

# **Biblical definition of Love**

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What does it mean to love someone? In Greek there are three different words for the word we know of as love. There is eros, phileo, and agape. Eros is a passionate love: a love between a romantic couple. This is where we get the word erotic. Phileo is a brotherly love: a close bond between friends and siblings. And agape is a self-sacrificing love. This love sort of transcends the other forms. That is because agape is more of an action than a feeling. Agape is basically putting others before yourself, and you can do that with eros or phileo relationships or even someone you don't know. The best example we have of agape is Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sins. We were enemies with God and we deserved death, but Jesus, though we hated Him, died on our behalf.

But what does it mean for us to love? Someone once told me that loving someone meant putting them above you: putting their needs above yours. Someone else said that loving someone meant wanting what's best for them. While both of these are true, they aren't entirely true. In this essay I will explain what it means to love unbelievers, believers, and God.

## **Loving unbelievers**

So is showing love to someone wanting what's best for them? I'm going to say it is. The question you need to ask now is what is best for someone. For an unbeliever, I would say the best thing for them is to come to salvation. You can be as nice to someone as possible, you can put them first in everything you do, but if you don't share the Gospel with them and they die and go to hell, how loving can you be?

So if you have a friend who is an unbeliever, you can care about them and you can want them to succeed in life, but if you truly love them with a Godly love, you will desire them to come to know the savior. What's really important in all eternity is if they know Jesus Christ as lord of their lives. We as believers have a direct intervention in that by sharing the Gospel with them. The Bible says we are to plead with people to repent and trust in Christ. This also refers to those we don't know. You don't have to be best friends with someone to show great love for them. Just gently share the Gospel with them.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 says, "We loved you so much that we shared with you not only the Gospel of God but our own lives, too." Paul says here that he worked hard to not be a burden to the Thessalonians and to be kind to them and serve them as to give testimony to his message of the Gospel. Paul was a very compassionate and generous person, but that alone isn't love. He did what he did in conjunction with proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ to give men what they truly needed: salvation from their sins.

## **Loving Believers**

Let's stick with the definition that says that loving someone means wanting what's best for them. What is best for a believer: one who already knows Jesus Christ? Paul prays for this very thing in

all his epistles. What does he pray for? That they may know Him. These people had already been saved, but the best thing for them is the same as the best thing for an unbeliever: to know Him, to know Christ more fully. To know the riches of His love and the knowledge of His will. A goal and desire for Christians is to be like Christ: to walk in a manner worthy of their calling. And how does someone know how to be like Christ? Growing in grace and knowledge of Him.

So what does this mean for us? If we are to love a fellow believer, we must help them to know all they can about God and help them live for God. This means Godly fellowship. A manifestation of love we can show is to engage one another in spiritual discussion. Just talking about the wonders of God, His love for us, the gift of salvation are just a few of the multitudes of spiritual discussions that can lead to exhortation and spiritual growth. The intimate knowledge of our savior, will give us a desire to love and serve Him

Another way to show your love for another believer is to gently point out a sin in their life. Matthew 18:15 says, "If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother." You don't need to be a jerk about it, but it is loving to show a brother that he is in sin. If the greatest thing on earth for us is to know and imitate Christ, then it is helpful and caring to do all that is in your power to help others live for God.

## **Loving God**

If loving other people results in an exhortation to love God, then the next question you may have is: What does it mean to love God? When we sing our praise and worship songs, we often proclaim our love for Jesus, but what does it really mean to love Jesus? Jesus actually says in John 14 how to love Him. John 14:15 says "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." Again in verse 21 of John 14 Jesus says, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me." Jesus makes it pretty clear that if we love Him we will obey Him.

But does obedience to God's word necessarily mean we love God? No. Think of it in a human sense. We follow the rules of the governing officials, but how often have you enjoyed going the speed limit? Can you say you love our government? It's the same with God; just following rules laid out in the Bible isn't love.

If you love a spouse you will want to make them happy, and when you do you yourself receive joy. If we translate this to our relationship with God, the key words here are "want" and "joy". If we love God we will want to keep His commandments and in doing so we receive joy from that. What does it mean to love God? It means getting joy out of serving Him. 1 John 5:3 says, "For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not burdensome."

So what does it mean if we get our joy from something else? As Christians, if we receive pleasure from the world, be it trash on TV, drugs, alcohol, anything apart from God, that's adultery. Just like if a married man receives pleasure from another woman who isn't his wife, if we as Christians get pleasure from anything other than God, we are committing adultery. God said in Deuteronomy 6:5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jesus also repeated this as the greatest commandment of God

Are things like TV or alcohol inherently sinful? No. It's the love of those things that is sinful. God is jealous of your love for Him. Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And in Isaiah 42:8 God says, "I will not give my glory to another". Possessions are not sinful or even wrong to enjoy. God gave them to us to enjoy, but they must be viewed in their proper context: as gifts from a loving God.

### **God's Love for us**

The best example of Love is, of course, Christ's death on the cross for our sins. All of mankind has sinned and God said that no one does good or even seeks for God. In Colossians 1:21 Paul calls us enemies of God, hostile towards Him, and doing evil deeds. That was the situation we were in; all of mankind was in rebellion against God and penalty for sin is death. All of us were on death row awaiting our judgment.

We had nothing to show for ourselves. In Isaiah 64:6, God tells us that even our "righteous deeds" were like filthy rags, unfit for a perfect God. But God being rich in mercy decided to pay or debt. Romans 5:6-8 says, "For while we were yet weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man. Yet perhaps for a righteous person someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Jesus paid our debt of death even though we were His enemies. It's not like He did a favor for a friend, He died for a world who hated Him. He never once sinned, but the world said, "Crucify Him". That is the definition of Love. He gave the most perfect demonstration of love possible: He gave the world the opportunity to come to know God and have everlasting life. A notable verse, John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

In John 15:13 Jesus says, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends." Jesus died so that men may come to a knowledge of God and reap everlasting life. The least we could do is to tell others about that gift. If the most important thing for man is that Jesus died for them, then the second most important thing would be for them to know it and to know how they can come to believe in that savior.

### **Christians are hate-filled**

It is common thinking nowadays that Christians are hateful and unloving and intolerant. This is most commonly used by proponents of gay marriage. Because Christians believe homosexuality is a sin, they are seen as hateful. As looked at previously, this is entirely untrue. While we may be intolerant of a homosexual or other sinful lifestyle, it is unloving to tolerate sin in someone's life.

We as Christians first and foremost love God, and that means we cannot love sin. James 4:4 says, "friendship with the world is enmity towards God". Our first duty is to keep God's

commandments. Second, if we love other people, like we should, then that means calling them out on their sin. A loving Christian would show someone living in sin that their actions are offending God. The loving thing to do would be to explain to them that they are sinning and under condemnation: then proceed to share the Gospel with that person.

Jesus loved everyone on earth, but he didn't tolerate their sin. Jesus was so intolerant of people's sin that He died on the cross to save people from their sins. He gave His life to change people and bring them out of the sin that ruled them. That is love. Love does not allow another to reap the consequences of sin, it does all it can to bring the sinner into a right relationship with God. By not tolerating a sinful activity or lifestyle, Christians are not being unloving: quite the opposite. By pronouncing God's judgment on sin, we are giving opportunity to show God's love for them.

### **Conclusion**

God gave us a perfect example of love: Jesus Christ. Our duty is to follow His example and love others. We love others by sharing the Gospel, and sharing in the grace of God. We love God by keeping His commandments and gaining pleasure from keeping them. Anyone can say that they love someone, but only with the help of God, can you truly desire what's best for them