

Love One Another

As we contemplate the make-up of the Body of Christ, we discover that individuals are not perfect. Often times, individuals do things or say things that are not in good taste, but not really meaning any harm. We only have to look to the original Twelve to understand the conflict that sometimes exists among equally godly people. Two of the disciples represent a case in point. The mother of these two (John and James) sought to gain prominence for her two sons (Matthew 20:20-23). Apparently both Apostles were in on the plot to gain positions of prestige. When the other disciples found out about this, they (the Ten) were indignant about this kind of behavior (20:24).

Shortly before the death of Christ, He told His disciples: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34). What does this kind of love mean to us? When the disciples inquired of Jesus about how to pray, we are confronted with one thing—forgiveness toward others. This prayer that Jesus taught His disciples should strike the heart of us all: “Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 5:12). Do we forgive in this manner? Peter, one of the Twelve, said, “Love one another deeply, from the heart” (1 Peter 1:22). What does it mean to love “from the heart”? Once more, we should pay attention to Peter as he goes right to the heart of love when he writes: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins” (4:8).

If all were wonderful or ideal in our lives, the following Scripture citation would not make sense: “Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, **bearing with one another in love.** ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:2-3). What does it mean to us to “bear with one another”? We, as believers, need to remind ourselves of Paul’s admonition about love on a regular basis. Listen to him as he describes love in its pure form:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ **It is not rude,** it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, **it keeps no record of wrongs.** ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ **Love never fails.** (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

As Christians, we are to keep the bond of peace created by the Holy Spirit. This unity is real because of God’s love for us. The Gospel exemplifies, or demonstrates, God’s love. His love takes hold of us “in” and “through” Jesus. As saints of God, we are to love others in spite of their shortcomings. In other words, we are to receive one another just as God has received us. It is for this very reason that Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome: “**Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you,** in order to bring praise to God” (Romans 15:7). Do we exhibit the love of God in our relationship with one another?

Just a brief reflection upon God’s love quickly reveals that His love is motivated by His will to freely give. It is in this vein that John records the words of Jesus to Nicodemus: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall

not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). With the coming of Jesus, we observe the down-going movement toward salvation in the Incarnation and the redemption in the Cross of Calvary.

With the coming of Christ “from above,” we immediately recognize that God’s love is not just simply an attitude; it is not just simply an act; it is the very essence of God Himself—**“God is love.”** Christ bestows God’s love upon us and God’s forgiveness. God’s love is our guarantee of eternal life. God’s love shines loud and clear in the Crucifixion of His Son. Love is evidence of Divine creation. **Love is a powerful force in demonstrating that humanity did not come into existence through evolution. How could mindless matter generate love?** The question that confronts everyone is: **where did love come from?** The only answer is found in God our Creator. God placed the ability to love within us. Love is a gift from God. The following story about love illustrates God’s love for us even in our rebellion:

It is the story of a young man who lived in a village and fell in love with a woman from a neighboring village. His love for her was genuine, and he sought her hand in marriage. She, in turn, felt no such affection for him and only exploited his feelings to her own advantage. She made it a game, ever demanding more and more proof of his love for her.

At last, when all her ploys were exhausted, she demanded the unthinkable. “If you really love me,” she said, “I would like to be confident that it is an unrivaled love. To prove that, I ask you to take your mother’s life and bring her heart to me as a trophy of my victory over your love for her.” The young man was left thoroughly confounded for weeks and grief-stricken at his option. Unable to withstand his “loss” any longer and seeing his mother alone, in a frenzied fit he killed her and took the heart out of her body. He ran as fast as he could to present this trophy to the girl he loved, all the while fleeing the guilt that tormented him. While running through a heavily wooded area he stumbled and fell, and the heart bounced out of his hand. As he attempted to rise to his feet, he frenetically rummaged through the undergrowth looking for her heart. Finally, he spotted it and picked it up, and as he dusted off his knees he heard a voice coming from the heart saying, “Son, are you hurt? ... Son, are you hurt?”¹

This story is quite descriptive of God’s love. When we are without love, our hearts are empty. Since God is love, we, too, are to love. When we present our bodies as living sacrifices to God, this sacrifice surrounds itself with love. Love is a part of our worship to the One Who is Love. **Worship is not just in a building; it is our way of life!** Paul informs the believers in Rome that love is a part of their “spiritual act of worship” (Romans 12:1). True worship involves love. Listen to Paul as he explains what correct devotion to God is all about:

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. **Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.** ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will

¹Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Dallas, London, Vancouver, Melbourne: Word Publishing, 1994), 110.

repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” (Romans 12:9-20)

When we seek to live our lives without love, we live our lives without God. An absence of biblical love can lead to a Stalin (1878-1953), a Hitler (1889-1945), a Mussolini (1883-1945), a Hussein (1937-2006), a Gaddafi (1942-2011) or an Idi Amin (1925-2003). When these men lived their lives without the God of the Bible, we see the atrocities committed by these individuals. To illustrate what life without God can lead to, I call attention to a quote from one of Ravi Zacharias’ books about a sign that hung on a wall at Auschwitz and Birkenau (death camps). The following words, by Hitler, appeared on the plaques with a coldness that envelops the mind with horror:

I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality.... We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence—imperious, relentless and cruel.²

²Ibid., 23.