

Foundations Lesson #8

Love

The term “love” can mean vastly different things to different people. Therefore, we need to understand what God means when he uses the word “love” in the Scripture. Only then can we love all people the way God has intended. The people of this world talk about love as being a feeling, an emotion. There's a song that says, “I'm a prisoner of love.” People talk about falling in love and then falling out of love, as if they had little control over who they were loving and to what degree they loved them. But God's love for us is not like that at all, and the way he expects us to love others is not like that at all, either. So let's look at Roman Numeral number one on our outline, “love as it is used in the Bible.”

I've defined love as: “an attitude of viewing another as precious and valuable, therefore choosing and desiring to treat them according to what is best for them.” Let's try to grasp that definition one bite at a time. The first aspect of love I'd like to focus on is, from our definition, represented by the word “choosing.” Love is primarily a choice. When God commands us to do something, he's using his authority as the ruler of the universe to tell us what we need to do. God will never frustrate us by commanding us to do something that we're incapable of doing. So when he commands us to love, we can understand that we are indeed capable of obeying that command; we have what it takes to love; we are able to choose to love. Love is, first and foremost, a choice.

Dt. 30:16a For I command you today to love the LORD your God,

Gal. 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

II Jn. 6b As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love.

I Jn. 3:23 And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us.

These passages and many other similar ones make it very clear that we can choose to love because we are commanded to love. We can even choose not to love, which would be a mistake, but the choice is still ours. So first and foremost, love is a choice. But love also involves some emotion.

Mk. 10:21a Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said.

When Mark records that Jesus looked at this young man and loved him, I don't believe that Jesus had previously *not* loved him. Jesus perfectly embodied the love of God all the time without fail. So what does this verse refer to? Perhaps, Jesus just looked at him lovingly. Perhaps the young man's response in the previous verse evoked a feeling of love from Jesus' heart. The details aren't spelled out in the Scripture, but it seems that emotion was clearly involved. There are other passages from the Bible that show us the emotional side of love.

Lam. 3:22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

Over three dozen times in the Old Testament alone, God is revealed as a compassionate God. One New Testament verse even talks about his tender mercies. Then, in Jesus' Parable of the Lost Son, the father – who is a type of God – is described as showing quite a bit of emotion.

Lk. 15:20

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

So love is primarily a choice, but love also involves some emotion. Many years ago, there was a woman in our church, I'll call her Sally. Sally strongly maintained that even though we were commanded by God to love the people of this world, we were not commanded to like them. She even gave advice to some fellow Christians about their objectionable work associates, that they had to love them, but that Scripture nowhere said that they had to like them. Then one day I asked Sally a question. I said, “Sally, how would you like it if God the Father and God the Son were having a conversation in heaven and one said to the other, 'I have to love Sally, but I don't have to like her.' How would that make you feel?” That question helped her to see that her position was way off. God loves us. He rejoices over us with singing. And he likes us. I believe liking someone is a part of truly loving them. We're called to love the people of this world with the same love that God has for us. Jesus said to his disciples, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” The standard, the measuring rod that evaluates our love for the people of this world is God's love.

Sally's original position also presented another difficulty. We don't **have to** love the people of this world as though that were some great imposition or burdensome sacrifice. Yes, we're commanded to love, but Scripture also says, “This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). The Psalmist declared, “for I delight in your commands because I love them” (Psalm 119:47). In Psalm 19, David declared, “The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb” (that's Psalm 19:9b-10). Everything God tells us to do is for our own good. Everything. Viewed properly, it's not that we **have to** love the difficult people of this world, it's that we **get to** love them. Obeying God has been designed to be a great joy, a great delight for us.

Then there's a side to love that so fervently desires the good of the one being loved that it will even allow pain to come to that one if it's necessary for their own good.

Heb. 12:5-11

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.”

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Rev. 3:19

[Jesus speaking] Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

God is not a Father who's in the business of raising spoiled brats. He knows when we need spiritual spankings, and he will, in his faithfulness, administer whatever is necessary for us to become the vessels of honor we have been destined to become. He is a good, good Father.

