

Intro:

What is the most important thing? If you could summarize what God demands of the human race in 50 words or less, what would you say?

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Leviticus 19:18 ... but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

1. Love is what God requires of you**2. Love involves your whole being****3. God's love creates reciprocal love in the believing saint****1. By loving our neighbor we become keepers of the law****2. It is assumed that we love ourselves****3. We are commanded to love our neighbor in the same way we love ourselves.****1. By loving our neighbor we become keepers of the law**

Mt 7:12 "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for **this is the Law and the Prophets**

Matthew 22: 40 **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**" (hang)

Romans 13: 8 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another **has fulfilled the law.**

Ro 13:9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and **any other commandment, are summed up in this word:** "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Ga 5:14 For **the whole law is fulfilled in one word:** "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Jas 2:8 If you really **fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture,** "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

What does this love look like?

2. It is assumed that we love ourselves

In order to understand how we are expected to love others, it will help us to look at how we love ourselves.

a. Self love is always assumed, never commanded.

b. Self love, properly used, is not condemned, but used as the standard for our loving others.

c. Self love abused quickly spirals out of control and evolves into self worship.

Ro 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Ephesians 5:28 In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

29 For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church,

30 because we are members of his body...

33 However, let each one of you love his wife as himself...

Self love could be defined as the passionate pursuit of our own happiness.

It is biblically expressed as nourishing and cherishing – nursing and warming – incubating; providing an atmosphere conducive to healthy accelerated growth. – illustration of Hannah

1625 **εκτρέφω** ektrepho *ek-tref'-o*

from 1537 and 5142; ; v

AV-nourish 1, bring up 1; 2

2282 **θαλπω** thalpo *thal'-po*

probably akin to thallo (to warm); ; v

AV-cherish 2; 2

1) to warm, keep warm

2) to cherish with tender love, to foster with tender care

1) to nourish up to maturity, to nourish

2) to nurture, bring up

God made us to be happy creatures. There is nothing at all wrong with seeking your own happiness. God is all about us seeking meaning, purpose, fulfillment, satisfaction, happiness in life. Just look at how he set up the garden back in Genesis. When he finished creation, he didn't say 'what a miserable harsh difficult ugly painful boring place'. It says 'and God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good' Gen.1:31. He created all kinds of plants and animals – none of which were hostile or dangerous; it says 'the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food' Gen.2:9. This garden had a built in watering system. And this was before weeds. There were four rivers running through it, there is gold in the land. He places man in this garden that he had made, and there is one thing that God sees that isn't good. It is not good for man to be alone, and that he fixes. He makes the perfect companion. He makes a beautiful woman that is the perfect match for this man, and the bible says 'the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed' Gen.1:25. God places the man and the woman in paradise and tells them to be fruitful! Now tell me that God doesn't desire our happiness!

2. We are commanded to love our neighbor in the same way we love ourselves.

If it is true that we love ourselves by seeking our own happiness, fulfillment, satisfaction, enjoyment in life, then we are to seek our neighbor's fulfillment, satisfaction, enjoyment of life; and we are to seek our neighbor's happiness with the same intensity and passion and energy and fervor that we seek our own. We are to passionately pursue the good of our neighbor in the same way as we pursue our own good.

1Co 10:24 Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor.

If the concept of a neighbor was too fuzzy for us to understand just who is and isn't included under this category, some of Jesus' opponents help us here so we have a crystal clear picture of who he's talking about; he gives us the story of the man injured on the road and the only one who would be a neighbor to him was a Samaritan (Lk 10:33)– he focuses our attention on the actions that were neighborly; then if this weren't enough, he extends this requirement of love for neighbors to those that are enemies and even those actively hating and persecuting us.

Matthew 5: 43-48 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

44 But I say to you, **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you,

45 **so that you may be sons** of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

- 47 And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?
 48 You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This command to extend love is not strictly a new thing in the New Testament:

Leviticus 19:34 You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Sometimes we don't pursue our happiness to the full extent that we should, but this is no excuse for us to be lazy in loving others;

Philippians 2:2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same **love**, being in full accord and of one mind.

