

# Essentials of our Christian Faith

A Study of What We Believe,  
Why We Believe It, and  
What Difference It Makes  
in Daily Life

a compilation from Catechisms and Confessions, systematic theologies, and  
commentaries to facilitate our study and discussion of our beliefs

Winter 2022  
Lesson 12  
January 12

# Essentials of our Christian Faith

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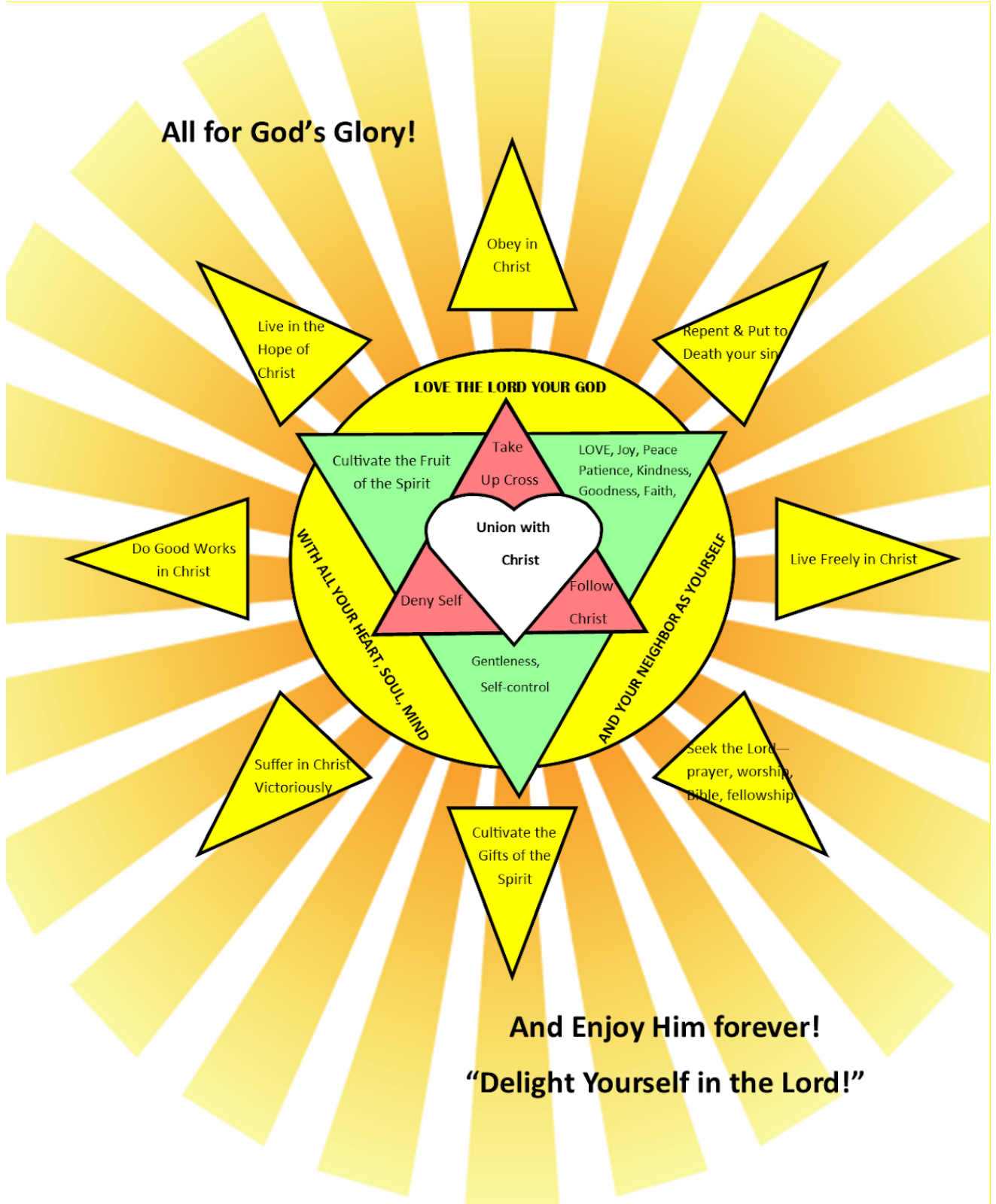
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\*Living in Christ (See diagram note on next page)

