

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

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Number: 27

Verses: 1 Thessalonians 3:12

Topic: Love vs. Personality

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1Thess 3:12 *And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we also do for you.*

1John 3:18 *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

Love and personality often get confused in people's minds. We are flat out telling the difference between someone who genuinely loves us and someone who is merely manipulating our emotions with their wonderful personality.

However they are actually incredibly different! Love is a truthful and divine action as in "God so loved the world that He gave..": whereas personality is just an often-manufactured social appearance as in: "That motivational speaker sure has a great personality!".

The meaning of the word "personality" has gradually broadened out in common use to include our inner being as in the concept of "personality tests" but that is not the original definition or the definition I will be using in this study. Here personality will retain its meaning as how you are socially perceived e.g. as the "life of the party" or "that poor girl just has no personality".

Someone with a "great personality" can convince us that we are loved. They smile, touch, flatter, use nice words and persuade us until we are taken in. The sad truth is that we are just being manipulated for their own ends (to buy their DVD, vote for them or enter into a exploitative relationship with them..).

Love never exploits. Love never engages in wickedness. Love is never unjust. Love never asks you to go against Christ, against the Bible, against your conscience or against your own best interests. Love never steals your last dime.

Personality and love are often mixed up as in: "she just really loves on people", which translates as that the person is generally extroverted, is warmly affectionate and socially accepting and often compliments other people. While this is good, and is sure better than being hostile and nasty, it is not quite the same as agape love. For instance such a person could just be selling you a set of very expensive cookware! Unfortunately this rather phony "love as words and gestures" is the accepted form of love in many churches and little more is thought about it!

The Bible corrects this view stating: *My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* (1 John 3:18). This tells us that true love is a verb, and not just verbal! Love is active. Agape love is shown in good deeds done in a truthful and non-manipulative manner.

The Bible asks us to "walk our talk" if we are going to claim to be loving. Many polite and socially adept people are in fact very selfish and self-centered (e.g. some diplomats). So we need a better definition of love, one that will guide us in our own actions, and also guide us as we interact with others.

Never think that being nice is enough. Niceness does not satisfy God at all. Many a church back-stabber is nice on the surface! Love is a benevolent action not just a social interaction.

Encouragement can be part of love, but on its own it is not quite there:

James 3:15,16: *Suppose a brother or sister does not have any clothes or daily food and one of you tells them, "Go in peace! Stay warm and eat heartily." If you do not provide for their bodily needs, what good does it do?*

In these difficult times we need to do much more than saying: "I will pray for you brother, now go home and be warm!". Instead we need to take some positive action steps toward helping that particular person, according to our ability to do so.

Modern technology allows certain people, with exceptional personalities, to create great and powerful delusions. People relate to television hosts as if they were part of the family and believe that the TV personality genuinely loves and cares for them, when in fact they are just a statistic, a mere single "viewer" out of millions! We agree with this delusion and give it power because we want to be entertained and it seems "harmless enough at the time".

However it is far from harmless when the whole of life is considered. Video games, TV, music and the Internet can consume enormous amounts time in virtual fantasy worlds. People lose say 20 hours a week interacting with cartoon figures, actors and models, who do not care about them at all, while ignoring Jesus Christ who does love them, who died for them and who truly wishes to bless them!

Weaker souls become obsessed with certain media personalities and think about them day and night. This is encouraged by advertising gurus, so we even have semi-religious phenomena such as the "cult of personality", "American Idol" and "rock star worship".

Personality deceives and enslaves. You get the "enchanting" woman who wants men to adore her and be enslaved to her every desire; and the charismatic cult leader with hundreds of devoted followers under his authority. Many people are very needy emotionally and a ruthless person with a powerful personality can captivate them.

Love of course is the exact opposite! Love frees and liberates. Love lets go. Love wants people to mature into independent adults, no longer swayed here and there by every wind of doctrine.

Personality thrives on adolescent instability and immaturity, whereas love works towards responsibility, dignity and nobility of character. Personality wants to produce slaves that rave. In contrast love wants to grow saints that reign - with Christ as kings and priests!

Love does not create idols, love tells you to focus on God first. There is only one true religion and that is the worship of the God who created the heavens and the earth, the seas and springs of water (Rev. 14:7). The Bible forbids bowing down before idols, before people or before the works of our hands. (This was the "problem" with Mordecai who refused to bow down before the egotistical official Haman). Paul and Barnabas were truly horrified when the people at Lystra decided to offer sacrifices to them after they had healed a man lame from birth (Acts 14:8-18)!

We are to "put on Christ" not our make-up or our mask or our "business smile" when we go out the door! Instead of "developing a winning personality" lets "develop a Christ-like character"!

There are some who advocate personality as essential to ministry, as if preaching the gospel was some sort of sales promotion with quotas, tough closes and monthly bonuses. However personality is quite independent of success in ministry. In fact personality can hinder ministry by making people trust in men rather than having them trust in God. It seems that even the apostle Paul may not have had a "winning personality":

2Cor 10:10 *For it is said, "His letters are weighty and powerful, but his physical presence is weak, and his public speaking is despicable."*

The gospel is not a matter of slick pitches and personality but of words given by God:

1 Corinthians 2:2-5,13 *For I didn't think it was a good idea to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. 3 I came to you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. 4 My speech and my proclamation were not with persuasive words of wisdom but with a powerful demonstration by the Spirit, 5 so that your faith might not be based on men's wisdom but on God's power. ...13 We also speak these things, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.*

So we see that Paul deliberately avoided the cult of personality, even saying at one point "who is Paul and who is Apollos..." (1 Corinthians 3:4 ff.), deriding the very idea of having a human following. Paul wanted people to follow Christ, not himself, and did not use human means of persuasion but rather spiritual words of wisdom and the demonstration of the Spirit and of power so that the faith of the new believers would not rest on human wisdom (which can be out-argued by a philosopher) but on the irrefutable and demonstrable power of God.

(2 Corinthians 4:2) *Instead, we have renounced shameful secret things, not walking in deceit or distorting God's message, but commending ourselves to every person's conscience in God's sight by an open display of the truth.*

The Good Samaritan is not known to us for his looks, charm and eloquence but for his loving and neighborly actions. The love of Jesus is not known by His outward appearance or stage personality but by His dying on the Cross (Romans 5:8)! In fact it seems that Jesus was not considered to be humanly impressive in His day, read the following verses noting what people thought of Jesus is a social sense:

(Isaiah 53:1-5) *"Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a tender plant, and like a root out of a dry ground; he had no form and he had no majesty that we should look at him, and there is no attractiveness that we should desire him. "He was despised and rejected by others, and a man of sorrows, intimately familiar with suffering; and like one from whom people hide their faces; and we despised him and did not value him. "Surely he has borne our sufferings and carried our sorrows; yet we considered him stricken, and struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, and he was crushed for our iniquities, and the punishment that made us whole was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed.*

The One who loved us and redeemed us was considered as despised, rejected, without value and unattractive! So your social potential and your ministry potential are completely unrelated!

Thus it is clear that being a loving person and having a great social personality are, in fact, almost opposites. Love is truthful, sincere, non-manipulative, honest, forthright, spiritual and without masks or pretense and declares itself through action and through words of wisdom and through the demonstration of the Spirit and of power!

Blessings,

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