

Biblical Love - Part 1

Selected Passages

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I. Introduction

- In our society, love is usually spoken of in passive terms.
 - That is, love is something that happens *to us* over which we have little or no control.
 - We “fall” in love.
 - We speak this way chiefly because we associate love with a particular feeling or emotion.
 - Such emotion cannot be produced by pushing a button or by a conscious act of the will.
 - We do not “decide” to fall in love with someone.
- The Bible, however, speaks of love in far more active terms.
 - The concept of love functions more as a verb than as a noun.
 - Love is a duty—an action we are obliged to perform.
 - God commands us to love our neighbor, to love our spouse, and even to love our enemies.
 - It is one thing to conjure up feelings of love and affection for one’s enemies; it is another thing to act in a loving manner toward them.
- The Bible has a complex concept of love that is expressed in relatively few words.
 - The Old Testament predominantly used one Hebrew word, *ahab*, to express love.
 - The New Testament primarily used two Greek words for love—*phileo* and *agape*.
 - *Phileo*, from which the city Philadelphia derives its name (meaning the “city of brotherly love”), is the Greek word that is used to denote the affection shared by friends.
 - By contrast, the term *eros*, which is not used in the Bible, refers more to sexual or erotic love.
 - It is the kind of love we often associate with romance.
 - These two types of love are common to all human beings.
 - These types of love have a tendency to be motivated by self-interest, self-gratification, and self-protection.
- The New Testament, however, describes a third kind of love.
 - *Agape* stands in contrast to the more basic affections. Its most distinguishing feature is a lack of self-interest. It proceeds out of a heart of care and concern for others. Its characteristics are enumerated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13. Agape love is patient and kind. It neither boasts nor envies. It is not proud, rude, self-seeking, or easily angered.

It is quick to forgive; it seeks the good and the true. It protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres always. It never fails.

- Biblical love is therefore more than a mere emotion.
 - It is active.
 - The calling of the Christian is not primarily to develop feelings of love for others.
 - In many instances that is outside the Christian's control.
 - However, we can control how we respond and act toward a given person.
 - The Christian is to *be loving*, to mirror the selfless love of God.
- Agape love, then, is the ultimate fruit of the Spirit. As Paul wrote,

"...now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13:13).

- Insofar as agape love mirrors and reflects the character of God's love for us, it may be called a steadfast love, a love that endures with loyalty.
 - It is characterized by fidelity—the faithfulness that is built upon trust.
 - Such love is incapable of being fickle; it is the love of permanent commitment.
 - The steadfast love of God and is oriented toward *others*.
- Let's think a bit about just what the Bible teaches about love and how we ought to approach At least three things:
 - Love FOR God
 - Love TO Christ
 - Love FOR Man
- Let's take a more in-depth look:

II. Love FOR God

A. Commanded of believers.

Deut. 6:4-5

*⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your
soul, and with all your strength.*

1. We Worship ONE God

- This command to love God is prefaced by the well-known statement that God is One - not many as all the surrounding "gods" were presented.

2. 5 "Parts" to the Command

- This is the OT command that is called "The Greatest Commandment"
 - Note that there is five parts to this command:

1. Love for God is intended to be an ACT performed - a conscious and deliberate function
2. It involves ALL four parts of man's being:
 1. Our Heart
 - First in the list of all that was essential for the Jew was unreserved, wholehearted commitment expressed in love to God.
 - This is NOT talking about flinging our emotions into our relationship or our worship with God.
 - Since this relationship of love for God could not be represented in any material way as with idols, it had to be demonstrated in obedience to God's law in daily life.
 - Cf. 11:16–21; Matt. 22:37; Luke 10:27.
 - **6:6 these words ... in your heart.**
 - The people were to think about these commandments and meditate on them so that obedience would not be a matter of formal legalism, but a response based upon understanding.
 - The law written upon the heart would be an essential characteristic of the later New Covenant (see Jer. 31:33).
 2. Our Soul
 - "Soul" speaks of the mental participation, we are to seek to give over our mental faculties to the pursuit and worship and love of our God
 3. Our Mind
 - It is interesting that Moses tells us that our worship is not to be a "mindless" worship
 - For how many today is worship simply a matter of emotions and such - they weave, wave and, with closed eyes and shaking heads listen to and/or sing whatever music is going.
 - There is no mental participation.
 - BUT - Moses (speaking for God) says that our mind MUST be a part of the equation!
 4. Our Strength
 - "Strength" speaks of effort or giving over of our whole participation.
 - It is not just a matter of music and some words.
 - Nor is it a matter of waving, etc.
 - It is a matter of doing whatever it is that God and His Word tells us that our love for Him is to be.
 - There is no definition here, but there is elsewhere - holiness, separation, service, etc.
- Notice that all three of them are emphasized...

all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength

- It is Moses' intention that we see that these are not merely a mechanism, but they are an essential and important part of our active love for our God!

