

LIVING FAITH

8.3 – LOVE

8.3.1 – These are beautifully poetic words. There are three opening moves: 1) God's love is the source of creation, 2) God's love is the source of daily inner sustenance, and 3) God's love is the means toward greater inner wholeness (salvation). God's love is also described as both 'a consuming fire of purity' and 'warm and gentle compassion.' How do you understand the difference? 'We respond to the God who is love by loving in return.' Do you experience life as God's love to you? Do you find meaning in your love toward others as an expression of your love for God?

8.3.2 – This section emphasizes the belief that love is a relational word that involves our relationship with others. To claim to love God or know God's love and not love others is a contradiction. But can we always love others well? Is this not a requirement of us that is doomed to failure at some level? We need to know God's standards of love (the law of God) even as we need to experience the constant grace of God (God's ongoing forgiveness as an expression of God's unconditional, committed love for us no matter what).

8.3.3 – Lots of statements about love are made here. Which ones resonate in you? Which ones do you find a little harder to relate to? Which ones are more natural to you and which ones are more challenging for you? One example: "Love grows in knowledge and discernment." What does this mean? Does it mean (as I would like it to mean) that you can only truly know something or someone if your heart is open in love toward them. I can know a tree scientifically and all, but truly loving the tree I can know it even more profoundly. I have a relationship with the tree, even a commitment. What do you think?

8.3.4 – Self-love has often been taught as contradictory to real love. Self-love has often been thought of as a synonym for being selfish and self-absorbed. But this section wants to emphasize the necessary connection between knowing love for others and knowing love for ourselves as we are, imperfect as we are. Without loving ourselves and knowing ourselves worthy of love, how can we really know the worth of others in the way we love them? How do we measure someone's worth?

8.3.5 – In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul's famous 'hymn to love,' he ends by speaking of the three divine virtues of faith, hope and love. But he ends by saying that love is the greatest of all. This section gives us a clue as to why this may be. Once we come face to face with God, we will no longer need faith and hope. Faith and hope are virtues necessary for our journey here and now when we cannot see God "face to face" so to speak. We trust and hope in God. But love speaks of a way of being that is eternal. When we come face to face with God our faith and hope will be fulfilled. But love is how we will be with one another eternally.

8.4 – JUSTICE

8.4.1 – The biblical word 'righteousness' is another word for justice. Righteousness is not about morality (good and bad, right and wrong) as disconnected from our relationships in the world. Our righteousness before God and our commitment to justice in the world are intertwined.

8.4.2 – Many things in the western world that are about human rights have their origin in biblical faith. Justice is also one of those things.

8.4.3 – Fairness and the protection of others as their right is essential to God's vision for the world. Protest is an expression of love in the face of injustice. It protests without resorting to retaliation and revenge.

8.4.4 – All these 'secular' concerns of the world, are actually 'sacred' concerns of God and therefore of Christians also.

8.4.5 – this section also speaks about justice reaching into our relationships with criminals and their victims. Justice can easily degenerate into vengeance and hate. This is not God's vision. How do we love victims but also criminals as human beings?

8.4.6 – Prejudice is an insidious thing that sneaks up on us in so many ways. We make judgements of others all the time but we would rarely see it as prejudice. This section teaches that it is always wrong in whatever form it takes. In recent years we've been learning the importance of words like "privilege" and "systemic" among others. The word "handicap" is no longer used, and even "disability" focusses too much on what a person cannot do versus what they can do as differently abled. What do you think?

8.5 - WORLD PEACE

8.5.1 – Peace is something we need to be involved in, in every relationship and situation. But the peace section comes after the justice section. Peace without justice is no peace worth having.

8.5.2 – How do we 'fight' for peace? This affects our personal lives and relationships, but it also affects our approach as nations in a global village. Is war ever a necessity? Is there always a lesser evil than war? How do we dance between the threat of military intervention and diplomacy?

8.5.3 – The cost of war is often underestimated. Do we see poverty as something we have to fight, that undermines peace, that is the cause of war? How about disease? And what about the scale of war with our modern technology? Are the casualties and the impersonality of today's wars with bombing from a distance using drones all the more dangerous? Is our planet beyond the capability of sustaining a war today in terms of the scale of nuclear destruction?

What about greed, profit, finance, and natural resources like oil as the biggest drivers behind the façade of war? This section says nothing about it. Should it?

What is missing here? The world arms race continues to be a global threat. But perhaps a bigger and more immediate threat is environmental annihilation, no? And what about another pandemic as we have seen now that we've lived it?