

## Love One Another

'I give you a new commandment; that you should love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you too should love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:34 & 35). 'This is My commandment; that you love one another just as I have loved you ... This is what I command you; that you love one another' (John 15:12 & 17).

'For this is the message which you have heard from the first, that we should love one another ... We know that we have passed over out of death into Life by the fact that we love our fellow believers. He who does not love, abides in spiritual death ... And this is God's commandment; that we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus the Messiah and that we should love one another just as He has commanded us' (1 John 3:11 & 23). 'Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and he who loves his brethren is begotten of God and is coming to understand God. He who does not love has not become acquainted with God. He does not and never did know Him intimately, for God is love ... Beloved, if God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another ... No man has at any time yet seen God, but if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is brought to completion, to its full maturity in us ... If anyone says "I love God" and hates his born-again brother or sister is a liar, for he who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen. And this command we have from Him; that he who loves God shall love his fellow believer also' (1 John 4:7 to 21).

'Whoever says he is in the Light, and yet hates his born-again brother (or sister) is in darkness even until now. Whoever loves his born-again brother (or sister), abides in the Light, and in him there is no occasion for stumbling; but he who hates his born-again brother (or sister) is in darkness and walking in the dark; he is straying and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes' (1 John 2:9 to 11).

'If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a clanging cymbal. If I have prophetic powers and understand all the secret truths, and if I have enough faith so that I can remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. Even if I give to the poor but have not love, I gain nothing. Love endures long, is patient and kind, is never envious, is not boastful, does not display itself haughtily, is not rude, arrogant and inflated with pride and does not act unbecomingly. Love is not self-seeking, it is not touchy, it pays no attention to a wrong, it does not rejoice at injustice, but rejoices when truth prevails. Love bears up under anything, is ever ready to believe the best of every person and it endures everything. Love never fails' (1 Corinthians 13:1 to 8).

Without love we are just an empty noise. The above scriptures tell us in no uncertain terms, that we are to obediently and willingly love all believers and no one is exempt. To some, loving people is a small thing, but we need to be obedient in small things as in great things, because the small things are as great as the great things. We have no right to pick and choose whom we will love. Even if they go to another church fellowship, or accept a slightly different slant on the scriptures, or are at a different level in their walk with God, or even if we know somebody who is hard to love for whatever reason, we must, by God's command, love them and accept them anyway. There are some people who have been saved from the most appalling conditions; brand new baby Christians who are still learning what God expects from His people and they can be difficult, but love them we must. We must not allow them to slip back into darkness, and loving them is initially, the only way they will grow. We do not have to condone bad behaviour but we do need to love new Christians, even when they misbehave. When people come to us with questions, often it is not a verbal answer they want – they want to be reassured they are loved. They are seeking to be comforted. Questions are a way of saying 'help me to feel loved'. Showing love is an act of our will, not an emotion.

We must love all Christians as much as we love our friends and family. We are not given the choice. God first loved us so we must love others (1 John 4:19). We are not to judge others or criticise them but are to accept them wholeheartedly, with all their idiosyncrasies and weaknesses. We are to support those who are going through tough times, bearing in mind, that one day we will all have to endure a testing time in our lives. We are to bear one another's burdens and so fulfil the Law

(Galatians 6:2). We are not to reject or withdraw from someone who is going through the fire. To withdraw at a time like that is not showing love. 'Love one another with brotherly (or sisterly) love; showing honour to one another as members of one family' (Romans 12:10).

'Owe no man anything except to love one another; for he (or she) who loves their neighbour has fulfilled the Law' (Romans 13:8). What is the righteous requirement of the Law of Moses? It is to love one another. 'God has done what the Law could not do, in that it was weak in the flesh. Sending His own Son in the flesh as an offering for sin ... so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fully met in us who live not in the way of the flesh but in the way of the Spirit' (Romans 8:3 & 4). We are not required to keep the Laws of sacrifice because Jesus was the ultimate sacrifice, once for all (Hebrews 7:27), but we are required to keep the Laws regarding love. The two great commandments are to love the Lord and love our neighbour. 'One of them asked which commandment is greatest and most important in the Law, and Jesus replied, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind (that is your will and understanding). This is the greatest and first commandment and the second is like it; you shall love your neighbour as yourself. The Law and the prophets (the Old Testament) hang (depend) on these two commandments"' (Matthew 22:35 to 40). 'The whole Law is fulfilled in one word; you shall love your neighbour as you love yourself' (Galatians 5:14).

