

LOVE IS...

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Love is Godlikeness in the heart, in the tongue, in the hands and in the thoughts. It supervises all the human attributes and seeks to control them. Those who possess a love with these characteristics are able to appreciate it even though they cannot explain it. We hope this study will give us an appreciation of the type of love that God requires, and what we need to do to attain this perfect love.

We will look at the elements of perfect love as outlined in what we call the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: “Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (Revised Standard Version).

What is the love that is acceptable to God? How important is love? When will we finally attain this divine love? What are the meanings of the words translated love and how do they differ?

What is the love that God desires in his people? Without this wonderful quality, nothing is acceptable in the sight of God.

First John 4:7,8,10-12 (RSV): “Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.”

Manna text of March 7: “Whether I am something or nothing in God’s estimation is to be measured by my love for Him, for His brethren, for His cause, for the world in general, and even for my enemies — rather than by my knowledge or fame or oratory.

“In the measurement of character, therefore, we are to put love first, and to consider it the chief test of our nearness and acceptance to the Lord.”

How important is love? In Matthew 22:37-39 (RSV) Jesus answered the Pharisee’s question: “Which is the great commandment in the Law?” 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. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Paul ends the love chapter (1 Corinthians 13:13): “So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”

First John 4:16-21 (RSV) “ So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear, for fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also.”

So we see that “God is love” because he is perfect; God is the personification of love. Whoever is fully in God’s likeness may be said to be love, for love is the great principle which represents most fully the divine character. Jesus Christ is also love because he is perfect. And when the church is complete it will be perfect and it also will be love. This hope of attaining the likeness of the divine character is the ambition which inspires us to faithfulness and endeavor.

Our Heavenly Father does not expect us to acquire perfection of love in the flesh, for the weaknesses and imperfections of the flesh will not permit us to do so. In order to completely develop the character required, we must not live after the flesh, the old creature, but must train our minds to desire only those things which are true, pure, loving and good. In this sense, we are to be copies of our Redeemer, Christ Jesus. To have this love developed in us to the degree intended by our Lord, it is necessary that it should come from a pure heart in full accord with the Lord and his law of love.

What does the word love mean as used in the scriptures? In the New Testament three different Greek words are translated love. The principal word which corresponds to our word love in English is “agape.” It is designated “divine love” and represents the highest type of love when used regarding the Lord and his people. It is love of the broadest and most comprehensive kind.

The Greek word “Philadelphia” signifies “brotherly love,” love of the brethren and beyond. We are exhorted to develop this love for the brethren. Its presence is an indication that we are new creatures in Christ. The Apostle Peter brings this to mind as he encourages us to go beyond this degree of love and attain to the broader divine love.

Second Peter 1:7 (KJ) “And to Godliness add brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness, charity (agape).”

The word rendered love “philio,” is designated duty love. “ It implies a love that is more or less respect, more exclusive or selfish, not for everybody. It represents more of an individual or family love.

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul outlines the various gifts of the Holy Spirit given to the early church for its establishment and development. These gifts had a special purpose, but some of them ended shortly after the death of the apostles.

He ends this chapter by saying, “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.” Yes, something better than any of these gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Our study pertains to this more excellent way, the acquisition and development of the spirit of love. This is the most important fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 lists the fruits of the spirit--love is the first one listed. All of them can be combined in the one word--love. Fruits of the spirit are more valuable than gifts because they represent character and not merely power.

In 1 Corinthians 13:1 Paul points out: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels . . . And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, . . . If I give away all I have and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.” This not only pertained to Paul, but it pertains to us as well.

The Apostle Paul then proceeds to describe what perfect love is and what it is not, how it operates or conducts itself. Let us each inquire within ourselves whether we have such love, especially for the household of faith.

Paul outlines the elements of perfect love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (RSV); some words are slightly different in other translations but basically have the same meaning.

Paul first lists the positive aspects of love: patient, kind, rejoices in right, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Then he shows what it is not: love is not jealous or boastful, not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, not irritable nor resentful, does not rejoice in wrong.

