

What Matters Most of All (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love.

All you need is love, all you need is love, all you need is love, love, love is all you need? Love, love, love. Love, love, love. Love, love, love. So are the incredible, brilliant words of John Lennon. From 1967, as the Beatles broke out this song, we don't quite know where they were at the time, this was before they were anti-war, but all you need is love.

Love is all you need. Sounds good, doesn't it? Who wouldn't agree with that? But what love? What do we mean by love? What kind of love? How does this love look?

What is love? How does our culture define love? How did the first century, when Jesus was ministering, how did that culture define love?

See, an important ingredient today to look at is what did Jesus mean by love? Because we can't just take our concept, our American concept of love and read it into what Jesus meant.

[1 : 51] Nor could the first century Jews take their concept of love and put it into that as well.

Because what we will find is that Jesus changes the definition.

changes the description of it. At the end of the Gospel of John, in chapter 21 of John, after Jesus had rose from the dead and the guys were out there fishing, remember?

And Jesus is cooking breakfast on the shore and they come in and they have breakfast with Jesus.

And Jesus says to Peter, remember Peter who had denied Jesus three times?

Jesus says to Peter, do you love me, Peter, more than these? And Peter says, you know, Lord, I love you.

Now, the key is when Jesus said, do you love me? He's using the word agape, which is the word here in this text, which is the word predominantly all through the New Testament as the word that defines Christian love.

[2 : 58] Jesus is saying, Peter, do you agape, love me, more than these? And Peter says, Lord, you know, I phileo love you.

He uses a different word. Phileo, Philadelphia, brotherly love. He uses a word that in that culture was a higher kind of love than agape love.

So Peter thinks he's cranking it up a notch when he says, Jesus, I phileo. I'm devoted, committed, family bond love.

So Jesus says again, Peter, do you agape love me? Yes, Lord, I phileo love you. Third time. Okay, Peter, do you phileo love me?

Yes, Lord, I phileo love you. Got it now, right? Okay, shepherd my sheep, feed my lambs. So even Peter did not understand that Jesus, in using this other word agape, was introducing a whole new concept of love.

[4 : 05] He is taking a common word for love in the first century that essentially means the same thing that we Americans mean when we say love.

It was generic. It was just, you know, more about feelings. He takes that word that really had no real oomph to it and began to define it in new terms.

Change it. Deepen it. So here in Mark 12, Jesus is asked about which is the greatest commandment. He defined the greatest commandment not as one thing but two things.

And in both of these, loving God and loving our neighbor, both involve this word love, agape.

Agape. What does it mean? So last time we looked at this passage, we introduced this important passage.

We were looking at the main question. Who defines what matters most? And it began in verse 28 with a scribe who came up to Jesus and asked him the question, which is foremost?

[5 : 16] Now this scribe was not a typical scribe because every other scribe we've met in the book of Mark has been an enemy of Jesus, has been a hardened heart kind of person.

Preconceived judgment was seeking to destroy Jesus, trying to trap him. What we find in this man, he comes as an individual, not a group. He comes on his own.

He has seen what Jesus did with the previous question. He saw how well Jesus answered. He was impressed with Jesus. And so I believe he comes with a truly sincere question.

He's testing Jesus, but he's not trying to trap Jesus. He is one who has studied the law himself and wants Jesus' view. How do you see it?

How do you put all that together? What theology have you come up with in regard to what matters most? How do you aspire to do with Jesus? mindfully, he said to him, you are not far from the kingdom of God.

[6 : 45] So this is a different kind of scribe. This is not one who's the outsider, who's already judged Jesus. Here is one who's asking genuine questions, wanting to come in.

Jesus answers him the question, doesn't speak a parable. He treats him like someone coming into the inner circle. And in fact, encourages him and says, you're not far. You're not there yet.

Your theology's good. Your thinking's good. Still lacking a little bit here. You've got to come around to that humility. You've got to come around to that recognition that you're not able to keep those commandments.

You need brokenness. But you're not far. You're close. Because you're thinking. Thinking gets you close. Right thinking gets you on the right road.

Now we need to deal with the heart and the soul. So then we looked at Jesus' answer in general.

[7 : 46] How does he answer this question? What matters most? And we see that Jesus gives two. He's asked which one command is most important. Jesus again gives two answers.

Which is typical of him. To the tax question he answered. Not just about what we have to do to Caesar. But what we have to do to God. To the resurrection question.

He answers not only do you have error in regard to the scriptures. But you have error in regard to the power of God. He introduces two issues.

