

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be looking at the subject of love.

I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter. The primary criteria for inclusion are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

Also, if you have particular subjects that you would like me to cover in the Newsletter, please let me know.

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Genesis 3:3 (Inspired Version) But behold, my beloved Son, which was my beloved and chosen from the beginning, said unto me, Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever.

Genesis 7:40 (Inspired Version) And in the garden of Eden gave I unto man his agency; and unto thy brethren have I said, and also gave commandment, that they should love one another and that they should choose me their Father.

1 Nephi 3

56 And he said unto me, Knowest thou the condescension of God?

57 And I said unto him, I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things.

There is a certain truism to the fact that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is about love. In the King James version of the bible the word "love" or any variants of it are not to be found until Genesis 22:2, where Abraham is described as loving his only son Isaac, and he is told to go and offer him as an offering of burnt sacrifice. To many this does not sound like the commandment of a loving God to offer one's only son as a burnt sacrifice, but there is much more to that account than first meets the eye.

The end of that account is that Abraham obeyed and a replacement was made for Isaac in the form of a ram (a male sheep). Even so, Abraham depended on the promise of God to the end that he knew God could raise him from the dead to complete the promise.

Hebrews 11

17 By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,

18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called--

19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from whence also he received him in a figure.

(Abraham's faith was such that he understood that the power of God could do all things, and this because God loved him.)

Nephi was shown in a vision many things and they all pointed to how God loves his children whom he had created. Moses was told about the commandment given to Adam and Eve that they should love one another and to choose God as their father. Moses was also shown how Jesus was the beloved and chosen from the beginning.

Even with these few examples we can see that love is really a very big subject. From our own lives we know that love takes shape in our lives in myriad ways, none of which is so fixed and immovable that we can exactly describe it to the smallest detail. Many times we resort to giving examples or showing what love is "like" for lack of a better way of describing it.

We can use **similar** terms like "affection" or "devotion" or "fascination" even, but love has its own way of being rather resistant to simple definition, and that is because there are so many ways it affects, effects, influences, or does things for us or to us.

Many theologians are quick to point out six definitions of love from the Greek language, but I will refrain from these because translation is not my area of expertise, so I will endeavor to list a few kinds of love that I can describe in my own limited way.

Marital love

Parental love

Childlike love

Brotherly love

Kindly Affectioned love

Godly love

One or more of these terms may be a bit surprising to you, but you'll note that I do **not** include the following in the former list:

Lust
Greed
Sex
Passion
Self-Adoration
Material Love

In the annals of theology my lists may not hold up to scrutiny, but let me explain.

For the most part, love is what most would agree is an unconditional affection, which can be either given or received, or be given and received. The way I've named the terms should be fairly self-explanatory, but the second list – being my “list” of things that are “not” love – may be just as useful as the first to understand what needs to be known about love.

Lust is a condition in which a person desires to have someone for themselves on the basis of only one or two traits, whether that is beauty, or intelligence, or some talent. Whatever the trait or traits, lust, like many of the other “not” love words, is a diseased version of love that cannot really qualify as love. It isn't self-less in any sense of the term.

Greed, likewise, is a condition in which a person may want someone or something for themselves to the exclusion of letting any others interact with them. Greed is a poisonous version of love because it centers on the possession – in the sense of slavery or imprisonment – of the object of desire.

Sex is, to many people, the very pinnacle of the expression of love, but it is similarly not qualified to be on the roster of things that love is because intercourse is not itself the expression of love between two people. It does serve an important part in the life of people, but two people may not have any love for each other and yet participate in sexual intercourse. The great fallacy of many generations including the current one is that the culmination of love is sex, as though it is the proof of love, but love cannot be proven by intercourse itself.

Passion, in a similar way as Lust, Greed, or even Sex, can be described in several ways, both as good or as bad. For example, one may have a passion for gardening, or they may have a passion for food, or they may have passion towards their spouse, and in itself passion is not bad. But passion is something other than love itself because it is not self-guided towards some end result that benefits oneself or others. Passion is something you can have, but it is not something that you can give to others.

Self-Adoration is possibly one of the strangest entries, but it is really and truly the thing that made Satan rebel against God. Satan considered himself to be deserving of something he knew could never be given to him, and it was as much the definition of an intellectual lie as

ever has been faced in the history of the creation. This is a far cry from the “love thy neighbor as thyself” – which suggests one should love oneself. Self-Adoration demands self-worship -- and unworthily so.

