

What is Love?

Jason A. Graham

Contents

The First, Second, and New Commandments	1
What is Love?	2
16 Truths About Love	2
APPENDIX: The Law Fulfilled—Righteousness Imputed.....	8

The First, Second, and New Commandments

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 (NIV) ⁴ Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ⁵ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶ These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. ⁷ Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹ Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV) ³⁷ Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

John 13:34-35 (NIV) ³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

- Jesus said that loving God was the First and Greatest commandment.
- Loving others as we love ourselves is the second commandment.
- He later raised the bar, so to speak, and gave us a new command: to love one another as He has loved us.
- On these two hang the law and the prophets. What does that mean?
 - It means that, for a believer to obey all the laws and statutes handed down by God through the Old Testament scripture, all they must do is Love.
 - Now on one hand this seems very simple. Where it may not be so simple is in some common misunderstandings about what it means to “love”.
 - What does a biblical definition of Love look like?
- To be clear, our goal is not to fulfill the OT Law. Jesus fulfilled the Law and imputed righteousness to us. I’ve included a short scripture study on this topic in the below section [APPENDIX: The Law Fulfilled—Righteousness Imputed](#).

What is Love?

Love is God. Or, if you flip the two sides of the equation around, it will read the way the Bible says it:

1 John 4:8 (NIV) Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

1 John 4:16 (NIV) And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

- So, Love is God. God has a nature. God does certain things and doesn't do other things.
- When we evaluate love in our life, it must be evaluated against the nature of God himself.
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 is possibly the most concise description of the nature of God that we see in scripture, and it is the measuring rod for true love in our own lives.
- ***The degree to which we love like the scripture says is the degree to which we are like God.***

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV) ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

- Notice that these things describe either the *nature* of love (love is or is not) or the *behavior* of love (love does not, keeps no, always does, etc.).
- Therefore, we can conclude that love is never just something that we feel inside—**it is not an emotion**.
- It is a living thing that has a certain nature. It “is” or “is not” certain things.
- Because of that nature it “does” or “does not” do certain things.
- It is a description of the character of God.

16 Truths About Love

From 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 we see 16 truths about love. This is a description of God, for God is love. This is how we should love. This is how we act like our Father.

LOVE:

1. **Love Is Patient** (longsuffering, long-spirited, or long-tempered)
 - a. This does not just mean being able to wait a long time for something to happen. It means to be:
 - i. Mild
 - ii. Slow in avenging
 - iii. Slow to anger
 - iv. Slow to punish—this is a very important thing to understand about the nature of God. He will avoid administering punishment altogether whenever possible.
 1. Many modern parenting ideals, even in the church, directly oppose this idea of biblical love. For example, there is often the thought that parents must punish a child quickly who demonstrates disobedience or rebellion so that they won't

develop the idea that their behavior is okay. However, the biblical concept of love would allow for being slow to punish.

2. The Heavenly Father certainly demonstrates this kind of patience with us.

2. **Love Is Kind** (mild, sympathetic, forbearing, affectionate)

a. I've found that kindness is best understood when it is contrasted with something that it is often confused with: Being Nice.

- i. Kindness is not being nice (pleasant, agreeable, polite), which mostly has to do with outward appearance.
- ii. Kindness has to do with one's inward nature—being mild, sympathetic, forbearing, and affectionate.
- iii. Being nice can be rooted in deception (I said that just to be nice, but I didn't really mean it.).
- iv. However, kindness is always rooted in the truth.
- v. The Bible never tells us to be nice. It does tell us to be Kind.
- vi. It never says that God is nice. It says He is kind, and that his kindness leads to repentance.

1. **Romans 2:4 (NIV)** Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?

- vii. So in us, love will have much more to do with our mild inward nature than any false outward display.
- viii. Also, I believe that the kindness of God revealed through us in love can also draw others to repentance.

3. **Love Does Not Envy**

a. The word for envy here is also translated as jealousy in other passages of scripture. In some passages, it has a positive meaning:

- i. The Lord is Jealous over us.
 1. In this sense, it means that he wants our whole hearts, and He doesn't want us drawn away by other lovers. That is a good thing.

b. When meant in the negative way, as in this passage of scripture, it means jealousy or envy over what others have. We should not desire what others have in discontent.

