

## Love Your Brother

To me, the word "love" is one of the the most pleasant words I have ever heard and had the pleasure to use. I do not know of anyone who does not like the word "love." But the funny thing is, many Christians sometimes act like they have never even heard of the word when it comes to their brethren. The apostle John, who is known as the apostle of love, had much to say about love (1 John 4:7-10).

This discussion relates maturity to love. Being mature is nothing more than being fully developed. When it comes to love, children of God are seldom fully developed. We must strive to understand the nature of love. Most of our relationships are reciprocal, but the relationship between God and man is not (Romans 5:8). For example, I love my wife and she loves me. However, the love that God has for man loves in spite of anyone loving back. The mark of a Christian is love, which is demonstrated in the sacrifice which Jesus made and in charity which we must show (1 John 3:11-18).

In the Gospels, Jesus taught His disciples about love over twenty times. Why do you think He did this? I believe He emphasized love because He knew it would be difficult for them to love one another. It is hard for us also. Thankfully, however, Jesus saw more potential in us than we do. John spoke about either loving one another or loving God approximately twenty-two times in 1 John. The New Testament is full of references regarding loving our brethren (Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 1:22). This love is an earnest and zealous love.

Love is something we have to work at, just as an Olympic contestant has to work to develop their skills. Christian love is not just a feeling; it is a matter of the will. We show love to others when we treat them the same way God treats us. God forgives us, so we forgive others. God is kind to us, so we are kind to others. We must constantly work at this if we are to succeed. I want to love my brother from the heart.

Despite all the references to love in the New Testament, one of the most successful tactics of Satan is how he distorts our perception of love. Frequently, he tries to make us limit our love for each other. In Matthew 18:21-35, Jesus tried to teach His disciples about the need for forgiveness. When Peter suggested forgiving someone up to seven times, he thought he was going the "extra mile." The Jewish rabbis taught that forgiving three times was enough, but Peter was willing to go

all the way up to seven times. But Jesus taught that forgiveness should be unlimited.

One of the major problems which we have with each other is that we are unwilling to go the distance with our brethren. We would rather continue to foster envy and hate than correct the situation. Instead of letting things go, we want to hold on to them and carry a grudge to the grave. One thing that will surely destroy a congregation is placing limits on love. When Paul encouraged Christians to put on love and serve each other with love (Colossians 3:14; Galatians 5:13), he meant love which knows no boundaries. Are you ready to pledge a love with no boundaries? I want to love my brother, no matter how many times I must forgive him.

Another disturbing aspect concerning love among brethren is the problem of racism. Some brethren still harbor ill-will against someone whose skin color is other than white. But how can a Christian and have feelings of hatred and prejudice against someone else? Acts 10:34-35 affirms that God is no respecter of persons, and Galatians 3:28 says that we are "*all one in Christ Jesus.*" The Good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 gives us a great example of a person who had no racial prejudice. He helped the stranger when no one else would. This is a man who looked beyond the outside appearances. When God was selecting someone to rule as king over the land of Israel, He did the same (1 Samuel 16:7). I want to love my brother, regardless of background or skin color.

I am not sure why human nature is this way, but our natural tendency is to look out for Number One. Too many times we go around tearing one another down and putting our own interests above others (Philippians 2:3-4). If we bite and devour each other, we do not show that we are born of God (Galatians 5:13-15). The nurse's motto, "Above all, do no harm." That means looking out for our enemies' best interest. If we love our brethren, we have to be prepared to put up with an awful lot sometimes (Ephesians 4:1-2; 1 John 4:21). I know this is difficult, but maturity in love means putting aside pettiness and grumblings and setting ourselves to the task of building up the body of Christ and spreading the gospel.

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