

DO YOU KNOW WHAT LOVE IS?

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Jesus said the two greatest commandments are: "You shall **love** the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "You shall **love** your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39 ESV).

1. WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN BY "LOVE"?

Ancient Greek had several words for love, including agapē, philia, and eros. Agapē refers to self-giving love, philia to friendship or affection, and eros to romantic love. In the greatest commandments, the word for love involves **agapē** love.

Agapē love seeks another person's good and treats others as you would want to be treated (Matt. 5:44; 7:12; 1 Cor. 13:4–7).

In other words, biblical agapē love doesn't require feelings of affection or that we necessarily like someone. We know this because Jesus commands: "But I say to you, **love** your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44 NASB).

Even if you have no affection for someone, you can still pray for them, refuse to hate them, treat them justly, help them when appropriate, and desire that they repent and be saved.

Biblical love is therefore more than a feeling. **Love acts for another person's good.**

2. GOD SHOWS US WHAT LOVE IS

Jesus said: "For God so **loved** the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16 KJV). And so, God's agapē love **gave**, acted, and sacrificed.

Scripture explains further: "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" (1 John 4:10 ESV). Jesus said, "Greater **love** hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13 KJV).

Therefore, biblical love is self-giving, sacrificial, and concerned with another person's true good.

3. LOVE OBEYS GOD

Biblical love can never require us to disobey the God we claim to love. Jesus said: "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15 KJV).

And so, we cannot say, "I'm doing this because I love someone," when what we are doing contradicts God's Word.

The Bible says, "Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good" (Rom. 12:9 CSB).

Notice how closely Scripture joins **love and moral truth**. Genuine love doesn't embrace evil. It rejects what God calls evil and clings to what God calls good.

Loving God always comes first. Therefore, loving our neighbor means loving them **in a way consistent with God's commands**, not according to whatever our culture currently calls loving.

4. LOVE TELLS THE TRUTH

Love and truth are not enemies.

Christians must practice "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15 KJV). Further, "Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6 CSB).

Sometimes telling the truth is pleasant. Sometimes it isn't.

Suppose someone you loved was unknowingly walking toward serious danger. Would it be loving to remain silent because warning her might upset her?

The same principle applies spiritually. If Scripture says something is sinful or spiritually dangerous, hiding that truth because someone may dislike hearing it isn't love.

That doesn't give Christians permission to become cruel, arrogant, insulting, or obsessed with pointing out everyone's faults. Truth must be spoken **in love**, with humility, patience, and a genuine desire for the other person's good.

But love cannot require us to lie.

Sometimes loving someone means warning him. Jude even speaks of "sav[ing] others by snatching them out of the fire" (Jude 23 ESV).

5. LOVE SOMETIMES CORRECTS AND DISCIPLINES

Modern culture often treats correction as the opposite of love. Scripture doesn't.

Jesus said: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19 NASB1995). Hebrews likewise teaches that God disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6–11).

A loving parent doesn't allow a child to do anything he wants just because correction may be unpleasant. The purpose of biblical correction isn't humiliation, revenge, or domination. It's the other person's good.

That principle extends beyond parenting. Christians sometimes must correct one another, but Scripture tells us to do so gently and with awareness of our own susceptibility to sin (Gal. 6:1; 2 Tim. 2:24–26).

Correction without love can become cruelty. But refusing necessary correction can become unloving indifference.

God Himself demonstrates that genuine love can include both tenderness and discipline.

6. LOVE IS NOT INDULGENCE

There is an important distinction between **love and indulgence**.

Indulgence says: *Whatever you want to do is fine because I don't want to upset you.*

Biblical love asks: *What is actually good for you according to God?*

Allowing, encouraging, celebrating, or excusing something God calls sinful doesn't become loving just because it avoids hurt feelings.

Love also isn't constant criticism, self-righteousness, hatred, unnecessary confrontation, or demanding that everyone share our personal preferences. Christians must distinguish actual biblical commands from opinions and disputable matters.

But where Scripture clearly calls something sin, **love does not allow us to call it good.**

"Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18 ESV). Biblical love requires both **deed and truth.**

7. WHAT IS THE MOST LOVING THING WE CAN DO?

If love seeks another person's true good, then the greatest good we can desire for anyone is reconciliation with God and eternal life through Jesus Christ.

We should feed the hungry, help the poor, comfort those who suffer, defend the vulnerable, forgive, show mercy, pray for our enemies, and treat others as we would want to be treated.

But none of those good things replaces a person's greatest need: **Jesus Christ.**

That's why love and evangelism belong together. Jesus commands His followers to make disciples and teach people to obey what He commanded (Matt. 28:19–20).

Loving others therefore means doing whatever we biblically can for them—especially for their **eternal good.**

We pray for them, serve them, tell them the truth, warn them when necessary, point them toward repentance and faith, and proclaim the gospel.

CONCLUSION

So, **do you know what love is?** Biblical love isn't mere affection or indulgence. It's not pretending sin is righteousness, remaining silent about dangerous error, or changing God's standards so that no one is offended.

Biblical love **sacrifices, serves, obeys God, prays for enemies, shows mercy, tells the truth, corrects when necessary, and seeks another person's genuine good.**

The supreme example is Jesus Christ. God loved us by giving His Son to save sinners.

We should therefore love others as God has loved us—not merely by saying that we love them, but by **acting** for their good.

And their greatest good is knowing Jesus Christ.

Love people enough to serve them, to pray for them, and to tell them the truth. And above all, love them enough to point them to Jesus.