

What is Love

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Few words are used as often, and misunderstood as deeply, as the word love. In our culture, love is commonly defined by feelings, attraction, or personal satisfaction. We say we “love” pizza, sports teams, hobbies, and people, often meaning nothing more than enjoyment or preference.

When the Bible speaks of love, it speaks of something far deeper, stronger, and more demanding.

The clearest biblical definition of love is found in 1 Corinthians 13. It has been called “The Love Chapter.” Contextually, Paul discusses the importance of the brethren in the first century to allow love to motivate their use of spiritual gifts. With that in mind, we do have a beautiful definition of love laid out in the chapter.

Rather than describing love as a feeling, Scripture defines love by action and character. The apostle Paul writes,

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude” (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).

From the very beginning, we learn that biblical love is not about emotion alone; it is about how we behave toward others (Rom. 12:9ff; 1 John 3:18).

Biblical love is patient. That means it endures frustration without retaliation. As a parent, preacher, teacher, and coach, this is a real struggle sometimes, but if I want to practice Biblical love, I must be patient with others.

Love waits, bears burdens, and gives people room to grow. In a world that values quick reactions and instant gratification, patience stands out as a powerful expression of genuine love.

Biblical love is also kind. Kindness is not weakness; it is intentional goodness. Jesus demonstrated this repeatedly by touching lepers, speaking gently to the broken, and offering mercy to sinners.

Love acts for the good of others, even and especially when it is inconvenient.

Paul goes on to tell us what love is **not**. Love does not envy or boast. It is not self-centered or competitive. True love does not seek to elevate itself above others. This runs directly against the grain of modern culture, which often speaks to self-promotion and personal branding above humility.

One of the most challenging descriptions of love is found in verse 5:

“It does not insist on its own way.”

Biblical love is not demanding or selfish. It does not manipulate, dominate, or control. Instead, it considers the needs and well-being of others. This kind of love requires humility and sacrifice—qualities that do not come naturally to us.

Scripture also tells us that love is inseparable from truth. Verse 6 says,

“It does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.”

Love does not excuse sin or celebrate what God calls wrong. Instead, love desires what is right, good, and holy. This reminds us that love and truth are not enemies; they are partners (John 14:15; 15:13-14; 1 John 5:3).

The Bible ultimately points us to God as the Source and definition of love. 1 John 4:8 plainly states, "God is love." This does not mean that God merely shows love; it means love flows from His very nature. Love is His essence. Every expression of true love finds its origin in Him.

Jesus Christ provides the clearest picture of what love looks like in action. He taught love, lived love, and demonstrated love through self-sacrifice. His willingness to lay down His life shows us that biblical love is costly. As Jesus Himself said,

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

When we ask, "What is love?" the Bible answers clearly: Love is patient, kind, humble, truthful, enduring, and sacrificial. It is not driven by emotion alone, but by a commitment to do what is right before God.

Understanding love biblically challenges us to move beyond shallow definitions and embrace the kind of love that reflects the heart of God.