

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

General Idea: When God tells us that love is not self-seeking, He means that we are never to take advantage of others. We are to be empathic, placing others before ourselves. We are to be considerate, appreciative, and never critical. We are never to plot evil or allow insults to get to us. We are to make allowances for the shortcomings of others. Our call is to lift one another up, and be dignified, having good conduct yet never dictating to one another our standards, or demanding or manipulating others to get our way. Rather, we are to model Christ-like character so it is contagious and inviting. Because God loved us so much, He never had a self-seeking attitude. If He had, He would never have sent His Son on our behalf. Every Christian must respect the rights and dignity of other people, and never force his/her will and thoughtless behavior onto others. We cannot force expectations or demands on our friends or our spouse. We need to be happy when others around us experience success and growth, and never be jealous. Love is the seeking of His truth, and finding a way to bring it to others.

Authentic Love is Altruistic (and does not have a "me first" attitude!)

Contexts and Background:

This passage continues the supreme example of our Lord's character that we are to emulate. This church in Corinth had both good and bad doctrines; they did a lot of squabbling among themselves, like what we see in all of society and even in many Christian homes and churches today. This church seemed to lack the main fruit of faith, which is love. Any church like this one, when it lacks love, will only have disorder. What is supposed to be sought and proclaimed, Christ the Lord, will be replaced with pride and strife and God will not get the glory. Without love in a marriage, all you have are strife and divorce. Without love in the church, all you have are pride and emptiness. There will be no effective mission for our Lord, just the emptiness of souls and the disillusionment of the saints!

Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings:

- *Love is/Charity.* Love is the supreme example of our Lord and our supreme asset and model for living. There is nothing greater in God's economy than His propensity to love, and our obedience is to follow suit! Another vital aspect of real, biblical, Christian love is that *it is extreme!* Real love takes us beyond who we are and what we want and focuses us upon others as Christ did with us. Thus, love is not about our feelings or being overly cautious, sappy or over-romantic, or clever and manipulative. Rather, real love takes us to the max...to the extreme. If the love we think we have for something or someone does not take us beyond our self interests, we do not have real love; we just have desires, pride, and lust. Thus, what we have has no real value to anyone or to God and it definitely does not protect (Mark 12:28-31; John 3:16, Matt. 22:34-40; John 3:16; 13:1, 34-35; 14:1; 15:9; Rom. 1:31; 5:10; 12:10; 1 Cor. 13; Eph. 2:4-7; Phil. 2:2; Col. 1:1-6; 3:12-14; 1 Thess. 1:3; 2:8; 3:6; 12; 4:9-10; 5:8; 13; 2 Tim. 3:3; Heb. 10:24; 1 John 4:7-12).
- *Not self-seeking/seeketh not it's own/is not selfish/does not insist on its own way/seeketh not her own/does not demand its own way/not always "me first,"/not self-centered.* Real love is altruistic and empathetic and seeks to lift others up. When we are just self-seeking, we are selfish and unconcerned with eternal values or with serving our Lord. By doing this, we fall into a trap, not because of God's vengeance, but because we are not doing as we should. As a result, natural consequences will take over. God's precepts are for our benefit and protection; He gives us what is best for us, just as loving parents would do for their child. The fullness of love makes our relationships real and centered upon godly directions. By not placing ourselves first, we are able to place Christ first and we end up with a better deal. We can seek the love of 1 Corinthians 13,

and this will compel us to share our richness as Christians with both ourselves and with others. So, out of our completeness in Christ, we can build ourselves up in Him, casting away what has hurt us, what causes us to fear, and what is wrong, replacing it all with biblical character and values. This will be the foundation upon which to create the lasting bonds with Christ and others, as we glorify our Lord and live in and for His Church (Prov. 10:12; Matt. 6:33; John 12:24; Eph. 5:15-21; Phil. 2:21; Col. 1:13).

