

Show-Me Your Love

John 3:16, 13:34

Robert Browning, the nineteenth century poet, wrote the famous Sonnets from the Portuguese, including one with these now famous words: “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.” The sonnet went on to list the many ways Browning loved Elizabeth Barrett, whom he married. Browning said he loved her “to the depth and breadth and height my soul can reach.” He said he loved her “purely...with passion” and “with the breath, smiles, tears, of all my life.”

People often string words together to tell others how much they love them. Many people mean what they say. But often the boast of love is not fulfilled with action. Christianity is often described as a religion of love. It is true that love is a central theme of the Bible. In fact, the Bible declares simply in I John 4:8 that “God is love.” But John also reminded us of the true nature of love when he wrote in I John 3:18, “My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” In the Bible, love is not mostly a feeling; it’s an *action word!*

Our emphasis on stewardship has featured the repeating theme, “Show me!” Nowhere is this exhortation from God more fitting than in the matter of love. We may love God to the breadth and depth and height our souls can reach, but how do we show Him our love?

John, sometimes called the apostle of love, told us about Jesus’ meeting with Nicodemus. As part of that long conversation, John recorded in 3:16:

16. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Perhaps two years after saying those words to Nicodemus, Jesus was with his disciples in the upper room just before the cross experience, and He told them this:

34. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

Sometimes great truths become clearest when we compare scripture with scripture. These two passages team up to teach us about how real love is demonstrated in what we do.

(Summary of verses)

John wrote that God gave Jesus as an expression of His love, and that Jesus commanded us to imitate that example.

(Idea of this message)

God's love for us is the model for our love of Him - we are to love each other by giving of ourselves for other's good. Considering that Jesus loved us by giving what it took to save us—namely His own life - our loving others means we must give whatever it takes to see them come to salvation in Christ.

(Goal of this message)

As we study what Jesus said about God's love and our love, we must come to the point where we devote ourselves to loving God and loving others by giving to enable both ministry and the gospel.

God desires our love. But he wants more than poems and pretty songs. He says, "Show me your love."

God gave Jesus to Show His Love

God's expectation that we show Him our love is based on the fact that first of all He shows us His. John 3:16 says, "God so loved that He gave His only begotten Son". God gave Jesus to show His love.

The first four words of that verse teaches a principle all by themselves, "God so loved that He gave" – love gives. We celebrate that truth every time a birthday rolls around; we give presents and often by making special gifts to God by supporting His work. Giving is recognized everywhere as a way to demonstrate our love for others.

The most important gift God has given to show His love for us is Jesus Christ. Without Christ, there is no eternal life for us, only a lifetime of enslavement to sin and an eternity of darkness and misery. God gave us the one and only thing that could conquer sin, remove our guilt, forgive our trespasses and make possible a new birth to everlasting life – Jesus Christ, God the Son made flesh. God gave us Himself in human form to die for our sins and rise in victory to give us new life. What a gift!

A pastor in Kentucky told how he sent his parents a microwave oven one Christmas. His thinking was that now they could be part of the "instant generation". Unfortunately for his parents, many electronic devices these days require a whole new way of thinking to be able to figure out the buttons, lights and language by which they operate. Bottom line, the pastor's parents couldn't make the microwave work. It took a visit from their son to fix the problem. His mother said to a friend, "I really don't need better directions, I just needed my son to come along with the gift".

God didn't just send us directions, He sent His Son. The solution to our sin problem was not and is not a better set of instructions, a new set of rules, or a new form of religion and ritual. The solution was not *something*, but *someone*.

God gave us Jesus to show us His love.

What made God's gift of His Son such a wonderful demonstration of His love was the fact that Jesus the Son continued the giving.

Jesus Gave His Life to Show His Love

God gave his Son Jesus and in turn Jesus gave His life to show His love. Some people talk about how Jesus was such a good example, how He healed and inspired and taught us how to live. All this is true, but Jesus' whole purpose in coming was to do what He did on Calvary, to die for our sins and rise again to bring us everlasting life. All the other things were good and wonderful, but without Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, nothing else would count much.

Most of us have heard the poem, "I Asked God, How Much Do You Love Me?" by an unknown author. The poem ends with these words:

*I asked God, "How much do You love me?"
He said, "I love you this much:"
And He stretched out His arms and died.*

Only Jesus could give His life to save sinners. But only we can now give our lives to make Jesus known to sinners. God operates no radio stations from heaven to broadcast the gospel. Jesus left it up to us to take the gospel to the world.

Believing that Jesus' self-sacrifice was the model for Christian living, Southern Baptists have placed their priority on missions. The International Mission Board exists for one purpose - to send missionaries to as many countries as will allow them. Currently more than 5,500 missionaries are under appointment. Figures for 2003 are not yet available, but in 2002 the IMB started more than 8,000 churches and baptized more than 420,000 new believers in Jesus Christ. Southern Baptists are loving people by introducing them to the Savior.

