

“PROVE THE SINCERITY OF YOUR LOVE”

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Introduction

Sometimes faithful Christians needlessly bear a load of guilt because, while they know they are supposed to love their enemies (Luke 6:35), they do not feel a sentimental affection for them. Since they do not thus “love” their enemies, they then reason, they must not love God or their fellow man either. This concept of the word *love* is faulty. Emotions can be deceptive. The most frequently used word translated “love” (*charity*, KJV) is *agape*. This higher type of love is not dependent on our feelings. For example, Jesus said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). If we are faithfully keeping His commandments, then we can **know** we love Jesus. We do well to heed the words of Paul in the title above (2 Cor. 8:8b). Let us look at some passages of Scripture to learn how we may prove the sincerity of our love.

Love Keeps the Commandments of God

“Commandment keeping” has fallen upon hard times over the last several years. Many would like us to believe that what they style “loving God” is paramount. They say that works of any kind are not important; “grace” should be stressed. But Jesus said, “If a man love me, he will keep my words, and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). The other side of the coin is, “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings” (v. 24a). Likewise, John wrote: “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). The love of God is perfected in keeping the commandments (v. 5).

All of the law and the prophets were dependent on these two principles: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Mat. 22:36–40).” James called the commandment to love one’s neighbor as self the “royal law” (Jam. 2:8).

Love Speaks the Truth

We are to “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15), and doing so should not make one a person’s enemy (Gal. 4:16). If we do **not** warn people by speaking (“all the counsel of God” [Acts 20:27]), we will be personally responsible for their condemnation (Eze. 33:8–9). Withholding the Truth demonstrates hatred or indifference, not love. Paul had to strongly rebuke the Corinthians, but he did so with many tears (2 Cor. 2:4). If we love Truth and righteousness, we hate error and evil. Jehu rebuked Jehoshaphat for aiding wicked Ahab: “Shouldest thou help the ungodly and love them that hate the Lord?” (2 Chr. 19:2). We are never to act or speak so as to imply endorsement or encouragement of those who are the Lord’s enemies (Eph. 5:11; 2 Tim. 4:2–4; 2 John 9–11).

Love Is Bold

Abraham approached God several times with his plea for Sodom (Gen. 18:23–33). The Scriptures encourage us to “...draw near with boldness unto the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy, and may find grace to help us in time of need” (Heb. 4:16). However, such boldness must never be confused with irreverence. Abraham was called the “friend of God,” yet he never presumed upon that friendship by being too familiar with Almighty God, referring to himself as “I...which am but dust and ashes...” (Gen. 18:27).

Perfect love casts out fear (1 John 4:18), it is true. *Fear* in this context is that which would cause one to cower in constant dread of a cruel and mean master or which an evildoer would feel toward God's wrath against his wickedness. God's loving, faithful children are freed from such terror and dread. But no matter how much we may love God, we may never "cast out" our reverence and awe for Him. "Boldness" never excuses our addressing God in such terms as we would use in mere earthly relationships, or in attempting to bring Him down to our level (He is not "the man upstairs").

Paul told Timothy: "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear [fearfulness, ASV]; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Tim 1:7). The word *fear* (or *fearfulness*) in this passage does not refer to dread or terror (as in 1 John 4:18), but to cowardice and timidity, the opposite of boldness and confidence. (Notice that having love for God does not negate the use of the mind; to do so is rather a conscious decision arrived at by correct reasoning.) We are to exhibit such boldness and fearlessness in defending His Truth and in confessing Christ under any and all circumstances.

Love Is Compassionate Toward Fellow-Christians

A Christian will show compassion to his brethren because he loves them: "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing" (1 Pet. 3:8–9; see also Rom. 12:10). Love is the crowning "Christian grace" (2 Pet. 1:5–11). Studious application of the foregoing Scriptures would prevent most church quarrels.

A Christian will show love to fellow Christians by humbly serving them (Heb. 6:10; Gal. 6:10). We can show love by our hospitality (1 Pet. 4:9), as Mary and Martha did for Jesus. Mary gave Jesus the very best that she had: her alabaster box of expensive ointment (Mark 14:3; John 12:3–8). The sinful woman in the house of Simon the leper washed Jesus' feet with her tears and dried them with her hair (Luke 7:37–38). The Lord said that “she loved much” (v. 47).

