

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 1/25/04 Brad Brandt

Value #3—"Love: Living with the Proper Focus" **

Main Idea: If we are going to value love as we ought, we need to grasp three biblical truths about love.

I. We need to learn what love is.

A. Love is what God is (Ex 15:13; Deut 7:9; Psalm 89:1-2).

B. Love is what God requires (Matt 22:35-40; Heb 6:10).

1. We see it in the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8-10).

2. We see it in the Beatitudes.

C. Love is what we lack.

1. We tend to equate love with infatuation (Judges 16:4; 2 Sam 13:1-2).

2. We tend to settle for externals (Matt 23:5-7; 1 Cor 13:1-3).

II. We need to learn what love does.

A. It gives (John 13:34-35).

1. We focus on the Lord first (John 14:15-24).

2. We focus on the Lord's people next (John 15:9-17).

3. We even focus on our enemies (Matt 5:43-46).

B. It grows (Phil 1:9).

1. You can see it (3 John 5-6; 2 Cor 8:7-8, 24).

2. You never arrive (1 Thes 3:6, 12; 4:9-10; Heb 10:24).

III. We need to learn what makes love possible.

A. You must know Christ (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7-10; 2 Tim 1:7).

B. You must depend upon the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; Rom 5:5).

C. You must die to self (2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 12:11).

Make It Personal: If we are to love as the Lord loved us...

1. Get to know one another.

2. Get involved.

3. Get your strength from Him.

Let's do an imaginary experiment. Let's suppose we put three children in chairs at the same table and then placed in the middle five pieces of candy and said, "Eat up!". That's three children with five pieces of candy. What will happen? There's enough there for each child, right? But that's not the problem. Who gets *two* pieces? Or worse, who *doesn't*? That's the question that just might lead to World War III.

Put six billion people on a planet, a planet designed by the Creator with plenty of resources to meet all their needs, and what happens? Those who have plenty are more than willing to help those who have need, right? Not exactly.

What's the problem? The problem at the children's table is the same as the problem in the world. By nature, we have a focus problem. We enter the world with a *self-focused* bent. In the words of the song, "What the world needs now is love."

But what really is love and how can self-focused people experience it? We'll find out this morning as we continue to *get a grip*.

Simply put, that's our aim in our current Sunday morning series. According to the Bible, there are seven values possessed by strong Christians and churches. They're non-negotiable.

First, as we learned two weeks ago, they're committed to worship. They've settled the issue of who is first

in their lives. They realize this is God's world and seek to give priority to His kingdom. They live life by *looking up*.

Next, they are committed to edification. They approach life in a growth mode. They're committed to personal edification, realizing they have a long way to go in their pursuit of being like Christ. But they're also serious about the edification of the church, and do all they can to help others grow. They don't view church as a place to go once a week. It's integral to who they are seven days a week.

For memorization purposes I'll mention the other five values now. In a moment we'll consider #3—love. In weeks ahead we'll consider the rest: #4—service, #5—evangelism, #6—fellowship, and finally #7—obedience. What I'm attempting to do with each is develop a biblical theology, that is, to see what the whole Bible says about each subject.

The theme before us today is mammoth, both in terms of content and application. There are over 800 references to love in the Bible. And once we get a handle on the biblical meaning of love, then comes the biggest challenge. We must do it!

Here we go. If we are going to value love as we ought, we need to grasp three biblical truths about love.

I. We need to learn what love is.

If you survey the Bible you'll make discoveries about love.

A. Discovery #1: Love is what God is (Ex 15:13; Deut 7:9; Psalm 89:1-2). By nature, God is love. It might surprise some that even the Old Testament emphasizes this:

--Exodus 15:13 "In your *unfailing love* you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling."

--Deuteronomy 7:9 "Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his *covenant of love* to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commands."

--Psalm 89:1-2 "I will sing of the *LORD's great love* forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. I will declare that *your love stands firm forever*, that you established your faithfulness in heaven itself."

If you want to know what love is, look at God. God defines love. Look at His actions and you'll see love. And of course, come to the New Testament and you'll witness the climax of His love. "*But God demonstrates his own love for us* in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)."

There's the essence of love. It focuses on others. It does something for others. That's discovery #1. Love is what God is.

B. Discovery #2: Love is what God requires (Matt 22:35-40; Heb 6:10). In His Word, the Lord calls us to love many things. We're to love God's house (Psalm 26:8), God's salvation (Psalm 40:16), God's name (Psalm 69:36), and God's commands (Psalm 119:127). And that's just for starters. The Scriptures also exhort us to love mercy (Micah 6:8) and truth (Zechariah 8:19). In fact, it's the lack of the latter that keeps people from salvation according to 2 Thessalonians 2:10, "They perish because they *refused to love the truth* and so be saved."

