

Chapter Six: Walk in Love

Love is regarded by many as a complex emotion. In its truest sense, however, love is much more than an emotion; it is a verb. If we love someone or something, then our actions will show that love. It is not enough to tell our friends, parents, spouses, children, God, etc. that we love them. Our actions must also show that we love them. We are to live our lives as Christians with such an active love. To do this, we must first understand what love is (1 John 4:8-10). Then, we will be equipped to walk in love (Ephesians 5:1-2) and understand our responsibility to love God (1 John 5:1-3), love the brotherhood (1 Peter 2:17) and even love our enemies (Matthew 5:44).

To truly understand what it means to walk in love we first understand what love is. According to 1 John 4:8, “God is love.” Love, *agapē* (G: 26), means “affection, good-will, love, benevolence” (Thayer 4). God is not like love; God is love itself. God is affection. God is good-will. God is benevolence. “God is fundamentally and essentially love” (Jamieson 1507). Love is not just in God’s character; love is God’s character. God, by definition, is love. Additionally, “love is of God” (1 John 4:7). Just as God is love itself, he is also the source of love. “All true love has its origin in God” (Barnes 1487). If it were not for God, we would not even know what love is. “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” (1 John 4:9-10). Manifested, *phaneroō* (G: 5319), means “to make visible, clear, manifest...the true meaning is to ‘uncover, lay bare, reveal’” (Vine 390). When God sent Jesus in to the world he revealed his active love to us. Sent, *apostellō* (G: 649), means “to send on service, or with a commission” (Vine 560). Christ was commissioned to give mankind life through his death. He became the propitiation, *hilasmos* (G: 2434), for our sins. Propitiation is “a means by which sin is covered and remitted” (Vine 494). God showed his love for us when he sent Christ into the world for the sole purpose of dying on the cross, thus remitting the sins of the world. One of the best-known Bible verses immediately comes to mind: “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” (John 3:16). God loves us enough to give us his “only begotten Son.” Christ is a free gift. Man has no right, no claim, to the life-saving blood of Christ, but God willingly gave him to us anyway. “This is the highest expression of love of which we can conceive” (Barnes 278). “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Even greater than that, Jesus laid down his life for sinners. God did not just love us; he showed

us a perfect love. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Man typically loves those who return that love. God, however, is the perfect love—he also loves those who do not love him. God loves us, sin or no sin. God’s love is unconditional, but that does not mean he approves of our sinful actions (Psalm 5:4; 11:5-7). God is love and the source of love. Through him we know what love is.

Now that we have a fuller understanding of love we are better equipped to do as the apostle Paul entreats: “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 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 (Ephesians 5:1-2). In Ephesians four Paul calls for a unity in the body of Christ and exhorts us to “walk not as other Gentiles walk” (verse 17). Since we have put on the new man we must consequently put off the conversation of the old man and be renewed (verses 22-23). Therefore, because we have “put on the new man” (verse 24) we are to be “followers of God” and “walk in love” (5:1-2). Followers, *mimētēs* (G:3402), means “an imitator” (Strong 1649) and “is always used in a good sense in the NT” (Vine 319). Additionally, the verb tense in the verse “indicates a decisive act with permanent results” (Vince 320). Children often imitate the behavior patterns and personality traits of their parents, often without even realizing it. Here, Paul encourages us to follow the example of our heavenly Father and imitate him. Paul calls for us to make an active decision to follow God and continue in that decision. We are not just to follow God when we feel like it or when it is convenient, but always and in every situation. As we follow God we “walk in love.” Walk, *peripateō* (G: 4043), refers to how we live our life, our lifestyle (Strong 1659). Love, *agapē* (G: 26), is the same word used earlier in 1 John. To walk in love, then, is to let an attitude of affectionate good will be the guiding force of our lives. “It [love] should be the principle from which we act; it should direct the ends at which we aim” and the means by which we get there (Henry *New* 18: 333). To walk in love, simply stated, is to have our lives “characterized by love” (Barnes 1000).

Paul continues to describe our walk in love by linking it to God’s love. This time, however, the love of Christ is emphasized. Paul exhorts us to live in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us as an “offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2). An offering, *prosphora* (G: 4376), is a “presentation; concretely an oblation (bloodless) or sacrifice” (Strong 1665) and indicates “that which is offered, a gift, a present” (Thayer 550). A sacrifice, *thysia* (G: 2378), is “the usual word in the Scriptures to denote a proper sacrifice...It always implied the *killing* of the animal as an acknowledgement of the sinner that *he* deserved to die. It was the

