

Letters on the Word

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LOVE 101

“And now abide faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.”
NKJV

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I have often wondered why the love chapter in the Bible says that love is greater than faith. Faith it seems, is all that our walk with the Lord God Almighty is built on: faith in his son Jesus Christ to redeem us. Faith it seems is what separates believers from unbelievers; people of faith from people of no faith. However, when we look at John 3:16, known and quoted frequently by most Christians, we see that love is the foundation of faith: *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

The love of God was the cause of him giving his only begotten Son to redeem us, which then opened the door for us to have faith in him. The more I meditate on this verse, the more I realize that God’s love is really the basis of the story of our faith in Jesus Christ. To believe in Jesus Christ, I must first believe in the Father’s love. I find some golden nuggets of truth when I take a little time to ponder the Father’s love for me (which I should do more often). Our Father, the creator of heaven and earth, my creator, loves me. He loves me enough that he gave his only begotten son so that I may live eternally (John 3:16), and abundantly (John 10:10). So my belief in the Lord Jesus Christ is also my belief in the Almighty God’s love for me.

Many definitions of love have been offered over the ages. For example, Greek literature has it that there are at least four types of love: storge (familial love), eros (emotional love), philia (brotherly love), and agape (selfless love for others). What is our Heavenly Father’s definition love? In this issue, we consider the Father’s definition of love; the value he places on love. And in particular, we come to find that only the things we do in love are of value to the Father. (I Corinthians 13)



“...The greatest of these is love” (I Corinthians 13:13)

GOD'S LOVE: THE GREATEST LOVE OF ALL

The Greatest Commandments Matthew 22: 28-31

“One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?” “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.* The second is this: “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” “There is no commandment greater than these.” (Matt. 22: 28-31) NIV

“... the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

To love the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength: what does this entail? To love my neighbor as myself: what does this require? The love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) tells us what love is: God's definition of love.

1. Love endures long and is patient
2. Love is kind
3. Love is never envious

4. Love does not boil over with jealousy
5. Love is not boastful or vainglorious
6. Love does not display itself haughtily
7. Love is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride)
8. Love is not rude (unmannerly)
9. Love does not act unbecomingly
10. Love does not insist on its own rights or its own way
11. Love is not self-seeking
12. Love is not touchy
13. Love is not fretful
14. Love is not resentful
15. Love takes no account of the evil done to it (*it pays no attention to a suffered wrong*)
16. Love does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness. It rejoices when right and truth prevail
17. Love bears up under anything and everything that comes
18. Love is ever ready to believe the best of every person
19. Love's hopes are fadeless under all circumstances
20. Love endures everything

without weakening

21. Love never fails (*never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end*).

Enduring. Unconditional. Not dependent on any individual, thing or circumstance.

The Word tells us that the spiritual gifts which we cherish are only of value to the Lord when they are motivated by love. It also tells us that these gifts will pass away but love will never end. Prophecy (the gift of interpreting the divine will and purpose) will be fulfilled and pass away; tongues will be destroyed and cease; even knowledge will pass away for it will be superseded by truth and lose its value). Love, however, *will never end.* (1 Cor. 13:8 Even giving, which is near and dear to the Father's heart, is of no value when it is not motivated by love (1 Cor. 13:3). We remember that God's gift was motivated by love: “For God *so loved* the world *that he gave ...*” (John 3:16).

Our Father values actions that are motivated by love.

Must receiving also be done in love, to be of value in our Father's eyes? Must love be the motivating factor for all our actions? Must love be the basis of our daily lives?

JESUS' COMPASSION: THE EFFICACY OF HIS LOVE

Just as the Father's love saves us from spiritual death and brings us abundant life, so is his love in us is efficacious in practical ways. The Bible has several things to say about the efficacy of God's love.

1. Love causes us to overlook offenses. Above all else, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. (1 Peter 4:8) Love covers over all wrongs ... (Proverbs 10:12)
2. Love promotes and perfects unity. Therefore as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Col. 3: 12-14)
3. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)
4. The Lord watches over all who love him. (Psalm 145:20)
5. God keeps his covenant of love with all who love him

and obey his commands (Daniel 9:4)

6. God's love is constant ... Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39)
7. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:35)

The transforming power of God's love: Jesus' compassion ...

The practical nature of God's love can be seen in the compassion of Jesus Christ that preceded and motivated His actions to improve the lot of humankind. Indeed, the Word tells us that God is the Father of compassion.

Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort.

(2 Corinthians 1:3)

Jesus, like the Father, was full of compassion:

1. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had *compassion* on them and healed their sick. (Matthew 14:14)
2. Jesus called his disciples to

him and said, "I have *compassion* for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way. (Matthew 15:32)

3. Jesus had *compassion* on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. (Matthew 20:34)
4. Filled with *compassion*, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" (Luke 5:13)
5. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had *compassion* on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. (Mark 6:34)

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). Thus, he is still full of compassion today, and his love has transforming power. For us today, Jesus is the Word. (John 1:1-5). Therefore, the Word has transforming power.

This letter on love makes me see my life in a somewhat different light. The Word says that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his ways higher than our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). I

WHAT MOTIVATES MY ACTIONS?

am coming to understand that the way God values my life may be quite different from how I value my life a lot of the time . . .

One question I want to ask the Lord each day now is: “Lord what will you have me do today?” And one question I feel compelled to ask myself at the end of each day now is: “How many of my actions today were motivated by love; i.e., by my love for God, obedience to God’s commands? And how many of my actions were motivated by compassion for my fellow men and women?” If I want to please my Father; if I want him to value and look favorably on my actions, then they must be motivated by love for him and compassion for my fellow men and women. This realization is forcing me to shift my behavior in some significant ways. Many people would consider me fairly driven. In general, I used to be very serious about setting goals for myself, for weeks ahead at a time, sticking very closely to my agenda and evaluating my life by how well I was accomplishing things on this agenda. I find that there is a shift in this

practice. I still plan, yes. The difference now is that I remind myself that it makes a great difference to God whether I do the things I do in love or not. I remind myself to acknowledge him in everything I do so that he will direct my paths (Proverbs 3:5-6). And I ask how God values those things I place on my agenda in the context of his eternal kingdom. One of my goals now is to increase the percentage of my daily actions that are motivated by love to the point where practically everything I do is motivated by God’s love: 100% living in love.

What percentage of my actions are motivated by love?

This may mean that now I will take the time to focus on someone who walks unannounced into my office even though s/he is not on my “schedule” and the consequence may be that I will not complete all the things on my schedule that day. It means that I will take the time to plug in and serve the Lord at my local church. It means

that I may take the time to join the care team to distribute food this weekend to those in need in our community. One of the main motivators for my daily living ought to be compassion. And this compassion, God’s love, that motivated him to send Jesus Christ to redeem his creation, is the same compassion that motivated Jesus Christ to heal the sick, raise the dead, and improve the lot of His fellow men, women and children in many other ways when he walked the earth roughly 2,000 years ago.

How would your life change if you decided that your actions would be motivated by love most of the time, (not occasionally, not sometimes, but pretty much most or all of the time)? How would the lives of your loved ones change? How would the lives of your colleagues and other acquaintances change? How would this affect the people who depend on you and the people on whom you depend? What would your world look like if your life showed that love indeed was your highest priority?

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Adjo Amekudzi
amekudzi@yahoo.com

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Your blessings abound in Christ Jesus!