

Biblical Love and Ethics

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Biblical Love and Ethics, just what relationship do they have with one another in conjunction with the theme, *1st Century Ethics in a 21st Century World*? First, it is essential to realize that the phrase *1st Century Ethics* refers not to what everyone in the first century believed or practiced regarding ethics, but is a reference to what Jesus and the inspired writers of the New Testament taught. Second, it is essential to address the issue often raised, is it practical to expect one to live by *1st Century Ethics in a 21st Century World*? There are those who would suggest that to live by the teachings of the New Testament in a 21st Century World is an idea that borders on ridiculous. The belief is that *1st Century Ethics* are no longer applicable in a *21st Century World* because times have changed and the two centuries are vastly different. The two centuries are vastly different from a mechanical and technological perspective. Modes of travel, communication, the way goods are produced, farming, medicine, etc., have all changed, but in spite of the fact that these things have changed, changing day to day life for human beings, does that mean that human beings themselves have changed? Do husbands and wives love one another any more or less, or do parents love their children any more or less in the 21st Century than the 1st Century? The wise man, Solomon, wrote, "...there is no new thing under the sun" (*Ecclesiastes 1:9*). Solomon observed many changes in his lifetime, but as far as who man is and what man needs, "...there is no new thing." Since man was created (*Genesis 1:26-28*), on day six, he has needed to eat, sleep, work, worship, have companionship, and to love and be loved (*Genesis 2*), and the same can be said for man in the first, fifth, tenth, and twenty-first centuries. Time has not changed the fact that in the 21st Century man is still created "*in the image of God*" (*Genesis 1:27*), "...a living soul" (*Genesis 2:7*).

The teachings of Jesus and the other inspired writers of the New Testament are timeless because "*the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart*" (*Hebrews 4:12*). However, what about Biblical Love and Ethics? How will Biblical love affect the ethics of the 21st century man and woman? In this study worldly love, upon which many base their ethics, and Biblical love, that which was taught in the 1st century, and its impact upon our ethics, will be examined.

THERE IS A WORLDLY LOVE UPON WHICH ETHICS ARE BASED

John wrote, *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in Him"* (1 John 2:15). The love of the world, as John is using it, means thinking of this world as the total sum of our existence. Love of the world is like man of whom Jesus spoke (Luke 12:16-21), whose life was expressed by the attitude, *"...eat, drink, and be merry"* (Luke 12:19). Today it is expressed by the philosophies of "live and let live" and "you only go round once in life." Concerning this attitude Jesus said, *"So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God"* (Luke 12:21). Characteristics of the love that John speaks of, the love of the world, is that it is first, self centered, and second, present centered. John explains the love of the world, *"for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world"* (1 John 2:16).

Through the years some have misunderstood what John has written, thinking that this life is to have no joy or pleasure, or that we can not appreciate the good things in this earth life. John does not mean to imply that there is to be no joy or pleasure in life, rather, John is writing with reference to loving this world above all else. Loving the world to the point of sacrificing one's eternal salvation. The Bible teaches that human beings are to appreciate this world (Psalm 8:1-9, 9:1-2, 19:1-6, Romans 1:19-20), and when man does there will be an even greater appreciation for this world, God, and self.

The impact of having a love of the world means that our ethics will spring forth from that love rather than from the love of the Father. The wise man wrote, *"For as he (man) thinketh in his heart, so is he..."* (Proverbs 23:7). The logical and practical end of functioning by a worldly love leads to the elevation of the creation above God, and eventually above man, and when that happens the ethics and moral standards by which man lives are lowered (Romans 1:21-32).

The impact of loving the world can also be seen in how the world defines love. The world defines love as accepting the actions or lifestyle of a person, even though that lifestyle may be dangerous to that person or someone else physically or spiritually, and even though the Bible would define such as sin. The worldly love not only accepts a sinful lifestyle, but also will not speak against such. The accusation is that when one speaks out against homosexuality, abortion, adultery, and many of the topics found in these lectures, then one, according to the world, has become judgmental, uncaring, and unloving.

