

Commandment To Love

1 John 2:7-14

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. 12 I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name's sake. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, children, because you know the Father. 14 I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
(1 John 2:7-14 (ESV))

Over my years of being a Christian, when I encounter such words as these, words that “command” us to love God and to love one another, I confess that I have found the “command to love” a bit strange. And I believe that is probably so with most people.

I say that because the concept that our “natural mind” usually understands as being “love” tends, not towards something that we can control and intentionally “do”, but rather that love is something that we “fall into”, something that just “happens” to us, feelings and emotions that just “well up” uncontrollably within us, through no design or intention on our part.

And yes, the emotions of love seem to do exactly that, a seemingly chance meeting at a gathering, or a quick glimpse across a crowded room, then suddenly we are smitten! I can recall the beginning days of first meeting my beloved wife, I was immediately attracted to her. And that emotional attraction eventually worked its way out into a deep and strong lifetime of love.

The question that must first be considered is this, is the kind of “emotion of love” that I have just described the same kind of “love” that God is speaking about in these words, and even commanding us to do?

The answer to that question is, no, it isn't that kind of "love"! But then again, yes, in some ways, it is. I don't pretend to know the whole "psychology" of love. God has not given me an adequate understanding of it. And as I have observed the advice and the conclusions given by many of the so-called "experts" in the "field of love", it would seem that none of them know much about love either.

But we should know about it! We really should and we must! Because according to God, "love" is the most important thing that we are to ever experience. Why do I say that? It is because, both in the Old and the New Testaments, God declares it to be so. In Deuteronomy 6, we read,

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. 6 And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:5-9 (ESV))

And then, in the New Testament, when Jesus was asked what the first and greatest commandment was, He said,

37 . . . "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40 (ESV))

And then, in John telling us here that he is not giving us a new commandment, but restating an old one, but really is giving us a new one, he is saying that this original commandment to love our neighbor as we love our self, is still always in place, but more needs be added. In John 13, we are told

34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. (John 13:34 (NIV))

This "new command" is for us to love other people beyond the way we love ourselves. We are to love them as Christ loves them. That is a much deeper and far more spiritual form of love, a love that can only be experienced through the presence and the power of God's Holy Spirit dwelling within a person.

The intended meaning of all of these words is that "love" is to be the central element and the compelling reason behind all that takes place, first in the heart of God and in all that He does in His relationship with us. And then, that same kind of "love" is to be the

one central element and compelling reason behind our response back to Him. And then further, “love” is to reach into and become the foundational element of all we are and all that we do with the people around us.

And the simple truth is, if we will “love” God and “love” people, in the way that God is commanding us to “love”, then we surely will live a near perfect existence all the days of our lives. But sadly, we do neither. We don’t love God and we don’t love people as we should! And even more sadly, we don’t even know why we don’t love them. And even worse, most people never seem to go so far as to be able to figure out what the word “love” even means.

There are seven billion people on our planet and it seems that each of the seven billion people have their own, very different version and understanding of what “love” is and how it is to be shown. And that is sad beyond measure. So very sad!

Thankfully, there really is an answer to our dilemma of understanding, and it is fully available to us. Instead of our doing as the “relative thinkers” of our generation do, as they rely on their own individual definition of the word “love”, we can go to the “One” who created the “mystery of love” to begin with, to God, our loving Father, and we can ask Him.

And God really does have so very much to say about the subject of “love”. As some preachers are fond of saying, “this whole bible is a ‘love letter’ from God to each of us”. And while our search here today and perhaps in the weeks to come will only yield a small part of God’s real meaning of love, we will be so very blessed with each kernel of truth about “love” that we do learn.

With that being said, may we go first to the most well-known revelation about love, the words given in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. Please turn there with me. And as we read, I want us to note that the first truth we learn about “love” is that it has both a “being”, as well as a “doing” requisite within it.

