



Love is a command

...and to know His love that surpasses knowledge.

Ephesians 3:19

"But I don't love her!" That may well have been Joseph's reply to the angel, had he been informed by late 20th Century culture. And that would be the end of the matter. Since discovering that she was with child by no act of his own, Joseph may well have felt that he did not love Mary anymore. And what is a person to do if he has lost his love?

Love has become, in our day, an elusive emotion that makes puppets of us all – a fickle tyrant – and we, its helpless slaves. People are either head-over-heels in love, or without hope because their relationship has lost its love. Christians are beginning to see it this way too: when a relationship has lost the dynamic of love, it is hopeless. What can we do when love has become a fugitive, when the elusive feeling has fled? For many, there is no solution but to separate or divorce.

This is a common perception of love between a man and a woman.

But this is not a biblical perception. In the Bible, love is just one emotion among many that we must master. Just as we must control sinful emotions (by resisting them), we must control righteous emotions (by using them). Love is a righteous emotion. Christians are not to wait for love to *happen*. In the Bible, God *commands* us to love. "*You shall love Yahweh your God.*" Jesus demands that we exercise extraordinary control over this righteous emotion when he says, "*Love your enemies.*" Love is not a choice. It is a command. It is not something we wait until it happens to us, we must simply go and love.

That may sound impossible, but it is not. God does it. He commands us to love because He loved us first. We cannot meditate on God's love enough. Paul says that the love of God in Jesus Christ is beyond every conceivable boundary, for He loved when it seemed impossible to love. It is easy for a child to love his parents, and for a parent to love his child, but there are many people that we just cannot imagine loving. Yet, the truth is, it is easier for me to love Adolph Hitler (a man responsible for the attempted extermination of the Jewish people and many others) or Henry Morgentaler (the man who fought for and won the right for women to abort their unborn children) then for God to love me. Much easier. Hitler and Morgentaler sinned against equals, against their fellow man; my sin is of a much higher or uglier order: I had sinned against God. "*Against you, you only have I sinned,*" David says.

And yet, as ugly as we are, God loved us. He sent his Son down from heaven to save us. And even though we keep on insulting God with sin every day, He keeps on loving us, and draws us closer to himself by the Spirit of adoption. That is the love of God. He loves people who are utterly disgusting in his eyes; He loves people who have absolutely nothing lovely about them. Despite whom we are, God loved us and keeps on loving us.

The emotion of love is a beautiful thing. A man should be desired and loved in the eyes of his wife, and a woman in the eyes of her husband. People cannot seriously contemplate marriage if they do not experience vibrant and growing love. Their relationship should demonstrate the emotion of love. But if the love of God controls us, then even if this emotion fails, we will continue to love. We are commanded to. God could. And so can you, if God's Spirit does indeed dwell in you. Then your love becomes extraordinary, like God's. It costs you something you never paid before: it costs your own self.

Paul says in his letter to the Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of God. If we are in the love of God, then nothing can separate a husband and a wife. Not even when the emotion has fled. Love remains, because God commands it.

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