- i. Now, I have found that envy likes to hide its ugly little face. Very often people will say that they don't envy, meaning that they are not sitting around wanting the things that someone else has.
- ii. However, envy often manifests in a subtler form. It can manifest as not being happy for other people when they get something good that we don't.
- iii. Envy keeps us from rejoicing in the victories of others.
- iv. So, rather than looking at envy as just consciously wishing you had other people's possessions, judge your heart to see if you genuinely have a hard time being happy if other people get or do what you want (to your exclusion).
- v. Be very wary of the phrase "That's not fair." It can be a sure sign of envy in our hearts.

4. **Love Does Not Boast**

a. Love is not self-centered; therefore, walking in love will cause you to not make a display of yourself.

- i. This is often connected with rhetorical embellishments about oneself. In other words, verbally attempting to make oneself look more important, smart, unique, strong, etc.

- b. This can take the form of intimidating others or putting others down to explain how much better or different you are than most other people.
- c. Boasting is the outward action of inward pride, which I have personally come to believe is one of the ugliest conditions the human heart could have before the Humble King.

5. Love Is Not Proud

- a. The nature of love is to be humble. The lover does not try to exalt themselves, but rather praises and builds up the one they love.
- b. Having true love will cause you to see yourself rightly—humbly.
 - i. Humility doesn't lower self-worth, but rather raises it—because it allows us to see ourselves as God himself does.
 - ii. Pride on the other hand lowers self-worth because its self-adulation is empty and false, which leads to us reaching for a self that does not exist, and ultimately leaves us feeling empty and worthless.
 - iii. The true deception in this is that the condition it leads us into causes us to boast more, looking for others to see us how we want to be, which turns to anger when they don't see it and ends in deep self-loathing.
 - iv. That is not the nature of love.

6. Love Is Not Rude

- a. Some translations say, “does not behave unseemly”.
- b. It means not acting inappropriately for the circumstance. So, love never behaves inappropriately.
- c. We will often be the rudest with those we are closest with and will even use that closeness as an excuse for being rude.
- d. God's kind of love, however, does not behave rudely or inappropriately. It isn't self-centered enough to do so.

7. Love Is Not Self-Seeking

- a. Love is never motivated by self-fulfillment.
- b. Modern sentiments like “whatever makes you happy”, in the world of love and relationships, fall way short when we look at a biblical definition of true love.
- c. Love is self-fulfilling—of that there is no question. However, it is not motivated by self-fulfillment.
- d. True love's motivation is in fulfilling others rather than self.
- e. It recognizes the truth that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

8. Love Is Not Easily Angered

- a. This really goes hand-in-hand with patience. When we deal with someone else through a position of love, then we will not be easily provoked, irritated, or angered.
- b. This is one of the key characteristics of love that should make a home a safe place.
- c. In love, everyone should feel the freedom to exist, speak, and act without the fear of punishment.
- d. **1 John 4:16-18 (NIV)** ¹⁶And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. ¹⁷In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. ¹⁸There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

- i. This scripture shows that, in the face of the very judgment of God, love will cause us not to be afraid, because there will be no fear of punishment.
- ii. Love should be the primary motivation in our homes for leading children toward obedience—not the fear of punishment.
 - 1. The same should be true in all of our relationships, friendships, Coworking situations, and leadership roles of any kind.
- iii. This doesn't mean that there is never punishment for wrong-doing, but rather that children should not be motivated toward obedience through fear of punishment before being motivated through love.
 - 1. Those motivated by fear will obey in your presence, and act out in their anger, disdain, or rebellion toward you in your absence, because they cannot be perfected in love.
- iv. As discussed in my teaching on "Do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil", this makes the difference between lovers of God and sons of hell.

9. Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs

- a. Some translations say "seeks no evil" instead of "keeps no record of wrongs". Why the difference? The Greek word translated into "seeks" in those translations actually means "take an inventory" or "to number—to estimate".
- b. So, it actually does mean that it doesn't keep a record of evil or wrongdoing.
- c. This is one of the more challenging aspects of love, I believe, for us as humans because it seems so "natural" to have a good arsenal of mistakes to shoot off as soon as someone crosses us.
 - i. However, we should be endeavoring to live supernaturally—to be like Jesus.
 - ii. He keeps a record of rights, and plans great rewards for them.

10. Love Does Not Delight in Evil

- a. The word for evil here means "iniquity" or "injustice".
- b. This means that love is never happy about injustice—even if the injustice would cause them to come out on top.
- c. Injustice is always evil and love always recognizes it as such.
- d. Also, we cannot say that what the scripture otherwise labels as evil is good just because some version of what humans want to call love is involved. True, godly love does not delight in evil.

11. Love Rejoices with the Truth

- a. There is a conjunction (but) that joins this phrase with the phrase before it. This gives us more of a clue of what it would mean to rejoice in truth.
- b. Love does rejoice in truthfulness, as the scripture clearly says. Also, in context we could derive the fact that it rejoices in justice rather than injustice.
- c. Love rejoices in justice, even when it brings personal harm. We can see this characteristic in the Father when the Bible speaks of His reaction to the suffering and death of Jesus.
 - i. **Isaiah 53:10 (NIV)** Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
 - 1. The phrase "it was the Lord's will to crush him" is more accurately translated as "it PLEASED the Lord to crush him" or that the Lord "delighted" in crushing him. I use

the NIV here because the wording of the rest of the verse is so much clearer than many other translations.

2. The Father's heart Rejoiced with Justice over sin, even though it meant the crushing of His own son.
- d. How does love rejoice with the truth? I believe that, because having a love for the truth is such a key component of the kingdom of God, that love rejoices with the truth even if the information is not positive or encouraging.
 - i. God desires truth from the inward parts, even if we are confessing sin, God rejoices in the truth from us rather than rejecting us because of sin.
 - ii. If we walk in godly love, we will treat others in the same way.

12. Love Always Protects

- a. This word means to protect by covering.
- b. This concept of providing a covering is abused in some ways in manipulative teachings about anointing and hierarchical spiritual authority.
 - i. In these teachings, the focus about covering is usually presented as a warning that those under the one with anointing must endeavor to stay under the covering of that ministry in order to maintain the blessing of God on their lives, or to have "God's best."
- c. However, the idea of covering from this scripture works in the opposite direction.
 - i. The one providing the covering **always** provides it out of a motivation of love, even if others do not "deserve" it.
 - ii. There is never a threat of anyone losing it because love "always protects".
- d. This means that love will not uncover the one it loves.
 - i. It won't expose to danger.
 - ii. It won't expose to ridicule.
 - iii. It won't expose to humiliation.
 - iv. It won't expose to shame.
 - v. It always protects. Always covers.
- e. We see in the account of Noah becoming drunk, how his son Ham failed to cover his father.
 - i. [Genesis 9:20-23 \(NIV\)](#) ²⁰Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. ²¹When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. ²²Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. ²³But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness.
 - ii. If Ham had shown love to his father, Shem and Japheth would have never known their father had been naked for two reasons:
 1. Ham would have covered Noah himself.
 2. Ham would not have attempted to expose his father to ridicule or shame.

13. Love Always Trusts

- a. This word in the Greek derives from the word for "faith".
- b. It means that love believes; however, it is not intended to indicate that love is gullible or that it will just believe anything.

- c. It means that love has trusting faith.
- d. LOVE BELIEVES IN YOU!!!
- e. Love expects the best from you and for you.

14. Love Always Hopes

- a. This goes hand in hand with love always trusting.
- b. Love never gives up hope.
- c. It always believes that there is reason to not give up because God is faithful.
- d. **Romans 15:13 (NIV)** ¹³ *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
 - i. Here God is called a God of hope, and we see that hope is something that is granted to us by the power of the Holy Spirit.
 - ii. This does not mean a simple longing like “I hope it is a pretty day tomorrow.”
 - iii. It is a powerful gift given by the Holy Spirit that causes us not to lose heart even in the hardest of circumstances.
 - iv. *It believes that even though it can see no way to reach into the dark and bring light, that light will still come.*
 - v. Love always Hopes.

