

In This we Know

LOVE

# #1 Know Love Series Love Defined

Forest Park Church

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By Jason Corder

Several years ago, I was asked the question: does your congregation love one another? I'm sure at the time I passed it off, but it is a question that is stuck with me for a very long time.

I grew up with the idea that those who talked about love had somehow lost their edge, that any discussion of love inevitably led to compromises on doctrine or personal behavior.

And yet Jesus said:

**John 13:35,**

*“By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”*

It seems to me that humans struggle with balance. We tend to fall to one side or another on an issue. In many ways, this is a comfortable position, but God is not calling us to make comfortable decisions. He calls us **as His children** to live our lives in conformity with Christ.

## I. God Is.....

### **I AM**

This is a name of the ultimate independent, self-complete being. Jesus also used many “I AM” statements to reveal himself as God, like “I am the bread of life” John 6:35.

### **Infinite**

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You can't measure God—He can't be defined by size or amount. He has no beginning, no end, and no limits.

**Omnipotent**

God is all-powerful. He spoke all things into being, and all things—every microorganism, every breath you take—is sustained by Him.

**Immutable**

All that God is, He has always been. All that He has been and is, He will ever be. He is ever perfect and unchanging.

**Omniscient**

God's knowledge encompasses every possible piece of information regarding anything that currently exists, existed in the past, or will exist in the future.

**Omnipresent**

God is everywhere—in and around everything, close to everyone.

**Good**

God is the embodiment of perfect goodness. He is kind, caring, and full of favor toward all of creation.

**The Lord is Just**

God is righteous and holy, fair and equitable in all things. You can trust Him to always do what is right.

**Holy**

God's holiness is not simply our best image of perfection. God is utterly and supremely untainted. His righteousness stands apart—unique and perfectly complete.

**Love**

God's love is so great that He gave His only Son to bring us into fellowship with Him. God's love not only encompasses the world but embraces you personally and intimately.

**The fact that we see love last on the list doesn't mean that it's the least important.**

- In reality, many of the things on this list are things we will never be, we are limited by our human frailty.
- However, there are a couple of items near the bottom of this list that God calls us to be direct. He has given us his own spirit to empower us to become the people that he called us to be.

## A: Holy

### 1 Peter 1:15-16

*but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,<sup>16</sup> since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”*

Through Moses, God spoke to the people, saying, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy” (**Leviticus 19:2**)

Both the Old and the New Testaments stress the importance of cultivating personal holiness in the life of every believer.

Being holy means to live our lives in a way that reflects God’s glory rather than conforming to the ways of the world (Romans 12:1-2).

- It means that we shape our lives and decisions on the outline God laid down for us in the Bible.
- It takes discipline to do this, and it is not always easy.

Remember that God calls us to be holy — set apart and special.

- When we follow His plan, live with His love, and seek after Him, we certainly stand out in the world.
- When we’re baptized, the Holy Spirit comes and lives in us.
- He helps us to pursue the holy lifestyle.

Before the commandment to be holy, Peter lays out how we can live in the light of God’s command to be holy as He is holy.

Peter says to:

### 1. Discipline our minds.

#### 1 Peter 1:13

*“Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

### 2. Live as God’s obedient children.

## **1 Peter 1:14**

*As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,*

### 3. This change of behavior begins with our attitude and mindset.

- When our inner thought life, our purpose, and our character are changed into the image of Christ, our outward selves and behavior will alter naturally.
- This process is the Holy Spirit's work: "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

### 4. Reverent Fear

Peter instructs believers to "live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear" **1 Peter 1:17**.

- Living as strangers here on earth hammers home the idea that our earthly lives with all their challenges and struggles are only temporary.
- Even in our pain, we can live with hope as citizens of a future heavenly reality.
- *Reverent fear* refers to humble, respectful awe of God, which motivates us to live obedient, holy lives.

### 5. Love one another

Peter makes the point that living in the light of God's holiness means demonstrating

1 Peter 1:22

*"Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,"*

When we "do not conform to the evil desires" we had before we came to know Christ, we live in response to God's holiness, adopting His behavior as our pattern things begin to change!

## B: Love

### 1 John 4:16

*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.*

Interpreters have often noted that the letter of 1 John is, in many ways, a commentary on the Gospel of John.

The letter is a magnificent reflection on the two great themes of John's Gospel:

- Believing in Jesus
- Jesus' command to love one another.

### 1 John 3:16-19

*We know love by this that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?*

*Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.*

## II. The heart of the matter.

As we know, the Pharisees and the religious leaders have been questioning Jesus over and over again. Now, they ask, "**Which command in the law is the greatest?**"

That's a good question for us all: what's the most important thing for us to do as followers of God?

### Matthew 22:36-40

<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

*<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

### **A: Love God (vv. 37-38)**

**37 He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.**

- He doesn't dodge the question.
- He doesn't answer it with another question.
- He just answers the question matter of factly.

He says to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind! Basically, He's saying, “Love God with everything in you!”

Jesus continues in verse 38, **“This is the greatest and most important command.”**

This was given to the Jewish people in the book of Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verse 5.

**5 Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.**

- This is what the Jewish people called *the Shema*.
- Every faithful Jewish person would know *the Shema*.
- However, this is the most popular and most central command to the Jewish people.
- He meant that this was the greatest and most important commandment.

**Jesus' response captured what is most important for the follower of God to do: love God with everything.**

The greatest way that we can be faithful to God's commands is to love Him! Does Jesus stop there? No, He does not. He keeps going.

## **B: Love People (v. 39)**

verse 39: ***“The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself.”***

Jesus gives them more than they are asking for.

- He not only provides the greatest commandment,
- He provides the second greatest as well: to love your neighbor as yourself!

We must grasp the importance of the fact that Jesus included this. He had to have thought that it was vital to include this because He provided it even though He wasn't asked about it.

**Jesus is saying, the way that you think about yourself all the time, the way that you meet your own needs, think that way towards others!**

- This is not a type of love that we have to learn to **understand**, but it is a type of love that we have to learn to **demonstrate**.
- We know what it means to love in this degree because most of us love ourselves.
- But, for many of us, we still need to learn how to show it to someone other than ourselves.
- So, Jesus says to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.
- This is our task, to seek the greatest good for our neighbor, just as we seek good for ourselves.
- What a weighty command that this is from Jesus. This is a difficult task!

Jesus is asked this question: What is the greatest commandment? He provides the first answer: love God with everything you have, and He provides the second answer: love your neighbor as yourself, and finally we have . . .

## **Conclusion**

The greatest of these is Love