



COMMANDED TO LOVE

“BELOVED, IF GOD SO LOVED US,
WE OUGHT TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.”

1 John 4:11 NKJV

I can't remember a morning of my growing-up life that didn't smell like coffee. Both of my parents always started their day with a cup or two, so the house was filled with the fragrance of it. I love the smell of coffee! But as a youngster I wasn't allowed to touch the stuff. "It'll stunt your growth," I was warned. "It'll put hair on your chest." And so they put me off. When I got older, and finally got the chance to sample some coffee, I was deeply disappointed. The dark liquid was so hot, it scalded my tongue. It tasted bitter, even when I tried adding creamer. And it left a bad taste in my mouth and a sour feeling in my stomach. That was enough of that! Coffee was an acquired



CLEARING + THE + COBWEBS

Some foods require a more "educated palate"



to appreciate. What are some of the more exotic foods you've sampled . . . and liked?



I need truth in strong doses like a great cup of coffee in the morning.

Nicole Johnson

taste, and I didn't care to acquire it. From then on, I'd just not be a coffee drinker.

Coffee shops began popping up everywhere. And more and more of the bookstores I so loved started adding little cafes. There's something cozy about being asked to go out for coffee. I

felt as if I was missing out on something. Then, came the fateful trip back home to visit family. You see, my sister was working at a Starbucks® at the time. She thought I should try some of the delights of her profession, and had something called a Mocha Frappuccino® concocted for me. Do you know? If you add enough sugar, chocolate, and whipped cream to coffee, it tastes pretty good!

Now consider this. We are commanded to love people as God loves them, but that's not always easy to do. People can be so disagreeable (bitter and sour), we'd just as soon swear off them for good. They're an acquired taste we'd rather not cultivate. But just as sweeteners make coffee more palatable, love makes the difference in our relationships. When we have the love of God for the people in our lives, they become bearable—even welcome!

1. When Jesus came, He brought a new commandment for those who loved Him. What was it, according to John 13:34?

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2. What began as something startling and new became the standard to live by. How does the beloved disciple refer to this commandment of Christ's in 2 John 1:5?

3. Over and over again, we are told that we should love one another. But hang on! Should? That makes it sound as though we have some wiggle room—we *should* love people, but it doesn't always happen. Nope. Love is commanded, and there's no way of getting around that!

1 John 3:23—"And this is His _____: that we should _____ on the _____ of His Son Jesus Christ and _____, as He gave us _____" (NKJV).

1 John 4:7, 11, 12—"_____, let us _____ one another, for _____ is of God; and everyone who _____ is born of God and knows God . . . _____, if God so _____ us, we also ought to _____ one another . . . If we _____ one another, God _____ in us, and His _____ has been _____ in us" (NKJV).



1 Timothy 1:5—“Now the _____ of the _____ is _____ from a _____, from a _____, and from _____” (NKJV).



Every good life is a balance of duty and bliss. We will be called upon to do things we would rather not. Sometimes people say, “Just follow your heart,” but that isn't necessarily the right approach. We have to weigh decisions by the word of God.

Barbara Johnson

4. We cannot love God without loving our fellow believers. The two go hand in hand, and we can't have one without the other. In fact, this is commanded. What does 1 John 4:21 have to say about it?

5. If we're to succeed in this acquired taste of brotherly love, what two ingredients are absolutely essential? Paul prays they'll be ours in 2 Thessalonians 3:5.



The child's game of Simon Says is quite popular around our house. Daddy is usually Simon, and he leads a very energetic game. Yes, there's nothing like a good Simon Says workout to tire out the family before bedtime. But is it so easy to play Simon Says with our emotions? How many of us have been told "You're going to eat that . . . and you're going to like it!" We may have choked down our veggies, but did we really like them just because we were commanded to? How can we possibly order our emotions around? The very idea makes us rebel. But stop a minute and think. The heart will often follow where we lead it with our heads. What begins as going through the motions may just surprise you by coming from sincere love in the end.

6. What does Romans 13:8 say that we owe to one another as believers?

The human heart is selfish, prefers its own way, fights being molded by God, and doesn't want to give in when we don't get what is "rightfully ours." We're stubborn, prideful, and strong-willed, and these unbecoming characteristics are most starkly revealed in our relationships.

Luci Swindoll



7. Just as love is a commandment, loving is the fulfillment of the law! Why does Paul say love fulfills the law in Romans 13:10?

8. It's clear enough that we need to love one another, but that brings up the question of "How!?" How do we even know where to begin? What does Paul tell us in 1 Thessalonians 4:9?

9. What does Paul tell us to put on in Colossians 3:14, and why?

DIGGING DEEPER

Some people are easier to love than others. We just seem to "click" with certain people. There are many reasons for this—personalities, interests, similarities, backgrounds, goals, etc. But that doesn't get us off the hook of loving anybody else. Consider Luke 6:32. How does this affect your understanding of God's command to love others?

If you only love the lovable, do you expect a pat on the back? Run-of-the-mill sinners do that. — Luke 6:32 MSG



PONDER & PRAY

This week, ponder over the people in your life. Who is easy to love, and who makes it a challenge for you? Ask the Lord to teach you how to love as He does. Tell Him of your willingness to obey His command to love one another. Ask for inspiration in finding ways to show God's love to those around you. And when you find those who are difficult to love, ask for special grace to acquire a taste for what may seem distasteful at the outset. The love of God will help to sweeten the duty.



TRINKET TO TREASURE

Love is not so easy at times. There are people out there who leave a bitter taste in our mouths. But an acquired taste for people comes through God's own loving ways. Your trinket for this week is coffee beans. Small and fragrant, they hold the promise of something good. Just as it takes a heavy dose of sugar and whipped cream to make coffee palatable to some of us, we must have God's own love for others if we are to fulfill His commandment to love one another.



† NOTES & PRAYER REQUESTS †

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