3 Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility **count others more significant than yourselves.**

4 Let each of you **look not only to his own interests**, but also to the interests of others.

Listen to this verse:

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

2 And **walk in love**, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

The standard of our love for others is to be Christ's love for us in laying down his life for us. Now this helps us define what our responsibility to our neighbor is and is not. We are not called to appease our neighbor's every whim and desire. Christ did not lay down his life so that we could go about our daily lives however we wanted to. He laid down his life on my behalf in order to effect a radical change in my constitution, so that I would turn from my self-centered self-seeking self-worship and worship and fall passionately in love with the God of the universe. Christ, in his ultimate act of loving us was making an offering to God. We have things and people and events that we think will bring us happiness, but Christ is not content to leave us to those things that will leave us thirsty. Jesus doesn't give us what we want, but he changes our desires so that we will want the things that will truly satisfy. He brings us living water so we will never thirst again. He brings us to the true source of our joy and meaning and purpose and contentment and fulfillment and lets us drink deeply of the fountain of God. He commands us to love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. This, and this alone is where we will find our true contentment. If we are to love other people the way Christ loved us, we will passionately pursue them and lay down our lives in order to bring them to this same fountain where they can drink and be satisfied.

How do we know our love is genuine? How do we evaluate ourselves to see if we are following this command?

1Ti 1:5 The aim of our charge is **love that issues from a pure heart** and a **good conscience** and a **sincere faith**.

The love that we are talking about is said to come from three places; a heart that is pure, a conscience that is clear, and a faith that is sincere – it issues from a solid conscientious heartfelt belief in God

1Jo 3:16 **By this we know love**, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

1Jo 3:18 Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in **deed** and in **truth**.

1Jo 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for **love is from God**, and whoever loves has been **born of God** and **knows God**.

1Jo 4:8 Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1Jo 4:9 In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that **we might live through him.**

1Jo 4:10 In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1Jo 4:19 We love **because he first loved us.**

1Jo 5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

1Jo 5:3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.

We derive our definition of love from Jesus' love for us

Genuine love derives from God as a result of the new birth

Love exists among people that are not born again, but this kind of love is distinct from that – and comes only as a result of God's transforming power in your life.

II Corinthians 8:1-8 We want you to know, brothers, about the **grace of God that has been given** among the churches of Macedonia,

2 for in a severe **test** of affliction, their **abundance of joy** and their **extreme poverty** have **overflowed** in a wealth of generosity on their part.

3 For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, **of their own free will,**

4 **begging us earnestly for the favor** of taking part in the relief of the saints—

5 and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

6 Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace.

7 ¶ But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you— see that you excel in this **act of grace** also.

8 I say this not as a command, but to **prove** by the earnestness of others **that your love also is genuine.**

How do we know that our love is genuine? In I Cor. 1:8 Paul claims that what he has just said in the first seven verses is a proof of their love; whether or not it is genuine.

Paul is writing to the Corinthian church concerning the collection that he was taking for the poor saints in Jerusalem. He is encouraging them to give and he uses the churches in Macedonia as a standard of genuine love. At first glance it appears Paul is being manipulative to milk the Corinthians for more money, but before we conclude this, let's look carefully at what he is saying.

In verse 7 he calls their giving an 'act of grace'. Back in verse 1, he says that what is going on in the Macedonian churches is a gift of the grace of God. He attributes their giving, not to their superior spirituality, but that it was a gift of the grace of God to them. The fact that they were giving was because of a gift of God's grace – their giving was motivated by God's grace being given to them.

Now let's look at the context of their giving. The circumstances were the worst possible. It just wasn't good timing for them. He calls it 'a severe test of affliction' and he says they were experiencing 'extreme poverty'. They had no money to give. They couldn't meet their own needs. But they gave anyway.

Now what was the character of their giving? Where did it come from? Did Paul twist their arm? Were they under compulsion? They gave 'beyond their means, of their own free will.' Paul says they were 'begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part'. I could imagine the apostle discouraging them – you guys need to take care of your own needs; I really don't want you to feel obligated. But they insisted- they begged earnestly for the favor – the privilege of giving. 'their abundance of joy overflowed from their circumstances in a wealth of generosity.'