**\*Living In Christ:** The Christian life is like an explosion of life-giving, life-transforming, Holy Spirit-given power and Christ-reflecting glory that travels outward from the believer's new heart. Christ's glory radiates throughout all aspects of the believer's life, and just as the light shining from the sun is seen in one brilliance rather than in distinct rays, each layer of the believer's life in Christ overlaps and interconnects in multifaceted ways. Although, as believers, we shine imperfectly in this world, we are "set apart" to live by the Spirit and reflect Christ's image. The above graphic helps visualize how the Christian is called to live according to Scripture. It is helpful in understanding the different aspects of the Christian life in light of the "big picture." As believers, all the pieces are important, and by understanding them, we can examine if there are some pieces that may be weaker, neglected, or overlooked in our lives, thereby revealing areas where we individually or corporately should seek to grow.

**Lesson 12**  
**Living In Christ: Part 2**  
**Loving the Lord and Others**

**Introduction:** The passage below tells part of the story of Paul's shipwreck as he was traveling to Rome to stand before Caesar. This is a story about real life stress and yet Paul's unfailing love for God and others can be seen throughout the story. His whole voyage was one of love and surrender to God. Paul put his life second and following Christ first. See what evidence you can see in this story where Paul demonstrates his love for his captors and fellow prisoners and shipmates. If you have time this week, read Acts 21:27 to the end of the book of Acts for the whole story of Paul's journey, paying special attention to his love for God and others.

“Since they had been without food for a long time, Paul stood up among them and said, “Men, you should have listened to me and not have set sail from Crete and incurred this injury and loss. 22 Yet now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. 23 For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, 24 and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’ 25 So take heart, men, for I have faith in God that it will be exactly as I have been told. 26 But we must run aground on some island.” 27 When the fourteenth night had come, as we were being driven across the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors suspected that they were nearing land. 28 So they took a sounding and found twenty fathoms. A little farther on they took a sounding again and found fifteen fathoms. 29 And fearing that we might run on the rocks, they let down four anchors from the stern and prayed for day to come. 30 And as the sailors were seeking to escape from the ship, and had lowered the ship's boat into the sea under pretense of laying out anchors from the bow, 31 Paul said to the centurion and the soldiers, “Unless these men stay in the ship, you cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship's boat and let it go. 33 As day was about to dawn, Paul urged them all to take some food, saying, “Today is the fourteenth day that you have continued in suspense and without food, having taken nothing. 34 Therefore I urge you to take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” 35 And when he had said these things, he took bread, and giving thanks to God in the presence of all he broke it and began to eat. 36 Then they all were encouraged and ate some food themselves. 37 (We were in all 276 persons in the ship.) 38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, throwing out the wheat into the sea” (Acts 27: 21-38).

**Let's Review:**

- **Union with Christ**

“This union may be defined as *that intimate, vital, and spiritual union between Christ and His people, in virtue of which He is the source of their life and strength, of their blessedness and salvation.* That it is a very intimate union appears abundantly from the figures that are used in Scripture to describe it. It is a union as of the vine and the branches, John 15:5, as of a foundation and the building that is reared on it, I Pet. 2:4,5, as of husband and wife, Eph. 5:23-32, and as of the head and the members of the body, Eph. 4:15,16. And even these figures fail to give full expression to the reality. It is a union that passes understanding” (*Berkhof*).

