

**Love – a definition that got it sincerely wrong**

Years ago a movie hit the theaters that became a rage. The movie had one of the most foolish definitions of the word “love” ever conceived. This film took that wonderful word, turned its focus completely around, and made it all about me instead of others. Even worse, the horrendous definition became a household catch-phrase, repeated by people (many of whom should have known better) long after the movie left the theatres.

What was that foolish, ill-conceived definition of the word “love?” Simply this: *“Love means never having to say you’re sorry,”* from the movie Love Story. A closer look reveals how this definition of love shifts the focus from others onto ourselves. Taken at face value this version of love says, *“I can do something bad, and there’s no need to apologize since I did it to the person I love. Whoopee! Ain’t love grand?”* Happily, there’s more to love than that, as we shall see in this week’s study. Let’s explore what sincere love - the type of love that pleases God - is all about.

**Monday – Words of Love**

*“Love is the sum of all virtue, and love disposes us to good.”* Jonathan Edwards, 18<sup>th</sup> c. American theologian

1. Please read Romans 12:9-13. How does the beginning of verse 9 set the tone for the remaining verses?

**Text Insight:** Paul says love must be “sincere” (or genuine). The original Greek word is literally “un-hypocritical.” Our word “hypocrite” comes from an ancient Greek word meaning “stage actor,” so Paul was telling his readers that our love should go beyond play-acting or pretense, and be the real thing.

2. What words and phrases in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13 remind you of the ideas we find in Romans 12:9-13?

3. Compare James 4:7-10 with Romans 12:9. What does James say about clinging to what is good and resisting what is evil? How would following his directions help you love sincerely?

**Making it Personal:** Pray, asking God to show you the opportunities he has for you to love someone today, and to give you the ability to do it sincerely.

**Tuesday – Old Testament Love**

*“Love is a fruit in season at all times, and within the reach of every hand.”* Mother Teresa

1. Please read Psalm 86:14-17, Psalm 103:6-13 and Psalm 145:8-9. What common phrase do you find in each passage? How does this description of God fit in with your own understanding of him?

2. Compare those passages in Psalms to Romans 12:9-13 and 1 Corinthians 13:4-8a. What common themes do you see running through these Old Testament and New Testament passages?

3. This description of God as “gracious and compassionate” dates back centuries before even the psalms were written, as shown by Exodus 34:5-7, 29-35. How does this passage support the notion that God’s love, his very character, is awesome and powerful?

**Digging Deeper:** Now look at 1 John 4:7-10. In what way is this passage a fulfillment of Exodus 34:5-7?

**Wednesday – Love, the Sweetest Fruit**

*“Why is Love greater than faith? Because the end is greater than the means.”* Henry Drummond, 19<sup>th</sup> c. Scottish writer

1. Please read Galatians 5:22-23, 1 Corinthians 13:13 and 1 John 4:8b. How would you explain to someone the truth that love is considered the greatest, and why it heads the list of fruit of the Spirit?

2. According to John 16:27-28, who has received the love of God? Now look at Matthew 7:15-23; how does it tie John 16:27-28 together with Galatians 5:22-23?

3. What insight does Romans 5:5 give you regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in delivering God’s love?

**Digging Deeper:** Take a look at John 3:1-21. What does this passage tell you about the extent of God’s love, and the role of the Holy Spirit in delivering that love?

**Thursday – Commanded to Love**

*“The Bible tells us to love our neighbors, and also to love our enemies: probably because they are generally the same people.”* G.K. Chesterton, Illustrated London News (July 16, 1910)

1. Please read Mark 12:28-34 and John 13:34-35. How can living out Romans 12:9-13 fulfill Jesus’ commandments in Mark 12 and John 13?

2. Now look at Deuteronomy 6:4-9 and Leviticus 19:18. What words or phrases lend weight to the declaration of Jesus in Mark 12 that these commands are of supreme importance?

3. Obeying commands can be quite simple in some ways, as seen in Matthew 8:5-10. Why do you think Jesus so thoroughly approved of the Centurion’s definition of obedience and authority?

**Making it Personal:** How does the Centurion’s statement apply to your own relationship with God and to the way you love others?

**Friday – Obeying the Command**

*“You learn to love by loving.”* Francis de Sales, 17<sup>th</sup> c. French bishop

1. Please read Romans 12:12-13. What is the focus of verse 12? Verse 13?

2. Now look at 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18. How do the three directions in that passage parallel each command in Romans 12:12?

3. Read James 2:15-16 for insight into helping others. In what way does it expand on the theme of Romans 12:13? How does James 2:16 bring you back to the beginning of Romans 12:9 (*love must be sincere*)?

**Prayer Focus:** Pray for those in our church and community who are struggling with issues touched on by Romans 12:12 or 12:13. Pray, asking God to use you to love them, whether by ministering to them directly or by donating to our church benevolence fund or another relief fund.

**For the Weekend:** Re-read Romans 12:9-13, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and Mark 12:28-34. Pray over each statement in these passages, and ask God to show you how he wants you to love him and care for others.