

LOVE: THE MOST EXCELLENT WAY

*Shauna Amick, M.Ed.*Watermark Ministries*

“His banner over me is love.”

Song of Songs 2:4

The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart (1Samuel 16:7). He sees deep into your heart right now. Take a moment in prayer to ask God to reveal what it is He wants you to see, as well. Then trust Him as He takes you deeper into His Word and ever closer to His heart.

Love truly is the most excellent way (see 1Corinthians 12:31). When Jesus was asked, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”, He answered with profound simplicity; “Love.” Read this interaction in Mark 12:28-31, then focus on verse 30 of that passage. How are we to love God? _____

Loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength is the first and greatest commandment. The second is like it. What is the second commandment, according to Jesus’ words in Mark 12:31? _____

There is no commandment greater than these. In fact, all the law and prophets hang on these two commandments of love (Matthew 22:40). Check it out for yourself. Go back to the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17 and review the law God gave to Moses.

The first four commandments (Exodus 20:3-11) show us ways to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. List them here: _____

The remaining six commandments (Exodus 20:12-17) demonstrate how we are to love others as we would have them love us. List these “one another” commands here: _____

In essence, Jesus sums up the Old Testament Ten Commandments in two New Testament commands; not to take away from the original law, but to take it to a deeper level of love. Read His words in Matthew 5:17. Jesus did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to _____.

Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament in the sense that He gave it its full meaning; emphasizing deep, underlying issues of the heart rather than legalistic requirements. Keeping commandments without loving God and allowing God to love others through us simply misses the mark of God’s heart.

How does Galatians 5:6 confirm that? _____

What do you think “faith expressing itself through love” looks like? _____

Biblical love shows in our actions as well as in our motives for those actions. Read Isaiah 58:1-14 and list some of the ways God expects us to demonstrate our love for Him and for others. _____

Using our God-given gifts to feed the hungry and clothe the naked are indeed outward expressions of our genuine love for Christ. In fact, Jesus identifies Himself with the hungry and oppressed in the Gospel of Matthew. Read Matthew 25:34-40. How does Jesus connect Himself to those around us in need? _____

When we choose to love God’s people, we reveal our love for Christ. God blesses us for showing such heavenly love (see Matthew 25:34). Is the Holy Spirit encouraging your heart to “love the least of these” in any tangible way at this time? _____

Serving others in the Name of Jesus is a noble cause, to be sure. Yet even the most spectacular manifestations of our spiritual gifts mean nothing unless they are motivated by love. How does 1Corinthians 13:1-3 support this statement? _____

Our motive for serving must go deeper than desiring rewards in Heaven, just as the exercising of our individual giftings is intended by God to spread His love rather than bring us status; be it in Heaven or on earth. How has God gifted you, and how are you sharing that gift *in love*? _____

Remember that *love never fails* (1Corinthians 13:8). Your acts of love do make an eternal difference that reaches far beyond anything we can see with our earthly eyes. Even after your personal gift has been given, God’s grace-full gift of supernatural love sticks around. How does 1Corinthians 13:8-12 confirm this truth? _____

When the music is over, the last prayer has been said, the doors have been shut and everyone goes home, love remains. Write 1Corinthians 13:13 here: _____

This triad of faith, hope and love is found throughout the New Testament. Read 1Thessalonians 1:3 and note the fruit these virtues produce. Faith produces good works; hope inspires _____; love’s prompting motivates our _____.

Why is it that the greatest of these virtues is love? Check out Colossians 3:14 for the answer. What does love do, according to this Scripture? _____

Unity! Love – this incredibly powerful fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22) – is what binds Christian virtues, as well as the Christian community, together in perfect unity.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm! Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the Lord's works of love. This divine encouragement is given to us in 1Corinthians 15:58. Read the rest of that passage and record the reason we can be so encouraged here:_____

Our labors of love in the Lord are never done in vain! Even when those we long to serve seem unappreciative or unreceptive, God is blessed by our efforts. When His Name and His Word are spoken, blessings abound. Read Isaiah 55:10-11. What will God's Word accomplish according to verse 11?_____

Rest in the truth that God's Word will achieve the purpose for which He sends it. We can trust that He will fulfill this promise because He does so for the sake of *His* holy Name (see Ezekiel 36:22). God's holiness will be revealed through our willingness to share His Word and our faith through selfless acts of love. What will "the nations" know then, according to Ezekiel 36:23?_____

The ultimate purpose of God's plan is that the whole world may know the One True God. Such grace! God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ, and now calls us to the ministry of reconciliation (see 2Corinthians 5:18-19). Who are we, then, and what does God do through us according to 2Corinthians 5:20?_____

God is using you, Friend! God made Him who had no sin to become sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God! As His fellow workers, how are we to receive this amazing gift of grace according to 2Corinthians 6:1?_____

Living for oneself would be receiving God's gift in vain. This is one reason that Christ's love compels us to share the good news of salvation; to share the truth in love. How has the love of Christ compelled you to love others?_____

Is there a "praise report" you can share about such a time; a memory of a moment when you shared God's love and it was received in some astonishing way?_____

In contrast, have you ever shared what you believed Jesus wanted you to share with no hint of a response from your audience? Perhaps your words or actions were even rejected. Remember, God's Word will not return void! If you're obeying Christ – and doing so in love – God will use your words and actions to plant seeds that He alone will make grow in His own time.

What can we expect if we do not grow weary in well doing, according to Galatians 6:9?_____

Read further to Galatians 6:10 and record our charge here: _____

We are to continue to love and “do good”; when we’re blessed and even when we’re cursed. This is the call of Christ’s apostles – the call of love. Read 1Corinthians 4:12-13 and note how the apostle Paul responded to rejection. _____

1Corinthians 9:23 tells us why Paul was so willing to become the “scum of the earth”. Write his words here: _____

We, too, can be encouraged in heart and united in love, knowing that when we live for the sake of the Gospel we will share in its blessings. Hallelujah! We don’t need to be afraid of sharing God’s love. 1John 4:18 tells us why. Write it here: _____

Genuine love for God confirms our salvation in Christ, driving out fear of condemnation. The next time fear tries to sneak in, beat it back with Zephaniah 3:17. Record these loving words now, and commit them to memory: _____

God delights in you and can quiet your fears with His love which endures *forever* (Psalm 136). Isn’t this a direct answer to our deepest prayers? Write Proverbs 19:22a here: _____

We desire unfailing love. Think back to our definition of love in 1Corinthians 13:4-8. God’s love never fails. How has your understanding of God’s love for you changed over the course of this time with Him? _____

Oh, to grasp how wide and how long and high and deep is the love of Christ (see Ephesians 3:18)! Getting a glimpse of God’s love and forgiveness strengthens our love for Him and compels us to love others. How does Ephesians 5:1-2 echo this? _____

Unity in the church and an ability to love others comes from imitating Christ’s humility. Read Philippians 2:1-5. Ask God to show you your next step of love. Is there someone you need to forgive or someone’s forgiveness you need to accept? Is there a wrong you need to right, a chance you’ve got to take, or a gift you need to give? Write your response here: _____

You can go forward loving God and loving others in confidence, knowing that *if we love one another, God’s love is made complete in us* (1John 4:12).

Be on your guard, then. Stand firm in this glorious faith. Be courageous. Be strong....
Do everything in love (1Corinthians 16:13-14).
