

# The Heart of the Matter

## Lesson 4: The Christian's Attitude Toward Others

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### 1. We Are Not Alone

We share this planet and our very lives with others. No man is an island; few among us are total orphans. We are usually nurtured in families; we grow up to have families of our own. We will be educated among people; work among people; enjoy leisure time and activities among people. This is what God intended, for He made us social creatures.

Even as we are endowed with free will, so are others. As we hold certain very definite opinions, so do others. Our perspectives, convictions and values will differ with others from childhood through our golden years. How we come to view other people, and what our attitudes toward them are, will in large measure determine where we spend eternity.

### 2. Made in God's Image

In spite of the many differences between individual people, the great equalizer is that we are made by a common Creator.

**Job 31:13-15** – *"If I have despised the cause of my manservant or my maidservant when they complained against me, what then shall I do when God rises up? When He punishes, how shall I answer Him? Did not He who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same One fashion us in the womb?"*

**Acts 17:26** – *"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and has determined their pre-appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation ...".*

**Jas. 3:9** – *"With it (the tongue, jj) we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God."*

Whatever the failures of others (and they can be significant), we must not adopt a sub-human view of our fellow man. All men are created in the image of God, though that image may have become tarnished. But even sinful men who so faintly resemble God are objects of His love.

### 3. God So Loved the World ...

The most well-known Bible verse speaks of God's love for a corrupt world (John 3: 16). If He is the creator, lawgiver and ultimate judge and **He** continues to love those in sin, how can we who are other fellow-creatures do less?

Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally, is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered. Love seeks the welfare of all, Romans 15:2, and works no ill to any, 13:8-10; love seeks opportunity to do good to "all men, and especially toward them that are of the household of the faith,"

Galatians 6:10.

[W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Vol. 3, p. 21]

Jesus, Paul and James all summarize the law as the obligation to love our neighbor: Mark 12:30-33; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14; Jas 2:8. As members of the human race, we are called to support and serve each other. The lofty esteem in which we naturally hold each other is seen when a person's life is in

jeopardy. It is not uncommon to see people risk their lives to save another and

then reject praise as a hero. In such inspiring events we see the true esteem we should hold for one another as members of the same human family.

#### **4. The Spiritually Lost**

But if concern for the physical well-being of our fellow man is apparent, how much deeper should be our interest in his spiritual condition?

Think of what Jesus gave up to *"come to save that which was lost"* (Mt 18:11). As people volunteer their medical skills in impoverished countries, so Jesus likens His association with sinners to a physician tending to the sick (Mt 9:12). As a man who lost his sheep, a woman her money and a man his son, so God has made efforts to find and restore men who have wandered from Him (Luke 15).

We are perhaps frustrated by sinners' lack of interest in their own alienation from God. Blinded by Satan and filled with selfishness and greed, those who are lost often don't feel lost. Perhaps there are fleeting moments when an event reminds them of their mortality or pricks their conscience, but our society is increasingly insensitive to its own sinfulness. We must not let this make us indifferent to their spiritual condition. We must always be filled with loving concern for those who are willing to let us help them. Leading someone to Christ is the most significant achievement one can enjoy in this life.

#### **5. Others in the Family**

The people we will have the most in common with in this life will be those who share our spiritual outlook and heavenly goals. All that God has done throughout history has been unto the purpose of culling from the masses of humanity a spiritual family of believers.

When we come to appreciate God as our heavenly Father, and the love and mercy that He has shown for us, then we will have a natural affection for others who likewise share in our salvation. Thus the Scriptures abound with passages commanding due regard for our brethren:

**Phil. 2:1-4** – *"... fulfill my joy by being likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind ..."*

**Eph. 4:32** – *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ also forgave you."*

**1 Thess. 3:12** – *"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you."*

**1 Thess. 4:9** – *"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."*

**Rom. 15:5** – *"Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be likeminded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus ..."*

Many other exhortations to brotherly love are sprinkled throughout the New Testament. But this love is not automatic; it must be cultivated and developed.

We may be more frustrated and disappointed by the failures and foibles of our brethren than people in the world. First, we spend more time together and are more intimately acquainted with each other. "Familiarity breeds contempt," says the old adage, and our feelings for each other can become frayed because of our constant associations. Secondly, it is natural to have higher expectations of each other because of our shared values and insights. Thus when someone falls short of our expectations, we can react with a lack of patience and sympathy.

## 6. The Failure to Love

It is tragic when God's people do not love each other as they should. First, lack of due regard mars the image of Christ. Local churches can divide into cliques or be split asunder entirely. Much spiritual energy and vitality is drained from the community, and instead of working diligently for the Lord brethren work against each other.

The Corinthian brethren were plagued by petty jealousies and carnal bickering. James asks his readers: *"Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and*

*cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask ... Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?"* (Jas. 4:1-4).

One thing is certain: If we are the cause of such animosity and discord, we cut ourselves off from God: *"We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."* (1 John 3:14-15)

May we seek to love each other more, for it is the will of our heavenly Father.

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### Questions for Discussion

1. Discuss the "instinct" to save another human being's life at all cost.
2. How did Paul see his personal liberties in light of saving souls (cf. 1 Cor. 9:19-23)?
3. What is the highest display of love for a brother (1 John 3:16; John 15:13)? If we are not called upon to die for our brethren, how else can we show our love for them?
4. Discuss how we can restore our love for someone who has hurt us deeply.
5. How should we react to our enemies' needs (cf. Rom. 12:20; Matt. 5:44)?