

LOVE AS INTERPERSONAL

Virgil Warren, PhD

Both vertical and horizontal relationships have the same interpersonal character. Experiencing the horizontal helps us understand the vertical; understanding the vertical motivates us to do the horizontal. In both directions, love is the characterizing feature. It includes most aspects of interpersonal associations and originates so many of the virtues involved in them.

Love is accomplished by the mechanism implicit in the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12), which restates the Second Great Commandment (Leviticus 19:18). “Doing / for others / as you would have others do for you” parallels “Love / your neighbor / as yourself.” That means love is something we “do” rather than something we feel or say. Love is a pattern of doing—self-giving for the joy of “others” without qualification.

“*Neighbor*” in the Second Great Commandment was not a restrictive or contrasting term, but as a positive reference to someone considered close. The nature of personal relationship removes any distinction in worth between people of different races (Luke 10:25-37), societal statuses, economic levels, sex, age, or even between one person and a personal enemy (Matthew 5:43-48).

“*As yourself*” contrasts with impersonal ways of treating other people. It negates manipulating them by doing “so” they will do for us. It negates not taking initiative or doing only “because” others have done for us. It sets aside the conditional love of doing “if” others do for us. It overrides retaliation for doing “what” others have done to us.

To love, we must project consciousness from behind our own eyes to behind the eyes of the other. We cannot simply ask what we would want done for us because people are not the same. Projecting consciousness enables the socialization process, which turns individuals into social beings.

Love by projecting consciousness requires us to take the initiative; so we do good in return even for evil, because other people need that regardless of how they themselves have acted. Taking initiative represents a healthy trait that improves self-image, but it also enables us to reverse the downward spiral of deteriorating relationship that issues from revenge. Doing good in return for evil illustrates love at its most mature level.

Love as expressive of proper relationship requires that neither person is reduced to zero. Manipulating others through force, anger, emotion, money does not retain them as individuals. Letting people run over us means letting them manipulate us and reduce us to zero. In either case the process ceases to be interpersonal. People must love their neighbors as themselves.

Love as interpersonal action replaces the competition model with the cooperation model. The goal is to affirm the other person, to bring joy through self-giving, to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect.

Love produces a number of results present in social relations. On the basis of 1 Corinthians 13:1-8, we can say that love gives real and perceived meaning to our conversation, our abilities, and our activities (**1-3**). That meaningfulness comes because, being interpersonalized, our various actions come into positive contact with other people, which gives meaningfulness by way of relevance to persons. Love contributes a host of other personal qualities necessary for smooth personal interaction: patience, the lack of envy and pride (4), sensitivity to the wants and preferences of other people, the absence of selfishness, the presence of self-control, forgiveness (5), honesty (6), strength, trust, a positive outlook, steadfastness (7), and endurance (8). Love eliminates self-centeredness and competition, and replaces them with qualities that make for friendship.

Love puts people ahead of pleasure, possessions, goals, selfish concerns, power, or ideas. Love develops in interpersonal circumstances because it is interpersonal. So, to be loving, we put ourselves around loving people and imitate what they do. We treat everyone the way we treat our friends as a way of learning to love our enemies.