You say, "That list is too big. Can you simplify it? What does God require of us?" Jesus reduced the answer to two categories in Matthew 22:35-40: "...An expert in the law tested him with this question: 'Teacher, which

is the greatest commandment in the Law?' Jesus replied: '*Love the Lord your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: '*Love your neighbor* as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Plain and simple, that's what God requires of us. Love the Lord with all you've got. Then love your neighbor with the same tenacity you show to meet your own needs. Love God. Love neighbor. That's it.

Fifty percent obedience won't cut it either. Our love for God and people go hand in hand. Hebrews 6:10 puts it this way, "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them." When we show love to God's people, we're showing that we love God. Indeed, it's impossible to love God and not love His people.

We see this dual theme throughout the Scriptures.

1. *We see it in the Ten Commandments (Rom 13:8-10).* God used Ten Commands to sum up what He expected of His people, Israel. The first four pertain to one's relationship with God (have no other gods, no idols, no misuse of His name, honor the Sabbath), whereas the next six address man's relationship with fellow man (honor your parents, no murder, no adultery, no stealing, no falsehood, no coveting).

Do you see what God was doing? In giving the Ten Commandments He was showing His people *how to love*, specifically how to love Him and each other. In fact, right after recording the Ten Commandments, Moses said this to his people in Deuteronomy 6:4-6, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. *Love the LORD your God* with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts."

Note the emphasis on "these commandments." What commandments? The ones just mentioned in chapter 5. God's commandments show us how to love.

That was true of the Ten Commandments. That's true of the rest of God's commands. Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 1:5, "*The goal of this command is love*, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." John put it this way in 2 John 6, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love."

Most people today think that love is a feeling and that it comes naturally. That's not true. Sinners don't know how to love, not as God intended. We must learn *how to love*—which is why God gave us the commandments. The commandments show us how to love Him and others.

Paul explained this connection between God's commandments and love in Romans 13:8-10, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." The point again, we see that love is what God requires in the 10 Commandments.

2. *We see it in the Beatitudes.* Jesus began the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." He proceeded to spell out seven more characteristics of "blessed" people, of God's kind of people. These eight traits do what the Ten Commandments did, show us first how to have a proper *relationship with God* and next how to have a proper *relationship with people*. To love God you must be poor in spirit, mourn, be meek, and hunger for righteousness. To truly love people you must be merciful, pure in heart, a peacemaker, and be willing to be persecuted.

So love is what God is and love is what God requires. A third discovery...

C. Discovery #3: Love is what we lack. Perhaps you're thinking, "Who me? Lack love? No way. I'm a very loving person." Hold on. Based on whose definition of love, yours or God's? Listen again to Jesus in the Beatitudes:

This is love. Love is being merciful to those who wrong us. Love is having a pure heart (that is, not only doing good deeds but having a motive that is totally selfless). Love is being a peacemaker, that is, being willing to leave your comfort zone and help others resolve conflict. And love is being willing suffer persecution from the hands of the very people you're trying to help.

According to Jesus, that's what love is. And if we'll be honest with ourselves, that's what we lack. By nature, we have a self-centered focus.

Chuck Swindoll tells the story about a couple having a double celebration. "Both of them were celebrating their sixtieth birthdays, and their fortieth wedding anniversary. During their quiet evening together, a fairy appeared and said, 'Because you have been such a loving couple all these forty years, I want to grant each of you a wish. The fairy pointed her wand to the woman first. Being a faithful, loving spouse, the wife wished for an all-expense-paid cruise to a romantic Caribbean island for her and her beloved. Whoosh! Instantly the tickets appeared in her hand. She squealed and beamed with delight. Next the fairy turned her wand to the husband to grant whatever he asked. The man pulled the fairy aside and whispered, 'In all honesty, I'd love to have a wife thirty years younger than I am.' The fairy wiggled her nose, waved her wand and poof! He was suddenly ninety years old."

The love of God and others isn't natural. The love of self is. What's more, because we are sinners we tend to love the wrong things (1 Timothy 6:10 "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"), or the right things in the wrong way. Instead of exhibiting God's kind of love, we're prone to settle for cheap substitutes. Let me mention two.

1. *We tend to equate love with infatuation (Judges 16:4; 2 Sam 13:1-2).* Like Samson did in Judges 16:4. The Bible says, "Some time later, he *fell in love* with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah." If you know anything about Samson you know that he had a problem with women. He was a hulk of a man with a body that could kill, but he didn't have a clue about how to love a woman. He felt physical attraction to Delilah and thought it was love.

The same misconception surfaced in Amnon's life in 2 Samuel 13:1-2, "In the course of time, Amnon son of David *fell in love* with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her."

That's how many today view love. Love is something you fall into—and can fall out of. Love is getting to express your selfish desires with someone. Love is sex. But that's not love. That's lust. Young ladies, when the guy says, "If you love me you'll let me," tell him, "Get lost Amnon!"