And here again. Not just one commandment is great. But two. There is the greatest. And then there is the second. And there's nothing greater than these two. So Jesus says you can't just put one.

There must be two. These go hand in hand. One is vertical. One is love for God. One is horizontal. My responsibility toward man. It's always been that way. When God engraved the two tablets on Mount Sinai.

[8 : 49] With the covenant words. It had words. The first four commands related to God. The last six commands related to responsibility toward others.

It's always that way. And the New Testament follows suit. And so Jesus says these two are the great commandments. We ask the question. Why is loving God?

First. Why? Of all the commandments. He doesn't name one of the ten commandments. We would think the ten commandments are the great. They're the heart.

Right? And yet he says no. There's something greater than those. There's something even deeper and beyond those. And so he talks about loving God with all our heart.

With all our soul. With all our mind. With all our strength. And loving our neighbor as ourself. See. What matters most is not just what the limits are.

[9 : 48] Where the boundaries are. Because the law tends to show us where the line is. Right? No other gods. No idols. Don't steal.

Don't covet. Shows us a line. There's the boundary. That simply defines where good and evil is. When he talks about loving God with all your heart.

That goes deeper. That goes into relationship. That's not simply about duty. That's about relationship. And motivation. Why would I want to keep all those commands?

Because I love him. And if I love him. I'll keep those commands. And if I truly love my neighbor. I won't steal or kill them.

Hopefully. Right? Or covet from them. I won't seek harm from them. I want to do good to them. So. We saw that. Now. What I want to distinguish today.

[10 : 49] To understand this great commandment. And the second great commandment. We need to ask. What is it that distinguishes Christian love? What does Jesus mean by this word love?

What kind of love does Jesus want? What does it look like? And what I'd like to give you today. Is simply a summary. Because we could spend weeks studying this word.

Doing a word study. It's all through the New Testament. But I would like to summarize it under two things. And it's two distinctions. One is. Is Christian love.

Is the sum of all Christian virtue and character. So it summarizes all other Christian virtue and character. And then secondly.

Christian love. Fulfills all Christian duty. And faith. Okay. So what it is. In terms of.

[11:46] It is a summary. It is a totality. Of all other Christian virtues and characters. And then it fulfills. It does. All the things.

If we love. We have done all. Okay. So. So let's break those down a little bit. First distinction. Love is the sum. Of all Christian virtue.

And character. When I say love. I mean. This word Jesus uses. Agape. Not phileo. Not eros. Not some other word for love. He uses this word.

Agape. Okay. And. What I want you to see. Is three things. There's a. I want to first look at the common definition. Of what.

Agape was in the first century. Then. We want to learn. Christ's description. How he changes. And. And redefines this word. And then finally. The new test.

[12:40] The new test. The new test. The new test. The new test. Description. Of the character. Of love. So let's look at the common definition. First of all. In the first century. When I. I use about six lexicons.

And I look. When I do word studies. And just kind of look through. The various ones. Some are theological. Some are. Simply. Cultural. Time of the first century. Non-Christian. Just lexicon. Just defining. What the word meant. In the times. So. And. What's interesting. Is every one of them. Defined. Agape. According to the understanding.

Of the first century. As. An intense. Feeling. Of deep. Affection. A passionate. Interest. Or pleasure. Well. Doesn't that sound like. What we mean in America. When we say love. An intense. Feeling. Of deep. Affection. Passionate. Interest.

[13:39] Or pleasure. Something that we value. And esteem. So. If you love. Lasagna. It could be your passion.

Or caramel ice cream. Oh. I esteem that. So. This love. When motivated. By this deep affection. Will show itself. In care. Compassion. And even sacrifice. Because. Because. A mother would do. Anything. For.

Her child. She does. Father would do. Anything. For. Her child. So. But notice. That this is based. On deep. Affection. My question. My question. Is what happens. When the affection. Changes. Where does this love. Go. When my feelings.

[14:36] Change. So. Our culture. Talks about. I fell in love. Now. I've. Fallen out of love. Why? Because I've lost.

My affection. I found something else. I value now. Or. I've got tired. Of this one. I don't value it so much. I don't esteem it so much. See.

That's what agape. They meant in the first century. Believe it or not. It meant the same as we. Our culture means. When it says love. It's this kind of temporary. Trivial. You know.

Not all bad. But certainly not a committed. Devoted kind of love. Not a lasting love. So. When Peter hears Jesus say.

Do you agape love me? He's like. Yeah. None of that wishy-washy stuff. No. I phileo love you. I mean. I'm devoted. I'm loyal. I'm with you to the end.

