

# On Loving Others

by J.R. Miller

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*True Christian love bears all things and never fails, even in the closest relations, and requires us to look for the good in everyone and try to help them.*

**Scripture:** John 13:34

**Topics:** "Christian Love", "Compassion"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the commandment to love one another as central to Christian life, highlighting that true love extends beyond those who are easy to love and includes even our enemies. He critiques the tendency to qualify love based on personal convenience and stresses the importance of expressing love through kind actions and words. Miller points out that genuine love must endure through close relationships and challenging interactions, urging believers to maintain a spirit of charity regardless of others' behavior. He encourages a perspective that recognizes the hidden struggles in others, fostering compassion and understanding. Ultimately, Miller calls for a love that reflects Christ's unconditional love, which bears all things and hopes all things.

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## Transcript

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:34-35

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." Matthew 22:36-40

Next to loving God--comes the duty of loving others. Most people find it convenient in practical life, to qualify the scope of the law. In the ancient Jewish interpretation, enemies were left out; they were to be hated. This made the commandment to love others, easy of observance. Without any rabbinical gloss or tradition of the elders to justify us, while we preserve the text in its purity and read it in our Bibles with emphasis and commendation, it is seriously to be questioned whether we follow the commandment much more closely than did the religionists of our Lord's time!

There are some people whom it is not hard to love, and to whom it is quite easy to be kindly affectioned. They are congenial and to our taste. We are drawn to them by their amiable qualities or charming

manners; or their treatment of us is so kind and generous, as to win our affection. It is easy to love such.

But there are others to whom we are not thus naturally attracted. They are not congenial--perhaps not amiable. They have unlovely or irritating traits. Certain faults mar the beauty of their characters, or they treat us rudely and unkindly. It is by no means easy for us to bear ourselves toward such--with all of love's patience, gentleness, thoughtfulness and helpfulness. And yet it is this that is required of those who would walk in the footsteps of the Lord.

"If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that?" Matthew 5:46-47. Even the ungodly love those--who love them. Even the ungodly do good--to those who do good to them. Even the ungodly lend--to those of whom they hope to receive again. But we are to do more. We are to love our enemies. We are not to select from the mass about us--a few to whom the law of love is to be applied. We are to have our special friends, just as Jesus had, to whom our hearts and lives may turn for that deep companionship which all pure and true souls crave; but, like him also, we are to love all--and show to all love's holiest offices.

It is not enough to have the love in the heart; we need to look also to love's expression. In the bare, jagged trees that stand like naked skeletons in the early spring days, there are thousands of intentions of leaf and fruit--but they are folded up and hidden away in unopened buds. So, I believe, there are in many lives, thoughts and purposes of love--which do not reveal themselves. The love is in the heart--but it lacks expression. Oftentimes, the very reverse of the kindly thought is uttered. From many a lip the petulant word or the tone of bitterness is allowed to escape--while true love dwells deep within the heart!

Most Christian people are better than they seem. There are excellent men whose goodness is rugged and cold, like the bare granite rocks. It is strong, firm, true, upright--but lacks the finer graces of the Christliest kindness. It is quite possible to love--and not be kindly affectioned. There are homes in which there is love that would make any sacrifice--but in which hearts are starving for kindly expression. There is a dearth of those tender words and thoughtful little acts, which a true gentleness would suggest. There are fathers who love their children and would give their lives for them who are yet wanting in those kindly expressions which so endear the parental relation.

There are friendships that are true enough--but which are not hallowed by those graceful attentions and those tokens of thoughtfulness which cost so little and are worth so much. There are men whose hearts are full of benevolent dispositions toward the needy, and of sincere sympathy for those who suffer--in whose lives none of these benevolent thoughts or feelings of compassion take practical form. There are men with kindly natures--whose manners are gruff and rude. There are others who boast of honest frankness in speech--whose words are so harsh or ill-timed as to give immeasurable pain. Then how rare is that wise tact which seems always to know what one is in need of, and comes always at the very right moment with its delicate attention, its unostentatious ministry, its quiet help!

There is great need, therefore, of thought with regard to the fitting expression of love. The kindly feeling must find some way to utter itself--a way, too, in keeping with the beauty of the sentiment. Many a lovely thought loses all its loveliness, when clothed in speech or act. The benevolence of the heart, must show itself in amiability of deportment and in deeds of mercy. Manner is as important as matter. The gruff man can never impart much happiness to others. Kindness must be kindly expressed.

The true test of Christian love--is in life's closer relations. There is a great difference between loving people we never saw, and never shall see--and those with whom we mingle continually in actual contact. There are some people whose souls glow with love for the benighted heathen far away--who fail utterly in loving their nearest neighbors or those who jostle against them every day in business and in society. No doubt it is easier to love some people at a distance.

