

How To Be A Christian

With the first two series of lessons, we discussed basic doctrines of the Bible; the plan of God, the nature of God, the future of the dead, the requirements for salvation, and the prophecies of the world to come.

But doctrines do not save people. Knowing the truth about heaven, knowing the plan of God, knowing the requirements of salvation – these things don't save you. What does knowledge do? **1 Corinthians 8:1**. Knowledge is necessary, and knowledge of the truth is a great start, and a rare thing – but it isn't what makes you a true Christian. **Doctrines don't save you.**

What does? **Proverbs 28:18**. Is hearing true doctrines enough? **Romans 2:13**. Certainly grace and faith have a major part in justifying you – bringing you to salvation – but are they alone? **James 2:18-26**. Can any amount of knowledge save you? **1 Corinthians 13:2**.

So knowledge is important. But it is nothing but a liability, a roadblock to salvation, unless everything you know is backed up by OBEDIENCE. Works, faith, love, grace – these things that stem from obedience are what brings salvation, not perfect knowledge of doctrine. I know churches that have every single doctrine right – well, more or less – **but they are not true churches of God because they do not have obedience to go with it**. They have a FORM of godliness, much like the Pharisees did, but they DENY the POWER OF GOD! (**2 Timothy 3:5**).

Remember, the Pharisees of Jesus' day kept the Sabbath; the Holy Days; unclean meats; the Ten Commandments; they were very "zealous of the law", as Paul was before his conversion (**Acts 22:3**). Yet Jesus said to these same zealous Jews...

Matthew 23:23 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.*

These Jews had the doctrines down pat! They were able to say – honestly – "*I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess*" (**Luke 18:12**). They tithed DILIGENTLY. And yet somehow they were not worthy of salvation! Why? Because they omitted those "weightier matters" – judgment, mercy, and faith!

Today there are many churches out there that keep the Sabbath; some which also keep the Holy Days and most of the other doctrines you've learned in these lessons. They're small compared to the major denominations, but they exist. You've probably already found them. And in the letter of the law, those churches are not too bad; but when you spend time with them, you will start to realize that just like the Pharisees, they have a form of godliness but deny the power of it. They have the doctrines close, but what really MATTERS – judgment, mercy, and faith – they not only don't have, but they actively teach against.

And so the next set of lessons will teach you everything you need to know about the weightier matters of the law. What you've learned is a necessary foundation; but now it's time to grow beyond knowledge and doctrine and learn...

LESSON 27: HOW TO BE A CHRISTIAN

You are learning to act like God. Every doctrine you've learned has taught you a little more about the nature of God. You've learned that God would not torture innocent Chinese babies in hell – something your neighbor still believes. You've learned that God loves and protects the innocent more than the guilty. You've learned the law is the most perfect expression of the nature of God.

But now you're going to focus on how all that applies to YOU. Most of the world wastes their time meditating upon the beatitudes, or the gifts of the spirit, or that list of virtues in **Philippians 4:8**. And those are holy, inspired scriptures, it is true – but those are the end of the law, not the beginning. And they are useful – but not the way they use them. **They are the GOAL of the law, not the method by which you attain that goal.**

If you want to truly know God, you start, not at the beatitudes, but at the Ten Commandments. You study, not the gifts of the spirit, but the judgments of God in **Exodus 21-23**. You memorize, not the **23rd Psalm**, but the **119th**. Not **1 Corinthians 13**, but **Deuteronomy 5**. I don't mean to disparage any part of the Bible of course, but different parts serve different purposes. Some are the foundation, some are the goal.

You can study **1 Corinthians 13** until you have it memorized *and by itself it cannot help you!* That is practically blasphemy to most people, since many regard that as the most important part of the Bible, but I intend to prove it. Or rather, to have you prove it for yourself. But before I do, consider this analogy.

BUILDING GOD'S HOUSE

Suppose you wanted to learn how to build a house. Where would you start? Would you study a finished house, inside and out, over and over, thinking only of the end product? Surely that would give you a good idea of your GOAL *but you would have no idea how to achieve that goal!* By studying the finished product, you can learn how a house is supposed **to look**, BUT NOT HOW IT IS MADE!

In a finished house, you can't see the trusses that hold up the roof. You can't see how the plumbing, electrical, or air conditioning is built; your understanding of the house goes no deeper than the paint on the walls. Most importantly of all, you can't see how the foundation is laid **and without a proper foundation, any house will collapse!**

So in learning to build a house you will first study the foundation; see what the house rests on. Will it fall when it floods? When the sand shifts? Then you move on to the skeleton of the house – the walls and roof. Then you add the electrical, plumbing, air conditioning, siding, insulation; then the interior walls, painting, cabinets, trim, fixtures – and finally the house is beginning to look finished! **But if you only studied this finished product you would never understand this process, and you could never build a house that would survive the test of time!**

God is building a house for His spirit. What that house will appear like when completed can be found in such passages as **1 Corinthians 13**, **Matthew 5**, **Philippians 4:8**, **Galatians 5:22-25**, and so on. These verses represent the end result of God building perfect, righteous, holy character in us. And while it is wise to refer to these pictures of our finished house occasionally, **they are not what we need to study day in, day out!**

We need to study the FOUNDATION of our house; and if our foundation is solid, then we need to work on the structure; the walls; the roof; the things that keep the house from collapsing and killing us! The blueprints that show the construction of that house step-by-step are far more important than the picture showing the outside appearance of the finished house! Even if that final picture is more fun to look at!

