

Love God, love others, love yourself

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Do not be conformed to this world: but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Romans 12:2

How can we live as genuine, victorious Christians in a world where Christianity is barely tolerated, and often persecuted?

So that:

- **we don't conform to the world**
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world....
- **we make a difference in the world**
but be transformed by the renewing of your minds....
- **God's will is done in our lives and in His world**
then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12:2

People often asked Jesus similar questions!

What is the greatest commandment? Matthew 22:34 - 40

What is the most important thing in life? Mark 12:28 - 34

What must I do to inherit eternal life? Luke 10:25 – 28

His answer:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. Mark 12:30,31

Do this and you will live. Luke 10:28

What happens if we don't love God/our neighbour/ourselves?

Personally?

In our society?



Loving God/our neighbour/ourselves is pretty familiar. It's easy to say, but hard to do! Let's explore this more deeply and live it out! Nothing has more potential than this to bless our lives and change our world. That's why God's message to us is:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. Mark 12:30,31

<p>What?</p>	<p>Love (agapao) God's divine, sacrificial, inspired love</p> <p><i>We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19 God is love 1 John 4:16</i> <i>Love comes from God 1 John 4:7</i></p> <p>We are loved, and so we love.....</p>
<p>Who?</p>	<p>the LORD your God</p> <p>LORD = YHVH – the eternal, self-existent one (Yahweh)</p> <p>God's name was too holy to speak so was replaced by <i>adonai</i> - sovereign, master, Lord.</p> <p>The English word Jehovah has come from</p> <p style="text-align: center;"> Y a H o V a H ↖ ↗ ↘ <i>adonai</i> </p> <p>Your God = elohim (plural ie. Gods) - strong, mighty, God</p> <p><i>Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one. Mark 12:29</i></p> <p>God is plural (known to us in three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit) yet one.</p>
<p>How?</p>	<p>with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.</p> <p><i>How do you love the Father? Jesus, the Son? The Holy Spirit?</i></p> <p>If we don't love the Lord:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>personally</i>: we lose our fellowship with God, our lives become meaningless and our moral standards drop... ▪ <i>in society</i>: other gods take over, moral standards go, society falls apart, the world becomes a mess... <p>But if we really love the Lord. Wow! That's life!!</p> <p>The key to loving God is falling in love with Jesus. It's easy to love a person!</p> <p>As you fall in love with Jesus your love flows over into love for the Father and the Holy Spirit, then to others, and yourself.</p>

Falling in love with Jesus

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Mark 12:30

1 John 4:7-21

- love comes from God (because God is love)
- we love Jesus because He first loved us
- our love for Jesus overflows
 - in love for God
 - in love for others
- we have life by the Holy Spirit, as God's love fills us
- we do what God wants us to do.



To fall in love with Jesus we:

- See Him** *Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see Him, since Jesus was coming that way. Luke 19:3*
- Want to know Him** *Come near to God and He will come near to you. James 4:8*
- Meet Him** *If anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in. Rev 3:20*
- Spend time with Him** *I want to know Christ ...becoming like Him... Phil 3:10,11*
- Become one with Him** *And we... are being transformed into His likeness with ever increasing glory... 2 Cor 3:18 then one day...*
- Become His Bride** *Let us rejoice and be glad...for the wedding of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready Rev 19:7*

What's it like to fall in love?



When you fall in love with Jesus it affects all aspects of your life:

How this shows:

With all your heart (feelings)	
With all your soul (personality)	
With all your mind (thinking)	
With all your strength (actions)	

You will have your own way of loving the Lord, but Jesus said it should include **all** of these.

So loving the Lord means:

- you are in love with Jesus
- this love for Jesus infuses all aspects of your life (feelings, personality, thinking, actions)
- this love flows out of you
 - back to God
 - to others
 - to yourself
- you are really alive because you are fulfilling God's purposes.



God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in Him. In this way love is made complete among us. 1 John 5:16

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.

Love your neighbour as yourself. Mark 12: 30, 31

- The key to living as an authentic Christian is to love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.
- Love for our neighbours is a natural outflow of our love for the Lord.
- Loving your neighbour/living as an authentic Christian is based on biblical principles (as it's all about choices).

