

LOVE

Lesson Number Four

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John 13:34 & 35 says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 15:17 says it again, "This I command you, to love one another."

I John 3:23 says, "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us."

I John 4:7 says, "Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God."

And, conversely, I John 4:8 follows with, "He who does not love does not know God; for God is love." Turn with me now to I Corinthians 13:6 on Page 1000 in your Bibles.

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I Corinthians 13:6, "it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right."

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Phillips' translation gives I Corinthians 13:6 as, "(Love) does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails."

People today really aren't that much different than they were back when Christ was on Earth. Human beings still need to see and touch and feel in order to understand love. And, because of these needs, God expressed His love centuries ago in a familiar form, one that could be seen and heard and touched and experienced - Jesus Christ. Today He still expects his children to emulate Christ, to be Christlike, so that the modern world can also feel His love. The church today is called to demonstrate the love of God in all its dealings with the world and its people. This way, even when the scriptures are foreign, or obscure, or unavailable, God's people can be a universal language clear and understandable to all men. This is our highest calling as Christians. Here is the real and mature significance of the three little words that make up the new commandment; "Love one another." These three little words require of us an entire lifetime of practice. In the heart of every individual is a primary hunger to love and be loved. This can be fully satisfied only as a human being comes into the total belonging he experiences as he receives Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

But the soul of man also has a contrary tendency which rejoices in the unloving characteristics of others. It is easy to see the mote in our brother's eye and ignore the beam in our own! We often seek to lift ourselves by pulling others down. We are very deceitful this way; we even try to deceive our own selves. Love, on the other hand, refuses to capitalize on the shortcomings of others. Love implies caring - for better or for worse. Love is an active concern for the life and growth of those we love. The very essence of love is to work for something and to help it grow. Love and labor are inseparable. You love what you work for, and you work hard for that which you love. Love rejoices in the accomplishment of what is honest and right. Love is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out.

On the negative side, love finds no satisfaction in that which is wrong. When you read that crime and delinquency is at an all-time high and growing at ever increasing rates, what does it do to you? When you see the television news report about four boys beating an old man to death on a busy street corner, what do you feel inside? When you read of an innocent girl raped by a home invader in her own bed, or a child kidnapped, sexually molested, and brutally slain and mutilated, what is your reaction? When almost two thousand times a day, somewhere in this country, a gavel drops and a judge declares, "Divorce granted!" does it bother you?

To the christian, sin is sad. Love cannot find any satisfaction in evil. But God's truth, as it is revealed in the growth of those we love, those for whom we accept responsibility, is great joy for the concerned christian. When we see a troubled teenager brought into the shelter of a christian home and watch them discover a whole new life in Christ, it is a cause for rejoicing. One of my most joyful memories is of a few hours my wife and I spent talking with a young couple who were contemplating divorce. They were christians but had married very young and their first six months of life together had not been as smooth and sweet as they had expected. We did our best to let God's love flow through our concern and attention and it seemed that their love was reborn and enriched by the reaffirmation of God's love for them. Today, they are still married and I can sing and shout for joy that God's Plan for marriage is being glorified in their lives.

It is often very instructive when perplexed by the problems of our age, to ask the question, "What would our Lord do in this situation? How would Jesus deal with this person, or this couple?" Jesus Christ was loving; He was also uncompromising. At times His words were so piercing that the people wanted to kill Him.

It is true that He went about doing good, but His goodness was firm and His words stringent, and He called forth the best in the people He met. He gave offense to His disciples, to His relatives, to the scribes and Pharisees, for He was always obedient to a higher loyalty. Turn to Matthew, chapter ten, verse thirty-four on page 844 in the Bible. Jesus didn't mince words when it came to evil. Nor did he limit himself to words; He used a whip on the moneychangers in the temple.

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Matthew 10:34. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

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Jesus was loving and kind, but His kind of love is firm. When it came to evil He was severe. God's love never rejoices in wrong, but rejoices in the right.

In today's world, very few people actually understand what the word "love" really means. Much of what we read and see in the media shows the prevalence of the concept that the words "love" and "sex" are synonymous. But, even more insidious, is the widely held concept that "love" and "sentimentality" are equivalent. To confuse "love" and "sex" is something we christians studiously avoid, knowing that God never meant love to be sex and nothing else. But

Christians are often as guilty as the rest of the world of confusing "love" and "sentimentality." Even we Christians often miss the fact that there is a very stern side to REAL love. An easy sentimentality will decline to take stern action when the beloved is wrong. But this cheats the beloved. This leaves the beloved secure in his or her wrongdoing, unfairly confirming the very action that is wrong. The New American Bible renders Ecclesiastes 8:11 as "Because the sentence against evildoers is not promptly executed, therefore the hearts of men are filled with the desire to commit evil." If your son curses at his mother, and you don't chew-him-out and give him a spanking for it, he becomes convinced that he can get away with such behavior; an opinion that will result in disaster for him further on down the road. Because sentimentality refuses to do what is distasteful, it ignores the long-term benefits of reproofing and chastening the beloved because it sees that he or she will dislike the immediate unpleasantness. Sentimentality thus takes the easy way out.