1. **It is an organic union:** Christ and the believers form one body. John 15:5; I Cor. 6:15-19; Eph. 1:22,23; 4:15,16; 5:29,30.
  2. **It is a vital union:** In this union Christ is the vitalizing and dominating principle of the whole body of believers. It is none other than the life of Christ that indwells and animates believers. Gal. 4:19; Rom. 8:10; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 4:19,20.
  3. **It is a union mediated by the Holy Spirit:** Through the Holy Spirit Christ now dwells in believers, unites them to Himself, and knits them together in a holy unity. 1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13; 2 Cor. 3:17,18; Gal. 3:2,3.
  4. **It is a union that implies reciprocal action:** The initial act is that of Christ, who unites believers to himself by regenerating them and thus producing faith in them. On the other hand, the believer also unites himself to Christ by a conscious act of faith, and continues the union, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, by the constant exercise of faith. John 14:23; 15:4-5; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17.
  5. **It is a personal union:** Every believer is personally united directly to Christ. John 14:20; 15:1-7; 2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 2:20; Eph. 3:17-18.
  6. **It is a transforming union:** By this union believers are changed into the image of Christ *according to his human nature*. They share in a measure the experiences of their Lord. Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:5; Gal. 2:20; Col. 1:24; 2:12; 3:1; I Pet. 4:13 (*Berkof*)
- **Deny Self, Die to Self, Live for Christ**  
 “If we are not our own, but the Lord’s, it is clear to what purpose all our deeds must be directed. We are not our own, therefore neither our reason nor our will should guide us in our thoughts and actions. We are not our own, therefore we should not seek what is only expedient to the flesh. We are not our own, therefore let us forget ourselves and our own interests as far as possible. We are God’s own; to him, therefore, let us live and die. We are God’s own; therefore let his wisdom and will dominate all our actions. We are God’s own; therefore let every part of our existence be directed towards him as our only legitimate goal.” (John Calvin).

Read Matt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Mt 10:34-39; Luke 9:23-25; Luke 14:33; Jn 12:24-25; Rom 6:3-11; Gal 6:14. Spend some time in prayer over what this type of humble surrender looks like in your life.

- **Cultivate the Fruit of the Spirit**  
 Read Galatians 5:16-26; Eph 5:8-9; Mat 7:16-17; Phil 1:6 and spend some time in prayer this week over the fruit of the Spirit in your life.

### **What is it to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind and your neighbor as yourself?**

The hallmark of the Christian life is Christian love (Matt 22:35-40; Eph 4:32-5:2; I John 3:16). The agape love of God is profiled in 1Cor 13:4-8. Its total lack of self-concern is breathtaking. Love is a principle of *action* rather than *emotion*. It is by their active love to one another that Jesus’ disciples are to be recognized (John 13:34-35). (*Packer* p 181-182)

#### **Q. What does God’s law require of us?**

A. Christ teaches us this in summary in Matthew 22:37-40:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’<sup>1</sup> This is the greatest and first commandment. “And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’<sup>2</sup> “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” <sup>1</sup> Deut. 6:5; <sup>2</sup> Lev. 19:18 ~HC 4

Read the following and note what you learn:

Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18; Mat 22:35-40	
Eph 4:32-5:2	
1 John 3:16-17; 4:7-21	
1 Cor 13:4-8	
John 13:34-35; Rom 13:10	

**The Four Greek Words for Love:**

<b>Eros Love</b>	Romantic love - but this specific word is not used in the Bible	Usually motivated by self-interest, self gratification, and self protection
<b>Phileo Love (brotherly/friend)</b> <b>Storge Love (family love/affection)</b>	Affection of friends/brotherly love  Family/kindred love	Usually motivated by self-interest, self gratification, and self protection
<b>Agape Love</b> <b>“God is love (agape)”</b> <b>1 John 4:8</b>	1 Cor 13:4-8, 13	Fueled by the Holy Spirit - selfless love that never fails