Distance lends enchantment to many lives, just as a far-away rugged landscape may seem charmingly picturesque. We cannot see their faults and blemishes. We are not required to endure their uncongenial or disagreeable qualities. We do not meet them in the rivalries of business or chafings of social life. We see nothing of the petty baseness and selfishness, that closer association would reveal in them. Our lives are not impinged upon at any point, by theirs; and there can therefore be no friction. If we were brought into close association with them--our interest in them might be lessened! Many men who have been excellent friends while meeting occasionally and in favorable circumstances, have ceased to be friends when brought into close contact in the frictions of daily life. There are few characters, that will bear the microscopic lens.

But the test of true Christian love--is that it does not fail even in the closest relations, in the most trying frictions of actual life, in which men so often appear at their worst! Love bears all things--and never fails. When hitherto undisclosed and unsuspected faults or blemishes appear in one we have esteemed, we are not to love him the less. Disagreeable qualities may appear upon closer acquaintance, which will break the charm that distance lent--and sorely test the genuineness of our love. There may be faults or eccentricities which painfully mar the beauty of men's characters, rendering them uncongenial. Their actions toward us may give us apparent cause for withholding from them that courtesy and kindness which it is our accustomed to manifest to all men.

And yet none of these things, modify the law of love or abridge its application! In all our interaction with them, our treatment of them is to be in the spirit of the sweetest charity. No rudeness of theirs--must provoke us to rudeness in return. No matter how distasteful to our spirits, their habits or manners may be--we are to treat them with unvarying courtesy. Even wrongs and injustice on their part toward us--are to be answered only by that love that bears all things and is not easily provoked, by the soft answer that turns away wrath, and by the meekness that when reviled, does not revile in return.

The law of love, however, is not to be twisted into applications never intended. We are not required to take all sorts of people into intimate companionship or sacred friendship. There are many from whom we are commanded to separate ourselves. Even among the godly--our hearts are permitted to have choice of their affinities. Yet we are to nourish love toward all. In the face of the most repulsive qualities, even under the deepest wrongs, we are still to maintain and exhibit love in all its tenderness, patience, thoughtfulness, compassion and helpfulness--not the love which calls 'evil' good--but the love that desires for others the blessings which we seek for ourselves.

To help in bearing with disagreeable people or those with unamiable qualities, there is nothing better than a sincere desire to do them good. There is a better side to every marred or distorted character. Hidden away under the blemishes--are the seeds and possibilities of a noble and beautiful life. Christ sees under the most faulty exterior--that which by his grace--he can change into heavenly sainthood. We should look even upon the worst men in the same way, and hold it to be our errand to them to help to bring out in them the possible beauty. There is a 'key' somewhere to unlock any and every heart, and a hand that can bring betterment to every life. If we meet men and women, no matter how distorted their character, with a

sincere desire to help and to bless them--we shall find it an easy task to bear with them and treat them lovingly.

Longfellow says, "If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we would find in each man's life, sorrow and suffering enough, to disarm all hostility." We always feel kindly and speak softly in the presence of suffering. There is something in us, that prompts us to extend sympathy and help--to one that has sorrow. To remember that in every life there are hidden griefs--would go far to help us to observe toward all, the law of love.

An artist used to say to his pupils, "The end of the day--is the proof of the picture." He meant that the most favorable time to judge of the excellence of a painting is the twilight-hour, when there is not light enough to distinguish details. Then defects in execution cannot be seen, and the artist's thought glows in its richest beauty.

In like manner, the close of the day of life, is the truest time to look at human character. In the noon glare--all men's faults appear. Jealousies, emulations and rivalries show us to each other, in the heat of clashing, manifesting life in most unfavorable light. We are apt to put the worst construction upon each other's actions and motives. We see each other, through the defective and distorting lens of our own selfishness! All the evil appears magnified; and many of the better things are unperceived or shown in false settings. But when the shadows of the evening of eternity begin to fall upon us, we see each other with the asperities softened and the blemishes covered by the veil of charity. When the fierce competitions are hushed, we see men in truer light. We do justice then, to their virtues and better qualities. Envy and prejudice in us, no longer magnify the evil that is in them; while the good shines out in transfigured splendor. When we sit beside a man's death-bed, we have no harsh judgments to pronounce. Beauties appear, which we had never observed before; and imperfections fade out in the softening, mellowing glow that streams from the gates of the eternal world.

How kindly we feel toward him in that hour! Can we not learn to look at men--always as we shall at the close of the day? Then it will be easy to feel and to exhibit toward all that love which never fails, which thinks no evil, which hopes all things.

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