So if you were to build your own house, having only that finished model as your guide *you could only make something that LOOKS like a house – but you could never make a livable house that way!* Inside the walls you'd have *papier-mâché*, and it would collapse in on itself long before you ever finished it **because it had no foundation; no strength; only an external facade that looked like a house.**

This is what most Christians do. They are trying to build a house for God – their own souls – and they spend countless hours reading Psalms, the beatitudes, the gifts of the spirit, and **1 Corinthians 13** – all pictures of a FINISHED house of God. And so they try to copy those things, as they understand them; but without the FOUNDATION of the law! Without the STRENGTH of true faith!

They merely plaster an APPEARANCE of love and holiness *without having any idea what those things truly mean!* **And so instead of a house for God, they have a mere facade of godliness; a shallow pretense of love and humility pasted over a hollow, carnal soul!**

As a child, you've all known the dear, sweet, super-religious little old lady who everyone in town spoke so highly of, and yet one day you walked across the corner of her yard, and she came bolting out of her door wielding a broom and yelling like a rabid dog! This woman's carnal soul was hidden by her pretense of love – until you tested that love. Then you learned who she REALLY was.

This lesson is intended to give you the blueprints of a truly Godly house – a soul He would be pleased to dwell in. And in the end, it will look like **1 Corinthians 13**; but it will take many years – probably decades – to get there. First, you must lay the foundation.

THE FOUNDATION

What is the foundation of our house? **1 Corinthians 3:10-15**. Why does it matter? What is this building built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ? **Verses 16-17**. Is Jesus the only foundation? **Ephesians 2:20**.

So we are to build our temples – our spirits – on top of the cornerstone of Jesus Christ. And that's usually where sermons that mention this verse stop. But how does that help you? Really? It's just an abstract concept. What does it MEAN? How does it HELP? Are you to somehow catch Jesus, lay Him down on the ground, and stand on Him? Are you to just chant “my foundation is Jesus” over and over? What does it MEAN to have Jesus as your foundation? We aren't going to stop until you have an answer!

First, read the story in **Luke 6:47-48**. Someone who comes to Jesus and OBEYS HIM is like a house (which is what we're trying to build)! But he is like a house whose builder dug through the sand and anchored his house to a ROCK that doesn't move. By now, you well understand that Jesus is that rock (**1 Corinthians 10:4**). But how did that man anchor to that rock? By hearing AND obeying what Jesus SAID! That is how he builds on the foundation of JESUS!

Now the other man in **Luke 6:49**, he didn't bother to dig down to the rock; he just started building right on top of the sand. What does sand represent in the Bible? **Joshua 11:4**, **1 Kings 4:20**, etc. So if you anchor your building to that sand, what are you anchoring it to? The opinions of many PEOPLE! As you have learned the hard way, it takes many years of scraping that “sand” aside to get back to the plain, obvious teachings of the ROCK!

It is not easy to anchor to HIS words instead of the words of thousands of years of sand! But if you don't, when the wind comes, your house will fall and you will be destroyed; and what does wind represent in the Bible? **Revelation 7:1-3**. When the “four winds blow”, the first four trumpets sound; when that happens, anyone not anchored on the Rock will collapse.

So that's a start; but it's not a good enough answer. This is literally FOUNDATIONAL to your salvation, so you need a CLEAR answer. HOW do you drill a hole in that Rock and bolt yourself on to it? **2 Timothy 2:19**. The foundation of God rests on two things, according to this verse; that the Lord knows those that are His, and – more importantly for our present question – “*let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity.*”

The foundation of God rests upon **departing from lawlessness**; or as **Luke 6** put it, it rests upon hearing AND obeying Jesus! And we all know that Jesus taught obedience to His Father's law. But now we come to the clearest verse of all on the subject; a bullet summary of the foundation of a Christian's life! **Hebrews 6:1-2**.

This is the FOUNDATION of the doctrine of Christ. If you build on Jesus as the cornerstone, THIS is what you must build FIRST. Not love – love is not mentioned here; you’ll learn why later. But love is not a part of this foundation. FIRST – before all else – comes REPENTANCE from dead works.

Repentance, you will remember from Lesson 19, means you realize that pretty much everything you’ve ever done was wrong, stop committing sins of which you are aware, and start fresh. This is where it STARTS – with leaving behind those “dead works”, works which cause death – which, of course, is any act which breaks the law of God.

THEN you move on to faith. Because as you remember from Lesson 4, true faith cannot exist unless you are obedient; so until you have obeyed the law of God, **and know you are obeying it**, you cannot have powerful, Biblical faith.

These things are necessary before you can truly understand the other four things mentioned; notice that of the six items here, the first two are things you must DO; repent, and have faith; or, as Jesus put it “*repent, and believe the gospel*” (**Mark 1:15**). This comes FIRST! That cannot be stressed enough – so I will stress it more later.

But the last four are doctrines you must learn; the DOCTRINE of baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment; you learned these in Lessons 19-20 and 6-8. But you got the first part of the foundation in Lessons 3-4. Simplified, these six parts could be summarized as the law, faith, baptism, receiving the holy spirit, the fate of the righteous dead, and the fate of the wicked dead.

This much of the foundation you have already laid; many people have. Not everyone who does will be in the first resurrection, however, because “*many are called, but few are chosen*” (**Matthew 22:14**). So it is important that before you start trying to build on that foundation, you understand what it will take and “*count the cost*”; see **Luke 14:26-30**.

Some, having dug through the sand and seen that Rock peeking out, don’t like it; some reject it. See **1 Peter 2:6-8**. If you believe the Rock, and trust it, it will be precious to you and an unshakable foundation; but if you love your sins, and choose to be disobedient, you will find the stone offensive, stumble over it, and go back and build your house on the sand.

