

# The Love Disconnect

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For some time now I have had a great concern regarding the apparent disconnect between the values that we as Christians espouse and how we actually relate to one another. This is particularly disturbing in light of the fact that God's Word makes it abundantly clear on numerous occasions that we cannot compartmentalise our relationship with him from our relationship with each other.

Jesus was not playing games with words when He said to His disciples, "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" John 13:35. As the dark shadow of Calvary loomed on the horizon, Jesus primary concern was their relationship with each other. He said "A new command I give you: Love one another." This would have been challenging enough for this disparate group of men, but Jesus adds, "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." Really? Is that even possible? Well, if Jesus said it, it must be.

What is certain is that we cannot demonstrate this kind of love in our own strength. Paul states, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:16). The fifth chapter of Galatians makes a stark contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit. The "flesh" may be defined as our emotions operating on their own apart from dependence on the Holy Spirit. The flesh is our default mode of operation. The works of the flesh are the things we do to each other when we are not depending on the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 5:19). A failure to rely upon the Spirit to overcome our differences essentially says to God, "I don't need you. I will handle this by myself." If we are open to the Holy Spirit, He will convict us when we are unloving and disrespectful. The role of the Spirit is not to point out other people's faults, but to arouse us to our own deficiencies. No matter how others treat us, our response says more about us than it does about them.

Peter invites us to, "<sup>16</sup>Live as free people, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as God's slaves. <sup>17</sup>Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honour the emperor (1 Peter 2:16-17). We cannot live as free people if we are harbouring resentment in our hearts. We may wish to salve our consciences as we approach God with our acts of devotion, but He stops us in our tracks, spins us on our heels and ushers us out of the door of our complacency with a fly in our ear. "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

We often read this passage incorrectly. Jesus did not say, "If you have something against your brother", but "If your brother has something against you." In effect, He is saying "I don't care who started it, you go and sort it out." Jesus is saying that we have to take the initiative to effect reconciliation regardless of who is right or wrong. Jesus does not permit us the expensive luxury of nursing our grievances because He knows an unforgiving spirit will rob us of our peace, poison our relationships and ultimately estrange us from Him. In 1 John 4:20 the Apostle

John makes the scathing comment that, “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister [add husband, wife, child, colleague etc.], whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

The ‘marriage crisis’ in the Christian community is a crisis of faith. In other words, how we choose to relate with each other indicates our response to Jesus command to love one another. Our marriages are a test of our devotion to the God who brought us together and promises to bind our hearts in unity. Elizabeth Achtemeier makes the sobering comment that, “By the way we conduct our marriages, we proclaim that Jesus Christ has won the victory over sin in the marital sphere too, or we confess that He is powerless to reconcile husband and wife, parents and children, old folks and youth” (*The Committed Marriage*, 107-108). However, the truth of this statement should not be a source of guilt for the one who does everything within their power to save their marriage only to meet with resistance from a unwilling spouse.

Jesus reiterated the inseparable connection between our relationship with divinity and one another when He stated, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did *it* to one of the least of these My brethren, you did *it* to Me” (Matthew 25:40).

In light of these sobering truths we may well repeat the question, “This is a hard saying, who can hear it?” (John 6:60).

Within Seventh-day Adventism there is a swelling cry for us to get back to basics. It is a call for a revival of ‘primitive godliness’ which will result in the proclamation of loud cry of Revelation 14 ushering in the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. How can we hope to present a credible witness? The Gospel Commission in Matthew 28: calls for us to spread our distinctive message to all the world.