**Understanding Agape Love:** The Bible has a complex concept of love that is expressed in relatively few words. The OT predominantly uses the word, *ahab*, to express love. The NT primarily uses two Greek words for love - *phileo* and *agape*. I John 4:8 states, “God is love.” The word used for love, here, is agape. Agape love comes from God and is a fruit of the Spirit. See 1 Cor 13:4-8,13 for its description. Agape love is more than a mere emotion. It is active. The Christian is to be loving, mirroring the selfless love of God. It is a love that mirrors and reflects the character of God’s love for us. (Sproul p 316). The self-giving love that characterizes the Trinity finds clear expression in God’s relationship to mankind, and especially to sinful people. It should cause us great joy to know that it is the purpose of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to give of themselves in order to bring us true joy. It is God’s nature to act that way toward those upon which He has set His love, and he will continue to act that way toward us for all eternity (Grudem p 92).

- 1 John 4:10
- Romans 5:8
- John 3:16

We are called to imitate this communicable attribute of God, by first loving God in return, and second by loving others in imitation of the way God loves them.

**Love God with all your heart, soul and mind**

If we want to love God, we must love Him exclusively. No other gods can have our attention. Our **hearts** must be set only on what delights His heart. Our **minds** must be anchored only to His

word as the final authority. Our **souls** must be satisfied only with what pleases Him. Our **strength** must be spent on what serves Him alone.

Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind means that every Christian’s full time employment must be to please God (not to earn anything but simply because we love Him.) This may be properly described as the Christian’s personal calling. Jesus did not live to please himself, nor may we (John 8:29; Rom 15:1-3). Pleasing God in everything must be our goal (2 Cor 5:9; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4; 4:1). Faith (Heb 11:5-6), praise (Ps 69:30-31), generosity (Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16), obedience to divinely instituted authority (Col 3:20), and single-mindedness in Christian service (2 Tim 2:4) combine to form the prescribed way to do it. God both enables us for this kind of living and takes pleasure in our practice of it. It is the regular procedure in sovereign grace to give what He commands and delight in the result (Heb 13:21; Phil 2:12-13). Love will always ask whether more can be done to please, and more neighbor-love, more service of others’ needs, will always be a part of the answer (1 John 3:11-19) (Packer p 185). The truth is that, though we are justified by faith alone, the faith that justifies is never alone. It produces moral fruit; it expresses itself through “love” (Gal 5:6); it transforms one’s way of living; it begets virtue. This is not only because holiness is commanded, but also because the regenerate heart desires holiness and can find full contentment only in seeking it (Packer 159-160).

**Read the following Scriptures about living to please God and summarize:**

John 8:29	
Rom 15:1-3	
2 Cor 5:9	
1 Thes 2:4	
Col 1:10	
1 Thes 4:1	

**Read and note several specific different ways through which God is pleased:**

1. Faith - Heb 11:4-6; Ps 147:1; 1 John 3:21-23
2. Praise - Ps 69:30-31; Heb 13:15; Psalm 147:1
3. Generosity - Phil 4:18; Heb 13:16
4. Obedience - Col 3:20; 1 Samuel 15:22; John 14:23
5. Single-minded Christian service - 2 Tim 2:1-7; Heb 13:20-21; Rom 12:1-2

If we love God, we will obey his commandments (I John 5:3) and thus do what is pleasing to Him. We will love God, not the world (I John 2:15), and we will do all this because He first loved us (I John 4:19).

Take a moment to reflect on whether you live to please, love and delight in God? Is it something you think about daily?