Love does not take pleasure in the sins and shortcomings of others (1 Cor. 13:5b–6), but attempts to help them overcome their weaknesses. Love shall cover (not just **conceal**, but **cover**) the multitude of sins (1 Pet. 4:8). The Christian who is stronger and more mature is meekly to restore the erring brother or sister (Gal. 6:1). Paul was gentle with the Thessalonians, as a nurse cherishes her children (1 The. 2:7–11). So should we be with each other: “By love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13).

Love will apply the “Golden Rule”: “As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise” (Luke 6:31). In this context Jesus was teaching His disciples to love their enemies; but if we are thus to behave toward our enemies, how much more should we love our brethren (Gal. 6:10)?

Love seeks to edify—to build up—fellow Christians (Rom. 15:1–2). Paul wrote: “Knowledge puffeth up, but love edifieth” (1 Cor. 8:1). We have serious problems in the church today because so many are “puffed up” over their knowledge and education. They think they have outgrown the Word of God; the Gospel is just too simple for them. They therefore refuse to be built up, rejecting the love of other Christians and of God.

Dorcas was “full of good works and almsdeeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). The weeping widows showed Peter the clothes she had made for them while she was alive.

Their tears serve as eloquent testimony of the love they felt for Dorcas, and of her love for them.

Paul challenged the Corinthians to prove the sincerity of their love by abounding in the grace of generosity (2 Cor. 8:7–8, 24). He reminded them that Christ forfeited the riches of Heaven to enrich others (v.9). Paul also used the example of the Macedonians, who gave so generously because they first gave their own selves both to the Lord and to Paul (2 Cor. 8:5; cf. Rom. 12:1).

Love will rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). Jesus wept with Mary and Martha out of compassion for those He loved (John 11:33–35). The rejoicing may be a bit more difficult than the weeping—especially if another receives something that I badly want for myself.

Love Is Kind to the Unthankful and the Evil

Jesus said: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you” (Mat. 5:44). Joseph had long before practiced this principle by being kind to his brothers who had sold him into slavery (Gen. 37:27; 45:5). Jesus healed ten lepers, although He knew that nine of them would not even return to thank Him (Luke 17:17). Jesus prayed to the Father to forgive those who crucified Him (Luke 23:34). Stephen rebuked the Jews out of love for their souls, even though he likely knew he did so at great personal risk (Acts 7). When they stoned him, he asked the Lord not to lay that grievous sin to their charge (v. 60). Paul’s “heart’s desire” for Israel was their salvation (Rom. 10:1), even though they were his principal persecutors.

Love Makes Sacrifices and Endures Hardship

Priscilla and Aquila laid down their own necks for Paul's life (Rom. 16:3–4), which is precisely the description Jesus gave of great love (John 15:13). Paul said that at one time the Galatians loved him so much they would gladly have plucked out their eyes for him (Gal. 4:15). He endured hardship for the elect's sake (1 Cor 4:11–16; 2 Tim. 2:10; 3:10–12), and rejoiced that he was permitted to suffer for his love of Christ (Col. 1:24; Phi. 3:8).

Paul quoted Jesus' words to the Ephesian elders: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Love caused him to "spend" himself and keep on loving his brethren, even though their behavior toward him was sometimes unloving (2 Cor. 12:15). Paul said we are to have the mind of Christ, giving ourselves for the sake of others, as He did (Phi. 2:5–8). He came to earth to serve, not to be served, and to redeem us with the blood of His sinless life (1 Pet. 1:18–19). His love for us is beyond our comprehension (Eph. 3:19; 5:2). His love for His bride, the church, is the model for husbands to imitate in loving their wives (vv. 25, 29).

Conclusion

I am not sure that I could love anyone enough to give the life of my son or my daughter for him, but God did (John 3:16). He loved us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8), and showed mercy to us when we were utterly undeserving (Tit. 3:3–5). The Son was not compelled to give His life (John 10:17–18). Pilate could have had no power over Him except it had been given him from above (19:11). He could have asked the Father for more than twelve legions of angels to rescue Him (Mat. 26:53); but had He quit before His task was fulfilled, there would have been no hope for us. We are forgiven

only because He bore our sins on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24; cf. Isa. 53:4–6). As He freely gave Himself for us, so we are to give ourselves for Him and for others.

[Note: This article was written for and published in *THE GOSPEL JOURNAL*, May 2003, Dub McClish, Editor.]