

Love Is Not Less than a Feeling

By Daryl Wingerd

What does it mean to “love the brethren” (1 John 3:14)?

It has been correctly said that to truly love someone is more than just having feelings for them. Actions, in addition to words and feelings, are the proof of genuine love. The husband who truly loves his wife won't just *say* he loves her. He will show his love by his deeds. The true Christian won't just *say* he loves Christ. He will show his love by his obedience. True love certainly is more than a feeling.



But true love is also not *less* than a feeling.

Consider the words of Scripture, first from Jesus Himself:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

Christians are to imitate Christ in loving one another. We are taught to love each other *even as He has loved us*. This implies Christ-like self-sacrifice, or giving ourselves for the good of other believers. In imitating Christ's love for believers, we must “regard one another as more important than yourselves” (Phil 2:4). This is the “action” component of true Christian love.

But notice that after giving the command to “love one another,” Jesus goes on to say that the world will know that we are His disciples if we “*have love* for one another” (emphasis added). This tells us that Christ-like love is not merely bound up in our actions. It is something that we must “have” for each other. We must possess affection for other believers, and this affection then motivates loving actions.

Peter affirms this when he writes, “Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart” (1 Pet. 1:22). The word Peter used for “sincere” can also be translated, “unhypocritical”—not faked, not an act, more than just an outward display. This word dovetails perfectly with the words, “from the heart”—that is, from your reborn heart.

Heartfelt love for other believers is a critical part of our assurance that we have truly been born again. “We know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death” (1 John 3:14). Certainly (as John goes on to say in verse 16) we who have been loved by Christ “ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” But apart from genuine affection for other believers, your sacrificial actions are not conclusive proof that you love them. If you *really* love them, you will *feel* love for them. And because you feel love for them, you will be willing to lay down your life for them.

John goes on to say, “Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. By this we will know that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him” (1 John 3:18-19). Did you catch that? We must love “in *deed*” (the “action” component of love) and *truth* (the “fact” component of love). We must actually love other believers, not just pretend to do so. This is what Paul meant when he insisted that believers love one another “without hypocrisy” (Rom. 12:9).

Believers should cherish heartfelt affection for other believers in the same way they cherish the other evidences of true conversion: practicing righteousness rather than sin, and believing the Bible rather than false teaching. If your feelings of love for other believers have faded to the point where being with your local church is of little importance, or if what you thought was true love is subtly being replaced by impatience, intolerance, unresolved grievances, bitterness, disdain, or indifference, you should be just as concerned as if you had embraced a heretical system of doctrine or had been overcome by a pattern of ungodliness. “Love never fails” (1 Cor. 13:8). If what you currently call your love for other believers ultimately fails, then it was never true love in the first place.

Preserving and strengthening Christian love takes dedication, hard work, and humility. Because of differing personalities, diverse backgrounds, contrary preferences, personal weaknesses, and sensitivities, believers (including you) are not always easy to love. But if your affection for other Christians were a boat, sins like gossip, slander, complaining, grudge-holding, selectively avoiding fellowship, being easily offended, or reluctance to reconcile following an offense, are concrete blocks. The more of them you allow in, the closer your boat comes to sinking.

Do whatever it takes—*today*—to cast them all overboard so that your heartfelt affection for the brethren can thrive.

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