There is no point in evangelism unless we show love to one another. 'The goal of our instruction is to love with a pure heart, a clear conscience and sincere faith. Many have missed the mark on this matter and have wandered away into vain discussions and useless talk' (1 Timothy 1:5 & 6). Pastors, preachers, teachers and any church leader should be aiming to produce love within the church. If they are not actively doing that, then everything else they teach will be empty idle talk or vain discussion. A lot of so-called Christian activity is misdirected because it is not aimed at producing the one thing that has to be our objective – love. Our walk with God should not be just a religious procedure ... it must be producing the fruit of love (Galatians 5:22). Everyone needs to learn to love or they are missing the whole point of the salvation message and wasting time. Most church activities are not aimed at producing love; more likely aimed at producing new buildings, doctrine, politics, sports results or current events.

If we are to claim to be 'born-again' we must have love. The words 'born-again' have become just another Christian cliché. It is sometimes used by people who want to appear respectable but do not want to change their lifestyle for God. They use the phrase 'born-again' as a kind of 'passport' to heaven. They do not want to be transformed by the Word of God, but they want to think of themselves as 'nice' 'church going' 'Christian' people, without any commitment to genuinely serving God and walking the narrow path set before us. 'Since by your obedience to the Truth you have purified your soul, love one another, from a pure heart. You have been born-again, not from mortal seed but from the immortal, by the Word of God' (1 Peter 1:22 & 23). What is the evidence of being born-again? Loving our fellow believer. Being saved is much more than a change of a label. Salvation is more than walking to the front of a church and quoting a 'sinners prayer' or any other kind of rigmarole. Being saved is a total life changing experience and if the life has not changed, then the words 'born-again' are hollow.

God's love is a type of love a person cannot have unless they are genuinely born-again, and His love is the evidence that we know God. 'Whoever keeps His Word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. This is how we know we are in Him' (1 John 2:5). 'Faith, hope and love remain, but the greatest of these is love. Pursue this love and desire spiritual gifts' (1 Corinthians 13:13 & 14:1). It is good to desire spiritual gifts, but our priority should be love. God imparts His love for us by the Holy Spirit and by the Word of God. 'The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit Who was given to us' (Romans 5:5). The Word of God and the Holy Spirit working together is what changes us. During creation, we see that the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) hovered over the earth, then He spoke things into existence (Genesis 1:2 & 3). When the spoken Word (Jesus; Revelation 19:13) and the Holy Spirit worked together, creation took place.

'In Godliness, develop brotherly love and in brotherly love, develop Christian love; for as these qualities are yours, they will keep you from being unfruitful ... for whoever lacks these qualities is spiritually blind' (2 Peter 1:7 to 9). Brotherly love means to love our fellow believers, family and close friends; Christian love is the divine Holy Spirit given love, that gives us love for our enemies; that loves the people who persecute us; that loves the people who do not understand us; that loves the people who are different ... that love is the pinnacle of our Christian walk. It was that love that caused Jesus to ask the Father to forgive the Roman soldiers who were in the process of murdering Him, because they did not realise what they were doing! They did not know they were murdering the Messiah of the human race, Who was giving up His life for the very same people who were killing Him (Luke 23:34). That is the love Jesus said, "Greater love has no man, than to lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13). Jesus said friend, but how much more love would we need, to love and forgive someone who was killing us?

People who have been involved in a cult and have since become Christians, are often the ones who 'excommunicate' people from their lives more easily and feel justified in doing so, because that is often all they know. If someone has been involved in a cult and has 'withdrawn' from a fellow Christian; or in other words – excommunicated them from their life – then they need to repent before God and re-establish the fellowship. To break fellowship is to contradict God's word and He never ever does that; so if someone actually believes God is telling them to 'withdraw' from someone, then they are only hearing a lying spirit, sent by the devil for that very purpose ... to break fellowship. We are commanded to love one another. Breaking fellowship with another believer is not showing love. If the Lord has brought someone across our path and we find them too much of a challenge, God may allow us to put that challenge aside for a time; but God will bring the same challenge across our path again and again until we submit to God's command to love the people we consider unlovable. God loves us all equally and we must love everyone equally. We cannot pick and choose.

We are not permitted to be racist, sexist or even have favourites. 'There is now neither Jew nor Gentile; slave nor freeman; male nor female; for we are all one in Jesus our Messiah' (Galatians 3:28). We are not to be snobbish and favour the wealthy. 'My Brethren, pay no servile regard to people; show no prejudice and no partiality. Do not practice the faith of our Lord Jesus, the Lord of glory together with snobbery' (James 2:1). If we feel 'superior' enough to cast a fellow believer out of our life, we are in reality, judging them unfit to be our brother or sister and God calls us a hypocrite. 'Do not judge, criticise and condemn others, so that you may not be judged. For just as you judge and criticise others, so you will be judged and criticised, and in accordance with the measure you use to deal out to others, it will be dealt out to you ... You hypocrite, first get the beam of timber out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the tiny particle out of your brother's (or sister's) eye' (Matthew 7:1 to 5).

