

The Harvester



Preparing Souls

To Serve The Lord



Volume XXVIII

March 2008

Number 8

The "Apostle of Love" on Love

By Brian R. Kenyon

Love is a tremendous Biblical theme. Its greatness is realized by the fact that God is described as love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16). Because John has much to say about love, he is often referred to as the "apostle of love." By way of introducing love, there are two common New Testament words translated love. Most of us have heard these words in English forms. First, the Greek word *agape* (noun) occurs 116 times in the New Testament, and its verb 142 times. *Agape* love seeks the highest good for its object. This is the kind of love with which we can even love our enemies (Mt. 5:44). Second, the Greek word *phileo* (verb) occurs twenty-five times in the New Testament, and the noun, occurring twenty-nine times, is translated "friend" (Mt. 11:19; Acts 10:24; etc.). *Phileo* love refers to the kind of love one naturally has for family members and/or friends. These two words are much more similar in meaning than different. With these words in mind, let us consider what the "apostle of love" teaches on love.

God's Love for Us

Note first that God loves us greatly! "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." In John's writings, the "world" often refers to humanity. God so loved *humanity* that he gave His "only begotten Son." The greatness of God's love is staggering when we realize that this same world He "so loved" rejected His Son (Jn. 1:10; 7:7; 15:18-19; 1 Jn. 3:13). This is the same world that is presently ruled by Satan (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; Rev. 12:9), lies in wickedness (1 Jn. 5:19), and in its current, sinful state, cannot receive the Spirit (Jn. 14:17). Yet, despite this, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"! Jesus is the Savior of the world (Jn. 12:47; 1 Jn. 4:9), because He gave Himself for the world (Jn. 6:51), and because He takes away the sin of the world (Jn. 1:29; 1 Jn. 2:2).

"Whosoever believeth in him" lets us know that since God's love is to save us, we must obey what He says. The apostle of love said later in the chapter, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not [obeyeth not, ASV] the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (Jn. 3:36). The word translated "he that believeth not [obeyeth not, ASV]" (from *apeitheo*) means to be an unbeliever, to disobey (same Greek word as in Acts 14:2; Rom. 2:8; Rom. 10:21; 1 Pet. 2:7-8; 3:20; 4:17). God's salvation is conditioned upon believing/obeying Him!

Second, God's love for us is focused. God's love for humanity begins at the top of the human race, Jesus Christ Himself. In Jesus, we have the most unique human being to have ever walked this earth. He was at the same time both fully human and fully God (Jn. 1:1-2, 14, 18). God loved Jesus, His Son, as John affirms: "The Father loveth the Son..." (Jn. 3:35; 5:20). "Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again" (Jn. 10:17). Jesus, in turn, loved His disciples (Jn. 13:1; 15:9; Rev. 1:5). John even pointed out specific individuals as the objects of Jesus' love, such as Lazarus (Jn. 11:5, 36), His mother (Jn. 19:26), Mary and her sisters (Jn. 11:5), and even John himself, if he was, as most Bible students agree, that "disciple whom Jesus loved" (Jn. 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20).

While it is true that God loves all humanity, He has a special love reserved for those who do His will. Listen again to the apostle of love: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (Jn. 14:21); "For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (Jn. 16:27); "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God..." (1 Jn. 3:1).

Our Love for God

John recorded Jesus saying, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (Jn. 14:15). The ideas of love and obedience are inseparably linked in the Gospel. Note again the words of Jesus, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me..."²³If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. ²⁴He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings..." (Jn. 14:21-24). Is it any wonder then that Jesus said, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Jn. 15:14)?

The expression "actions speak louder than words" rings true in every aspect of life, especially when it comes to love. Imagine a spouse refusing to do what the other spouse would like him or her to do that is truly in the best interest of their marriage. Would not love compel a spouse to do everything in his or her power (within Scriptural parameters) to improve the relationship? Two significant differences exist, though, between marriage and Christianity. First, Jesus has all authority (Mt. 28:18). Second, Jesus always commands us to do things that are in our best interest (Jn. 6:63). Would not love compel a Christian to do what his or her Lord requires? How can one truly love the Lord and not do what He says (Lk. 6:46)?

