

BENEVOLENCE vs. SELFISHNESS

GIVING TO OTHERS BASIC NEEDS WITHOUT HAVING AS MY MOTIVE PERSONAL REWARD

“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” I Cor. 13:3

THE DEFINITION OF LOVE

The Bible word for benevolence is charity, or love. Love is giving to the basic needs of others so that their authorities get the credit, God gets the glory, and we have the joy of eternal rewards. It means giving without having as my motive personal rewards.

THE BIBLICAL TERMS FOR LOVE

The English language has only word for love, resulting in a limited translation of many Biblical passages that were written in Greek. The primary Greek words for love are *agapao* and *phileo*. *Agapao* means “to love dearly” and *phileo* refers to a “fondness” or “friendship”. When Jesus asked Peter if he “loved” Him, Jesus used the stronger of these words—*agapao*, but Peter responded with the weaker term—*phileo*. “Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest [*agapao*] thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love [*phileo*] thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. “He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest [*agapao*] thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love [*phileo*] thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest [*phileo*] thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest [*phileo*] thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love [*phileo*] thee” (John 21:15–17).

Jesus then told Peter about the suffering he would experience. If we respond to suffering with joy and thankfulness, we receive the power of the Holy Spirit with *agape* love; therefore, it is through suffering that our love is perfected and deepened. (See II Corinthians 12:9.) Twenty-eight times in the New Testament the Greek word *agape* is translated “charity.” Charity implies an unconditional love where the giver gets nothing in return.

HOW LIGHT EXPLAINS THE TRUE EXPRESSION OF LOVE

In John’s epistle on love, he explains that “God is light” (I John 1:5) and “God is love” (I John 4:8). The significance of equating light and love is that neither one determines who will benefit from its service. All who come to the light receive its benefits, regardless of their spiritual condition. Similarly, all who come to us should receive the benefit of God’s love through us.

God loves everyone in the world so much that He gave His only begotten Son as full payment for our sin, in order that whosoever believes on Him and receives Him as their substitute will receive the power to become the sons of God and have eternal life. (See John 3:16, John 1:12.)

HOW GENUINE LOVE IS DEMONSTRATED BY GIVING

Each time Peter stated that he loved Jesus, Jesus told him to give to the basic needs of others. “Feed my lambs,” “Feed my sheep,” and “Feed my sheep.” (See John 21:15–17.) Our motivation in giving to fellow believers is that we are actually giving to Jesus. “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matthew 25:40).

Love is not complete without giving. “God so loved the world, that he gave . . .” (John 3:16). If we see a person in obvious need and say to him, “Be clothed or be warmed,” but do not give to his need, “how dwelleth the love of God in [us]?” (See I John 3:17.)

Love will manifest itself in generous giving through good works. If these are done with pure motives and credit is given to others, God will be glorified. Therefore, we are commanded, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

First-century believers had such powerful love that they claimed nothing as their own but sold their goods and gave the money to care for the needs of other believers. (See Acts 4:32–35.)

THE NECESSITY OF LOVE

Genuine love is the most important of all character qualities. Every other quality must be motivated by it, or the quality will be empty and of no benefit. “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor [kindness, compassion, and generosity], and though I give my body to be burned [sincerity, courage, and determination], and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing” (I Corinthians 13:3).

Agape love is greater than faith and hope (see I Corinthians 13:13). It is the greatest commandment given by God (see Matthew 22:36–40). It is the credential of a true local church (see Revelation 1:20–2:5). and the badge of a true disciple (see John 13:35). It is the primary request of Jesus in His final prayer for His disciples (see John 17).

GOD’S DESCRIPTION OF LOVE

Because love is so important and there are many distorted ideas of what it is, God devoted an entire chapter in I Corinthians to define exactly what it involves.

1. Love suffereth long - It does not lose heart. It perseveres with patience and bravely endures misfortunes and troubles. It bears offenses and injuries with joy and confidence that a good reward will come from the hand of God.

Qualities: endurance, patience, forgiveness, joyfulness, faith, loyalty, flexibility

2. Love is kind - It looks for ways to be useful and acts benevolently. It is easy to be entreated and has the motivation of giving rather than taking. It focuses on people’s needs rather than their faults.

