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What is "Love"? - Part 2
Who Do We Love?

By Tal Davis

Lord, we don't need another mountain
There are mountains and hillsides enough to climb
There are oceans and rivers enough to cross
Enough to last 'til the end of time

Lord, we don't need another meadow
There are cornfields and wheat fields enough to grow
There are sunbeams and moonbeams enough to shine
Oh listen, Lord, if you want to know

What the world needs now is love, sweet love
It's the only thing that there's just too little of
What the world needs now is love, sweet love
No not just for some, but for everyone

"What the World Needs Now" by Jackie DeShannon (1965)
Songwriters: Hal David / Burt F. Bacharach

Remember that #1 popular song from 1965 by Jackie DeShannon? (Hear it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TopFgQ65CBw>) Probably not if you are younger than sixty-five years old. In any case, in the 1960s there was a whole lot of talk, especially among musicians and young people, about the need for more love in the world. The Beatles sang "All You Need is Love" for the first time in 1967 to a worldwide television audience of 500 million viewers. (See that actual performance here: <https://vimeo.com/252765355>. [Look for Mick Jagger, Peter Noone, and other British rockers in the audience.]) Many young

people flocked to San Francisco for a giant "love in."

Despite all that hype about it, sad to say, love is a term that lost much of its meaning and force in the last century. People thought they could easily love others (so long as it did not take too much commitment on their part). In many cases it was like the fourth grade class whose teacher was ill. The class sent her a valentine card in which was written, "Your fourth grade class wishes you a Happy Valentine's Day and a speedy recovery, by a vote of 15-14."

In the first installment in this three part series titled "What is Love?" we sought to define that word from a biblical worldview. We discussed how the Greek language had three words we translate in English as love. They are *eros* (sexual love - probably what was actually being fostered in the sixties), *phileo* (brotherly love), and *agape* (God's kind of giving love). To read Part 1 go here: <http://www.marketfaith.org/2021/12/what-is-love-part-1-defining-the-word-from-the-bible-tal-davis/>

Today human love is ambivalent. People still talk about love but act indifferently. But Jesus had a lot to say about the real meaning of love. As believers we need to get our ideas about love, not from shallow pop songs, but from Jesus Himself. In this second installment we analyze what the Lord said about who were to be the objects of our *agape* love.

The Jewish Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes (lawyers) often tried to put Jesus in difficult situations to make Him look bad before the people. In the 22nd chapter of Matthew's Gospel are several examples.

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The Pharisees quizzed Him about paying taxes to Caesar (Matthew 22: 15-22). About the same time the Sadducees, who did not believe in a resurrection, took a shot at Him and asked about marriage after the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33). Jesus soon was again questioned by a Pharisee scribe about what He considered the most important commandment.

34 But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him: 36 "Teacher, which is the great (or greatest) commandment in the Law?" (Matthew 22:34-36 NASB)

The Jewish scribes had delineated 613 separate commandments from the Old Testament Law. 365 of them were negative and 248 positive. As hard as the Jewish leaders tried to catch Jesus, He never allowed Himself to fall into their traps. Instead, Jesus gave them answers by quoting directly from the Scriptures (Old Testament). So, in this case, Jesus quotes two familiar Old Testament passages in answer to this question.

Every day, faithful Jews recited Deuteronomy 6:4 known to them as the "*Shema*" ("hear" or "listen"): "*Hear, Israel! The LORD (Yahweh) is our God (Elohim) the LORD (Yahweh) is one!*" (Deut. 6:4). This was the standard profession of faith of all Jews: that there is only one God, *Yahweh*. The Jews, however, never uttered that sacred name, so they substituted the Hebrew word *Adonai* (Lord) when reading out loud. Therefore, around 200 BC, the Jewish translators of the Septuagint (Seventy) Greek Old Testament translation replaced the name of God with the Greek word *Kurios* (Lord). Later English translations also followed that tradition using the word LORD (all caps) where the

sacred name *Yahweh* was in the Hebrew text. Most still follow that pattern.

But in answer to the scribe's interrogation, Jesus quoted the next verse, Deuteronomy 6:5 – one they all knew intimately.

*37 And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE (Greek: *agape*; Hebrew: *ahab*) THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND." (Deut. 6:5) 38 This is the great and foremost commandment." (Matthew 22:37-38 NASB)*

In the first installment of this series we said that is love not just a feeling. Real love (*agape*) is a decision and a commitment.

So first, Jesus says that commitment begins foremost with love for God Himself and includes several aspects of human personality.

The human heart is an amazing mechanism. It ordinarily beats anywhere from 55 to 100 beats a minute. That is more than 40 million times per year and 2½ billion times in a lifetime. Each beat pumps four ounces of blood to the lungs and throughout the body. That is more than 3,000 gallons a day or 650,000 gallons per year.

The ancients regarded the heart (Greek: *kardia*; Hebrew: *lebab*) as the center of emotion. Certainly emotions affect the heart. For example, couples in love feel their hearts beating rapidly when they kiss. So Jesus says we are to love God with our whole heart. Yes, our emotions are to be a part of our love for God.