Going back to our definition, love is an attitude; it's a condition of the heart. I think we all understand that we can choose to have a **good** attitude, or we can choose to have a **bad** attitude. When we choose to love, we are choosing to have the best attitude possible. Also, love views the other person as precious and valuable. All human beings are precious and valuable to God. He's created us carefully, tenderly, and with unimaginable wisdom. Each one of us is fearfully and

wonderfully made, being formed and fashioned by God in his own image and likeness. So when we choose to view the people around us as precious and valuable, we're simply agreeing with God, we're adopting his heart towards those people, which is what we need to be doing. Having said that, we all realize that people don't always **behave** like they're precious and valuable. People can be mean, arrogant, abusive, wicked, insensitive, or a host of other characteristics that are bad. God doesn't approve of people's bad behavior, but he still views them as precious and valuable. We are called to do the same. As one preacher has said, "Love the sinner; hate the sin."

So love is an attitude of viewing another as precious and valuable, therefore choosing and desiring to treat them according to what is best for them. Several years ago, there was a girl in our area who, when she turned 16, got some drugs as a birthday present from her mom. Was that a loving thing to do? Maybe the mom had nice intentions, but placing her daughter in the risk of being addicted is not a loving thing to do, because love treats the other person according to what is **best** for **them**, regardless of how enjoyable that may or may not be.

I'd also like to point out that genuine love has nothing to do with what we want for ourselves. Genuine love is completely unselfish – it focuses only on what is best for the one being loved. The young man who asks his girlfriend to go to bed with him is not acting in love at all. He may say he loves her, but the feelings of attraction that he has for her are selfish, because he cares more about satisfying his own lust than he does about protecting her purity, which is something genuine love would be very concerned about.

There's a passage of Scripture that gives us a thorough description of love. I'm reading from the book of I Corinthians, chapter 13 beginning in verse 4. It says,

I Co. 13:4-8a Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

I'd like to encourage you to study this passage of Scripture very carefully. If we meditate on each description of love mentioned, and think about how we can cultivate these qualities in our lives, the Lord will provide us with insight into how we can better live a life of love, just as Jesus did. In addition to these descriptions of love, I'd like to read you some passages of Scripture that give us the greatest **example** of love that has ever been manifested on the earth.

I Jn. 3:16 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.

Jn. 15:13-14 [Jesus speaking] 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.

I Jn. 4:9-10 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.

Rev. 1:5b To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood,

The greatest example of love ever demonstrated on planet earth was Jesus Christ's willing sacrifice of his life for us, so that we could be saved from the wrath and punishment of God for our many sins. When I was a very young believer I would, on occasion, have a problem with something God's word said I needed to be doing or not doing. When that happened, I tried to remember that the God of the Universe demonstrated his love for me by dying for me. If he loved me that much yesterday, then I knew he wouldn't steer me wrong today, because he's the same yesterday, today, and forever. Several times, the truth of God's love expressed in Jesus' willing sacrifice gave me the

strength I needed to do what was right in the eyes of the Lord right then.

Next on our outline, we see that the origin of all love is God himself. There is no other source of love in the universe.

I Jn. 4:7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

I Jn. 4:16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love.

Every act of love that has ever taken place on earth can ultimately be traced back to God as its source. Even if you were to tell me that you learned to love because your unsaved grandmother loved you, I would ask you where she got that love from. If we go back far enough, we'll find that every ounce of love that has ever been expressed existed because of God. It has always started with him.

We also see that the scope of God's love includes everyone.

Jn. 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This Scripture tells us that God has loved the world – not just the "good" people of the world, but everyone. One of my Bible school professors would tell us the story of a Sunday school teacher that didn't like him when he was growing up. He was a pastor's kid, and apparently he got into more than his share of trouble. This Sunday school teacher in class would say loudly, "Does God love **good** boys and girls?" And the whole class would answer loudly, "Yes!" Then she would say loudly, "Does God love **bad** boys and girls?" (and when she said "bad" she would be looking directly at him). And the whole class would answer loudly, "No!" Our professor would stop, look at us very seriously, and say, "If God doesn't love bad boys and girls then there's no hope for any of us." I've never forgotten that. The truth is that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. That's why we desperately need a savior. The truth is also that God **in his great love for us sinners** has provided that savior. He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Romans 5:6-8 puts it this way,

