



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

Resourcing for Prayer Network

Spiritual Guidelines

The Fruit of the Spirit (II)

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control Galatian 5.22

The Greatest of These is Love

Monica Hill

July 2015

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. ...And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (1 Corinthians 13)

This beautiful chapter on the nature of love is tucked between two chapters which show the Body of Christ in action in the early days of Christianity. Chapter 12 expresses Paul's desire to see the Spirit manifested in the life of all Christians and how the Body of Christ should be operating. Chapter 14 has the more practical instructions on the use or misuse of the gifts in the gatherings of believers.

This particular passage is a special favourite at weddings as guidance for relationships in a Christian marriage. But the introduction 'And now I will show you the most excellent way' is a reminder that no matter how well we are following Christ, how faithful or 'religious' we may be, or however many gifts we have been given, if we are not demonstrating love we are not fulfilling God's purpose for our lives.

We grow in our understanding of love, whether it is in our relationship with God or with others, and will continue to grow in strength the more we practise love - it is truly the fruit of living a spirit-filled life.

Varieties of Love

We are often inhibited by our lack of words in English. There are three kinds of love used in the Bible and the Greeks used four distinct words for different kinds of love.

Eros means 'love, desire and longing (or lust), mostly of a sexual nature' and is the name of the Greek god of love. Erotic love is based on the strong feeling we have usually for just one person, but this is often a selfish kind of love usually based on physical traits and can end up being possessive. Plato refined his own definition to include an appreciation of the beauty within that person and the word platonic means 'without physical attraction'.

Agape represents the divine-love of the Lord towards his Son Jesus Christ, human beings and all believers. It is unconditional and is the love that God commanded all believers to have for everyone whether he/she is a believer or not. Feelings may not enter into this kind of love in order to give it - but they can follow and give a feeling of well-being. Agape also refers to a love feast and Thomas Aquinas further defined it as 'to will the good of another'. Leslie Weatherhead, the Methodist preacher, used to define it as 'unbreakable goodwill'.

Philos is a unique kind of love like the one you have for a companion, a brother or sister and is the kind of love that many Christians tend to practise towards one another. It is an 'affectionate regard, friendship' and is often expressed variously as loyalty to friends, family, and community: it requires virtue, equality, and familiarity. The church in Philadelphia (Revelation 3.7-13) received a special word of encouragement.

Storge is a Greek word not found in the Bible meaning love and affection often referred to as a natural empathy, like that felt by parents for offspring. It is also known to express mere acceptance or putting up with situations, as in 'loving' the tyrant.

Biblical Love

Love in its various definitions is used nearly 700 times in the Bible, 260 of which are in the New Testament!!

The Old Testament introduces relationship teaching on God's love for his people *'Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments'*. (Deuteronomy 5:10; 7:9; Exodus 20:6). He assures them that *'The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion'* (Numbers 14:18). He calls them to *'Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures for ever'* (1 Chronicles 16:34) and his requirements are *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength'* (Deuteronomy 6:5).

Favourite stories show David and Jonathon's love for each other (1 Samuel 18), Ruth's love for Naomi *'Where you go I will go'* (Ruth 1.16) and the love of the true mother for her child in Solomon's wisdom (1 Kings 3:26). Then there is The Song of Solomon and the revelation of God's love through the prophets - especially Hosea and his love in the face of unfaithfulness. The Psalms abound in songs of God's love especially Psalm 136 and look at the meaningful Proverbs like *'Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs'* (10:12), *'Whoever spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them'* (13:24), *'Do not rebuke mockers or they will hate you; rebuke the wise and they will love you'* (9:8), *'Whoever pursues righteousness and love finds life, prosperity and honour'* (21:21) and the thought-provoking *'Better a dish of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred'* (15:17).

In the New Testament, Jesus' teaching on extending the commandments is in all three Synoptic Gospels *'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and love your neighbour as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.'* Mark makes the point that it *'is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices'* and then Matthew extends this even more to *'loving your enemy'* (5:43 - 46). John emphasised the importance of loving one another. *'As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.'* (13:34-35).

Perhaps the most famous verse in a Christian's life is John 3:16 *'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life'*. John records other pertinent sayings of Jesus on love *'Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends'* (15:13); *'the man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life'* (12:25); *'If anyone loves me he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him'* (14:23).

Jesus symbolic act of love in reinstating Peter despite his denial gives hope to us all (John 21:15).

Paul's Teaching

Paul describes God's unbreakable love for us *'while we were still sinners, Christ died for us'* (Romans 5:8). That *'neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord'* (Romans 8:39).

Paul emphasises the need for Love in Action in Romans 12:9 *'Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves'*. And in Romans 14:15 *'Do not by your eating destroy someone for whom Christ died'*. He tests the sincerity of our love by comparing it with the earnestness of others (2 Corinthians 8:8) and encourages Unity in the Body (Ephesians 4:16 and Colossians 3:14).

More Study

It is not possible to cover the depth or breadth of the biblical teaching on love in a single paper and you will find much more as you study your Bible. We need to bear in mind particularly at this time the warning in Matthew *'Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold'* (24.12) but stand on the promise that *'We love because he first loved us'* (1 John 4:19). Love does not make us perfect but God's *'perfect love drives out fear'* (1 John 4:18).

A Final Thought to Ponder

I remember my Sunday School teacher taught me many years ago that we do not need to 'like' someone in order to 'love' them! *'We like people because of what they are; but we love them in spite of what they are'*.

*This paper come to you as part of the Issachar Ministries Resourcing for Prayer e-mail in July 2015
Reproduction is permitted but the office would like to know 'how many and to whom' © Monica Hill*

The logo for Issachar Ministries UK features a stylized double-headed arrow pointing left and right, followed by the word 'ISSACHAR' in a large, bold, serif font. Below 'ISSACHAR' is the text 'MINISTRIES UK' in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font.

*(C and M Ministries Trust)
registered charity no 1029797*

PO BOX 184, Sandy, Beds SG19 1EL

Telephone: 01767 641006

Website: www.issacharministries.co.uk

office e-mail: info@issacharministries.co.uk