So having laid the foundation; the anchor bolts into that rock, to pursue the metaphor; how do you proceed? How do you, as **Hebrews 6:1** said, “*go on to perfection*”? **1 Timothy 6:17**. What sort of things do you build on that foundation? **1 Corinthians 3:12-14**. Gold, silver, and precious stones will survive fire; wood, hay, and stubble won’t. What does fire symbolize in the Bible? **1 Peter 1:7**. So TRIALS are symbolized by fire; temptations, things to test your faith – these are pictured as fire.

Now if you build your house of “wood, hay, and stubble” – all flammable – then when fire comes, it will consume your house. But if you build of gold, silver, or precious stones – none of which burn – they will survive the testing. So when you build this house, remember the materials you use will be tested by fire so... use good quality materials.

What that means in spiritual terms is, Jesus has given you a place to start; the cornerstone of the foundation. The apostles and prophets gave you a broader foundation to better understand what He said; but it’s up to you to make good choices that build righteous character in yourself.

It’s up to you to erect a spiritual temple that God would be proud to dwell in; and you do that by following the example given to you by the Chief Cornerstone – Jesus Christ.

BLUEPRINT FOR OUR SPIRITUAL TEMPLE

You’ve seen already that some virtues must exist before you acquire others; for example, you cannot have faith without obedience; nor obedience without repentance. But it goes much deeper than that. For example, can you

have wisdom without first fearing God? **Psalms 111:10**. Can you have understanding without obeying the commandments? Same verse.

Can you have knowledge without fearing God first? **Proverbs 1:7**. Can you receive true respect (honor) before you have humility? **Proverbs 15:33**. If you fear the Lord, what will you do? **Proverbs 8:13**. How will you do that? **Proverbs 16:6**.

Just as you cannot learn algebra before you learn addition, nor calculus before algebra, so you must fear to disobey God before you can learn to hate evil and stop doing it – to put it another way, **the fear of the Lord has to come before repentance** – otherwise, why would you be repenting?

But now let's move forward with this "chain of virtues" by reading a passage that sums up the entire process; **2 Peter 1:5-7**. Read the context too, just to get an idea of what we're talking about; specifically, Peter is telling us exactly HOW we are being made partakers of the divine nature (**verse 4**). This passage shows us a step-by-step path of development we will follow to complete the second part of our **Genesis 1:26** creation. This is HOW we will be made in that likeness – one step at a time.

We've already mentioned several times the key verse in **Isaiah 28:9-10**; God adds knowledge to us line upon line, one idea at a time; and we must grasp that idea and use it before God gives us a new piece of knowledge. So in **2 Peter 1:5-7** God outlines exactly the order in which these virtues that make up the divine nature come. Notice that the last step – the very LAST step is love! (Note that "love" was poorly translated "charity" in older Bible versions).

On the other hand, the first step mentioned is Faith; because Peter's audience had already followed the first three steps "the fear of the Lord", "repentance", and "faith". That's what we've been talking about, and what Peter's audience already knew; but what happens after that? After you follow all the instructions in Lessons 3 and 4, you're left with a feeling of "Ok, I'm obeying God in every way I know... now what? What comes next?"

(Note that when I mention these by number, I am including ALL the virtues; so far we have 1. Fear of the Lord; 2. Repentance; 3. Faith.)

4. VIRTUE

What comes next after faith? Peter answers "*add to your faith virtue*". According to Strong's, the original Greek word means "manliness (valor), i.e. excellence ... praise, virtue"; a simple way of expressing it is: faith should produce FRUIT; it should produce a praise-worthy change in you, as you add WORKS to your faith as **James 2:15-26** says. Abraham's faith combined with his obedience (**verse 22**) to produce "perfection".

And so Peter says you must ADD to your faith "virtue", **which is the actions your faith produces which give you courage**; courage to leave your car unlocked, courage to trust God to defend you from murderers, courage to trust God to take care of you in a thousand situations. This is what is meant by the word "virtue" in this verse. Truly trusting God can be scary at first, and it takes a commitment and moral – and literal – bravery to practice it. So a better translation of this verse would be "add courage to your faith" – the courage to put your fate in God's hands and put your faith to the test.

5. KNOWLEDGE

But then you must go on; for to that courage you must add knowledge. It is easy to be brave when you don't know what's out there. A naked savage can be brave in the face of a gun when he doesn't know what it is. A child can bravely play with a poisonous snake, when he doesn't know what it is. But when you add knowledge of God's requirements for protection; knowledge of your own faults; knowledge of the evils that are out there, it becomes harder to hold on to that courage, **and makes that courage mean so much more if you can!**

You may remember from Lesson 4 we spoke of “baby faith”, that God gives us; a simple yet powerful faith that even people who barely know God at all can sometimes use to do miraculous things. Many of the miracle-workers you hear about are very courageous in this way; many are sincere, and some are indeed using the power of God despite the fact they completely misunderstand everything about Him... this is possible because “*the gifts ... of God are without repentance*” (**Romans 11:29**).

But that baby faith is fragile; the slightest compromise of conscience and it can completely abandon them. But God commands us to add to that faith and courage KNOWLEDGE; to risk losing that faith in order to grow stronger in it. Baby faith is easily lost as we grow to be more aware of our faults and of God’s requirements; but when we become aware of those faults *and correct them and obey God more diligently our faith grows and this time it is unshakable because it is founded on FACT!*

Before, it was simply a gift; we didn’t know why we had it, we just did. We didn’t know God, we just thought we did. But now we KNOW what we believe, we know WHY we believe it, and so when we face a sin, a sinner, or a problem of any kind our courage is stronger than ever because it is backed by KNOWLEDGE.