[15:32] This is blood brothers. Okay. So even Peter was. Not that agape stuff. That doesn't mean anything. Now. I want you to see.

Jesus' description of love. Changes and redefines. What this agape love is. He defines. He takes this common word.

And now. Takes it as his own. To define true Christian love. Now he's going to give it. New descriptions. It's a. It's a.

It's a love. That acts. Sacrificially. It self-denies. It gives. And so. In Matthew 5.

He says. You have heard it was said. You shall love your neighbor. And hate your enemy. Which was. A Jewish understanding. But I say to you. Love your enemy.

[16 : 28] Love your enemy. Well. Agape your enemy. If that's from deep affection. How am I going to love my enemy. From deep affection. I'm not going to love my enemy. From deep affection.

So Jesus must mean. Love means something more. It goes beyond. Deep affection. And feelings. I do have feelings toward my enemy. But they're not affection. Feelings. Right.

And then. The verse we all know. John 3.16. Here's the word love. God so. Agape. Love the world. Did that mean.

Did that mean. Did that mean. Did that mean. Did that mean. Did that mean. Did that mean. rebellion against him who are under his yeah he has feelings of wrath for the world but in spite of that he loves and he so loved the world that he what gave his only son that's sacrificial that's self-denying not only to speak of what the father does but also the son the son loves by laying down his life is an he initiates an act of self-denying sacrifice for the highest good of another that's what love is Romans 5 while we're yet sinners God demonstrates his love toward us in that while we're yet sinners Christ died for us again Christ initiating before we're involved while we're still sinners so see that he's defining and describing this love this agape love as something that he initiates that is in takes initiative that acts in self-denying sacrificial ways in order to meet the highest good of the other so God initiates love on the world in a sacrificial way in order to what so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life for their greatest good

Paul tells husbands love your wives like Christ loved the church right guys kind of loves that it's the love that lays down my life it's costly it's sacrificing that doesn't mean it's burdensome but it does involve self-denial for the highest good so the New Testament describes then thirdly let's look at the character of love New Testament describes the character of love as that which sums up all other Christian virtues in other words you put all the other Christian virtues together and you have love love is not just one of many Christian virtues see it's the sum of all the other Christian virtues in one because if you love you're gracious if you love you're kind if you love you're patient if you love you deny you sacrifice on and on love is the highest it is the sum it is the totality of Christian virtue and character so if we love

[20 : 01] God how do I love God with this agape love how do I initiate acts of self-denying sacrifice for God's highest good how do I love God how do I initiate that I seek him I deny myself and I look to him I take up my time and I serve him for his glory not mine so it's for his highest good I take initiative to act in sacrificial ways to glorify him how do I love my neighbor then if love means initiating acts of self denying sacrifice for their highest good how do I love my neighbor how do I initiate that I consider them I consider them remember

Hebrews 10 24 talks about not forsaking the assembly but it talks about consider one another so consider them first how to love and build up right that's love love takes consideration I'm thinking I'm not just thinking of me I'm thinking of others Philippians 3 right it's not just seeking my own interest but seeking the interest of others actually thinking that others are more important than I am that's kind of self denying to do that isn't it that's love that's how the New Testament describes love in this in this self denying kind of way no wonder Jesus has been talking all along that if you want to follow me here's what you do deny yourself take up your cross and follow me it's not all about me it's about denying me and following him so love your neighbor as yourself how do you love yourself let me count the ways how do I love my do you know there are there's American way of viewing this which is totally false

I hear it over and over that oh to love your neighbor as yourself that means I have to love myself before I can love my neighbor eh wrong you'll never love your neighbor because you'll never finally love yourself for one thing no even if you hate yourself even if you have no esteem for yourself you're still focused on yourself you're still preoccupied with yourself there's still no one more important than yourself even if you don't like yourself you go out of your way to try to undo the hurt hatefulness see what I said it's not about how you feel about yourself it's how you act toward yourself so love as you love yourself in other words treat others the same you would treat yourself care for them with the same intensity that you care for yourself so

Christian love is the sum of all Christian virtue and character add all those other virtues and characters up and you have love listen to the familiar words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 we hear these words at weddings and I'm sure you've heard 1 Corinthians 13 many many times consider how he describes love here he starts off saying if I speak in the tongues of men and angels but I have not love I'm a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to move mountains but have not love I am

nothing if I give away all I have sacrifice if I give away all I have and deliver my body up to be burned but have not love I gain nothing love is there's that p word patient love is kind love does not envy or boast it is not arrogant or rude so it's not it's it's it's unselfish it does not insist on its own way it is not irritable or resentful it does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth see love doesn't have strings attached love doesn't have conditions

