

GOD JUST TOUCHED ME - WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT

Chapter 13 - LOVE

Introduction to Love

Love is a word that is much used and often misunderstood. It is a four-letter word beginning with the letter "L" and is often confused with several other four-letter words beginning with the letter "L". The first of these is the word "like", which means to have a preference for, to have a fondness for, to have a taste for, to want or wish. You might hear someone say: "I really love gooseberry-rhubarb pie" when what is meant is that they have a taste or preference for gooseberry-rhubarb pie. The second word is "lust", which is a desire to gratify the senses, an excessive desire seeking unrestrained gratification. Although lust is usually associated with sexual activity, it can be for any physical appetites, or for wealth or power. Lust has to do with receiving while love has to do with giving. The secular dictionary defines love as a tender feeling of affection for or attachment to another person.

Our English language has only one word for love. The Greek, in which the New Testament was written, has three words for love. The first of these is "eros" which is a physical attraction and gives us our English word erotic. Eros is not used in the scriptures. The second Greek word is "phileo" which is a brotherly love for family and friend and gives us our English word philanthropy. This word, which corresponds to the dictionary definition of love, is used in scripture when referring to brotherly love. The third Greek word is "agape", which is the love of a creator for his creation, the love of a mother for her newborn child. There is no English derivative for agape. It is used in scripture for the love of God. While eros expects satisfaction, and phileo expects love returned, agape gives without expecting anything back. Love is not the same as like; love is not the same as lust; love is not a feeling; love is a decision we make to care.

The Command to Love

When the Pharisees and Sadducees questioned Jesus about the commandments, His response was that we are commanded to love (Matthew 22:34-40). Our first requirement is to love God with all the love we have (Matthew 22:37&38, Deuteronomy 6:4&5). After that we are to love our neighbors (Matthew 22:39, Leviticus 19:18). Our love for God should be all consuming and have top priority in our lives. Our love for neighbor requires that we put their needs at least equal to our own. We should care about them as much as we care about ourselves. If making our neighbors equal to ourselves wasn't radical enough, Jesus said we were to also love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48). It is true that you cannot push someone through the gates of heaven with their heels dug in, nor can you drag them through the gates of heaven kicking and screaming. However, it is possible to love others through the gates of heaven. That is what God did to us through Jesus. Even when you have negative feelings toward someone you can make a decision, an act of the will, to treat them as God treated us while we were still sinners. Love is action (1 John 3:16-18, 23). Jesus put one more deeper love requirement on us (John 13:34&35). This is probably the most difficult command, because it requires us to have godly love for our fellow Christians. It isn't too hard to love the one that sits on the other end of the pew in church each Sunday, but it is something else to love someone from the church across town that has some serious doctrinal differences. If we can follow the requirements to love God, neighbor, enemies, and fellow Christians we will have come a long way towards becoming what God intended us to be. Love is also a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Remember what love is capable of (1 Peter 4:8).

God Is Love

Know that God is love (1 John 4:7&8). This scripture does not say that love is something God does or that love is something God has, but love is what God is. He is the author and source of love.

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Love is His nature. If we want to know what love does we need only observe our Heavenly Father in action. If we want to learn how to love we need only imitate Jesus. If we don't have love within us we are none of God's and we do not know Him. Though God knew we would fail even before creation, because He is love He created us anyway for the sake of those that would turn to Him (Ephesians 1:4-6, 1 Peter 1:18-21). Because He is love He paid a terrible price (John 3:16) while we were yet His enemies (Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:19). That is the kind of love that is so unfamiliar to the ways of the world that the only word used by humanity to describe it, "agape," is used only in scripture. Love makes us vulnerable to those we love; open to the pain of rejection. If you think the risks of pain outweigh the rewards of love, ask God for His conclusion.

Love Defined

If our lives are not driven by love we can have all the wonderful gifts and powers that the Lord could ever possibly give us, but they will be of no advantage (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). They will eventually cease to be (1 Corinthians 13:8-10). Love is what counts (1 Corinthians 13:13). Love is patient, unwearied, long suffering, and endures long. Look how long God waited for the time to be right for Jesus to make an appearance. Look how long God is waiting for Jesus to return. He is giving everyone maximum time to make a commitment to Christ.

Love is kind, caring, thoughtful, compassionate, and considerate. It takes into account the hurts and needs of others; and makes allowances for the human responses others make to their hurts and needs. Love is neither envious nor covetous nor boils over with jealousy. It has no desire for what others have, but wants only to bless others as it has been blessed. Love is neither boastful nor vainglorious nor does it display itself haughtily. It desires to build up others and encourage them. Love is neither arrogant nor conceited nor inflated with pride. It values others as God does, as being fellow sinners redeemed by Jesus (1 Corinthians 13:4). Love is not rude or unmannerly or act unbecomingly. Love is considerate of others and treats others as it would like to be treated. Love does not insist on its own way or own rights, but understands that it needs grace, and does not want what is really deserved. Love is not irritable or ill tempered or touchy. It refuses to allow others to control its spiritual state; it maintains the peace and joy of the Lord. Love is not resentful nor indignant nor offended nor pays attention to evil done to it. It recognizes attacks are against God and not self, allowing God to repay all things (1 Corinthians 13:5). Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, injustice, or unrighteousness, because all such things are an affront to God. Love rejoices in the truth and right because they are pleasing to God (1 Corinthians 13:6). Love bears, stands, tolerates, accepts all things under any and all conditions. No matter how rebellious or rude others may become, love still desires for them what is best for them; eternal salvation. Love believes all things - the best for every person. Napoleonic justice claimed that a person was guilty until proven innocent. Love assumes a person is innocent until proven guilty, and assumes the best of motives until proven otherwise. Love hopes, expects all things in all circumstances, anticipating God's grace to be functioning and effective. Love endures all things without fading. Love cannot be weakened by people, by circumstances, or by devils (1 Corinthians 13:7). Love never fails, never ends. If it is real love it will be eternal. It will not turn into apathy or hatred (1 Corinthians 13:8a). Did you know that if you take 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, and every place you find the word "love" you replace it with the name "Jesus", these verses will all still be true? If you take 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, and every place you find the word "love" you replace it with your name, will all these verses still be true?