Let's now explore some of these principles and choices:

Living as an authentic Christian in an anti-Christian world

- follow your conscience Rom 14:22
- act with graciousness Phil 4:5
- be a great example 1 Cor 3:21-23
- lay down your life for others
- be separate 2 Cor 6:14 - 7:1
- love with action 1 Cor 13

Principle 1: Follow your conscience

See Romans 14:13-23

Key verse: ***Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.***

Romans 14:22

- You know what is right for you to do (and do it!)
- You are happy within yourself about the actions you take
- You are free to take these actions
- You don't condemn yourself about the actions you take

This is a 'blessed' state! Then out of this (with a clear conscience):

- you won't judge others v13
- you won't knowingly put a stumbling block in someone else's way v13, 14-16
- you know what's right for you, and accept that this may be different for others v14
- you are a positive example v16
- you have righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit v17
- your actions are pleasing to God v18
- your actions are 'approved by men' v18

For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit v17

It's not about doing what you want! It's about doing what God (the King) wants. You lay down your will to do His will. Psalm 40:8

So, in loving your neighbour (and acting as an authentic Christian)

- you seek to bring about their good and build them up v19
- you do 'what leads to peace' v19
- you won't do anything that would cause them harm v20,21
- you will be governed by your conscience, doing what you believe is right in the situation:
 - right before God
 - best for them
 - that you are happy to do
 - that you don't condemn yourself about v22
- and if you go against this it is sin for you. v23

Declaration for Principle 1: Follow your conscience

In loving others ***I will follow my conscience***

- | | |
|------------|--------------------------------------|
| I will do | - what I believe is right before God |
| | - what is best for others |
| | - what I am happy to do |
| I won't do | - what I condemn myself about. |

Blessed are those who do not condemn themselves by what they approve. Romans 14:22

Principle 2: Act with graciousness

People react strongly to *how* they are treated (more so than to what is said or done).

Let all men know your forbearance or Let your gentleness be evident to all. Philippians 4:5

The key is *epeiekeia*. This word is translated: *gentleness, moderation, forbearance, lenience, considerateness, tolerance, unselfishness, fairmindedness, big-heartedness, patience, graciousness* ie. 'sweet reasonableness'

Out of your love for the Lord, and your inner poise you act to **all** with graciousness. This principle underpins all the others because if you don't act with graciousness any act of 'love' could be misinterpreted.

- It's easy to be gracious towards those who are pleasant – you like – have similar standards – believe like you.
- It's easy to be harsh and judgemental to those who are different from you.

To "love your neighbour" means you will be gracious to all: caring, accepting, wanting their best, gracious If you act with graciousness your love will be more likely to be accepted.

Example: *What is epeiekeia in the current situation regarding homosexual issues?*

Principle 3: Be a great example

To love others means we will be a great example: showing them how wonderful God's way of life really is.

- Christians are often seen as anti-fun, wowsers, do-gooders, missing out, bound up by irrelevant rules. Not a good example of how life can be lived!
- Jesus said: *I am come that you may have life and have it to the full.* John 10:10

God wants the best for us! So let's live our lives to the full, appreciating and experiencing all that God has provided. We have freedom to live a wonderful life! What an example this will be to our neighbours!

Set an example ... in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. 1 Tim 4:12

All things are yours the world, or life, or death, or the present, or the futureall are yours, and you are of Christ and Christ is of God. 1 Corinthians 3: 21-23

The world isn't evil. God made it and said *it is very good.* Genesis 1:31.
So, appreciate and enjoy it. Don't be bound up!

Put your hope in God who richly provides everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17

(But remember not to let your freedom cause problems for your neighbour. *It is better not to eat meat, or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves.* Romans 14:21,22)

Loving your neighbour means you will be a great example to them of what fullness of life in Christ really is.

**Declaration for Principle 2: Act with graciousness
Principle 3: Be a great example**

In loving others..... *I will act towards them with graciousness*

Let your gentleness be evident to all. Philippians 4: 5

I will live life to the full and be a great Christian example.

Set an example ... in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. 1 Tim 4:12

Principle 4: Be separate

Therefore come out from them and be separate. 2 Corinthians 6:17

See: 2 Corinthians 6:14 – 7:1 This passage is all about our attitude to the world.

- **Some Christians use (abuse?) the world for their pleasure**
Read Philippians 3:17-20 *Their mind is on earthly things.*
- **Some Christians try to isolate themselves from anything 'worldly'**

Neither of these are good examples for your 'neighbours'!!!

So what does it mean to 'come out from them and be separate'?

2 Corinthians 6:14 -7:1 contains wonderful promises about living positively in God's world:

- We are the temple of the living God v16
- God will live with us and walk among us v16
- He will be our God, and we will be His people v16
- He will receive us v17
- He will be a Father to us v18
- We will be His sons and daughters v19

These are wonderful promises, but they all have conditions!!

