

I dedicate this book to God the Father who did not withhold what was most precious to Him - His Beloved Son Jesus - but gave Him up for all of us. May He be praised forever.

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01

THE SUPREME VALUE

As Christians we have become accustomed to being told that the greatest thing in the world is faith. Yet the New Testament makes love the supreme value, so for those who follow Christ it cannot be otherwise. In the Gospel of Mark we are told that a lawyer stood up and asked Jesus which was the most important commandment of all. Jesus replied:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

(Mark 12:30-32)

In his First Letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul lists three great qualities – faith, hope and love – and without hesitation says that the greatest of these is love. Nothing higher can be imagined or conceived; love is the ultimate in values, and the supreme value in the Christian faith.

It is a surprising fact that many of the world's most popular philosophers, scientists and psychologists agree that love is the most constructive element in the world. Yet very few of them have discovered that the highest expression of love is love for God. We are to love Him with all the heart, soul, mind and strength of the body; this means the whole being is to be wholly devoted to Him, manifested in actions (see *James 2:14-26*).

Before moving on to discuss the type of love the Lord demands towards Himself and how to go about it, I would like to make one point clear about what He says regarding our neighbour.

Some Christians are greatly confused by the whole idea of loving ourselves, especially since Scripture commands us to deny self. In order to understand this apparent contradiction, we must differentiate between love of self and self-regard. Love of self is narcissism; self-regard is the respect and care that we are to have for our bodies so that with them we may glorify God.

02

LOVE DEFINED

As you may have experienced, there is much confusion on the subject of love in our world today, even among Christians. Many have laboured to give an adequate explanation and definition of its meaning.

We can begin this analysis by saying there are different types of love and ways of loving. For example, if I say, I love God, I love my husband, I love sport, or I love my dog, I am not talking about love in the same degree or definition.

In the New Testament there are three major Greek words that describe these various kinds of love. They are *Eros*, *Philia*, and *Agape*. The Greek word *Eros* is not actually used in the New Testament, only implied.

The reason for this may be because its origin came from the mythical god *Eros*, the god of romantic love. It is inferred in many Scriptures and is the only kind of love that God restricts to a one-man, one-woman relationship within the bounds of marriage.

Similar to *Eros* love, *Philia* love is based on feelings or emotions. We could describe it as tender affection, having a warm and good feeling toward another person that may come and go with intensity.

The third word used in Scripture to describe the word love is *Agape* and it is the highest kind of love that exists. This type of love is spontaneous, un-conditional and un-limited. A love that knows no boundaries, restrictions and barriers. Jesus displayed this *Agape* kind of love by going to the Cross and dying for sinners even though we were very unworthy of such a sacrifice.

Comparing Eros with Agape

Eros is a romantic and acquisitive type of love, it loves and longs to receive; it loves for what it can get and if there is no return, then love ceases. On the other hand, Agape is a self-giving, sacrificial love – it loves and longs to give.

Eros recognizes the value in its object and loves it for that; Agape sees the potential in its object and loves and creates value in it by the act of loving. God is Agape.

This is the type of love God wants us to have for Him and our neighbour, and if we are to obey His Greatest Commandment we must walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to produce this type of love in our lives.

His indwelling presence will provide the power to love and to act positively independently of how we feel. This is why John could say, “*His commandments are not burdensome.*” Then, and only then, will we find true happiness and fulfilment.

03

THE QUALITIES OF LOVE

Having established that Agape love is the highest value in the Universe and that loving unconditionally is the art of living, we will now turn to focus on the qualities of God's love. There are numerous biblical passages on the subject, but probably one of the most popular is to be found in the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. Many see this as the greatest exposition on love in the whole of literature. It says:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 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 do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient; love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues they will cease, as for knowledge it will come to an end.

(1Corinthians 13:1-9)

In order to understand the opening words of Paul's thesis, we need to know something of the era in which he was writing. During this period there were three dominant races – the Jews, the Greeks and the Romans.

The Jews greatly valued signs and the prophetic word; the Greeks valued eloquent speech and wisdom, and the Romans greatly valued military might and patriotism; especially those who were willing to sacrifice their own lives for their nation's honour.