Jesus said people will be able to recognise His disciples by the way they love each other. That strongly implies; if we don't love our fellow believer, then we are not a disciple (John 13:35). Disciple means literally 'disciplined one'. That is self-discipline; one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:23). We are to make allowances for one another. 'Walk worthy of the divine calling to which you have been called, with meekness (humility), with patience, bearing with one another and making allowances because you love one another' (Ephesians 4:1 & 2). 'Above all things, have unfailing love for one another, for love covers (forgives and disregards) a multitude of sins (the offences of others)' (1 Peter 4:8). God teaches us to love. 'But concerning brotherly love for all other believers, you have no need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another' (1 Thessalonians 4:9). If we don't love our fellow believer, then clearly, we are not obeying God. 'Since by your obedience to the Truth through the Holy Spirit, you have purified your hearts for the sincere love of the brethren, see that you love one another fervently from a pure heart' (1 Peter 1:22). If we don't love, then we don't know Him intimately and are not mature in God. If we don't love our fellow believer then we are spiritually blind, are straying and are walking in darkness. If we genuinely love God, then we will genuinely love our fellow believer (1 John 2:9 to 11). If we say we are a believer and say we love God, yet choose to dislike another believer, God says we are a liar (1 John 4:20). If we feel we have the right to 'withdraw' from another believer, then we don't know God as well as we think we do, and we don't love God as much as we say we do. Jesus said this: 'If you

really love Me, you will obey My commands ... The person who has My commands and keeps them is the one who really loves Me; and whoever really loves Me will be loved by My Father ... If a person really loves Me he will obey My teaching; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. Anyone who does not really love Me does not obey My teaching, and the teaching you hear is not Mine but comes from the Father Who sent Me' (John 14:15 to 24).

Clearly, from the words of Jesus Himself, if we do not obey His command to love one another, then we don't really love Him because if we really love Jesus, then we would automatically love all our fellow Christians. We cannot say we love Jesus, then go ahead and pick and choose which Christians we want to love. That is disobedience to Jesus' direct instructions to us as His Body. Those are Jesus' words given to Him by the Father, and deliberate disobedience to God's Word is rebellion and stubbornness, and those sins are as evil as witchcraft and idolatry (1 Samuel 15:23). Loving our born-again brothers and sisters is taken very seriously by our Father. Rejection is the opposite of love. If we have rejected a genuine believer, then we do not have love. Even more serious than that, if we have rejected a believer, then we have rejected Jesus and even God Himself. 'He who receives you, receives Me and he who receives Me receives Him Who sent Me' (Matthew 10:40). On the other hand, if we do not receive our fellow Christian, then we are not receiving Jesus, or the One who sent Him. Then further on, the scriptures state clearly; when we fail to do things for the least of the believers, then we are failing to do them for God. If we fail to love our fellow believers, then we are failing to love God (Matthew 25:45).

If you have been rejected by fellow believer/s – and sadly, that does happen – then forgive them and leave them to God to deal with, but you must maintain the correct attitude. It helps to remember that we are not dealing with flesh and blood, but a rebellious lying spirit that is influencing the person/s who rejected you. Even Spirit filled believers can be influenced by evil. Though their actions are hurtful, we must still forgive them and love them, then accept them back when they realise their sin and repent. In God's time, they will come to the point of spiritual maturity where they will love everyone.

If you are the person who has 'withdrawn' from fellowshiping with a believer, or group of believers then you need to examine yourself. You cannot be a Christian who claims to love God, yet reject born-again believers. God calls you a hypocrite and a liar. There is no scriptural excuse for treating any genuine Christian badly. We simply do not have the right and there is no scriptural justification for doing so. To reject a fellow Christian means we are blinded, straying and are walking in darkness (or listening to a lying spirit) (1 John 2:11). If we have been offended by a fellow Christian and are withdrawing from them, then we must forgive them because if we don't, then God will not forgive us (Mark 11:26). The reality is, and it is a sad fact, that not all professing Christians behave the way they should towards other believers. It does happen and it is most frustrating, when some Christians who have known the Lord for some years, still enjoy being immature, and use that as an excuse to behave badly. These immature people hate the truth; they refuse to listen to the wisdom of more mature and knowledgeable believers; they dismiss what is written in the Bible; they lack wisdom, compassion, mercy, kindness and Christian love. Their attitude is: "Why should I help this person or love that person. They brought it on themselves anyway." They hold onto that selfish and rebellious attitude. These immature people prefer to listen to a lying spirit, than listen to Jesus' command to love one another. Truly they are as the Christians Paul describes as clanging cymbals, but we must still love them anyway, and allow God to deal with their attitude. We really need to experience God's deep unfathomable love, in order to have that unquenchable love for all other people. We are going to spend eternity together in the Kingdom of God, so let's put all differences of opinion aside and love one another with brotherly love as we have been commanded.

Amen and God bless you.

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