



LOVE: THE MEASURE OF DISCIPLESHIP

by Bro. June Gentry

“All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”
-John 13:35

Part I

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING?

As I have preached in a variety of churches lately, the Lord has made me aware that there is a serious problem in many of our churches. Even though we can come up with all kinds of programs and can get people into our churches with promotions, the sad fact is that we lose them almost as fast as we get them. Why is this? What are we doing or not doing that is driving people from our fellowship? Strange as it may seem, the answer is a simple one, though the implications make it hard to apply. The answer is found in our text and can be summed up in one word: LOVE.

While we have become intellectual and even, sometimes, emotional in our approach to our faith, we have not learned how to practice love from a volitional point of view. Waiting for an emotional feeling, which may or may not come, we are not willing to pay the price to love. We are commanded to love (like Christ); we are told how important love is, yet, we spend very little time cultivating love between one another. Working at GODTEL with over 200,000 people since 1977 has taught us one thing, and that is people will stay where they are loved.

It amazes me that, though the Word tells us to love even our enemies, we often do not even love the people who sit on the pews with us. We can use our promotions to get them in - and that may not be all wrong - but only loving them as Jesus would will keep them there and help them grow into mature, fruit-bearing Christians. The principle is simple while the application takes commitment and obedience to the commands of our Lord. I know that when we confess our lack of love to our Lord, we receive grace to help in time of need.

Remember, fear is a strong cord, but not as strong as love. Love is so strong that it had the power to keep our Lord Jesus on the cross for you and me. Since Jesus loved us this way and gave us the example, why is it we don't die to ourselves and love one

another as Jesus did? My prayer is that, by a choice of our will, we will become more like Jesus.

“Remember, the measure of love you display to your fellowman is in direct proportion to your love for God.”

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Part II: WHY SHOULD WE LOVE?

Much has been said about what we, as Christians, should be doing in the area of love. Very little is ever said about **why** we should love. If all that was ever given to us was a command from God to love, that would be enough. God has already given us several: Love your neighbor, love your enemy, love your wife, etc.

We should understand that being told to love by God is all that is needed. Yet, God, in His Mercy, has given us another reason for living a life of love toward our fellowman. In order to really comprehend why God wants us to love, first, we must see what love is and is not.

First of all, love is more than a feeling or emotion. While I am aware that we, as humans, are full of emotion, and we like good feelings we must realize that love goes much deeper than an experience. Love - that is, God's love in us - does not depend on the way others treat us, either.

Love, according to the Word of God, is this: “Charity [*love*] suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.” (I Corinthians 13:4-8) It is also the fruit of the spirit: “But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith...” (Galatians 5:22)

Love is unconditional, undeserved, undemanding, unqualified, and unending. The kind of love referred to here is God's love for us, displayed to the World. This quality of love can best be seen in our Lord as He gave Himself for the Church, which is the very quality of God's nature. Love is the fruit of Christianity, the measure of Christianity, and the goal of Christianity. Love is the supreme end of the walk of the Christian - that is, to become like Jesus. “For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Romans 8:29)

To attain to the stature of love is not to become God, but to become God-like, for “God is love.” The supreme sacrifice that we can make - that is, dying to ourselves daily,

denying ourselves, and doing what Jesus says, “Trust and obey, for there’s no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.” You might say to me at this point, “I can’t love like this; no one can.” But I say to you, “I know you can’t, and God knows you can’t. If you could love on this level, you would not need our Lord Jesus to live in you.”

We do know that some have been able to love like this, and I will give you one example from Scripture. In Romans 9:3, the apostle Paul said that he would go to Hell for his brethren if it would get them saved. What love for a man to display!

Rather than giving up hope, let us continue to seek the Lord to so fill us with His Spirit that we can honestly die to self and learn to love. Remember, the measure of love you display to your fellowman is in direct proportion to your love for God. Our love for man should be like God’s love for us - a giving love: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

The ultimate reason for God commanding us to love is found in the 1st verse of I Corinthians 13, and that reason is that love is the only thing that will last forever. It is the only thing that can bind the brokenhearted on Earth and let the world know we are of God. “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.” (I Corinthians 13:13)

Part III: HOW SHOULD WE LOVE?

Now we will discuss how we can get the job done as Christians submitted to the will of our Lord Jesus. Most Christians we meet are having a lot of trouble in the area of their walk. As they set out to do the best they can, go after all manner of methods to live the overcoming life, or follow the many “teachers” who promise them victory, they seem to always come full circle, stumbling at the same point where they started. They are looking for a formula - which is always elusive - instead of learning God’s principles and trusting our Lord to respond to the truth of His Word. We are not trying to belittle anyone. We are simply wanting the body of Christ to live by the Word of God, to quit having “itching ears” for more methods, and to get back to the simplicity of the Gospel.

In Colossians 2:6, we find the answer to the question of how to live out the Christian life: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him.” This is one of the simplest statements in God’s Word, yet most Christians don’t even know it is there. The reason for a seeming lack of teaching is because this principle for living the Christian life leaves out “work of the flesh,” which always greatly inflates the ego.

God’s works in us are accomplished in and through our lives in the same manner as we became Christians. As we realized we were sinners, repented, and received Christ, we allowed God to save us. He gave us the power to become the sons of God; power to become everything that the Word of God says we are: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.” (John 1:12)

The problem lies in the fact that we do not believe the truth that this is what happened to us. Some go out and try their best instead of choosing to believe the truth of the Word, which can set us free. This unbelief is surely sin, and the church of the living God must

repent or be impotent in a lost world. We must learn how to walk in Christ the same way we received Christ, or be useless to the saved and the lost.

I am finding more and more that we do not - or will not - believe what is written about us in the Book. In John 14:2, Jesus said we would do greater works. Do we believe this, or do we just explain it away? In I John 5:4, we are told we have overcome the world. Do we believe this, or are we overcome by the world?

You see, my friends, we are going to have to choose to allow our Lord to live out His life through us by remembering how He saved us in the first place. We must then apply the same principle of repentance and faith to each situation in our lives or be defeated in our daily walk. God is in the business of bringing you to a problem bigger than you to bring you back to Himself, so He can do for you what you and the rest of the world cannot do. "Trust and obey, for there's no other way."

This message was not designed to give you all the answers, but to raise questions about your daily walk that only God, in His Word, can answer. My prayer is that you will diligently seek Him, for He is a rewarder of them that do.

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:6)

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This tract was compiled from three messages which appeared in *GODTEL News*, the monthly newsletter of GODTEL Ministries. To obtain additional copies, order #TR9107P. For more information about other literature, preaching tapes by Bro. Gentry, or the ministry in general, write us at the address below, or give us a call.

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