



Love

by Bernard Gabbott

Memory verse:

Love consists in this:
not that we loved God,
but that He loved us
and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

1 John 4:10

Love is one of those concepts bandied around a lot when it comes to Christianity. To many (if not most), it is the distillation of Christianity in one word. And, in this sense, it is hard to argue against or about—but more than that, it is hard to question. You see, when people reduce Christianity (and God) to one word—'love' - they don't necessarily ground their understanding in how the Bible describes/defines love. For many, 'love' is a lovely concept because it is often understood as a blank cheque to be who we are and to do what we want. Love is how God receives us humans—and how he leaves us humans.

But, that is not necessarily what the Bible says. Love is much bigger, much more fantastic, much more transformative, much more confronting, and much bloodier than many think—and to grasp love this way is to truly understand God, and who he is and what he has done—and who we are and can be!

Study 1: God's love for us

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, because love is from God, and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent His One and Only Son into the world so that we might live through Him. ¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us and His love is perfected in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given to us from His Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and we testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God-- God remains in him and he in God. ¹⁶ And we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and the one who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him. ¹⁷ In this, love is perfected with us so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; for we are as He is in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love; instead, perfect love drives out fear, because fear involves punishment. So the one who fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹ We love because He first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And we have this command from Him: the one who loves God must also love his brother.

1 John 4:7-21

Comprehend

1. Read 1 John 4:7-21.

Where does 'love' come from? (vs.7)

2. How was love 'revealed' and what does it 'consist in'? (vs.9-10)

3. If love is from God, and we have experienced that love, list how this love is then shown by us...
4. This love displayed is a statement of what relationship with God? And what is the reverse?
5. What does this love do in God's people now, and what vision does it give of the future?

Consider

1. How is this definition of 'love' different to, and similar to, much of what we hear about love in the world, and in Christian circles?
2. In what way does this love deal with sin, and show the reality of sin, in us?
3. How must this love be seen, amongst Christians?

Contact

1. What is at the heart of God's love for us? How must this be at the heart of our love for each other, as God's people?

Think of two practical ways this might be shown...

2. How might this love deal with your 'fear'?
3. How might the absence of this love be a problem for God's people?

Prayer

- Give thanks to God for his concrete and gracious love toward us.
- Pray for a heart, and opportunities, to show the same love to each other as God's people.
- Pray that, in love, you will know God more and more deeply.

Study 2: Our love for God

"This is the command-- the statutes and ordinances-- the LORD your God has instructed me to teach you, so that you may follow them in the land you are about to enter and possess. ² Do this so that you may fear the LORD your God all the days of your life by keeping all His statutes and commands I am giving you, your son, and your grandson, and so that you may have a long life. ³ Listen, Israel, and be careful to follow them, so that you may prosper and multiply greatly, because the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you a land flowing with milk and honey. ⁴ "Listen, Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is One. ⁵ Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶ These words that I am giving you today are to be in your heart. ⁷ Repeat them to your children. Talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸ Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them be a symbol on your forehead. ⁹ Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. ¹⁰ "When the LORD your God brings you into the land He swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that He would give you-- a land with large and beautiful cities that you did not build, ¹¹ houses full of every good thing that you did not fill them with, wells dug that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant-- and when you eat and are satisfied, ¹² be careful not to forget the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery. ¹³ Fear the LORD your God, worship Him, and take your oaths in His name. ¹⁴ Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you, ¹⁵ for the LORD your God, who is among you, is a jealous God. Otherwise, the LORD your God will become angry with you and wipe you off the face of the earth. ¹⁶ Do not test the LORD your God as you tested Him at Massah. ¹⁷ Carefully observe the commands of the LORD your God, the decrees and statutes He has commanded you. ¹⁸ Do what is right and good in the LORD's sight, so that you may prosper and so that you may enter and possess the good land the LORD your God swore to give your fathers, ¹⁹ by driving out all your enemies before you, as the LORD has said. ²⁰ "When your son asks you in the future, 'What is the meaning of

the decrees, statutes, and ordinances, which the LORD our God has commanded you?' ²¹ tell him, 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, but the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand. ²² Before our eyes the LORD inflicted great and devastating signs and wonders on Egypt, on Pharaoh and all his household, ²³ but He brought us from there in order to lead us in and give us the land that He swore to our fathers. ²⁴ The LORD commanded us to follow all these statutes and to fear the LORD our God for our prosperity always and for our preservation, as it is today. ²⁵ Righteousness will be ours if we are careful to follow every one of these commands before the LORD our God, as He has commanded us.'

Deuteronomy 6:1-25

Comprehend

1. What is the purpose of this section of Deuteronomy? (vs.1-3)
2. What is the command? And what are God's people to do with it? (vs.4-9)
3. What temptation will God's people face when they enter the land he has promised? (vs.12)
4. What should they do? (vs.13-18)
5. What question might be asked, and what answer must be given? (vs.19-24)

What does this express? (vs.25)

Consider

1. What is the connection between the 'one-ness' of the LORD, and the 'one-ness' of his people's love for him?
2. In this passage how, and why, is love connected to—and expressed through—obedience?

