

# How The Devil Distorts Love

**Introduction.** We are all familiar with the Bible concept of love. But the aspect of love which we will consider today is how the devil distorts love. It is not hard to figure out that the easiest way to destroy something is from the inside. This is certainly true of the church. For example, persecution made the church grow (Acts 8:4).

So in order to destroy the church, the devil distorts love. The parable in Matthew 18:21-35 illustrates distorted love very well. Jesus used the parable to teach His disciples about our need of forgiveness, and we can see in their attitudes how the devil distorts love.

## I. ***He Causes Us To Place A Limit On Love***

- A. Peter thought he was going the "extra mile" (vs. 21). The Jewish rabbis taught that a person might be forgiven a repeated sin three times; on the fourth, there was no forgiveness (cf. Amos 1:3; Job 33:29-30). But Peter was willing to go all the way up to seven times (Luke 17:4).
- B. One of the major problems we have is that we are unwilling to go the distance with our brethren. It is sad, but brethren would rather foster hatred and bitterness than correct the situation with forgiveness. Instead of letting the past go, we want to hold on to it and never let it go (Proverbs 15:17).
- C. Jesus is not saying that 490 times is the upper limit, nor that the forgiveness should be so unqualified that it wipes out the teaching in vs. 15-20. Rather, He teaches that forgiveness cannot possibly be limited by frequency or quantity; for, as the ensuing parable shows, all of them have been forgiven far more than they will ever forgive.
- D. One problem that will surely destroy a congregation is brethren 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 (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).
  1. The apostle John said that if you love God, you must love your brother (1 John 3:14, 16; 4:21).
  2. If you can determine how much you love Him, that will give you a good indication of how much you need to love your brother.

## II. ***He Causes Us To Be Unmerciful To Others***

- A. After just receiving enormous mercy from his master, the wicked slave refused to show a small amount of mercy (vs. 28). The similarity of his fellow servant's plea to his own did not move this unforgiving man, and he had him thrown into debtor's prison.

1. We can get some idea of the size of the indebtedness when we recall that David donated 3,000 talents of gold and 7,000 talents of silver for the construction of the temple, and the princes provided 5,000 talents of gold and 10,000 talents of silver (1 Chronicles 29:4, 7).
  2. Such indebtedness could not possibly be covered by selling the family into slavery, which was sanctioned by the Old Testament (Leviticus 25:39; 2 Kings 4:1). The top price for a slave was one talent, and one-tenth that amount or less was more common.
- B. We smugly think that the slave's unforgiveness was intolerable, but we turn right around and do the same.
1. We cannot lose our fervent love toward one another (1 Peter 1:22; 3:8).
  2. We cannot allow our love toward one another to grow cold (Matthew 24:12).
- C. People can see the results of distorted love. The devil is out there to destroy the work of the church in whatever way he can (2 Corinthians 2:11). When he distorts biblical love, he makes us forget each other and work only for our own interests (Philippians 2:4). Joaquin Miller said, "The man who lives for self alone, lives for the meanest mortal known."

### III. ***He Causes Us To Forget Our Own Need For Love***

- A. The master took the wicked slave aside and condemned him for his actions (vss. 31-33). If we lack mercy like the unforgiving servant, it will cost us dearly in eternity (Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Luke 6:37).
1. The offenses which our fellowman commit against us are insignificant compared with our offenses against God.
  2. The small debt shows how little man can offend against his brother compared with the amount in which every man has offended against God.
- B. Sometimes we act like we are the most perfect people in the world.
1. We forget that we would still be dead in our sins if God had not sent His Son to die on the cross for us (Ephesians 2:1-5; Isaiah 64:6; John 3:16). We are no different than the Israelites, whom God continually forgave (Psalm 78:38).
  2. We are nothing but a bunch of ex-sinners in need of grace (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). The devil distorts our feelings and makes us believe that we are so much better than we really are. Then, with a condescending attitude, we are ready to overlook our need of grace and blast those who sin. We need to judge, but we are to remove the beam first (Matthew 7:1-5; cf. John 7:24).

- C. Christians are often great harborers of malice (Matthew 5:7; James 5:9). When you forgive, you need to feel and act toward one as if the slate were clean (James 2:13).
- D. The statement that he was thrown in prison until he would pay the debt is a proverbial expression. Since man could never remove the smallest portion of debt which he owes to God, this was the strongest possible expression of the eternal duration of his penalty.

**Conclusion.** Satan will try his very best to destroy a congregation by breaking down the bond of love between brethren. Hebrews 13:1 says, "Let brotherly love continue." Love is more than just a sweet feeling; it is a feeling that will let us work with one another and let us build up the kingdom of God. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said, "Love does not consist in gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction." Will you be a church razer or a church raiser? Will you tear down or will you build up?