6. TEMPERANCE

In the KJV, the word “temperance” is the 6th step. But most Bibles translate it better as “self-control”. It is easy to fall back into the world at any step, but these first five are the hardest. After this, the hard personal choices will have all been made. You’ll have much to learn, but you will already be committed to the right way of life and it will just be a matter of sticking to your beliefs and learning how to use the tools God has given you, and gradually perfecting your nature.

The first five steps are the hardest, because they involve most of the “killing” of our old man. The fear of God propels us to repent of our sins, faith is where we root out all of those sins of which we are aware, courage is where we put that faith into practice and trust God and commit our cause to Him. Knowledge is where we seek to learn everything we can so we can better obey the first four steps.

But temperance is in some ways the hardest because it involves ruling the last enemy; your carnal nature. What does the Bible say about this enemy? **Proverbs 25:28**. Is a person who rules his spirit worthy of honor? **Proverbs 16:32**.

You have of course been forced to confront your spirit many times already in order to make the changes you made to get this far; but this is now a different battle. **Before, you were fighting a war against sin. Now you are fighting a peace against it.**

By that I mean that you had to make hard decisions before; but the enemy was clear, and so was your objective. Your choice, while not easy, was simple – between right and wrong, good and evil, black and white. But now you have made those choices, and sin has been eliminated for the most part. But now you must win the peace – and puzzle out a lifetime of “gray choices”.

Sin still exists. And it’s still inside you. And now, without the adrenaline of the battle as your aid, you must continually, day in and day out, keep it in subjection. This requires you to train your soul in self-control. Did Paul face this problem? **1 Corinthians 9:27**. This is why Paul said “I die daily” (**1 Corinthians 15:31**). What did Paul call this process? **Romans 7:22-23**. And how did he fight that “war” in his body? **Romans 7:25-8:1**.

Most of **Romans 8** talks about this topic; the bottom line is that Paul, when faced with that war, always chose to obey the promptings of the holy spirit and the commandments of God. And that requires self-control in the best of times...

7. PATIENCE

...but before God can trust you with immortality and the power of God, you must also fight that battle in the worst of times. This doesn't necessarily mean you have to be cast into poverty, living under a bridge and fighting dogs for scraps of meat, and trying to do what's right under those circumstances – although it may. (In reality, it is much easier to be righteous in those circumstances; you have less to lose and no one to fear offending).

But one way or another, all of these virtues you've built up in the months, years, or decades it took you to get to this point must be tested under the harshest conditions necessary to prove beyond a doubt that your heart loves the law of God.

Read **James 5:10-11** for a quick comment on this step of the process. Job was put in a very extreme situation and expected by God to retain his integrity, even though all his friends turned on him – and as far as Job could tell, God had turned on him, too. And Job did retain his integrity (**Job 42:7**). Of course, Job learned many things in the process of this trial (**Job 42:1-6**), but ultimately Job passed God's test because Job loved the truth.

That's the only way to hang on to the truth through that sort of trial; the knowledge that *“though he slay me, yet will I trust in Him”* (**Job 13:15**). Another example is Daniel's three friends in **Daniel 3:14-18**. Notice their attitude! They knew God MIGHT not rescue them. *But they didn't care!*

They knew God was able to save them. But if God didn't... well, that would be too bad, but they would *NOT* serve Nebuchadnezzar's idol. They loved truth; they didn't love the protection of God, they didn't love their own lives. Oh, they certainly liked living and they certainly appreciated God's protection when they got it; but TRUTH was what mattered; God's way of living was what they loved.

And when it comes down to it, true Christians obey the law of God and study the Bible simply because it's the right thing to do. If you truly understand God's law and love it as you should, then you'll live the way God has taught us to live *with or without God's help*. In fact you'll live this way WITH OR WITHOUT GOD'S EXISTENCE!

Because ultimately, God doesn't matter. Blasphemy, I know, but bear with me. If God wanted people who loved Him because of His power or beauty or glory, *He'd be here soaking up our fawning prattle first-hand*. **He wants people who love, not His office, power, or appearance, but HIS NATURE.** And that nature is expressed by HIS LAW.

And the only way He can be certain you love His nature, and not just the fact that He is “God”; the only way He can know you simply PREFER acting like He has taught you to act, and you aren't simply obeying Him because He is bigger than you... is for Him to step out of the picture. **If you love the law, you will continue obeying it whether God is helping you, whether God is protecting you, or whether or not God even exists; because the law of God transcends all of that.**

You can obey that law and love your neighbor as yourself no matter what happens around you. It may not be easy, it may cost you your life, but usually God will only ask you to risk your life, not actually sacrifice it. Then, when you have laid whatever you value most in this world on the line in obedience to Him, He will know what you hold dear. He learned this about Abraham in **Genesis 22:9-18**.

Whatever it takes in your case, God *will* push you to the point where He can confidently say about you “Now I KNOW...”. When God KNOWS what you love above all else, then God will give you everything you desire because He will know you can be trusted with it, because what you love is God's way of life. God's law. God's nature.

To put it another way, God wants people who love Him for Himself; who love Him for who He is. Not people who love Him for His money, His power, His miracles, His beauty, or even His Godness. **He wants friends who**

act righteously for no other reason than BECAUSE THEY WANT TO ACT RIGHTEOUSLY, in accordance with His law.

If you have not been infected with the vision of what that law produces, both in your own soul and in society at large, you will never survive when God tests your patience and your commitment to His law.

8. GODLINESS

Once that is out of the way, God knows you. You are not yet perfect, as Abraham and Job were not yet made perfect; but they had proven their heart was in the right place and nothing would come between them and righteousness. After that, it's just a matter of "details". Perfecting their nature would still take time, but the ultimate outcome was guaranteed.

