

# CHRISTIAN LOVE

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*Illustration:*

There is an old story about an older couple having dinner in a restaurant. The wife sees another couple about their age sitting in a booth nearby. She sees the husband sitting close to his wife, with his arm around her. He is whispering things in her ear, and she is smiling and blushing. He's gently rubbing her shoulder and touching her hair.

The woman turns to her husband and says, "Look at the couple over there. Look how close that man is to his wife, how he's talking to her. Look at how sweet he is. Why don't you ever do that?"

Her husband looks up from his Caesar salad and glances over at the next booth. Then he turns to his wife and says, "Honey, I don't even know that woman."

Today's sermon is on the topic of love, not ordinary love, but Christian love. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians 13:1-13 gives us a powerful definition of Christian love. He says that love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude, does not insist **on** its own way, is not irritable or resentful, does not rejoice in wrong doing, but **rejoices** in the truth. **Love** bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, love never ends.

**Is this the kind of love that the congregation of Holy Faith practices?**

I have often heard parishioners speak **about** love -- that we need to love one another, and that we need to **practice** Christ's love among ourselves. All this is true, but the question is, when are we going **to begin to** practice this kind of love with each other? **Because**, if we cannot love each other as Christ commands us to do, then we cannot call ourselves Christians.

Paul is clear when he says in his first letter to the Corinthians 13:1 "If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal." In other words, if we say that we are members of Holy Faith, but we don't have love for one another, then Holy Faith

cannot call itself a Christian church. If we say that we worship Christ every Sunday, but don't have love for our brothers and sisters, then we cannot call ourselves Christians. If we read the Bible and meditate on God's Word every day, but don't love each other, then we cannot call ourselves Christians.

**You see, to be a Christian is** more than coming to Church; it is more than reading the Bible, and it is more than being a member of a particular ministry in the church. To be a Christian means that we are willing to love God with all our hearts and minds and to **make Jesus' love a reality among each other**. Christ didn't say love only those of your kind, He said love everyone. In Matthew 22: 37-39 Jesus says, "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and **great** commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Do you know what this means? It means that if you don't love your neighbor, you don't love yourself! So, anytime you reject someone because of his/her **race**, or because of his/her disability; or because of his/her nationality you don't only reject yourself, but you also reject Christ who died on the cross for you and for your neighbor.

John wrote in his first letter **John 4:7-8** " Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

The church should be a place where people from all over the world should come and experience God's love, but unfortunately God's love is not a priority in many congregations. If we practice Christian love among ourselves, I guarantee you that this church will not be big enough to accommodate **the** thousands of people who will **hurry here** every Sunday to experience this love. Jesus says in John 13:35 "By this everyone will know that **you are my disciples**, if **you** love one another."

Christian love is not a choice, it is a mandate. Whether we like or dislike our brother or sister, we are instructed to love them any way. This is what it means to be a Christian. Do you still want to call yourself a Christian? If you are interested in being **an authentic** Christian then Jesus invites you right here, right now, to set aside hatred, unforgiveness, discrimination, and all negative feelings toward your neighbor and **begin** to practice Christian love among **yourselves**.

**Another discipline that Jesus Christ commands us to practice among ourselves in order to complete one of the requirements of becoming a Christian, is to love our enemies. This command of**

Jesus - to forgive our enemies, the people who have hurt us, is very difficult for many Christians to practice, because it requires us to be serious about forgiveness. Jesus says in Matthew 6:15 "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not **forgive** your sins." We cannot expect God to forgive our sins when **we refuse to forgive** others. If we want forgiveness, then we need to forgive, because if we don't, God will not forgive our sins.

A genuine Christian is one who has love in his/her heart for Christ, one who loves his/her neighbor and one who loves his/her enemy. Jesus says in Luke 6:35 "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked."

*Illustration:*

**A woman was bitten by a rabid dog**, and it looked like she was going to die from rabies. The doctor told her to put her final affairs in order. So the woman took pen and paper, and began writing furiously. In fact she wrote and wrote and wrote. Finally the doctor said, "That sure is a long will you're making." She snorted, "Will, nothing! I'm making a list of all the people I'm going to bite!"

**One of the prerequisites** for our entrance into heaven is to love each other. It doesn't matter how many people we tell about Christ. It doesn't matter how many **hungry** souls we feed. It doesn't matter how much money we put into the collection plate; the only way to get to heaven is to love God with all our heart, mind and soul and to love each other as Christ loved us. So if you want to get to heaven, then you have to love one another. That's the message of Paul in today's second reading, and he echoes the words of Christ. We are to love each other.

Beloved, we are Christians because we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior and want to follow His teachings. The teaching of Jesus Christ is that we should love one another -- and this includes our enemies. Therefore, if **anyone** has a problem loving others, I invite you to open your heart, right here, right now, and receive Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Jesus loves you and He wants you to practice His love among your neighbors. Know this, that the moment you accept Jesus **into** your heart, will be the moment you will have the courage to love your neighbor and to love your enemy unconditionally.

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