

self-control, **perseverance**, and in your perseverance, **godliness**; 7 and in your godliness, **brotherly kindness**, and in your brotherly kindness, **love**. NASB

These virtues are in fact the character and nature of the Holy Spirit who lives in us and the **end goal** of our **growth in holiness** for our daily lives. These **virtues** should now begin to **characterize** our life as Christians with ever **increasing intensity** as we take on the **image of God** more and more by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. In our struggle against the sinful nature we are to renew our minds with the beautiful and wonderful thoughts of the virtues of God, longing for and **pursuing His goodness** in our daily life as children of God. Let us therefore consider what these virtues are, so that we can renew our minds accordingly, dwelling upon, thinking about and pursuing these very virtues in our thoughts, words and deeds.

### **Love – the crowning virtue**

Now as we consider what the **virtues of God** are, let us acknowledge that some are more **prominent**, fundamental and important than others. Some are the **foundation** or **motivation** for others, and many virtues are **interrelated** and don't function properly without this relation to others. Surely without a doubt, **love** is seen in scripture as the paragon, pinnacle or crowning virtue. Our Lord Jesus when asked what the greatest commandment in all of the Old Testament was, he answered, **"LOVE!"**

**Matthew 22:36-40** - 6 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And He said to him, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."** 38 **"This is the great and foremost commandment.** 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." NASB

In fact, said Jesus, **"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."** His point here is, the **entire Bible** is **dependent, built on, pointing to and revealing the centrality of love** to the **worship and glory of God**. Of all that God has commanded us to do, the greatest is to LOVE. Surely this is why the Apostle Paul said that love was itself the fulfilment of the Law. Consider all the commands in the Law, God says they are fulfilled when we love our neighbor.

**Romans 13:8-10** - 8 **Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.** 9 For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."** 10 **Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.** NASB

And consider Paul's words toward the end of the love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13.

**1 Corinthians 13:13** - 13 But now abide **faith, hope, love**, these three; but **the greatest of these is love**. NASB

However great the **virtues of faith and hope** may be, they are **surpassed by love**. And surely this is why Peter tells us that more important than anything in regard to how we relate to one another in the Christian life, that **ferveant love** is **"above all."**

**1 Peter 4:8** - 8 **Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another**, because love covers a multitude of sins. NASB

And John tells us that this is because it is **God's very nature**, that is, God **IS** love.

**1 John 4:7-8** - 7 Beloved, **let us love one another, for love is from God**; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, **for God is love**. NASB

In fact John says here, that this is the **test** for knowing God and being **born of God**, that we **"love one another."** Without this **virtue of love** being brought forth as the **product** of our **life**, we cannot claim to be the **sons of God**. And it is by the great love that we show to one another that others recognize us as genuine Christians.

**John 13:34-35** - 34 "A **new commandment I give to you, that you love one another**, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 "**By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**" NASB

And surely it is the **great love** of **God** Himself that **motivated** Him to **save us** helpless and wicked sinners from His own justice through that great loving act of giving His only Son to die in our place and on our behalf.

**John 3:16** - 16 "For **God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son**, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life. NASB

**Romans 5:8** - 8 But **God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.** NASB

**1 John 4:9-10** - 9 **By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world** so that we might live through Him. 10 **In this is love**, not that we loved God, but that **He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.** NASB

And it was the same **selfless** and **glorious love** that **motivated the Son to give Himself** as a **sacrifice**, so that the demands of God's justice could be met and we could go **free** from the great bondage of sin and its penalty of death.

**Galatians 2:20** - 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in **the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.** NASB

**Ephesians 5:1-2** - 1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and **walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God** as a fragrant aroma. NASB

**Revelation 1:5** - 5 and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. **To Him who loves us, and released us from our sins by His blood.** NASB

Love is the sum total of all the **Law** and the **Prophets** of the **Old Testament**, and the **new commandment** in the New Testament. You see the **centrality** of **love** is taught everywhere in the **New Testament**. It is held up as the **chief** and **crowning virtue** and most **important** and **fundamental** of all that **we are** and all that **we do**. Let us therefore seek to understand how God describes this love in His Word, and thereby see how we shall incorporate it into our lives that we might become the very imitators of God that He has called us to be.

### Love is....

In all of Scripture, we have no clearer **portrait of love** painted than in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of 1 Corinthians. There Paul gives us a **description** of the **character** of **love** in very vivid and luminous terms. In the context Paul had been correcting the Corinthians on many failures in regards to the exercise of **spiritual gifts** and how they are designed to **serve one another**. As he reaches the high point of his discussion, it becomes necessary for him to describe to the Corinthians how **fundamental real** and **sincere love** is to the **nature** of **Christian worship** and **service**. It is here where Paul's hymn of love is brought forth to give us a vivid picture of the very **nature** and **character** of **love** itself, and also its **importance** and **prominence** among us. Consider how **love** is **contrasted** in **verses 1-3** with other virtues, and in **verses 4-8** is **defined** with utmost clarity.

**1 Corinthians 13:1-3** - 1 If I **speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love**, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have **the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge**; and if I have **all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing**. 3 And if I **give all my possessions to feed the poor**, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but **do not have love, it profits me nothing.** NASB

In these verses Paul refers to the **gifts** and virtues of **tongues, prophecy, faith, charity** and **martyrdom** to explain that even these great Christian gifts (charisma), without the **motivation** of **genuine love**, are of no profit in and of themselves. This obviously in the context is because the **design of the gifts** among the Christian church is for the **purpose of expressing love** and