

3:13-15, "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." The withdrawal of fellowship is, of course a last resort, but one with definite purpose. It is to help bring some immediacy to the consequences of sin and cause the erring one to count the cost, with hopes that they will return to the paths of righteousness. It is not something that is to be done in a mean-spirited way, but with love and sorrow, offering encouragement to repent, and the promise of a warm reception upon doing so at every turn.

When you stop and think about it, how could it be loving to ignore sin? Sure, the personal relationship, and the benefits that you receive from that relationship remain intact. But what of the sinner? He or she is hurtling toward eternity, lost and without hope, and those around them fail to show enough concern to do what they can to stop them before it is everlastingly too late! If this person was sitting within their house, enjoying some entertaining diversion, but that house was on fire, would you not remove them from that house, no matter what was required? To leave them alone to burn certainly could not be loving. How could it

be any different to leave them alone to face the fires of hell, while you, holding the Gospel, have done nothing to save their eternal soul?

Is it uncomfortable to confront sin? Does it sometimes cause rifts in relationships? Does it sometimes evoke anger, shame, sorrow, and other such emotions? Absolutely. But, is it not the ultimate act of love to set aside those temporal things that mean so much, and strive to save a soul? So, the next time that you are faced with a soul that is lost in sin, do what is loving, reach out to them with the Law of Christ, and help them, while there is still time!

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Phone: 662-283-1192

Choate@WorldEvangelism.org

www.WorldEvangelism.org

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What Is True Love?



Justin A. Hopkins

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Often you will hear someone speak about how unkind and unloving it is to judge someone else by saying that they are caught up in sin. After all, who are they to be judging? Don't they have sin in their own lives? How, then, can they judge me for what I am doing? Didn't Jesus say, "Judge not..." (Matthew 7:1)?

Here is an assumption about what is unkind and what is unloving. To accuse someone of being unloving is a heavy accusation, because "He that loveth not knoweth not God" (1 John 4:8). To say that someone is unloving, then, is to say that they are not in fellowship with God.

This makes the discussion about what is and isn't loving one of utmost importance. How, then, do we define love? John goes on to tell us that "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God, by His very nature is love. In the preceding verse John told us that "Love is of God." To truly understand love, then, we must turn to God and His Word for a definition. Since love emanates from the very essence of His being, any definition of love that contradicts His definition cannot be correct. We must ask, then: What does the Bible say about being loving toward those around us?

"And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it" (2 John 5,6). Here John tells us that, not only is love defined by the person of God, but it is commanded by Him. So, to be unloving is to be out of fellowship with God, and to be disobedient to His commands. Surely, nobody can expect to reach Heaven if they are acting in a way toward those around them that is unloving. Jesus takes this one step further, and tells us that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). So, then to be disobedient to God's commands also demonstrates a lack of love for our savior!

John goes further, and explains to us what this command entails. After all, there are so many different definitions of love, how can we know what truly is loving if God did not tell us? Thankfully He did! He says that love is to live by His commandments. Therefore, if I am to be loving to my neighbors, I must always ensure that my actions toward them are directed by God's commands. Conversely, if my actions toward my

neighbor are in direct violation of God's commands, or even fail to fulfill them, then I am not truly being loving toward them.

What, then, does the Bible say in regard to addressing sin and error in the lives of others? It must either be loving or unloving; there can be no middle ground. Galatians 6:1,2 commands us: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." So, if I am to be loving, I have an obligation to reach out to those who I see trapped in sin, and try to bring them back into a right relationship with Christ. To fail to do so, is to fail to fulfill the Law of Christ, and is therefore, unloving.

Paul strikes at the heart of the matter when he deals with the concept of withdrawing fellowship from a brother who is in sin. Here is an action that is seen by most in the world as being most unkind and most unloving. But, what does the Law of Christ say about it? In 1 Corinthians 5:5 Paul declares firmly that one of the purposes of withdrawing fellowship is to save the soul of the brother or sister who is caught up in sin. In the same vein, Paul tells us again in 2 Thessalonians