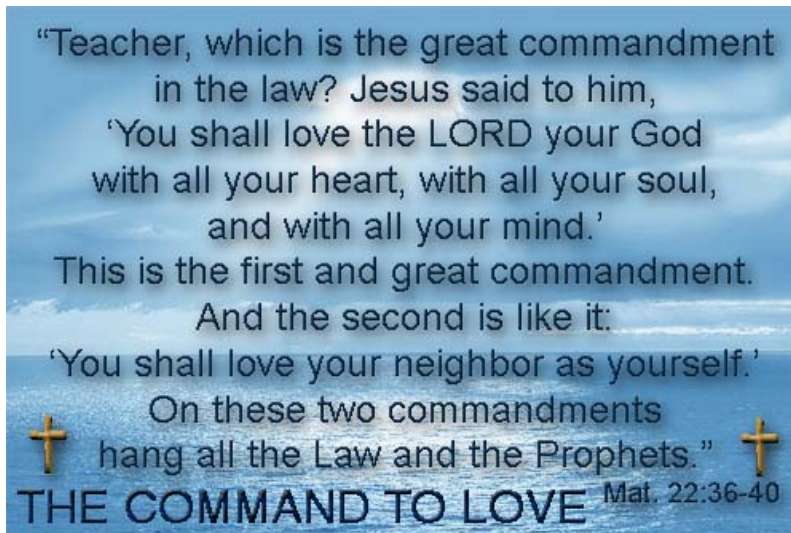


WHAT IS LOVE

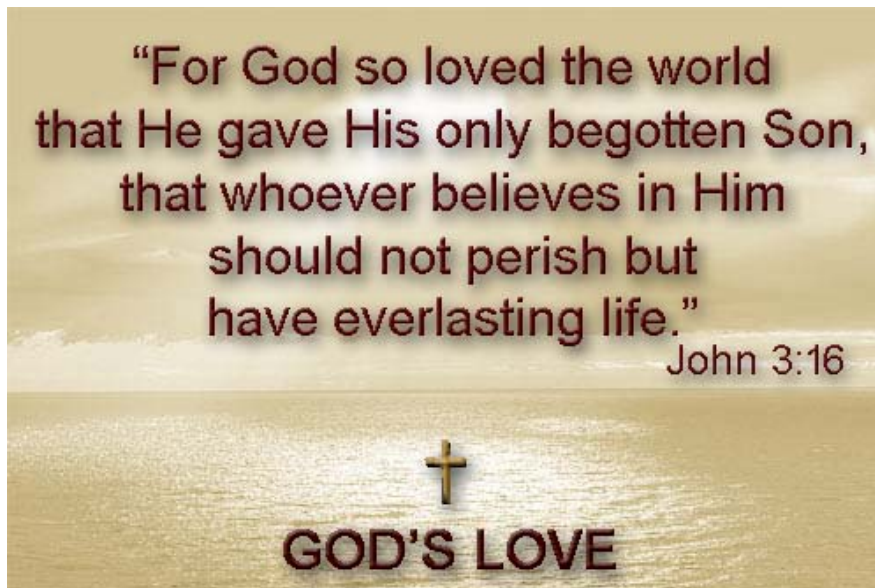


Jesus has left no doubt in our minds as to whether we must love, whether it is love for God, our neighbor, and as well He described who fits into the definition of neighbor. Love is one of the attributes of God amongst many others, that defines not only Who He is, but also requires that we worship Him in response to those attributes as a result.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus said, “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, ... By this all *people* will know that you are My disciples.” In other words, love is to be the mark of anyone who proclaims Christ as Savior and Lord. How could we profess to know Christ and not have love? That, in itself, would be the equivalent to say “I am saved without Christ”, a complete impossibility, right? In 1 Cor. 16:14 Paul said, “Let all *that* you *do* be done with love.” Notice he didn’t bring up any exception to the rule.

Why is love a commandment, and the one most developed throughout the bible? Do we realize that from the very beginning of creation, love from God has been the core element that has sustained us, as otherwise since the fall, God could have annihilated us completely? “God so loved the world...” and requires we love Him in return.