But the more one loves, the more one hates the things that prevent the beloved from enjoying the fullest and most abundant life. And if these things are really hated, then every effort will be made to see that they are put away. If the loved one is subordinate, that will mean taking strong and momentarily painful disciplinary measures to save the beloved from worse pain in the future. God himself deals with us, his children, in just this fashion. Turn to Proverbs 3:11 & 12 on page 548 in your Bibles. We will be exploring this subject in more depth in Lesson Eight of this series but, for now, let's just note that God deals with us whom he loves just as an earthly father is supposed to deal with his earthly children.

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Proverbs 3:11 & 12, "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights."

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The Living Bible presents these verses as, "Young man, do not resent it when God chastens and corrects you, for his punishment is proof of his love. Just as a father punishes a son he delights in to make him better, so the Lord corrects you." The operative word here is MUMCAR in the original Hebrew, a noun which literally means "chastening consisting of physical blows."

Throughout all the scriptures, this is the way that God has always dealt with those he loves. God's punishment of sin is no contradiction of his love; it was precisely BECAUSE he loved that he took Israel's sin so seriously throughout the Old Testament. His love was love in deadly earnest and could be severe. It was willing to hurt in order to save, to shatter all false securities and strip Israel of her gifts, if so be in the end, in nakedness and brokenness, she might learn to know true peace. But the severity was never separated from tenderness and we should remember that most carefully whenever dealing with the wrongdoing of those WE love!

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This week, we're going to be looking at the Greek word EROS. Next week, we will look at STORGE, the week after at

PHILEO, and the week after that at AGAPE. These are the four Greek words for love. The best examination of these words that I have seen is in C.S. Lewis' book, THE FOUR LOVES. Much of what I am going to be saying about these words over the next four weeks comes directly from that book and I would recommend that anyone who wants to make a more detailed study of the subject of love in the bible should begin with this book.

Lewis begins his study by dividing love into two categories: Gift-Love and Need-Love. The typical example of Gift-Love in the world is shown by the love which prompts a man to buy life insurance: it provides for the well-being of his family after he is dead. He will not see it or share in its benefits, yet he is willing to expend the premiums because the insurance will help support his loved-ones after he is gone. This is Gift-Love. On the other hand, the typical example of Need-Love is that love which sends a lonely or frightened child running to Mommy.

It is immediately obvious that God's love is Gift-Love. At the same time, man's love for God, from the very nature of humanity, must always be mostly (if not completely), a Need-Love. Now, man is capable of bringing more than just a Need-Love to God, but, to bring a Gift-Love would presuppose the existence of the Need-Love also. The capstone of a pyramid doesn't sit up in the air all by itself. It needs all the other stones beneath it to hold it up. In the same way, we are not capable of bringing a Gift-Love to God unless and until we are clearly aware of our Need-Love for Him.

This points to a rather strange corollary: Man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God. For what can be more unlike than fullness and emptiness, righteousness and depravity, limitless power and a cry for help.

Now, there are two different things that we might consider as being "near to God". The first is being like God and the other is making a close approach to God. Once upon a time, there was a young girl who lived in a small mountain village in Switzerland. One day she set off for a walk in the mountains. She knew she was supposed to be back home in time for lunch but she miscalculated how far she had to walk. By midday, she found herself at the top of a cliff overlooking the village. In physical space, she was very close to home. In fact, she probably could have thrown a stone and broken the front window of her house. But, she was only a young girl, not an experienced mountain climber. An experienced climber might have rappelled down to her house in a few minutes but that was beyond her capability. She had to walk back the long way around. At many times during her homeward journey, she was statically much further away from her house than she had been at the top of the cliff. But that was only statically. Dynamically, each step brought her closer to the yummy sandwiches and milk that her mother had prepared for her. We were created in the likeness of God. But, what is near God by reason of likeness is never going to get any closer: not any more than the young girl could have ever gotten any nearer to home by simply sitting at the top of the cliff. But nearness of approach is, by definition, increasing nearness.