And another warning, young people. Just because you feel your heart flipping when you're in the presence of a certain person doesn't mean there's love or that you should pursue a relationship with that person. Seek God's will and you may discover your heart *stops flipping!* Don't do what so many do. Don't equate love with infatuation.

2. *We tend to settle for externals (Matt 23:5-7; 1 Cor 13:1-3).* Remember what Jesus said about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:5-7? "Everything they do is done for men to see: They make their phylacteries wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.'" They had a love problem. They were religious, but they lacked something. What? Jesus told them in John

5:42, "But I know you. I know that *you do not have the love of God in your hearts.*"

You can do good things, even religious things, but if you lack genuine love for God and others, it's a big zero. Paul made it personal in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3:

"If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, *but have not love, I gain nothing.*"

My friends, we need to chuck the substitutes and *learn what love is.* That's truth #1.

II. We need to learn what love does.

That's right. Love *does* something. Love involves action. The Scriptures teach that two things happen to true love.

A. It gives (John 13:34-35). If you forget all other references from this study, don't forget this one, John 13:34-35. Jesus spoke these words to the disciples the night before He gave His life: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Ponder that for a moment. The way we love each other should resemble the way Christ loved us. How did Christ love us? He put His own interests aside and left heaven. He loved us selflessly by becoming a man. He saw our need and went to the cross. His sole aim in life was to please God and to help others.

Here's the difference between human notions of love and biblical love. In human love, we think about self. Even in the most noble expressions of human love, we think about what we're going to get. We calculate. If I do this, how will I benefit?

God's kind of love is totally selfless. Jesus never thought of Himself. Out of His love for us He paid a price. He made a sacrifice. He died for us.

Here's what's amazing. He says to us as His followers, "You are to love each other the same way I have loved you!"

Do you know what that means? We can never love each other too much! Husbands, you can never love your wife too much. Wives, you can never love your husband too much. The same goes in the church. Look at the person in the pew in front of you. You can never love that person too much!

The key word is *focus*. When we're truly exhibiting love, where will our focus be? Not on self, but *others*. What others? The Bible calls for a threefold focus.

1. *We focus on the Lord first (John 14:15-24).* "If you love me," Jesus said in John 14:15, "You will obey what I command." He elaborated in verses 23-24, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me."

Remember the connection between love and commands? It's not love to do what you *feel* like doing. It's love when you choose to do what the Lord commands, regardless how you feel. In order to love as God intends we must focus on the Lord first.

2. *We focus on the Lord's people next (John 15:9-17).* In His upper room discourse Jesus continued His

emphasis on love in John 15:9-17, "As the *Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.* If you obey my commands, you will *remain in my love*, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: *Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this*, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command..." He reiterates in verse 17, "This is my command: *Love each other.*"

There's the focus of true love. It's on others, *each other*, Jesus said. Granted, we are to love everyone, but especially other believers.

Peter emphasized this when he exhorted Christians in 1 Peter 2:17, "Show proper respect to everyone: *Love the brotherhood of believers*, fear God, honor the king." John said the same thing in 1 John 3:11, "This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should *love one another.*"

It's fine to give to world relief programs and serve in community service organizations, but don't miss this. Our love should start at home, in the family of God. It's easy to say we love people in general and fail to love the people of God in particular.

When we're loving as God desires, we focus on the Lord first, then on His people. But true love doesn't stop there.

3. *We even focus on our enemies (Matt 5:43-46).* Jesus said in Matthew 5:43-46, "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: *Love your enemies* and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?"

Anybody can give when there's a kickback in return, but Jesus said, "Do it with your enemies, too, just like your Father does." That's what true love does. It gives.

B. It grows (Phil 1:9). If you don't know Christ you don't have the capacity to love. But if you do know Him, you not only have the ability to love but your love should be *growing*.

This was Paul's prayer request for the believers in Philippians 1:9, "And this is my prayer: that *your love may abound more and more* in knowledge and depth of insight..."

If by its nature love is growing, then two things are true.

1. *You can see it (3 John 5-6; 2 Cor 8:7-8, 24).* Yes, true love can be tested and if present, there will be evidence for it. What kind of evidence? The kind John saw in his friend Gaius's life and wrote about in 3 John 5-6, "Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. *They have told the church about your love.* You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God." There was proof for Gaius's love. What was it? He entertained traveling missionaries. He helped the brothers. He shared his food and opened his home.

It's easy to say you love missionaries. The proof is whether you use what the Lord has loaned you to help them.

A very specific evidence of true love is what you do with your money. In 2 Corinthians 8:7-8, Paul talked pointedly to the Corinthian Christians about their giving:

"But just as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us—see that you also excel in this grace of giving. I am not commanding you, but I want to *test the*

sincerity of your love by comparing it with the earnestness of others." And in verse 24 "Therefore *show these men the proof of your love* and the reason for our pride in you, so that the churches can see it."