- Love is not salvation; love can't save you, but we can't share the Gospel unless we understand Christ's love and be examples of it. You can't be an effective or growing Christian if you are not a person who can give and receive love. The love we experience is directly connected to the love we give, and it all rests on the love of Christ for us all.
- Being self-seeking is like being rude and arrogant; it is the opposite of real, impacting love. It causes us to disrespect, humiliate, undermine, put down or show up another person either subtly or adversely. This is an aspect of pride and/or hurriedness, which are the direct opposites of our call and the teaching of our Lord. We must see that being offensive and selfish are awful attitudes and are the opposites of real love and kindness. This will ruin our relationships and potential relationships with others because we are deluded by our own self-perception or stuck in our hurts, fears, and circumstances. When we are doing things that are not nice or acting improperly, we push people away and thus we derail our opportunities and call. Behaving selfishly and badly will dishonor our God!
- Greed, stinginess, selfishness, and miserliness are rotten fruits because we hoard what God has given us, what He meant for us to share, and we do not use it properly as Christ called us to do. This blocks the flow of God's blessings and His "living water" from flowing in us. We will become stagnant and useless to either the Kingdom or the people around us. Pride and arrogance will be the driving force—the quintessential things that God hates the most (Proverbs 6:16-18)!
- Have you considered that the way God deals with us? He is never arrogant, rude, or self-seeking—even though we deserve it. We are never to be rude or tactless or lazy or forsake His principles that are so needed in our sinful world—a world that needs to see kindness and a God who is real.
- The Carnegie Institute has stated that 90% of all people who fail in their jobs and careers do so because they cannot get along with others. Being polite and courteous will always be more effective than offensiveness, strife, selfishness, or anger, even in bad situations. Being rude or self-centered only hurts your goals and prospects and turns others away. Society expects politeness; Christ demands it of Christians so that non-Christians will know who we are supposed to be and respond—more than we tend to do at times.
- When a Christian is giving from selfish motives, he or she expects a return for his or her "investment." When a real, growing, mature Christian gives, he/she expects nothing in return. One investment is eternal, while the other so-called Christian investment is of the world of today.

Devotional Thoughts and Applications:

To be good, we have to own a renewed nature and mindset from our Lord. Jesus calls us to an entirely different perspective and outlook of life. He sees the quintessential reason for life and our essence to be in relationships. He wants us to transition our thinking from selfish and materialistic matters to eternal matters and relationships, which are far more valuable and important. With love as our motivation, and unselfishness as our goal, loyalty and faithfulness to God and to others can be built. In addition, our attitude and mindset will also improve so when we face trials, setbacks, and hurts, we will be better able to handle difficult people and our hurts and fears. We will be able to take

tricky and complicated circumstances and learn and grow from them rather than fume and rant and rave, none of which do anything to help us. This is the outcome of being strengthened in the Word and growing in the Spirit by our prayer life, devotions, learning, and fellowship and then putting them all into practice as we walk through life. The result is a deeper love and an ability to endure what life throws at us (Matt. 5:38-44; 2 Cor. 4:16; Eph. 3:16-20).

Thus, a key aspect of love means we are not selfish. How do we know if we get this right? If you are not caring for others outside of your circle, then you are demanding your own way because your pride is in the way of His Way, and evil is on its way to you and from you! Our lives will be a false dedication to things that are not centered upon His will. We cannot earn our way, but our way must reflect His work (Rom. 6:12; Eph. 5:15-17; Col. 3:5; 1 Pet. 2:24)!

The fullness of love will come when we are first seeking Christ and His work in us, so we are pursuing righteousness and all that is good as a way to glorify Christ as Lord. What we all need to be doing is applying what we have been given, our completeness in Christ applied to our relationships; from friendships to fellowship, even dating all come from our service and mission for His glory. And, it is to be the same in ministry and in marriage. This is real, authentic love that is essential—not only in our faith development, but also in how we prepare ourselves to build relationships and interrelate with others.

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

Read these two passages again in different translations (1 Corinthians 13:1-8; 1 John 4: 7-12)

1. Discuss your thoughts on this aspect of love.
2. Give a positive example.
3. Give a negative example.
4. How is this type of love working in you?
5. Why is this love not working in you?
6. What blocks this love from being exhibited in you?
7. What would it take to get this love working in you?
8. What are you willing to do about it?

Additional Questions:

1. How would you define being selfish or self-seeking? Why does real love not take advantage of others?
2. Do you think a deeper understanding that God loves you could help you be more polite and less selfish? How so?
3. What causes you to be selfish? How does being selfish relate to being spiteful or condescending? How do you think Jesus feels about it?
4. Why are we as Christians never to take advantage of others? When would it be appropriate to do so?
5. We are to place others first, and ourselves after that. How would this help you feel more assured and have more self-respect and confidence? How would this improve your relationships?
6. What examples have you seen of people being considerate, appreciative, and never critical to you? How did this make you feel? How have you exemplified these to others? How do you think they felt?
7. Have you ever demanded or manipulated others to get your way? What was the result? How could you have handled the situation better? How would that have produced better results?
8. How can modeling Christ-like character be contagious and inviting for others to examine and except our faith?
9. What can your church do better to honor the rights and dignity of other people, and never force their will and thoughtless behaviors onto others (not compromising the Gospel)? How would this improve your evangelism and church growth?
10. Love is the seeking of His truth, and finding a way to bring it to others. How is this also how we are to relate to one another and do evangelism?