

## ***Promised to Those Who Love Him***

Love is a wonderful thing! Love is the motivation for almost everyone on the face of the earth! If you were to ask ten different people what love is, you would get ten different answers, more than likely. So what is love? How do we love God? How do we love our fellowman? These are important questions because in James 2:5-9 we are told that, *“God choose them that are poor as to the world to be rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he promised to them that love him”* and we are told that *“the royal law, according to the scripture,”* is *“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors”* (James 2:5-9). If we are going to please God we must know what love is, love Him, and love our neighbor as ourself.

The most comprehensive discussion of love is in I Corinthians 13. The immediate context is discussing spiritual gifts. Paul brings to mind the idea of love to illustrate the point that, *“Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away”* (I Corinthians 13:8). He encourages us to obtain love because it is what really matters when it comes to performing spiritual gifts and obedience to God. Even though Paul does not “define love” in this discussion, he does tell us what love does:

*“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things”* (I Corinthians 13:4-7). Love is commonly described as a “warm, fuzzy feeling” you have around someone, but love is more than that. Love is an attitude you have toward someone. Love is not a reactive feeling but a proactive motive. That is why Christ commands us to *“love your enemies”* and *“love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 5:44, James 2:8). We do not wait for someone else to do something to provoke us unto doing something out of love, we go out into the world and love without discrimination!

This applies first to our heavenly Father. He *“so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). He was willing to allow His only Son to come to this earth, pay the ultimate price, and die upon the cross. The choice to do this was not during a time when we were trying to do what was right, but was with the full knowledge that, *“while we were still sinners, Christ,”* would die *“for us”* (Romans 5:8). So how do we love Him back? Jesus told His disciples that, *“If you love Me, keep My commandments”* (John 14:15). If we truly have the love of God within us, we are going to be living our lives like He asks us to. All those who do not keep His commandments do not love God. You cannot have one without the other and you can not claim to love God if you are not keeping His commandments. As John put it, *“Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him”* (I John 2:3-4).

How do we love our fellowman? When Christ tells us to *“love your enemies”* He tells us that in order to do that we have to, *“bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you”* (Matthew 5:44). The true test of love is to do good to those who do not love you in return because after all, *“if you love those who love you, what reward have you?”* (Matthew 5:46). Everyone is willing to do good to those who will return the favor. Jesus illustrated this in a parable when He said, *“When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just”* (Luke 14:12-14). We do not love others to have them do things for us in return or even for them to love us back, but we love them because the Father first loved us when we did not love Him back.

This was the problem with the brethren James wrote to. They would cater to the rich when they came into their assemble. They would give them the best seats and sit the lowly and poor at their footstool. Being a respecter of persons is a sin (James 2:8). Why? Because it is not of God. As Peter accurately stated in Acts 10:34, *“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.”* Christ, *“died to sin once for all;”* (Romans 6:10) because, *“all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”* (Romans 3:23). God loves the whole world and was willing to provide a way that all of mankind could be saved. Now we must be willing to show the same love to everyone. We love all because God loves all. We show no partiality because God shows no partiality.

If we are willing to do this then we have a hope of heaven which, *“God has promised to those who love Him.”*