With these powerful words Paul says that if a person's deeds are not done for the glory of God and the uplifting and benefit of others, they will return to him void. In other words, it is the motive behind our actions that determine their worth, and good works can be negated by motives, no matter how abundant and beneficial they are to the recipients.

We see a good example of this in the Book of Acts. Here we read that true Agape love was demonstrated as believers sold land and possessions to be distributed by the Apostles in order to meet the needs of the community.

However, Ananias and Sapphira sold a possession and pretended to give the total amount of the sale to the Church, but kept back part of the earnings. It was this pretence and hypocrisy, for the purpose of receiving praise and honour from men, that brought a divine and swift judgement on both of them.

The dictionary defines hypocrisy as the feigning of beliefs, feelings or virtues that a person does not hold or possess – insincerity. In the Greek language, the word is *hupokrisis* and means the playing of a part on the stage.

Some people believe hypocrisy is doing something even though you do not want to do it, or feel like doing it. But to do what God requires you to do, or to do to others what you would want them to do to you, even if you do not feel like doing it, is not hypocrisy. It is hypocrisy only when your motive for doing it is wrong.

What Love Does and Does Not Do

In verses four to eight of First Corinthians quoted above the Apostle Paul spells out sixteen things about God's kind of love; eight things it does do and eight things it does not do.

The first thing he says is that love is "*patient,*" or *long-suffering* in the King James Version. Long-suffering, and its synonym patience, is the quality of being self-restrained in the face of being provoked; it is the opposite of getting angry and is associated with mercy and kindness.

Some people are very patient, but there is no kindness in it. It is not only important to have the act of being patient, but the right attitude behind it also. This is what gives patience its sweetness and true meaning.

Moreover, God's type of love is also patient because it knows that in spite of the present circumstances, the future is in God's hand and He "*Will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or bad.*"

The adjective "*kind,*" and its synonyms, kind-hearted, generous, gracious, and compassionate, are all adjectives that apply to a person's actions when they show evidence of concern and sympathy for others.

The next statement on Paul's list is that "*Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.*" So many problems can arise from envy and jealousy. The Apostle James said:

For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind.

(James 3:16)

Both envy and jealousy show a sense of inferiority. If you are envious or jealous of someone you probably feel inferior to them. Boastfulness is the other side of the coin; you boast to cover up

your feelings of inferiority. These are also all indications of self-centeredness.

When Paul says, love is not “*arrogant or rude*,” he means God’s kind of love always behaves itself well; it will never drive a person to behave improperly. The world in which we live operates on an emotional love that often overwhelms and drives people to do things that they would rather not do.

Hollywood has convinced them that love compels people to commit adultery murder and so forth. “I did not want to do it but I was in love and felt compelled to do so.” True love is not like that at all; it can involve and touch the emotions many times, but it is not an emotion; rather it is an act of the will.

At the centre of this statement are the other beautiful words that love “*Does not insist on its own way*,” it is not self-seeking. Agape love will even cause a person to lay down his life for another (see *John 15:13*), because he has literally forgotten himself. Therefore, God’s kind of love is the antidote to selfishness and pride.

If we are to manifest anything of Christ in this world, and find true fulfilment for ourselves, we need to gain victory over an insistent demand to have our own way. As someone aptly commented: “Half of our problems come from wanting our own way, the other half from getting it.”

Now to the other characteristic of Agape love: “*It is not irritable or resentful*.” Anyone who has a quick temper is not operating in God’s type of love, no matter how trying the situation. Neither does God’s love carry a chip on the shoulder or hold on to an unforgiving spirit. It is very positive, easy to get on with, and focuses on the good things in others and in situations; just like a little child.

Another quality of God’s type of love is that, “*It does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth*.” Most people, even Christians, have an attitude of always looking for defects in other

people and being glad when they find them. The unconscious motive behind this is to exalt oneself and prove one's superiority. A person who is mature in love will detest such an attitude and will seek and rejoice in truth, no matter where it leads.

Next in his list Paul turns to focus on four positive things about God's type of love: "*It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.*" The first and last words of Paul's statements here – *bears* and *endures* – are similar in meaning; as are the two central words – *believes* and *hopes*.

The two middle words help us to do the bearing and the enduring with joy and a smile. Love can bear all things because it knows and believes that, "*All things work for the good for those who love God,*" and that all things are being worked out according to God's eternal purpose.