Doing what the Lord says is the only proper reaction that one who truly loves Him can have. Note the force of this statement by John, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 Jn. 5:3). How can John say the Lord's "commandments are not grievous," when people who have kept them have suffered hardships and even lost their physical lives (Rev. 1:9; 6:9)? The answer is *love!* "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:2). Love makes doing God's will non-burdensome.

Jesus is our best example of loving God. As the Lord was preparing His disciples for His departure, He said, "But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do" (Jn. 14:31). Jesus knew that Satan would influence His death, yet He stayed faithful to the Father. Note again the important connection between love and obedience so supremely exemplified in Jesus: "I love the Father...as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do"! Later, in the same context of preparing His disciples for life without His physical presence, Jesus said, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love" (Jn. 15:10). Even for Jesus, keeping commandments was the way He showed His love for the Father. Should we expect anything less from us? Jesus, of course, kept the Father's will perfectly, but we often fall short of His glory (Rom. 3:23).

We must remain in God's love. Jesus said, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love" (Jn. 15:9). The Greek word behind "continue" means to abide in, or remain. In many ways, it is a key word in John 15, occurring eleven times, translated "abide" (15:4-7, 10), "continue" (15:9), and "remain" (15:11, 16). The command to "continue" in Jesus' love implies that it is possible to discontinue in His love.

Sometimes, we, like Peter, need to be reminded of Jesus' love for us and our love for Him. After His resurrection, Jesus asked Peter, who days earlier denied knowing the Lord, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" (Jn. 21:15a). Jesus here used the verb form of the Greek noun *agape*. Peter responded, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (Jn. 21:15b). Peter here used a form of the Greek word *phileo*. Jesus asked a second time, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" (Jn. 21:16a). Peter again

responded, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee" (Jn. 21:16b). Both Jesus and Peter used the same words for "love" that they did in verse 15. Peter's use of *phileo* was not on the same level as Jesus' use of *agape*. Jesus asked the third time, this time using Peter's word for "love," *phileo*, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest [*phileo*] thou me?" (Jn. 15:17a). Peter, somewhat "grieved" because Jesus asked him a third time, responded, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love [*phileo*] thee" (Jn. 21:17b). Much discussion exists as to why different words for "love" are used. Perhaps in light of his actions in denying the Lord (Jn. 18:25-27), Peter was humbled because of his earlier boast of loyalty above "all men" (Mt. 26:33; Mk. 14:29), and realized his weakness. As mentioned above, the two words used for "love" are very similar in meaning. The main difference is that *phileo* is more instinctive and affectionate, like family love, whereas *agape* contains an element of intellect and volition, always seeking the highest good in its object. Whatever the case, Peter was reminded by the Lord of how much He loved him.

The Harvester

Published Monthly
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Lakeland, Florida 33803
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Our Love For One Another

Loving one another is commanded. "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you....¹⁷These things I command you, that ye love one another" (Jn. 15:12, 17 cf. 1 Jn. 3:23; 4:21). Loving each other is a condition of our salvation.

Furthermore, Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:34-35). The newness of this commandment is that it is patterned after Christ's love for us. Remember, the love about which Jesus speaks is *agape* love, seeking the highest good for the one whom we love. Jesus showed us this love in the ultimate way—suffering on Calvary's cross! He loved us enough to die, even while we were sinners (Rom. 5:8). When we have this kind of love for one another, others will know that we are Jesus' disciples.

Loving one another should be natural to the child of God. In the physical world, there are laws of nature (cf. Gen. 1:11). Spiritually, there are also "laws of nature." If we truly belong to God, we will be like Him, to a limited

degree (1 Pet. 1:15-16). This truth is no less sure when it comes to love. John said, "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 Jn. 4:7).


Since God is love (1 Jn. 4:8, 16), and since God loves others (Jn. 3:16), His children should also love others, especially one another. When we seek the highest good for others, we are being like God. When we do not love others, we cannot be the faithful offspring of God. Our love, or lack thereof, reveals our true parentage. Listen again to John: "In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. ¹¹For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. ¹²Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:10-12). Cain was not of God because he did not love his brother.