Ro. 5:6-8 You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

If you're a believer and you have trouble accepting God's love for you, please be encouraged by something Judson Cornwall once said. Judson told us, "God loved you when you were a stinkin' sinner. He still loves you now that you are a stinkin' saint." You just gotta love Judson Cornwall. But please also understand God loves you not because you have your act together. He loves you because he is love. He doesn't love or approve of the sinful, selfish things you and I do, but that doesn't change who he is. He is love. Romans 5:10 puts it this way,

Ro. 5:10 For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

That brings us to the next line on the outline, which has to do with God's love for his own children. By the way, all human beings are children of Adam and Eve and, I suppose you could also say that all humans are sons and daughters of Noah. But only those who believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord **become** children of God. John's gospel chapter one verses 12-13 puts it this way,

Jn. 1:12-13 Yet to all who received him [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

In some circles it's popular to call all humans "God's children," but that's not true. If you have **become** God's son or daughter by believing in Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and Lord, then you are indeed a part of God's family, and he loves you as a part of his family.

I Jn. 3:1 How great is the love the Father has **lavished** on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.

Jn. 16:27 [Jesus speaking] No, the Father himself loves you because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God.

Ro. 8:38-39 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Nothing can separate you from God's lavish, abundant love for you. Perhaps you've known some people who have done strange things, just because they were striving to be loved. Doctor Thomas P. Malone has said,

QUOTE "Almost all emotional problems could be summed up in one particular kind of behavior. It's a person walking around screaming, 'For God's sake, love me! Love me! Just love me!' He goes through manipulations to get somebody to love him. That's at the core of most emotional sickness."

The famed psychiatrist, Dr. Menninger, has said,

QUOTE "Love cures all, both the one who gives it and the one who receives it."

STORY A father and son in Madrid, Spain, were estranged and the son ran away. The father searched for years and finally put an ad in the city's newspaper. The ad read, "Dear Paco, meet me in front of this newspaper office at noon on Saturday. All is forgiven. I love you." It was signed, "Your Father." That Saturday, 800 young men with the name Paco showed up, looking for forgiveness and love from their fathers.

As believers in our Lord Jesus Christ, we don't need to strive to receive love, because we've already received the greatest, deepest love that has ever existed, from the most powerful and important person in the universe. Since we are so richly loved, let's instead focus on giving that love away.

Foundations Lesson #8

Love, Part Two

Continuing on our outline, Roman Numeral number three deals with the importance of love.

Mt. 22:36-40

“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.”

This scripture clearly tells us that the number one most important thing in all of life is for us to love God with everything that's in us. There's nothing more important than that. Nothing. So if you forget everything else in all of life except one thing, then please remember: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Period. Jesus even told us how serious he was about our need to love the Lord our God. He said,

Mt. 10:37

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;

You can read that in Matthew's gospel chapter 10 and verse 37. I can't emphasize this too much. Perhaps you've discovered or soon will discover that most people who claim to be Christians do not live like that. Please, I exhort you and implore you, don't allow other people's compromise or halfheartedness to deter **you** from doing what is most important in the eyes of the Lord. On Judgment Day, those people will not be seated on the throne of the universe, but the Lord will. You will never have to give an account to those other people for the things you did while you lived in the body, but you will have to give an account to God for every careless word you have ever spoken. The most important thing you can do in this life is to make the most important thing the most important thing. Love God. Let everything else take second place, as it deserves. If you live like that, you will not regret it. I promise you that.

We also see the importance of love in the fact that the second greatest commandment tells us we must love. I believe that obeying the second greatest commandment is a natural outflow of fully obeying the first. If we truly and completely love God, we will also love our neighbor as ourself as a byproduct of loving God. Unfortunately, there have been entire organizations, movements, and even churches that have placed the second greatest commandment above the first. That's a huge mistake. Anything that we love, serve, trust, or honor **more** than we love, serve, trust or honor God is an idol. The sin of idolatry must be violently opposed. Let's make sure that God has **first** place in our affections, our priorities, and our allegiance.