But it runs deeper to the center of our being. Jesus says to love God with our soul (Greek - *psyche*). That term denotes one's total self, inner life, or innermost being. The Hebrew word is "*nephesh*," as in Adam became a "living soul." We are to love God from our inner most being.

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So love is a decision and a commitment (heart and soul). But, Jesus asserts, loving God also involves our intellect and thoughts – that is, with our minds (Greek: *dianoia*). We need to think accurately about who God is and all He has done. That is what we call theology. When we do that, how can we not decide to love Him and be committed to Him?

Note: Mark's Gospel (12:30) adds to Jesus' response the word "strength" (Greek: *ischus*; Hebrew: *meod*) to these principles. Real love for God requires effort. We need to exercise our spiritual "muscles" by praying, studying the Bible, going to church, etc. Those require discipline on our behalf, but they demonstrate our love for God and help keep it strong.

The point is, Jesus wants us to love God with our total being. This is why we were created. He blesses us by giving us the choice to love Him. He does not force us to love Him, otherwise it is not love at all.

So, according to Jesus, love of God is the most important of all the commandments. It is the foundation of our very being as humans. It is what makes life purposeful in all regards. But Jesus did not stop at that point. He also says our love is to include other people.

Jesus emphasizes the point that real love for God naturally spills over to loving other people.

After quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 as the greatest commandment, Jesus did not hesitate to quote another Old Testament passage from Leviticus 19:18.

The second is like it, '**YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**'" (Matthew 22:39 NASB)

This same statement, in another context, recorded by Luke, led a scribe to ask Jesus sarcastically, "*And who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:29). Jesus then told the parable of the "Good

Samaritan." (Luke 10:30-37) Read that story from your Bible. Notice carefully how Jesus framed His answer. After telling the story, Jesus asks the scribe:

36 "Which of these three (the Priest, the Levite, both of whom passed the wounded man, or the Samaritan who stopped to help him) do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" 37 And he (the scribe) said, "The one (the Samaritan) who showed compassion to him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do the same." (Luke 10: 36-37 NASB)

Ironically, Jesus did not actually tell the scribe who his neighbor was, but rather he showed the scribe how he could be a good neighbor to someone else. Jesus' point was that we, like the Good Samaritan, should show love to everyone regardless of who they are or where they come from.

There is one other curious phrase in the passage Jesus quotes to the scribe: "**LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.**" The implication is that we should care about ourselves.

The story is told that General Robert E. Lee found a young officer gazing at himself in a mirror. The General then said to him sarcastically, "You must be the happiest man. You are in love with yourself and haven't a rival in the whole world!"

That kind of self love is not what the Scriptures mean. It is not meant in a self-centered or conceited way. To love self as God loves us requires great humility, for we know that we are not really lovely. We are badly scarred by sin. But God has loved us in spite of ourselves, and if He values and loves us, we should value and love ourselves also. Why? Because when we realize how much God loves us, then we can truly love others.

Jesus concluded his comments by adding this summary.

"Upon these two commandments hang the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:40)

So, Jesus says we are to love God and love our neighbor. Those seem like fairly easy principles to follow. But one there is one more entity that He says we should love. This one is probably the greatest and most difficult test of all.

Jesus also commanded us to love our enemies!

43 "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 prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Even the tax collectors, do they not do the same? 47 And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Even the Gentiles, do they not do the same?" (Matthew 5:43-47 NASB)

Jesus' best known discourse is what is usually called "The Sermon the Mount" (Matthew 5-7). In it, Jesus quoted another traditional old Jewish saying, *"YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR and hate your enemy"* (Matthew 5:43). In this case, however, the phrase "hate your enemy" is found nowhere in the Old Testament. Nonetheless, it was how many Jewish rabbis had interpreted some ambiguous passages (Deut. 23:3-6; 25:17-19; Psalm 139:21). Jesus, however, wholly contradicted that statement. He told them, *"love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."* (Matthew 5:44)

This was, and is, a radical proposition. Jesus says it is easy to love someone who loves you, even unrighteous tax collectors and Gentiles (pagans) can do that. But love our enemies? That requires a supernatural kind of love. He says the reason is... *"So that you may prove yourselves to be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"* (Matthew 5:45). His point being that since God loves all people, even those who don't love Him, we should love all people as well, even those who don't love us.

A young American missionary to Bangladesh once befriended a Bengali Muslim. After they had gotten to know each other, his Muslim friend asked him, "Why did you come here? I thought Christians all considered Muslims to be your enemies." The missionary then answered, "When I realized how much Jesus had loved me, I had to come to tell you."

We were all at one time enemies of God. But He loved us so much he sent His only Son to die on the cross! We are saved by grace through the love of Jesus Christ. Because of that, Jesus tells us to love God, but also love others, even our enemies. The ultimate source of that love is God. It is a supernatural force that can only come from Him. Remember what John, "the Beloved Apostle," wrote:

9 By this the love of God was revealed in us, that God has sent His only Son into the world so that we may

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live through Him. *10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.* (1 John 4:9-11 NASB)

In the next and final installment in this three-part series, we will examine romantic love. We will look at it from a biblical worldview and answer a universal question asked from time immemorial: "How can I know I am 'in love'?"