**GOD IS LOVE! HOW ABOUT US?**

By Tom McDonald, June 2011, Rev. 3/14/16

Scripture from NASB-U

Anyone here really know – what LOVE is? What God means by LOVE?

If I don’t know what LOVE is how am I to know I’m *doing* it right – God’s way?

 There are many words for LOVE in the Greek!

 **Agape** – means unconditional love

 **Eros** – means romantic or sensual love

 **Fileo** – means brotherly or a friend’s love

 **Storge** – means parental love for a child

What is meant when we say we LOVE someone?

Is it a feeling …a decision? …a desire? …an intent? …an action?

The dictionary says, among many things, “a deep and tender feeling of affection for, or attachment or devotion to a person or persons.”

But God seems to mean a lot more than this about LOVE…

After all in I John 4:16, John said, “God is LOVE.” And thinking about that suggests that God’s every move toward us is bound up in His definition of LOVE. So let’s pursue that idea…

Matthew 22:34-40 Read that please. “But when the Pharisees heard that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered themselves together.

One of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.’ “

Jesus said in verse 37, we are to LOVE the Lord our God – then in verse 39 we are to LOVE our neighbors as ourselves, right? The word for LOVE in the Greek here in both cases is – you guessed it – **AGAPE**, unconditional LOVE.

What’s the implication of verse 40 “…depends all the Law and the Prophets”? Now look at Matthew 7:12, the Golden Rule “In everything, therefore, treat people the same way you want them to treat you, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” What’s the tie? “He who has My Commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Please read Deuteronomy 6:5-9 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.”

“You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.”

As Jesus spoke in the quote we read a moment ago from Matthew, He was drawing from this set of verses in Deuteronomy.

What kind of LOVE is used in Deuteronomy 6:5? It is the Hebrew “AHEV”, which (as in English) is used with reference to things and actions, as well as persons, but (unlike English) has less to do with emotions and more with actions. It is like “AGAPE” in its unconditional nature, it is expressed by or through actions.

God says, You say you LOVE Me – then show Me.

Look at Deuteronomy 7:9 “Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His loving-kindness to a thousand generations with those who love Him and keep His commandments;”

What do you see? If you LOVE God by obeying Him (following His commandments), He will LOVE you and shower you with LOVINGKINDNESS forever (thousands of generations).

Where in the New Testament do we find this extravagant promise repeated? Look at John 14:21, one of the most revealing passages in the entire Bible concerning how God “defines” or views LOVE. [recite it].

“He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him.”

Let me talk about the great meaning here – for all of us toward God and, by extension, toward each other. {speak as led by the Holy Spirit}

Let’s return briefly to Deuteronomy 6:7: “…and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up”. What are the implications to you and me today from this verse? As men – the high priest of our homes -- are we teaching these things to our sons and, by extension, to all our family members?

But – how can we teach something like LOVE unless we thoroughly understand it and then express it fully ourselves?

Jesus’ statement in John 14:21 is not all He had for us on the seemingly inscrutable subject of LOVE. Before He left earth, He gave His disciples a final commandment.

Verses 34-35 of John chapter 13: “A new commandment I give to you, that you LOVE one another, even as I have LOVED you, that you also LOVE one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have LOVE for one another.” Each of the four “LOVES” here is “AGAPE”.

Even if we know what Jesus meant here, “LOVE one another as I have LOVED you.” Can we attain it?

For sure, He has set the bar infinitely higher than when He said, “LOVE your neighbor as your self.” I don’t know about you, but I don’t do even this one well.

So now He wants us to LOVE each other as He has LOVED us – and how did He LOVE us?? His LOVE for us compelled Him to die in our place for our sin – and He LOVES us still…

Gives me a sinking feeling in my stomach – He is telling me to LOVE others that way? What kind of LOVE is that? I mean, how do I find that kind of LOVE?

If I do not know what LOVE is – for sure—then—there is no way on earth that I can comply with loving others that way.

So how do we get a good solid handle on this “thing” called LOVE???

How about this – could it best be defined *for us* by how it is **expressed**?

I think God understood **that** when He told us to LOVE Him using the word AHEV, in the Old Testament, which, we learned, is oriented toward actions and away from emotions, and AGAPE in the New Testament, which is oriented toward keeping His commandments – again, an action-oriented LOVE.

 Yeah, that may be it for me. I want something concrete,

 Something solid that I can understand and do.