1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 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 have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13:1-8 (ESV))

Note first in these words, God reveals the first failings by us as Christians. We may know Christ and have faith in Him as our Savior and Lord. And we may be a great “student” of the bible, knowing doctrines, and even be able to preach them. But if we are lacking in this one thing, “love”, we are falling woefully short of God’s plan and desire for us. Those words again,

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These words are clear and plain! For us as Christians, this is the first and most vital requirement of our Christianity, and of our daily “Christian walk” spoken about in verse 6. Do we “love” the people around us with the kind of “love” God wants us to “love”?

And here, God tells us exactly what that kind of “love” will look like as we show it towards other people. And here, He first tells us what love “is”. But with each revelation of what love “is”, He gives an implied command telling us what we are to “do” with our “love”. He tells us that,

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV))

A mysterious quality of “love” is that God has endowed “love” with its very own “nature”, its very own “personality” and an inherent mysterious “power”. And these words reveal and describe that “nature” and “personality” and “power”. Some people would reject what I am saying, but we who “love” know it be true. Love really does have a “nature”, and a “personality” and a “power” all its own.

Real and true love is patient and it is kind, and not just the “count to ten before you speak” kind of patience, but real “kind” and “understanding” patience. Once we begin to experience love for a person, our feelings and our behaviors toward that person really do change. We want the very best for them. And we want to be near them more and more, and to do things for them, things that we would not otherwise do.

Nowhere is that more evident than in a mother’s love for her baby child. A strong “force of love” compels a mother to do whatever it takes to meet the needs of her child. She

will suffer any misery or sorrow necessary, give her last bite of food to that child, die if she has too.

She is patient and she is kind beyond measure. Yes, she will have times of frustration. And she will want to pull her hair out. But even that is evidence of “love”. Because otherwise she would simply abandon the child and not care what it does.

And equally, real “love” can be clearly seen between a husband and wife who truly love each other. And yes, too often, these words become very “relative” in many marriage relationships. But in those marriages where both the husband and wife have given their hearts to Christ, these elements of love can be clearly seen.

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(1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV))

And yes, God is telling us that these same qualities of “love” can be and absolutely should be the foundation of all human relationships, whether it be within a family, between friends, between neighbors, between business associates, even between strangers. These qualities of “love” ought to be our ordinary manner of daily life with anyone we encounter.

And all of this is especially important because, as we know from studying about the “Providence of God”, things and circumstances and situations seldom, if ever, “just happen”. They are part of the “Will” and the “plans” of God. A seemingly random meeting between you and someone else has a “God ordained” purpose and meaning. And because of that, our behavior should always immediately be “patient and kind, not envious or boastful, not arrogant or rude, not insisting on having its own way, not irritable or resentful, not rejoicing in wrongdoing, but rejoicing in the truth, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping in all things, enduring the worst of things, remaining steadfast and never failing.

And yes, that is a tall order, a very tall order, especially when often, we barely know that other person. And it is especially difficult when we really do know that other person, and that person has unlovable attitudes and behaviors.

But folks, as difficult as those opportunities to love may be, God does not seem to give us any other options. He doesn’t say in these words that we can love that other person

if they show us love in return. Our only option is to show them these qualities of love spoken about here, no matter their attitude and response.

May I give this a bit more emphasis, especially as it relates to the love relationship between a husband and wife. In Ephesians 5, we have the requirements of love given simply and plainly. There, as a husband, God tells me,

25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. (Ephesians 5:25-27 (NIV))

Note that here also, there are no other options given to us husbands. I am to “love my wife unconditionally, just as Christ loves her, and gave Himself for her”! My willingness to love her must not be dependent upon her having first shown love to me. I am to love her regardless of her attitude and responses.

And likewise, we are to love our neighbor unconditionally, regardless of their attitude and response. And yes, that again, is an especially tall order, because some neighbors are especially “hard to love”.

And that is the essence of the instruction being given to us here in 1 John. Listen!

7 Beloved, I am writing you no new commandment, but an old commandment that you had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word that you have heard. 8 At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. 9 Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. 10 Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. 11 But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes. (1 John 2:7-11)

We'll close for today, and hopefully examine these words further next time. May we pray.