



## Knowing Love: Part 2

To know love is to love God. To love God is to know love.

*Ephesians 3:17-19*

### BIBLE PASSAGE

#### Ephesians 3:17-19 (NKJV - New King James Version)

<sup>17</sup> that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

<sup>18</sup> may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—

<sup>19</sup> to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

### INTRO

Love - God is its source and its definition. True and full love does not exist outside of the person of God. Love is not a principle that God adheres to or an action God takes, it is the definition of his nature.

***“To know love is to know God. To know God is to know love.”***

Human beings don't reserve the right to define their own borders, boundaries and definitions of what love is or is not because it's rooted in an outside source Who is the ultimate authority. People can talk about "all we need is love" and how we ought to all be loving each other because love is the answer, that will only be as effective as the definition they are using of love. A love rooted in God's truth and character is a love that will bear fruit, bring authentic unity, pursue forgiveness and restoration, and bring wholeness.

## APPLICATION

God is not merely the definition of love, He is the demonstration of love. The greatest picture of the love of God being demonstrated and manifested is in the person, work, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through Christ, this love of God is no longer foreign, but has been given to us and poured out in us.

Paul says that because of our reception of what Jesus has done,

**[ROM 5:5 NKJV] ...THE LOVE OF GOD HAS BEEN POURED OUT IN OUR HEARTS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT WHO WAS GIVEN TO US.**

As that love is poured into us, it will also overflow out of us. According to the scripture, the love of God in the believer should flow in two directions: Upward and outward, to God and to others, and in that order.

## APPLICATION

In between the love that God has demonstrated to us, and the love that we are to demonstrate to one another is the bridge of the love that we are to demonstrate to God. In between receiving the love of God, and giving the love of God, is giving God our love.

There is no higher expression of love than when a person expresses their love to God. In fact I believe it is safe to say that ***you and I will never be able to fully love others as we should if God doesn't fully have our love first.***

**QUOTE**

**“The only way love can effectively be directed outward towards others is when it is first directed upward towards God.”**

It's a little silly, but to say we are going to love others without prioritizing our love for God first is like inviting all your friends over to celebrate Billy's birthday, but you didn't invite Billy!

**TODAY'S SHORT STATEMENT**

***“To know love is to love God. To love God is to know love.”***

**BIBLE PASSAGE**

**[1Jo 4:19 NKJV] 19 We love Him because He first loved us.**

John will make it clear, as we will discuss next week, that those who truly love God will not be able to contain their love for each other, but he wants us also to see that the only appropriate response to the love that God demonstrated toward us is to love Him in return. In fact, we couldn't even love him as we should if it wasn't for Him initiating love toward us in the first place.

Why should we love God? The answer to that question is multi-layered, but at the very base of it is simply, “Because He is God, and He loved us first.”

Of course, we understand that we could never love God as perfectly as God loves us because our love will always be tainted and flawed by our human nature. We could never offer God the love that He deserves even though He offered us a love we could never deserve. This, however, should never restrain us from seeking to live a life that is poured out in a genuine and growing love for God.

## APPLICATION

True love is not merely spoken, but demonstrated. It's more than an emotional feeling about someone or something. Agape is observable and palpable.

When my daughters were younger, I used to ask them what it means to love God. Once Taylor, when she was probably 10 or 11 responded with a straightforward and simple answer that only could have come from a child:

***“Instead of just saying that you love God, actually act like you love God.”***

STORY: It reminds me of the little boy who wanted to tell his dad he loved him. After getting home exhausted from work, the dad sat down in front of the TV for a little decompression time. Eventually, the little boy ran over and dove into his dad's lap. The dad, slightly shocked and caught off guard asked, “Son, why did you go and do that?” The little boy replied, “Dad, I love you so much, I just had to do something about it.”

Does God have our love? Do you just need to do something about it? What does the Bible show us about the love that we are to have for God and what it will require from us?

# 1 Loving God is beyond our natural ability

## APPLICATION

There's an interesting exchange in John 21 between the resurrected Jesus and Peter that has always intrigued and captivated my mind, and you don't see it in the English language... it's hidden in the Greek words.

