

Dear brother or sister in Christ,

This is the seventh essay in our series considering God's will in regard to how single men and women are to relate to one another, especially as they seek God's will in finding a marriage partner. In this article I want to seek to understand what the Bible tells us about love. It is God's will for married couples to love each other. We live in a culture where the choice of a marriage partner is determined primarily by whether or not the couple "loves" each other. Therefore, if you are going to marry someone you love and then love that person for a lifetime you need to be able to answer the question: "What is love?"

What I want to do is give a definition of love and then seek to show you how each part of the definition arises from the Bible, especially from Christ's relationship to believers. The reason I want to concentrate on Jesus' relationship to us who trust in him is because he says, "Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends." The greatest demonstration of love is the death of Jesus for those who have been justified through their faith in him. My definition of love based on Christ is this: "Seeking your happiness in the happiness of another by working for their ultimate good in ways appropriate to your relationship to that person and in accord with the revealed will of God."

The first part of this definition sounds strange but is absolutely at the center of what love is. Why did the Triune God decide to save any sinners? What motivates the Father to send the Son to die, the Son to die for and the Spirit to give new hearts to undeserving sinners? Look at what these four verses describing God's love for his people share in common:

Deuteronomy 10:14-15, "To the Lord your God belongs the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord delighted in your forefathers in order to love them and he chose you their descendants out of all the nations of the world..." Zephaniah 3:18, "The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing." Luke 10:21, "At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure." Ephesians 1:4-5, "...in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ according to his pleasure and will..." What all of these passages show us is the joy or delight that the Triune God has in choosing and saving us through Christ. God's pleasure in us is not due to anything in us. Rather God delights to love us because it is in his nature to delight to love and save sinners like us. He loves us because he loves us not because we are lovable.

John Piper shares a simple illustration to show how necessary joy in the happiness of another is to love. He suggests this scenario: imagine he brought home a bouquet of flowers for his wife Noel. When she expressed her gratitude for his kindness he says to her, "I was just doing my duty. This is what good husbands do and I want to be a good husband." Immediately the act is no longer viewed as an act of love but as an act of

hypocrisy. In order for the bringing of flowers to be an act of love it must be motivated by a desire, a delight to make his wife happy. He must respond that it was a pleasure to give her flowers because nothing makes him happier than making her happy. This is the language and the reality of love.

The next part of our definition states, "...in the happiness of another by working for their ultimate good..." God's wants us to be happy with what is in our best interest. He does not want us to simply be happy any way we want to be happy. He wants us to be ultimately and eternally happy. The ultimate good for which we were created was the enjoyment of God. In 1 Peter 3:18 we are told, "Christ died for sins, once for all... to bring you to God." So Jesus' death for us is not merely the greatest expression of love because it is a willing death for us but also because of the ultimate good we receive from it. If the death of Jesus does not bring us some benefit than it is not an expression of love but of insanity. You don't die for someone else for no reason. So love is not measured only by the cost of the action but by the benefit obtained for the beloved.

The next part of the definition says, "...in ways appropriate to your relationship to that person..." Jesus, we are told, "loved the church and gave himself up for her." The way that Jesus expresses his love for non-Christians is different from how he expresses his love for his bride. While he provides life, and breath and everything else to non-Christians, yet he only dies for his church. He only gives his Holy Spirit to his church. He only brings the church to live with his Father in the new heavens and the new earth. We are commanded to love everyone, even our enemies, just like Jesus. However, the way I love my son and the way I love the clerk at the grocery check out counter are not the same, nor should they be. The way I love my Christian brother is different from how I love my non-Christian, biological brother. God demands that the way I feel about my wife and work for her ultimate good be radically different from how I feel about my neighbor's wife and work for her ultimate good.

The final clause says, "...and in accord with the revealed will of God." The point here is that often those whom we are seeking to love find pleasure in sinful things. It would be wrong of us to seek their happiness by gratifying their sinful desires. Additionally it would be wrong for us to break God's law in order to love another person. Rather our love is constrained by God's revealed will for us and for them. We see this so clearly in the love of Christ for us. His food is to do the will of his Father. He always does what pleases his father. While tempted like us in every way, yet he was without sin. What he wants for us and what he does for us always accords with God's revealed will.

In the next article I will begin to set forth some of the practical applications that arise from the biblical principles we've investigated in these seven articles and seek to apply them to our contemporary situation.

In the love of Jesus,