

# ***Love* — That Much-Maligned Word**

## **How Can We Understand It?**

There is perhaps no other word in the English language that is more misunderstood and maligned than the word *love*. It is a simple four-letter word, but the consequences of its use are far-reaching.

By simply stating this word wars have been averted, husbands, wives, and children have resolved their differences, and wasted lives have been turned around. Then again, through the misuse of the word lives have been shattered when confusing casual lust outside of marriage with the true love that helps cement a marriage as God intended.

It is no wonder that the word has been so viciously distorted in its meanings, because Satan hates the pure intent of what love means. Love comprises the very foundation of who we are and why we exist, for because of God's nature of love He needed to multiply Himself — the God-kind — and extend His character without end. One might say that because of love God *had to* create many more beings in His image. Satan, on the other hand, wishes to replace the Creator on His throne and destroy the essence of His nature.

### **The Meaning of Love**

The noun *love* means “a deep and tender feeling of affection for, or attachment or devotion to a person or persons; a feeling of brotherhood and good will toward other people; a strong liking for or interest in something; sexual passion.” The word connotes a wide range of meanings in the English language, as it does in Biblical language, where love is translated from several words.

#### ***Hebrew***

*ahab* (217 times), “to love, like, be a friend.”

*ahabah* (33 times), “love, friendship, familial love, romantic love, covenant loyalty.”

*hasaq* (8 times) “to set one's affection, desires, love, be attached to.”

*raham* (47 times), “to love, have compassion on,

show mercy, take pity on.”

*dod* (61 times), “uncle, cousin, relative, beloved one, lover, friendship and affection.”

*rayah* (9 times), “darling, beloved, companion, a woman who is the object of a man's affection.”

*agabiym* (1 time), “devotion, love.”

#### ***Greek***

*agape* (116 times), “love, generosity, kindly concern, devotedness.”

*agapao* (143 times), “to love, value, esteem, feel or manifest generous concern for, delight in.”

*phileo* (25 times), “to manifest some act or token of kindness or affection; delight in a thing.”

*philadelphia* (6 times), “brotherly love.”

*sophronizo* (1 time), “encourage, restore to a right mind, make sober-minded, steady.”

All of these definitions of love in both the Hebrew and Greek indicate the word means “a desire to help, show kindness towards, esteem highly, uplift, serve, and be friendly towards.” They indicate a positive kinship to the object of this desire, based in large part on warm feelings, joy, and giving.

Yet, the Biblical definition of love goes beyond these definitions, as defined by the context in which the word is used. Let us try to summarize these meanings based on the context of the usage, concentrating on the Greek words *agape* and *agapao* since they are used by far the most ... 259 times in the New Testament.

- The attitude of God towards His Son (John 17:26), to the human race (John 3:16; Romans 5:8), and to believers in Christ in particular” (John 14:12).

- A passion toward God is its primary object, and expresses itself in implicit obedience to His commandments (John 14:15, 21, 23; 15:10; I John 2:5; 5:3; II John 1:6).

- Not an impulse from one's feelings towards brethren or others, and it does not always follow one's natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself

only on those with whom one has a special affinity.

- Seeks the welfare of all (Romans 15:2).
- Works no ill to anyone (Romans 13:8-10).
- Seeks to do good to all men, especially to the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).
- Expresses a deep and constant passion and interest of a perfect God towards entirely unworthy objects (us), fostering a reverential concern in them towards the Giver, a practical closeness towards those who are partakers in the Godly way of life, and a desire to help others to seek God

