

“Love God and do as you please”

“If you love me you will obey what I command.”

John 14:15 (NIV)

St. Augustine was a leading Christian theologian of the fourth century and made the statement “Love God and do as you please.” This sounds reckless and dangerous given our sinful natures. We might ask for the wrong things all too easily. Why would such a responsible person make what appears to be an irresponsible statement?

Well, Augustine knew the teaching of Scripture and was using the word “love” in its biblical sense. Jesus defines love for us in the verse for today. You will note how different Jesus’ idea of love is from the common one today. In our society love is generally considered to be a powerful, overwhelming emotion of attraction towards someone or something. Someone has described it as an itch you cannot scratch.

When you look at Scripture for a definition of love you discover that it is not primarily an emotion. Rather it is a way of relating to another person. For example, one day when Jesus was explaining the idea of love to some people He told the story of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:25-37)

The Samaritan was walking down a road and found a Jew lying beaten and robbed. He took the victim and bound up his wounds and placed him on his donkey and took him to an inn where he had a line of credit. He paid the innkeeper some money and asked that the man be cared for. He told the innkeeper that if the bill for the man’s care came to more than he deposited, he would pay the balance the next time he came by.

Now, according to Jesus the Samaritan loved the robbery victim. There was no emotion except compassion shown by the Samaritan. However the kind man did indeed love the beaten person simply because he did something helpful for the victim. So to love someone in the Bible means to act positively towards the individual.

We read various times in Scripture that God’s love is an active work of rescuing His people from the consequences of their sins. A wonderful definition of love is seen in 1 John 4:10 where it says (NIV), “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”

In 1 John 3:16 we read (NIV), “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.”

There are many more passages where love is seen as an activity of benefitting others.

In our title for today, if we insert the biblical definition of love, it makes perfect sense. The problem lies in the modern definition of love as sentimentality or shallow affection. When a person vows love to their marriage partner today it often means they will stay with the person until someone a little more interesting comes along. We refer to it as fickle love.

A lot of people today think of God’s love toward us as something we deserve merely because we are His creatures. He made us and owes us love and kindness is the way it works for many. But when you stop and think calmly about the matter we should ask ourselves the question, “Why should God love those who love themselves the most and only give God a fleeting nod until tragedy occurs?” “Why should God love people who ignore him until life gets to be too much and only then do they seek His favour?”

What we all need to do is realise that God should come first in our lives and all else should come a distant second. God’s message in Scripture is for us to love Him with all we are for all He is. God goes so far as to say He is jealous for our love and loyalty. In Exodus 34:14 we read (KJV), “for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.”

If we love things, or family more than God it is wrong in God’s eyes. He gives us family, financial security, health, and so on as blessings but expects us to be thankful and make Him first in our lives.

Jesus made the remarkable statement in Matthew 10:37 (NIV), “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” So we are to serve God first and family second.

In 1 Timothy 5:8 it says (NIV), “If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

So we are to make adequate provision for our loved ones, we are to love them in other words. But God is first.

So when Augustine said what he did so long ago it makes perfect sense. The one who truly loves God is the one who serves God, who obeys God and lives for God. Those who come to God for His forgiveness discover that doing what pleases God gives us pleasure and satisfaction in life. Hence we do what we please as Augustine said.

When we face trials in life we find strength in the knowledge that God our Father is with us and loves us. That is to say, He will make provision for us through all the alternatives in life and because He loves us He will never leave us or forsake us.

Do you have this assurance in your situation? Do you love God? His heart is open to all who will come to Him for the rest and peace He offers. If you come you will not be disappointed. You will learn to love God and discover yourself doing what both you and God please.