

Shalom, beloved,

There was a powerful moment recorded in Scripture when the apostles approached Jesus with a heartfelt spiritual request:

Luke 17:5 (NIV): "The apostles said to the Lord, 'Increase our faith!'"

Although their request seemed simple, Jesus did not respond by laying hands or granting it instantly. He instead pointed to a process that involved spiritual diligence. True faith is not merely imparted it is cultivated.

In Matthew 17:21 (KJV), when the disciples struggled to cast out a demon, Jesus said:

"Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting."

And Romans 10:17 (NIV) reveals the principle:

“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.”

This teaches us that faith is built progressively through hearing, meditating on, and applying God's Word. But notice faith doesn't grow without intentional effort. You must *seek* it diligently. It cannot simply be passed down or transferred through prayer or laying on of hands.

The Central Role of Love in Christian Maturity

While faith is essential and hope anchors us in God's promises, the greatest of all is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (NIV):

“And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”

Why is love the greatest? Because God Himself is love:

1 John 4:8 (NIV):

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

A spiritually mature Christian is not simply identified by gifts, miracles, or deep doctrine, but by the measure of their love a love that reflects Christ.

Yet many today mistake Christian love for mere kindness, charity, or emotional warmth. These are expressions of love, but agapē, the divine love of God, goes far deeper.

What Is True, Godly Love?

In 1 Corinthians 13:1-8 (NIV), Paul defines love not as an emotion but a lifestyle and character that mirrors God's heart:

“If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not

have love, I am only a resounding gong... If I have faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing..."

Here are the attributes of this love:

- Patient and kind (v. 4): It endures mistreatment without retaliation.
- Not envious or boastful: It rejoices in others' success.
- Not proud or rude: It considers others above self.
- Not self-seeking or easily angered: It surrenders ego and offense.
- Keeps no record of wrongs (v. 5): It forgives completely.

- Does not delight in evil but rejoices in truth.
- Always protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres (v. 7).
- Love never fails (v. 8).

Ask yourself: Are these characteristics visible in your walk with God and others? If we struggle to forgive, hold grudges, or act in pride, then God's love has not yet been perfected in us.

Why Love Can't Be Transferred It Must Be Cultivated

Just like faith, love requires discipline and spiritual formation. It cannot be received passively.

1 Peter 4:8 (ESV):

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”

“Earnestly” or “fervently” here (Greek: *ektenēs*) suggests a strenuous, ongoing effort. We must work at love until it becomes our nature.

This love grows when we:

- Forgive quickly.
- Choose not to gossip or judge.
- Serve others sacrificially.
- Let go of resentment and offense.
- Focus on people's virtues, not their faults.

It may be difficult at first but with time, the Holy Spirit forms this divine character in us.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV):

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

Notice that love is the first fruit mentioned. Without it, the rest lose their meaning.

Love Grows Through Discipleship and Character Development

This divine progression is described beautifully in:

2 Peter 1:5-7 (NIV):

“Make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”

Each trait builds upon the previous. Love is the climax of spiritual maturity.

2 Peter 1:8 (NIV):

“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Final Exhortation: Make Love Your Highest Goal

Let us commit ourselves, starting today, to pursuing love not just in words, but in action and truth.

Romans 12:10-11 (NIV):

“Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

1 Peter 1:22 (NIV):

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

Love must be developed daily. Start with small acts, then grow. Let it become your habit, then your character. And in time, it will reflect the heart of God in all you do.

Because:

1 Corinthians 13:2 (NIV):

“...if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.”

And:

1 John 4:8 (NIV):

“Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”

Let us love with all diligence, that we may truly know Him.

Shalom

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