giving up of *life*, which was supposed to reside in the *blood*...and hence it was necessary that *blood* should be shed” (Barnes 1000). Christ gave himself to God as a present on the behalf of mankind. At the same time, Christ was also a blood sacrifice. His “love was shown in his being willing that his blood should be shed to save men” (Barnes 1000). The willing blood sacrifice of Christ was a “sweetsmelling savour” to God (verse 2). This is “a metaphor borrowed from sacrifices” indicating “a thing well pleasing to God” (Thayer 264). The selfless sacrifice of Christ is our example to follow. Just as Christ died for us, we should show the same dedication in our love. True love is selfless, always putting others first. If we love someone, then we should be willing to sacrifice our time, energy and even our own wellbeing, if necessary, for that person. “Christ sacrificed himself by *love*, and that sacrifice was acceptable to God. So do you show love one to another. Sacrifice everything which opposes it, and it will be acceptable to God” (Barnes 1000).

As we walk in love we have a responsibility to love God (1 John 5:2-3). God did not love us and show us what it means to truly love just so we would love him in return. Love is selfless, freely given with no thought of self or gain. This does not, however, negate our responsibility to reciprocate God’s love with our own. We love, not out of obligation but out of desire, for a forced love is no love at all. “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). To love God is to keep his commandments. Keep, *tēreō* (G: 5083), means “to attend to carefully, take care of...to observe” (Thayer 622) and, further, “to give heed to” (Vine 340). Commandments, *entolē* (G: 1785), refers to an “injunction, i.e. an authoritative prescription” (Strong 1625). This term is used universally “of the commandments of God” (Thayer 218) and includes all of the laws, precepts and guidelines God has set forth to govern our lives; everything God has prescribed for the benefit of man. We are to carefully observe, maintain and give heed to God’s commands. “This constitutes true love; this furnishes the evidence of it” (Barnes 1490). Since keeping God’s commandments shows love for God, it is fortunate for us “his commandments are not grievous” (verse 3). Grievous, *barys* (G: 926), means “weighty, i.e. (figuratively) burdensome, grave” (Strong 1613). The things God asks us to do are not a burden. It may, at times, be difficult to resist the temptations we face, but God does not require of us anything we are unable to do. Certainly, it is necessary to put forth an effort, but we always have the ability to carry out God’s commands. “It is easy to obey God when the heart is right; and those who endeavour in sincerity to keep his commandments do not complain that they are hard” (Barnes 1490).

As we walk in love we have a responsibility to “Love the brotherhood” (1 Peter 2:17). Brotherhood, *adolphotēs* (G: 81), means “brotherhood (properly the feeling of brotherliness), i.e. the (Christian) fraternity” (Strong 1600). There is a general love which is owed to all (Galatians 5:14), but to our fellow Christians a greater love is demanded. We are to “*habitually love* with the special and congenial affection that you ought to feel to brethren, besides the general *love* to all men” (Jamieson 1474). John linked this brotherly love to our love for God, the latter being the proof of the former. “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments” (1 John 5:2). The children of God are the followers of God, those who have put on Christ. If we love God and keep his commandments, then we will likewise love our brethren. The converse is also true. “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:20-21). Love is here contrasted with hateth, *miseō* (G: 3404), and loveth not, the negative form of the verb *agapaō* (G: 25). *Agapē* (G: 26) and *agapaō* (G: 25) are corresponding noun and verb forms of love, thus they both hold the meaning of affection and good-will. Hateth means “to detest...by extension to love less” (Strong 1649). We see the “love less” aspect in this verse as hateth is paralleled with loveth not. The point is this: “If we do not love *the brethren*, the visible representatives of *God*, how can we love God, the invisible One, *whose children they are?*” (Jamieson 1508). We cannot love God without also loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. Likewise, we can not love our brothers and sisters without also loving God. This is why John uses our love to God as proof that we love the children of God. The two are inseparable. One without the other is an empty, worthless love. It is not the true, sincere, selfless love God taught us. We must, if we love God, show an active love toward our fellow Christians as well.

Our love toward our brethren shows others that we love God. “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” (John 13:34-35). New, *kainos* (G: 2537), “denotes ‘new,’ of that which in unaccustomed or unused, not ‘new’ in time, recent, but ‘new’ as to form or quality, of different nature from what is contrasted as old” (Vine 430-431). The command to love is not new and original, but “unprecedented, novel, uncommon, unheard of” in the common world (Thayer 317). The uncommon nature of this love dealt with the extent or degree of love Jesus admonishes his disciples to have for each other. Christ uses himself as the example: “as I have loved you” (verse 34). “This was the *new* feature of it. Christ’s

