

1. Love (2Q 2009—Walking the Walk: The Christian Life)

Biblical material: Isaiah 53, Matt. 22:37–39, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 3 and 1 John 4.

Love definitions:

- A grave mental disease. *Plato*
- A mutual misunderstanding. *Oscar Wilde*
- A kind of warfare. *Ovid*
- A beautiful dream with glandular activity. *Eugene E. Brussell*
- Two minds without a single thought. *Philip Barry*
- An ocean of emotions, entirely surrounded by expenses. *Lord Dewar*
- The triumph of imagination over intelligence. *Henry Louis Mencken*
- The state in which a man sees things most decidedly as they are not. *Friedrich W. Nietzsche*
- Our highest word, and the synonym of God. *Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- To love means to commit oneself without guarantee, to give oneself completely in the hope that our love will produce love in the loved person. *Erich Fromm*
- An image of God... the living essence of the divine nature which beams full of all goodness. *Martin Luther*
- A mutual self-giving which ends in self-recovery. *Fulton J. Sheen*
- The heart's immortal thirst to be completely known and all forgiven. *Henry Van Dyke*
- Practical or it is not love at all. *P W Heward*
- Love is all we have, the only way each can help the other. *Euripides*
- Service rather than sentiment. *John R W Stott*
- The distinguishing mark of Christian life. *John Blanchard*
- The cognitive affective state characterized by intrusive and obsessive fantasizing concerning reciprocity of amorous feelings by the object of the amorance. *Anon (supposedly a psych textbook!)*

Questions

How do we avoid appearing trite when we identify love as the primary Christian virtue? What do the above “definitions” tell us about love? How can we best explain the results of love? How does God reveal that he is truly love? How would you define love? If love is about the other, why are we so concerned about ourselves?

Bible discussion

Isaiah 53 is the classic chapter from the “gospel prophet” that reveals the extent of God’s love in coming to us. Jesus’ summary of the “law of love” (Matt 22:37–39) shows the basis for the way God runs his universe. 1 Cor. 13 tells us that love is the greatest gift/virtue, and that without love, everything else is meaningless. John in his epistles gives us the divinely-inspired conclusion that only love really matters. Here’s some more specific biblical data: Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law. (Rom 13:10 NIV). But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:5, 6 NIV). This is how we know what love is:

Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers..... (1 John 3:16NIV). No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (1 John 4:12 NIV). God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. (1 John 4:16-18 NIV).

Comments

This quarter's studies on the key concepts of the Christian faith rightly begin with love. The trouble is in the definition of such an overused word. For many it is synonymous with feelings and emotion; yet where the God of love is concerned, it's very different. Not that there is no emotion in our love relationship with God, just that emotional feelings is not the base. Love is a principle, and it guides the way we live.

So many people today are desperate, wanting someone to love and to be loved. "I just want somebody to love. Just want to share my love," a church member told me once. So much of the world is hurting for lack of love! This is echoed in popular culture—it might even be argued it is the basis for most pop songs, novels, and movies:

- "I could tell you about my life/ And keep you amused, I'm sure/ About all the times I've cried/ And how I don't want to be sad anymore.../ And how I wish I was in love." *Peter Green/ Fleetwood Mac*.
- "Can anybody find me/ Somebody to love?" *Freddie Mercury/Queen*

In one survey that asked people what they most wanted in life, the most frequent answer was that they "wanted to love and be loved." In a world faced with so many shortages, the worst is a shortage of love. A lack of love. A love famine. Love lost. And in Lucifer's self-centered desire to place himself above the Most High, we see what happens when self-love annihilates love for others.

In his life-work, Jesus showed God's love in healing and teaching, in sharing the truth and saving. He bows down to wash his disciples' dirty feet, and the record says that he was showing them the full extent of his love, as he went on from there to Gethsemane and the Cross. Here is "love that will not let me go," and we love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:9). Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:39).

Ellen White Comments

Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. There is but little real, genuine, devoted, pure love. This precious article is very rare. Passion is termed love. True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse, and which suddenly dies when severely tested. {AH 50}

How many do not manifest patience, forbearance, forgiveness, and true love! Many have their likes and dislikes and feel at liberty to manifest their own perverse disposition rather than to reveal the will, the works, the character of Christ. The life of Jesus is full of kindness and love. Are we growing into His divine nature? {AH 178}

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