

Love Matters

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Paul poetically declares in 1 Corinthians 13:13, "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love," and he compounds the point in Colossians 3:14 when he says, "But above all these things, put on love, which is the bond of perfection." There is a song that we sometimes sing which says, "Love, love, love, love...the gospel in a word is love." How true! The very essence of the gospel is love: God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for one another.

Every aspect of our lives is affected by the level of love that we have for God and our fellow man, and so when our love falters, our relationships falter and thus our quality of life is diminished. Think about it... when two people are married yet they lack true love for one another, problems arise and the couple is unwilling to overcome the hurdles together. They fail to communicate to one another and they begin to act selfishly. Divorce is a common end-result. In the church, when brethren do not love each other as they ought, they are no more than warm bodies inhabiting a lifeless building three times a week. They don't grow close to one another. In fact, too often they argue and bicker over every little thing...why? Because they lack love. Whether we are talking about friendships, family relationships, church relationships or our relationship with God, when our level of love is not what it should be, these relationships will falter and perhaps even fail.

Husbands are told to love their wives (Eph. 5:25). Wives are told to love their husbands (Tit. 2:4). Parents are to love their children (Tit. 2:4). We are told to love even our enemies (Mt. 5:44). Christians are to love one another (1 Jn. 2:10-11) and above all we are to love the Lord (Mt. 22:37-38). Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is, among other things, love (Gal. 5:22-23). The love that we are to have in all of these various areas of life is *agape* love, which is an active, expressive, charitable kind of love. It is not a mere verbal expression, but rather a way of life. In other words, to love is to serve. To love is to commit our whole mind and heart, to surrender our attitude and our spirit to the betterment of others. Biblical love is not a half-hearted thing (Rev. 3:14).

We also must recognize that love grows. Paul said in Philippians 1:9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Love is not a mere emotion. Paul says here that love is knowledgeable; it involves the intellect of man, and therefore, it can "abound yet more and more." Just as we can acquire more knowledge about a particular subject and thus grow in that area, so also can our love grow. It is not a feeling that comes and goes. It is something that can be learned, and that can mature over time. This is true regarding our love for God, but it is also true regarding our marriages and our other relationships. We grow to love our spouse more and more. We grow to love our brethren more and more, as well as our friends and foes.

There is one final thought that we need to understand. True love is rooted first and foremost in our commitment to God. Notice in 1 John 4:7 that we are to "love one another, for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." You see, God is love and therefore to truly understand love we must know God as He is the epitome of love. If we reject God or fail to seek Him, we will never truly comprehend what love is. We may develop a worldly kind of love, and we may be able to maintain good relationships in this life, and we may care for others, but we will not attain unto the perfect love of the scriptures. But when we recognize God's love and begin to understand it, we will then begin to love others...better. Our marriages will improve. Our friendships will grow. Our churches will be more harmonious and productive. Our children will be happier and more obedient. Love is the bond of perfection (Col. 3:14).

Paul prayed that the Ephesians would "be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:18-19). God's love is truly incredible. It is what prompted the Lord to go to the cross...to die for our sins. It is what prompted God to give us the hope of eternal life even though we didn't (and still don't) deserve it.

What an amazing God we serve. When these things begin to click within us, and as we grow in our knowledge of the love of God, we will grow in our love for God and for others.

Love matters!