In summary, let’s look to Christ’s example:

Jesus always did the Father’s will and sought to please His Father. Read the following Scriptures:

- Luke 22:42
- John 8:29



John 4:34  
Mark 10:45  
Phil 2: 5-8

### **Love Others as Yourself**

Read John 15:12; John 15:17; Rom 13:8 and consider the ways we show our love to others:

1. Serving - Gal 5:13; John 13:15
2. Bearing one another's burdens - Gal 6:2
3. Forgiving one another - Eph 4:31-32; Col 3:12-13; Eph 4:1-3
4. Instruct one another - Rom 15:14
5. Comfort one another - I Thes 4:18

Read the following and note how Scripture teaches us to love even our enemies:

Luke 6:27-32; Mat 5:41-48; Luke 10:29-37; Rom 12:14-21; Prov 25:21-22; Luke 6:35; Ex 23:5; Eph 5:1-2; Luke 23:28-37; Acts 7:52-60; Prov 24:17-20; Obadiah 1:12-13; Job 31:29-30

Read Phil 1:3-10 and note the example of love for other believers. For additional examples you can read Eph 1:15-21; Col 1:3-9; 2 Tim 1:1-4; 2 John 1:1-2; 3 John 1:1-8, 1 Thes 3:12

Read Gal 6:10 in light of the above passages and consider if our love (as described in 1 Cor 13) is different between our enemies and our brothers/sisters in Christ. Is it?

In the following weeks, we will look at specific ways taught in Scripture that we can actively and purposefully live in love to God and others. These include:

1. Living freely in Christ
2. Obeying in Christ
3. Repentance and putting to death our sin
4. Enduring suffering victoriously
5. Doing good works
6. Seeking/Praising God through the Christian disciplines
7. Using our Spiritual gifts
8. Living in the hope to which we are called

**Memory Verse:** And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength (Mark 12:30).

### **Digging Deeper:**

**Loving God:** When one of the religious scribes asked Jesus which commandment is most important, He answered: "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Mark 12:28–30). Christ essentially quoted Deuteronomy 6:4–5, thus showing that the requirement for God's people has always been the same, and, indeed, always will be the same, even into eternity. What, then, does it mean to love God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength? He who answered the scribe's question also happened to be the One who, unlike any other person since the fall, knows what it is to love God perfectly with all of His being. Jesus had one duty on earth: to love His Father. He did not merely avoid sinning while on earth, but by recognizing the Father's presence with Him, affirmed that He

"always" did what was pleasing to God (John 8:29). In fact, Jesus kept God's commandments in order to abide in His Father's love (John 15:10), for if He had shrunk back even once, His Father would have had no pleasure in Him (Heb. 10:38). Just as Christ said to His disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), the Father could have said the same to Christ. Jesus kept His Father's commandments because He loved Him. The Shema was Christ's great confession. His heart, soul, mind, and strength were in perfect unison as He loved His Father with a perfection that should humble us to the very core of our beings. The Scriptures are clear that the heart is central in loving God; we are to "keep [our] heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov. 4:23). Those who are good are those who have good stored up in their hearts (Luke 6:45). Purity of heart is required for those who love God and wish to worship Him (Ps. 24:4). Indeed, only those with pure hearts will see God (Matt. 5:8), whether in this life by faith or in the life to come by sight (1 John 3:2–3). We are not only to love God with all our heart, but also with all our soul (synonymous with "spirit"). In our devotion to God, our soul is responsible for our highest spiritual exercises; it is the seat of our emotional activity. Christ's obedience was nowhere more tested than in the garden of Gethsemane, where His soul was "very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38). The soul expresses the sorrow and joy that inevitably accompany the life of faith (Ps. 42; 32:2). Thus, without wishing to press the distinction too far, it would seem that the "heart" relates to the will and the "soul" to the emotions. To love God with our whole mind involves the seat of our intellectual life. However, to love God with our mind is also to love Him with the right dispositions and attitudes, those that place our intellect in strict subordination to God's revelation of Himself, not only by thinking about Him, but by submitting our thinking to His revelation. Because of our finiteness, we will never get to a point where we have no need of learning more about God. We read in Isaiah 50:4 that God had given the "servant" (that is, Jesus) "the tongue of those who are taught," and that "morning by morning" the servant was awakened by God to be taught. Christ's love for God meant He applied not only His heart and soul, but also His mind. If it was necessary for Jesus to be taught so that He could love God with His mind, how much more is it necessary for His people? To love God with all our "strength" brings together all the various elements that have been discussed so far. Our heart, soul, and mind are distinguished in the words of Christ, but they should not be thought of as three distinct and separable pieces of our natures. Just as God's attributes cannot be divided, so these elements of our being cannot be divided. In other words, just as God's power is His love is His wisdom is His eternity is His knowledge, and so on, our "heart" is our "soul" is our "mind" is our "strength." To love God with all of our strength, then, is to love God with all our being, which involves the whole man, both body and soul. That explains why the word *all* is repeated four times by Christ (Mark 12:30). Moreover, all four commandments are prefaced by the Greek preposition *ex*, thus highlighting that we love God not only *with* our whole heart but *from* our whole heart (Sproul).

