

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

Contact: [John Edmiston](#)

Number: 15
Verses: Hebrews 13:1-3
Topic: Let Brotherly Love Continue!
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Hebrews 13:1-3 *Let brotherly love continue. (2) Do not be forgetful of hospitality, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. (3) Remember those who are in bonds, as bound with them, those who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.*

Christianity is not a private affair that is just between you and God. Being a true Christian includes genuine outward acts of faith. It includes such things such as showing brotherly love, maintaining hospitality and caring for persecuted Christians.

The inward-minded prayer closet Christian is missing the point! And the mystic in her cave and the solitary monk on a pole in the desert may actually (if they isolate themselves too much) be sinning against God's clear command to "love one another as I have loved you". The goal of the Christian life is not mystic feelings of awe or deep spiritual experiences but love for all that God has created especially the brethren, who are His children, in His image!

The phrase "Let brotherly love continue" should perhaps be better translated "Let brotherly love be uninterrupted" or "Let brotherly love abide always" (Gk: meneto, from meno, to abide).

Jesus lived a life awash in constant love and only interrupted his love of the brethren in order to more deeply commune with His heavenly Father. Jesus did not interrupt His love for people, even when He hung on the Cross, where He showed love to the soldiers, the thief, His mother, the apostle John, and of course to you and I.

The kind of Christian who goes from meeting to meeting, website to website, and fills their lives with books, music and DVDs is trying to have the things of God, without having to interact with messy reality (e.g. other people) too often. This kind of self-centered Christianity goes stale and turns into a kind of spiritual neurosis.

While teaching is good, teaching alone is insufficient. We need to "roll up our sleeves" and start caring about our brothers and sisters in the Lord e.g. by showing hospitality.

As a bible teacher I could happily spend all day chasing down Greek verbs and studying commentaries. This is very pleasant work. It is when I stop doing that and have to interact with a real human being that the problems begin!

Of course those who interact with people all day (e.g. high school teachers) may need to spend some time in the Word just in order to retain their spiritual poise and sanity!

So the goal is to live an uninterrupted life of love toward God and also towards others. This of course is a rather lofty achievement. Getting there is a kind of "one-step-at-a-time" process. So we need to ask "what interrupts our love?" Here is a list of a few of my (rather depressing) answers:

1. Preoccupation with self and with our own feelings and needs and crises
2. Constant feelings of inferiority and an overwhelming desire to please others
3. Greed and covetousness and self-protection (to love might cost me money..)
4. Worshiping our own agenda so that we are always "too busy" for others
5. A preoccupation with our own social or religious image and a desire to stay away from people of a lower social or spiritual "rank" unless they affirm us in some way.
6. Anger, resentment, bitterness, rejection, self-pity, moroseness and grudges
7. The desire for revenge, spitefulness, retaliation and retributive "justice"
8. Lustful thoughts, pornography, sexual immorality, using people for gratification
9. Dividing people into "important vs. unimportant" or "useful vs not useful to me"
10. Argumentativeness, intellectualism, and/or doctrinal divisions
11. Pride, superiority, "coolness", vanity and elitism
12. Distorted thinking that misunderstands people's motives and actions
13. Easily taking offense and being hard to please
14. The habit of avoiding people (often over trivialities or imagined slights)
15. Grumpiness, irritability and a general dislike or contempt for humanity
16. Aggression, the tendency to fume, rage and be angry
17. Being very particular over everything, perfectionism, a critical spirit
18. Spiritual deadness, prayerlessness, no desire or motivation to love others.
19. Depression, sourness, dejection and emotional dryness.
20. The need to control or have power over others.
21. The need for everything to be convenient, comfort-orientation
22. The desire to "stay in the groove" and never change or adventure out of it.
23. Immaturity, the desire to be babied, "its all about me"
24. Fear, anxiety, imagined perils, lack of trust in God
25. Disappointment; "I tried loving people and I just got burned.."
26. Laziness, "I just couldn't be bothered"
27. Pleasure orientation, the need for everything to be fun or entertaining
28. Living in a delusional world/ full of daydreams / drugs, alcohol
29. Gambling, addictions, having your life controlled by a habit or substance
30. Idealism, being consumed by a theory or idea & sacrificing people for it.

