

7 Lessons on Love

by Bryan Gibson

The word love appears 362 times in the New King James version of the Bible, so we've got a lot of material from which to choose. For this article, though, let's see what wisdom we can glean from the Book of Proverbs.

#1: Proverbs 19:8 speaks of one who "loves his own soul," so let's start there. One who loves his own soul will work diligently to keep it (19:16), guard it (22:5), preserve it (16:17), and avoid anything that would destroy it (6:32; 21:23).

#2: One who loves his own soul will love that which is designed to nourish his soul—the knowledge, wisdom, and understanding that comes from God's word. "He who gets wisdom loves his own soul... (19:8). Love wisdom and it will "preserve you...keep you...promote you...bring you honor...place on your head an ornament of grace...give you a crown of glory" (4:5-9). Only a fool would despise instruction (1:7); only a fool would wrong his own soul (8:36).

#3: One who loves his own soul will love those who rebuke him. "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you" (Proverbs 9:8). On the other hand, "he who disdains instruction despises his own soul" (15:32). If one loves his own soul, how can he be angry with someone who is trying to save it?

#4: One who loves the souls of others will correct and rebuke them. If those "whom the Lord loves He corrects" (3:12), shouldn't we do the same? How can we claim to love someone when we don't have the courage to turn them back to the truth? "Open rebuke is better than love carefully concealed" (27:5).

#5: One who loves the souls of others will forgive and forget. "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (28:13). They can count on it from God, but wouldn't it be a shame if they didn't receive it from us? "Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins" (10:12).

#6: It doesn't matter how much one has if he doesn't have love. You just can't put a price tag on the genuine love we both extend and receive. "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred" (15:17). "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold" (22:1).

#7: Not everything that is called love is really love, at least not as God defines it. Listen to the adulteress in 7:18: "Come, let us take our fill of love until morning; let us delight ourselves with love." She may call it love, but it's not. She doesn't love God's word; nor does she love her own soul, the soul of her husband, or the soul of the one whom she enticed. Love and lust are not the same, and it's high time we learned that lesson. Any "love" that acts in conflict with truth is not really love.