Material Love is one of the most simple or base items on the list as it contains elements of Lust and Greed, but directed towards things in the physical world, though it may differ from those by magnitude. For example, if I love the flavor of butterscotch, it is perhaps not sinful like the greed to gain more money at all costs, but it isn't really on the same qualifying scale as these overtly evil examples. It is not likely that I would kill someone to get butterscotch, but it could be a temptation to steal something even if I never act on it. There is a spectrum of this desire that may make little difference in the realm of righteousness or unrighteousness, but that is also the point – it is not a very good definition of love, and to excess it can be sinful.

With these “not-love” items taken care of we return to the real thing, and we can see a pattern in what love consists of that helps us to understand the difference it makes in our lives.

Love – the real thing – makes us better individually and collectively, and not only from an interpersonal or social perspective. Love makes us better spiritually, and perhaps as importantly, it can help others spiritually as well.

When a man and woman love each other enough to be married, they have decided that neither is complete enough by themselves to walk through life separately any longer. If or when that stops because of death the pain is real, as that part of the one being is no longer there to provide the added strength. Scripturally we know that the marriage between Christ and the Church is to make one being that is perfect, living beyond the constraints of time and forever taking joy in the presence of one another.

Likewise the love of parents towards their children is a beneficent relationship knowing that there is a special bond that cannot be broken, perfect and undeniable, knowing further that what was created is unique and part of the union. There may be some who would criticize this definition because there are parents that seemingly have little regard for their children, and so it is, but the absence or presence of love is the only difference. Parental love is pure when it is present, and though there are those who may be misguided about how to be parents to their children, pure love is what makes the relationship worthwhile when they desire to do so.

Childlike Love is the view of Parental Love from the other end of the telescope. A little child is not capable of the same degree of understanding as the parents, so their understanding and experience with love is perhaps simpler. A child loves his or her parents initially

without any reservations because they are the world to that child, but as the child grows – their ignorance becomes an appreciation. Not all children have loving families, but in those families that do the ability to mature in this love for ones' parents can incentivize them to have their own families and share the same love they were partakers of. One of the hallmarks of love is that the capacity for it to increase does not have an upper boundary.

As individuals we have the capacity to possess more than one kind of love. If we mature to adulthood, our love for our parents does not have to cease, and if we have children our love for them does not have to diminish because they grow up, and neither is the ability for us to have what I term Kindly Affected Love for those around us ever at risk of being limited by circumstances. In nearly all cases, the love we have for others is our decision (excepting perhaps little children, in which case it is the reality of the world they know and not a decision to make), and not something that merely “happens” to us by some happenstance. We have friends that we may not meet with for years or even decades whom we have fondness for because of past shared experiences, and while we may not be in constant contact with them, we are kindly affected for them because we cherish them and the memories we have with them.

A step up from Kindly Affected Love is perhaps the strongest adult love we can have for those around us that are not a spouse or children. Brotherly love can only be described as a Christ-like love for our fellow man, and we may make commitments to live or die in service to Christ for their sakes. This is a love that may be so great that it says, “I have such a great desire for you to have eternal life that I am willing to do all things so that you might make that right choice and find your way to salvation.” This is the love that the apostles demonstrated time and again in their ministry.

Surely to have a single paragraph to explain these lofty definitions is inadequate, but it must be inadequate because of the last of these terms, which is “Godly Love”.

We can look at this last term from two perspectives since it involves the first of the great commandments, that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. But the second part is equally important, because God so loved the world that he gave his Only Begotten Son, that whoso believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

Godly Love therefore is a two-part definition. If we love God with all that we can, and we know that he has loved us enough to give his all for us, then we can be part of that Love.

1 John 4

8 He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love.

9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his Only Begotten Son into the world that we might live through him.

10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

12 No man hath seen God at any time, except them who believe. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world.

15 Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

16 **And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.**

17 Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world.

18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

19 We love him because he first loved us.

John here states a definition that is simple at the first read, but it requires understanding to appreciate. From the beginning of the creation to the end of judgment, the Love of God has defined the purpose for the actions he has taken to ensure the outcome he has desired for us from the beginning. Where we have seen God issuing judgments it was for our perfection, and where we have seen God sacrifice it has been for the realization of that perfect plan for us.

What is that perfect plan? If there is no other simple statement to be found, it is that he wants us to be with him forever, and that cannot happen if we remain in our sins. He took the necessary steps, sacrificing the only thing great enough to accomplish the task: himself.

Any of the various shades of love that we have discussed are the helpers along the way to make this final reality a worthwhile effort. It adds meaning to the statement that **God is love** to see this scripture in a brighter light:

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when he shall appear, **we shall be like him**; for we shall see him as he is.

If we are filled with the love of God, then it is his Holy Spirit that fills us, and we know that only those temples of the Holy Ghost that have been filled will remain.

1 Corinthians 6

19 What! Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

20 For ye are bought with a price; therefore, glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Be a temple of God's love.