

# Covenant

## How Do I Love Others

### SR 203 Lesson I Text

*The following are excerpts from articles in "Hebrew Word Study" by Skip Moen*

The Hebrew concept of love is not translated in terms of friendship (*phileo*) or desire (*eros*). All of this helps us distinguish what love really means from a Hebrew perspective. What we find is this:

1. The concept of love expressed in *ahav* is focused on *community*. It is about love for neighbor, stranger, countryman and enemy. The context of understanding what it means to love is found in my *treatment of others*, not in my feelings or emotions.
2. When *ahav* is used to describe my relationship with God, the focus is on the total commitment of my entire person. In other words, love is a verb of action. It is "strikingly pragmatic." In fact, love that does not produce benevolent behavior is sin.
3. Since love is essentially an inner resolve displayed in outward action, the principal characteristic of biblical love is *faithfulness*. When it comes to loving God, this means obedience. When it comes to loving another person, this means nurturing fidelity.
4. From a biblical point of view, love does not stand on a foundation of emotions but rather on a foundation of ethical responsibility. Love demands specific boundaries for behavior. Love is not about being free. It is about acting within the confines of what it means to be faithful, trustworthy and reliable.
5. In community, an act of love is an expression of justice. What is not just, is not loving.

What is love? Try this definition on for size: love is what delights God and blesses others. Both elements seem to be necessary. Attitude and action are married in benevolence, often with personal cost. Ask yourself if you are experiencing and exhibiting biblical love. If you are, then God is smiling and someone else is being blessed, even if you are paying the freight.

***"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you," John 13:34***

**Love One Another** – Jesus is an Old Testament expositor. When He describes the action that sets His followers apart from all others, He refers to a "renewed" *old* commandment. You will find the foundation in Leviticus 19:2: "Love your neighbor in the same way that you love yourself." Of course, God's idea of neighbor is not quite the same as our idea. We like

to redefine the Hebrew word *ahav* in terms of the Greek *phileo*. That makes it easy to love our neighbors because that allows us to love the ones who are like us. But this will never do. If God's display of *ahav* is the standard, then *ahav* cannot be about loving those like us. God loved us while we *hated* Him. God's love is the perfect display of *ahav* (*agape*) because it is all about enemies.

The Bible amplifies this theme, just in case we thought we could overlook it. Proverbs 25:21 tells us what *ahav* looks like in action. If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. If his animal is in trouble, help. (Exodus 23:4). Jesus says the same thing (surprise, surprise) when He describes love toward those who are hungry, thirsty, naked or abused. Until we treat our enemy with the same regard as we take care of ourselves, we have not understood or practiced *ahav*. All of this is built into the *torah*. That means that the love commanded by God is *not natural to human beings*. Yes, you might be a humanitarian. You might care for those in need. But to offer your enemy shelter, sustenance, good-will and rescue finds no basis in normal human emotions or actions. The only basis for this kind of love is God Himself. I am to apply the effort that I exert to care for myself to those who oppose me. This is the Golden Rule in its widest application. From a biblical perspective, it is *impossible* to love God (*ahav*) and hate your enemies. *Ahav* compels action on behalf of the other, particularly if the other opposes you.

Paul understood the Hebrew context of love. His classic definition in I Corinthians 13:4-8 is really a description of the character of God. Paul's poetry is the positive rendition of the Ten Words that God revealed from Horeb. Both passages describe who God is and ultimately, God is love.

We have a lot to learn. Fortunately, God has equipped us with the ability to learn how *ahav* affects our relationships. But it will not happen by reading these words. Words can only confront our misunderstandings. Now we must put this renewed commandment into action for the learning is in the doing. If you want *ahav* to empower your life, you must become the agent of *ahav* where you live today. You can do it because God will provide the ability for you to release His Spirit in your efforts. God will thrust you into circumstances where the opportunity for *ahav* action interrupts your well-planned existence. *You* must take that opportunity. All God can do is arrange it. But as soon as you embrace it, the Spirit is there to rush reinforcements to your aid. Combat never felt so good.

### **I Corinthians 13**

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** If I have *the gift of prophecy*, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** And if I give all my possessions to feed *the poor*; and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

**4** Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous; love does not brag *and* is not arrogant, **5** does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong *suffered*, **6** does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; **7** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

**8** Love never fails; but if *there are gifts of prophecy*, they will be done away; if *there are* tongues, they will cease; if *there is* knowledge, it will be done away. **9** For we know in part and we prophesy in part; **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. **11** When I was a child, I used to speak like a child, think like a child, reason like a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

**12** For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I will know fully just as I also have been fully known. **13** But now faith, hope, love, abide these three; but the greatest of these is love.