### The Evidence: What Is Love?

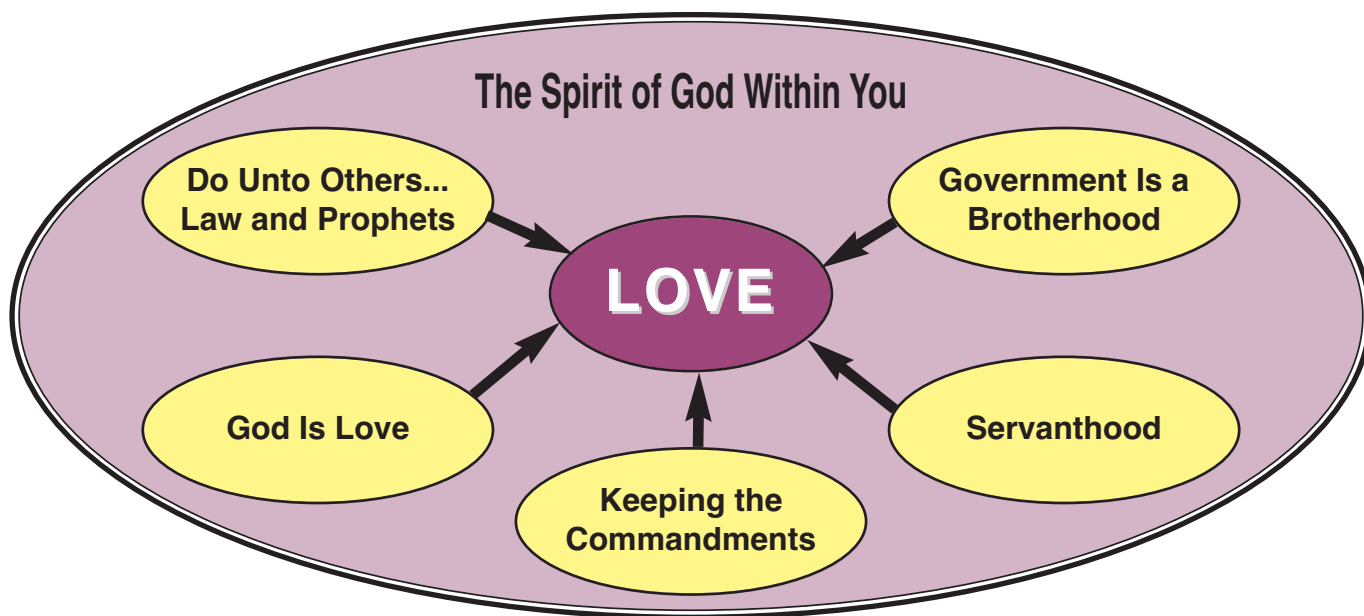
Let it be understood first of all that it is impos-

placed within us. that makes it possible to love our Creator and to love one another, even as the disciples could not find it within themselves to love Jesus and each other at the Passover the night before the crucifixion. They squabbled among themselves to see who would be the greatest in the Kingdom rather than understand what love truly is ... prompting Jesus to explain that the servant is the greatest of all. They did not possess the spirit yet, but at Pentecost 50 days later they received it and were changed men.

There are several lines of evidence to show us what love is, that help us understand the meaning of the concept.

**1. God is love.** John states this directly in I John 4:8

## The Components of Love



sible to understand and fulfill the command to love unless one possesses the spirit of God. The carnal mind is "... enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7), and unless the spirit of God dwells in you are "... none of His" (Romans 8:9). God cannot dwell in you unless you love Him ... and His indwelling spirit makes the expression of that love possible.

The mind of God is the fruit of that spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and moderation (Galatians 5:22). Therefore, as the accompanying figure illustrates, all facets of love are encompassed by the spirit of God that is

and 16. Thus, the whole personage of our Creator is defined by this word. Profound! Such a fact expands the meaning of the word to nearly infinite limits, for what is God? He is named and defined according to what He does, so each of these qualities defines love! There is an extensive list of names of God — 62 in all — in the Old Testament, 16 of which are listed below as a sample.

**Elohim** = God, His power and might, and in the plural form the God family. Genesis 1:1; Psalm 19:1.

**Adonai** = Lord, a reference to the lordship of God. Malachi 1:6.

**Yahweh** [or **Jehovah**] = a reference to God's di-

vine salvation. Genesis 2:4.

**Yahweh Maccaddeshem** = the Lord our sanctifier. Exodus 31:13.

**Yahweh Rohi** = the Lord my shepherd. Psalm 23:1

**Yahweh Shammah** = the Lord who is present. Ezekiel 48:35

**Yahweh Rapha** = the Lord our leader. Exodus 15:26.

**Yahweh Tsidkenu** = the Lord our righteousness. Jeremiah 23:6.

**Yahweh Jireh** = the Lord will provide. Genesis 22:13-14.

**Yahweh Nissi** = the Lord our banner. Exodus 17:15.

**Yahweh Shalom** = the Lord is peace. Judges 6:24.

**Yahweh Sabbaoth** = the Lord of Hosts. Isaiah 6:1-3.

**El Elyon** = the most high God. Genesis 14:17; Isaiah 14:13-14.

**El Roi** = the strong one who sees. Genesis 16:13.

**El Shaddai** = the God of the mountains, or mighty God. Genesis 17:1; Psalm 91:1.

**El Olam** = the everlasting God. Isaiah 40:28-31.

In the New Testament there are 101 names for God, the first 15 arranged alphabetically here.

