

## CHAPTER 5

### MYTH 5: ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

#### 5.1 DO WE LOVE?

The saying "all you need is love" is very popular, even finding its way into some of our popular songs. If it were interpreted strictly according to the biblical definition of love, it would be true. However, no one would state that "*all* you need is love" if they thoroughly understood and were trying to convey the biblical definition. This is because the expression necessarily implies that there is something else that is not needed. Why would someone state: "all you need is love" if they were not trying to imply that some other requirement of God is not important? We shall see that this is an act of hatred. Thus, like faith only, *love only* is an oxymoron.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves or convey the wrong impression. Love is by far the most important motivator in the life of a Christian. Jesus responded to a question as to what is the greatest law (Matthew 22:37-40): "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." These were commands of the Old Testament law (Dt. 6:5, Lev. 19:18), which was the law under which Jesus lived. However, it is clear from the teaching of Christ, the practice of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts, and the letters to the churches that this law was not only brought into the New Testament, it was greatly enlarged upon (see Section 5.3).

Love is such an important concept that it formed the center point of the New Testament. In concluding his Chapter on love, the apostle Paul stated (1 Cor. 13:13): "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these [is] love." Jesus is cited as the example in this regard (Rom. 5:6-8): "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." The ultimate unrequited love of a sinful people was demonstrated by Jesus when He died on the cross.

When we answer the question "do we love?" we need to do so in light of the definition of love given to us by the suffering of Jesus. When we see men and women in our society unable to even love their children, their husbands and wives, their fellow church members and their close acquaintances, we must conclude that something is drastically wrong with the religious base which declares: "all you need is love!" The major portion of our society does not even know what the word means in the biblical sense. A large plurality, if not a majority, have seen the word so exploited in our modern story-telling culture (i.e., movies and TV) that they associate it almost exclusively with

erotic or romantic relationships. Our society and the world is paying the price for this ignorance of God's word.

Let us begin by allowing the bible to define the biblical usage of the word "love" that we use in the English language. Then we will explore the extensions of love which the New Testament has made so that we can better apply these definitions. At that point we will look at what the bible teaches on making love an integral part of our lives -- making love a reality. Then we will look at the natural effects of love and determine if these exist in our society and in our churches today. Finally, we summarize by returning once again to the question: can we be saved by love only?

## 5.2 LOVE DEFINED

We will begin with the technical Greek definitions, since without these it is impossible to distinguish between the different Greek words that are interpreted to our English word love. However, a knowledge of the Greek is not necessary, since the bible itself defines love quite adequately; that will be considered in Section 5.2.2.

### 5.2.1 GREEK DEFINITIONS

There are two Greek New Testament words which are translated to our English word love: *agapao* and *phileo*. We can obtain a distinction between these two words by contrasting their use in the New Testament. Let us begin with *agape* (verb: *agapao*), which is the *love that is commanded* of Christians by God. As such, it is more of a reasoned love, not one which proceeds out of the emotions or that is necessarily provoked by the actions of others. Let us examine some of its uses in the New Testament:

#### AGAPE/AGAPAO

**John 17:25-26:** Jesus praying with his disciples: "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare [it]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them." That love was the love of reason.

**John 3:16:** "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." God had this same type of love for us that he had for His son. It was this love that motivated Him to send Jesus into the world so that we could be saved.

**Rom. 5:8:** "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet

sinner, Christ died for us." This brings out the aspect of it being unwarranted and unprovoked. In this case it was totally without any merit on our part; God loved us despite the fact that we had the general mind to crucify His son.

**John 13:34:** "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." This illustrates that agape love is that which is commanded of God. It also indicates that under the New Testament the quality of our love should change (i.e., a *new* commandment). We will discuss the aspect further below.

**1 Thessalonians 3:12-13:** "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all [men], even as we [do] toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." This type of love is attributable to God. That is, He assists us in acquiring it, and without this assistance we are not capable of acquiring it. Note also that the end of this love is to be "unblamable in holiness."

**1 John 4:8-12:** "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son [to be] the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." This type of love so characterizes God that John said "God is love" (agape). As Christians, this is what we are to become. It is the love which God "naturally" possesses; it is a love that must be acquired by man. We acquire this love only in the recognition of what God has done for us.

**2 Corinthians 5:14-15:** "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And [that] he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again." This is the transformation introduced in the previous passage.

**Ephesians 5:2:** "And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour." This command pictures love not as a feeling but as a "walk." The goal, which is never reached is "as Christ also hath loved us."