Another aspect of loving the world is seen by whom one desires to be love. There are many today in the religious world, and sadly, even in the Lord's church, who like the Pharisees, *"...loved the praise of men more than the praise of God"* (John 12:42). That comes about because of a love of the world. When that is the case, where ethics are based upon a worldly definition of love, the religious and moral decision-making process will be apart from the inspired Word of God.

THERE IS A BIBLICAL LOVE UPON WHICH ETHICS ARE BASED

Since the New Testament was written in Greek we come to understand Biblical love, as we know how the word was used in the 1st century. The Greek language has several different words, which are translated into the English as love, and the one used with reference to ethics is the word "agapao." *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* defines the word in this way, "to be full of

good-will and exhibit the same, to have a preference for, wish well to, regard the welfare of" (8). Mr. Thayer is saying that this love is a decision, a determined and active interest in the genuine welfare of another person, be it for their physical or spiritual welfare. The interesting thing about this love is that it is not limited by one's feelings for or against a person. This is why Jesus said, *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son..."* (John 3:16), and why Paul wrote, *"But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). God set the example of true Biblical love and how one is to ethically act upon that love.

Jesus taught that Biblical love must be the basis for our life, which includes our ethics. Jesus said, *"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is first and greatest commandment"* (Matthew 22:37-38). How does one love God? Jesus said, *"If you love Me, keep My commandments"* (John 14:15). John wrote, *"For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments"* (1 John 5:3). Biblical love does not begin with the created, but the Creator, God. Jesus expounded on Biblical love by saying, *"And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets"* (Matthew 22:39-40). Jesus was saying that the true ethics by which people are to act upon are found in these two commands, loving God and love one's fellow man as himself. When one truly loves God first, as God defines love, then one will be able to truly demonstrate love for humanity. Previously it was mentioned that a worldly love is defined as accepting the actions or lifestyle of a person, no even if they are physically or spiritually dangerous to that person, or someone else. It is said that to disapprove or speak out against such is to be unloving. That may be the world's opinion, but in reality acting with Biblical love is far more loving and beneficial to the person.

Proof of Biblical love is seen in the life and words of Jesus, the One who deeply cared about people, and who deeply loved people. Jesus demonstrated great care, concern, and love for people in their situations of life, yet without accepting, compromising, or approving of their sinful lifestyle. Jesus demonstrated tremendous compassion for the woman brought to him accused of adultery, first, by challenging the attitude and motive of the accusers (John 8:7), and second, without compromise, and in true loving fashion, saying to her, *"go, and sin no more"* (John 8:11). As the old saying goes, Jesus loved the sinner, but not the sin, and she clearly understood that fact.

Biblical love will cause us to act in the best interest of another person. This may mean helping, or not helping a person in a given situation. The loving thing to do may be to give food to one truly in need, as Paul wrote, *"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men..."* (Galatians 6:10). Or the loving thing to do may be to not give someone a hand out, encouraging laziness, but to encouragement them to become employed, as Paul also wrote, *"if any would not work, neither should he eat"* (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Biblical love will do what is best for a person's physical and spiritual well being. Some parents believe love for their children is withholding discipline and allowing them to do whatever they want, but love will cause parents to *"...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord"* (Ephesians 6:4), which includes loving guidance in truth and what is right, and loving discipline, such as the wise man wrote, *"...he that loveth him (one's child) chasteneth him..."* (Proverbs 13:24). As we can see from this study, and from the writings of Paul, Biblical love is not self-centered, but consistently acts in a way that demonstrates genuine concern for God and

one's fellow man (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). John put it this way, "*He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love*" (1 John 4:8).

Conclusion

Ethics that spring forth from a love for this world and a love defined by this world leads to self-centeredness, short-sighted decisions, and a decay in one's moral fiber. On the other hand, ethics that spring forth from a Biblical love looks upward and outward to the welfare of others, both presently and in the future. May we strive to live our lives base upon this Biblical love.

Works Cited

Thayer, Joseph Henry (1977). *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House