Now God begins in earnest with your training as a firstfruit. Godliness is not well understood by any of the translators, so we must use the Bible to understand what this word means. You'll be doing this many times in coming lessons, so I won't spend a lot of time explaining the process here; but basically, you look up every time this original Greek word was used and see how God used it in every place. This will tell you many facts about the word, which you can then put together and see what it means to God. You will see that a word often means something far different to God than it did to the translators.

For example, this word appears 15 times in the NT. The first is in **Acts 3:12**, where it is translated "holiness". But notice what that "holiness" ("godliness") is doing; making the lame walk! Peter said it was not their power or godliness that made this man walk *but that proves Godliness is a source of the power for miracles!*

I won't quote all the verses here; but **2 Timothy 3:5** uses the word saying people had a "...*form of Godliness, but denying the POWER of it*". This again proves Godliness is closely associated with the POWER of God – the same power Peter used to heal that man's leg!

1 Timothy 6:5 says gain is NOT Godliness; but it doesn't say what it IS. **1 Timothy 4:7-8** tells us that it must be *exercised* just as we do push-ups or chin-ups. And in this last passage we find the answer, in the context; reading on in **verses 9-11**. Notice **verse 10** begins with "for THEREFORE" – that is, "for this reason" – what reason? The reason just mentioned in **verse 8**, exercising Godliness!

So in order to exercise Godliness then, **verse 10** continues "*we both labor and suffer reproach BECAUSE we trust in the living God!*" Obviously, trust in God is synonymous with faith. But we already learned Faith in step 3; that faith produced courage in step 4; it was tested in step 7. **But in step 8 it is time to practice using the power of God.**

A future lesson will be almost entirely devoted to this subject, so for now let's just briefly say that you will be a king or a priest in the world to come if you pass all these steps; you will help bring the second-fruits to salvation; you will be ruling entire cities with the power of God. You will be making life-and-death decisions that affect the lives of people every day. When are you going to learn how to do that?

God tells us in **1 John 5:16** that there is a "*sin not unto death*" that we should pray for, and a "*sin unto death*" that we should *NOT* pray for. And what does **Matthew 18:18** tell us? God has committed great power to the firstfruits in this life – through prayer and faith, not power in ourselves but through His spirit – so we can get practice using that power today, while He is watching over us to make sure we don't make any serious mistakes.

He won't even listen to your prayers unless your intentions are good, but even with the best of intentions our senses must be "*exercised by use to discern both good and evil*" (**Hebrews 5:14**). That is what Godliness teaches us – as we exercise it, we'll learn that "*Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.*"

9. BROTHERLY LOVE

And now at last we approach the goal of all these ideals. First brotherly love, and finally unqualified love. Brotherly love – poorly translated “brotherly kindness” in the KJV – is true Godly love shown towards brothers. This highlights the fact there are two “levels” of love in the Bible; loving those who love you back... and loving those who hate you. This is the first level, and pure love is step 10 which we’ll get to in a moment.

Read **Matthew 5:44-47**, which we’ll discuss a lot in coming lessons. Here the Bible uses tax collectors as villains, because everyone hated them; to update it to our time, you might say “even *lawyers* love those who love them back”. But true love requires you do more than that, and love those who hate you as well.

But it is much easier to START by loving those who love you; once you master that, then you can more easily transfer those feelings over to your enemies. Because love is much more complicated than you think, as the second part of this lesson will show. For now, we’ll simply say this step is where you master loving your friends; and when you’ve done that, then finally you will arrive at...

10. LOVE

This is the last step for a reason. As you learned up front, if you just memorize the characteristics in **1 Corinthians 13** and try to “pretend” to feel those things, you’re like a house built of *papier-mâché*. You might look like a Christian from a distance – most people would swear you were the perfect Christian, in fact – but because those traits are artificial, something you forced yourself to feel based on a few written words, they are not true love.

True love will come automatically from within when the time is right. You won’t have to strain, chant, or pretend you already have it. If your foundation is laid properly, you will find yourself automatically making decisions out of love for your neighbor rather than love of yourself. This will inevitably end in true love, without you doing anything specific beyond simply following the course laid out in **2 Peter 1:5-7**.

I haven’t said much specific about love because it needs to be dealt with separately; I’ve just shown you where it fits into the puzzle, which checkpoint it is on the road to salvation. Now that you’ve seen a map of that road, we’ll shift gears and you can prove for yourself true love cannot exist until the very last step of the process.

LOVE IS THE END

1 Timothy 1:5 (NKJV) *Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,*

The PURPOSE of the commandment is to produce LOVE; love that comes from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith. Other translations make the first words clearer, Philips says it is the “ultimate goal”, Weymouth says it is “the end sought to be secured” by the commandments – but it is clear that love is the finish line, not the starting point. Why is that?

To properly answer that, you have to know what love IS. Do you know? Can you nail it down; define it in a few words? Perhaps you turn to **1 Corinthians 13** for a definition – most people would. But can you find one there? Let’s look. Read the entire chapter.

Did you see a definition of what love IS? Or only a long list of things love DOES? See, in defining something, whether it is an idea or a word or a thing, what it DOES is different from what it IS.

For example, suppose someone asked you what fire is. Would you say “fire is hot, fire burns wood, fire is yellow-orange, fire makes smoke”? Those things are all true, and they do indeed *describe* fire – but they are not what fire IS! What IS fire? Where does it come from? How do you create it? Saying “Fire is hot” could never

help you to answer those questions! It could only help you to recognize fire when you saw it, because it is a *description of fire, not a definition of fire!*

There is a huge difference. If you were to DEFINE fire you would say fire is the combustion of oxygen and (usually) carbon. If someone then wanted to know what combustion was, you could tell them it was a carbon molecule and an oxygen molecule slamming into each other, and the energy from that impact gives off heat, light, and carbon oxides as a by-product.

