

## The Epistles of John part 5

Our passage for this week was 1 John 3: 11 - 24

In this section and the section to follow, John emphasises that a sure sign that we are in Christ, is that we will love our brothers, our fellow believers. Note again that this is not a prescriptive passage in the sense that certain behaviour is prescribed. Rather it is simply describing what the state of affairs will be, if we are truly in Christ.

Added to this, there is the reference in John 13:35 " By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" which makes it clear that this love between believers is to be a witness to the world.

We started off by getting some contributions from around the room as regards what it means to us when we read that we should love our fellow believers; how is this love displayed? We had several contributions: 'It means always being nice to them', 'It means putting them first, above my own desires', 'it means to love them with God's love - a love not from ourselves', 'It means to always be welcoming...' During the preceding week, I had done some work on this as well, by asking random people (Christians) the same question. The most common answer I got, was that we "should always be nice to them, especially because the world is watching"

We then proceeded to establish three main points in the study:

1. The reason why John could state that if we are in Christ, there would be love for each other and a lack of hatred,
2. The nature of this love, how it is actually displayed, what form it takes,
3. In what way this love is in fact a testimony to a watching world.

First of all we established, by way of discussion, personal testimony and scripture references, what the true nature of the world is, what human nature is like. I started by sharing some of what Heidi had shared with me as regards what the staff at schools where she has taught in her life, were like. It always looks O.K. on the outside, but on the inside, the amount of bitternesses, hatreds, resentments and gossip that goes on, is astounding. Personally, living and working in three different parts of the world in different industries, has taught me exactly the same. Others in the group confirmed that this was their experience of the world and people of the world. There is a pleasant veneer, but once you dig deeper, it uncovers a multitude evils - jealousy, envy, pride, ambition and the like. We then proceeded to look at what the Bible says about human nature:

**Genesis 6: 12   Micah 7: 2   Galatians 5: 15 - 21   2 Timothy 3: 1 - 5   1 John 2: 16**

and some scriptures documenting 'brotherly love' in the Old Testament:

**Proverbs 18: 19   1 Samuel 17: 28   Genesis 4: 3 - 6   Genesis 27: 41   Genesis 37: 16 - 20**

These references gave us ample confirmation of what came out during our discussion. Friends, it is **very important** that we come to realise what fallen human nature is truly like. Anyone who believes that human beings are intrinsically good, is deluded, and is obviously looking only on the surface of things, and not any deeper. Furthermore, they also deny what God's Word teaches on the subject. Scripture is full of references to the true, fallen, evil nature of man, and that includes us...I pray that God will reveal this truth to us, because it is one of the most basic doctrines of the Christian faith. One which these days, is swept under the carpet and a message is proclaimed that all men are intrinsically 'good' which is completely contrary to God's Word. It is also vital to our understanding of why Jesus Christ had to suffer and die on the cross.

Having established the above regarding human nature, we then looked at some truly glorious scriptures about how we have been saved **out of** the world, **out of** darkness:

**John 15: 19    1 Peter 2: 9 - 12    Ephesians 2: 1 - 3    1 John 3: 14 - 15    Romans 12: 2**

These scriptures confirm that once we believe God, accept Jesus Christ as our Saviour and Lord, transferring all our trust to Him, we are born again, this time into His kingdom, where things are very different...We receive a new nature - the old one is crucified and our lives are now hidden in Christ. We now display His characteristics, as we are filled with Him. We literally 'cross over' from death to life, from darkness into light. It is for this reason that John can write in our passage, that we are to love our brothers. It is because we have now come out of that world with its passions and desires, hatreds and bitternesses, and our nature is now love! So, there cannot be hatred, bitterness, resentment and anger...Those belong to the old nature and to those who have not crossed over yet, from death to life. We are a new creation, created to do the works that God desires.

We also compared some very interesting scriptures with a clear and uniform message, which is that if we cannot love our brothers, there is little hope that we will be able to love those in the world...ponder these 2 scriptures for a bit:

**1 John 4: 20    and    Jeremiah 12:5 - wonderful similarity!**

To explain our second point for the study, we looked at the nature of a love-relationship. Nikki and Dave helped us with this in terms of their marriage. They shared that yes, they love each other, but there are also times when things are not plain sailing. This, many of us confirmed from our own experience of marriage. So, it follows then that even when two people love each other that much, there are still difficult times when that love is tested. The quality of the love is proven by these difficulties. Now, to relate this back to the statements made by people in response to the question about loving our fellow believers, the same applies...According to the answers I got, it seems as if many people get from this passage that we are to, at all times, display the love we as believers have for each other, to a watching world - **whether it is so or not, even to the point of pretending sometimes...**

However, we have just seen that love is proven genuine, exactly when things go wrong. We then looked at a number of scriptures which describe the dynamic of the love between believers:

**Colossians 3: 13    1 Peter 4: 8    1 John 3: 16    Romans 12: 9 - 21    Matthew 18: 21 - 22  
Ephesians 4: 29**

Surprisingly, many of these scriptures contained the idea of much forgiveness between believers (70 x 7!), letting things go, making allowances, bearing with one another etc etc. This is the way our love for each other is displayed - by the very fact that we react differently to the world when things are done against us or when our fellow believers frustrate, irritate or hurt us. This is exactly contrary to the way the world reacts, which is: 'I will get that person back', 'what goes around comes around', 'you hurt me - I hurt you', 'I will make you pay'...etc etc.

This, friends, is how the love between believers is a testimony to a watching world. Not by pretending to always be loving each other and holding up this 'front'. No, by the very way in which we forgive, let go, harbour no bitterness, always building up...Jenny shared a testimony with us, that this is in fact so, and I can also confirm that I have had similar comments from people in the world, that they find that specific phenomenon interesting. So, do away with anxiousness to always having to hold up a front of love. The above is much more real than that!

May God bless you richly this week my dear friends

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