When a person says he loves the Lord but refuses to give generously to the Lord's work—even though he spends hundreds of dollars every month on cable tv, movie rentals, dining out, hobbies, clothing and other things he doesn't really need—he shows what he really loves. The thing about true love is this. You can see it. As is this...

2. *You never arrive* (1 Thes 3:6, 12; 4:9-10; Heb 10:24). There's always room to grow.

The Thessalonian believers are a great example. In 1 Thessalonians 3:6 Paul wrote: "But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought *good news about your faith and love*." Paul commended them for their love. Just a few verses later, however, he said this—verse 12 "May the Lord *make your love increase and overflow* for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you."

We see the same combination of commendation and challenge in the next chapter, too. In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 Paul wrote, "Now about *brotherly love* we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to *love each other*. And in fact, *you do love all the brothers* throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to *do so more and more*."

Right here's another reason why we need to be faithful in church. Hebrews 10:24 offers this instruction, "And let us consider how we may *spur one another on toward love* and good deeds." People who stay away from church tend to become self-absorbed. Why? They don't have anyone encouraging them otherwise.

If we're going to value love as we ought, we need to learn what it is and does. Then...

III. We need to learn what makes love possible.

By the grace of God, you must do three things if you want to love God's way.

A. You must know Christ (John 17:26; 1 John 4:7-10; 2 Tim 1:7). The reason is clear. Until Christ enters our lives, we are slaves to our self-centered interests.

When an unsaved couple comes to me for marital counseling I tell them two things right up front: One, I can show you from God's Word how your marriage can sing, guaranteed. The problem is, two, you don't have the power to do what God says it takes. Only people who know Jesus Christ can experience and exhibit true love.

Let this sink in. If you know Christ, you have the ability to love, *His ability*. Listen to Jesus' words in John 17:26, "I have made you known to them [i.e. the disciples], and will continue to make you known in order *that the love you have for me may be in them* and that I myself may be in them." Where is His love? In us. When a person receives the Lord, He also receives the Lord's love.

1 John 4:7-10 expands on this, "Dear friends, let us love one another, for *love comes from God*. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."

If loving people is a grind to you and if giving to meet needs cramps your style, and you want to change, here's where it starts. You must know Christ. Don't rush at this point. It's not enough to know *about* Christ. It's not enough to say you know Christ. You must *know Christ*. For it's then that you receive the capacity to love.

Perhaps you're thinking, "I'm a Christian, but I just can't love so-and-so." Not so. You can do it and here's why, as Paul reminded Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7 "For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, *of love* and of self-discipline."

B. You must depend upon the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:22; Rom 5:5). Galatians 5:22 states, "But the *fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness...*" Love isn't something we manufacture. It's not a work of the flesh. It's fruit that the Spirit produces.

Romans 5:5 declares, "And hope does not disappoint us, because *God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*"

You can be in Christ but not depending on Christ, and if so, you'll lack love. But if you are in Christ and day by day depending on His Spirit, you will exhibit love. The Holy Spirit has come to reproduce the very life and love of Jesus Himself in us.

But something must happen, something you must do.

C. You must die to self (2 Tim 3:1-5; Rev 12:11). Galatians 5:24-25 explains, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit."

In order to love God and others, we must get our eyes off of ourselves. Self-love destroys biblical love. Ironically, self-love is something our humanistic culture praises as a great virtue. "Believe in yourself," educators teach their students. "Stand up for yourself," parents tell their kids. "Take time for yourself first," the marriage therapist says, "Or you won't be able to love your husband and children."

It's a lie, beloved. It's also alarming since the Bible warns that self-love is a characteristic of the last days. Listen to 2 Timothy 3:1-5, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be *lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them.*"

In contrast to the self-lovers of this age, Revelation 12:11 describes another group of people, those who resist Evil One and the spirit of the age. How do they do it? "They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they *did not love their lives* so much as to shrink from death."

We can be different, dear friends, but to do so we must know Christ, we must depend upon His Spirit, and we must die to self. Let me make it even more personal...

Make It Personal: If we are to love as the Lord loved us...we must make three choices.

I'll put it in the form of three "gets:"

1. *Get to know one another.* You can't love somebody unless you know them. You can't love your wife, men, unless you know her. You can't love your children, parents, unless you know them. You can't love your church family unless you make the effort to get to know your brothers and sisters.

2. *Get involved.* The Word of God says in 1 John 3:16-18, "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, *let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*"

I challenge you to get involved this week, get involved in meeting practical needs in people's lives. That's what we'll do if we truly value love. And to do so you must...

3. *Get your strength from Him.* "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, *having the same love*, being one in spirit and purpose (Philippians 2:1-2)."