



**Easter 7**

## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

***Be imitators of God and walk in love***

***It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me***

### ***To be a Christian is to love others***

Because God is love, it is imperative that we are clear on what the Bible means by that word. This is even more important given the divine command that we *must love* one another. As Jesus warned: *by this everyone will know that you are my disciples: if you have love, one for another.* But this is no easy task given the malleable way this word is used in our contemporary secular world.

Biblical love is not some warm fuzzy feeling that comes about through our “liking” of someone else. It is not “love” that leads to bed. While its meaning is under constant transformation, most conversations about love end up talking about “romantic love”.

However, when it comes to the Bible, there is very little said about “romantic love” – person A loves person B. This is not because it did not exist but because the Bible begins its understanding of love from a very different starting point.

### ***Biblical love grows from sacrifice***

The first of our biblical love stories is the account of Abraham’s sacrifice of his only son Isaac. Abraham’s love of God is greater and more compelling than the love he has for his son. The point of the story is that biblical love involves sacrifice, a willingness to sacrifice all we have and all we out of love for God. Wanting to love God, we put the *self* to one side, and embrace *the other*. Abraham obeyed out of love and he persevered in that love even to the point of sacrificing Isaac.

This is where Christians come to their understanding of love from a different starting point. The love believers have for others will include the characteristics found in universal ideas about love – affection, a desire to please others, tenderness, compassion, sensitivity, support, and possibly more. Nothing wrong here. Our starting point is given to us by John when he writes...: *Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.* Biblical love is something that begins in a divine action in the world. It is being caught up in *God-reaching-out* into human history, into creation, making himself known and bringing His plans to fruition. This divine self-giving is love. Not the noun *love* but a never-ending verb – *loving*.

The clearest explanation of this kind of love can be found in what the Father did for us in Jesus: *God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.* Jesus emptied himself, taking on the form of a slave: He loved us.

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## *Philippians 2:7 – Jesus made himself of no reputation*

This is the reality of the Post-Easter world. In Jesus the prophecies of old are now fulfilled. He is, in Isaiah's words... *despised and rejected— a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care.* Somewhere here is biblical love.

This is the measure of God's love for us. Paul writes how Jesus *was in the form of God (truly and fully God)* but He gave up all that is associated with that and took on *the form of a slave.* He did not stop being God, but so that He could take on the burden of our sins He became fully and completely human, putting aside the privileges and prerogatives of divinity to become a slave.

What was the motivation for this extraordinary act? Love. Jesus showed himself to be more concerned about the immediate and eternal wellbeing of others than He was for His own wellbeing. This self-sacrificing love transformed the world, restored it by inviting all men and women to live under God's loving rule.

### *Love moves the world beneath us*

This self-sacrificing love (*agape* in Greek) is unconditional, non-discriminating and has no preconditions. This is why it is earth-shattering. It is because it is something God is doing. It is not dependant on us and even our rejection of the love of God does not stop God loving. God changes the world because God loves the world. And this is where we come into the picture.

The more we live in the love God is pouring out on us, the more we become loving people. That love that is God is experienced in Christ His Son and our Messiah. As Jesus taught, God's love is like the good soil into which we put down our roots. The deeper they go the more we produce *good fruit.* And this is what the world sees and can experience: God's love flowing through us to them. It is the very food our world most desperately needs, a love that heals and makes us whole.

Thus, *love one another* means allowing the Christ into whom I have been baptised, to reach out through me to the Christ in others, Christ in all those created in the image and likeness of the same God. But here is a warning: We should not forget that when Jesus tried to do that He ended up nailed to the cross, dead in a shameful and horrendous execution. In less dramatic ways we too will find our attempts to *love* others rejected. Not necessarily our "earthly love" as even unbelievers can have that kind of love. The love the world rejects is the love of God reaching out to them.

### *What then is biblical love?*

Love in the New Testament requires us to ***be to others as God is to them.*** It is a way of living and being in the world. To define what love is requires us first of all to be able to say who God is because *God is love.* **Love is** giving others an experience of divine love through our words and our deeds. **Love is** making Christ known to others. Love is difficult which is why it is so easy to leave the transformation of the world to others. But that is not an option for Christians. We have been sent out into the world to *be in the world* (to love) as *Christ was in the world* (loved)

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