love to His people in giving His life a ransom for them was altogether new, and consequently as a Model and Standard for theirs to one another...that law in a new and peculiar form” (Jamieson 1059). The degree of Christ’s love was to death. “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:12-13). Christ freely “gave himself up, not to *common* sufferings, but to the most bitter, painful, and protracted, that man had devised, not for himself, not for friends, but for a thoughtless and unbelieving world” (Barnes 339). We have a responsibility to our brethren, and to God, to love them with the same degree of love Christ showed us. “Our love for one another must be free and ready, laborious and expensive, constant and persevering; it must be love to the souls one of another. We must also love one another from this motive, and upon this consideration—because Christ has loved us” (Henry *New* 5:150). Only with this type of love “shall all men know” that we are indeed the disciples of Christ (John 13:35). This love is often referred to as the Christian’s “badge of discipleship.” We are to wear it always, wear it proudly and wear it openly. “It shall be the thing by which you shall be known among all men” (Barnes 332).

As we walk in love we have a responsibility to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44). “Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, 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” (Matthew 5:43-44). Neighbor, *plēision* (G: 4139), means “neighbor, i.e. fellow (as man, countryman, Christian or friend)” (Strong 1661). “The command to love our neighbour was a law of God, Lev. xix.18. That we must, therefore, hate our enemy, was an inference drawn from it by the Jews. They supposed that if we loved the one, we must, of course, hate the other” (Barnes 27). This is clearly not the case. Jesus taught such in a parable recorded in Luke 10:25-37. There, Jesus showed our neighbor is “any other man irrespective of race or religion with whom we live or whom we chance to meet” (Thayer 519). Our neighbor, therefore, is everyone with whom we come into contact. We have a responsibility to love these individuals and care about their well-being, despite the way they may treat us. In the text in Matthew Jesus adds that our enemies are also our neighbors and deserve our love as well. Enemy, *echthros* (G: 2190), simply means “adversary” (Strong 1632). It includes anyone who opposes us or what we believe. Jesus uses this opportunity to correct the faulty inference the Jews made. Do not hate your enemies—love them. Jesus continues exhorting us to bless those that curse us, do good to those that hate us and pray for those that use and persecute us. Bless, *eulogeō* (G: 2127), and curse, *kataraomai* (G: 2627), are opposites. The former means” to speak well of” (Strong 1631) while the latter

means “to pray against, to wish evil against a person or thing” (Vine 141). Even though others may wish us ill will and speak evil against us, we must not return in kind. Rather, we love and bless them. We are “to speak of those things which we can *commend* in an enemy; or if there is nothing that we can commend, to say nothing about him” (Barnes 27). We are to find the good in everyone and speak only about that good, not the evil they do. When it comes down to it, if we do not have anything nice to say, then we should say nothing at all! Additionally, we are to do good to those who hate us. Good, *kalōs* (G: 2573), means “to do good to, benefit one” (Thayer 323). Hate, *miseō* (G: 3404), means “to detest (especially to persecute)” (Strong 1649). Again, we see these two terms as somewhat opposites. We are only to do that which will benefit those who have malicious feelings and intentions toward us. We are to shower those who detest us with goodness. Lastly, we love our enemies by praying for those who “despitefully use” and “persecute” us. The former, *epēreazō* (G: 1908), means “to insult, slander” (Strong 1627). The latter, *diōkō* (G: 1377), means “in any way whatever to harass, trouble, molest” (Thayer 153). Rather than return evil words for evil words, we are to pray for them, beseeching God on their behalf and seeking their best interests. It does not matter what our enemies do or say. We are to return their ill favor and hateful words with love and kindness, only speaking good about them and doing good for them. This, Jesus says, is how we love our enemies. This is how we walk in love.

Love, as the Bible describes it, is much more than an emotion; it is an active way of life. To understand this love we must look to God, for God is love. Love is in God—God is love itself and all love comes from God. By sending his Son into the world, God showed us a perfect, selfless love. He gave us his unconditional love, not so we would love him, but so we would know what love is and desire to share in that love. As we walk in love we share our love with God, our fellow Christians and neighbors, including even our enemies. “We must love, not only show love, but have it in the root and habit of it, and have it when there is not any present occasion to show it; have it ready” (Henry *New* 5:150). Everyone deserves our love, no matter how poorly they may treat us. No one is undeserving of the same selfless, serving love God showed us through Christ. Love is the Christian badge of discipleship: by it all with whom we come in contact will know that we serve God. May we all wear it prominently and proudly!

Questions:

1. God, by definition, is what (as it pertains to this lesson)?

a. What is the source of love? _____

b. How were we showed what love is?

c. What is the highest expression of love?

2. Who do we have a responsibility to love?

a. How do we show that love?

b. To what extent are we to love?

c. Who is our neighbor?

d. How are we to treat those who mistreat us?

3. What does our love toward our brethren show others?

4. How is love a badge of discipleship?

5. In your own words, explain what it means to walk in love.