**Abba**. Romans 8:15.

**Advocate**. I John 2:1.

**Alpha**. Revelation 22:13.

**Amen**. Revelation 3:14.

**Author of life**. Acts 3:15.

**Author of our faith**. Hebrews 12:2

**Beginning**. Revelation 21:6.

**Blessed and Holy Ruler**. I Timothy 6:15.

**Bread of God**. John 6:33.

**Bread of life**. John 6:35.

**Bright Morning Star**. Revelation 22:16.

**Chief Shepherd**. I Peter 5:4.

**Christ (Anointed)**. Matthew 22:42.

**Christ of God**. Luke 9:20.

**Christ the Lord** Luke 2:11.

**2. Love is keeping the commandments.** A major identity of love is the keeping of the Eternal's commandment ... His laws, statutes, and judgements.

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments, and His commandments are not grievous” (I John 5:3)

“If you love Me, keep My commandments .... He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me, and he that loves Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.... If a man love Me he will keep my words, and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him” (John 14:15, 21, 23).

“If you keep My commandments you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

“And this is love, that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment, that, as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it” (II John 6).

Jesus made it plain that He did not come to do away with these laws that define love, but He came to live them and show us how to keep these laws in their spiritual intent, not just in the letter, to “... magnify the law and make it *honorable* [*adar*, ‘majestic, glorious, powerful’]” (Isaiah 42:21). Notice the words of Matthew 5:17-19.

“Think not that I am come to *destroy* [*katalyo*, ‘dissolve, demolish, throw down, nullify’] the law or the prophets; I am not come to destroy but to *fulfill* [*pleroo*, ‘make full, fill up a deficiency, pervade with an influence, perfect’]. For truly I say unto you, until heaven and earth pass, one jot or tittle shall in any wise pass from the law until all is *fulfilled* [*ginomai*, ‘to come into existence, to be created’]. Whosoever therefore shall break one of the least of these commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

By keeping His commands we walk in His footsteps — do as He did (I John 2:4-6; I Peter 2:21).

**3. Love is the Golden Rule.** We have two marvelous encapsulations of the true and deep meaning of love as defined by this “Golden Rule”:

“If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Therefore, all things whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them, for this is the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:11-12).

“Give to every man that asks of you, and of him that takes away your goods ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them like-

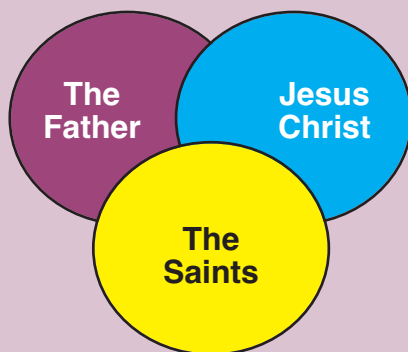
wise” (Luke 6:30-31).

These are two witnesses of how we are to demonstrate love to one another powerfully reveal the intent of the entire word of God: do to others as you would want to have done to yourself. Jesus went on in Luke 6:32-36 to describe how love truly operates within a person. It drives you to love your enemies, to do good to those who hate you, and to lend without hoping for or requiring anything in return.

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again, and your reward shall be great, and you shall be children of the Highest; for He is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:35).

**4. Love is a government defined by a brotherhood of the elect.** It is difficult to diagram the character of God’s government of love compared to the top-down government of Satan, but the figures below are an at-

#### God’s government within the ecclesia



- The spirit of brotherhood, or each looking upon others as better than oneself (Matthew 20:25-28; Luke 22:24-27; John 13:2-15; 17:20-23; Romans 8:29; 12:10; Philippians 2:1-5; Ephesians 5:21; I Peter 5:5)
- Each is equally valuable, with “the least being the greatest” (Luke 9:48; Matthew 23:11-12)
- Service to others with one’s spiritual gifts, given at baptism and the laying on of hands, is one’s essential duty (I Corinthians 12; Romans 12:6-8; I Peter 4:10)
- A spirit of love and forgiveness (II Timothy 1:7; Galatians 5:22-23; John 13:34; 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 13:8; Ephesians 4:2; Luke 17:3-4; Matthew 18:21-22)

#### Satan’s government within the world



- The spirit of domination over others, looking upon others as more inferior down the pyramidal structure (Matthew 20:25; Luke 22:24-25)
- Value depends on position within the pyramid, with “the highest being the greatest” (Luke 22:25; *lordship* = *kyrieuo*, “to exercise control over: and authority over = *exousiazō*, “to exercise power or authority over anyone”; Mark 10:42; *lordship* = *katakuriuo*, “to control, subjugate; authority = *katexousiazō*, “to wield full privilege over”)
- Control over others to order them as a slave (see the references above)
- A spirit of self-centeredness and narcissism (II Timothy 3:1-5; Romans 1:28-31; Galatians 5:19-21)



tempt to do so. Note the contrasting character of the two forms.