### **God's love for the world and His People:**

When speaking of God's (agape) love, theologians describe three types (or circumstances) of that love - **the love of benevolence, the love of beneficence, and the love for His elect**. The reason for the distinctions is to note the different ways in which God loves all people, in one sense, and the special way He loves His people, the redeemed.

**Benevolence** is derived from the Latin prefix *bene*, which means "well," or "good," and it is the root for the word *will*. Creatures who exercise the faculty of the will by making choices are called volitional creatures. Though God is not a creature, He is a volitional being insofar as He also has the faculty of willing. We are all familiar with Luke's account of the nativity of Jesus in which the heavenly host praises God declaring: "Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:8–14 NKJV). Though some argue that the blessing is given to men of goodwill, the root meaning is the same. The love of benevolence is the quality of good will

toward others. The New Testament is replete with references of God's good will to all humanity even in our fallenness. Though Satan is a malevolent being (one who harbors bad will both toward us and God), it can never properly be said of God that He is malevolent. He has no malice in His purity, no maliciousness in His actions. God does not "delight" in the death of the wicked - even though He decrees it. His judgments upon evil are rooted in His righteousness, not in some distorted malice in His character. Like an earthly judge weeps when he sends the guilty for punishment, God rejoices in the justness of it but gets no glee from the pain of those justly punished.

**Beneficence:** This love of benevolence, or good will, extends to all people without distinction. God is loving, in this sense, even to the unsaved. This type of love, the love of beneficence, is closely linked to the love of benevolence. The difference between benevolence and beneficence is the difference between disposition and action. I may feel well-disposed toward someone, but my goodwill remains unknown until or unless I manifest it by some action. We often associate beneficence with acts of kindness or charity. We note here that the very word "charity" is often used as a synonym for love. In the sense of beneficence, acts of kindness are acts of the love of beneficence. Jesus emphasized this aspect of God's love in teaching regarding those who benefit from God's providence: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (Matt. 5:43 ff. NKJV). In this passage, Jesus enjoins the practice of love toward one's enemies. Notice that this love is not defined in terms of warm, fuzzy, or sanguine feelings but in terms of behavior. In this context, love is more of a verb than a noun. To love our enemies is to be loving toward them. It involves doing good to them. In this regard, the love we are to display is a reflection of God's love toward His enemies. To those who hate and curse Him, He shows the love of beneficence. God's benevolence (good will) is demonstrated by His beneficence (kind actions). His sun and rain are given equally to the just and the unjust. We see then that God's benevolent love and His beneficent love are universal. They extend to the whole of humanity.