- Jesus, risen from the dead, appears to his disciples. After revealing His identity through a fishing miracle, Peter immediately responds by jumping out of the boat and

running to shore to meet Jesus. Jesus has breakfast cooking on a fire for the disciples and seems to get into a side-conversation with Peter about his future ministry and death.

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**[Jhn 21:15-19 NKJV] 15 So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (agapeo) Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (phileo) You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs." 16 He said to him again a second time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (agapeo) Me?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love (Phileo) You." He said to him, "Tend My sheep." 17 He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love (Phileo) Me?" Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, "Do you love Me?" And he said to Him, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love (Phileo) You." Jesus said to him, "Feed My sheep. 18 "Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish." 19 This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, "Follow Me."**

## APPLICATION

What's interesting here is that Peter seems to dodge the actual question Jesus is asking a couple of times.

- Agapeo - the verb form - loving with sacrificial self-giving action. This is how Jesus frames the question. It's not just "Peter, do you love me generally?" It's, "Peter, do you love me in this specific way?"
- Pete responds with, "Lord, I phileo you.." This is the Greek word that means loyalty, affection, or camaraderie. In other words, Peter says, "Yeah, I'm on your team, Jesus; I feel connected to you."
- This happens twice. The third time, it's Jesus that changes the word. He downgrades his language to Peter's response and asks Peter if he's loyal and considers Him a friend. This is why Peter's discouraged because He just said that he did twice already.

- Directly after this, Jesus tells Peter that ultimately, Peter would lose his life, being led down a path he didn't want to go.

## APPLICATION

I think there's a lot to unpack here, but admittedly, I feel as though I still haven't made it to the root of this.

- Up to this point, Peter had not yet been filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. His last experience with Jesus before this was denying Him THREE TIMES. It's not accidental that Jesus asks Peter about love three times... one for each denial.
- I think Peter was putting the pieces together. "Peter, do you agape me?" Peter might be thinking, "If I loved Jesus in that way, I wouldn't have fled to preserve my own life when they took him away."
  - Do you remember when Jesus told the disciples they would be scattered, and Peter responded, "Even all are made to stumble, I will never deny you. I will die with you before I deny you." How'd Peter's resolve work out for Him?
  - At this point, I think Peter's being honest about the fact that he felt that he didn't have what it took within himself to truly Agapeo Jesus. Jesus loved to the death. He gave it all, holding nothing back. That's how agape love works. Peter wasn't sure he had that yet... he had already failed.
- Jesus does not condemn Peter for his response but rather comes to Peter's level. He knows Peter isn't there yet, but he also knows that Peter will get there eventually because one day in the future, his life will once again be threatened for the sake of Jesus, and only agape love would be enough to give Peter the strength to go the final distance.

I find it very interesting that in Peter's first epistle, He writes:

## BIBLE PASSAGE

**[1Pe 1:6-9 NKJV] 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise,**

**honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love (agapeo). Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your]souls.**

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#### APPLICATION

I believe that the Holy Spirit changed everything for Peter. When the Spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, He began to birth love in their hearts that nothing else could produce. That love gave him courage, removed his fear, and freed him to follow His destiny all the way to an upside-down cross, unwilling to die the same way as His God and Savior.

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#### APPLICATION

Before I get into the imperatives of what it requires from us to love God as He deserves, I think it's important to understand that it can be a process. In fact, the first step into growing into loving God in a sacrificial, self-giving way, pouring it all out for Him, requires for us first to be honest about our need for the Holy Spirit to build that love within our hearts.

- Maybe you have a Phileo love for Jesus. "Oh, I'm on team Jesus. I go to church, read my Bible, Christian t-shirts, and Phil Wickham all day long. I'm loyal to Jesus, and I feel connected to Him emotionally."
- But is your love for Jesus maturing into a love that goes beyond simple affiliation to sacrifice? Has what He has done for you has become so overwhelmingly clear and beautiful that giving yourself for the cause of Jesus is becoming more natural and joyful?

If I were to ask for a raise of hands to the question, "Would you die for the sake of Jesus?" Many people, like Peter did before the cross, would put a well-intentioned hand in the air. But let me challenge you with a couple thoughts:

- If you're unwilling to take some of your money and make a sacrifice to give to the Lord because it might interfere with your ESPN and Netflix subscription, do you think you have what it takes to stand for Jesus with a gun pointed to your head? If you struggle

to take 30 minutes to go help a brother in need because it might interfere with your football game or your nail appointment, will you lay it all down for Jesus when the world turns against you?