- The parts of this love that is speaking of actions and the “doing” that we have spoken of we find over in Dt. 11:1:

Deut 11:1 “Therefore you shall love the LORD your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always.”

- It is the same style as the prior one we have already spoken of.
 - In Chapter 10:12-22, Moses has spoken of exactly what the Law is and what it requires.
 - Here, as the very first statement in Chapter 11 he ties what the Law is and what God’s people are to DO regarding that Law.
- “Therefore”
 - “In light of” what we already said...
 - We are commanded again to “love the LORD your God AND...”
 - This is the “strength part”
 - keep **His charge**,
 - His **statutes**,
 - His **judgments**, and
 - His **commandments**
 - **always**.
 - “And” ties the beginning of the verse to the things are the end of the verse.
 - “His charge” speaks of their obligation as His people
 - “statutes”, of course, speaks of the details of the Law
 - “Judgment” is a more applicational idea...speaking of the definition of what is true and acceptable.
 - What God has said is true and is right is, in the light of our love for Him, ours as well.
 - As we study the Law (in the sense of the entire Word of God in the NC) we develop a sharper and better understanding of what is true and what is acceptable for us to have in our lives.
 - “Commandments”, naturally refers to the Law, or the written Word of God as we hold it in our hands.
 - In other words, in light of what Moses has said on the prior passage, what we do and think **MUST** be affected and changes
 - This was one of the MAJOR failings in Israel’s life (and still is)
 - They failed in all 4 of what Moses has said here, and they **CERTAINLY** didn’t do it **ALWAYS!**
- Joshua echoed this idea to them once they had entered into the land:

Josh 22:5 But take careful heed to do the commandment and the law which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, to love the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to keep His commandments, to hold

fast to Him, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

- Again, we simply want to note that he urged two acts or aspects of action:
 - take careful heed to
 - do what has been commanded
 - We might note a third one as well:
 - Recognize that such obedience is a necessary part of what follows loving God.
 - This “loving of God” in turn has several aspects to give shape to what has been commanded:
 - We might say that the first part is to recognize and to actually love the Lord their God
 - to walk in all His ways,
 - to keep His commandments,
 - to hold fast to Him, and
 - to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul. - we talked of this before.
- I think we can all recognize that this not intended to speak of a casual or mere token thing
 - The point is that “loving God” is not just emotions, not just observation or ritual.
 - It involves a commitment and pursuit that involves all of our being and all of our strength.

David had something to say about the idea as well...

Ps 5:11 But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them; Let those also who love Your name Be joyful in You.

- In the immediately preceding section, David had prayed for the just ends of the wicked according to God’s revealed standard of justice (Deut. 25:1),
 - Similarly and contrastingly he had urged those who are regarded as righteous by the Lord’s grace to joyfully celebrate His blessings.
 - The idea here is that David knows that there can be confidence for the believer in the Lord, that is for the genuine believer.
 - It is this genuine one what can who can do things mentions:
 - Rejoicing
 - Shout for joy
 - Be joyful

Jesus was very clear about the matter as well...

Matthew 22:37-40 ³⁷ Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’

³⁸ *This is the first and great commandment.* ³⁹ *And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* ⁴⁰ *On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."*

- Of course, He is quoting here from the Deuteronomy passage we looked at earlier...
 - Additional to what we said earlier, we should understand that the use of the various terms is not meant to delineate distinct human faculties, but to underscore the completeness of the kind of love that is called for.
 - It is intended to show us the fullness of what our love for God ought to be...
- Just as an aside, Jesus often spoke of the immense requirements of the Law to enable the measuring up to the standards of the Father.
 - Likewise, this teaching is intended to show us just how righteous and holy the Lord Jesus was in His practical living.
 - HE is the perfect and full example of just HOW we are love the Father - we must love the Father after the same pattern as demonstrated by our Lord Jesus when here.
- It is interesting, is it not?
 - It is upon Loving God and Loving those around us as God has commanded us that "...hang all the Law and the Prophets."
 - You can't DO ANY BETTER!!

B. The first and greatest commandment.

- We've touched on this idea already and so we just want to underscore again.

Matt 22:37-38 Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment.

- I just find it interesting that Jesus found it necessary to use language that was already present in the OT, in the Law of Moses and should have been at least familiar to the Disciples.
 - Again, the use of the various terms is not meant to delineate distinct human faculties, but to underscore the completeness of the kind of love that is called for.
 - It makes the concept "larger" or more impressive if you will.
 - We'll also note again that this underscores the mandatory nature of what Moses said, and argue that it is echoed by the Lord Jesus.
 - This is NOT a suggestion, but rather is a direct command and must, thus, be significant on the NT He is in the process of introducing.

In Mark 12, Jesus address a couple things

- He gives the parable of the vineyard owner and then speaks of the matter of taxes
- The Sadducees then question Him on the issue of the Resurrection and He answers them.

