

## A Valentine Form Jimmy

Jim Elliff

Valentine's Day brings back some strange memories for me. I'm especially haunted by the fact that after signing my batch of Valentines on the night before the classroom exchange I would invariably inscribe some with "Form Jimmy." I hated that. I knew the difference between "Form" and "From," but my hand seemed destined to make this mistake at least some of the time. This was alright if the card went to someone with "cooties," but heart wrenching if it went to some of my favorite people. People with cooties, well, they didn't deserve much anyway.



We all know that Valentines Day is more likely designed by the Card manufacturers than God. There's nothing in the Bible about such an event. But it doesn't hurt to think about love on a cold February day. After all, it's part of the definition of God Himself.

Here is the way Jesus laid it out. He said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (Jn. 13:34) Why is it called new?

The initial standard of love for others was based on our love for ourselves-"Love your neighbor as yourself." But here Jesus ups the standard and makes Himself the measure of love-and this is brand new. Our love for ourselves is uneven, incomplete, and sometimes distorted. But Jesus love for people is pure, sacrificial and unconditional. There is no higher standard to be found.

Throughout the New Testament then you find this standard placarded before us. We are to forgive as Christ forgave, bear burdens like Christ did, give as Christ gave, accept others as Christ accepts us.

Paul said, for instance, "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God." (Rom. 15:7)

It might help to place in front of your mind that person who is most disagreeable to you, that cantankerous, obnoxious, or overbearing person, or maybe that person who gets all the breaks, all the attention.

Do you accept that person like Christ accepts you? Is it possible? The source for that love is the Spirit within us. But the way that love begins to show up in the believer often corresponds to our perspective on His acceptance of us. A healthy understanding of just how much love that takes, considering what kind of person we are, really helps.

We are professional sinners, committing thousands of sins in our lives, so what right should we have to reject someone else? And the fact that we really know better, makes our sins are even more grievous. But Christ accepts us unconditionally. Can we really shun someone else when we're thinking accurately about that amazing fact?

Love doesn't mean that you like every one equally, or that you will spend the same amount of time with people whose mannerisms are difficult for you to respond to. It does not mean that we give in to everybody's desires, or that we should not think through the best way to be with people.

Love is deeper than "like." But you must not shun the difficult people. You must not be exclusive in spirit. You must welcome the difficult people from your heart as much as Christ welcomes you. You must be ready and inclusive when God brings them to you.

A friend of mine was the chaplain for the Razorback Football team in Fayetteville, Arkansas. He pastors a church that has attracted many college students. Years ago on the practice field at the very time he was talking seriously with a player about Christ, up came Tommy Defenbaugh one more time. "Hiiiiiii, pastor!" he blurted out. Tommy was one of those people who was too loud and always had wrong timing. He was a slow learner. And he became a real irritation to this pastor. Tommy got in his way-almost always.

When considering this nagging problem, God brought this potent thought to this pastor's mind: "Remember, you are my Tommy Defenbaugh."

He got the message. Do you?

Christ accepts his family without condition. He did not accept us because we are something special. He accepted us in the same way we are to accept others, cooties and all. And Valentine's Day, whether it is in the Bible or not, is as good a starting place for that kind of love as any other day.