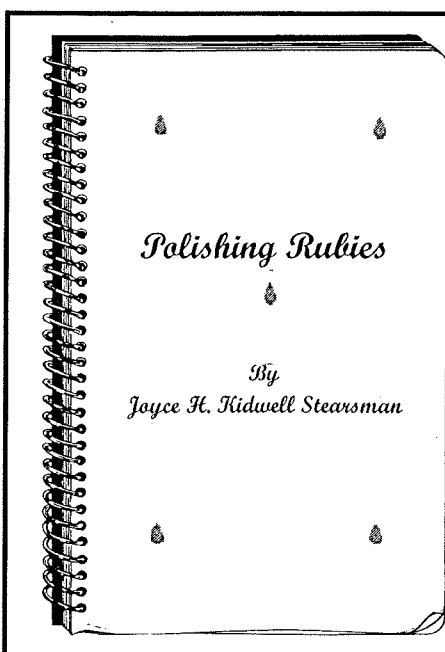
When we love one another, we will naturally keep God's commandments: "Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him

also that is begotten of him. ²By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments" (1 Jn. 5:1-2). If we do not love one another, we are not keeping God's commandments, and we are thus displeasing to God. "He that loveth not knoweth not God....²⁰If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (1 Jn. 4:8, 20). Loving one another is serious business!

When we love and appreciate the truth, we will love and appreciate others who do the same. Note John's love of two individuals. First, "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; ²For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever" (2 Jn. 1-2). Here, John declared not only his love for this lady, but the love that all those who love the truth also had for her. People who love the truth love those who also love the truth! Second, "The elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. ²Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 Jn. 1-2). Here, John again declared his love for an individual in the truth. Note also that his request for Gaius involves seeking his highest good. Prospering materially by itself is not necessarily good, but John wanted Gaius to prosper as his soul prospered, showing the importance of the soul's prosperity.

Conclusion

Space fails us to include two others aspects of the "apostle of love" on love; namely, that God's love can involve rebuke and chastening and that there are things we are not to love. What is written, though, when properly applied, will make us better servants of God. May God help us to know His love for us, to love Him, and to love one another. 



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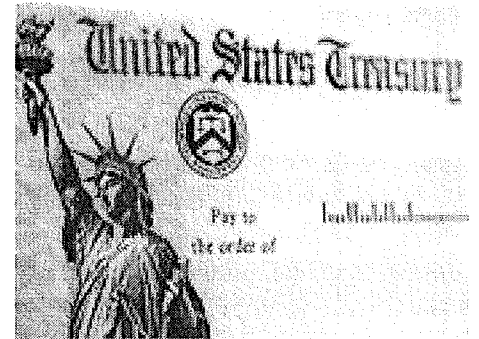
What Would You Do With Free Money?

By Brian R. Kenyon

Where else but in America would the government send a decent sized sum of money to almost every household in order to “stimulate” the economy? While this money may not be “free” in the strictest sense of the word (it is costing something to our government and, ultimately, its citizens), it is “free” to us in the sense that we were not expecting it and certainly have not earned it. Whether or not we agree with the proposed economic stimulus package, if it ends up being a reality, what will we do with the money?

Among the lessons we learn from the Ananias and Sapphira situation in Acts 5 is that we can do whatever we want with our property and money as long as it is in accordance with proper stewardship, remembering that we will have to give an account for it (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10). Peter told Ananias concerning the selling of his land, “While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?” (Acts 5:4). The sin for which he was struck dead was lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3-4).

Let us realize two truths concerning the use of our money. First, we will have to give an account for our stewardship. All material things belong to God (cf. Ps. 50:10). We are simply stewards of what God has allowed us to handle (cf. Jas. 1:17). We must not be like the foolish farmer and hoard our possessions, including money, for ourselves (Lk. 12:16-21). Second, the Gospel needs to be carried throughout the world (Mk. 16:15-16). Who is going to do it: the world or the church? Preaching is essential to the spread of the Gospel (Rom. 10:13-15). We have been faithfully training preachers since 1969. Since that time, we have been able to operate due to God’s blessing and the generosity of individuals and congregations. Why not help us by committing a portion of your “economic stimulus” check to the Florida School of Preaching? We need your help! If you would like to know more about the school, contact Gene Burgett (burgett@windstream.net, or 352-229-3195).



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