**5. Love is being a servant.** Perhaps no other concept defines love better than servanthood ... and what is servanthood? Is it not offering up what you are and what you can give to uplift and better your fellow man, be he in the ecclesia or in the world? It was the essence of Christ's mission here on earth, and the purpose for which man was created, to likewise be servants [in this world's system], "For who is greater, he that sits at the meal or he that serves? Is it not he that sits at the meal? But I am among you as He that serves" (Luke 22:27). Again we read in Matthew 20:27, "And whoever will be chief among you, let him be your *servant*" [*doulos*, "a slave, involuntary or voluntary, in a qualified sense of subserviency"] (see also Matthew 23:11). Christ came not to be served but to serve (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). More will be covered on this point later.

### What It Is to Love

There is no better way to understand what love is, and how to internalize and express it, than to search the Master's words. He has not let us without a witness to what this word truly means.

#### 1. Wash the feet of others

"He rose from supper and laid aside His garments, and took a towel and girded Himself. After that He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded .... So after He had washed their feet, and had taken His garments, and had sat down again, He said to them, 'Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Master and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I say unto you, the

servant is not greater than his master, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him'" (John 13:4-5, 12-16).

Notice some profound things here! Jesus obviously knew He was Master and Lord, but at this moment he did not place Himself above the disciples: "... the servant is not greater than his master..." and ***here Jesus was showing that the servant was not less than the Master, by Him taking the form of a servant and showing to them that, from the world's way of looking at things, HE WAS ACTUALLY PLACING HIMSELF "BELOW" THEM!***

Of course, Christ was not "below" the disciples in terms of value or authority, but He was plainly telling them HE DID NOT PLACE HIMSELF ABOVE THEM! He was revealing that their relationship was as brothers, just as revealed in Romans 8:29:

"For whom He did foreknow, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren [*adelphos*, 'a brother, near kinsman or relative, of the same nation or nature, one of equal rank and dignity']." Love is a lateral, same-plane relationship of one person not placing himself above another, but seeing others as equal or better than oneself;

more will be said on this later.

Is Jesus saying that He is making the brethren equal with God ... in training, as it were, to be gods themselves? The answer is clear in these examples as well as in John 10:34, Psalm 82:6, I John 3:2, and elsewhere.

#### 2. Give your life for others

"As the Father loved Me, so I have loved you: continue in My love. If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love .... This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love has no



man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you” (John 15:9-10, 12-14).

Love is placing the lives of others as being just as important as your own, even to the point of you being willing to sacrifice your very life for your brother. So we read in Romans 12:10, Philippians 2:2-4, I Peter 5:5, Ephesians 5:21, and I Corinthians 10:24 and 33. It is the very attitude of Jesus Christ when He willingly sacrificed His own sinless life so that all of us might have eternal life along with Him at the Father’s throne (Revelation 3:21).

### 3. *Be as little children*

“And Jesus called a little child unto Him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, ‘Truly I say unto you, except you be *converted* [*strepho*, ‘make a change, change one’s direction, change one’s course of principle and conduct’] and become as a little child, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as a little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever shall receive one such little child in My Name receives Me” (Matthew 18:2-5; see also Mark 9:33-37 and Luke 9:46-48).

Once again we see the necessity of absolute humility to be one of God’s people, to be an inheritor of the realm of God. As a young child has no conception of trying to elevate himself to be greater than others, but rather simply enjoys the company of others and exploring the creation, so we must utterly abandon the world’s paradigm of the rich and powerful somehow being better than others. The child knows that a hierarchy of people does not bring him enjoyment. This requires being clothed with humility (I Peter 5:5), even as the Creator and Sustainer of the universe — the possessor of all that is — knelt down and washed the disciples’ feet. Luke 9:48 makes this episode of Christ and the child very plain: “... for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.”