#### APPLICATION

Perhaps, as we look more deeply into this tonight, we should start by honestly telling the Lord, "Lord I want to love you. I have the intention of loving you. But God, I need the love of the Holy Spirit to radically work in me to come to the place where loving you becomes my natural response to everything you've done for me."

## 2

### Loving God as He deserves takes the entirety of our being.

#### APPLICATION

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment (or in other words, the thing that matters most to God), He clearly told us that the first commandment (the primary, the first in priority) is,

***MAR 12:30 NKJV] 30 "...YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.' THIS IS THE FIRST COMMANDMENT (FIRST IN RANK)."***

In this answer, Jesus quotes something every Jewish child would know by heart. It was the "John 3:16" of Judaism (still is today). It's what is called the SHEMA ISRAEL (hear O Israel) It is taken directly from Deuteronomy 6. There we read the context:



**BIBLE PASSAGE****Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NKJV - New King James Version)**

<sup>4</sup> “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!

<sup>5</sup> You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

<sup>6</sup> “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.

<sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.

<sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.

<sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

**THE LORD IS ONE**

Literally this translates, “Hear O Israel, Jehovah stands alone.” In a polytheistic world, this was a unique and revolutionary statement. That Jehovah, the true and living God, was the **ONLY** God.

- And yet, even in the Hebrew language, we find something very interesting. For in God’s aloneness and oneness, is a compound unity.
- Our God is one - Elohim Echod - Elohim is in the plural. How can the one single God be pluralistic? It’s what we call the godhead. Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
- Not three separate God’s, but three unique persons all who alone are God.

Because He alone is God, He alone should be loved above all other potential gods or idols.

**APPLICATION**

LOVE - what the one true God desires

Now, love as a command seems awkward at first. How can we be commanded to love?  
Doesn't it have to be voluntary to be love?

Is it like a command you teach a dog? Fido, love me! And he goes and fetches you a soda?

Let's look at the etymology a little first:

HEBREW - Love (AHAV) - in its outline of biblical usage, it can mean multiple things, but one in particular.

***“Human appetite for objects such as food, drink, sleep, wisdom.”***

*EXAMPLES: How many people in here LOVE ice-cream? How many people LOVE to read? How many people LOVE a good movie? How many people LOVE a great hike? You see, though our personalities might incline us to certain things over others, we aren't born with a love for anything, but we are all born with the God-given capacity to develop desires and loves based on what we do.*

*And chances are, all the loves you have in life started somewhere with an act of obedience, an experience or initiation.*

*EXAMPLES:*

*- Eat your dinner! I don't want to. Eat it anyway... mmmmm! I love that!*

*- Hey, you have to go on this hike with us, you will love it!*

*- Hey, see this movie, I swear you'll love it. No it looks stupid. "Wow, when can I see that again."*

## **YOU SHALL LOVE**

Develop an appetite for God above all else. Experience God, initiate time with God, and listen to God even when you don't feel like it or think you'll like it!

**Psalm 34:8 - O taste and see that the Lord is good!**

## HOW ARE WE TO LOVE GOD? WITH ALL...

I guess you could say that there is only ONE thing that God deserves, and that is ALL! But on a more personal and

convicting note, what this really means is:

***“True love for God doesn’t leave room for affections that compete for God’s rightful place in your life.”***

- If you love your wife, there's no room for pictures of girls on screens or flirtatious conversations in the office. If you love your Savior, there's no room for the things that seek to compete for His rightful place of worship in your life.

Now of course this is not God forbidding the enjoyment or love of other things. Just after this Jesus says love your neighbor. It's just that every other love is a lesser love than the love for God. This is not so much about how many things are in your life, but the priority and extent of how you love those things.

- **EXAMPLE:** “Can I love God and love golf at the same time?” The answer is yes. But the bigger questions comes when we ask “Do I love golf more than I love God?” If the answer to that question is NO, than the third question becomes, “How can I love God IN my golfing?”