15. Love Always Perseveres

- a. The meaning of this word in the Greek doesn't mean perseverance in the way we often think about it. It doesn't mean the ability to keep going no matter what. Although I do believe that is true of love, certainly.
- b. However, the meaning of this word gives a totally different picture. Rather than the ability to “keep going” this word means that love “keeps staying”.
- c. It literally means “to remain” or to “stay under”—even in times of great pressure. Love will always stay and stand under pressures that would otherwise push down and crush us.
- d. So, love will not leave. It will always stay through all circumstances. Love always endures.

16. Love Never Fails

- a. This word “fails” in the Greek literally means “to fall out of”, in the sense of being taken off course.
- b. To say that love never fails is to say that love never falls off course—it never falls away from its purpose.
 - i. We may often think that this means that love (God) will never disappoint us. However, it is not that trite of a thing. God's ways may often disappoint because our ways are not his ways and our thoughts are not his thoughts. His plans—although always better—may be beyond our comprehension and may disappoint us by not turning out how we wanted.
 - ii. If that is what failure means to you, then you may think that love fails.
- c. The truth is that love never does fail—it never falls off its course.
- d. What is its course?
 - i. To be patient.
 - ii. To be kind.
 - iii. To not envy.
 - iv. To not boast.
 - v. To not be proud.

- vi. To not be rude.
- vii. To not be self-seeking.
- viii. To not be easily angered.
- ix. To keep no record of wrongs.
- x. To not delight in evil.
- xi. To rejoice with the truth.
- xii. To always protect.
- xiii. To always trust.
- xiv. To always hope.
- xv. To always persevere.

LOVE NEVER FAILS. GOD IS LOVE, and the degree to which we love as described above is the degree to which we love like God. We must reject cultural redefinitions of love that do rejoice in evil, injustice, perversity, and delusion. That is not Love. God, as described in the scripture, is true Love.

APPENDIX: The Law Fulfilled—Righteousness Imputed

As I've made the point that, in order to fulfill the Law, a person would have to Love God with everything and love their neighbor as themselves—as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 22:37-40, I wanted to include a short scripture study to emphasize the fact that the believer's goal is NOT to fulfill the Law, but rather to rest in the completed work of Christ who has already fulfilled the Law.

- Jesus said that he came to fulfill the Law but warned that nothing would be taken from the Law until everything was accomplished. Then at his crucifixion we see that Jesus recognized that everything was accomplished and even declared out loud—as his last words on the cross—It is finished.
 - **Matthew 5:17–20 (NIV) — 17** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18** For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law **until everything is accomplished. 19** Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. **20** For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.
 - **John 19:28–30 (NIV) — 28** Later, **knowing that everything had now been finished**, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” **29** A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. **30** When he had received the drink, **Jesus said, “It is finished.”** With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.
- We also no longer live under the Law of Moses because it was the ministry of death that gives power to sin. Jesus brought us the ministry that brings righteousness, and He gives victory to us, not power to sin.

- **2 Corinthians 3:7–17 (NIV)** — **7** Now if **the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone**, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, **8** will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? **9** If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, **how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness!** **10** For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. **11** And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! **12** Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold. **13** We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. **14** But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. **15** Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. **16** But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. **17** Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.
- **1 Corinthians 15:56–57 (NIV)** — **56** The sting of death is sin, and **the power of sin is the law.** **57** But thanks be to God! He gives us the **victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**
- The book of Romans makes it clear that **NO ONE** will be declared righteous by the Law. Righteousness comes apart from the Law to those who have faith in Jesus. And Ephesians explains that even that faith itself is a gift from God.
 - **Romans 3:19–26 (NIV)** — **19** Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. **20** Therefore **no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law**; rather, **through the law we become conscious of our sin.** **21** But now **apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known**, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. **22** This **righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.** There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. **25** God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished—**26** he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.
 - **Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)** — **8** For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—**9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

We can boast in nothing but the finished work of Jesus Christ.