

LESSON ESSENTIALS

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND WORLDVIEW

LESSON 13: LOVING OTHERS

Everyone's greatest need is to love and be loved. The apostle Paul emphasizes the importance of love in a Christian's life in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 when he says that without love we are nothing more than loud noises. And the greatest expression of love is, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16

Loving others is not an easy task and takes a lot of effort, but the Bible repeatedly emphasizes that we need to love others. And the commandment of Jesus Christ is to love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:31).

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Love is such a vital theme in the Bible, and in the way God relates to us. The central commands of Scripture that Christians have always attempted to live by centre on love. If we do not understand it, how can we live it? Let us look into the different meanings of Love as described in the New Testament.

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Agape is an unconditional love that cares for someone regardless of the circumstances, without condition, benefit, or reciprocity. This can be categorized as the highest form of love and is applied to God's love for us. This is a spiritual form of love, loving from our very soul.

Eros, according to C. S. Lewis, is a passionate love, with sensual desire and longing. This word is applied to the sexual love between husband and wife. It is a love we feel deeply, without the balance of logic, or even being able to explain why we feel that way. This is a very physical love.

Phileo is the love between friends. Friendship is the strong bond existing between people who share common interests or activity. It is a mental love that spills out into beneficial action. It can be sacrificial, wanting the best for the other person, as well as loyal.

Storge is the kind of love that exists between family members, or sometimes members of your community or colleagues. The love that is felt by parents for their children can be described as *storge*. It is protective, unifying and compassionate and comes out of a deep commitment or a natural affection.

Now let us understand the five biblical principles of God's love in loving others:

The first principle: God loves us unconditionally. Have you come across people who love others unconditionally? This is nearly impossible as humans are, by nature, selfish, and loving others unconditionally does not come naturally. God's love is unconditional; it was demonstrated through the death of His only Son on the cross for us while we were still his enemies (Romans 5:8). Christ laid down His life for everyone in the world, irrespective of their colour, creed, or nationality. There are only two things that are everlasting: the love of God and the salvation that He offers through His Son, our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ. The reality is that our lives are filled with contradictions but God's love is consistent (Romans 8:38-39).

For example, Christ knew that Peter would deny Him, yet He did not condemn him. The people demanded His death, yet He forgave them. God does the same for us all.

The second principle of God's love in loving others: We are commanded and empowered to love. We are commanded to love God and our neighbours because our greatest joy and fulfilment comes when we love.

How do we go about this? We are commanded to love God who is the source of all love. When the lawyer came to Jesus and asked Him, "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 ("Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength") but then added the call to also love your neighbour as yourself (see Matthew 22:37-38).

Besides loving God, we are also called to love others as much as we love ourselves. What's more, we are even commanded to love our enemies! In Matthew 5:43-46a, Jesus commands us to go beyond simply loving those whom we love. He calls us to love even our enemies! He adds that loving those who love us is easy and is even practiced by pagans. But loving those who hate us forms a distinctive mark of His followers.

The third principle of loving others in God's love: We cannot love in our own strength. By nature we are not patient, kind, selfless, and loving. Therefore it is impossible for us to love others; especially our enemies! We can't do this without God's strength (Romans 8:6-8).

If we look at the characters of the Bible like Peter, Paul, Daniel, David, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, or the prophets, they had one thing in common: their lives reflected the power of God and not the strength of man. They were often scared, they doubted, they questioned, but they also pushed forward in the strength of the Lord. Similarly, being loving also requires God's strength.

The fourth principle of loving others: We must love with God's love. In Romans 5:5, we read that God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. The Bible tells us that we were created in the image of God. This involves two things pertaining to our lives on earth: Learn to love God and learn to love other people. Life is all about love. But love

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The only reason that we can love God or love anybody else is because God first loved us (1 John. 4:19). His deep love is reflected in everything that we have in life. It's all a gift of God's love. In order to love others, we need to first of all understand how much God loves us. Once we are secure in God's unconditional love, we'll start to love people in turn.

The fifth and final principle of loving others: We must love by faith. Everything in the life of a Christian is based on faith. Faith is the act of agreeing with and depending on the facts recorded in God's Word.

How do we love by faith? In order to love by faith, we must be filled with the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul passes on this command to us. Ephesians 5:18 describes the sin of drunkenness as the habit of voluntary excessive drinking of any strong liquor, whereby the mind is disturbed, and deprived of the use of reason. Christians are to be filled with the Spirit of God rather than with intoxicating wine. As being under the influence of alcohol affects our walk, our speech, and our thoughts in a negative way, being under the influence of the Holy Spirit affects our walk, our speech, and our thoughts in a positive way! The filling of the Spirit of God enables the believers to demonstrate love for one another by faith, and to extend the love of God to our neighbour by the Spirit of Christ.

As you go about your week, consider how you can put yourself in a position to practice loving others. It will be difficult sometimes to love enemies or those who have harmed you, but this is one way we can proclaim the Gospel – that God is powerful enough to reconcile and to overcome hate with love through us.

IN REVIEW

1. The Greek language uses four words for "Love" (*Agape*, *Eros*, *Phileo*, and *Storge*). Each one has a different shade of meaning and indicates different intensity of love.
2. The Bible's view on loving others can be summarized in 5 principles.
 1. God loves us unconditionally.
 2. We are commanded and empowered to love.
 3. We cannot love in our own strength.
 4. We must love with God's love.
 5. We love by faith.

HAVE YOUR SAY

- How has this teaching changed your understanding of the word Love?
- How have you failed in loving your neighbour as yourself? How can you repair that relationship now?
- Are there people who have hurt you? Are there people who you would say that you hate? What concrete steps would you take based on this teaching to reach out to them in love?
- Give three instances of experiencing God's love in your life.

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