

## **Spiritual love binds those who experience it both to God and to one another. Thoughts on St Thalassios the Libyan's teaching about love.**

Audio: [http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/misc\\_2023+spiritual-love-binds-those-who-experience-it-both-to-god-and-to-one-another.mp3](http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/misc_2023+spiritual-love-binds-those-who-experience-it-both-to-god-and-to-one-another.mp3)

Video: <https://youtu.be/U8jFZEBarlU>

(The text version was read in the video and audio, so it differs very slightly from the text)

Text: [http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/misc\\_2023+spiritual-love-binds-those-who-experience-it-both-to-god-and-to-one-another.docx](http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/misc_2023+spiritual-love-binds-those-who-experience-it-both-to-god-and-to-one-another.docx)

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1. An all-embracing and intense longing for God binds those who experience it both to God and to one another.
2. An intellect that has acquired spiritual love does not have thoughts unworthy of this love about anyone.

On Love, Self-control and Life in Accordance with the Intellect First Century, St Thalassios the Libyan, Philokalia, Volume 2

These words of Saint Thalassios remind my poor soul of the words that we say in preparation for communion "As for me, I said in mine ecstasy: Every man is a liar." (Psalm 115:2)

We are liars, aren't we? We say that we love God and yet we do not love our neighbor. We excuse or perhaps more often do not even notice seemingly small omissions of love for our neighbor. We are not completely bound to our neighbor as St Thalassios says, and as our Lord also indicates as an absolutely necessity for salvation in His high Priestly prayer: "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as We are" (John 17:11)

We have petty thoughts about people and judgments and irritations and bad attitudes and bad first impressions, not to mention gossip and slander and purposefully hurting our brother. Since sin includes our bad thoughts, most of our sins are against our brother, which means that we are proving over and over again that we do not have an "all-embracing and intense longing for God" and that we do not love God.

May God help us poor hypocrites. We profess to love our God and yet we do not love our brother. We cannot love God without loving our brother first. The Apostle of Love makes this very clear, and our ignorance or outright defiance of this commandment does nothing to make it less true: "If any man say: I love God, and hateth his brother; he is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he seeth, how can he love God whom he seeth not?" (1 John 4:20)

We learn to love God through loving our brother and if we love our brother, and of course our brother includes our enemy, then we will learn to have an "all-embracing and intense longing for God." Saint Thalassios, as do all of the fathers, and the entire mind of the church, teaches that spiritual love must be acquired. It is not given to us without cost, or without our effort. One can even say that salvation is the process of acquiring spiritual love.

How is it that we can be bound to our brother even though our brother does not consider himself bound to us and may even be our enemy? How is it that we can have peace with someone who is not acting peaceably? And what about the person that we, in a limited way because of our weakness, feel bound to in love and yet we have conflicts with, and although we might consider ourselves blameworthy to a small degree, we consider the other to be more blameworthy?

It is certain that our Lord Jesus Christ had peace with everyone. He had temporal worldly conflicts with people but His heart was not moved to anger or judgment. This is because He had an “all-embracing and intense longing for God,” His Father, first as being God and therefore eternally \*being\* love, and second, as being man fully anointed with the Holy Spirit and therefore possessing an “all-embracing and intense longing for God”, and therefore, and never having even the smallest “thoughts unworthy of this love about anyone.”

This is why we should consider any lapse in love for our neighbor to be as dangerous as being bitten by a rattlesnake. If we saw a snake or heard his rattle, we would back up immediately, and yet we are often not even aware of how much we judge our brother and how poisonous this judgment is for our souls.

I've heard thousands of confessions. And in only a small percentage of those confessions if I heard someone say something like this: "I don't love God because I don't love my neighbor." Shouldn't this be the first thing we confess, and with bitter tears? How can we be worthy of the love of God when we do not love our neighbor? Any lapse in love for our neighbor, no matter how small it appears to us (and mostly, we are not aware of anything at all!), shows that we do not love God, and the whole point of our life is to become love, since God is love! We were made to love God and we learn to love God through loving our neighbor.

Many times, the holy fathers would spontaneously write a prayer based on the meditation that they were giving. This is especially true of fathers like Saint Isaac the Syrian, and I have taken to copying out many of his prayers, and also those of any others. And sometimes, in my poor way, I try to emulate them, so here is a short prayer, a confession.

**O God, Thou Who art Love**, I speak of loving Thee, and yet I do not love my neighbor because of my judgments and my sins. Bind me to my neighbor and guard me against any thoughts about my neighbor that are unworthy of thy love. And especially O Lord, guard me from thoughts unworthy of Thy love against those who are close to me and with whom I have conflicts.