

Simple and Difficult
1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 4:9-10

Introduction: Love is simple and difficult. It is simple in the sense that if we can truly love, we can obey God's commands since love is, as Steve said on Sunday, the "one organizing principle for all the commands of Scripture." Jesus said that love is the one word that sums up all the commands (Mark 12:28-31). And so, to sum up all of the commands of Scripture in this way makes the Christian life pretty simple. Simple? Yes. Easy? No! To love everyone in our lives is the most difficult thing God could require of us. But that is indeed what He asks. And so learning to love must be our passionate pursuit. May this study encourage you to excel still more in your love for others.

Opening Discussion: What do you think it means that love is the one organizing principle for all the commands of Scripture? How is it possible that love can organize all the commands?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13; 4:9-10

1. What is Paul prayer for the Thessalonians (3:11-13)?
2. Why does he pray this?
3. What does it mean to "abound in love for one another" (3:12)?
4. What does it mean to "abound in love for . . . all men" (3:12)?
5. What is the distinction that is being made between love for "one another" as opposed to love for "all men"?
6. How does Jesus "cause" us to increase and abound in love for one another (3:12)?
7. How does abounding in love for others result in our hearts being established "unblamable in holiness" before God (3:13)?

8. Paul writes that God himself teaches us that we are to love one another (4:9). How has God taught this?

Steve said:

In his book *Sacred Companions* David Benner argues that one of the primary ways that God wants to transform us is by making us into “great lovers.” God is love; God is therefore a great lover; God wants us to be like Him in the sense that He wants us to also be great lovers. Benner is very insightful when he writes this:

How I wish God had set something – anything – other than love as the supreme measure of spiritual progress. Recognizing the impoverishment of my love of both God and others is so discouraging. It's the most depressing thing I have encountered in my Christ following.

My first response to the limitations of my love is always the same – to try harder. I pray for love with more fervor. And I try to love with more diligence. But nothing seems to change. Then I recall that once again I have got it all backwards. God doesn't want me to try to become more loving. He wants me to absorb his love so that it flows out from me. (p. 34)

9. Why doesn't trying harder really work?

10. How can we “absorb his love” so that it flows out of our lives? In other words, what helps you truly experience God's love?

Steve said:

God wants to teach us to be great lovers. As you experience the love of God, identify a relationship or a situation and pray: “God, in this situation/relationship, teach me to be a great lover. It's not enough to be a mediocre lover; God, teach me to be a **great** lover.” Choose a situation or a relationship in your life and allow God to teach you how to love. Start somewhere.

11. What is a relationship (or situation) in your life in which you want to allow God to teach you to love?