Translating these negatives into positive terms, we have the following: love is not jealous, but is generous and benevolent; love is not boastful, but is modest and humble; love is not arrogant or rude but is courteous and polite; love does not insist on its own way, but is unselfish and sacrificing. Love is not irritable, but is even minded and good-tempered. Love is not resentful but is guileless and pure; love does not rejoice in wrong but is genuine and sincere.

Perfect love is patient, or suffers long. The concordance defines it as “forbearing, bearing long, long spirited.” I like one of the definitions given by Webster: “the quality of being able to calmly wait or endure.”

Perfect love is patient with all, with the weaknesses, and imperfections of those who give any evidence of good intentions.

In fact, it is patient even with those who are in opposition to righteousness, realizing that the world is more or less under the influence of the great adversary who blinds the eyes of the masses. We are all familiar with the patience of the prophets and our Lord.

James 5:7-11(RSV) “Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient over it until it receives the early and the late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble, brethren, against one another, that you may not be judged; behold the Judge is standing at the doors. As an example of suffering and patience, brethren, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.”

With the faithless host of Israel, God waited and suffered long. He could have destroyed them for their sins time and time again, yet he refrained over long

centuries, even to Jesus' day. God is long suffering toward the wayward and venturesome members of his spiritual family. "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing (patient) toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9). So, to develop perfect love we must have patience.

Perfect love is kind in its methods. Strong's describes kind as "to show yourself useful, gracious, to act benevolently." Webster defines it as "gentle, benevolent, pleasant, agreeable and all four of these expressed in a gracious manner." A description in a publication

I read described kind as "a sweet tempered gentleness, which is graciously humane, and tenderly obliging to all."

Perfect love not only seeks to do good to others but seeks to do it in the kindest possible manner. We are all aware that the manner and tone of our words and actions have much to do with every affair of life. In proportion as perfect is attained, the constant effort of the heart will be to have every word and act, like the thought which prompts them, full of kindness. Above all we, as children of God, should be kind, courteous and gentle at all times, to all people.

There has been much kindness by our Heavenly Father. The calling and salvation of the saints began in his kindness to men.

Titus 3:4-7 (RSV) "When the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life."

Here is kindness and love toward all men in that a savior is provided for them; and a special kindness to those who are called to higher things. Let us "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." (Ephesians 4:32). And how do we do this?

Ephesians 4:22-24 (RSV) "Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life. . . and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness, and holiness."

Perfect love rejoices in right. The concordance for the word truth reads, “true in doctrine or profession, straight, true.” The concordance for the word right designates “a right, or a wrong.” Right also means “righteous.”

Perfect love can take no part in error, nor can it desire the reward of evil, no matter how profitable it might be. But it does take pleasure in the truth, truth upon every subject, and especially in the truth of divine revelation, no matter how unpopular it might be, how much persecution it may involve or how much loss it may cause of earthly friendship.

The principles of right and wrong must be so firmly fixed in our minds, so thoroughly in accord with the right, and so opposed to the wrong that we cannot avoid rejoicing in the truth and its prosperity.

A love based upon fixed principles which will always be firmly adhered to, at any cost!

We who are followers of Jesus hear the truth, the word of God, and rejoice in it. Jesus was sent into the world to bear witness to these truths that we hear. Jesus’ reply to Pilate when asked if he was a king is given in John 18:37 (The Living Bible). “Yes, . . . I was born for that purpose. And I came to bring truth to the world. All who love the truth are my followers.”

The next four positive elements of perfect love are: bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. The common thread is “all things.” The concordance describes all as “every one or the whole,” and describes things, as used here, as “goodly, honest and worthy.” So in these cases, it is speaking of every good and honest thing.

Perfect love bears all things. To bear means “a covering, to cover with silence, to endure patiently.” The Diaglott reads, “To cover all things.” This love is willing for the cause of God to endure reproaches, reproofs, insults, losses, misrepresentations, even death!

“. . . this is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith.”

