

## Truly Loving God

\*Warning: Difficult questions ahead, and careful following and contemplation required.

**Do you love God?** If so, do you *love God* simply because He *loves you*, cp. 1John 4:10 and Matt.5:46-47? Or, do you *love God* because of what He *has done* and *continues to do* for you, cf. 1John 4:9-10? How do you know? To answer this question, we must first be sure we accurately **understand “love” and its motivations**.

I've previously said many times that *biblical*, or *divine* love, “creates rather than requires a value.” That when we “love” someone in this way, they become **valuable to us because we love them**, rather than us “loving” them because they are in some (usually physical or emotional) way valuable to us. If we only “love” someone because and as long as they present some value to us, this is actually closer to *lust* rather than *love* because it is **selfish** rather than **selfless**. Furthermore, I've supported this concept with Rom.5:8 showing that God “loved” us (mankind) when there was no *value* to Him because we were yet “sinners” and even “enemies” (v.10); so much so as to give His Son to redeem us.

While I still believe these things to be true, I've concluded that some clarification is also needed. *Agape* (love), *agapao* (to love), and *agapetos* (beloved), upon further research, have included in their definition the notion that the affection and its compulsory actions are “**based on sincere appreciation and high regard**” according to the Greek-English Lexicon of the NT, by J.P. Louw & E.A. Nida. How can this be, if, as I've thought and taught that such love “creates rather requires value”?

Let's go back to Rom.5:8,10. That we were “loved... while yet sinners” and “while enemies... were reconciled” cannot be denied and should not be doubted. It is also true that in such a state we possessed no **apparent** value to God. We were not, at that point, praising, glorifying, or serving Him in any way- let alone “loving” Him. But His “love” for us was **not** dependent upon those **apparent outward values**, but the **inherent internal value** He placed in each one of us: that eternal part of Himself called the soul/spirit, Gen.1:26-27; 2:7; Jas.4:5. Thus, God did **see and appreciate “value”** in us that was worthy of His love, but it was **inherent internal value** rather than being derived from **apparent outward service or benefit** to Him.

What effect does this have on my previous conclusions and efforts to define and describe why and/or how we “love” someone else? In the main, it doesn't. We “love” like God when the motivation for our love (which in turn makes this person *valuable* to us because we *love* them) is not **selfishly based on service or benefit to us**, but **inherent within them as a person created by God and possessing a soul that is valuable to Him**, and thus to us. In this way, we are able to “love” *our enemies* and “those who persecute” us as in Matt.5:44, rather than just *reciprocating* “love” derived from selfish motivations of service or personal benefit(s), Matt.5:46-48. But how does this revised understanding affect how/why we *love God*?

Let's look at John 14:15 and (re)think *how* and *why* we “love” God. There is a definite *link* between *loving God* and *keeping His commandments* (and *loving the children of God*), vv.21,23,24; 1John 5:2; 2John 6. But, do *keeping His commandments* and/or *loving His children* **necessarily** mean we *love God*? Perhaps so, in a foundational way,

until our love for Him can *grow* and *mature* from greater understanding or appreciation. Or, does first *loving God* allow/motivate us to then *keep His commandments* and *love His children*, cf. 1John 5:3; 2John 2:6? Note carefully 1John 2:4-5 for a more specific answer (note the word “*perfected*” - we’ll come back to it later). While *keeping His commandments* is a necessary “requirement” of *loving God*, it is also true that one can be motivated to *keep His commandments* by *guilt* or *fear* rather than *love*, cf. Dan.4:29-36,37, and thus *keep His commandments* without actually *loving God*. Likewise, heathen unbelievers can *love* (at least some of) *God’s children* without *loving God*, cp. 1John 4:20. So, though *loving God* unavoidably **requires** *keeping His commandments* and *loving His children* (*i.e. brethren*), it **does not necessarily follow** that *keeping His commandments* and/or *loving His children* always mean that we *love God* (though again, there is a definite link, John 14:21). In these regards, as in other applications, **motivations matter**. Think of a young child. Initially, their “love” of their parents is *reciprocal* (because they love him/her) and based on *external value* (they meet perceived needs). Thus, they learn to “love” and *obey*, and also “love” their *siblings*. But eventually (and *hopefully!*), their “love” *matures* in greater understanding of **who** and **what** their parents are **internally**. Now their “love” has been *perfected*, cf. 1John 2:5; 4:12,16-17 (“*perfected*” is from the Greek word *teleioo*- *to carry through completely; add what is yet wanting in order to render a thing full*). It is no longer merely *reciprocal*, or based on the *external value(s)* of them supplying needs and wants (*i.e. things*).

All of which brings us back to our central question and point: **How do you know whether or not you truly love God**, or whether our love for Him has been “**perfected**” or yet remains **infantile** and **incomplete**? Perhaps these questions will help to clarify both our understanding of what it really means to *love God*, and know whether or not we do:

1. Is our “love” of God **just reciprocal**- because He loves us, 1John 4:19?
2. Is our “love” of God **selfish**- because He blesses and benefits us, cf. Job 1:9-22?
3. Or, do we “love” God because we understand the *inherent/intrinsic/internal value* of *who* and *what* He is as “God”? Not **just** because He *loves* us- of which even the heathen are capable and do; and not **just** because He *blesses/benefit* us- which is *selfish*; **but because He is “God” and intrinsically “good”**... and we, according to the definition of *agape*, have a “**sincere appreciation and high regard**” for Him as such?
4. If the answer is “#3,” then *loving God produces* our *keeping of His commandments* and *love of His children* rather than being just a product of **them**. It is a “horse and cart” issue, but one in which it is vital to understand which is the “horse” and which is the “cart” (“Which precedes and produces which?”). If we get this backwards, we’ll probably never really understand or experience true love for God.

**So, how do we discover or develop a love for God that is not just reciprocal, and produces obedience to His commandments and love of His children (our brethren)?** The answer is actually quite simple: **Get to truly know God**. How?

- **Read His Book**- not just to understand His requirements of us, or to discern all the benefits for obedience and liabilities for disobedience (here or hereafter), but to discover *who* He is, 2Pet.1:3. Then our *love for God* can be *selflessly* “based on sincere appreciation and high regard” for His *intrinsic value* rather than being *selfishly* motivated by His *love* of and *blessing* us.
- **Talk to Him**- not just to ask Him for *physical things*, but for *spiritual understanding* and *wisdom*, Jas.1:2-5. Our prayers so often consist mainly of asking for the (again, *physical*) things *we want* that we fail to avail ourselves of the *spiritual guidance* to understanding what *we need*: true knowledge and understanding of Him!
- **Get to Know His People**- again, not just to be blessed by their association, but as *visible/earthly manifestations* and *reflections* of Him. Start with *His Son*, Jesus Christ, John 1:18; Heb.1:3; 1John 5:20; but also learn from *His children*, as they are *born of* and therefore *manifest His traits/characteristics*, 1John 4:12-16; Matt.5:13,14,16.
- **Walk with Him**- It has been often said that “To really know someone, walk in their shoes.” While we cannot “walk *in* God’s shoes,” walking *with* Him greatly enhances our comprehension *of* Him, Mic.6:8; cf. Luke 24:13-31.

Now, “**Do you love God?**” If so, then “*keep His commandments*” and “*love one another.*” If not, back up and make sure you “know” Him- for, as the saying goes, “to **know** him is to **love** him!” But while you’re doing so, *keep His commandments* and *love His children* (the *brethren*) as these are also part of the process!