

While reading in 1 Thessalonians I became aware of a misconception that I have had at times of what holiness is. Paul writes, “May the Lord cause you to increase and abound *in love* for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness.” (1 Thess 3:12-13) Here we read that in love for the brethren and all men we will be established blameless and holy.

I was reminded of how a couple of years into my walk with Jesus I started having the mindset that holiness was defined in what I did and did not do. I thought I was holy and more righteous than others because I didn’t practice particular sins, and didn’t watch/listen to certain things, and had laid down areas in my life. A verse I would often use was, “without holiness, no one will see the Lord!” (Heb 12:14) As a dear brother pointed out, we often quote this verse without quoting the first part which says, “Pursue peace with all men *and* holiness ...” Without pursuing peace with all men, so much as it depend on us, no man will see the Lord either. I am not saying that being obedient to the Spirit and allowing Him to set us free from sin and change how we walk, talk, and act in this world is not a part of becoming “holy as He is holy.” But, when we put our trust in our own righteousness, which is filthy rags in God’s sight, and think we have attained to some place in God because of our own ability, we begin to forget our former purification from our sins and become blind or short-sighted. (2 Pet 1:9)

“But now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is *love*.” (1 Cor 13:13) God puts love at the utmost importance in our lives: “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for *God is love*.” (1 Jn 4:7) “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the *love of God*, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn 5:1-3) There is a very close relationship between keeping His commandments and walking in love. Earlier in first John we read, “But whoever keeps His word, in him the *love of God* has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.” (1 Jn 2:5-6) We know that Jesus is the spotless Lamb of God and He walked in love always, in every circumstance—even to lay down His own life and go to the cross to be the propitiation for our sins. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another ... if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us.” (1 Jn 4:11-12)

“Now the purpose of the commandment is *love* from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith.” (1 Tim 1:5) “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy and blameless before Him, *in love*.” (Eph 1:4) What a testimony was written of the Thessalonians: “As to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” (1 Thess 4:9) May our hearts desire be in accord with Paul’s prayer for the Philippians: “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” Perhaps Paul’s prayer sums up best what the Lord was trying to speak to my heart. He wants our love to continue to increase so that we would be blameless, having the fruit of righteousness which come through Jesus alone.

“By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.” (Jn 15:8-11)