3. In what way is disobedience an expression of not loving the LORD?
5. What does Jesus say about this section of God's word? (cf. Matthew 22:34-40)

What does the New Testament say about this connection between love of God and obedience to God? (cf. 1 John 2:3-6)

4. How important is 'remembering' for loving, and obeying, the LORD?

Contact

1. How do God's people love God?

Why?

2. Is this a 'debt-ethic', or is there something bigger and more exciting going on here?
3. How might we fail to love God?

What does our obedience reveal about our love for God?

What does our disobedience reveal about our remembering of God?

Prayer

- Give thanks to God for his great act of salvation for his people.
- Give thanks to God for remembering what he has done for us.
- Pray that God protect you from disobedience to him, and pray that he grows obedience in you, as a statement of love.

Study 3: Our love for each other

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vineyard keeper. ² Every branch in Me that does not produce fruit He removes, and He prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me. ⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in Me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without Me. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown aside like a branch and he withers. They gather them, throw them into the fire, and they are burned. ⁷ If you remain in Me and My words remain in you, ask whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸ My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be My disciples. ⁹ "As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in My love. ¹⁰ If you keep My commands you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love. ¹¹ "I have spoken these things to you so that My joy may be in you and your joy may be complete. ¹² This is My command: love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, that someone would lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you slaves anymore, because a slave doesn't know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from My Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose Me, but I chose you. I appointed you that you should go out and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you. ¹⁷ This is what I command you: love one another.

John 15:1-17

Comprehend

1. Jesus starts with an image that he uses throughout

This passage—what is it, and what is he claiming as he uses it? (vs.1, 5)

2. If you are 'in Jesus', what will you be, what will you do, and what will happen if you don't? (vs.2-4)

How do you get 'in Jesus'? (vs.3)

3. How does Jesus restate/emphasise these ideas in verses 5-8?

4. Jesus then discusses what this 'fruit' looks like—what does he start discussing in verse 9?

5. What connection does Jesus make in verse 10?

6. How is this fruit displayed amongst God's people—in the vine? (vs.11-15)

How is this possible? (vs.16)

How does Jesus show this himself? (vs.13)

What is the result? (vs.11)

7. What is Jesus' command? (vs.12, 17)

Consider

1. What do you find striking about the 'vine' imagery of Jesus? How does it help you understand living as God's mob, in community?

2. How does God's people produce 'fruit'? (cf. vs.3, 15)

Is producing 'fruit' optional/negotiable for God's people?

What does that 'fruit' look like? (vs.10, 13)

3. How is the connection between 'love' and 'obedience' made again, and how is this seen in Jesus? (vs.9-10)

Contact

1. How does this passage change/affirm/confront your view of living amongst God's people?
2. Why do you struggle with loving God's people?

Why do find it easy to love God's people?

How might you love God's people?

Prayer

- Give thanks that Jesus is 'the vine', and loves his people by obeying his Father and laying down his life.
- Give thanks that God the Father is a diligent and loving pruner.
- Pray that Jesus works love in you, and amongst us, through his words and by his revelation of God.
- Pray that you look for, and take, opportunities to love each other this week.

Study 4: Our love for the world

¹¹ *Knowing, then, the fear of the Lord, we persuade people. We are completely open before God, and I hope we are completely open to your consciences as well.* ¹² *We are not commending ourselves to you again, but giving you an opportunity to be proud of us, so that you may have a reply for those who take pride in the outward appearance rather than in the heart.* ¹³ *For if we are out of our mind, it is for God; if we have a sound mind, it is for you.* ¹⁴ *For Christ's love compels us, since we have reached this conclusion: if One died for all, then all died.* ¹⁵ *And He died for all so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for the One who died for them and was raised.* ¹⁶ *From now on, then, we do not know anyone in a purely human way. Even if we have known Christ in a purely human way, yet now we no longer know Him like that.* ¹⁷ *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things have passed away, and look, new things have come.* ¹⁸ *Now everything is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ; certain that God is appealing through us, we plead on Christ's behalf, "Be reconciled to God." ²¹ He made the One who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.*

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

Comprehend

1. What drives Paul as he does his work here? (vs.11)
2. How does he re-phrase this drive in verse 14?

What is at the heart of this 'love'?

3. How does this affect the way Paul views people, and the world, around him? (vs.16-17)

4. How else does Paul describe this work, and his role? (vs.18-20)
5. At the heart of this love, and work, is what plea? (vs.20)
How is such a plea given substance? (vs.21)

Consider

1. What do you make of the connection Paul establishes here between 'fear of the Lord' and 'Christ's love'?
2. What compels Paul here—and why is that unusual?
3. Christ's love compels Paul to change his view of people—why?

What message lies at the heart of this?

Why is this so important?

Contact

1. Christ's love compels Paul here to confront the world with the ugly damage of sin—how is this different to the way our world views love and its effects?
2. How does this love affect the way we understand terms such as 'reconciliation' in the world?
3. How does such love change the way we view all people?

Prayer

- Give thanks for Christ's love, and how it changes people.
- Give thanks that Christ's love changes our view of the world and people.
- Pray for true reconciliation through the good news.