

True Love

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Love is fundamental to our faith as followers of Christ, but that doesn't mean it's easy. You've probably heard the adage that "love is a many-splendored thing." One little boy overheard some adults use this expression and asked his mother why love has so many splinters. The little boy might have misunderstood the quote, but he was right about love. Love can often be challenging, confusing and full of splinters. This is why we must turn to Scripture to understand this complicated spiritual exercise.

I'm reminded of Jesus' statement in John 13.35 that the world will know us as His disciples by our love for each other. We Mississippi Baptists might be known for a number of things ranging from personal evangelism to global missions. However, the one quality that should be pervasive in all we do is love. Paul reminded us that even if we have enough faith to move mountains, if we don't have love then our faith is empty. Love gives substance to all our expressions of obedience to God. Our works of goodness are like a series of zeroes, which ultimately equal zero no matter how many you write. When you add love to those works, it's like putting a 1 or a 5 or any base number at the head of those zeroes. Love gives value to our works of righteousness.

I'm also struck by John's statement in 1 John 3.18 that we should love with our deeds and not just our words. Love is not so much a matter of talk as it is a matter of our treatment of others. So often, people associate love with our emotions and relegate it to the category of sentiment. In reality, love is

not merely an emotion; it is, rather, an action. Love truly is something you do!

Another misconception many have about love is that it is weak and passive. Nothing could be further from the truth. No one demonstrated love more perfectly than Jesus, and He was definitely not passive in His personality. In fact, no one ever loved with more truth and strength than did Christ. Paul instructed the Ephesians to “speak the truth in love” (cf. Eph. 4.15), which informs us that truth and love ought not to be separated. Many in the world resort to speaking the truth in hatred, while others mistakenly compromise the truth in love. Though these approaches are easier, they are not best. Love and truth must always be found in tandem. When they are isolated from each other, the result is anger and compromise and division.

These are indeed turbulent times we are living in, and it is mighty easy to justify unhelpful behaviors under the guise of truth separated from love or love isolated from truth. The challenge for those of us who follow our Lord, however, is to blend them together in the same manner our Lord blended them when He hung from the cross.

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