Now, the reason this is important is because it is necessary to the proper understanding of John's Statement that "God is Love" in I John 4:8. The difficulty with this statement of John's is that we are easily led to misinterpret it and twist it into an opposite meaning entirely. If we twist the truth that God is love into its converse, that "Love is God", love turns into a demon! Every human love, at its height, has a tendency to claim for itself divine authority. Erotic love is extremely guilty of this today. Love of one's country can become guilty of this too; especially in wartime. Family affection is also prone to this perversion.

The natural loves make this blasphemous claim to Godhood, not when they are at their worst, but when they are in their best, natural condition. This is especially obvious in the erotic sphere. A faithful and genuinely self-sacrificing passion will speak to us with what seems to be the voice of God. Mere sexual lust will not! We may go ahead and take action on the basis of sexual lust but we are not going to revere the passion any more than we revere an itch when we scratch it. Our loves do not make their claim to divinity until the claim becomes plausible. It does not become plausible until there is in them a real resemblance to God, to Love Himself.

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In the same way that love is divided into two categories, we can also divide pleasures into two categories: those which would not be pleasures at all unless they were preceded by desire, and those which are pleasures in their own right and don't need any preparatory desire. An example of the first type would be a drink of water. This is a pleasure if you are thirsty and a great one if you are very thirsty. But, who ever pours himself a glass of water and drinks it just for the sheer fun of doing so.

On the other hand, suppose you were out for a walk in an unfamiliar countryside and, coming around a bend in the path, you suddenly came upon a quiet meadow, swathed in wisps of fog and crowned with a full rainbow. The pleasure is one of the second kind; no preparatory desire was necessary.

There are complications of these simple examples of course. Suppose you are thirsty and, instead of a glass of water, you are given a cup of coffee. Both pleasures now exist. Your thirst is assuaged and you also experience the pleasant taste of the coffee. On the other hand, suppose you drink whiskey because you like its taste. If you get into that too heavily, it becomes an addiction; you become an alcoholic. Then a pleasure of the second kind has become one of the first. A pleasure of appreciation has become a need pleasure.

Need pleasures cease to exist when satisfied. The glass of cold water looks extremely appealing when you have just come in from mowing the lawn. Five seconds later it is of no interest at all. Pleasures of appreciation are very different. One does not simply enjoy them; one feels that they somehow deserve to be enjoyed. One would be outraged at the thought that the beautiful mountain meadow, crowned with the rainbow, was to be torn up for a parking lot; even if the one knew he were about to die and would never see it

again himself. We do not merely like such things; we pronounce them, in a momentarily God-like sense, "very good."

The appreciative Pleasures Point to a need for a third category of love: appreciative love of Persons. When a man offers it to a woman, it is called admiration. When a boy offers it to a man, it is called hero-worship. And, when we offer it to God, we call it worship simply. Need-Love cries to God from our Poverty; Gift-Love longs to serve God or even to suffer for Him; Appreciative love says, "We give thanks to thee for thy great glory!" Need-love from a man says of a woman, "I cannot live without her!" Gift-Love longs to give her happiness, comfort, protection, and, if possible, wealth. Appreciative love gazes and holds its breath and is silent. It rejoices that such a wonder should exist even if it is not obtainable. He who appreciates will not be devastated if he cannot have her but would rather have it so than never to have seen her at all.

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Which brings us to the Greek word EROS. Turn with me to Jeremiah 22:20 and 22 on page 670 in your Bibles. The word EROS does not appear anywhere in the Greek New Testament. The fact that the writers of the New Testament chose not to use the word EROS when talking about love is an important point. It tells us something about what they believed love NOT to be. The word EROS is, however, used in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament executed at Alexandria in the third century before Christ. It is the earliest version of the Old Testament which we have available today: the versions we have in the original Hebrew are from a later date than the Septuagint.

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Jeremiah 22:20 says, "Go up to Lebanon, and cry out, and lift up your voice in Bashan; cry from Abarim, for all your lovers are destroyed." And the twenty-second verse is "The wind shall shepherd all your shepherds, and your lovers shall go into captivity; then you will be ashamed and confounded because of all your wickedness." The word "lovers" in these two verses is the Greek ERASTE which is a noun derived from EROS.

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The word is used throughout the septuagint to refer to the physical act of adultery but it is used in the allegorical fashion primarily: to paint a picture of how Israel went whoring after other Gods. But EROS doesn't just refer to sex. EROS is the noun corresponding to the verb ERAO. Bauer's Lexicon defines ERAO as "to love passionately, sensually or otherwise; to have a burning desire for." EROS is thus the state of "being in love" or, if you prefer, the kind of love that lovers are "in". I am not just talking about sex here. We, as Christians, often accuse the sensualists of today for their confusion of the terms "sex" and "love". Well, it is also not proper to confuse "sex" and "EROS". Sex becomes a part of EROS only when it becomes an ingredient in the complex state of "being in love." It is intuitively obvious that sex can take place without love and that love can exist without sex. This is just as true of EROS as it is of AGAPE!

