

Our Lives can Express God's Love

We help others recognize the reality of the Lord Jesus because of our love for one another, and our love for Christ.

(John 13:35, 15:13-14; I Corinthians 13:1-8)

More than any other attribute, God's love changes people's lives. As we express God's love in and through our lives we can also see people's lives transformed in the same way our lives are transformed.

1. How is your life today an expression of God's love for those around you?
2. If you feel you are not expressing God's love then examine your life. What changes do you need to make to become an instrument of God's love?

To express the love of God in our lives we must love our enemies as well as our friends. We cannot love with God's love without loving our enemies.

(Leviticus 19:17; Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 23:34; John 15:13)

We must never harbor ill intentions toward those who hate us. We must be willing to bless when cursed. This is exactly the way that Jesus behaved when persecuted and even upon the cross as he died. We can know that we are experiencing and fully expressing God's love only when we love our enemies.

1. Loving our enemies is a difficult thing. Do you want to fully express God's love in your life? Pray right now and ask God to begin to transform you into this kind of person; who is like the Lord Jesus.

Though we are commanded to love God and love even our enemies, there are certain things we are never to love, permit, or excuse.

(I John 2:15; Romans 12:2; James 4:4; I Timothy 6:10-11; II Timothy 3:1-5)

Sometimes it can be hard to express love for those who are deeply committed to a life of sin. They sometimes view condemnation of sin as a form of hatred for them. We must *never* excuse sin in any form. However, we must be careful to express the difference between hating sin and loving the sinner who commits it—just as God did through Jesus.

1. How can you express love for someone yet not approve of sin at the same time?

God's Character & Man's Ethics, Study #7

The Love of God

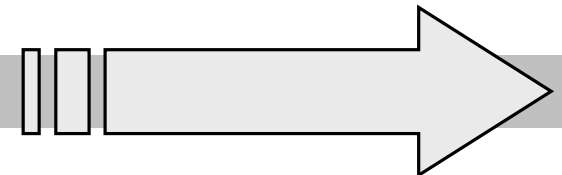
There is probably not a single greater attribute of God that has motivated more change in more peoples lives than the love of God. Love is not only one of God's supreme attributes; it is also a command for every Christian.

The scripture is replete with commands and admonitions to "Love the Lord your God," (Deuteronomy 6:5), "Love your neighbor as yourself," (Leviticus 19:18), "Love your enemies," (Matthew 5:44), "Love the brothers," (John 13:35, I John 3:14), and to love the church (implied in Ephesians 5:25). Love is given as the first Fruit of the Holy Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, signifying its primary importance among Christian character traits. Jesus remarked that people would understand us to be His disciples if we "have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Yet for all of these admonitions of love, including Jesus' command for us to love one another as He loved us (John 13:34), there are times when love is inappropriate, even wrong.

Paul's words in I Corinthians 13 describe the attributes of love from both a positive and negative view. From a positive view: "Love is patient and kind...[love] rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all thing." But notice also Paul's negative admonitions about love: "Love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoings." In fact Paul says more about what love is not than he does about what love is.

In this study we will learn about God's character attribute of love, how he expresses it, and how we can become people who love as God does.



God: Love is His Supreme Attribute

Love is that superior attribute of God whereby we understand God's feelings, thoughts, and acts toward man. God is love.

(I John 4:10, 16)

It was because of God's love that he created the universe and all that is in it, including us! God's love requires an object to pour out his love upon—man is the object of his love. As such, we can rest in the knowledge that God wishes to act toward us from the depths of his love.

1. What ways can you think of that the Creator of the Universe has demonstrated his love for his creation?

God loves those who love him, and God loves those who do not love him.

(Exodus 34:6-7; John 1:29; Ephesians 2:4-5)

Christianity is unique among all religions in that only Christianity asserts God's love for both the righteous and the sinner. In fact, the scripture teaches that it is because of God's love that the sinner becomes righteous.

1. How can God's love motivate a sinful (bad) person to be righteous?

Though God is love and loves both the righteous and the sinner, there are certain things that God does not and cannot love.

(Proverbs 6:16-19; Amos 5:15; Malachi 2:16)

God's love is great, but it is not unlimited. God's character traits of righteousness, justice, goodness, and truth require that he *not love* certain things. In fact, there are certain behaviors that God *always hates and never loves*.

1. Examine the list of behaviors provided in the scriptures above. Can you make a list of these you have committed in your own life?
2. Since we learned that God loves the sinner even though he hates certain behaviors, what else does this tell you about God's character and feelings toward you?

Jesus is God's Expression of His Love

We recognize the reality and superior nature of the Lord Jesus because of His love.

(John 3:16, 15:12-13; I John 3:16, 4:10)

Jesus was unlike any person who ever lived. He is superior in every way—but especially in his love. Jesus had the power and authority to punish all of mankind for its sin, instead he chose suffering and sacrifice on our behalf.

1. Look at the scriptures above. What attributes and/or actions of Jesus are part of his expression of love for us?

Jesus loved both his friends and his enemies so much that he sacrificed himself on behalf of them both, equally.

(John 3:16; Luke 23:33-34; Romans 5:6-8,10)

Since it was the sinner and enemy of God that needed mercy, Jesus Christ provided that mercy through his atoning death on the cross for our sins. Jesus loves the sinner whom he died for. Jesus also loves the sinner who receives his sacrifice on his behalf.

1. How is Jesus' love and sacrifice unique from all other religious leaders and philosophers you are familiar with?
2. Can you think of a greater expression of love than someone dying for a helpless person, or dying for the salvation of their enemy?

Jesus died for sin, but his death on our behalf does not mean that we can continue to live in sin, or excuse it. Love for Jesus requires that we hate sin.

(John 15:10; Romans 6:1; Hebrews 10:26, 29-30)

It was for sin that Jesus died. His death wipes clean our guilt before God. All of this was done because of his great love for us! Therefore it is proper for us to respond to God by giving him our obedience by fleeing from temptation.

1. How have you expressed your thankfulness and love to God for what he has done for you?

