

Promoting Love

Introduction. The fact that love is important is seen in many passages (1 John 4:7, 12; Matthew 22:35-40; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Colossians 3:14; 1 Peter 1:22). But very few people can explain or define love. The world's concept of love is shallow, confused, and selfish. To most people, love is a mere "emotional attachment" to someone. To them, love is something you easily fall into or out of, depending upon how your needs are met. The love that Jesus demanded of His disciples goes far beyond mere emotional involvement. It is a learned, disciplined, and unselfish response to others.

I. ***Jesus Taught Us To Love Our Enemies***

- A. If one loved his enemies, surely loving family and brethren would be easy (Matthew 5:43-48). In other words, if through the teaching and discipline of Christ, one has conditioned himself to love his enemies, loving others would be easy, especially those who love him.
- B. Certainly, there is no "emotional attachment" to an enemy.
 1. Loving those we find unlovable (irritating, detestable) is not easy. C.S. Lewis once wrote, "Do not waste your time bothering whether you love your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him. If you injure someone you dislike, you will find yourself disliking him more. If you do him a good turn, you will find yourself disliking him less."
 2. It is not natural for an ordinary human being to love his enemies. It is natural to love them that love us, but it is supernatural to love them that hate us. Nevertheless, God requires it of us.
- C. Consider the examples of others who loved their enemies.
 1. Saul and David.
 - a. Saul threw a spear at David on two occasions (1 Samuel 18:7-16; 19:8-10).
 - i. Saul sent men to kill David (1 Samuel 19:11-17).
 - ii. He went after David himself (1 Samuel 19:18-24).
 - iii. He had the army of Israel chasing David for many years (1 Samuel 26:2).
 - b. Nevertheless, on two occasions, David deliberately chose to spare Saul's life (1 Samuel 24:1-7; 26:7-21).
 - c. When was the last time someone threw a spear at you? Or

sent hired assassins after you? Perhaps they have hurled hurtful words at you or they have plotted behind your back to get other people to not like you.

2. Paul and the Jews.
 - a. Paul escaped from his own countrymen by being let down through an opening in the wall in a basket at Damascus (Acts 9:23-25).
 - b. He was stoned in Lystra and left for dead by some of his own country (Acts 14:19-22).
 - c. He had been beaten by the Jews (2 Corinthians 11:24). Yet, Paul had deep rooted love for his fellow Jews (Romans 9:1-5; 10:1).
 - d. When was the last time your relatives openly made fun of you because you were trying to do what was right? When were you ridiculed because you did not take the popular stand? When was the last time they tried to exclude you from “the family” because you are a Christian?
3. Joseph and his brothers.
 - a. Joseph’s brothers wanted to kill him (Genesis 37:4, 20, 28)
 - b. Later, his brethren knew that Joseph had his chance to get even. However, Joseph was of a different spirit (Genesis 50:15-21).
 - c. When was the last time someone tried to kill you and sell you into slavery?
4. Jesus Christ and the Pharisees.
 - a. When He began, people in His home town tried to kill Him (Luke 4:25-30).
 - b. He was falsely accused of many things and finally was betrayed, deserted, arrested, beaten, mocked, insulted, and then murdered in the cruelest of fashions (1 Peter 2:21-24). He left us an example that we should follow in his steps.
 - c. When was the last time you were arrested on totally false charges? When was the last time someone twisted your motives, insulted you, mocked you, tried to hurt you, or was just mean to you?

II. ***We Promote Love By Controlling Ourselves***

A. We need to control our words.

1. Most of us would never dream of going to the person who gossiped about us and inflicting some kind of bodily harm on them.

2. Unfortunately, we frequently retaliate with words (Romans 12:14; 1 Peter 3:8-9). We had better be careful because those words will come back to judge us one day (Matthew 12:36-37).
- B. We need to control our actions.
 1. Revenge is one of the names God wears (Jeremiah 51:56). It is the Lord’s task to deal out retribution, not ours (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19).
 2. In dealing with those that we do not particularly like, or with those who do not seem to like us, we need to choose our weapons well (Romans 12:20-21). Our more powerful weapon is “rendering good for evil,” not “evil for evil.”

III. ***Love Can Be Difficult To Promote***

- A. Practicing love can be difficult in church relationships.
 1. At times brethren will disappoint, discourage, or abandon you. Instead of leaving, members of the church should stay together and work out their problems.
 2. There is no such thing as a perfect church and the Lord expects Christians to stay together and work together in love (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8).
 3. It can be difficult to forgive, but love demands it (1 Peter 4:8). The one who forgives is truly seeking love (Proverbs 17:9).
 4. We can never surrender the truth, but everyone of us should be willing to surrender in situations that do not matter. Abraham was a good example of this principle (Genesis 13:7-9).
- B. Practicing love can be difficult in family relationships.
 1. It can be difficult in marriage relationships.
 - a. Remember the vow you made for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in good times and in bad times.
 - b. Unfortunately, at times we seem to receive the “worse,” the “poorer” and the “bad times.”
 - i. The love we have toward our spouse must be unconditional (Ephesians 5:25, 28; Titus 2:4).
 - ii. Too many have the idea that they will love their mate as long as it is convenient, easy, and their needs are being met. Ask the husband or wife, who for years has cared for an invalid spouse, if love is always easy and convenient.
 - c. With such a high number of marriages dissolving today, love is sorely needed. Husbands and wives need genuine love to help them weather the storms of life.

2. It can be difficult in parent/child relationships.
 - a. For instance, discipline is not pleasant for the giver or the recipient (Hebrews 12:11). Parents must love their children with a love that will effectively dispense the needed discipline (Proverbs 13:24).
 - b. In later years, the child may have to tenderly and patiently care for their aging parents who can no longer care for themselves. Genuine love does not run away from the bedside of the sick and dying.

Conclusion. Let us work at promoting love among us. We are to have “fervent charity among yourselves.” Most people are committed to raising their standard of living. Let us be committed to raising our standard of loving. That standard is that we love one another the way Christ loves us (John 13:34).

Crippled and disfigured by sin, the risen Christ has given us hope. He understands our temptations, our discouragements, and even our thoughts. By His resurrection we have help in this life and hope for the life to come. We need to develop the kind of love Jesus had for us, and then manifest that love to others. On the whole, God’s love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him. If you wish to show your love for Him today, do so by keeping His commandments and obeying the gospel (John 14:15).