



First Things First:

MAKING TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS MOST A SIX-WEEK LENTEN STUDY

Join us Wednesday evenings during Great Lent



March 1 First Things First: *Worship*

Dinner Sponsored by the Sunday School

March 8 First Things First: *Community*

Dinner Sponsored by the Choir

March 15 First Things First: *Love*

Dinner Sponsored by the AHEPA/Daughters

March 22 First Things First: *Learning*

Dinner Sponsored by the Young at Heart and Welcome Ministry

March 29 First Things First: *Service*

Dinner Sponsored by the Philoptochos

April 5 First Things First: *Priorities*

Dinner Sponsored by the Young Adults and Bible Studies

EACH WEDNESDAY EVENING SCHEDULE:

- 6:00 pm Pre-Sanctified Liturgy
- 7:15 pm Lenten Dinner provided by one of our ministries
- 7:45 pm Presentation by Father Stavros
- 8:05 pm Small group discussion
- 8:30 pm Concluding remarks and closing prayer



GREAT LENT 2023
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH
TAMPA, FL



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Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be yours as well.
Matthew 6:33



PART THREE: *Love*

LOVE IS...

- There are several Greek words for love - *eros, storge, philia, agape*. St. Paul set the standard for "agape" love. He states that without love, we are accounted as nothing. He described love as patient, kind, not jealous or rude, rejoices in the right. **1 Corinthians 13:1-8**

GOD'S LOVE FOR US

- Everything that God has done for us is an act of love, from the Creation, through the fall, to our redemption in Jesus Christ. Even the fall didn't cause God to abandon or reject us. **Ephesians 2:4-5**
- Our redemption from sin and the fall are made possible only through God's abundantly generous love for us. **John 3:16**
- God's love is often expressed as grace, mercy, and peace. **2 John 1:3**
- There is nothing we can do earn God's love or to lose God's love. **Romans 8:38-39**
- At the Last Supper in His farewell discourse, Jesus invited us to "Abide in My love." According to the Orthodox Study Bible footnotes, the word "abide" shows our union with Christ is intimate and real, dynamic and vitalizing. **John 15:9**

OUR LOVE FOR GOD

- After the Lord gave Moses the law, Moses imparted the cornerstone prayer of the Hebrews, referred to as the Shema, instructing them to not only focus on the letter of the law, but with a heart of love for God. **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**
- Professing our love for God is a prominent theme in the Psalms. **Psalms 18:1-2**
- When Jesus was tested to answer the question "What is the great commandment?" He narrowed all 613 commandments down to two. **Matthew 22:35-40**
- In the Gospels, Jesus emphasizes how we are to prioritize a loving relationship with Him.
 - No one can serve two masters. **Matthew 6:24**
 - He who loves his life will lose it. **John 12:25**
 - Do you love Me more than these? **John 21:15**

OUR LOVE FOR OUR NEIGHBOR

- In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus revolutionized how we are to love our neighbor because He redefined who our neighbor is. **Luke 10:36-37**
- In the Sermon on the Mount, He taught that we are to love our enemies. **Matthew 5:43-44**
- During the beginning of His farewell discourse, He commanded that we love one another and that our whole identity as His followers is based on love. **John 13:34-35**
- Jesus demonstrated this love by enduring the Passion as the ultimate act of love. **John 15:13**
- As the early church was being established, the emphasis was always on love. There are countless verses to look to for guidance and encouragement on how to show love. **1 Corinthians 16:14, Galatians 5:22-23, 1 John 4:18-19**



SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-8	<i>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. 4 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; 5 it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 8 Love never ends.</i>
EPHESIANS 2:4-5	<i>4 But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)</i>
JOHN 3:16	<i>For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.</i>
2 JOHN 1:3	<i>Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love.</i>
ROMANS 8:38-39	<i>38 For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.</i>
JOHN 15:9	<i>As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you; abide in My love.</i>
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-5	<i>4 "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; 5 and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.</i>
PSALM 18:1-2	<i>I love Thee, O Lord, my strength. 2 The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in Whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.</i>
MATTHEW 22:35-40	<i>35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, to test Him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" 37 And he said to Him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets."</i>
MATTHEW 6:24	<i>No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.</i>
JOHN 12:25	<i>He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.</i>
JOHN 21:15	<i>When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?" He said to Him, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He said to him, "Feed My lambs."</i>
LUKE 10:36-37	<i>36 Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" 37 He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."</i>
MATTHEW 5:43-44	<i>43 "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.</i>
JOHN 13:34-35	<i>34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."</i>
JOHN 15:13	<i>Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.</i>
1 CORINTHIANS 16:14	<i>Let all that you do be done in love.</i>
GALATIANS 5:22-23	<i>22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.</i>
1 JOHN 4:18-19	<i>18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. 19 We love, because He first loved us.</i>

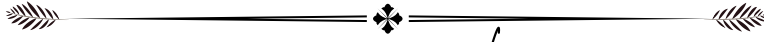


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PART THREE: *Love*



1. St. Paul tells us that love is patient and kind, not rude, and optimistic. Which of these is the most challenging in our society today? How can we as Orthodox Christians change that?
2. According to John 3:16, God loved us so much, He gave us His Son. God's sacrificial love is exceptionally generous. How can you show love with a generous spirit?
3. What gets in the way of us loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind?
4. When today's culture thinks of Christians, what do you think is the first thing they of? With your table, go back and read John 13:34-35. Do we as individuals reflect this "new" commandment well? Do we as a Church?