Another way God emphasizes the importance of a matter is by repeating it. When God repeats himself it's not because he's run out of words. So when the word “love” in its various forms is used 321 times in the New Testament alone, we can understand that God has placed a great emphasis upon the need to love. First Corinthians 13 even tells us that love is far more important than giftedness or sacrifice.

I Co. 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.

Here the apostle Paul is contrasting love with things that are impressive and tend to draw a lot of attention before men. But there's a huge difference between what's valuable in the eyes of man and what's valuable in the eyes of God. As Jesus said, “What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight” (Luke 16:15).

Here are a few more Scriptures that show us the importance of love.

I Co. 16:14

Do everything in love.

I Co. 13:13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Gal. 5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

A pastor's wife was teaching in their church's Vacation Bible School. Her class was interrupted on Wednesday about an hour before dismissal when a new student was brought in, a boy who had one arm missing. She was concerned that one of the other children would say or do something that would make him uncomfortable, but she had no opportunity to say anything to prepare them.

All seemed to go well until she had the class join her in the usual closing ceremony. "Let's make our churches," she said, putting her hands together with interlocked fingers. "Here's the church and here's the steeple, open the doors and see..." Then it hit her. The very thing she had feared the children would do, she had done! As she stood there, horrified, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over her left hand and placed it up to his right hand and said, "Davey, let's make the church together." Many acts of love are like that. With no time to plan or prepare, they spring out of a pure heart and a sincere faith.

Going on to Roman Numeral number four, let's take a careful look at our being commanded to love.

Eph. 5:2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

II Pt. 1:5-7 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith... [seven qualities, the last of which is...] love.

Ju. 21 Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

I Tim. 6:11 But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

As Christians, we have to understand that the love of God is both a great blessing and a great challenge. It's a great blessing because we get to be recipients of God's vast and rich love. That's glorious. But it's also a great challenge because what we have received from the Lord we are called to give away. Since our nature is very different from God's nature – he's perfect and we're sinful – that means we have to change. We have to learn to love people we otherwise wouldn't even like, and that's not easy but it's definitely worth it. There are some people in the family of God that you may not like. Do you know what? God has made sure they're in the same church with you. Why? Because he wants to teach you to love. That's right. God will raise up Brother Objectionable and Sister Insensitive just for your sake. We'll never learn to love the unlovely unless God puts them in our path. We want life easy and pleasant. God wants to transform us into people who are holy and Christlike. His goal for our lives is far better than ours. So when you come face to face with someone who irritates the daylights out of you, rejoice. That's right, rejoice. Why? Because God is giving you a precious opportunity to be transformed into a person of love. You'll have to cry out to the Lord for help. You'll probably have to repent of sinful thoughts and attitudes you'll have along the way. It won't be easy. But it'll be worth it! If it was easy, everybody would be doing it. Be exceptional in your walk with God!

So we're commanded to love, but where God calls us to go, he'll always equip us to get there. He'll never call us to go into battle without armor. In the same way, he has promised to provide us with all the love we need.

Ro. 5:5 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.

II Tim. 1:7 For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

I Jn. 4:19 We love because he first loved us.

God will provide us with all the strength we need to love those who are difficult to love. Corrie Ten Boom spent several years at the German concentration camp in Ravensbruck because she and her family had aided the Jews who were fleeing from the Nazis. In her book, The Hiding Place, she gives many details of the horrible conditions and the atrocities that were prevalent in that awful place. She forgave those who had treated her horribly and, after the war, was called by God to preach his forgiveness to individuals, and ever to nations. In her travels, she was ministering in Munich when after a service there a tall man approached her. She recognized him as one of the worst guards at Ravensbruck. He said to her with a smile, "Ja, Fräulein, it is wonderful that Jesus forgives us all our sins, just as you say," and he held out his hand. Corrie tells the story that at that moment she froze. She could not bring herself to shake his hand. She still remembered the horrible things he had done. But now he stood before her as a brother in Christ, forgiven. The only thing she had the strength to do was to cry out to God in her heart. She tells the story that as soon as she cried out to God, she watched her right hand shoot forward and shake that man's hand. What she didn't have the strength to do, God did for her. Let's remember that 17 times in the book of Psalms alone God identifies himself as our help. We have to ask for his help. We have to trust him and believe him for his help. But he is faithful to help us. He has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

