

## What is Love? by Hendrik Joubert

There is more to love than the spontaneous emotion generated by an attraction to someone or something, and the attraction is not always physical – unless we are talking about the shallow love into and out of which people tend to fall on a regular basis. This is not the love the God of the Bible commands of us, and it is not the love His Son had for the world when He died upon the cross. Love, as demonstrated by this sacrifice, is a selfless attitude expressed toward another, or others. **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)**

Yes, love is commanded. One is commanded to **love God, whom he has not seen: “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” (1John 4:20; Matthew 22:37)** The level and the intensity of this commanded love is missed because of the tendency to focus on the amazing love of God and Christ, a love which is beyond comprehension. **(Ephesians 3:19)** This selfish attitude ignores the demand to love Him in return with this intense love.

The line of priority continues: **The second is like it, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.”** Self is in the back of the line, but is the one who helps us understand more of the essence of the love commanded of us. One who has the type of self-love generated by the image in the mirror is considered weird and often is the brunt of jokes. The love of self involves an instinctive care, a deliberate consideration for the things necessary for self-preservation. This attitude, so basic it may be referred to as *survival instinct*, is the purest form of love.

This love is acknowledged by the Bible: **...for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,...** **(Ephesians 5:29)** This is the love used as a basis for reference when love is commanded by God: **So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself;...** **(Ephesians 5:28)**

This love is easily understood in its physical setting, however transplanting it to the spiritual realm is a challenge. This is where *eternal* survival is at stake; however that instinctive sense of survival is lacking. Eternity is a concept we talk about, however we cannot fully *know* it in a physical experiential sense. Notice Paul's discourse in **1Corinthians 15:35-58**, starting with the question: **But someone will say, “How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?”** What we learn about life after the grave is based purely upon faith, what we learn from God. **(Romans 10:17)**

Another contributing factor is a failure to realize the treat we face. When a cobra rises up to strike, self love is instinctive – kill it, or run for your life. Sin is not considered such a threat. One who is **hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Hebrews 3:13)** finds it difficult to remove self from this threat. The venom of sin causes one to focus on the grace of God, and not the need to **repent**, or **perish**. **(Luke 13:1-3)**

Love is demonstrated by action, and not proclaimed in word only: **“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” (John 14:15)** Consider also the definition of love towards God: **For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:3)**

This definition seems cold and impersonal, as does the idea that one could be commanded to love. It reminds one of the fixed marriage situations of years gone by. When love is present there is an active desire to please the recipient of that love. Consider how a young couple will work at establishing what the other likes in order to do it to express the love they have – What would you like to do? No, what would *you* like to do? Where do you want to go for supper? Where do *you* want to go? – and so it goes back and forth as the one seeks to please the other.

Through John God confirms the principle; if I love Him, I will find out what it is He likes, and I will do it. What makes this difficult is that I have to refrain from doing many of the things I do almost instinctively. Unlike the physical relationship between two couples I cannot merely walk away when I find our desires incompatible. I should have this attitude: ***We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,...*** (2 Corinthians 10:5)

I so desperately want the benefits of immorality, but I am not willing to sacrifice myself in return for His sacrifice. I become a prime subject for a delusion as I will accept anything that will give me both the pleasures of this life, but also the reward of heaven. (2Thessalonians 2:8-12; 2Timothy 4:3)

Following is an expression of victorious love towards God: ***And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even to death.*** (Revelation 12:11) And here is the attitude we should have towards securing eternity for our brothers and our sisters: ***We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*** (1John 3:16) The *true love* commanded of God does not consist merely of words: ***Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.*** (1John 3:18)