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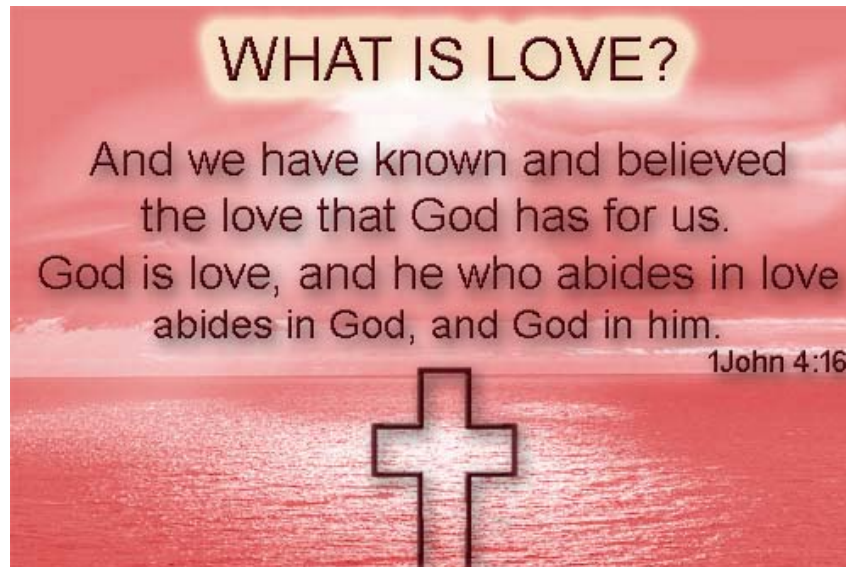


The featured scripture is perhaps the most widely known of the bible. And obviously, it clearly describes God's love for us. God demonstrated His love through Christ, who not only taught us about God, but as well proved it through His actions and miracles. "The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love," 1John 4:8 says. In other words, without God, there is no love, and conversely, without love, God is not present.

Paul in Ephesians 3:17-19 said, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height, to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God." This extraordinary description of God's love for us shows clearly how God proved His love for us through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

Correspondingly, we can only be empowered with His love through faith in Christ. And we prove our love for God and Christ through seeking Him with all our hearts, study His Word to learn from Him so we can become more and more like Christ each day. That's why Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."

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Obviously, God has put love at the core center of our faith. But the question is, "What is love?" While there are different types of love such as familial love, romantic love and selfless or agape love, our world has polluted the very essence of love as designed by God with deceptive imitations such as lust of the flesh, desire for control, and carnal pride, all directed to self!

Paul in 1Cor. 13:4-7 says, "Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Love, according to God, goes to the extent of seeking the best for others even at our own expense. In Colossians 3:14, Paul calls it "The bond of perfection".

After His resurrection, Jesus was on the shore and asked Peter three times, "Peter, do you love Me?" Imagine the Lord asking you, me, "Do you love Me", three times in a row?" Would that make us reflect and seriously examine ourselves whether we really love God? And if we say we do, does our love reflect God's love or the self-directed hypocritical imitations of the world?

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“But I say to you, love your enemies,
bless those who curse you,
do good to those who hate you,
and pray for those who spitefully use you
and persecute you, that you may be
sons of your Father 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.”

Matt. 5:44-45

✝ EXTENT OF LOVE ✝

Loving our enemies, really? Is it possible to love even our hypocritical political enemies, murderers, nasty neighbors, our unfair boss, anyone? What a crazy thought, some would say! If we look around in our country right now, do we see love, or do we rather see hatred, lawlessness, even murder?

Jesus' statement to love even our enemies leaves no doubt as to the extent that our love should go. Let's remember that loving our enemies doesn't mean to love what they stand for or what they do, but rather realize that at one time, we were all enemies of God, who through His love has redeemed us through His sacrifice on the cross.

Shouldn't we therefore give everyone the same love our Savior gave us? 1John 3:18 says, "My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth." And then, in 1John 4:16 the apostle says, "And we have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him."

Therefore, to truly love God with all our hearts requires that we love even our enemies, to the extent of desiring they seek God's love for their lives. The big question to ask ourselves is "Do we truly love God if we hate our enemies?"

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On many occasions, Jesus told His disciples and the crowds that love for God is not a matter of just saying the words, but more importantly to demonstrate our love through our actions. That’s why the apostle John said, “Let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” 1John 3:18. Then in 1John 4:20 he said, “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?”

If we say we love God, shouldn’t our life’s actions support our faith statement? Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” It doesn’t get any clearer than that, right? Christ has given us the greatest proof of His love, as John 15:13 says, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends.” Do we realize that not only did Jesus teach us what real love is, but that as well He gloriously proved it through dying for us, sinners?

Paul has called love “The bond of perfection”. The apostle of love, John said this: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.” Do our actions say we love God right now?

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THE POWER OF LOVE

“There is no fear in love;
but perfect love casts out fear,
because fear involves torment.

But he who fears
has not been made perfect in love.”

1 John 4:18



How powerful could we say God's love is? Let's consider how delirious Satan and his demons must have been, when Jesus died on the cross. However, imagine the terror, the panic and fear they experienced when Jesus resurrected from the dead on the third day. Conversely, can we imagine the glorious manifested power of God and Christ at the resurrection, the explosion of love, the rejoicing of the angels in heaven, the restoration of hope, and finally, the elimination of fear for those who know Christ?

Paul gave us a glorious description of the power of God's love in Rom. 8:37-39; "Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's why Paul also said: "And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."

God's love casts out all fear, but as well gives us the power to love with the love of Christ.

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