- At the end of that discussion Jesus actually tells them they are mistaken and “do not know the Scriptures”!!
- At the end of verse 28 He speaks of them as “greatly mistaken”!
- He then goes on in verses 28-31 and speaks of the matter we have in mind.
 - The Scribe actually affirms what He has said and Jesus tells him that he “is not far from the Kingdom of God”.
- This actually echoes Matthew 22 which we have already thought about a bit.
 - There Jesus quoted Moses and said that Loving God and your neighbor is the greatest commandment.
 - He goes on in verse 38 and says that all of the Law and the Prophets (in fact the entire OT) HANGS on this statement.

We could carry this on in Matthew 12:33 saying this act is BETTER than all human sacrifices:

C. Better than all sacrifices.

Mark 12:33 And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

- Let's note that one of the real standout characteristics of a burnt offering is that they were totally and completely consumed when offered.
- It was not a partial or convenient thing.
- Yet “loving God and loving our neighbors as ourselves is MORE than this.
 - More speaks of being more efficacious and effective - not in the sense of earning righteousness or favor with God.
 - It speaks of doing those things that please God and achieve His purposes and work amongst men.
- We also want to “re-mention” that our Lord is speaking of the way He intends for us to deal with our “neighbors”
 - The word “neighbor” is actually used in the Bible, OT and NT, some 153 times.
 - Many of those times in what is actually a “positive” interactive context: either how we are NOT to treat them or how we ARE to treat them.
- Given such a command, which I think all will admit is not truly natural to the vast majority of human beings as we are self-oriented and self-centered, we must ask the logical and reasonable question:
 - Where does the ability and desire to do so in a way that pleases God and follows the Scripture come from?

- Remember that the Bible actually says that we are rebellious AGAINST God and His will
- We are, Paul says, sinful and even haters of God
- How then are we to develop and cultivate this COMMANDED love for our Heavenly Father?
- We're told that...

D. Love, in Believers, is Produced by

- First, we should note that we do not have the capacity to “produce this love in and of ourselves.
 - For us, those who, before our redemption, walked according to our own lusts, and who have such tendencies persisting in us post-salvation, must have, shall we say, “assistance” in a number of areas, particularly in loving and embracing One whom we once hated
 - This comes by the means of the aid and enablement of:

1. By The Holy Spirit.

Gal 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

- Among many other essential things for the Christian life is the matter of love...
 - Note that there is no specific statement about what “type” of love:
 - Love for God
 - Love for the Lord Jesus
 - Love for other believers
 - Love for families
 - Etc.
 - Here, it is simply a general reference to the entire matter
 - It seems as though Paul is telling us that, in order to “escape” what could be the overriding aspect of our nature, a tendency to self-orientation - we must seek the aid of God’s Spirit...
 - It doesn’t just “COME ALONG”
 - We’ll talk more about this in a moment - it is cultivated, at least in part as a response to our prayers...
 - We must seek the direction of the Lord “into” the love of God

2 Thess 3:5 Now may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

- This is NOT regarding us entering INTO God’s love, or God loving us,
 - Rather it is speaking of us developing the love of you and I for God
 - It is not the love described in John 3:16
 - Rather it is a reciprocal love on our part for the One Who saved us.

- But, there is a sense in which it is a **response** to...

2. *By The love of God to Us.*

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us.

- We might even refer to this as a matter of gratitude, or of amazement!
 - Some have referred to it as a function of the change that results from our “new nature” that comes at the moment of salvation.
 - We are made “new” as Paul says.
 - We certainly ARE new!
 - Those who were haters of God, gradually but definitely become those who LOVE Him!
 - Now this does NOT mean that the love in view just “SHOWS UP” fully formed and needing no effort from us...

3. *By Answers to Prayer.*

Ps 116:1 I love the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.

- David is a wonderful example of the interaction of the believer and His God
 - He is clear that one aspect of that interaction is the deepening of what we can call the “personal relationship” he was in with the Lord.
 - One part of any personal interaction is the communication between the two parties.
 - For believers - the components are prayer on our part and blessing, answers to prayer and increasing knowledge and understanding of the Word of God on His.
 - Another distinct thing David saw as a part of this is the increasing and/or deepening of His love for God.
 - I’m not sure that he refers to a giving of love that was not there...
 - Rather I suspect he is speaking of an expression and deepening of his experience (on his side) of that loving relationship with his heavenly Father.
- David had come to understand that a relationship with God was NOT merely a mechanical or liturgical observation of his walk and observation of rituals.
 - He understood, of course, that God loved him, and he had and did experience his OWN love for God.
 - He hatched and felt it deepening on an ongoing basis and saw that it was result, at least in part, as a function of prayer.

You and I have come to see that the greatest demonstration of God’s Fatherly love is demonstrated and understood as it was/is

