

### The Love You Don't Need

Scripture: Matthew 22:38–40; John 15:13; Romans 13:8–10; 1 Corinthians 13:4–8; Galatians 5:14; Ephesians 4:32; Ephesians 5:1–7; Colossians 3:14; James 3:17; 1 John 4:10–11

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### "All you need is love."

So said the Beatles. If they'd been singing about God's love, the statement would have a grain of truth in it.

But what usually goes by the name *love* in popular culture is not authentic love at all; it's a deadly fraud.

*Far from being "all you need," it's something you desperately need to avoid.*

The apostle Paul makes that very point in Ephesians 5:1-3. He writes, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints."

The simple command of verse 2 ("walk in love, as Christ loved us") sums up the whole moral obligation of the Christian. After all, God's love is the single, central principle that defines the Christian's entire duty.

*This* kind of love is really "all you need." Romans 13:8-10 says, "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments . . . are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Galatians 5:14 echoes that selfsame truth: "The whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Jesus likewise taught that all the law and the prophets hang on two simple principles about love—the First and Second Great Commandments (Matthew 22:38-40). In other words, "love . . . is the bond of perfection" (Colossians 3:14, NKJV).

When Paul commands us to walk in love, the context reveals that in positive terms, he is talking about being kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving to one another (Ephesians 4:32). The model for such selfless love is Christ, who gave His life to save His people from their sins. "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). And "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11).

In other words, true love is always sacrificial, self-giving, merciful, compassionate, sympathetic, kind, generous, and patient. These and many other positive, benevolent qualities (cf 1 Corinthians 13:4-8) are what Scripture associates with divine love.

## When Love Is Bad

But notice the negative side as well, also seen in the context of Ephesians 5. The person who *truly* loves others as Christ loves us must refuse every kind of counterfeit love. The apostle Paul names some of these satanic forgeries. They include immorality, impurity, and covetousness. The passage continues:

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not associate with them. (Ephesians 5:4-7)

*Immorality* is perhaps our generation's favorite substitute for love. Paul uses the Greek word *porneia*, which includes every kind of sexual sin. Popular culture desperately tries to blur the line between genuine love and immoral passion. But all such immorality is a total perversion of genuine love, because it seeks self-gratification rather than the good of others.

*Impurity* is another devilish perversion of love. Here Paul employs the Greek term *akatharsia*, which refers to every kind of filth and impurity. Specifically, Paul has in mind "filthiness," "foolish talk," and "crude joking," which are the peculiar characteristics of evil companionship. That kind of camaraderie has nothing to do with true love, and the apostle plainly says it has no place in the Christian's walk.

*Covetousness* is yet another corruption of love that stems from a narcissistic desire for self-gratification. It's the exact opposite of the example Christ set when He "gave Himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:2). In verse 5, Paul equates covetousness with idolatry. Again, this has no place in the Christian walk, and according to verse 5, the person who is guilty of it "has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God."

Such sins, Paul says, "must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints" (Ephesians 5:3). Of those who practice such things, he tells us, "Do not associate with them" (Ephesians 5:7).

In other words, we are not showing authentic love unless we are *intolerant* of all the popular perversions of love.

Most of the talk about love these days ignores this principle. "Love" has been redefined as a broad tolerance that overlooks sin and embraces good and evil alike. That's not love; it's *apathy*.

God's love is not at all like that. Remember, the supreme manifestation of God's love is the cross, where Christ "loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:2). Thus Scripture explains the love of God in terms of sacrifice, atonement for sin, and *propitiation*: "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10). In other words Christ made Himself a sacrifice to turn away the wrath of an offended deity. Far from dismissing our sins with a benign tolerance, God gave His Son as an offering for sin, to satisfy His own wrath and justice in the salvation of sinners.

That is the very heart of the gospel. God manifest his love in a way that upheld His holiness, justice, and righteousness without compromise. True love "does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth" (1 Corinthians 13:6).

That's the kind of love we are called to walk in. It's a love that is "first pure, then peaceable" (cf. James 3:17).

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