**Romans 13: 8-10:** "Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if [there be] any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely,

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love [is] the fulfilling of the law." This is agape. It is not a good feeling toward everyone - it is an attitude which desires the wellbeing of everyone. There is a significant difference between these two.

## PHILEO

The use of this word indicates tender affection, more from the emotions than from the reason. It never appears in the New Testament as a command. However, neither is it discouraged. It appears that it is the normal affection which develops when we have close associations with those whose presence we enjoy. This is the relationship which also develops as we learn more about Jesus and enjoy His fellowship. Thus, the apostle Paul warns Christians who do not have this type of relationship (1 Cor. 16:22): "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." Clearly, phileo is not only encouraged, it is expected.

The problem is that phileo is not under our control as is agape. We cannot turn on and off our emotions. We can express kindness, for example, without it being motivated out of a concern for others. Phileo is sometimes translated kindness, indicating a deep concern for the wellbeing of others. An example is in Acts 28:2: "And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold."

While the love which God has for man is most often described using Agape, this is not exclusively the case. Consider Titus 3:4-5: "But after that the kindness and love [phileo] of God our Saviour toward man appeared ... he saved us ..." (We have discussed this verse elsewhere, so in this case we have omitted that part not relevant to the meaning of phileo.) Since God has this love for man, it would seem only appropriate that we respond in kind. In fact, both agapao and phileo are used to describe several relationships: the love of the Father for the Son (John 3:35; 5:20); the love of God for the believer (John 14:21; 16:27), and Christ's love for certain of His disciples (John 13:23; 20:2). (In all cases the first reference is agapao while the second is phileo).

This overlap between the two types of love might seem confusing, but not if we recognize that God has, and wants us to have both types of love. From the fact that agape is commanded, we must conclude that it takes priority both in time and in importance. In time, since generally we love with our head before the love of the heart and emotions develops. In importance, since unless we love with our reason the love of the heart can lead us to do things which are counterproductive to those who we love.

This is brought out by Jesus' discourse with Peter after His resurrection but before His ascension into heaven, which is recorded in John 21:15-17: "So when they had dined, 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. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep."

The implication is that Jesus was inquiring with regard to the primary love of reason which is commanded of all Christians. Following his normal impulsive pattern, Peter's response was to go a step further and indicate that the affection that he had for Jesus was superior even to that which Jesus was inquiring about. This would have been an accurate assessment had Peter's love begun with the love of reason which would have led him to do the Lord's will, which in this case was exemplified by the command "Feed my lambs." To show Peter his deficiency, Jesus asked the question again, still using agapao. Peter, not known for his ability to "get it" the first time, responded as he had before. The third time Jesus provoked Peter by questioning not his agapao but his phileo -- effectively: "Do you really have the affection and feelings for me that you claim?" Peter was so convinced that he had what he felt that he had that he appealed directly to the knowledge of the Lord: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love (phileo) thee." Again Jesus command: "Feed my sheep" had the impact of questioning Peter's motivation for going back to his occupation of fishing -- effectively: "If you love me so much, what are you doing fishing when you should be feeding my sheep?"

We state readily that this is based on implication. Clearly Jesus meant to draw a distinction between the two types of love, and this would seem to be a reasonable explanation. Other explanations which we have heard bring out the same conclusion. Jesus wants phileo, but he wants agape first. Unless we have our behavior under the control of our reason and are indeed acting in the best interest of others (or God), the "feeling" love may not be on target. In fact, it could be leading us to do things which are not loving at all. Feelings are funny things, which we will consider in detail in Chapter 7.

We dare not belabor the distinction between agape and phileo, since it is not at all critical to the point of this chapter. When the Greek word used makes a difference in our interpretation, we will put it in parenthesis as we did above. It is the *biblical* definition of love which is critical, and that is what we will take up next.

## **5.2.2 BIBLICAL DEFINITIONS**

There are several equivalent definitions of love given in the New Testament. None is more succinct than 1 John 5:5: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." Clearly this definition requires that we know all of the commands of God and that we do our best to apply them to every aspect of our lives. This is not the definition which is generally applied by those who would believe that we can ignore God's word and just practice love.

