

# Thirukkural and the Bible

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## Abstract

*This study examines two world classics that have held significant sway in the world, the Thirukkural from Tamil literature and the Holy Bible, and the moral philosophy and ethical vision they express. Through analysis of selected chapters and verses, the paper compares the role of selected principles of love, self-control, purity, patience, and restraint in the welfare of the individual and society that are upheld in both texts. The comparison and interpretation method used in this research shows a strong connection between Thiruvalluvar's spiritual ideals and biblical moral teachings. The texts stress that personal goodness and community harmony go together and that moral discipline brings peace and grace from God. The study highlights the enduring significance of these ethical principles in modern day and age, and their ability to lead mankind toward righteousness, compassion, and self-mastery.*

**Keywords:** Bible, Family Values, Moral Values, Thirukkural, Wisdom.

## Introduction

Individuals who live by their own wills tend to get caught up in the complexities of life, and may not have the mental force to rise above them, resulting in suffering. Those who live according to moral values and the discipline, however, have peace of mind, and take pleasure and pain with the same attitude. How to Overcome Tension (p. 51) tells us by Banu Kumar, "The body and the soul working together is the mind working in motion; the dignity of a man lies in the dignity of his mind." Throughout the ages, saints, scholars and spiritual guides have supported moral codes as fundamental rules for living righteously. In this respect, both Thirukkural and Bible uphold morality of the person, through their distinct but complementary teachings. Thirukkural emphasizes on good conduct as ways to create a good life, and the Bible tells about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ that are the basis for good life. Though differing in religious and cultural backgrounds, both texts have a similar moral vision, stressing values like righteousness, compassion, self-discipline, and moral responsibilities. In order to achieve this, a comparative analysis is conducted in this study, which focuses on some personal moral qualities in both pieces. Read both from the religious and secular perspectives, these texts emphasize universal principles that promote human well-being and moral sensitivity. Hence, the study's purpose is to remind the society of the common moral principles that can lead them to a more harmonious and principled living.

## Scope of Study

There are two parts to the Bible: Old Testament and New Testament. Thirukkural comprises 1330 couplets which are universal truths and values of ethics and virtue. As a result of the scope and limitations of this study, the selected portions of the study are considered to be compared. The choice of Bible for the month is the Old Testament Book of Proverbs (Neethimozhigal) as it gives a focus on wisdom and good morals. The chapters on Love (Anbudaimai), Self Control (Adakkamudaimai), Avoiding the Desire for Others (Piranil Vizhaiyaamai), Abstaining from Intoxicants (Kallunnamai) and Patience (Vegulamai) are examined. As a collection, these choices convey the common moral and ethical commitment of both texts.

## Thirukkural and the Bible

People are social animals, relying on others and every living thing for their survival. This natural interdependence demands virtues of love, restraint, chastity, control of anger and abstinence from intoxicants, all of which are a sign of the integrity of the person. These moral considerations are reflected in the Thirukkural and the Bible, as detailed below.

## Love as the Essence of Life

Love is a positive powerful energy that elevates, is a driving force of life and a power that can change the world. It involves many aspects such as loving of loved ones, loving of all living things, feelings of sympathy for others who are suffering, and awakened feelings of humanity because of others' suffering. The scope of love is immeasurable. One who knows the basic law of nature: "The world belongs to us all", gets his/her heart full of love. This is a heart that is not subject to envy and hatred, is not at odds when things go wrong and doesn't dwell on the misdeeds of others, and keeps its spirit pure. Love is a virtue which raises the human spirit up to a higher level: Love is patient, love is kind... It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). It also declares, "Love covers all sins" (Proverbs 10:12), which means that an unconditional love cleanses the heart and eliminates sin. Love is the very essence and the breath of life to every living entity, similarly Thiruvalluvar says, He speaks of love as being part of the human soul (Kural 79), and as not being to be restricted (Kural 71). He says those who are relatively a source of love give their wealth along with themselves to the benefit of others (Kural 72). Moreover, love is the basis for a virtuous action, and also the basis for valor: "Love supports virtue and valor too,— (Kural 76). Thiruvalluvar also points out that love results in long-term human relationships: 'அன்பினும் ஆர்வம் உடைமை அதுநனும் நண்பென்னும் நாடாச் சிறப்பு' (Anpu inum arvam uṭaimai atuṇnum, nanpennum nāṭāccirappu). "Love begets affection, and affection begets the idea of excellence, friendship" (Kural 74). He also suggests that a life lived in the spirit of love is deserving of eternal admiration, for love clears away everything less than noble, and only good things flourish. This is the theme of M.S.Udayamurthy in Ennangal (p.58): "All the good things like kindness, truth, growth, help, compassion, make one's life heavenly". Both the Thirukkural and the Bible agree that love can eradicate hate, clear the mind and promote harmony. So, the principle of moral and spiritual life is love.

