

This Is Love

What Love Is

August 27, 2023

I. What is love?

A. The word of God has a lot to say about love – and especially the love that we are to have for one another. For example:

1. **1 Corinthians 13:4-8**, “Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, [5] does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, [6] does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; [7] bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [8] Love never fails.
2. **Romans 13:8-10**, “Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. [9] For this, ‘You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ [10] Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”
3. **Matthew 5:43-48**, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [44] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the [unbelievers] do the same? [48] Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
4. **1 John 4:7-8**, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. [8] The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”
5. **John 13:34**, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

B. However, in spite of all the Bible says about love, there are only two places in which it says, “**This is love.**” The first one is in **1 John 4:10**, and the second one is in **2 John 1:6**.

C. Pray

II. This is love

- A. **1 John 4:10**, “**This is love**, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
1. In essence, or at its core, love – real love, genuine love, biblically based love, godly love, agape love, or whatever else you want to call it – love is seeking the good of everyone who is in any way effected by your choices and behavior.
 2. **Vs 10** helps make this clear by comparing the kind of love we are prone to express with genuine love – that is, the kind of love God expresses toward us.
 3. It is this comparison that helps us see the difference between giving love in response to being loved – or treated well, **and** giving love in order to seek a person’s good or meet their need – regardless of how we feel or how they have or are treating us.
- B. Therefore, **vs 10** begins with “This is love, **not** that we loved God...”
1. Our love for God is not genuine love, because we are returning love to a loving God who continues to love us and do an immense amount of good for us – even though it is undeserved.
 2. In other words, we are responding with love to being loved with undeserved love, gracious love, sacrificial love, costly love, unfailing love, tender love, compassionate love, perfect love.
 - a. Think about this: because God’s love for us goes far beyond our human ideas of how far love should go, and because God is perfectly good, our love for Him has never been tested.
 - b. We don’t know if we would continue to love Him should He do us ill, because He has never done us ill. He has only and always done us good. And as most of us know, it is easy to give love to someone who loves us and treats us well.
 - c. The reality is, our love for God is more a mixture of appreciation and giving to get, or giving good to ensure good keeps coming to us, than seeking God’s good for His sake.
 3. But, you say, God is superior to us in every way and has need of nothing! What good could we actually do Him? What need could we actually meet? How could our love for God be tested when – because of who He is – there is no cost or sacrifice involved in loving Him?
 4. And yet, there is a way in which our love for God is tested every day. And there is a way in which self-sacrifice is required of us. And there is a way in which this show of love is not directed directly toward God.

- a. How can that be, you ask? According to the word of God, we are loving God with genuine love when we love our neighbor as ourselves. For example:
 - b. **Proverbs 19:17**, “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and [the LORD] will repay him for his good deed.”
 - c. In His parable about separating the sheep from the goats, Jesus said that to the extent that we show love to those in need around us, we are showing love to Him, and that the good we do for our neighbor, we are doing to Him (**Matthew 25:31-46**).
5. The point is, we are loving God with genuine love when we love those around us with genuine love. And we are loving those around us with genuine love when we are seeking their good – regardless of their behavior or our feelings toward them.
 - a. Yet who does this? Who has committed himself to loving his neighbor as himself – regardless of the cost?
 - b. But maybe the more telling question is: Who goes through their day thinking about, or even aware that how they love those around them is how they are loving God?
 - c. Therefore, given the weakness of our humanity, the shallowness of our thinking, and the immaturity of our Christianity, we may think our love for God is genuine, but **vs 10** brings us back to reality by saying, “**This is love**, not that we loved God, but that He loved us...”
6. The truth is, genuine love is seeking the other’s good – regardless of their behavior, and regardless of the feelings you have or don’t have toward them. And in some cases, regardless of the cost.
 - a. This is what God did in seeking our good while we were still rebellious sinners.
 - b. In other words, God loved us according to our need – not according to our behavior or according to our treatment of Him.
 - c. And He did not have to have feelings of endearment toward us to do this. All He needed is **love**.
7. Therefore, **1 John 4:10** says that genuine love is demonstrated by the love God has for us – a love which compelled Him to send His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
8. We owed a debt we could not pay. So out of love – not endearment, not pity, not mere mercy – but out of love, the love that seeks the good of others, God met our need by paying a debt He did not owe.
9. **This is love**. Therefore we read in **vs 11**, “if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” – whether it is someone we hold dear, or

an enemy we want nothing to do with, yet who has a true need that love calls us to meet.

- a. This is a high-calling, an “other world” calling, but we live in this world. So how do we love like this in real life given all the different kinds of people and situations and needs that we encounter?
- b. This brings us to the second place in God’s word where the words, **this is love**, appear.