### 4. *Be a servant*

“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And He said unto them, ‘The kings of the gentiles exercise *lordship* [*kyrieuo*, ‘be lord over, to exercise control over’] over them, and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But you shall not be so, but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he that is chief as he that serves. For who is greater, he that sits at the meal or he that serves? Is it not him that sits at the meal? But I am among you as he that serves’” (Luke 22:24-27; see also Matthew 20:25-28 and I Peter 5:3).



***We can serve in many ways, but the most valuable service is giving of yourself when others cannot give anything in return, or may even be your enemy.***

Perhaps I am being redundant here in emphasizing the need to be servants of one another to express the love of our Creator, who by washing the feet of the disciples and sacrificing Himself for our sins, by illustrating the humility of little children and showing our need to oppose kingly hierarchies, personified humility. ***The lessons of needing to resist the oppressive overlordship of leaders in this Satan-inspired world is our Elder Brother’s direct assault on the horrible abuse that men heap upon other men by being their fuhrer instead of their servant. No man***

*is supposed to rule over another man. We are to be servants to our brothers, not dictators. So love cannot express itself when one rules over another; rather, love is suppressed.*

### 5. Consider others better

“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the spirit, if any bowels of mercies, fulfill you my joy that you be like minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each *esteem* [*hegeomai*, ‘to take the lead, consider, regard’] others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:1-5).

What mind did Jesus have? A mind filled with mercy, love, and joy, unified in the Godly way of life, thinking of ways to help others, and *esteeming others better than oneself*. This attitude is merely a restatement of what we have already learned that Christ is about: a servant’s attitude of foot washing, being willing to sacrifice one’s life for others, becoming humble as a little child, and filling one’s life with service towards others. As Jesus Christ washed the disciple’s feet and then asked, “Do you know what I have done to you?,” we are today asked the same question: do we know what it means to take the form of a servant? If we do not, we do not know how to love.

### What It Is to Love

As difficult as it is to describe what love is in words, it can be experienced by *doing* what Jesus Christ told us to do, “For it is not the hearers of the

law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified” (Romans 2:13). By fulfilling the law — that means keeping all ten of the commandments in their spiritual intent — by doing to others as we would have them do to us, by having a brotherly relationship with our fellow elect, by serving others in the ecclesia with our spiritual gifts, and by looking upon others as better than ourselves we will experience the joy that comes with loving our brethren. These ways are the mind of God, and God is love. Love cannot be expressed unless we humble ourselves, and never place ourselves above others, even in our thoughts.

The Apostle Paul tells us to earnestly desire our spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:31, but then goes on to show us a “more excellent way.”

“Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have be-

***Love is much more than just a feeling. It is giving of yourself to others in time of need, even doing good to your enemies and to the detriment of yourself, so you can be a witness of the lifestyle they also might live to understand what love is, and experience the abundance in life that is possible with their Creator.***

come sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but

have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 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. 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 13:1-8).

### The Big Test — Loving Our Enemies

Perhaps the greatest test of expressing love is when you deal with enemies, those who are against you and your welfare. At those times the natural human inclination to strike back and reward kind-for-kind, to hurt those that hurt you ... in other words, to wage war. The servant of God who is expressing love to his neighbor is not allowed to act in this way. Rather,

“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with

good” (Romans 12:14-21).

Why should we treat our enemies with love and respect? The answer is simple. As God’s people we are to be walking as He walked (I John 2:6), and thinking as He thinks (I Peter 4:1). He desires that none be lost, that all of His creations will be saved from destruction (I Timothy 2:4; II Peter 3:9). All are made in His image, and He wants none to be lost. God is no respecter of persons (II Chronicles 19:7; Job 34:19; Romans 2:10-11; I Peter 1:17), and ultimately desires that even the rebellious and evil people should repent and turn to Him. Thus, we, the firstfruits, are to be lights to those still living in darkness (Matthew 5:14; Ephesians 5:8), witnesses to them of the truth (Acts 1:18), and ambassadors of the kingdom of our heavenly Father (II Corinthians 5:20). Like our Elder Brother did, we are to lay down our lives for the sake of others as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1; Galatians 2:20) for the ultimate regeneration of all mankind in the second resurrection, “that none be lost.”

Let no person rule over you. Let your heavenly Father and Jesus Christ be your head (I Corinthians 11:3). Do what He wants you to do in your daily living. Then you will understand how to love, a love that will occupy your total being!



