

And above all these put on love

By Wendy Wood

Jesus summed up the entire law in two commandments (Matthew 22:37-39) saying love God, and love others. Throughout Scripture, believers are commanded to love. We are commanded to love fellow believers (John 13:34), neighbors (Leviticus 19:18), family (Ephesians 5:25, Psalm 103:13), and enemies (Matthew 5:44); meaning we are to love all people. This command comes from God who defines Himself as love. 1 John 4:8 tells us “God is love”. God’s very character is the definition of love. Love is not a feeling we have when we feel warmly toward someone else. Love is action oriented and is aimed at the other person’s well-being. Genuine love is a heart posture that desires the good and well-being of another person.¹ When Scripture tells us to “put on love”, we are replacing our sinful habits of selfish attitudes and our sinful ways of interacting with others and replacing it with Christ-like love. Colossians 3:12-15 tells us

“Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Love is to be put on “above all” because it is necessary to do any of the other attitudes, actions, and words listed above. Without love, we may be able to occasionally show kindness or sometimes bear with one another, but only genuine love is a God glorifying motive for relating to people in relationship. We can only show this type of love when we know this kind of love from God. Put on then, is key. Preceding this section of verses, Paul recounts that we have been raised with Christ, we have died to sin and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. We are reminded that we will appear with him in glory. We are called to love in Christlikeness because we are united with Christ by grace through faith. As the scripture above tells us, we are God’s chosen ones who are holy and beloved. Christlike love only comes after God has opened our eyes to faith and has put within us a new heart that is able to love sacrificially. Christian love must look different from the world’s love.

Our culture has much to say about love. Sometimes we hear about “falling in love” as though love were something that happens to us spontaneously and accidentally. Unfortunately, if this is the axiom you live by, you can also “fall out of love” and no longer

¹ Maximum Impact by Wayne A. Mack

feel obligated to be married to or in relationship with that person anymore. “Falling in love” is an emotional high, not the high calling of selfless, sacrificial attitude and actions towards others. Countless “love songs” talk all about warm, fuzzy emotions that focus on how the person experiencing the feelings likes how they feel. This is a selfish and distorted version of love. When we enjoy the exhilarating feelings of someone new that we are attracted to, we “love” how that person makes *us* feel. *We* feel excited, or we are comforted, or we are hopeful and are happy to be feeling this way. Really, we are focused on taking care of ourselves and enjoying how we experience the relationship rather than being focused on how to serve the other person. This is not biblical love.

Biblical love is about sacrificially choosing the other person’s well being over your own. Philippians 2:3-4 tells us to “count others more significant than ourselves”. The word “count” means to consider, calculate, and to reckon. We are to choose to place ourselves below others and intentionally place their needs ahead of our own. Biblical love seeks to emulate Christ and how he interacted with others. Philippians 2:5-8 shows us the extent of Christ’s sacrificial love.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not *count* equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Jesus’ love was humble and intentional. He “counted” Himself a servant to others. He wasn’t concerned about His own well-being, but rather was willing to give up His life for others.

Our hearts are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9). We can easily fool ourselves into thinking we are doing something out of love for others, when we are really being selfish and serving ourselves. Only what we do with the right motive (desiring to love God and please Him through loving others) will be considered God honoring in his sight. God knows our hearts and intentions perfectly (Hebrews 4:12). We cannot fool Him. Therefore, we must learn to love Him and others more from a genuine heart. We must continually be growing in loving God and others.

The importance of doing things with love cannot be overstated. First Corinthians 13 begins with saying that you can have absolutely amazing gifts of prophecy and faith, but if they are not done with love they are nothing. Worse, the picture Paul uses is a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”. I remember when my boys were quite small and would pull

pots and lids out of the cupboard. They would bang away enjoying the loudness and cacophony of sound. I would cringe and barely be able to tolerate the sound for a few minutes. That awful, irritating, and annoying sound is what we believers are like when we act without love. We fail to produce anything good (like well orchestrated music) and additionally, others don't want to be around us. Even to try to help someone or share the gospel with them, without love, is useless and frustrating to others. Jerry Bridges talks about putting an entire row of zeros on a paper.² You may be able to line up 30 zeros and have a 30 figure number. What is it worth? Nothing! But put a single numeral one in front of those zeros and suddenly there is tremendous value. That is what love does to the gifts God has given us. When we are loving others from the heart, our service to God matters.

Wayne Mack compares love to a diamond.³ A diamond has many facets that make up the total value and beauty of a diamond. When buying a diamond you may consider cut, clarity, color, carats, and shape. These facets complement each other and are essential to making the diamond complete. Yet, they are all unique in the quality they bring to the diamond. Love is like a diamond. It is made up of many facets, all of them essential and unique to the way love is expressed. In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul shows us the many facets of love. Without these different qualities of love, our impact for Christ will be nothing. With these qualities of love growing in us, we will bring honor and glory to God as His love is displayed through us.

I've already mentioned that we need to learn to love as God loves because without love our gifts and service to God are nothing. Then, after Paul explains the facets of love, he gives us another reason we need to learn to love well. First Corinthians 14:1 begins with "Pursue love". To pursue means to run after or to press on to reach a goal. Wayne Mack says, "God does not just zap this kind of love into our hearts. We must search for it, train for it, reach for it! It takes effort and sacrifice and prayer for us to be able to lay hold of this precious love."⁴ We are commanded to love.

² Respectable Sins by Jerry Bridges

³ Maximum Impact by Wayne Mack

⁴ Ibid