***“It is not so much that we should love God more, but that we should love everything else less in comparison.” -CS Lewis***

**APPLICATION:** You see, what this command does it it doesn’t allow us to compartmentalize our lives and our loves (The God part, the hobby part, the work part, etc.) It’s ALL the God part! The command involves the entirety of our being! Kent

Hughes sums it up really well:

## QUOTE

**“It does not take much of a man to be a believer, but it takes all there is of him!”**

Kent Hughes

**WITH ALL YOUR HEART (HEBREW - LEBAB - THE SEAT YOUR EMOTIONS AND PASSIONS. GREEK: KARDIA - THE SOURCE OF YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE)**

Do I honor God with the stuff that's inside me. The stuff that no one else sees? People see my actions and can judge certain things, but only God knows the affections of the heart.

- Remember one of Jesus' biggest problems with the religion and worship of the Pharisees?

**[Mat 15:8 NKJV] 8 “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.”**

To love God with all my heart means that my actions, my worship and my words stem from, and are motivated by a genuine love for Him; not a sense of religious duty, or out of selfishly oriented motivations.

- You might lift your hands in worship because you love God. You might lift them because you want someone to think your spiritual. Others might never know why you're doing it, but God does.
- You might serve a need, do an act of kindness, go on a mission trip, but if a love for God is not in your heart, than it's all for nothing.
- On the other side, "Would I still worship, serve, and give if no one was watching? Does my love for God hold up in private as well as in public?"

**ALL YOUR SOUL (CLOSELY ASSOCIATE WITH THE DEEPEST DESIRES OF YOUR LIFE)**

Soul was the word to describe the whole of one's life and existence. It included your heart, but encompassed so much more.

- What are you most passionate about? That comes from your soul. Some of you are passionate about your work. Some of you are passionate about politics.
- What is it that drives you to that next thing every

morning you wake up? That's the "soul" part of you that needs to wholly love God.

- My passions need to be directed by a love for God. My desires need to be governed by a love for God.

## ALL YOUR STRENGTH

Strength or Might has an implication of all that a person possesses that makes them strong. As one author puts it,

***"...the might of a person is not simply who he is, but what he has at his disposal."***

Your "might" or strength consists of your determination and your drive, but also your wealth, your resources, and your gifts, both spiritual and physical. All of these things form your might.

- Have you ever seen someone pour their time, money, emotions, and effort into something? They are loving that thing with their might.
- When I'm loving God with all my strength, I am saying that He has first dibs to everything I possess to use for His purposes.

The tragedy of Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler was his unwillingness to truly love God with ALL His strength.

## ALL YOUR MIND (THIS WAS AN ADDITION BY JESUS; HE OBVIOUSLY HAS THE AUTHORITY TO DO SO!)

(Deanoia - how we think and understand).

**Romans 12:2 - "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God."**

- I think this is particularly relevant today. Many people today want to trade any form of thinking about God for pure emotionalism or experience.

- It sounds like this, “Don’t bore me with all that theological language, I just want to feel God!” Well, God wants us to feel Him a little with our heads!

## QUOTE

“**Feeling God’s presence is wonderful, but true love for God seeks to understand Him as well. The heart cannot love what the mind does not know.**”

Pastor Josh

## 3 Loving God as He deserves requires willful obedience.

## APPLICATION

You will be hard-pressed to find a passage in Scripture about loving God that does not include obedience.

- In the Old Testament, commands to *love the Lord* are followed by phrases like: “*Keep His commandments, obey His statutes, keep His charge, walk in His ways.*”
- In the New Testament, Jesus makes it unmistakably clear:

“**If you love Me, keep My commandments.**” (John 14:15, NKJV)  
 “**If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.**” (John 14:23, NKJV)

The apostle John reaffirms this truth:

“**He who says, ‘I know Him,’ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him.**” (1 John 2:4-5, NKJV)

## GOD'S LOVE LANGUAGE

Many are familiar with *The Five Love Languages*:

- Gift Giving
- Quality Time
- Words of Affirmation
- Acts of Service
- Physical Touch

But there is a **sixth**—and it is the most important for us to understand.

**God's love language is obedience.**

Loving God is not just about emotions or words; it is demonstrated through faithful submission to His will. Yet some resist this idea:

“Is God just a dictator who enjoys ordering people around?”