## LOVE IS PATIENT

In an important sense this kind of patience is not a virtue. It is certainly virtuous, but it is not something that can be actively achieved. It is not developmental work, planned steps or rewarded discipline. An approach like that would nullify the passive dimension of love's long suffering. For love to be patient is for love to simply reflect God's character. God's patience is the archetype. We reflect that archetype when we, by choice, decide that His will be done, that His hands are adequate, that His strength is enough. This is not patience as a measure of self-control. It is surrender to God's control. Love is patient. The verb here expresses a **state of being, not of doing**. If we love, patience is the result; a result that comes about only because we model the long-suffering passion in the character of God Himself.

## LOVE IS KIND

Is primarily a statement about God's character, a character that is behind every act of good will, perseverance, gentleness and compassion. It is also a standard. But it cannot be achieved by simply performing acts that may be interpreted as kind. In fact, the character of kindness cannot be achieved at all. It must be inherited – the direct result of a first-hand encounter with God's personal kindness in a soul changing transformation. (Exodus 34:6)

Think about it. No matter how many kind acts I perform, my actions do not guarantee that I am a kind person – that I have kindness rooted in my soul. As human beings, we are constantly at the mercy of false behavior. We only see the outer actions. We judge the character of a person on the basis of those actions. Knowing full well that the disguise of action can cover many hidden evils, are we really surprised when someone whom we thought to be upright, moral, kind or generous is discovered to be selfish, egotistical or worse? The cynicism reflected in jokes about politicians and lawyers only demonstrates that surface behavior cannot cover a man's deception.

Jesus was a man who was interested in roots, not leaves. He showed us that God does not judge us on the basis of our outward actions. Perhaps we need to say that again. **God does not judge us according to our outward actions.** God is interested in character and character is what we are in the dark. God judges us on the basis of our character because character produces action – for good or evil. God knows that love in the roots will produce kindness in the leaves. Actions are only the by-product of intentions of the heart. So God looks at the source. There is no way to "fake it".

"Love is kind" is not an expression of activity. It is a completely automatic result of reflecting God's character in my life. If God is in my roots, I cannot help but be kind.

## LOVE IS NOT JEALOUS (*ou zeloi*)

*Ou* means an absolute and independent negation Paul begins this statement about love by telling us that there are never any conditions or circumstances where love acts with *zeloi*. Now we need to see exactly what *zeloi* means.

The Greek background of the word *zeloi* refers to a passionate striving for a personal gain or cause. This is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, in the Greek world, zeal was often considered the noble impulse toward the highest ethical development. But it can also become a word that describes contention, evil passions, jealousy and envy. This is the context that is usually applied to Paul's statement here.

## LOVE DOES NOT BRAG AND IS NOT ARROGANT

Any speech or act that lessens the authority and supremacy of God violates the commandment to not take God's name in vain. This is much more than showing respect. God wants us to *live* on the basis of His rightful authority. This is a commandment that is for our own good because it reminds us of our necessary and essential dependency on the Creator of Life. It positions us so that we are in the right relationship with God. Improper boasting is sin because egotism replaces God with our own image.

## LOVE DOES NOT BEHAVE UNSEEMLY (*ouk aschemonei*)

This word is used only twice in the NT, here and in I Cor. 7:36. In the seventh chapter, the word is associated with sexual propriety and this seems to be the correct context. Love does not behave indecently.

For the first time, we see love in outer conduct. To this point, we have had linguistic descriptions of the character of love that we often mistake as behaviors. On closer inspection, we have found that these descriptions are about states of being rather than results of actions. Now Paul shifts gears. We are presented with an aspect of love that is behavioral. There is a very good reason for this. It has to do entirely with the shift in God's love from inner responses to outer requirements.

Love does not behave unseemly because it can't. Love maintains its bond to the sacred and jealously guards the purity of its origin.

And that last statement should remind us that we are still within the context of the Commandments. Jealousy, purity and holiness are inseparably linked to Love. Even in sexual conduct, Love guards jealously the purity of the bond because Love understands it is a sacred and holy thing.