

The Greatest of These is Love

Most Christians are familiar with 1 Corinthians 13, “the love chapter.” And for good reason, without love even great sacrifices are of no profit, clearly stated by Paul within the chapter, “*And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing*” (13:3, NASB).

What many Christians miss is that “love” in that passage is “agape,” the type of love that seeks the highest good of another person. Our modern western minds use the word “love” mostly to describe a wonderful, emotional high toward a person for whom we have deep and active feelings, often, but not always, romantic.

Fast forward to modern American and we begin to see a problem developing... many Christians today define “love,” just about any kind of love, and think themselves spiritual as they appeal to 1 Corinthians 13. True, biblical spirituality must include true, agape love or it is not, *true* spirituality. But that reality is little understood, even by many who claim the name of Jesus.

Whether speaking of warm, fuzzy personal feelings or group outpourings of love and wonderful emotions, we must remember God’s use of *agape* and ask ourselves, “Is what I am experiencing wonderful and personal, or godly, spiritual love. Never forget, even atheists can be magnanimous, giving and caring. Likewise, they can be filled with joy, and seek to bring joy to others. It won’t do them much good on judgment day, but they can, indeed, be very caring.

However, biblical love for God and one another must be based on His love for us. John reminds us of that reality in 1 John 4:19, “We love (agape) because He first loved us.” We must recognize that our love must be a reflection of His love, not merely an outpouring of emotion in song and feeling. Agape mandates obedience (“If you love Me you will keep my commandments,” John 14:15) and also action (as the benevolence outlined in James 2:14-19).

In today’s news we are seeing a revival in various areas of the United States. I do, indeed, hope these emotional outpourings lead to a greater understanding of biblical truth and a deep repentance that leads to true spirituality. Emotions can be good. Paul calls us to a dedication from the heart, in Romans 6:15-18. But notice that the dedication *must be to the teaching they had learned, not merely to a wonderful, loving feeling.*

Many people today are starved for love and are easily swayed toward any outpouring of emotional love. That can be good, but it can be bad, if and when emotional human love draws people away from the love of God. E.g., a girl might be drawn to the love of a man, but often that emotional human love ignores God’s call not to choose bad company which corrupts good morals, (1 Corinthians 15:33).

Our first and foremost love must be loving God’s truth. Why? Because, if we don’t we will not be saved, no matter how much we love in other ways. Listen to Paul’s warning in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10, “...that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the ***deception*** of wickedness for those who perish, ***because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.***”

“*What IS truth?*” the world asks? Jesus answers in His prayer to the Father, “Thy word is truth,” John 17:17. God’s truth must guide all of our emotions!

Who do *you* love? What do *you* love? People? Emotionalism? Kind-heartedness? Outpouring of emotions? Or do you love God’s truth so as to be saved? And do you love others as Jesus has loved you? (John 13:34, 35).

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