That is what fire IS. That tells you how to make it, where it comes from, what it's made of, and how to use it. Saying "fire is hot" does not. So now just transfer that thinking to love. In **1 Corinthians 13**, *every single thing there is something love DOES*. Love suffers long; love does not envy, love is (acts) kind, does not get angry easily, doesn't think evil... doesn't rejoice in iniquity, rejoices in truth.... do you see?

These are all DESCRIPTIONS of love, DESCRIPTIONS of how a person who is loving would ACT – but nothing here DEFINES love! Saying "love is kind" is like saying "fire is hot" – true, certainly, but that doesn't answer the question of what it IS, how you can CREATE it, or where it comes from!

Nothing in that entire chapter tells you how to GET love! **There is only a description so you can recognize someone who DOES show love. But not a single word in this chapter is devoted to teaching you HOW to show love!**

Of course, like the house analogy earlier, there is certainly a time to refer to what the finished product will look like; a goal you can aim towards. And that will surely help you to understand love once you know more about it – but it doesn't tell you what love IS.

WHAT IS LOVE?

The easiest way to understand love in general is to understand how we show love for God. How do we do that? **John 14:15**. Is this a hard thing to do? **1 John 5:3**. How does that help us love other people? **Verse 2**. How can you perfect the love of God? **1 John 2:5**.

What is it about God that you should love? **Psalms 119:47-48**. And to whom does God show mercy? **Deuteronomy 5:10**. With whom does He make His covenants? Is a few commandments enough, or must you walk in ALL His ways? **Deuteronomy 11:22**. If you love the Lord, should you hate something else? **Psalms 97:10**.

Can you love God while hating your brother? **1 John 4:20-21**. If you don't love your brother, are you a part of God's family? **1 John 3:10-11**. If you don't love your brother, are you spiritually alive? **Verse 14**. Did Jesus give us an example? **Verse 16**.

What is the opposite of love? **1 John 3:14-15**. So the opposite of love is hate. Is punishing a child an act of love or hate? **Proverbs 13:24**. So according to your Bible, *not* spanking a child is an act of hate. Does God "spank" us for our faults? **Hebrews 12:5**. And is that because He loves us, or hates us? **Verses 6-8**. Why does He do this? **Verses 9-11**.

This is why I said it is very important that **1 Corinthians 13** not be the primary source of your understanding about love; because these scriptures say, beyond all argument, that sometimes love requires you to punish someone; it requires you to withhold blessings or actually to cause them discomfort in order to show them love.

Yet if you read **1 Corinthians 13** you will not see a single word that mentions that; in fact, if you read "love suffers long" and "love is kind" and "love is patient" – and ignore the rest of the Bible – you would walk away believing spanking is a sin. Most of the world has done just that.

Because that chapter is a description of love, not a definition of love. And every description is incomplete, because every complex subject can be described in an almost infinite number of ways.

For example, let's return to our fire analogy. Fire is yellow... but it can sometimes be green or blue or many other colors, depending on what it is burning. Understanding what fire IS explains that; the description leaves you incomplete. From the description alone, you might think that blue fire wasn't fire at all, but something else, because "fire is yellow!" after all.

In the same way, fire makes smoke. But there are times when it *doesn't* make smoke. So is a smokeless fire still a fire? Since we know what fire is we can confidently answer "yes!" – but if we were going solely based on that description above, we would have to answer "no", because fire makes smoke – therefore, if there is no smoke, it must not be fire.

Only by truly understanding what fire is can you explain the times when fire is different from the description of a typical fire; similarly, only by understanding love can you explain how love "is kind" and yet also spans an unruly child.

1 Corinthians 13 is part of a package, an incomplete description of how love generally acts. But the source of that love sometimes requires other actions not mentioned in that list. For example, punishing a child for stealing a candy bar is good for him. He is on a path to hurting himself, and an act of love will be whatever it takes to keep him off that path to evil. A few well timed swats might keep him from doing years in jail in a few years. Is that not love? **Revelation 3:19, Proverbs 3:12.**

Similarly, a few well timed periods of suffering brought on you by God can save you from much worse suffering down the line. As long as the correction is done not out of anger, but out of a genuine concern for the person's well being, it is an act of love.

A NEW COMMANDMENT?

Many people read **John 13:34** and conclude that love is a new commandment Jesus brought, which replaced all the old commandments. And that is both right and wrong. Love is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, so obviously Jesus didn't invent it right then and there. To say that love began to exist at that moment is absurd, especially since God Himself is love (**1 John 4:8-16**).

But ask the Bible... is love a new commandment – or an old one? **2 John 1:5**. How long has this commandment been around? **Verse 6**. In the midst of a discourse on love in **1 John 2** – making love the context – John says this commandment is in fact quite old (**1 John 2:7**).

So why did Jesus call it a new commandment? *He didn't!* LOVE wasn't the new commandment... loving each other AS HE LOVED US was the new commandment! Read exactly what **John 15:12** says. And HOW are we to love each other as He loved us? How do we express that love? **Verse 13!** As it nearly always does, the context makes the answer obvious! And that is repeated in **1 John 3:16**.

The OC commanded you to love our neighbor AS yourself; in other words, to treat others EQUAL with yourself. But the NC love requires you to love your neighbor MORE than yourself; to put their happiness and their life ABOVE your own! THAT was the "new commandment"!

THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT?

