

“I love God”

The word “love” is used very loosely in our society. At times it is expressed without much thought at all of its implication or its responsibilities. Likewise, many religious people are guilty of carelessly saying “I love God” without any intention of demonstrating that love with meaningful changes, genuine reverence and faithful service. Vain love is transparent to God the moment it is uttered.

According to our Lord Jesus Christ, to love God is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:37; Deuteronomy 6:5). The enormity of this commanded love is expressed by Jesus when He explained that “*all the Law and the Prophets*” hung on the commands to love (v. 40). At the time the New Testament was written, the Greek language had multiple words to communicate different kinds of love. Jesus commanded the highest and noblest kind for God. It is not a love stirred by physical attraction, nor natural affinity. It is a rational love [Gr. *agapao*], wherein the individual determines and seeks another person’s welfare and interests above his own interest. This love is an exercise of the will, which deliberately chooses to do what is right and good.

God Himself is the source and the essence of love [Gr. *agape*]. The Holy Spirit guided the apostle John to boldly declare twice in his epistle that “*God is love*” (I John 4:8, 16). Love is His nature. The inspired Scriptures state that we can know this about God because of the gift of His Son. “*In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*” (I John 4:9-10). Love is evident by the actions and deeds it prompts.

John’s two declarations concerning the nature of God are made to instruct Christians to exercise that same love in their own lives with one another. “*Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*” (I John 4:11). This excellent love is much more than a feeling of emotional affinity but a determination and a commitment to practice constantly deeds of love. The call to practice love is to put knowledge to work proficiently. The daily implementation of godly love becomes a reflection of God’s character in Christians’ lives.

Jesus told the apostles in the upper room, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. . . . If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word*” (John 14:15, 23). Love is an exercise of the will, a deliberate choice to act. God truly acted out of pure love when He planned and provided salvation for sinners. Divine interest in the welfare of unworthy recipients worked to make justification available to all men. This immeasurably deep love is revealed to produce a reverential love in men towards the Almighty Giver. The like love we are called upon to reciprocate is not simply words of affection but obedience to the heavenly will. Love of God is negated any time when what we want or what pleases ourselves hinders the keeping of Christ’s word and commandments.

The believer who loves God will respect and uphold divine precepts and ordinances. The apostle John argued that point in his first epistle. “*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?*” (I John 4:20) The application of love reaches all facets of life. “*Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have.*” (Hebrews 13:5) “*Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.*” (Colossians 4:6) “*Whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery.*” (Matthew 19:9) “*Fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*” (Ephesians 6:4) “*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of the Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*” (Acts 2:38) “*As obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct*” (I Peter 1:14-15). Take note: the Lord Jesus said that the person who loves Him will keep His commandments and word. The keeping of the word of Christ includes the whole counsel of God.

The principle of adherence to God's divine revelation is stressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount. "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*" (Matthew 7:21). The principle would not have been changed, if He had expressed it this way: Not everyone who says to me, 'I love you, I love you,' [dfb] shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. To voice love for God and neglect to do what He says is empty love, an unpleasant noise rising up from those who ought to be bearing the image of their Creator and Father.

The great commandment to love God requires the giving of your TOTAL being in the obedience of the divine will. "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.*" There is no room for any amount of selfishness. This does not catch the student of the gospel by surprise because Jesus taught that His disciples that believers must deny themselves to follow Him (Matthew 16:24). One hundred percent of our being, our nature and our life must be devoted to exercising our will to do God's will. We are commanded to love God inwardly and outwardly; we are commanded to love God physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually. Our commitment to love God takes precedence over all other loves because when the true love of God abides in us, then we are able to exercise the same love for family, friends, strangers and even enemies. Let us, therefore, love God in deed and in truth, not simply in word or in tongue (I John 3:16).