- **Be separate from sin**

What do righteousness and wickedness have in common? v14

Flee from anything you know to be sinful (but recognise that sin is, by its nature, deceitful). Open yourself to God, obey His Word and follow your conscience.

Make every effort to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12: 14

- **Be separate from darkness**

What fellowship can light have with darkness? v14

The Bible has lots to say on this!

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man; the lust of his eyes; and the boasting of what he has and does - comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:15-17

The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you that those who live like this will not inherit the Kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19



These are clearly aspects of the sinful nature. Be separate from them! (But watch that you don't define 'darkness' legalistically and become a modern day Pharisee). Then:

Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think on these things. Philippians 4:8

The earth is the Lord's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. Psalm 24:1

Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31

Put your hope in God who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17

- **Be separate from false religions**

What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? v15

Today false religions are welcomed in the name of 'diversity' and 'tolerance'. The prevailing religion is pluralism: everyone has the right to believe what they want and it is valid for them.

These false religions can and do influence us. To be separate from them means to focus on Jesus; seek to be like Him; to find what He wants us to do and do it.

- **Be separate from unbelief**

What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? v15

This is not really about marriage or business partnerships! The emphasis is not on the relationship (we can't help having relationships with unbelievers) but on not sharing their unbelief.

What unbelievers are bound to	What Christians are bound to
Look after No 1 Trusting themselves Getting It's all over when you die	Finding and doing God's will Trusting God Giving Hope for eternity

Let's isolate ourselves from unbelief, but not from unbelievers!

- **Be separate from idols**

What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? v16

Many idols are worshipped today. Examples: sport, heroes, riches, possessions

Christians are different! We worship God, through Jesus Christ. He is Lord!

So what does it mean to 'come out from them and be separate?'

You will be separate from:

- sin
- darkness
- false religions
- unbelief
- idols

You will live in a special, intimate relationship with God.

You will be positive, righteous, and life-affirming. You will enjoy God's world and make a positive difference for God, your neighbours and for the planet.

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Corinthians 7:1

Declaration for Principle 4: Be separate

In loving others ***I will be separate from***

- sin
- darkness
- false religions
- unbelief
- idols

I will live in a special, intimate relationship with God in a righteous, life-affirming way. I will enjoy God's world and make a positive difference for God, my neighbours and for the planet.

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God. 2 Corinthians 7: 1

Principle 5: Lay down your life for others

Jesus is the greatest example of how to love. But how did Jesus love? He lay down His life for us!

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11
Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. John 15:13.

His love was real. It was sacrificial. It was focused on what is best for us. This is what *agape* love is all about!

Jesus became a servant

See Philippians 2:5-11.

I am among you as one who serves. Luke 22:26,27

I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. John 13:14

A servant (doulos) is a love slave: one who lays down their life to serve others. This involves:

- laying down your status
- noticing others' situations
- identifying what's best for them
- doing what's best for them

There's always a sacrifice
in this type of love!

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. John 15:12-14

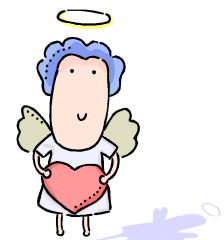
Jesus is the source of our love

See 1 John 3: 7-13

- God is love
- God showed His love by sending Jesus
- He now lives in us by the Holy Spirit
- We can love others because God (who is love) lives in us

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God and God in him. In this way God's love is made complete in us. 1 John 3:16,17

Does this mean only Christians can show genuine love? Yes and no!!



The problem is with the English word 'love'. The Greeks had four words for love:

Eros *sensual love* (not in NT)

In the Bible eros is only for marriage and anything outside marriage is forbidden. Why? Because eros is so powerful. (Within a marriage it is a positive force to build the marriage and family; outside of marriage it is destructive). Matthew 5:27-30



Storge *family love* (once in NT)

This is the affection, warmth, care, tenderness, commitment you have for those in your family (and the family of God).

Philia *friendship* (56 times in NT)

Friendship love has warmth, affection, comfortableness, sharing, binding together.

- Philia is wider than storge. eg. In the Church family you love everyone (storge) but have special friendship (philia) with a few.
- Eros, storge, philia just happen! They can't be commanded. They all include 'liking' and we certainly don't like everybody!



Agape *God's love* (250 times in NT and rarely in other writings)

- Agape love is commanded: we are to love God; one another, our neighbours, ourselves, even our enemies.
- Agape love doesn't just happen. We have to use our minds, our wills and our hearts. We choose to love.



You have heard that it was said 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy'. But I tell you 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven'. Matthew 5:43,44

Agape love is God's love.