**God's special love for those who are redeemed in Christ** (also called love of complacency by theologians): God's love for His own people is the special delight and pleasure He takes first of all in His only-begotten Son. It is Christ who is the beloved of the Father, supremely; He is the Son in whom the Father is "well pleased." This love is not universal. Sadly, in our day, the glorious character of this type of divine love is routinely denied or obscured by a blanket universalization of the love of God. By adoption in Christ, every believer shares in this divine love. It is the love enjoyed by Jacob, but not by Esau. This love is reserved for the redeemed in whom God delights - not because there is anything inherently lovely or delightful in us - but we are so united to Christ, the Father's Beloved, that the love the Father has for the Son spills over onto us. God's love for us is pleasing and sweet to Himself - and to us.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. Is it possible to love with a God-given (agape) love apart from the Holy Spirit? How have you experienced this love working in your own life?
2. What sets agape love apart from the other types of love?

3. Reread I Cor 13:4-8 and reflect on the depth and ramifications of this description of love. In particular, what do you think the phrase, "love never fails" means and how are we to live that out?
4. What examples do you see of God's love never failing in Scripture and how does that challenge us when we are dealing with difficult relationships or even our enemies?
5. Read Exodus 23:5. It is such a practical example of loving our enemies. What are other examples or ways we can love our enemies? When we love our enemies, what does that say about our hearts?
6. What are examples we find in Scripture of loving others and how can we show that love in tangible ways?
7. What does it mean to love others as you love yourself? What does it mean to love yourself? What does it not mean?
8. What are some cultural obstacles or barriers here in the US that affect how well or how often we show our love to God and others as the Bible teaches? Have any of you been to a different country where you have seen greater love lived out by believers?
9. Discuss the active nature of love. Does the Bible describe love as a feeling or an emotion? What do we do when our feelings don't line up with the love we are commanded to give?
10. How would you describe the difference (if there is a difference) between loving our enemies and loving brothers and sisters in Christ? Read Gal 6:10.
11. Does it make sense that our ability to love will grow as we grow in Christ? What are the reasons for that?
12. Take a moment to reflect on whether you live more to please God or yourself. Is it something you think about? What are some verses about pleasing God that either challenged or encouraged you in this area?
13. How is living to please God related to loving and glorifying God?
14. Read Romans 8:31-39. How does the love of God for you described in this passage enable and strengthen you to love both God and others?
15. What does it mean to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind? Does this include delighting in God and in His presence? How does loving God fully bring us joy?
16. What do you think of the descriptions of God's love in the Digging deeper section? Is that helpful? Do you agree?

*Bibliography / Resource List attached to earlier lessons. Available on request. Not printed to save space.*

## Essentials of our Christian Faith

### RESOURCES / BIBLIOGRAPHY

#### Books for further reading

*Wide variety of books you might consider purchasing for use at home to go along with this study. These books were used in the compilation of this curriculum. Class participants are encouraged to pick any of these which you might like to accompany this curriculum.*

*They are not however required for class participation, simply for personal resource.*

\*Daily Devotional - *Training Hearts, Teaching Minds*, by Starr Meade.

*The Westminster Shorter Catechism for Study Classes*, by G.I. Williamson.

These first two (above) are great for making these truths applicable to daily life and are simple enough to use with kids for family devotions.

*Concise Theology*, by J.I. Packer.

*Christian Beliefs*, by Wayne Grudem.

*Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, by R.C. Sproul

*(WCF) Westminster Confession of Faith in Modern English.*

*(WSC) Westminster Shorter Catechism with Scripture Proofs.*

*(WLC) Westminster Larger Catechism with Scripture Proofs.*

Both Westminster Catechisms can be found free online in Modern English.

*The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes*, by G.I. Williamson.

*First Catechism*. GCP Publishers, GCP.org. Super simplified.

Other recommended titles:

*Everyone's a Theologian*, by R.C. Sproul

*Foundations of the Christian Faith*, by James Boice

*Systematic Theology*, by Wayne Grudem.

*Systematic Theology*, by Louis Berkhof

*Core Christianity 101: Student Edition*, <https://www.westbrookechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Core-Christianity-%E2%80%93-101-%E2%80%93-Student-Addition.pdf>

*New City Catechism*, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/new-city-catechism/>

*The Heidelberg Catechism*, available free online

*1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*, available free online