There's a very painful verse in Matthew's gospel chapter 24. Jesus is speaking and he says,

Mt. 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

By the way, that's verse 12. I consider that to be a painful verse because the increase of wickedness **should** have the opposite affect, at least in the lives of believers. That kind of trial should cause us with faith in God to be transformed more fully, more completely, into people who love. God's love never grows cold. That means his followers have an unlimited supply at their disposal. The great tragedy of this verse is that **most** do not have a relationship to God strong enough to see what needs to happen and to trust him for the provision they need in order to live as his representatives in the midst of that darkness. Let's remember, God has **empowered** us to live as his sons and daughters who excel in loving even the worst of people.

We've already mentioned that loving God is the number one priority for all of life. The outline gives us a few other verses that tell us to love God.

Lk. 11:42 [Jesus speaking] "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone.

Dt. 11:1 Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.

I Co. 16:22 If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!

As mentioned earlier, if we're genuinely successful in loving God wholeheartedly, we would also love people. As First John chapter 4 and verses 19-21 tell us,

I Jn. 4:19-21 We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.

As a preacher from Kentucky once said, "The love of God is like grease on a brown paper bag. If you got it, it shows." Fortunately for us, God has also spelled out some specific examples in his word of who we are to love. The first one that's covered here has to do with family relationships.

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her
verse 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Tit. 2:4 Then they [the older women] can train the younger women to love their husbands and children,

I believe there's a principle in the Kingdom of God that the closer we are to someone, the more responsible we are to them. The closest relationship we should have with anyone is with the Lord himself. Right after that, for those of us who are married, would come our relationship to our spouse, because the marriage relationship has been designed by God to be the closest relationship between two humans on this side of heaven. So we're very responsible to love those in our family, because they're so close to us. But our church family is also important.

Jn. 13:34-35 [Jesus speaking] "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."

Heb. 13:1 Keep on loving each other as brothers.

I Pt. 4:8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

As we mentioned in Lesson #6 on the church, the phrases "one another" and "each other" are often used in the New Testament to refer to the family of believers, the church family. But our love needs to extend to more than just those who are close to us. Jesus told us specifically that we should love our neighbor, our fellow man.

Ro. 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.

Gal. 5:13-14 You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather serve one another in love. The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Jas. 2:8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right.

When it comes to loving our neighbor, there are, unfortunately, some incorrect teachings in the body of Christ. I've heard some people say that in order to love our neighbor as ourself, we have to

love ourselves first. That may sound good, but if we look carefully at what the Bible has to say about self, we'll find that we are told to deny self (Matthew 16:24-25), die to self (Romans 6:6), control self (I Peter 1:6), and discipline self (II Timothy 1:7). I believe it's quite clear that any teaching which says that we need to love self is not consistent with Scripture. Besides, the book of Ephesians gives us further explanation about loving self.

Eph. 5:28-29 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church –

This passage illustrates the fact that we already love self just fine by reminding us that we feed ourselves and care for ourselves. We want what is best for ourselves; that's love. Jesus quoted Leviticus 19:18, pointing out that even the Old Covenant law said we were to love our neighbor **as ourselves**, meaning that we're supposed to use the same standard that we use in taking care of ourselves on our neighbor. How do you feel when your neighbor is hungry? or cold? If you're every bit as burdened to meet his needs as your own, then you're obeying God's law. If you're like me, you have a long way yet to go.

Regarding loving our neighbor as ourself, I've heard people say, "I don't like myself. I'm so ugly." The truth is, if they didn't already love themselves, they'd be glad that they're ugly. Think about it. I'm not trying to be insensitive to people who struggle with their appearance, but the very fact that they're upset about perceived ugliness shows that they are loving themselves just fine. They want to look good. That's love for self. On a side note, God is a master creator, and he's created each one of us to be a wonderful and precious masterpiece. It's always a good idea to agree with God's viewpoint, because he's always right. In his eyes we are not ugly, so let's not believe that he's wrong or try to tell him that he's wrong.

