

Returning God's Love

Jesus said, *"If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching."*
(John 14:23)

Rom 5:8 tells us, *"God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* Through the cross, our heavenly Father clearly demonstrated His love for us. What does He require from us to return that love?

First, let's look at not loving God

In 1 John 3:1 we are told, *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!"* As believers, we are sons of God and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) is a good example of what a child of God should not do. This young man demanded his inheritance while his father was alive and then went off into a life of sin, showing no respect for God, the law of the land nor for his father and family. By taking what was not yet due to him, and living an ungodly life, he abused God's laws and showed a total lack of love for those close to him. In Jewish society, these actions were extremely shameful and punishable by death (Deu. 21:18-21). Fortunately, like our heavenly Father, his father was full of love and accepted him back when he repented. This young man is a good example of what we should not do.

What must we do to show God our love?

Jesus has not left us with any doubt about what it means to love God. In John 14:23, He said, *"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."* Jesus has made it very clear that to love Him is to obey Him and, in John 15:10, He tells us, *"If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love."* So, Jesus' love for us is not unconditional as many think; we will only remain in His love if we are obedient to His commands. If we fail to obey these commands then we will not remain in His love and will not inherit eternal life because, in John 15:6, He said, *"If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned."*

So, exactly what is commanded of us?

Jesus said the greatest commandments were to love God and to love our neighbour (Matt. 22:37-40).

We show God our love when we put aside all idols and focus on Him and His kingdom. We express that love when we seek His presence and guidance, perform our duties to the best of our ability, attend church, evangelise, give, pray, study the Bible and generally try to honour Him in all we think, say and do.

Regarding loving our neighbour, James 2:8 tells us, *"If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."* So, by loving our neighbour we keep the Royal Law of Love and are doing what is good and pleasing in God's sight. Rom. 13:8-10 explain what it means to love our neighbour: *"... 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."* So, in simple terms, to love our neighbour means to stop sinning against him because:

- When we lie we are not loving our neighbour.
- When we steal we are not loving our neighbour.
- When we hate we are not loving our neighbour.
- When we lust we are not loving our neighbour.
- When we covet we are not loving our neighbour and
- When we ignore the needy we are not loving our neighbour.

Loving is the greatest thing we can do as it is the fulfillment of the law. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, *"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."* So, we can see that obeying Jesus' commands is loving God and loving our neighbour by not sinning against them.

Finally

Obedience is more than just something we 'should' do; it is essential for salvation. Jesus has shown His love towards us by dying FOR our sins and in return we show Him our love by dying TO our sins. 1 Pet. 1:2 tells us that we *"have been chosen ... for obedience to Jesus Christ"* and 1 John 2:3-4 reveal the seriousness of obedience. These verses say, *"We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, 'I know him', but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him."* This is a very clear warning that if anyone claims to know Jesus but is not doing what He commands then he doesn't have the truth, and is in fact a liar. Make no mistake, these verses are speaking to Christians as John the apostle includes himself by saying "we". These are very fearful words because we know that all liars will end up in the lake of fire, just as it says in Rev. 21:8.

So, I want to encourage you. If, for any reason, you are not being obedient to the Lord then please show Him your love by turning to Him in repentance and calling on Him to cleanse you of all unrighteousness, just as it says in 1 John 1:9. By doing this you will come to know the peace and joy of walking with the Lord and be sure of receiving a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of heaven.

[**Some comments on Rom. 8:35-39:** From this article it can be seen that, if we want to remain in His love, we must remain obedient to Jesus' commands and keep from sin. Rom. 8:35-39 appear to be saying that sin will not separate us from God's love but this apparent contradiction disappears when we note that these verses have nothing to do with the separation caused by sin. What these verses are saying is that there is nothing in Creation that can separate us from God. That is, there is nothing that man, nature, demons or otherwise can do to us to separate us from God's love. These things are all external influences that we can't control whereas sin originates within us and is our choice. Sin will always separate us from God but He will not allow any of Creation's hardships to cause us to fall away and be separated from His love. Paul suffered many, many hardships but nothing was able to separate him from God's love because God kept him through all his trials. Over the centuries, many martyrs have kept the faith despite unspeakable suffering – God kept them because they loved and obeyed Him!] Amen.

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