As we mentioned previously, Agape love also bears and endures all things because it knows and believes that God will avenge all wrongdoing and call man into account for his actions on Judgement Day, and even before. In his Letter to the Romans Paul wrote:

Beloved avenge not yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay."

(Romans 12:19)

Letting God be the one to defend us is a matter of faith, great faith. If there was no God to judge unrepentant sinners for their evil actions, then turning the other cheek would be a foolish thing to do. It is important to point out again here that these words of Paul would be humanly impossible to fulfil without the New Birth and the supernatural indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. This being the case, it is wrong for a Christian to say, "I have reached my limits, I cannot bear this anymore, after all I am only human." The truth is, a believer has been crucified with Christ

(*Galatians 2:19-21*); he has a new nature, the very nature of Christ, and the Holy Spirit living in his heart to provide the power to live in God's Agape love.

Only Love Remains

In his famous love chapter the great Apostle sums up his description of real love with these powerful words:

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end, as for tongues, they will cease, as for knowledge, it will come to an end.

(*1Corinthians 13:8-9*)

There will come a time when there will be no more need for spiritual gifts. In eternity, in the new order of things, we will know all things (*1Corinthians 13:12b*). Paul is contrasting the temporariness of these things with God's love; showing, again, its everlasting nature and superior value.

Note, Paul is not saying that love promises to bring about the change of heart in people we long to see or produce. In saying that love never ends (fails, in some translations), I believe he means true love will always produce something positive. Even if your unconditional love is despised, abused or rejected, you learn something of Christ; you partake in His sufferings, which is the greatest result possible (see *Philippians 3:10-12*).

Dear reader, how are you living your life? Are you living for self, or serving God for selfish purposes? Listen to these powerful words in the poem *Only One Life* by C.T. Studd:

Two little lines I heard one day, traveling along life's
busy way; Bringing conviction to my heart, and from

my mind would not depart. Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one, soon will its fleeting hours be done. Then, in "that Day" my Lord to meet, and stand before His Judgment Seat. Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, the still small voice, gently pleads for a better choice. Bidding me selfish aims to leave, and to God's Holy Will to cleave. Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, a few brief years, each with its burdens, hopes, and fears; Each with its days I must fulfil, living for self or in His will. Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

When this bright world would tempt me sore; When Satan would a victory score. When self would seek to have its way, then help me Lord with joy to say: Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

Give me Father, a purpose deep, in joy or sorrow Thy Word to keep. Faithful and true what e'er the strife, pleasing Thee in my daily life. Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

O let my love with fervour burn, and from the world now let me turn. Living for Thee, and Thee alone, bringing Thee pleasure on Thy throne. Only one life,

'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

Only one life, yes only one, now let me say, "Thy will be done." And when at last I'll hear the call, I know I'll say "twas worth it all." Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.

To be told on Judgement Day that all our religious activities, giving to charity, and other great deeds and achievements, have no value at all, because there was no love for God and humanity behind them, is for me the tragedy of tragedies. Paul reminds us:

The work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done.

(1Corinthians 3:13)

04

JESUS IS THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE

As we noted previously, many of the world's greatest thinkers agree that love is the greatest principle in the world, but then refuse to link that principle to the Person who gave us the greatest example. Yet it is quite impossible to understand the meaning of love, that is, true love, unless we are prepared to look at it in relation to the Son of God, and to see it demonstrated in His attitude and actions. **HE IS THE ULTIMATE EXAMPLE!**

The King of kings and Lord of lords came to this Earth in the meekest way possible; born in a stable to humble parents. The Gospel of John tells us that even after His resurrection Jesus was still a humble servant. He went to the trouble of preparing breakfast for His beloved disciples.

And from all four Gospels we learn He never once appeared to any of His accusers to vindicate Himself, but only to those who followed Him. Truly Jesus was “*gentle and humble in heart.*” “*He is the same yesterday and today and forever.*” Centuries before the Son was even born the Father spoke these words of Him through the prophet Isaiah:

Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights, I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street, a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench, he will faithfully bring forth justice.