As I said above, many people think love replaced the need for the commandments. And as I said above, that's both right and wrong. And that is because love DID replace the commandments – but not by abolishing them. By encompassing them. If you're paying attention, you might have figured out what love is by now, but now it's time to give you the simple answer to the question of what love IS. All you have to do is read **Romans 13:8-10**.

Do you see what love is now? In **verse 8** Paul says “*he that loves another has fulfilled the law*”. Love is the COMPLETION, the fulfilling of the law. Then Paul cites the last five commandments, concluding “*Love avoids doing any wrong to one’s fellow man, and is therefore complete obedience to Law.*” (**verse 10, Weymouth**)

That is the final answer on what love IS. It IS complete obedience to the law. That is what love is MADE of. You are made of cells and flesh and spirit. Bread is made of grain and water. Fire is made of carbon and oxygen. **Love is MADE of obedience to the law. That’s what it IS!**

IF you love your neighbor *you would never steal from him*. If you love your enemy, you will not kill him. If you love God, you will have no idols in your home. It’s that simple. John is widely known as the apostle of love because he wrote more about love in his books than any other apostle. Not surprisingly, he also wrote more about obedience to the commandments than any other NT writer. So what was his final answer? If you were to ask John “What is love?” what would he tell you? **2 John 1:6**.

This is the commandment; the commandment you’ve had since God created Adam. Keep the commandments of God and you cannot help but show love. Paul said the same thing in **Galatians 5:14**.

God’s spirit reveals His nature to you; it is His conscience living in you. That spirit leads you into all truth (**John 16:13**). Obeying that spirit then, inevitably makes you more like God. It leads you down that path you studied earlier through faith, courage, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, love of brethren and ultimately love of everyone, friend or foe. And so obedience to that spirit leads you into love; and that is why **Galatians 5:22-23** says “*the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.*”

Do you see? The fruit – the result – of obeying the spirit is that list of virtues! The result of obeying the commandments, repenting of your sins, having faith in God, living by every word of God *inevitably results in those fruits of the spirit!* Is it the spirit that strengthens your inner man – teaches you moral character? **Ephesians 3:16**.

You don’t magically get those gifts at baptism! You get them gradually, one step at a time, as God leads you down a narrow, tortuous path towards righteousness. Do you see now why I said up front that studying those gifts was largely a waste of time? Because you CAN’T get those gifts without laying the proper FOUNDATION! And if you DO lay that foundation, you can’t HELP but get them! It’s unavoidable, if you follow God’s path! Because that’s where the path leads!

Let me say again there is a time to refer to those scriptures to get a feel for where you are headed; to understand the goal. But that should be a small fraction of your study, not the majority like they are for most people. They should be kept in their proper place, behind the foundation of all truth – God’s law of love.

Many abuse the last part of that passage “against such there is no law”. Well of course there isn’t! There is no law against ANY of those virtues, nor is any further law needed for someone who already possesses them – if you have complete love, *you already obey the entire law and saying it again would be redundant!*

TWO PARTS TO LOVE

The Ten Commandments are a complete expression of love; however, they are divided into two segments; because there are two groups to whom you express love. Who are they? **Matthew 22:36-39**. So there are two groups – God is in one group, fellow humans in the other – to whom you express love. And some commandments are about your relationship with God, and some are about your relationship with your fellow man.

Love God is the first great commandment; there is no other commandment greater than this, it says. But how do you express that love? With prayers, chanting, and worship? God says NO! **John 14:21-24**. Likewise, the second great commandment is “love thy neighbor as thyself”. Now go back and read **Romans 13:8-10** once more. Do

you notice that Paul references the “second great commandment” there? He says those five commandments – and any others regarding your relationship with men – are ALL summed up by one phrase “*Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*”

So the last five commandments are about your relationship with your neighbor, and can be summed up in that one phrase. The first four commandments are clearly about your relationship with God, and are summed up by the phrase “*love the Lord your God*”. Now read **Mark 12:30**, a different version of this story. Notice there are four different ways you show love to God; your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Just as the first four commandments are about God.

For example, how do you love God with your “strength”? By not working on the day He set aside as holy! How do you love Him with all your heart? By having no other gods before Him. Exactly which of the words “heart, soul, and mind” correspond to which of the first three commandments is debatable – what isn’t debatable is that they do correspond.

But that only mentions 9 commandments; what of number 5, “honor your father and mother”? This is not a part of the first group according to **Ephesians 6:1-3**; it is the first of a new group of “commandments of promise”. Yet it is not always mentioned with the last five such as in **Romans 13:8-10**.

So it is a sort of “bridge” commandment. It applies to God, as our Father; and it also applies to our physical father and mother; it is the only commandment that directly applies to both God and man. In this way it ties the two great commandments together and makes them one commandment – love.

And all of the law; all the judgments and statutes and prophets and writings; every word God ever wrote is summed up in those two great commandments – so said Jesus in **Matthew 22:40**. So yes, the greatest commandment IS love; and it DID replace all the other commandments. **But not by abolishing them! By encompassing them and building upon them!** Paul summed it up in...

1 Corinthians 13:13 (Weymouth) *And so there remain Faith, Hope, Love—these three; and of these the greatest is Love.*

WHY COULDN'T YOU DO THIS IN THE BEGINNING?

If this is the goal, why couldn't you just jump ahead? What's to keep you from just deciding “I'll show love today”? Nothing, technically; nothing but the fact that you have no idea what love is. Even after explaining that love is the keeping of the commandments, it is years before you begin to feel and express true love. Surely flashes of it here and there will come, every time you obey the law; but the true goal is simply not possible until you have your carnal nature under control.