*God is love (agape). We love (agape) because He first loved (agape) us. 1 John 4:16,19
Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. 1 John 4:16*

So agape love is a Christian thing. You can't agape love without God. He puts His love in you (by His Spirit) and it flows out through you to others. You lay down your life for others sacrificially: out of your love for God and for them.

Only Christians can show genuine agape love because it is essentially God's love. (This makes sense of verses like 1 John 3:10, 4:8).

So

- Jesus is our example of how to love
- Jesus is our source of love
- We are commanded to go out into the world and lay down our life for others, just like Jesus did for us. This means we will love God, one another, our neighbours, our enemies, the world, ourselves. After all God does!



Declaration for Principle 5: Lay down your life for others

In loving others

- *I will follow Jesus' example*
- *I will let God's love flow through me, sacrificially loving others as He loves me*

Let us love one another, for love comes from God. 1 John 4:7

We have seen that

- Jesus is our example of how to love
- Jesus is the source of our love
- We are commanded to go out into the world and love God, one another, our neighbours, our enemies, the world, ourselves. After all God does!

To really love our neighbour we must do what Jesus did, and show our love.

Principle 6: Love with action

Love must be shared

God has put His (agape) love in us.
We must share that love.

Let us love one another, for love comes from God. 1 John 4:7

Love may be felt, but it must be shared (by saying or doing),
for it to be worked out in practice. Love always results in action!

This is love for God: to obey His commands. 1 John 5:3

Love must be genuine

How you show love is vital. If you are not genuine your love
can be misinterpreted and turned against you.
That's where 1 Corinthians 13 is so helpful!

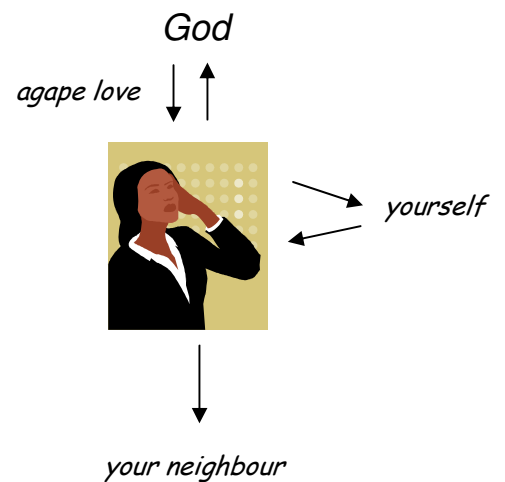
God's agape love



sharing of
agape love



Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8



Love must be focused on the others' good

It's easy to be selfish when you are 'loving'.

Jesus is our example of unselfish love. *For God so loved the world that He gave ...* John 3:16
Jesus' life was all for us!

Unselfish love involves:

- - laying down your status
- - noticing others' situations
- - identifying what's best for them
- - doing what's best for them

*Jesus said:
I have set you an example that you
should do as I have done for you.
John 13:14*

So our neighbours are out there, right now, needing our agape love! (Our neighbours are anyone/everyone!). Our task is to:

- share God's agape love with them
- be genuine in how we share that love
- focus on their good.

So what can our Church do to love our neighbours and make a real difference in our community?

These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:13

Declaration for Principle 6: Love with action

In loving others

- *I will share the agape love with them that God has shown to me*
- *I will be genuine in the way I show this love*
- *I will focus on their good*

This is love for God, to obey His commands. I John 5:3

**So how can we love God, love our neighbour and love ourselves?
How can we really make a difference in an anti-Christian world?**

The answer is to fall in love with Jesus!

Then out of this:

- Follow your conscience
- Act with graciousness
- Be a great example
- Be separate from sin, darkness, false religions, unbelief, idols
- Lay down your life for others
- Love with action.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. Mark 12:30, 31

Discussion questions

Is there a difference in the way we love God, others and ourselves?

What does it mean to love God with *all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*? Is it really possible to do this when we are sinful, and selfish?

Describe how you love God the Father; the Lord Jesus Christ; and the Holy Spirit.

Give examples of situations when you put the six principles above into practice. What were the results? How could you have been more loving in these situations?

What is the difference between eros, storge, philia, and agape love? Give examples of each?

"These three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love". 1 Corinthians 13:13
Why is love greater than faith and hope?

What is the opposite of love? Some say it is hate. Others say it is selfishness. What do you think?

Jesus is the greatest demonstration of love the world has ever seen. How did He show His love?

What have you learnt from your study of love? How will you apply this in your daily life?