

The Personal and Practical Meaning of Love

Introduction

- A. The books on counseling are right when they state that a person must be loved, must love, and must have significance with others -- in order to be a whole person.
- B. The Fall and our sin has produced at least a fourfold loss in this area. We now no longer realize that God loves us, we are unable to love God or one another, and we are greatly hindered in loving and accepting ourselves. The new birth makes recovery in these areas possible but true recovery can only come through spiritual growth and healing prayer.
- C. The Biblical teaching on love underlines it's basic message: salvation is a relationship with a Person. To miss that, in daily practice, is to deprive ourselves of love, joy, power, and fruit.

I. The Importance of Loving God.

- A. It is the first commandment - Matt 22:36-40.
- B. It is the virtue to be sought above all - I Cor 12:31; 13:13; Col 3:14.
- C. It is a necessary requirement for exercising faith - Gal 5:6.
- D. It is an evidence of genuine sonship - John 13:34,35; I John 3:16-18.
- E. It is inseparably related to obedience - John 14:15,23,24; I John 5:3.

II. A Provisional Definition of Love. (Note the characteristics of love in I Cor 13.)

- A. Love is a decision to recognize another person as a person.
(It means to give that person their God-given rights.)
- B. Love is a decision to give that person their rightful place in one's life.
(Not everyone has the same place in one's life. The relationship is the key.)
- C. Love is a decision to always do what is right by that person by seeking their good in a sacrificial way. (Love is the opposite of selfishness and self-centeredness.)

III. Some Explanations Regarding Love.

- A. Love is not primarily an emotion.

While emotions are related in many ways to love, it would seem that the basis of love and it's primary motivation, are not first of all emotional. Some evidence for this is found in the statement in John 3:16 "God so loved that He gave" which points more to decision than emotion. And also in the command in Matt 5:44 where we are told to love our enemies. The text does not support the view that we must have good emotional feelings for our enemies.

B. Love is a decision.

How difficult it would be if we only practiced love when we felt like it! The commands in the Bible regarding love point to the importance of making a decision to obey, in spite of the emotions we may have, or the circumstances involved. Since love, like faith, is a decision that is very close to the heart of our walk with God, we know that the ability to love has been given us in the new birth. And we can also say, God does not command us to do what we cannot do.

C. Love is a decision to practice truth.

When we ask as to what we are to do when we love, the answer would be, "Do what is right" or "practice truth." And here the threefold definition of love would have relevance. The many passages that reflect God's love for us make those three statements even more clear. When loving a person in a situation demanding discipline the principle of "practicing truth" is helpful.

D. Love is a unconditional.

The term "unconditional" simply means that love cannot be earned - it must be freely given. When a person will choose to respond favorably toward another, only when certain conditions are met, such a "favorable response" is not love but manipulation. If we had to earn the love of God by meeting some divinely imposed standard - no one would be loved.

E. Love makes a distinction between the person and what that person does.

As God loves us as a person even though He may not be pleased with some of the things that we do - so we must learn to love that way. This does not mean that He is not concerned with what we do. In fact, His love for us may mean He will discipline us as in Heb 12:6 "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth" While we must be honest about our behavior it is important to learn how not to allow our actions, or the lack of them, interpret God's love for us.

IV. Some Characteristics of God's Love.

- A. The love of God is everlasting in time, Jer 31:3.
- B. The love of God is persevering in forgiveness, Hosea 3:1.
- C. The love of God is immeasurable in extent, John 15:9; 17:23.
- D. The love of God is evidential in proof, Rom 5:8.
- E. The love of God is permanent in duration, Rom 8:38,39.
- F. The love of God is transforming in effect, II Cor 5:14.
- G. The love of God is personal in intimacy, Gal 2:20.
- H. The love of God is incomprehensible in knowledge, Eph 3:19.