(Isaiah 42:1-4)

The Apostle Peter tells us:

When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

(1Peter 2:23-24)

The Apostle Paul gives us another beautiful piece of Scripture that perfectly captivates the nature of Christ and urges us to follow His example:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:5-9)

These are just a few examples, but enough to make the point clear: our definition and examples of the meaning of love does not reflect at all its true meaning. Here we also begin to understand why God had to send His Son.

The difference between the world's love and God's Agape love could never have been completely understood by words alone – it had to be seen; it had to become flesh and dwell among sinners; suffer the worst pain imaginable and die for them. Then, and only then, could the word love, in its truest sense, be made known and displayed.

05

GROWING AND MATURING

It is a sad truth that many people love in relationships with the self-seeking immature type of love we have spoken of previously. Many counsellors say relationships break down for this reason.

Strong feelings, possessiveness and deep passions do not necessarily spring from genuine love. The words, I love you, as fervent as they may be pronounced, very often mean I love myself and want you because you make me happy.

When such restrictions are not observed in relationships, and self is not denied so that God's Spirit can gain control, there is no true love, only lust and self-love, which was at the heart of Satan's and man's rebellion.

The central role played by the love of self in man's rebellion against God is the reason Jesus commanded that His followers must deny self to be His true disciples (see *Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:24; Luke 9:23*). He commanded this not to deprive us, but to give us abundant life. This is where true happiness lies. True love has no greater joy than pleasing the one who is loved.

Do all for *His* Glory

Having established these important biblical truths, it is important to guard against self-sacrifice being done to draw attention to ourselves. Jesus condemned the religious leaders of His day for such behaviour.

Giving in this way is not really self-sacrifice but self-exaltation; by pretending to hold ourselves back, we are actually pushing ourselves to the front. It is doing Christian work for the wrong motive; for what we can get out of it – self display, approval and

admiration from others, and, in most cases, to obtain pardon for sins from God.

This is not what the Bible teaches about giving. A believer must be involved in Christian work because he loves the Lord and humanity, even if he gets nothing out of it.

In his beautiful Letter to the Romans Paul tells us that the Law could never make anyone perfect, only awake in us the desire to do what it forbids. Only true love is able to restrict our bad conduct; it even causes us to fulfil the Law unknowingly (see *Romans 13:8-11*).

06

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF LOVE

God's Agape love always seeks to be positive, but there are times when it has to be negative. To put no negatives in love makes it sentimental. Paul wrote:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.

(Romans 12:9-12)

Part of true love is hatred of sin and evil; if we do not hate and rebuke sin – the thing that hinders a person's spiritual growth and brings about his downfall – then we are not operating in Agape love. On the contrary, our love is hypocritical.

It has become customary in our politically correct society to conceal our real feelings behind a hypocritical mask and shy away from speaking the truth in love to our neighbour. Although we should be tactful and not purposely say or do things to offend others, there is a time and a place for speaking out, even though it may not be popular. The Word of God says:

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin, you shall reprove your neighbour, or you shall incur guilt yourself.

(Leviticus 19:17)

This verse says that if we fail to rebuke our neighbour when he sins, we actually hate him (see also *Ezekiel 3:17, 33:1-9; 2 Timothy 4:2-3*). Many people keep silent about sin and evil under

the pretence, “I just love them too much to hurt their feelings.” The truth is they just love themselves too much to run the risk of being rejected and ridiculed.

Jesus spoke the truth in love when He rebuked the religious leaders of His day; as did John the Baptist and the Apostle Paul. Paul even rebuked Peter for displays of hypocrisy and I am sure Peter was grateful for such godly correction.

The Word of God also tells us there is a righteous type of anger that cannot be called sin (*Ephesians 4:26*). Jesus illustrated this when He drove the merchants out of the Temple and overturned their tables.

I will finish up with one last point on this topic. It is interesting that Paul tells us not to lag in zeal (slothful in KJV) immediately after he mentions brotherly love. This adds a very important balance to brotherly love which many people today are totally missing.

While it is true we have a responsibility to help others, it is also true that a handout does not help a lazy person. When we support people, who are living in direct disobedience to God’s instructions regarding laziness, we are really hurting them and inhibiting their personal growth.

Charity should be reserved for those who need it, not for those who abuse it. There are many other Scriptures against laziness and Paul went so far as to say:

For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat.

(1Thessalonians 3:10)