There are two aspects of this definition. First, is the keeping of God's commands,

which requires us to both know them and exert the effort to either perform them or abstain from sin. But as important as the raw keeping of those commands is the recognition that God established them out of love for us. Thus, "his commands are not grievous." Grievous means heavy or burdensome to the person who is obedient to those commands. We might view the statement "and his commandments are not grievous" in two possible ways:

1. As a statement of fact. This is validated by Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30: "Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke [is] easy, and my burden is light." It is a fact that obedience to the commands of God is the best possible life that anyone can live. His commands are not grievous, and unless we believe this we cannot possibly love God while keeping his commands. In fact, if we view his commands to be grievous we will despise God for denying us of the things which the world values so highly.
2. As a condition. This views the definition of love as a compound condition: (1) to keep His commandments, and (2) that those commands are not grievous. If this be the case, then we could fail to love God even while doing His commands if our heart was not in it because we failed to recognize them as being the result of God's love for us.

Either interpretation leads to the same conclusion. To demonstrate our love for God we must not only do His commandments but we must also possess a heart which recognizes the value that those commands are to us, both in this world and in the world to come. The value in the world to come is due to the price that Jesus paid for us with His own blood (Acts 20:28).

Love is adequately defined as non-grievous obedience to God's law. This was emphasized by Jesus in a number of places. One example is John 14:21-24 "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him. Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me."

Again, in John 15:9-11: "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and [that] your joy might be full."

It is clear from the biblical definition of love that we can easily deceive ourselves into thinking that we love God and our fellow man while not keeping His commandments. Indeed, very few people in this world do not consider themselves to be loving people. Yet, great atrocities are done in the name of love. The words of Jesus above seem to warn us that if we feel that we love but do not keep His commandments, we are deceiving ourselves.

While this proves the point that intuitive love is not what pleases God, we will now present some other biblical teachings on the subject of love that further reinforce this truth.

### 5.3 OLD TESTAMENT LOVE EXTENDED

The sermon on the mount is probably the most counterintuitive lesson ever preached. Jesus began with the beatitudes, each of which contains its own surprise. It was as if Jesus was trying to get their attention by saying: "What I have for you is as far from your intuitive feelings as you can get." Jesus touched on the subject of love near the middle of this sermon (Matthew 5:43-47): "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more [than others]? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

This certainly extends love beyond its reasonably accepted intuitive limits. "Love your enemies" is a command and, as such, it helps to define agape love as something which we can control, and something which will, at times, have to go *against our feelings*. The "publicans" were tax collectors, who most often were paid according to how much they could extract. They were cited because of the general hatred that the common person had for them. Yet, these men, as hateful as they were, still exhibited love for their families and friends. God's people are to possess a degree of love which is far beyond that which people have naturally. Having the best interests of those who hate us is essential to carrying out the great commission.

At the same time that Jesus extended the love that Christians are to have for their enemies, He also extended the love that they are to have for each other (Jn. 13:34-35): "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that

ye also love one another. By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." How is this command new? We know that both loving God and loving our neighbor were commanded in the Old Testament. Yet this is a new command. It can only be new in its degree: "as I have loved you." Indeed the love that Jesus had for us was much different in degree than that possessed by men. Consider Romans 5:6-11:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only [so], but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Jesus' love for us is totally unconditional. He desires and pleads for us to accept what He has for us. It is only our own rejection of Him that keeps us from availing ourselves of His saving power.

This defines what it means to love "as I have loved you." We might plead that such love is not possible for us ordinary mortals. However, if God expects us to be able to love our enemies, surely for us to possess such love for our fellow Christians is not the least bit unreasonable. In fact this is essential to our evangelistic effort: "By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Not by our knowledge, moral excellence or purity of speech; although the absence of things will certainly declare that we are not His disciples. But the *knowledge* that we *are* his disciples can only accrue to unbelievers if we truly have love one for another.

Some additional scriptures which indicate the counterintuitive nature of love are given in the following paragraphs.

*Biblical love of our brother includes discipline* (2 Thes. 3:14-15): "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count [him] not as an enemy, but admonish [him] as a brother." Keeping God's commandments in this regard is an act of love. In fact, a failure to do so contributes not only to his own departure from the Lord, but it also allows reproach to be brought upon the church (see 1 Corinthians 5).

*Biblical love is not judgmental* (James 4:11-12): "Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of [his] brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that

judgest another?" The difference between "speaking evil" and legitimate disciplinary action is detailed in Matthew 18:15-17.

As a final counterintuitive aspect of love, like our Lord, we are not to have respect of persons (Acts 10:34). This is made quite clear in James 2:1-10: "My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, [the Lord] of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one [point], he is guilty of all." Those who feel that they have no weakness in this regard have lost touch with reality.