In **1 John 4:7**, the phrase “born of God” means “conceived by God” as you learned in Lesson 14. True love is something only those who are conceived as spiritual children of God can show. There is another “love” the world shows, which is exactly opposite of true love; in his churches, Satan has twisted love into a perfect counterfeit, diametrically opposite true love. But true love is something you cannot understand unless you know God. Peter said to people who were well along their Christian path...

1 Peter 1:22 (Philips) *Now that you have, by obeying the truth, made your souls clean enough for a genuine love of your fellows, see that you do love each other, fervently and from the heart.*

Do you see that? Those people had, BY OBEYING THE TRUTH, made their souls CLEAN ENOUGH for a genuine love of their fellows! Because their soul was not able to feel that **GENUINE** love until it was thoroughly cleansed!

It could feel things they thought were love, and love should certainly have been their goal; but it takes a pure heart to feel pure love. That is why it is the end of the commandment, not the beginning; because sin – any sin – destroys love.

Why did Jesus say there would be very little true love in the end time? **Matthew 24:12**. Love is made of obedience to God's law. So when iniquity – lawlessness – abounds, the love of many grows cold. It's mathematical – the more sin, the less love. The more righteousness, the more love. It's that simple.

ACTION OR FEELING?

We are trained from birth to think of love as a nebulous feeling. Nailing down exactly what it is reminds one of trying to nail jello to the wall. But love – as God defines love – is a very simple thing. It is obedience to the law of God.

We established long ago the law of God is a perfect expression of the nature of God. If you sum up God's nature in one word, what would that word be? **1 John 4:8**. So if God IS love; and God's nature is expressed by God's law; then obedience to God's law must also be love. And that's exactly what **Romans 13:10** says.

We can make **Romans 13's** "love IS" square with **1 Corinthians 13's** "love DOES" very easily. Corinthians says "love thinks not evil". Surely anyone who keeps God's law would not think evil. Love is kind – surely anyone obeying God's law will not allow harm to come to their neighbor, and their actions will therefore be kind.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (BBE) says "*love has no high opinion of itself, love has no pride*". Are both of those called sins? **Proverbs 21:4**. So if someone keeps the law of God, they will do neither. Everything love does in **1 Corinthians 13** can be explained easily as an automatic result of full obedience to the law of God.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Obedience to the law is an ACT of love. Every time you don't kill your neighbor, every time you don't lie to him, that is an act of love. And as you get better and better at obeying the law, and obey it in finer and finer points as God reveals them to you, the acts of love you do will be subtler, more natural, and habitual. You won't let him starve; you won't cheat him at cards; you won't deceive him.

These are acts of love. Not the fuzzy feeling of warmth, attraction or benevolence that this world calls love. You can feel that fuzzy feeling towards someone while committing adultery with their spouse. You can feel that way, calling someone your best friend, while lying to them on a daily basis. That is what the world calls love.

The world's love looks at **1 Corinthians 13**, and tries to force their carnal, lawless, selfish nature to act that way. In effect, they pretend to be loving, lying to themselves that they are indeed feeling the feelings they see portrayed there, because they think that's what God expects of them. But they cannot possibly understand this love because love IS the keeping of the commandments; you cannot break the commandments and show love at the same time. It is impossible.

God's love begins with obedience to His nature; and God knows that as your nature becomes more and more closely patterned after His, *you will not be able to avoid feeling love*. **As you learn to act more like God, and adopt the divine nature He has offered you, the feeling of love will automatically grow in you.**

You won't need to force it, pretend it, or dwell on it. It will just happen, as you obey the law of God and follow the chain of virtues in 2 Peter 1:5. God's love starts at the foundation of what love is – His law – and ends at a feeling of true love that is the OUTGROWTH of acts of love.

The world's love starts by pretending the feeling of love while constantly committing acts that hurt other people – which is the opposite of love. The world starts by looking at the finished house, God starts by building the foundation.

Love is the END of the commandment; the RESULT sought to be attained by obedience to the law of God. The FULFILLMENT of the law and the prophets. That is why it is the last virtue in a long chain, the most elusive – and the greatest of all (1 Corinthians 13:13).

This is a spectrum; with perfect love on one end, and a complete lack of love on the other. And all that is happening – the entire plan of salvation – is God taking someone who has no true love whatsoever, and giving them the fear of the Lord; then they respond with obedience, faith, and so on; and eventually in a logical, step-by-step process, they are taught the meaning of true love – and when they truly understand that, they have the divine nature. They have finished making their spirits into a copy of the spirit of God, and their creation is finally finished.

The journey towards true love began with someone who knew nothing but hatred; and by the grace of God and the fear of God, that person began gradually to move towards love. And at first, it was a list of negatives – don't steal or God will "get" you. Things like that. But gradually it became "don't lie or God won't bless you as much as He has". Then it grew to "don't deceive because it would hurt your neighbor". Then ultimately, it left behind that fear of consequences altogether.

Fear of consequences is necessary for a selfish being. Without that, most of us wouldn't get out of bed in the morning. But ever so slowly you should leave the fear of consequences behind and do things simply because they're the right thing to do. Not because someone will criticize you if you don't, not even because God expects it from you; but because you expect it from yourself. Because it's the right thing to do. Because you truly care about others more than yourself, and would give your own life to protect their well-being.

When you reach that point, love has cast out all fear from your heart; and that is why we conclude with the last word on love; once again from the book of John...

1 John 4:18 *There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.*

This work is completely non-denominational and is meant to fulfill Christ's great commission to "*preach the gospel to every creature*" (**Mark 16:15**). **This publication is not to be sold**; "*freely ye have received, freely give*" (**Matthew 10:8**).

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