

CHAPTER 58

THE SIMPLE SECRET OF TRUE CHRISTIAN LOVE

*Are you overlooking the vital
key that unlocks the true
meaning of love? This article
reveals it!*

Love is one of the most commonly used words in our everyday conversation. It is the underlying theme behind most songs we hear, human interest programs on television, books and magazine articles we read. Yet, if you should ask a hundred different people to give their personal definition of love you would probably get one hundred slightly different answers. It seems that the word love has come to have such a broad and ambiguous meaning in today's society that it's almost impossible to boil down to its true essence.

What is the meaning of this all-important word? Can you think of a single term that most accurately describes it? Did you know that such a word exists and that the Bible either uses or refers to it repeatedly from Genesis to Revelation? Even you, yourself, are familiar with this word and may be using it unwittingly in your day-to-day conversation. It has only one syllable and contains four letters.

This simple little word if properly understood and applied could virtually put an end to all wars, strifes and human conflicts. It could save marriages, unify families and build lasting friendships. Strange that more people are not practicing this word since it is one of the vital keys to happiness, success and personal well being. The more you apply this practical definition of love, the more you begin to experience one of the great secrets of a fruitful, Christian life.

An Important Clue

What is this profound little word? Let's notice a clue in John 3:16. '*For God so loved the world, that he gave his, only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*' Did you catch the relationship between the word 'love' and the word 'gave'? God loved and He gave. This verse describes God's definition of true love. It tells us how His love works — it's an outgoing concern that prompts Him to action. It's directed away from self and out to others. God so loved that He gave.

The word we are searching for that most accurately describes love is the word GIVE. It's difficult, if not impossible, to think of love in any other way. True love is giving. The underlying motive is to care and show concern for others and to see their lives enriched. There is no selfish thought of getting when one gives freely from the heart. Love that gives to get is not true love: that brand of love is self-centered greed.

The very nature of God is that of giving. You can see it reflected in the whole of His creation. Think of the myriads of blessings and benefits that God gives to us as His created beings. He has given us life itself with its manifold pleasures and delights. He has given us this beautiful earth to inhabit with its gorgeous flowers, towering mountains and breathtaking landscapes. He has given us a vast variety of foods to eat and enjoy. All of creation is a constant testimony of God's love in action.

God has even infused this concept of giving into the laws of nature. Cows give milk. Trees give fruit. Clouds provide rain in due season. No matter where you look in your natural environment, you see this principle of love at work. Thus, the word 'give' tells us in a nutshell what true Christian love is and how it is to be practiced.

The Biblical Approach

Since God's nature is that of giving, it should come as no surprise that His Word also instructs us to strive for the same characteristic. Numerous passages talk about and expound the 'give' principle of love. Acts 20:35 says, '*...it is more blessed to give than to receive.*' Giving, as a principle of life, is more

productive than receiving. When you give you are helping to upgrade the lives of others by contributing to their success and happiness. But when you practice the 'get way,' you are the only one who is benefitted. This is a selfish and narrow approach. Think of how much you could better the quality of life for fellow man when you practice outgoing love.

Matthew 10:8 commands, '*...freely you have received, freely give.*' God has bountifully blessed us in ways beyond measure because He is a giving, loving heavenly Father. His most supreme gift was His Son Jesus Christ, whom He gave to save the world. Since God has freely given us all things to enjoy, He desires that we adopt this same giving lifestyle. God did not give us our blessings solely for our own personal enjoyment. He gave them in order for us to share with neighbor so that He, too, can be blessed. Thus, if you want to know whether you're motivated by God's form of love, you can determine the answer by how much you are willing to sacrifice and give.

II Corinthians 9:7 states, '*...for God loveth a cheerful giver.*' Notice the kind of person God says He loves. He loves one who gives freely and cheerfully. He takes delight in the person who has a generous heart, puts others first and is genuinely concerned about their welfare.

Thus, we can see from the above verses that the 'give way' is the 'love way.' This giving concept epitomizes in a simple and succinct manner how true love should be practiced.

Is it sheer coincidence that Mr. Herbert W. Armstrong has adopted the 'give way' versus the 'get way' as the theme of his message to world leaders? Doesn't this motto sum up the true meaning of the Gospel?