#### **5.4 MAKING LOVE A REALITY**

First and foremost, our love for each other must start with God. Matthew 22:37-38 is still the greatest law, and the love of God comes first. There are many organizations which are established purely for the benefit of the members, and where the members act in (their perception of) each other's interests at all costs. In these organizations love (of one another) becomes the god, harmony becomes the idol and compromise the rule. "Love is all you need" is practiced, but it is not the love of the New Testament.

Love begins with God, since God is the source of all love. Without a knowledge of God, we cannot love our fellow man. But how do we increase our love for God? The beginning of love for God begins with an appreciation of ourselves. In Psalms 139:14 David said: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully [and] wonderfully made." David's assessment of himself is not what is currently called "self esteem," for that carries with it the excess baggage of pride.

As an aside, many of the current programs to instill self esteem in our children through the public educational system are destined to fail because they ignore God. Some day these children will have to enter the real world, and when they find out that they are not the center of the universe we can expect the suicide rate to skyrocket. I did not make myself fearfully and wonderfully -- no, I am fearfully and wonderfully made by the God whom I love.

David was not proud that he was fearfully and wonderfully made, but he recognized it. He recognized it when he was a lonely shepherd -- when most men would have complained about living out on the pastures, the terrors of wild animals, the heat of the day and the cold of the night. He recognized it when he was hunted by Saul. And he recognized it when, due to his own sin, his own family turned against him. David had plenty of things to complain about. He could have (wrongfully) blamed God for any of his problems, as many people do. But through it all, he maintained an attitude of thankfulness for what God made him. It seems strange that those who have the least of this world's blessings are often the ones who are the first to proclaim: I have been fearfully and wonderfully made! Yet, this is the beginning of our love for God. For, what are we doing when we complain and murmur other than demonstrating our hatred for what God has done for us? It is no wonder that God dealt so harshly with murmuring in the Old Testament times.

If having an appreciation of self is the beginning of our love for God, the cultivation of it is through *fellowship*. Fellowship with God and our fellow Christians is defined in 1 Jn. 1:7: "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The only way that we can grow close to one another according to God's will, is for us to walk in the light. When we have common fellowship with God, we will have fellowship with one another. Conversely, when we fail to continue walking in the light we can expect divisions and all kinds of organizational problems despite the many efforts which will be made to create good relationships between our fellow Christians.

This further reinforces the fact that the love which is commanded of us in the New Testament is subject to our will. We can choose to do God's will for us (walk in the light) or not. When we do, our love for God increases as does our desire to continue doing his will.

## **5.5 CAN WE BE SAVED BY LOVE ONLY?**

We made it clear above that when you place the word *only* behind even the noblest of actions or motives, it changes the entire meaning. We are saved by faith, but not by faith only. We are saved by obedience, but not by obedience only. It can also be said that we are saved by love. If we have love, it covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8). Paul indicated that love is greater than faith (1 Corinthians 13:13): "And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these [is] love." But can we say: "all we need is love?"

Love is intangible. It is a motive. Having the best interests of God and others is an essential emotion. However, by itself it is only in the imagination. If it exists as the New

Testament teaches that it should exist, then it will manifest itself in outward actions. As with true faith, it *cannot* exist without works. Thus "all you need is love" is a contradiction in terms.

If the speaker means the type of love defined in the New Testament, then why say that this is "all you need?" What is excluded? What do we not need? On the other hand, if the speaker is intentionally trying to infer that we do not need to pay any attention to God's other commands, then this is not the love defined by the New Testament.

## LIST OF SCRIPTURES WHERE LOVE IS USED BY GREEK WORD

Let us begin with the word agape (verb: agapao), which appears in the following scriptures:

agapao

John 17:26

3:16

Rom. 5:8

Jn 14:21

13:34

1 Thes 3:12

1 cor 16:14

2 pet 1:7

1 jn 4:8,9,10, 16

2 cor 5:14; eph 2:4; 3:19; 5:2

gal 5:22

Jn 14:15, 21, 23, 15:10

1 Jn 2:5; 5:3; 2 Jn. 6

Rom. 15:2; 13: 8-10; Gal. 6:10; 1 Cor. 13; Col 3:12-14

philanthropia -- love for man (verb: phileo)

-- tender affection; never as a command

as a warning: 1 Cor 16:22

Acts 28:2

Tit 3:4

BOTH ARE USED

Jn 21:15-17

BOTH ARE USED (agapao; phileo):

love of father for son (jn 3:35; 5:20)

God for the believer (14:21; 16:27)

Christ's love for certain disciples (13:23; 20:2)