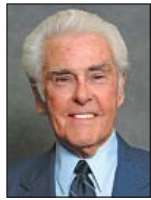


Distinct in my love

We have recently experienced Valentine's Day when all kinds of love was being proclaimed on cards and in



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person. Arthur Rouner has a delightful little book titled *How to Love...* in which he rightly acknowledges that love is a very vague and general term that is hard to define. He indicates, though, that love "is a word, a quality, and a reality of frightening power. And if we do not somehow learn to understand it, use it, and grow with it, all our relationships are in peril" (1974, p. 11).

In his letter to the Roman Christians, Paul emphasized the nature of the love that is to be expressed in Christian social relationships when he said, "Let love be genuine," or as Phillips translates it, "Let us have no imitation love" (Romans 12:9).

How does authentic love show itself in Christian attitudes? Let us examine New Testament love with other persons like us or with persons who can be termed enemies.

Love as attraction: eros. The Greek word *eros* is not used in the New Testament as a descriptive term for love, but it was used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint. For example, from the Song of Solomon, we have the translation, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me" (7:10). Erotic love came to designate sexual love as one form of loving. Obviously, Jesus was not using this meaning for love in our text for today.

Love as friendship: philia. *Philia* is love as personal warmth, affection and responsiveness. The Greeks also had a word *storge* describing natural affection within families. Paul, in Romans 12:10, uses a combination of these two words when he instructed the believers to "love one another with brotherly affection." This was

not Jesus' meaning of love in our text.

Love as unselfish caring: agape. As Arthur Rouner indicates, *agape* love is "very different from good feelings, very different from tremors in the tummy...the test of love is suffering, enduring difficulty, putting up with problems, and letting someone else's life be more important than your own" (p. 15).

In 1 John 4:19, the apostle reminds us our capacity to love is given by the One who is love: "We love, because he first loved us." Each of these words for love is a form of *agape*. But perhaps the most encouraging promise of Scripture is that "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23). It is by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit that we can love our persecutors and enemies because we are to act as Jesus did.

Demonstrate Christian love as a testimony to others (Matthew 5:44-47). The actual statement that you should hate your enemies is not found in the Old Testament but a similar attitude is found in Psalm 139:21-22 where the Psalmist declares his hatred of the wicked: "I hate them with the utmost hatred; they have become my enemies." Christ's command to "love your enemies" used a form of *agape* and banishes the Psalmist's defense of his hatred.

H. Leo Eddleman explains that there are three patterns of behavior open to us when we face our enemies. "First, unlimited revenge or animal ethics; second, limited revenge or Old Testament ethics; and third, unlimited love or Christ's ethics" (The Teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5-7, p. 68). We are to follow the example of Jesus who prayed for the forces that crucified him: "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:24). Just as he did, the Lord instructs us to love our enemies and pray for them.

Such behavior brings us into our

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status as sons of the God who "makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain upon the just and the unjust." The challenge of obeying Jesus' instructions on how to treat our enemies is one of the most difficult commands that the Lord leaves with us. When we fulfill his will and onlookers see how we respond to the angry hurt, it becomes a testimony of our faith in Christ. *Agape* love is beyond what persons in a secular society expect to happen.

Forgiving an enemy can possibly make him a friend (Matthew 5:48). John tells us that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (3:16). Through love God changed the enemies of the gospel into disciples. It is possible by expressing love we can help enemies and prosecutors become fellow disciples and friends.

But when Jesus declares that we "must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect," is this not an impossible demand? Jesus has in mind something that is affected by our English word "perfect." Biblically, "to be perfect means... to be whole or sound or true; and to be perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48, the main NT reference), means to be wholly turned, with the whole will and being, to God, as he is turned to us.... It is the call to purify our heart and will one thing" (A Theological Word Book of the Bible, p. 167).

Perfection is not sinlessness, for we are all sinners, but it speaks of our basic commitment to our Lord and Father to be the center of our living experience.

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