Nor will I tolerate the notion so common to so many modern philosophers: that it is the absence or presence of

EROS which makes the act of sex either impure or Pure, degraded or exalted, unlawful or lawful. If everybody who ever slept together without being in love were unacceptable, then we would all have to admit that we come from extremely tainted stock. The times and Places where marriage depends upon EROS are extremely few and far between. The idea of only marrying "for love" is actually rather new and unusual (and, given modern divorce statistics, of rather questionable value also). Almost all of our ancestors were married off in their early youth to Partners chosen by their Parents on grounds that had nothing to do with EROS. They went to bed together with nothing more driving them than Plain animal lust! And they did right! They were honest christian husbands and wives, obeying their fathers and mothers, and Properly discharging their marriage responsibilities. And they went on to Properly bring up families in the admonition and nurture of the Lord. On the other hand, sex, committed under the influence of a soaring and iridescent EROS which reduces the role of the senses to a minor consideration, may nevertheless be Plain adultery; may involve breaking a wife's heart, deceiving a husband, betraying a friend, Polluting hospitality, and deserting your children! It has not Pleased God that the distinction between a sin and a duty should turn on something as fleeting as feelings. Sex, like any other act, is Justified (or not) by far more Prosaic and definable criteria; by the keeping or breaking of Promises, by Justice or injustice, by charity or selfishness, by obedience or disobedience!

Those who espouse the theory of evolution tend to define EROS as something that grows out of sexual desire; a late complication which develops from the immemorial biological impulse. Now, this may sometimes happen but I think it is really comparatively rare. There may be some men who have first felt a mere sexual desire for a woman and then gone on later to fall in love with her. But far more often what comes first is simply a delighted pre-occupation with the Beloved. A man in this condition really doesn't have time to think about sex; He's too busy thinking about a Person. Now EROS is unquestionably a Possessive love. That's what it is all about; where its Primary definition lives. EROS wants to Possess; completely! But Sex and EROS are thus clearly not the same. Sexual desire wants IT; the act itself; EROS wants the Beloved.

The sex act itself is a sensory Pleasure; an event occurring within one's own body. We make a mistake when we say that a young man out cruising the streets is looking for a woman. He doesn't want a woman. He wants a sensory Pleasure for which a woman happens to be a necessary piece of apparatus. How much he cares about the woman as such may be measured by his attitude to her five minutes after the act is completed. EROS, on the other hand, makes the man want, not just a woman, but one Particular woman. In a mysterious fashion that we never really understand, the lover desires the Beloved herself, not merely the Pleasure she can give. Without EROS, sexual desire is a fact about ourselves; within the sphere of EROS, however, it becomes a fact about the Beloved.

Now, one of the most widely held beliefs about EROS is

that the spiritual danger of EROS arises essentially from this carnal element within it. The contention is that EROS is noblest or purest when sex is minimized. For years, many moral theologians have seemed to think that the main danger in marriage is that of a soul-destroying surrender to the senses. But this is not the scriptural approach. In the seventh chapter of First Corinthians, Paul says that it is good for a man not to be married. But all he really says about sex is that prolonged abstinence within marriage is to be avoided. What he fears is pre-occupation, the need of constantly pleasing - that is considering - one's partner, the multiple distractions of domesticity. It is marriage itself, not the marriage bed, that will be likely to hinder us from waiting uninterruptedly on God. And I find that Paul was right. In my own experience, it is the practical cares of the world that are the greatest distraction. Sometimes the most minor annoyances are the greatest distractions. And often, it is the pleasant things that get in the way; it is much more fun to sit up in the living room and play games with the kids than it is to go down in the basement and work on preparing Sunday school lessons. There were many times when these lessons simply waited awhile.

Without EROS, sex is nothing more than animal lust. Within EROS, it becomes a grand and glorious fulfilment just as it was intended by God that it should be. But it is in the grandeur of EROS that the seeds of danger are concealed. EROS speaks like an all-commanding God. For EROS, honored without reservation and obeyed unconditionally becomes a demon. EROS leads to adultery, murder, theft, and all manner of evils if allowed full control. The biggest error of today is that men and women have turned EROS into an idol. The idea that anything is somehow okay if it is truly done in the name of love is modern man's slap in God's face. Remember the First Commandment, "I am the Lord your God...You shall have no other gods before me."

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Let's spend a few moments together in prayer.