

#236 "What Real Love Does"

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The Bible has much to say on what love is, such as being without jealousy, envy, arrogance, or boasting. We learn that love is patient, kind, forgiving, unselfish, persevering, hope-filled, and always and forever bound intricately with the truth of Jesus Christ with which true love always rejoices (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). But in what follows we will consider not so much what love is but what love does. In other words, given what love is, let us consider the practical outworking and transformative power of God's love. When we are exposed to Divine love and receptive to it, it can do a wonder in terms of deepening our connection with God and our ability to get the most out of our earthly relationships. Plain and simply, the love of God is a force to be reckoned with, and it changes hearts.

#1 Love covers a multitude of sins. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all transgressions." 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins." In the church, given enough time, a multitude of sins will be committed. I don't say that in a defeatist or careless manner, but in a humbled, truthful one. I realize that I, for one, am prone to misunderstand love, to doubt love, to rationalize love away, and to let my blindness to my own failures move me to judge others rather than show them mercy as one who has been shown mercy. I, like each one of us, need to be continually transformed by real love, learning to grow in mercy and basking in Christ's ready forgiveness such that I, too, cannot help but forgive (Matthew 18:23-35).

Real love keeps no records of wrongs suffered (what love is), and Jesus commanded us in Matthew 18:21 to forgive as many times as it takes (what love does). This means that we really, truly, and actually wipe a person's slate clean when they have asked for our forgiveness. It means that we don't gossip about their shortcomings to others and begin to rank ourselves in relative terms rather than looking to the perfection of Christ. We are not to tell those who have wronged us that they owe us one, nor are we to allow an attitude of superiority to creep into our hearts. Love, by being patient, kind, and forgiving, snuffs out ill-will, selfish ambition, self-righteousness, and unrighteous anger, extinguishing what could otherwise spiral out of control into division and destruction of relationships. Love thinks the best about our brothers and sisters in Christ, remembers that we all stand in equal need of Christ's love and mercy, and always looks to help others grow rather than crumble. Love is not blind to sin, it calls sin "sin," and it graciously confronts it. However, once repentance is present, love is able to move beyond the past and thrive in the present. Love, rather than harboring bitterness, is the more excellent way (1 Corinthians 12:31). The natural man cannot understand this kind of love and forgiveness, which is why it is so important, for it proves the power of Christ's love and the fact that He really changes hearts. He makes relationships deep, real, and how they should be. **The power to cover a multitude of sins is simply not of this world but of heaven, and therein it is revolutionary.**

#2 Love gives us reason to trust. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). This world beats us down, and rejection is the norm. Being lied to, judged, or abandoned are commonplace experiences in relationships. These wounds go deep,

and it can be difficult to ever open up our hearts to another given the pain that we feel and the loss that we have experienced. If you have ever been around an animal that has suffered abuse, you know that it has trouble trusting. It is afraid of being tricked, harmed, ignored, or injured. It doesn't feel safe, and it is unsettled, jumpy, and always looking over its shoulder. It is an awful existence, one full of fear, dread, pain, and certainly not love. Many people unfortunately can relate to this lack of love, and their feelings of rejection and isolation run deep. Trust is the basis of a loving relationship with God and others. At some point, trust must be given, otherwise love can never be enjoyed. Thankfully, God demonstrated His own love to us first, so that we who have suffered rejection have reason to step out in faith and trust Him and learn the revolutionary way of love. Those for whom this is difficult can be helped as they are constantly reminded of God's love through God's people. God is love (1 John 4:7-8), after all, so if we want to know God we need to know love. The two can never be separated. Healing happens and relationships flourish when people know that they are safe, but this will only happen if our kindness is honest. People need the real deal, people who keep their word, who forgive, and who actually and truly care. Only God does this perfectly, but it should be the ever-present goal of His people. As love grows, so, too, will faith, and hope, but the greatest of these is love. **Faith may be the bedrock of our gospel theology, but love is the visible proof, giving us reason to trust and have hope.**

#3 Love brings joy to our hearts (Psalm 16:11). Love makes life worth living, for otherwise we are merely a summation of actions, even if they are righteous actions. Without love for others, faith is hollow and good deeds are without satisfaction or reward (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). It is one thing to "minister" to somebody, and it is another to actually love them. The first is easy, while the second is hard. To truly care about others makes life vibrant, and it motivates us to share the gospel. Without love, the gospel is academic only, but love makes it so worth sharing because of the transformative power we know it carries with it. It is not merely a promise of heaven to come, but a radical change of life even now as we come to know Jesus and find something so different, so real, so fulfilling, and so life-giving. **If the love of God ever becomes boring to us, so, too, will the gospel, rendering life shallow, hollow, and without meaning.** Eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3), and it is that loving relationship that changes everything, including our earthly relationships. Being loved is the rarest thing this world has to offer, and there is no joy that compares.

The Christian life can best be summed up by loving God and loving our fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40). Thus, if we are failing to love and be loved, we need to go back to square one and read the pages of Scripture asking God to reveal His love to us. We need to see it in Christ, in His life, and in His sacrificial death. We need to see it across every page, from God creating man in love, to redeeming him in love, and to living with him forever in eternity as His bride. As light exposes darkness, love exposes rejection, filling the gaping holes with fullness of joy, a solid refuge, and a faithful relationship. There is nothing more needed or more powerful, and let us pray that we come to know it and believe it more each day.