I love you if you do this I love you until you do that because he goes on and he says love bears all things love believes all things hopes all things love endures all things love never fails so in other words this kind of love you don't fall out of because it never gives up it never quits it keeps believing keeps hoping keeps enduring keeps bearing bearing is fun isn't it it's fun isn't it all right another one I'll bear that one they hurt me I'll bear that I'll absorb the cost of that because I love them sometimes I need to love them even deeper where okay this bearing thing it's more serious and we need to sit down and talk and I need to love them

[26 : 07] I need I need to speak the truth in love gently gently gently gently as I'm not going to beat their head in I want to win them right so love does the hard things too so without love even our greatest acts are meaningless love involves a genuine care a genuine intent love love love acts unselfishly without conditions it never so there's our first description or distinction of what this agape love is it's the summary it's the sum total of all Christian virtue and character there's a second distinction we see about love love is also the fulfillment of all Christian duty and faith it's the fulfillment it satisfies all that

I am required to do all that God wants me to do love satisfies it achieves it accomplishes everything I must do as a believer I have many things God calls me and urges me to do if I love I will accomplish all this see the new testament takes all the ten commands and puts them into just one command simple right love just love so love is a fulfillment it fulfills three things first of all it fulfills the law it fulfills the ten commandments if you love God and love your neighbor you fulfill the ten commandments you don't even have to worry about which number is that because if I love God I'm not going to have other gods

I'm not going to have idols I'm not going to use his name in vain and I'm going to keep the sabbath day however I understand that because I love him I'm not going to do anything to dishonor so I have to worry about what are the lines no idols no other gods no I love him I'm not even going to go and then the second part of the law if I love my neighbor and my closest neighbor as a child is my parents so the fifth commandment is honor your father your mother if I love I will do that I will want to do that and if I love I'm certainly not going to go out killing somebody or committing adultery or stealing or lying or coveting because if I love I want their best I don't want to harm them I don't want to take from them so several places in the New Testament Paul and Peter and

John talk about how love is the fulfillment of the law it's the royal law James calls it the royal law if I love I'm covered that's all I got to just worry about love simple right like the Beatles said it's easy all you need is love this kind of love so it fulfills the law it also fulfills Christ new commandment it fulfills what Christ calls us to do Jesus excuse me up to standard he said it was said you shall love your neighbor as yourself now Jesus gives a new commandment because it has a new object and it has a new measure he says love one another as what not as you love yourself love one another as I have loved you now it's a new standard love one another as I have loved you so first of all he changes neighbor love your neighbor to love one another see because under Old Testament understanding Leviticus 19 where the love your neighbor as yourself comes from your neighbor under the Old Testament meant those who are the same race as you okay those who lived in your boundaries it did not mean Gentiles and so when Jesus did the parable of the good Samaritan remember he broke that boundary because he brought the most hated of all a Samaritan as the one who fulfilled that commandment and the Jewish priest and the Jewish you know they walked around here's this Samaritan and then he has a new measure not not just love one another as you love yourself but love one another as

[31 : 25] I loved you so that raises the standard how did Jesus love the disciples ultimately by laying down his life but how did he love them! How did he express his love to them?

Well a whole lot of patience right? Are you not yet getting it guys? I'm not going to cast you off more teaching more teaching he loved them by teaching them by training them he loved them in his kindness he loved them in his patience he loved them in his forbearing with them he loved them ultimately in his sacrifices because he gave his life for them so it fulfills the law it fulfills Christ's new commandment and finally this Christian kind of love fulfills the Christian call in Galatians 5 13 and

14 talks about our call to freedom we we have been in the gospel we have been set free from laws demands so one who comes under Christ no longer has to follow the law in terms of circumcision in terms of diet in terms of drink in terms of day see the

Christian end of the gospel has been set free from the demands of the law not the demands of doing right and wrong but other laws that were specific to a nation of Israel who was set apart for God so those things that distinguished the nation circumcision diet day are no longer applied to the believer so listen to what Paul says in Galatians 5 he says you were called to freedom brothers only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh but through love serve one another for the whole law is fulfilled in one word you shall love your neighbor as yourself so what's he saying well you're called to freedom yes you have freedom as a Christian all things are lawful for you but not all things are!

all things are lawful for you but not all things are helpful all things are lawful for you but not all things edify others so in other words yes you are called to freedom you have been set free from the law now you follow Christ but there's a higher principle than your freedom because you're called to love and love trumps your freedom and so if my freedom is hurting a weaker Christian I am to sacrifice that freedom if my drinking hurts another weaker brother I sacrifice that freedom to drink right Paul says I won't eat meat because I know meat is difficult for these