## The Importance of Guarding One's Speech

Education and money can create pride when it is about the self. This frequently results in a feeling of superiority in relation to those who are thought to be better and inferiority in relation to those who are thought to be worse. These attitudes are often displayed in speech, and can be destructive to other people and at times can create problems for the speaker. The Bible counsels us to be careful about what we say, and to remember that many words lead to sin, while a few are

worth what we are likely to lose: “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (Proverbs 10:19); “He who guards his mouth preserves his life” (Proverbs 13:3). A key principle to these teachings is that nice words bring a smile, hurtful words bring a wound to the heart. Thiruvalluvar also shares this wisdom in the Thirukkural: “யாகாவா ராயினும் நாகாக்க காவாக்கால் சோகாப்பர் சொல்லிழுக்குப் பட்டு” (Yākāvā rāyinuṁ nākākkā kāvākkāl cōkāppar colliḷukkup paṭṭu). “Keep your mouth shut in every situation, else you will be sad” (Kural 127). Again Thiruvalluvar states that without control over speech, there will not be any righteousness at all. He cautions: “Aṭaṅkāmai ā iruḷ uyttu viṭum” (or “அடங்காமை ஆறிருள் உய்த்து விடும்”). A person that is not self controlled goes into deep darkness (Kural 121). Hence, self-restraint has to be seen as the basis of life: “காக்க பொருளா அடக்கத்தின் ஆக்கம் அதனினாங்கு இல்லை உயிர்க்கு” (kākkap poruḷā aṭakkatthai ākkam ataṇiṇūṅk illai uyir kukku). “Self-control is considered the greatest virtue: Without it, there is no other virtue to help the life of a person” (Kural 122). In the Purananuru, it is also explained that persons themselves derive their good and evil experiences: “Tīṭum naṇṇum pirartara vārā” (தீதும் நன்றும் பிறர்தர வாரா) (Puranaanooru.192) So, both the Thirukkural and the Bible make it clear that it is essential to be careful with your words and to exercise restraint. To live a good and harmonious life, it is necessary to have a clear sense of what is and is not to be spoken.

### **Not Wanting Another Man or Woman to be One’s Spouse**

Marriage is a holy union between a man and woman, a union of love, trust and virtue. The idea of Illaram (domestic virtue) is to stress the primary mission of a couple to live a disciplined and righteous life! In the modern world, however, the glamour and fallibility of self-indulgence have been undermining this ideal more and more. The situation of diminishing moral standards is distressing to see, leaving the dignity of marital bondage to be undermined. Formerly love and desire were accompanied by restraint and discretion, and only certain people strayed from the road of virtue. Science and technology have made significant strides, with definite benefits, but also adding to the loss of self-discipline. The increasing rate at which married persons break their vows is a particular concern to the moral fibre of the future generations. If not controlled, this kind of indiscipline is a great threat to the welfare of the society. Such actions are clearly condemned in the Bible: “He who sleepeth with a man’s wife is a fool” (Proverbs 6:29). Likewise, Thiruvalluvar strongly rejects the lust for another man’s wife, ‘எனைத்துணையர் ஆயினும் என்னாம் தினைத்துணையும் தேரான் பிறனில் புகல்’ (Enaittunaiyar āyinuṁ enṇām tinaittunaiyum tērāṇ pirāṇil pukal). “What though a man be greatly endowed with learning and wealth? “He who desires another man’s wife has no virtue at all (Kural 144). Thiruvalluvar also says that chastity is seen as a virtue of women; abstaining from another man’s wife is a necessary discipline for men. He cautions against this unworthy act, saying that it brings four vices, enmity, sin, fear and disgrace upon him (Kural 146), and leads to loss of honor and life of misery (Kural 145). He also stresses the fact that if life goes on without morals, family life will not flourish. The message of the Thirukkural and the Bible therefore emphasizes faithfulness and moral self-control. They affirm that the absence of desire for another’s spouse is vital to the practice of individual purity and to the cultivation and strengthening of love in family life and society.

### **Those Who Drink Alcohol, Beware of Poison**

Alcohol use in today’s fast-paced world is often considered as an emotional getaway. It often results in destruction, crime and loss of self control, however. The human mind can under its influence become an accomplice of immoral acts like murder, stealing, adultery, etc. And that helps to involve in social and moral deterioration. The Bible clearly warns against the use of intoxicants:

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler; he who is led astray by them is not wise (Proverbs 20:1). It also warns the person that it will ultimately hurt them: “At the last it will bite like a serpent, and will sting like an adder; Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will speak perverse things” (Proverbs 23:32-33). Likewise, Thiruvalluvar condemns the drunkenness. He vividly compares drunkards to the dead: ‘துஞ்சினார் செத்தாரின் வேறல்லர் எஞ்ஞான்றும் நஞ்சுண்பார் கள்ளுண்பவர்’ (Tuñcinār settāriṇ vēṛallar eññāṇṇum nañcu uṇṇar kaḷuṇṇavar). When someone sleeps he is just like the dead, likewise he who drinks the drink is like the one who eats poison (Kural 926). From this, Thiruvalluvar concludes that drugs ruin intelligence, cloud the judgment and invite the vice. Therefore, the Thirukkural and Bible teach that overindulgence in alcohol leads to moral and spiritual deterioration which ultimately affects an individual’s peace of mind, integrity and social responsibilities.