I am sure that you can think of others!

As you can see it is very, very easy to find a reason not to love people or to adopt a non-loving lifestyle. A drug addict who lives for the next fix and is totally selfish in the pursuit of drugs has stopped loving because drugs are more important than agape love (and similarly for gamblers etc).

So we need to stop doing those things that stop us from loving others. For instance if vanity and materialism are serious obstacles to our regard for other people then we need to bring those attitudes to God for cleansing and for change. We need to start unclogging our spiritual arteries so that we are no longer hardhearted.

Continual love requires supernatural strength. The power to love comes from the Holy Spirit, who empowers our new nature, and strengthens us in the inner man, giving us the faith to both know God's love, and to make it known.

So the first step in attaining brotherly love is to pray for it and to believe in it, with the clear intent of putting it into practice.

We should also pray for one another to grow in love just as the apostles Paul and John prayed for the Christians in the churches of Asia Minor to dwell in love.

Love is foundational to everything else in the Christian life and foundations should be always present. A consistent Christian is not loving one minute, and then cold, mean and nasty the next. You might love in different ways, and use different means, but your intent in all things – prayer, service, your daily work, relationships etc should always be love.

You can love and still be busy (since love is an action not just an emotion). Jesus and the apostles were busy loving people! Abiding and continuing in love means no “exceptions” thus no deceit or dishonesty. If your work involves you selling a shoddy or dishonest product, then ask God for different work. It is not ever God's will, not even for a single second, for you to tell lies or to rip people off.

You can abide in love and still be in secular work. You do not need to go into “the ministry”. You can be a kindergarten teacher and abide in love, or a nurse, or an accountant, or a doctor, or a car mechanic and still be honest, loyal and caring and you can even charge a fair price for your services. You do not have to do everything for free. A stay-at-home mum who abides in love and cares for her family is higher up on God's spiritual chart than a totally selfish evangelist!

When we abide and continue in love we abide and continue in the Vine, who is Christ Jesus. Please read the following rather long passage with some prayer and reflection:

John 15:4-12 *Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me. (5) I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered. And they gather and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (7) If you abide in Me, and My Words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done to you. (8) In this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, so you shall be My disciples. (9) As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; continue in My love. (10) If you keep My commandments, you shall abide in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. (11) I have spoken these things to you so that My joy might remain in you and your joy might be full. (12) This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

When we abide in love, we abide in Christ's commandments, our prayers are answered, our life becomes fruitful and we glorify God. On the other hand, if we decide not to love, and abide in selfishness, we dry up, become fruitless and useless and get “gathered up and burned”. In the terminology of Mark's gospel we “lose our souls” (Mark 8:34-38).

This incredibly powerful and compelling conclusion is a fairly straightforward interpretation of dozens of different Scriptures (not just John 15). Even the world thinks Christians should always be loving and should love one another. Even the world thinks that stingy, cold, selfish people are without true souls. If this is so, how do so many Christians fiercely resist any thought of engaging in intense brotherly love?

I think it boils on down to the fact that selfishness seems sane and sensible while love seems downright crazy and risky. Love takes faith. Jesus could love because He truly believed. He knew Heaven and its rewards and could forsake all. But we baulk, we cringe, we hesitate. We aren't so sure that love will work out for our benefit any day soon, and the Cross is terrifying!

Mark 8:34-38 *And calling near the crowd with His disciples, He said to them, Whoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. (35) For whoever will save his life shall lose it; but whoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, he shall save it. (36) For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? (37) Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? (38) Therefore whoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My Words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man shall also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.*

Let brotherly love continue, even if it hurts sometimes!

Blessings,

John Edmiston

Chairman/ CEO of AIBI/Cybermissions

Senior Pastor – Eternity Christian Fellowship

Email: johned@aibi.ph Twitter: @Cybermissions Skype ID: johnedmiston

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