1 John 5:4 (RSV).

We are placed beneath the overspreading covering of Christ’s righteousness. And, likewise, we should cover up the frailties of a brother from the common gaze, and sustain him with our love to the best of our ability. Perfect love can bear up under all circumstances and, by God’s grace, bring us off as conquerors and more than conquerors, through him who loves us.

Perfect love believes all things. The definition of believe is “to have faith with respect to persons or things, especially to one’s spiritual well being.” Perfect love is not suspicious, but is trustful; it has confidence in our fellow man. It can say to a friend in time of strain and difficulty, “I believe in you.” It acts on the principle that it is better to be deceived a hundred times than to go through life soured by a suspicious mind. This is far better than to wrongly accuse or suspect even one person unjustly. As the Master said in Matthew 5:7 (RSV) “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

It is a great thing for our fellow men, who are struggling under the law of sin and death, for almighty God to say that he believes in them. He has shown by his attitude of confidence toward them, that he knows that with the help afforded and Satan removed, they will respond to the magnetic pull of his love and fatherhood. We believe in God’s word and his divine plan.

Perfect love hopes all things. The Greek word for hope means to look forward to with confidence or expectation and trust. A person or thing on which one may base some hope. A feeling that what is wanted will happen. This is the secret of love’s perseverance.

Perfect love is not easily discouraged. It knows no despair, for its anchorage is beyond the veil and firmly fastened to the rock of ages. Having learned of God and having a measure of his spirit of holiness, we trust him and hold firmly to hope for the fulfillment of his gracious covenant, no matter how dark are the immediate surroundings. This hopeful element of love is one of the striking features in the perseverance of the saints. Its hopeful quality hinders them from being easily offended or easily stopped in the work of the Lord. We hope for the coming kingdom with confidence and trust in our Heavenly Father’s promise.

Perfect love endures all things. This is closely related to our element of patience. Here we have patience enduring without flinching to the end. It speaks more to tolerance in respect to persons or things. The concordance gives the thought of persevering. This has been the attitude of God throughout the long dark reign of sin and rebellion. He has never doubted what the consummation would be. He has never wavered in His determination to see it through till righteousness is established in heaven and earth. The message to us is the same as to the apostles: Matthew 10:22, “. . . he who endures to the end will be saved.” (RSV). God can never fail and is fully competent to accomplish all that he has set out to do. We

can surely endure all things if we truly bear, believe and hope all things, things that are good and honest spoken to us by our Heavenly Father.

Looking now at elements of what perfect love is not, we will try to focus more on the positive side of these. The thought in the scriptures is not to be these things if we want to be a copy of our Lord.

Perfect love is not jealous. The Hebrew word for jealous indicates: “zealous in a bad way; envy.” The New Testament of the King James Translation reads: “envieth not.” It means to covet earnestly, to have desire, envy.”

In Galatians 5:20, 21 (RSV) Paul tells us, “For where jealousy . . . exists, . . . we shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” In James 3:16 (RSV) “For where jealousy. . . exists, there will be disorder and every vile practice.”

The opposite of jealous is generous or benevolent. Perfect love is generous and has no place for envy which springs from selfishness.

A love that is generous can see others prosper and rejoice in their prosperity, even if their own affairs are not too prosperous. This is true generosity, the very reverse of jealousy or envy. Love rejoices with those who rejoice. It is a mighty flow of generosity to each and all.

It prompts the least, emulates the best, and all to emulate the Lord in the interest of the divine plan. So perfect love is generous, not jealous.

Perfect love is not boastful. The Greek word for boast is to vaunt, in good or evil. The King James version reads, “vaunteth not itself” or “not puffed up.” The word vaunteth means “a braggart, to boast.” No child of God has any ground for boasting in himself. He has brought nothing of value to the structure of the divine plan, and at his best he is no more than an unprofitable servant. He shall make his boast in the Lord as Paul writes in Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 10:17, 18 (NIV) “...let him who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved, but the one whom the Lord commends.”

Perfect love is modest and humble, not boastful. It’s good deeds are not to be seen by men but would be done the same, no matter if anyone knew but God himself. It is not boastful of its knowledge or of its graces, but in humility acknowledges that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father. “Humility and reverence for the Lord will make you both wise and honored.” Proverbs 15:33 (TLB).