C. **2 John 1:6a**, “And **this is love**, that we walk according to God’s commandments.”

1. The end or demonstration of love is in its outward manifestations, but love begins in the heart – with our beliefs, values, fears, hopes, thoughts, and desires.
 - a. Therefore, if we are to love as love is, we need to have our beliefs, values, fears, hopes, thoughts, and desires shaped and directed by the Word of God.
 - b. And as this happens, we learn the why and how of loving with genuine love. But we also learn where our security and well-being come from so that we can feel safe loving this way. And we grow in kind of wisdom and discernment that enables us to figure out in realistic and practical ways how to love even the irresponsible, self-centered, uncaring people in our lives.
2. The reality is, our feelings and emotions of endearment, our longing to be held by someone we hold dear, the comfort and joy gained from sharing life together – are good, and even wonderful feelings and emotions. Yet none of them tell us what genuine love is, or how to express it toward the difficult people in our world.
3. It is the Word of God that tells us what love is, and how to love in the various situations in which we find ourselves as we experience the day-to-day realities of life – including teenage life, young adult life, married life, parenting life, extended family life, work life, neighborhood life, and church life.
4. Admittedly, the scriptures are not crystal clear on all aspects of loving our neighbors as ourselves.
 - a. But if you will go beyond reading the Bible to **(1)** applying what you read **to yourself**, and **(2)** to thinking and pondering long enough to understand the truth and purpose of what you are applying to yourself, and **(3)** to figuring out or getting help to figure out how to apply God’s word in realistic and practical

ways, and (4) to asking God for wisdom and insight – especially in those situations where it is difficult to know what to do, and (5) to moving forward in doing what you believe is best – even though it may turn out to be wrong or not produce the desired results, and (6) to learning from what works well and what doesn't, **then** you will discover that God's word provides enough information and direction to show you how to love as you ought.

- b. For example, when you feel hurt by something someone has said or done, and you feel the urge to strike back by saying something sarcastic, or by giving the person the silent treatment, or by pulling away as if to end the relationship, it is the word of God that says, "never return evil for evil." It is God's word that says, "Love does no wrong to its neighbor." It is the Word of God that says, "Be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger." And it is the word of God that says, "Be angry (*or hurt, or frustrated, or disappointed*), and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger."
 - c. In each of these portions of scripture, **the good of the other person**, which effects the good of the relationship, which effects the good of the community, **takes priority over the good of self**. This is the way of love.
5. There are three common mistakes in relation to love that get in the way or blind us to loving according to the word of God.
- a. **First**, there is the mistake of giving love according to how we perceive we are being loved. When we do this, we are abandoning the word of God and using the behavior of others and our own self-interests to determine the quality of the love we show.
 - b. **Second**, there is the mistake of giving love according to how we feel about a person. If our feelings are positive and emotionally satisfying, or if we feel there is reciprocity, we are inclined to love, even to the point of loving sacrificially. But if we don't like the person or have been mistreated by them or they have taken advantage of their relationship with us, we are inclined to withhold love in their time of true need. When we do this, we are treating our feelings as more important than God's word in determining how to love.
 - c. **Third**, there is the mistake of giving or withholding love based on the cost to ourselves.
 - (1) For example, if I get up every day knowing that there is an unresolved conflict between me and someone dear to me, or

that the one who is dear to me remains committed to a relationship damaging behavior, then the question is, will I also get up committed to loving this one who is dear to me as God's word says I ought?

- (2) In this situation, to love as you ought is very costly, for you must be content with **giving** genuine love to someone who chooses not to give you genuine love in return. In addition, you must do this cheerfully, gracefully, and tenderly, rather than grudgingly or resentfully, for your show of love to be genuine.
 - (3) For those who know nothing of this kind of situation, you may be wondering where the cost to self is? It is in giving without receiving. It is in playing fair in an ongoing unfair situation. It is in doing what is right while being denied the reciprocal blessings of doing what is right.
 - (4) If you have done this, then you know how costly to self it is. If you have not done this, then there is not much more I can say about this.
6. Participating in any of these three mistakes is not only wrong, it is foolish, because they not only go against what God's word says about love and loving, they damage relationships, they damage your character and spiritual health, and they damage your relationship with God by hurting those He loves. And when you hurt those God loves, you are showing Him you don't love Him all that much.
 7. However, if you will fashion your beliefs, values, and attitudes according to the word of God, if you will guide your thinking and manage your feelings and emotions according to the word of God, if you will teach your mouth to speak and learn to behave according to the word of God, then you will love with genuine love. And when you do this, you will love God as you ought.

III. Conclusion

- A. If you want to know what love is, **look to** the Word of God. If you are going to love as love requires, **allow** the Word of God to shape and direct your beliefs, values, fears, hopes, thoughts, and desires. If you are going to love God as He deserves, love everyone affected by your choices and behavior with genuine love, as prescribed and made practical by the word of God. If you need help to do this, seek out a believer who is doing this and ask them to teach you what you need to know.