Corinthian folks who are just coming out of idol worship where that meat is sacrificed to idols I am not going to get in there and hang them up I will forego I will be a vegetarian while I am with them then when I am with the Jews I go to lamb so he is sensitive so love is sensitive yes I have freedoms all things are lawful for me but not all things are right love trumps that so it fulfills our call so there's there's a little bit more I want to offer you about love Christian love brings us confidence peace and assurance with God this is interesting Christian love brings us confidence with God peace with God and assurance with God when we love

[35 : 46] God and when we love our neighbor it's not just that we are fulfilling what we are to do but we gain confidence and we gain peace and we gain assurance with God listen to how John describes it in 1 John 4 John says so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God and God abides in him by this is love perfected with us so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment because as he is so also are we in this world so I have confidence love is perfected what does he mean my love is perfected it's completed in other words

God started it and initiated it he loved us and then what happened when when I experienced his love what do I do I love him back and I love others so see love is perfected it doesn't just stop it's not just a one way ticket it's he loves I love circles around I love others it's perfected and then watch what he says there is no fear in love isn't that a bold statement there is no fear in love in other words there's peace there is no fear in love love if you sacrifice it all if you have given it all what do you fear if you denied yourself if you laid it all out and it's not all about you what do you fear there's no fear in love so if I'm fearing I might be maybe not loving

God all to my or rather not a guilt thing just a okay gives me a measurement there's no fear in love but perfect love perfected love casts out fear for fear has to do with punishment and whoever fears has not been perfected in love we love because he first loved us and now watch what he says if anyone says I love God and hates his brother he is a liar oh if anyone says I love God and hates his!

he's! for he who does not love his brother who he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen and this command we have from him whoever loves God must also love his brother so notice so notice again these two loves are combined as Jesus said love for God and love for neighbor John combines them as well love for God and love for brother it's horizontal it's vertical and it's horizontal so in other words there's no solo Christians you can't say I love God it's just me and God it's just me and Jesus I don't care about the!

I just love God well John saying if you say that you're a liar because if you love God guess where you'll be you'll be with God's family you'll be looking out for God's family there's no solo Christians there's no walk on my own God has designed it that we be interdependent love and I'm only able to love others because God has first loved me I'm not even able to love others well until I experience God's love and begin to understand what that love looks like and then our love for him of course moves us to love his children so what does love mean what is the meaning of love here's the simple definition I've said several times today love is initiating self denying sacrifice for the highest good of

others it's initiating

[40 : 22] God sent his son acts of self denying sacrifice he sent his son to die for the highest good of others so that they might live I love my neighbor I initiate I begin to think about them I pray for them I I'm not just about me I not just come to get I come to give so I initiate so I go I say how are you I look for them I pray for them and then I have acts of self denying sacrifice now I may not see it that way I just want to spend time with them but that's time that I'm not spending mowing my lawn or whatever else is on my list right so it is a sacrifice but don't think of it as a!

thing because from a worldly perspective yeah it's sacrifice but not from a love perspective I'm spending time I'm doing things I'm acting in ways to help them to build them up to edify them to encourage them to for their highest good that make sense so this is the kind of love we're talking about as we go into this great commandment when I come back you'll still remember this all fresh in 12 weeks so when I go back we'll begin to look at loving God with all our heart first we're just going to spend time what does that mean and then soul I think that one's fascinating how do I love God with all my soul what's that look like with all my mind with all my strength that's how you say strength in Hebrew!

! okay so let me meddle just for one minute do you love like this just for you to think about do you love like this of course we do and we don't right we do and we don't we love God by seeking him and sacrificing and giving and serving all to honor him do you love others by looking out for them and serving and giving in order to edify and build them up I would imagine every Christian here could say yes and no working on it gotcha me too so let us pray right that we and I believe everyone who's a true Christian here wants to do this I want to love God with all my everything and I want to love my brothers and my sisters as

Christ loved me so we pray God transform us God teach us God continue to grow us and mature us and fill us so that we can do this okay let's pray father we thank you for the word we thank you lord that our Jesus takes a word that is common and almost trivial and raises it to a new standard of what Christian love looks like it is distinct from the world it is not a temporary love not a love that fades or falls away it is a love that endures and moves on and and and a love that you've given to us so we can give to others so father we do pray each one of us lord can say we have failed in this and we have sought to do this so help us oh lord help our faith increase our faith increase our passion our desire our heart and our soul and our mind and our aspire aspire
Thank you.