### To Protect Oneself, Guard Against Anger

One of the major enemies of mankind is anger. It fogs the mind, encourages violence and leads to inner turmoil. Anger, fear and love are a part of our nature and not all emotions can be logically explained, as noted by John B. Watson (A. V. Subramanian, The Manifestation of Fear in Agapporul, p. 40). Of all these, anger can become uncontrollable and cause people to lose their intelligence and clarity of thought. The Bible is warning us of the consequences of being angry: “A fool shows his annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult” (Proverbs 12:16); “A hot-tempered person must pay the penalty” (Proverbs 19:19). These teachings stress the need to be patient and disciplined to maintain harmony. Likewise, Thiruvalluvar emphasizes the negative impact of anger. “நகையும் உவகையும் கொல்லும் சினத்தின் பகையும் உளவோ பிற” (Nakaiyum uvakaiyum kollum ciṇattiṇ pakaiyum uḷavō pira) – He observes that anger destroys happiness and peace. “Can there be any greater foe than anger which takes away laughter and joy? (Kural 304). He further warns: “தன்னைத்தான் காக்கின் சினம் காக்க காவாக்கால் தன்னையே கொல்லும் சினம்”. Tannait tāṇ kākkiṇ ciṇam kākkā kāvākkāl tannaiyē kollum ciṇam. When a man wants to save himself he should save himself from anger; otherwise, anger will eat him up (Kural 305). Thiruvalluvar also discusses forgiveness and self-restraint: “இன்னா செயினும் புணரின் வெகுளாமை நன்று” (Inṇā ceyinum puṇariṇ vekuḷāmai nanṇu). Although one may be injured, it is better not to be angry at the person who caused the injury the next time he visits him (Kural 308). He says that patience is the remedy to overcome anger. One who is patient achieves a higher state of mind and can respond with goodness to those who hurt him. This is also captured in the order of the chapters of the Thirukkural, that when naming “Inna Seiyyaamai” (Not doing harm) it comes after “Vegulaamai” (Forbearance) and to underscore moral progression. This is his succinct statement of the principle: “இன்னா செய்தாரை ஒறுத்தல் அவர்நாண நன்னயம் செய்து விடல்”. Avoid arguing with your child. (Inṇā ceytārai oṛuttal avar nāṇa nannayam ceytu viṭal). Shame evil doers by giving them good for evil (Kural 314). The Israelites were told in Exodus 23:5 to feed those who were hungry and to give water to those who were thirsty so that they might be satisfied. This moral rule is also described in the Bible: If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink (Proverbs 25:21). Therefore, the Thirukkural and the Bible both impart that the inner peace that is found through overcoming anger requires patience, forgiveness and kindness. Anger and compassion are taught to be the supreme values, so that people can live harmoniously and morally elevated lives.

### Conclusion

The purity of mind is the basis of a meaningful life. If there be noble thoughts, then naturally good actions, and then good actions brings success, harmony and inner peace. The Thirukkural

and the Bible make this statement from different cultural backgrounds and spiritual understanding, but with a similar philosophy of ethics. M. S. Udayamurthy reminds us in Ennangal (p. 28) that “Thoughts become faith, Faith becomes action, action becomes habit, and habit becomes character.” This awareness reinforces the value of initiating positive thinking and developing healthy routines to benefit the mind. The Thirukkural is a universal work that goes beyond religious lines - a guide to ethical living and the Bible remains a timeless book of morality for all people regardless of their religious beliefs. They have united to say that good behavior and virtues are necessary for personal development and progress of human beings.

### **Research Findings**

This comparative study shows that the Thirukkural as well as the Bible emphasizes the following moral principles in all of them in a consistent manner: Love is the most basic force that brings about the eradication of sin and harmony; Control of speech is essential for a peaceful and disciplined life; Chastity and fidelity are the basis for good family values; Abstinence from alcohol is necessary for preserving mental clarity and moral integrity; Avoidance of anger and practicing kindness are the highest forms of moral virtue. Together they teach us that the real power of human life is spiritual well-being and that moral self-discipline is the heart of spiritual progress.

Related themes for further comparative studies: Wisdom, Diligence, and the role of the virtuous women, Parental respect, and the concept of Divine justice in the Thirukkural and the Bible. Areas for future research: Further comparisons of related themes like wisdom, diligence and role of virtuous women, parental respect and the concept of divine justice in Thirukkural and the Bible. These questions would further throw light on the common ethical and humanistic heritage of Tamil and Biblical thought.

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