Perfect love is not arrogant or rude. Arrogance in the Old Testament means haughty or proud. The Greek word translated rude means “ignorant, unlearned, a private person.” Pride is the root out of which grows much of the unseemly conduct of impoliteness, so common to those who think themselves somebody, intellectually or financially. The King James version reads: “Does not behave unseemly” which means “indecent, shameful.” Perfect love does not prepare disgrace for another by exposing it to shame. Instead, love would hide known faults with a mantle of charity, remembering that one’s self might also be frail and full of faults.

Perfect love is courteous and polite. It develops courteousness along with humility. A thoughtful man has said: “Politeness has been defined as love in trifles. Courtesy is said to be love in little things.” Politeness can be either surface polish or love in the heart. As Christians, we are to have the heart love that will promote acts of kindness and courtesy, not only in our dealings with each other but in our dealings with all. 1 Peter 3:8 (KJV) tells us “to be courteous.”

The Diaglott reads “Seeks not that which is not her own.” We are to seek for the good of all. We are told in Matthew 6:33 “Seek you first the kingdom of God.” And, in Philippians 3:14, “Press on toward the mark for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” This perfect love then, is unselfish. We must be willing to sacrifice some of our own rights for the rights of others. The proper thought seems to be that we should not think exclusively of our own interests in any of the affairs of life, rather, that we should be on guard against taking any unjust advantage of others. We should be willing to suffer a wrong or an injustice rather than to do a wrong or to do an injustice.

Perfect love is not irritable or as King James reads, “not easily provoked.” The meaning of provoked is to irritate, to rouse, to anger. Here “easily” is the key. There can be some good reasons for being provoked with righteous indignation. Perfect love can be provoked unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24), only for the sake of truth and righteousness, and not for slights and injuries to oneself. For his Father’s sake Jesus was provoked to intense indignation, but for his own sufferings he uttered not a word.

Perfect love is good tempered, even minded, not easily provoked to anger. Among the evils abounding today is this one of ill-temper, touchiness, quick to take offense. To whatever extent this disposition is fostered and not fought against, it becomes a deficiency, an imperfection, in our development in the Holy Spirit of our Father and our likeness to Jesus our pattern.

Perfect love is not resentful. Webster defines resentful, “to consider as an injury or affront.” The King James reads: “To thinketh no evil.” The Greek word for evil meaning “injurious or wicked.” We are not to cause injury to others by our actions or words, not even in our thoughts. In all our relationships we should have good intentions and endeavor to view the words and conduct of others from the standpoint that they do have good intentions.

Perfect love is guileless and pure. The spirit of love is guileless which means, “without intending to deceive.” It is pure, which means “free from guilt.” It is not suspicious or evil or looking for faults in others. It does not manufacture a chain of circumstantial proofs of evil intentions out of trivial affairs. It seeks always to interpret the acts of others charitably (agape), to make all possible allowances for errors in judgment, rather than to suspect ulterior motives of the heart.

Perfect love does not rejoice in wrong, but rejoices in right or the truth, as mentioned earlier. Perfect love is genuine and sincere. Love rejoices as it sees the truth abound today in little things. And it rejoices even more as it looks forward to the coming day when truth will abound universally.

So if we have love, we are: patient, kind, generous, benevolent, modest, humble, courteous, polite, unselfish, sacrificing, good tempered, guileless, pure, genuine, sincere, rejoicing in the truth, bearing all things, believing all things, hoping all things, enduring all things.

All of these elements must be combined because perfect love is not any one of these alone. To all appearances this is a list of simple qualities. Simple as they are, they are too exacting for the ordinary man to observe and practice in the common round of life. Once, and only once, in the eyes of men, has this balanced whole been exemplified. That once is the standard for all time set by Jesus, the standard of perfect love given to us by our Heavenly Father. The standard that we are to strive for if we are to make our calling and election sure. May God help us as we strive toward this goal.