

“LOVE”

Theology @ 9
Harvest Christian Fellowship
Sunday, 18 December, 2011

The word “love” is multi-faceted in meaning. It appears numerous times in both the Old and New Testaments. This lesson will focus primarily on the New Covenant’s teaching regarding Christian’s responsibilities to love. There are two basic NT words translated as “love” in English. We will focus on the most often used word for love: agape.

Definition: “To love” in the New Testament sense, is to act on behalf of someone else’s best interest.

The moral law requires us to love God and love our neighbor.

Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Deuteronomy 6:4–6 (ESV)

⁴ “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 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.

Matthew 22:35–40 (ESV)

³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “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.”

Mark 12:28–31 (ESV)

²⁸ And one of the scribes came up and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, asked him, “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Romans 13:9 (ESV)

⁹ For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

For Christians, our love is a response and expression of God's love to us.

Ephesians 4:32–5:2 (ESV)

³²Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

1 John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

“We need not—indeed, must not—choose between a view of the church as a purely passive recipient of grace and a view of it as an active bearer of grace. We are always passive recipients of grace from God and active agents of love to our neighbor. Grace activates works; love flows from faith...*In this light, the church is always a recipient of grace in relation to God yet also active in witness, love, and service toward the neighbor.*”

-Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A systematic theology for pilgrims on the way.*

- So, we do not love to win favor with God or to become right in God's eyes; rather, because we have been declared righteous by God we will necessarily love God and our neighbor.

The hallmark of Christian Life is Christian love. The measure and test of love to God is wholehearted and unqualified obedience.

1 John 5:3 (ESV)

³ For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

John 14:15, 21, 23 (ESV)

¹⁵ “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

²¹ “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”

²³ Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.”

The measure and test of one's love for his neighbor is laying down one's life for them.

1 John 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

John 15:12–13 (ESV)

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus shared the parable of the good Samaritan to expand the people’s concept of “neighbor.”

Luke 10:25–37 (ESV)

²⁵ And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶ He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” ²⁷ And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸ And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.”

²⁹ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “**And who is my neighbor?**” ³⁰ Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. ³² So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. ³⁴ He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’ ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” ³⁷ He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”

Matthew 5:43–45 (ESV)

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” [Common Grace]

Neighborly love is profiled in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7:

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.

- notice the totally selfless nature of this kind of neighborly love

Question: If you had to write a similar paragraph based on the parable of the good Samaritan how would you write it? For example, “Love bandages others’ wounds, it pays the cost, it sees the need when others pass by.”

NT “love” is primarily action based on decisions with others’ best interest in mind; therefore:

- Sometimes genuine love seems cruel
 - Like dog caught in a bear trap

- Love is not primarily emotional though it certainly can be emotional
 - Pre-marriage counseling

Love for fellow believers is a marker of the authenticity of one’s faith. We see in fellow believers one whom Christ also died for.

John 15:9–17 (ESV)

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. ¹⁷ These things I command you, so that you will love one another.”

Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

1 Peter 4:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. ⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

1 John 3:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

Romans 14:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.

1 Corinthians 8:11 (ESV)

¹¹ And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died.

Discussion Topics or Topics for Further Research: (hints provided)

1. Do you think it is possible for a non-Christian to love his or her neighbor? If so, what is the difference between a Christian loving his neighbor and a non-Christian loving his neighbor?
 - Compassion
 - Guilt
 - compulsion

2. Is love for one's neighbor and evangelism always one and the same?
 - Evangelism is the proclamation of the Gospel

3. Contrast "loving with an ulterior purpose" with being set free to love while looking for opportunities to proclaim the good news. Is there a difference?

4. We often hear the phrase "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Discuss ways that is relevant for the Christian and ways it may not be.
 - Probable long-term versus short-term contact.

Most of the foregoing material was taken from JI Packer's *Concise Theology*; Michael Horton's *The Christian's Faith*; John Calvin's *Institutes*; and Daniel Akin's (editor) *A Theology for the Church*.