 Based on prayer, and much research in Scripture,

 After asking God “What is LOVE?”

 I can say now that…

**The greatest act of LOVE ever known is when God the Father GAVE His Son, Jesus the Christ, to die as our blood sacrifice to FORGIVE all the sin of everyone in the world, past, present and future, if we will each repent and believe He is the resurrected Son of God… and accept Him as our Saviour and as our LORD. (Paraphrase of: John 3:16-18)**

{As a quick aside, if you have NOT embraced that LOVE and that forever FORGIVENESS, you need to do that before you leave here today. You need to nail down tight where you are going to spend Eternity.}}

 LOVE, therefore, is fully and exhaustively expressed through two actions

 AND, further, in these two ways all the possible ways

 of viewing LOVE

 as a feeling,

 as a decision,

 as a desire,

 as an intent,

 as an action,

 are fully and completely expressed!

 And what are those two?

 GIVE AND FORGIVE

 All other acts of LOVE that we can do on earth

 are merely subsets of these two.

Why GIVE?

LOVE (real love, true love, agape love) compels us as an act of our WILL to give of our TIME, our TALENT, our TREASURE, routinely and sometimes sacrificially, to help those in need, or to show affection.

More on this later…

Why FORGIVE?

LOVE (real love, true love, agape love) compels us as an act of our WILL to FORGIVE others of all transgressions against us – or it should.

More on this later…

Some of you may still be thinking that there surely must be more to LOVE than just GIVE and FORGIVE. Let’s look at it in more detail.

 We are each body, soul, spirit and mind.

 From these four we have only *four possessions*, which enable us to GIVE or FORGIVE to express our LOVE to others.

**Our TIME, our TALENT, our TREASURE, and our WILL**

That’s all any of us has – to GIVE and FORGIVE – and they’re all any of

 us need

 **to help others**

 **which are the only ways we are able to express**

 **our LOVE**

**GIVE \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\***

Let’s first explore the “GIVE” part of LOVE.

Some examples:

When you are a caregiver for someone, you LOVE them by being WILLING to GIVE your TIME and, perhaps your TALENT and your TREASURE.

When you WILL to GIVE of your TREASURE and TIME to support your family or a ministry, you are LOVING the people of your family, or those who are the object of that ministry’s help.

When you WILL to LOVE someone like your spouse or a good friend, you express that by spending TIME with them – spending TREASURE for gifts occasionally –or using TALENT to help them build or fix something.

By your WILL, becoming an active member of a ministry that helps people (Builders for Christ, Georgia Baptist’s Disaster Relief, Salvation Army, etc.) by sharing your TIME, TALENT and TREASURE.

How about when a friend loses a family member; is it better to say, “I’ll pray for you”, or offer to spend TIME with them, or run an errand for them, or bring a meal or two for the grieving family?

There are any number of examples of “GIVE’. You get the idea, so think about it and look for your own opportunities.

Read I John 3:17 (“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”) and,

James 2:15-16 (If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, Go in peace, be warmed and be filled, and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”)

When it comes to our church, of course, we should – even must GIVE our full tithe before anything else

(see Malachi 3:8-11 “Will a man rob God?” Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the Lord of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes,” says the Lord of hosts.)

The Barna Group, a California research company, found that only 4% of US adults tithed their income as of early 2011. Over the past decade, the percentage of those donating at least a tenth of their income has hovered between 5 and 7 percent.

Therefore, the Tithe is the single best way to show God Himself that you LOVE Him – you GIVE back to Him a mere tenth of the whole thing He GIVES you. This tithe GIVING is an act of your will in loving obedience to God. (Incidentally, I have found that the ninety percent goes further than the hundred percent did. It’s not magic; it’s one of God’s blessings, as promised!)

Then consider offerings beyond the tithe by speaking with God about it. Sometimes He may ask you to give sacrificially; that is, to give TREASURE, TALENT or TIME that “hurts”, or diminishes other of your activities. Perhaps you are already giving offerings routinely – such as to ministries, which He has moved you to support; that’s as it should be. But He may ask you to do still more. Ask Him.

**The bottom line is that you can show God’s LOVE by helping people directly or by helping your family, church, ministries and other organizations that exist to help people. As an act of LOVE, you WILL to expend your TIME, TALENT and TREASURE as expressions of that caring – of that LOVE.**

**FORGIVE** \*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

Let’s now take a close look at FORGIVE, one of the most difficult aspects of LOVE.

