

Teaching Sound Doctrine

“True Love”

Love is a word that is used very loosely today. Some may “love” this or that particular entertainer, or “love” a certain brand of clothing, only to “hate” it (or that person) as their tastes change; wondering why they ever loved them in the first place. People claim to “love” their vehicles, or “love” a certain ball team, only to change their feelings when the car breaks down, or the ball team is in a losing streak.

What is love, and how is it described in the Bible? What is true love, and how can we recognize it? Let us consider the Bible answers to these important questions.

Love Described In One Word: Sacrifice!

Jesus said, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). In this statement, we find the very embodiment of sacrifice. Jesus is alluding to his own death by the crucifixion. Therefore we know that the crucifixion did not succeed because people’s hatred for Christ was so great; but because the love of God for man was so great. Paul wrote, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The apostle John reiterated this point by saying, “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10).

In each of these passages, love is seen in sacrifice. God sacrificed his son because he loved man (see also John 3:16). The Lord Jesus Christ loved us and gave himself for us (Gal. 2:20). Therefore, as we consider the death of Christ on the cross, and the resulting remission of our sins (Matt. 26:28), we are seeing love in action!

With this in mind, we see love as Paul writes to the Corinthians, telling them, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved” (2 Cor. 12:15). To “spend and be spent” meant Paul was willing to give every fiber of his being for them because he loved them. He was ready to sacrifice all for the cause of Christ in that city. He would do this, even if it was not reciprocated! Certainly, this was the attitude of Christ as well for he

gave himself for a world who hated and were opposed to him.

Could we do this? Could we love those who hated us? Could we sacrifice for those who do not care about us? Christ encouraged such behavior in Matthew 5:43-44. He then asked the following questions: “For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so?” (Matt. 5:46-47). Yes, there is more to “loving” a person than we might have first thought! John said, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16). How much do we love our brethren? Read 1 Peter 2:17 in connection with this!

Let us consider the fact that the love husbands have for their wives is described as sacrifice. Paul wrote the Ephesian Christians and said, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it. . . . So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself” (Eph. 5:25, 28). How much did Christ love the church? So much so that he gave his own life to purchase it (Acts 20:28). In like manner then, a man ought to love his wife to this degree — to be willing to give his life for her if that was what was required. A husband ought to be willing to make those sacrifices for his wife as well as his children (Eph. 6:4). Many women have had good husbands, and many children have had good fathers because these men were ready to sacrifice themselves for them. This is love. This type of love emulates the love that God and Christ have for us. Unfortunately, we are living in an age when this type of man is fast vanishing. This is tragic. Men, let us be the type of men that our wives and children can look up to. Let them see Christ in us (Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17; 2 Cor. 4:10). Let them see true and proper love as we willingly give of ourselves (sacrifice) for them.

God’s Love For Man

God’s love for man ought to be apparent to all. In fact, we cannot look at this world without knowing that God loves us. As John was in visional rapture on the isle of Patmos, he recorded that the 24 elders around the throne of God said, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created” (Rev. 4:11). “Pleasure” is defined as: “a determination, i.e. (act.) choice (spec. purpose, decree; abstr. volition) or (pass.) inclination: desire, will” (Strong’s). In other words, what the elders were saying is that God created all things because he wanted them! No, we are not here by accident; rather the love of God motivated him to create us. What a wonderful God we serve! Further, his love is seen in the greatest gift — his only begotten Son (John 3:16). The fact that he would give his

son for the sin of the world shows undeniably that God loves man. He wants us to be with him in Heaven one day, and has therefore, given us a book to follow, the Bible, which will lead us to Heaven!

Man's Love For God

Truly, there is no question about the love of God, nor his willingness to sacrifice for us. There is no question he wants us to be with him one day in Heaven. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God doesn't want anyone to perish, but wants all to come to repentance.

However, the great question we must face is, do we love God? God's love is unmatched, and unquestionable. It is our love for God, however, that we need to consider. Do we love him or not? Consider what we have discussed thus far, and see that our loving God requires more than "lip-service." Love requires action! It requires that my love be shown in sacrificing myself to do his will. This is the thrust of Romans 12:1. Here, Paul says, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." To "present" one's body is to "to stand beside, i.e. to exhibit, . . . bring before, commend, . . . yield" (Strong's). In other words, we are giving (sacrificing) ourselves to God by giving him our lives. We love him and are willing to do his will all the days of our life. To put it another way, "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor. 5:14-15). Since Christ sacrificed himself for us, are we sacrificing ourselves by living for him? If not, we do not truly love him!

What Love Does

The type of love we have been studying manifests itself in various ways. Many times, we have read bumper stickers, or saw signs that said, "Honk if you love Jesus!" or words to that effect. How demeaning to the love of Christ! As we have seen already, true love as the Bible discusses involves sacrifice. This love is agape love.

What does love do? When we truly love God and Christ, we will do more than "honk horns." Rather, we will obey his word. John records this fact several times in both the gospel record and his epistles to the Christians. John recorded Christ's words as he said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. . . . If a man love me, he will keep my words. . . . He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings" (John 14:15, 23-24). Further, John wrote, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1

John 5:3). This is stated in a similar form in 2 John 6: “And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.” Just how obedient are we to the will of God? According to John, our love for God and our obedience to his word are directly proportional. The more we love him, the more we obey his will, the less we love him, the less we will be obedient to him. With this in mind, it is important to remember that James said: “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17). And we all know the results of sin in men’s lives (Rom. 6:23; Jas. 1:14-15)!

Conclusion

Our love for God goes a long way in determining our eternal home. Without love for God, everything we do is in vain (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Our love for God motivates us to do what is right, to please him, and live for him all the days of our life. In this way, faith and love go together, for both are great motivators; yet they are worthless by themselves. Just as it is useless to merely claim to love God (ex: “honking horns”) and do nothing about it; so also one cannot merely claim to have faith in God without obeying his will (John 14:15; Jas. 2:24, 26).

Do we have that sacrificial love for God? For our spouse? For our brethren? Does this kind of love fill our lives? I hope so. This is what is necessary if we are going to be the kind of Christian God wants us to be. The love the Bible discusses is not for the faint of heart, nor for those merely giving “lip-service” to the Lord. This type of love is for the spiritually mature, and for those ready to do God’s will regardless of the circumstances and the sacrifices.