The North American Mission board also exists for one reason - to reach people in North America for Christ. Currently there are more than 5,200 missionaries under appointment. Every Southern Baptist who gives to his church is giving *through* his church to support these mission boards plus six seminaries, and commissions and agencies trying to communicate the Christian message to America. Every Missouri Baptist who gives through his church is supporting the missions efforts of the Missouri Baptist Convention, which works through Christian higher education, the Children's Home, and many Executive Board strategic initiatives, to communicate Christ to the hundreds of thousands of Missourians who are not yet saved. Missouri Baptists are loving people by telling them about Jesus.

Loving others through kind deeds is important; but we could do kind things for the

lost for a lifetime. But if we did not love them by telling them the gospel, we would not have loved them very much. We have the privilege of extending Christ's kind of love to people we will never even meet by participating in the work of Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program—the strategy that unites this church with the Missouri Baptist Convention and the Southern Baptist Convention to support the mission work we've described. We participate by giving, because Jesus gave his life for us.

Every Christian knows these two truths, that God gave His Son to show His love, and that Jesus the Son gave His life on the cross to show His love. What Jesus then said to His disciples in the upper room goes on to teach us what we not only *can* do but what we *must* do to show our love in response:

We Must Give Our Lives to Show Our Love

Our other text from John 13:34 tells us that Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another." Then Jesus added, "As *I* have loved *you*, that *ye* also love *one another*." What a standard of love! Jesus wants us to give our lives for others. That's how we can show our love for him.

But, we might say, there are not many opportunities for any of us to actually die for someone else. How are we supposed to give our lives for others? We've already said it. Outside of the few who are called to be martyrs, Jesus doesn't call us to die for Him, but to live for Him. If persecution results in a life or death choice, then living for Jesus may mean dying for Him, too. But Jesus wants people who will live for Him, giving their lives in ministry and mission.

Remember the man who was delivered from demons and who urgently asked to join Jesus' traveling disciples? Jesus told him, "Go home and tell all that the Lord has done for you." That's how Christ wanted that man to live for Him. He was to take up a mission to tell others.

Many Christians have a far too private and personal concept of loving and serving God. God wants us to be committed to reaching people for Him. "As I have loved you," Jesus said. His love for us was aggressive, selfless, personal, and sacrificial. How can we love God as Jesus loved us?

When we organize our lives so as to make room for charity and ministry, we are showing God we love Him. When we forego luxuries so we can tend to the eternal needs of others, we are showing God our love. When we take a personal interest in our church's commitment to missions from around the corner to around the world, we are loving God back. When we commit our money to God and begin to be sacrificial in our giving to support our own church's mission and the work of Southern Baptists through the Cooperative Program, we are loving God back. When

we minister to people in crisis, and make certain our church also supports and does ministry, we are loving God in return for His love for us. In Jesus Christ, God said, "I love you." Let's let our lives say to God, "I love you, too."

Which of us can say he has done enough to show God his love? For most of us, re-commitment is in order. Only you know what you must do in your daily walk, where you work, learn, live or play, to touch people's lives for Christ.

But as part of the body of Christ, His church, you can begin by making a commitment to devote more of your resources to join your church in reaching people for Christ.

Begin by making yourself available to participate in a ministry of this church to people in need, opening doors to witness and demonstrating to people in our own neighborhood that we care because God cares. Join with the church in supporting evangelism and missions beyond our borders to this state, our country and the world, through greater, more self-sacrificial gifts. Get involved in our local association to reach communities throughout our area. Give through this church to fund the Cooperative Program's worldwide reach of missions and evangelism.

Some of you could double your present giving, or more, to show your love. Do you need those extra things in your house as much as someone in a mission area needs eternal life? Sometimes, it literally comes down to that kind of choice. Sometimes we forget that our giving in church actually has an impact on lives. As a church, we try to keep ourselves informed by mission studies and tracts and pamphlets. Sometimes we have mission speakers. Our association offers mission events. But sometimes we just see the offerings, and can't quite make out the images of the people whose lives we touch.

Ray Boltz wrote the wonderfully inspiring song, "Thank You," about a person who dreamed he was in heaven with a friend. People came up to tell the friend how they were there because he had given to the Lord. Some of the words to this song are:

*One by one they came
Far as the eye could see
Each life somehow touched
By your generosity.*

*Little things that you had done
Sacrifices made.
Unnoticed on the earth
In heaven now proclaimed.*

And they said,

*Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am a life that was changed.
Thank you for giving to the Lord
I am so glad you gave.*

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Giving really is the greatest measure of love. God so loved that He gave. Jesus gave His very life to "love us into heaven." What will we give to show our love for God and to show others the way to Him?

How will you answer that challenge today?