Continuing on, we need to love even our enemies.

Mt. 5:43-44 [Jesus speaking] "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,

Lk. 6:27-31 [Jesus speaking] "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

STORY Abraham Lincoln was never treated with more contempt than by a man named Stanton. He called Lincoln "a low cunning clown." He nicknamed him "the original gorilla" and said that DuChailu was a fool to wander about Africa trying to capture a gorilla when he could have found one so easily at Springfield, Illinois. Lincoln said nothing. He made Stanton his war minister because Stanton was the best man for the job. He treated Stanton with every courtesy. The years wore on. The night came when the assassin's bullet murdered Lincoln in the theater. In the little room to which the President's body was taken there stood that same Stanton that night, and, looking down on the silent face of Lincoln in all its ruggedness, Stanton said through his tears, "There lies the greatest ruler of men the world has ever seen." The patience of love had conquered in the end.

We as servants of the Most High God, are called to overcome evil with good, to overcome darkness with light, and to overcome hatred with love. As it is written, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (I Peter 3:8). And, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). And since God loves people without showing favoritism, we've been commanded to do likewise.

Mt. 5:45-48 [Jesus speaking] ...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? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Lk. 6:32-36 [Jesus speaking] "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Before closing this section on our being commanded to love, I'd like to point out that all of us can and need to be growing in love. The love that resides in our hearts can and needs to be richer and fuller today than it was yesterday and greater tomorrow than it is today. Each day we're destined to become more and more Christlike.

I Th. 3:12 May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

II Th. 1:3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

So not only are we supposed to be growing in love ourselves, but we're also supposed to be helping others do the same.

Heb. 10:24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Because God is infinite and his love is inexhaustible, we'll always be able to grow in love, and so will those around us.

Foundations Lesson #8

Love, Part Three

Going to the back of our outline, Roman Numeral five deals with some evidences of loving God. In other words, if we really love God, we will _____ (fill in the blank). So what does the Bible say we'll be doing if we love God? Well, for starters, we'll obey God.

Jn. 14:15 [Jesus speaking] "If you love me, you will obey what I command.
verse 21 Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him."

verses 23-24 Jesus replied, "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.

I Jn. 5:2-3 This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

I've had people who claimed that Christ was their savior but were living in sin tell me that they loved God. They may have had an emotional affection for God, but they didn't love him. Jesus was clear about that. He told us that if we love God, we **will be** obeying what he commands. In addition to that, we will **not** be loving the world.

I Jn. 2:15-17 Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.

Col. 3:1-2 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

The system of this world and the priorities of this world are contrary to the Kingdom of God. So we have to choose which we will embrace, which we will accept, which we will adopt. Another evidence of loving God has to do with our attitude toward money.

Mt. 6:24 [Jesus speaking] “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

I Tim. 6:6-10 But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the **love of money** is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

The value of money is extremely temporary. It's the people who have no vision for anything past this life who love money. Since we believers realize that the roughly 80 years, give or take, that we'll be spending in this body is nothing compared to the billions upon billions of years we'll be spending with the Lord after we leave this body, we realize that eternal matters are much, much more important than earthly matters such as money. As Jesus has said in Luke 16:9,

Lk. 16:9 I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

II Co. 9:7 Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

Before leaving this section, I'd like to mention that the list given here under Roman Numeral number five is in no way intended to be exhaustive. If we really love God, we'll be knowing his word better and better; we'll want to tell others about Jesus; we'll join ourselves to a church family; we'll spend a lot of time praying, we'll worship God in spirit and truth, and we'll be doing a whole host of other things. The key is not to come up with better and more refined lists. The key is to be so full of love for God that we do whatever pleases him not because it's written on a list but because it's written on our hearts. If we love God, we'll want to please him with every choice we make, with every

thought we think, with every word we speak, and with everything we do. If that's your desire, you'll please God. You'll get there. He'll show you the way.

In closing, I want to read the Scriptures given on the outline. "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." / "And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ." / "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." / "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength." / "Do everything in love." Amen. God bless you all.