Qualities: kindness, generosity, availability, creativity, compassion, sensitivity, initiative, gentleness, alertness

3. Love envieth not - It does not boil with desires to have that which belongs to others. It is not possessive of what has been entrusted to it. It is content with basic necessities and rich fellowship with the Lord.

Qualities: gratefulness, contentment, resourcefulness, thriftiness, security

4. Love vaunteth not itself - It does not boast of its abilities or its accomplishments. It does not look for ways to promote itself or extol its virtues with rhetorical embellishments.

Qualities: sincerity, meekness, deference

5. Love is not puffed up - It does not cherish exaggerated ideas of its own importance. It does not look down on others with contempt or disdain. It is not proud.

Qualities: virtue, humility

6. Love doth not behave itself unseemly - It does not flaunt itself to attract attention or to stir up sensual desires in others. It does not act indecently or shamefully. It has good manners.

Qualities: self-control, discretion, responsibility

7. Love seeketh not her own - It does not demand its own way. It does not crave things for its own pleasure or profit. It does not focus on itself but on the needs of others. It is willing to lay down its life for the benefit of others.

Qualities: hospitality, dependability

8. Love is not easily provoked - It does not get irritated or exasperated. It conquers anger and wrath. It is not quickly excited to rivalry but rather to helping others succeed.

Qualities: reverence, cautiousness, punctuality, orderliness

9. Love thinketh no evil - It guards its heart and mind and brings every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. It distinguishes between good and evil and rejects the evil. It does not retain wrong desires or plans or harbor hurtful feelings toward others.

Qualities: obedience, thoroughness, discernment

10. Love rejoices not in iniquity - It grieves when evil people are promoted and unjust laws are made. It does not secretly desire to carry out the lusts of the flesh, the lusts of the eyes, or the prideful goals of life.

Qualities: justice, decisiveness, determination

11. Love rejoices in the truth - It delights in God's Law and meditates on it day and night. It dwells upon thoughts that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of a good report. It is eager to share truth with others and rejoices with all good people when truth prevails.

Qualities: truthfulness, boldness, persuasiveness, diligence, enthusiasm, attentiveness, wisdom

This kind of love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." It can outlast anything, because love "never faileth" (I Corinthians 13:7-8).

HOW LOVE IS DEVELOPED

The power of genuine love is a reward of being in fellowship with God's Holy Spirit and successfully passing the tests that He designs for our spiritual growth. When a person becomes a believer by faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit indwells his spirit. Each believer can then ask his Heavenly Father to fill his soul with the Holy Spirit based on the promise of Luke 11:13. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

The Holy Spirit will then take the believer through times of testing. If the believer responds with rejoicing and gratefulness, a powerful spirit of love will come upon him. This sequence is seen throughout the New Testament, beginning with the life of Jesus. After He was filled with the Spirit (Luke 4:1), the Spirit immediately led Him into the wilderness for testing, and He returned—not in the fullness of the Spirit, but in the power of the Spirit. (See Luke 4:1-14.)

In the same way, the Thessalonian believers received the Holy Spirit at their conversion. Then they endured "much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost" (I Thessalonians 1:6). The result was that their faith grew exceedingly and their love for each other abounded. (See II Thessalonians 1:3-4.) This is the pattern described by Paul: "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:1-5).

HOW GENUINE IS YOUR LOVE?

- Do you tend to get discouraged and want to give up when everything seems to go wrong?
- Do you look for ways to be useful and help out wherever you go?
- Do you tend to envy the possessions or opportunities of other people?
- Do you enjoy telling about your achievements more than listening to the accomplishments of others?
- Do you tend to look down on those who do not live by your standards?
- Do you choose your clothing with a motive of drawing attention to yourself?
- Do you know and practice good manners wherever you are?
- Do you tend to want your own way and argue when you do not get it?
- Do you get irritated or exasperated with the character deficiencies of others?
- Do you harbor grudges against those who have hurt you?
- Do you dwell on secret desires to fulfill the lust of the flesh?
- Do you meditate on God's Word day and night and delight to do His will?