The Practical Art of Giving

Since we have now demonstrated that to give is practical love in action, let's discuss some of the ways that you can put it to work.

In answering the question of a rich young man on how to receive eternal life, Jesus said, '*...if thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*' (Matt. 19:21). Here then is an area of life where you can start practicing true love. In place of selfishly hoarding your personal possessions, God wants you to cheerfully share what He has given you with those who have less. Notice how this principle is further brought out in Luke 11:41, '*...give alms of such things as you have...*' Matthew 5:42 says, '*Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.*' And again in I John 3:16-18, '*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.*' Clearly, giving to those in need is one of the most charitable and positive ways to fulfill the law of love.

But there are also other forms of giving you can practice. You can give kindness, courtesy, and friendship to those with whom you come in daily contact. You can give encouragement to those who are depressed or who have failed in some endeavor. You can give of yourself in time and service to your neighbor when he needs a helping hand. You can give comfort and compassion to the lonely and suffering. There are hundreds of opportunities all around you in everyday life where you can practice the art of giving.

The attitude of giving even applies toward your enemies. Proverbs 25:21-22 instruct, '*If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.*' Imagine! If you are to take on the very nature of God as one of His children, you, too, must bless your enemies and truly be concerned about their comfort and well being just like our heavenly Father. '*But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust*' (Matt. 5:44-45).

The all important key to remember in describing true love is in the meaning of the word 'give.' It is probably the most descriptive term in the English language that tells us in a nutshell what God's brand of love is all about.

The spirit and practice of giving is what indeed marks a true Christian a child of God. If you are led of His Spirit outgoing love for neighbor will become easy, natural and spontaneous.

The Reward of Giving

It's a human propensity to 'give' in order to 'get.' We either expect something in return for our generosity or we perform good deeds in order to be seen of others. We want to impress them and have them think well of us. These are selfish and negative forms of giving and do not meet with God's approval. A true sense of giving should always be from the heart, without any selfish motive whatsoever to get.

Does this mean that acts of giving are without reward? And that we should never expect to receive anything for our Christian deeds and good works? Of course not! God who is the greatest giver in the universe has built into His laws an automatic reward system if they are faithfully obeyed. For examples in giving His Son to save the world, He will ultimately reap millions and perhaps billions of additional sons for His family. He knows by virtue of His created laws that He will receive if He first gives in love.

Notice how this truth is revealed on the human plane in Luke 6:38. *'Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.'*

In Ephesians 6:8 the apostle Paul affirms, *'Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall be receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.'*

Galatians 6:9 says, *'And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.'* II Corinthians 9:6 further emphasizes, *'But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.'*

How reassuring! Just as you plant seed in the field and will eventually reap a harvest, so in like manner when you practice the give way in your daily Christian life, you will also reap a reward.

God's Spirit Empowers

To assume that we can attain this noble love for mankind by our own strength is a serious and tragic mistake. We are not born with this kind of godly love. Nor is it an emotion we can work up or create within ourselves. True giving love is a gift of God bestowed by His Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 says, *'And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us.'* Therefore, the first step in attaining God's love is to ask Him for it (Luke 11:1-3). Pray earnestly for the power to replace the stranglehold of carnal, self love with God's divine, spiritual love. Then start practicing it. You will discover to your amazement that as you walk in faith a transformation will occur in your attitude and outlook. Giving will become a delightful pleasure — an experience that you will actually enjoy.

Be Thankful and Act

How marvelous are God's ways, and how thankful you should be for such wonderful knowledge! By the simple act of giving you not only fulfil God's law of love, but you also set in motion a principle of life that blesses all within your sphere of influence. Who would have ever dreamed that the simple act of giving could be one of the most powerful forces for good in the universe! It is the rule by which God exists and sustains all of creation. It is a graphic description of His loving, righteous and holy character.

Why don't you resolve today to embark on a new adventure of giving? Strive to become a source of good to all with whom you come in contact — a beacon of light to this morbid, dark and sinful world. Remember that true love is the give principle set in motion. Make it a constant, daily goal to practice this godly attitude — give!

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