For some of us – to forgive someone who “done us wrong” is almost impossible. Dante in his “Divine Comedy” recognized this when he wrote, “To err is human, to FORGIVE divine.”

The Divine (God) offered to forgive all mankind its sin by way of a sinless Christ’s **unfair** death.

**This is a true statement, isn’t it? We want to be FORGIVEN wrongs we’ve done to others.**

**Yet, isn’t it also too often true of us that we want to withhold FORGIVENESS from those who did us wrong?**

For us to forgive someone an injustice to us – often takes superhuman (divine?) WILL power. Why is that? Pride? Ego? Anger? Hatred?

But when we, as an act of our WILL, FORGIVE someone a wrong against us, we LOVE them and drop our supposed “right” to hold them in bondage to us through our UNFORGIVENESS… we forego holding a grudge…

By FORGIVING them, we free them from that bondage, just as God frees us from our bondage to sin’s penalty through His FORGIVENESS.

Of equal importance, by forgiving, we free ourselves from the self-destructive internal stress of being unforgiving and angry toward the one who hurt us.

There is another way to look at FORGIVENESS. Remember when Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends? (John 1:13). Not many days after saying that He GAVE His life in full payment of the debt we all owe for our sin. But for us, this sort of LOVE is optional, right?

We all know the rare combat stories of a soldier falling on a grenade to save his buddies. But wait – what does Ephesians 5:25 say about the LOVE we men must show our wives: “Husbands love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her.”

There is yet another way we must “sacrifice” our lives for another person.

Jesus talked about dying to self in Luke 9:23

“And He was saying to them all, ‘If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.’ ”

We are to take up our cross daily to follow Him. It is an expression meaning that we set ourselves in humility under Him – we subordinate our WILL and our “supposed” rights to the greater good of another – just as Jesus did.

So instead of my demanding my “rightful” pound of flesh from someone who has hurt me, maybe deliberately – I deliberately forego my right to retribution and FORGIVE him or her their hurt to me. That is dying to self out of LOVE for the other person (and for Jesus). You love them, as though you are Christ – by forgiving them. Easy right?

NO! It’s not easy. It’s hard to master our egos to the point that we can put them in perfect surrender to the WILL of God. It must be an act of our WILL born out of our LOVE for the other person and for Jesus!

Because of what God the Son did for God the Father for all of us, it is clear the perfect WILL of God is always to FORGIVE – no matter how large or how horrible the offense against you. Just as Jesus died for us, we must die to ourselves to FORGIVE the offending person **before** they even ask our FORGIVENESS. They may never ask you. God’s FORGIVENESS is a pre-set attitude of our heart (our WILL) – you extend FORGIVENESS immediately.

Remember Jesus on the Cross? He’s our model! [Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do.]

That’s how to forgive. Do it early. Do it completely without a hint of insincerity. Do it without a shred of mental reservation… And do it before you are asked. **Do it out of LOVE!**

THAT IS JESUS’ WAY!

In our last scripture reference, I want you to see just how very serious God is about this vital subject of FORGIVENESS…

Will someone please read Matthew 6:12, 14, 15? “And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.”

God as Christ, the greatest teacher who ever lived, wanted to make sure we would get this issue of FORGIVING right! If we don’t get with it on this FORGIVENESS thing – He will not FORGIVE US. Did you HEAR that?

**Often we want justice for others, but mercy for ourselves. Yet – His Grace is far better than either Justice or Mercy.**

 **Justice is getting what is deserved.**

 **Mercy is not getting what is deserved.**

 **Grace is getting what is not deserved.**

**God extends His Grace to all of us freely – and none of us deserves it**.

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**So there – Now we finally have it – from God’s own Word.**

 **God says His LOVE is perfectly expressed and**

 **Defined by GIVING and FORGIVING**

 **He demonstrated it for us all to forever remember by**

 **GIVING His Son…to FORGIVE us our sins.**

 **Do this faithfully, and you will be expressing LOVE**

 **In all its fullness and beauty, as Christ did.**

**I close with this!** Jim Elliot, a missionary killed by the Auca Indians, said, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

 We must each give up our Selfishness and Self-centeredness if we are ever to GIVE and FORGIVE in LOVE here on earth.

 If we all would only lay down our lives so as to LOVE

 each other as Jesus does – we would surely gain Heaven’s

 greatest rewards eternally.

  **Let us pray:**

God – with Your help, I will make it so in my life…to the **Praise of Your Glory forever! AMEN!!!**