Nothing could be further from the truth. If we see obedience as burdensome, we have a distorted view of God. His commands are not arbitrary rules but expressions of His deep, unfailing love for us.

- Every command God gives is **birthed out of love**.
- Every instruction is for **our good**—to lead us into joy, peace, and blessing.
- God's joy is not in having **slaves** but in seeing **His children flourish** through obedience.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 John 5:3, NKJV)

## ILLUSTRATION

Like rebellious children who resist a parent's wisdom, we often treat obedience as **optional**—something to consider *if* it is convenient. But Jesus never left room for selective obedience.

We tend to overcomplicate what is simple:

- Imagine telling a child not to run into the street, and instead of obeying, he demands a *systematic overview* of your reasoning.
- Many of us do the same with God—debating, theologizing, and rationalizing what He has already made plain:

“If you love Me, keep My commandments.” (John 14:15, NKJV)

Picking and choosing which of Jesus’ words we want to obey **limits our love for Him**. Partial obedience is **disobedience**.

#### HOW CAN WE PRACTICALLY OBEY GOD?

1. **By Loving One Another** – *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* (John 15:12)
2. **By Placing Our Faith in Christ** – Obedience begins with trusting Jesus fully for salvation. *[Jhn 6:29 NKJV] 29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.”*
3. **By Knowing His Word** – *“I have hidden Your word in my heart that I might not sin against You.”* (Psalm 119:11) How can we obey if we do not know what He commands?
4. **By Walking in the Spirit** – True obedience is not about striving but about surrendering to the Holy Spirit’s leading.

Obedience is not about duty—it is about **delight**. It is not a burden—it is a **blessing**. The more we obey, the more we walk in the fullness of God’s love.

So the question remains:

**Do we truly love Him? The obedience of our lives will tell the truest story.**

#### CONCLUSION

Maybe, as you reflect on Jesus’ words about love and obedience, you’ve come to a sobering realization:



*"By these standards, I don't love God as much as I thought I did!"*

If that thought crosses your mind, you're not alone. Many faithful believers throughout history have had the same realization. In fact, one of the most **vibrant and active** churches of the early Christian era—the church of **Ephesus**—faced this exact issue.

Paul's prayer for them in **Ephesians 3:18-19** was that they would **know the depth of God's love**. But by the time Jesus addressed them in the book of Revelation, they had strayed from their **love for God**.

## BUSY BUT DISTANT

The Ephesian church had everything that, outwardly, looked like spiritual success:

- **Works and labor** – They served tirelessly.
- **Patience** – They endured hardship.
- **Holiness** – They refused to tolerate sin.
- **Doctrinal Soundness** – They opposed false teaching
- **Perseverance** – They remained steadfast in faith.

By all appearances, they were a thriving church. If they had been a modern congregation, they might have said:

*"We've got it all! The homeless ministry, the worship team, the kids' program, the addiction recovery groups, the community outreach, the doctrinal committees—we are building the kingdom of God!"*

But then came Jesus' piercing words:

**"Nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love."** (Revelation 2:4, NKJV)

Their hands were busy **doing** the work of God, but their hearts had drifted **away** from a love relationship **with** God.

Does that sound familiar? How often do we fall into the same trap—working tirelessly for God while **neglecting intimacy with Him**?

## THE SOLUTION

Jesus did not leave the Ephesian church (or us) without a solution. His command was clear:

**"Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent." (Revelation 2:5, NKJV)**

- ✓ **Remember** – Recall the closeness you once had with Jesus.
- ✓ **Repent** – Turn away from whatever has taken priority over Him.
- ✓ **Restore** – Return to what you did when your love for Him was fresh and fervent.

How is your **love for Jesus** today?

- When was the last time you truly **enjoyed** His presence?
- When was the last time **prayer** felt like an expectant joy rather than an obligation?
- When was the last time you **couldn't wait** to say yes to whatever He asked?

If your love has cooled, Jesus is calling you back. **Remember. Repent. Restore.**

Let's not settle for outward activity **without** inward devotion. Let's not just be **workers** for God—let's be **lovers of God**.

**[Eph 6:24 NIV] 24 Grace to all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with an undying love (incorrupt, sincere).**