" to developing the building blocks of the spiritual life and then to be even more diligent to make their call and election sure. His steps of spiritual life culminate in love being added to their life. Looking at Peter's advice from another perspective, we understand that we are to develop our spiritual lives with the objective of having an increasing love for God and love for all people.

2Peter 1 vs 5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, 6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, 7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.

As we persevere in living according to the daily instruction of the Holy Spirit within us, He enables us to take on God's character. This is seen by our life being lived with increasing moral excellence and love towards God and those people around us. Love must therefore be experienced and lived in our internal spiritual life as well as in our external life. As we are spiritually perfected, the greatest evidence of Christian maturity will come from the level of our heart-sourced love for God and other people.

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