

The Priority of Love (2019 AACP CPFI Prayer Breakfast Presentation)

By Jeff Copeland

It seems that if you want to know an answer these days, you simply “search the internet.” I wanted to know how many songs had the word “love” in the title. The best answer was found on Yahoo Answers – “an insane number.” I then searched my University’s library for works related to love – 5,398,205 entries. I then searched in libraries beyond my University and found 6,845,305 entries. Results included 1,020,061 dissertations, 2,875 images, 9 legal documents, and 2 maps. If you simply look at the sheer number of entries, it’s clear that love is a priority. To me, God’s Word is the dissertation of all dissertations on love. His Word is not merely the image of love, but His Word became flesh at the Incarnation. God’s Word is the legal document by which all humankind will be judged. Finally, if we follow God’s Word, it will direct our steps along the path of blessing. Let’s explore love a little more as we answer a few questions and conduct a few reflections.

Our first question is “What is Love?” If you have been around Christianity for more than a few months, you are probably aware that the New Testament was written in Greek. There are three words in Greek for love: *eros*, *phileo*, and *agape*. *Eros* is sexual love, *phileo* is brotherly love, and *agape* is unconditional love. *Agape* is best described as including “both love for God and love for fellow man. It is a love which holds its object in high esteem and admiration and expresses itself in concrete fashion. It is expressed to the lovely and unlovely and seeks the best for its object”.¹ (Rogers & Rogers, 431). I find it important that love is directed toward God and others, which sounds very much like the two greatest commandments (Mark 12:28-31). Also of note is that love is put into action. In other words, it is not merely a theological thought but also a physical action. Finally, love should be expressed to those who are easily loved, along with those patients, colleagues, students, and family members that are, may we say, tough or challenging to love.

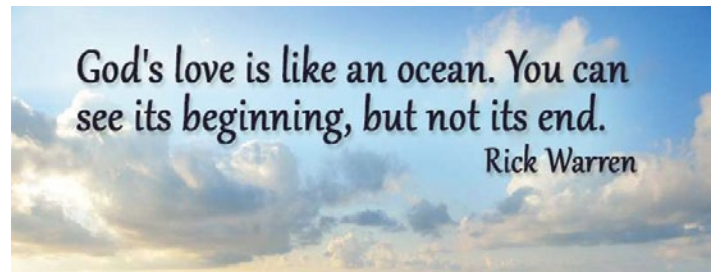
Reflection: Considering *agape* love, is our love for others (or even God) best described as conditional (*If you do... or don’t do... then I love you*)? Or unconditional? (*Even though you did... or do... or don’t do... I still love you*)?

Our second question is “How is love described?” If you have been to a Christian wedding, you have probably heard what I refer to as the “love passage.” It is a go-to text for weddings. The passage is 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. When I examined these verses, it was easier for me to understand the passage by dividing the descriptions into two columns: the first column describes what love is, and the second column describes what love is not.

Love is: patient
kind
rejoicing in the truth
bears all things
believes all things
hopes all things
endures all things
never failing

Love is not: jealous
boastful
arrogant
unbecoming
selfish
provoked
revengeful
rejoicing in unrighteousness

Reflection: Considering the description of love, how would others describe you? Would they select terms from the “love is” column or the “love is not” column?



Our third question is “Who does love characterize?” This question has two answers. The first person whom love characterizes is God. Love is an attribute or character trait of God. 1 John 4:8 states that “The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love” (all passages are from the New American Standard Bible, except where noted). God’s love is perfect. It cannot get any better because it is perfect. It cannot be increased or decreased. We cannot do anything to cause God to love us more (we cannot earn His love) or love us less (we cannot lose His love). His love for us is perfect and permanent. He does not always like what we do or do not do, but His love for us does not change. The second person whom love characterizes is a Christian. In John 13:34-35, Jesus states, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Love is to be a distinguishing trait of the Christian.

Reflection: Consider the truth that love is a distinguishing trait for us as believers. If each of was put on trial for loving God and one another, would there be enough evidence to convict us without a reasonable doubt?

Our fourth question is “How does God demonstrate love?” Recall that love is not merely a theological thought, but also a physical action. Love causes action. Probably the most well known verse in all of Scripture is John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life”). This great verse contains:

¹ Rogers, CL Jr. and Rogers, CL III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. Zondervan Publishing House. Grand Rapids, MI. 1998. Pg. 431



- a. The Greatest Love – God loved the world so that He gave
- b. The Greatest Gift – Jesus
- c. The Greatest Opportunity – everyone
- d. The Greatest Simplicity – believes
- e. The Greatest Promise – not perish but have eternal life.

Romans 5:8 (“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”) also shows how God loves us. While we were at our very worst, God still loved us. While we were at our most unlovable state, God still loved us. We also see God’s love for us in 1 John 3:1 (“See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are”). By God’s grace we went from being enemies of God to children of God. God greatly and unconditionally loves us.

Reflection: Consider God’s love for you. How has He demonstrated His love to you individually, and within your family?

Our fifth question is “Why are we to love?” A couple of reasons come to mind. The first reason is a response to God’s love for us. 1 John 4:19 states that “We love, because He first loved us.” The second reason is obedience. We are commanded to love in the two greatest Commandments, which Jesus states in Mark 12:29-31 – “‘Hear O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Reflection: Consider the commands (not suggestions) to love God and others. Do you love God with your entire being, regardless of your circumstances? Do you treat others the way that you would want to be treated?

Our final question is “How do we demonstrate love?” Remember, love should lead to an action. We love God by obeying his commandments (1 John 5:3 – “For this is the

love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome”). We love others sacrificially by our actions rather than mere words (1 John 3:16-18 – “We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or tongue, but in deed and truth”). We also love others in our teaching and counseling (1 Timothy 1:5, NET – “But the aim of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith”).

Reflection: Analyze your demonstration of love. Do your actions express your love for God and for others?

Although we did not comprehensively examine all 6,845,305 entries on love, we briefly skimmed the surface of the most important reference of all on love – God’s Word. My prayer is that the Holy Spirit will apply His Word to our lives in such a manner that we will love more authentically and consistently.

Heavenly Father, thank You for loving us so unconditionally. We are grateful for Your unending and inseparable love... and just as the Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman believers, we are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from Your love, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We also echo Paul’s prayer to the Ephesian believers, that being rooted and established in love, we may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge. May the love of our CPFI family be filled to the measure of Your fullness, Father. We ask this in the name of Jesus, amen.

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