

Doctrine of Love

1. The word love is translated most often from the Hebrew '*ahaba*' and from the Greek, '*agape*'.
2. Love is chiefly represented in the *Scriptures* as an attribute of God and as a Christian virtue. Its consideration, therefore, belongs to both theology [the study of God] and ethics [moral living].
3. In *Scripture*, love as an attribute of God. God is presented as having feelings and affection, although rationalistic theologians have asserted the contrary. The theological word for this is *anthropathism*.
4. While the theologians' debate the church must derive her conceptions of God from the special revelation that He has given of Himself. The *Scriptures* declare the love of God as strongly as His existence. 1 John 4: 8, 16 says simply enough, "*God is love*".
 - *1 John 4:8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*
 - *1 John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.*
5. Love is the highest characteristic of God, the one attribute in which all others harmoniously blend. Without love, God's absolute power, presence and knowledge would be monstrous.
6. The love of God is more than kindness or benevolence. Benevolence may be exercised toward irrational creatures, but love is directed toward rational, personal beings.
7. The eternal love of God has never been without an object, a fact upon which the Church receives some insight from the *Scripture* revelation of the threefold personality of God.
 - *Matthew 3:17 And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.*
 - *John 15:9 As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.*
 - *John 17:23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.*

8. The gracious love of God to men, even to sinful men, is most strongly declared in both the OT and NT.
- *Exodus 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth,*
 - *Isaiah 63:9 In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.*
 - *Jeremiah 31:3 The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.*
 - *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.*
 - *1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*
9. The love of God underlies all that He has done and is doing, although many facts exist that we cannot reconcile with His love on account of our limited understanding.
10. The highest disclosure and most complete proof of divine love is in redemption.
- *Romans 5:8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*
 - *Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? 33 Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. 34 Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

36 As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. 38 For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39 Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.
 - *1 John 4:9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

11. The reality and power of this love are properly apprehended only under the influence of the Holy Spirit. *"The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).*
12. Love (Greek, 'agape) is a Christian virtue. The only word in the *Bible* translated charity means love.
13. Love is an affectionate, tender and passionate attachment, a sentiment of our nature excited by qualities in a person or thing that command our affection. Love is a virtue of such efficacy that it is said to be the fulfilling of the law.
14. The absence of love invalidates all claims to the Christian name. It is the antithesis of selfishness.
15. Luther calls love *"the shortest and longest divinity."*
16. Love is active, and dissatisfied if not blessing others. Christian love is piety, the greatest blessing that God can give, for *"God is love."* In love all human duty is summed up.
 - *Matthew 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.*
 - *Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*
 - *1 Corinthians 13:13 And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.*
17. Love is the first named element in the composite *"fruit of the Spirit"*. *Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.*
18. Charity, in modern speech, has other meanings.
 - Love is that sentiment that prompts us to think and speak well of others, judge their acts kindly, and make them happy.
 - Love produces generosity to the poor.
 - Love is that which is given.
 - Love is a benevolent foundation on which to construct a greater superstructure of the soul.
19. Love is the preeminent virtue inculcated or impressed upon the heart, and produced by Christianity.

20. The whole law is summed up in love, not in the sense of rendering all other requirements as inconsequential, but in the sense that love is fundamental, expresses the spirit of all others, and with enlightenment or understanding will lead to the observance of all others.

- *Matthew 22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
- *Matthew 5:43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 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; 45 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. 46 For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? 47 And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? Do not even the publicans so? 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*
- *John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.*
- *John 14:21 He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.*
- *John 15:12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you.*
- *Romans 13:8 Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*
- *1 Corinthians 13:1 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*
- *Galatians 5:14 For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*

21. Accordingly, love is declared to be the chief test of Christian discipleship.

- *John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.*
- *Matthew 5:44 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;*

- *1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*

22. Love is the highest motive or ground of moral actions.

23. Without love all other motives fall short of furnishing the true stimulus of Christian living.

24. As all sin roots itself in selfishness, so all virtue springs out of love.

25. The love that is presented in the NT as the mainspring of holy living is *grateful* love as distinct from the love that is wholly disinterested. "*We love, because He first loved us*" are words that rightly express the whole matter.

- *1 John 4:19 We love him, because he first loved us.*
- *2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead:*
- *Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.*

26. The contention that true Christian love should be disinterested, that we must love God exclusively on account of His perfection, so that if He did not bless us, but were to cast us off, we would love Him still, finds no support in the *Scriptures*. There is no merit in loving a loveless God.

27. With that being said, our love should be like Job's, in that we are certainly not to love the gifts of God more than the Giver. We are not to love God wholly on account of His gifts.

28. True love is a grateful love, that includes adoring love, or that which loves God for His own sake.

29. In summary, Christian love is made possible only by divine grace.

30. It is said to be a fruit of the Spirit.

- *Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,*
- *1 John 3:14 We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*