

The Mark of a Christian
August 23, 2015

Several significant events occurred while Jim was on vacation. The first was an earthquake nearby. The U.S. Geological Survey recorded a 2.2 magnitude earthquake in Crownsville, Md., at 10:07 p.m. Saturday, August 8, 2015. My wife and I did not feel it, but we heard it. It sounded like a rumbling of some kind, not exactly like thunder though. We opened the front door to listen, but did not hear it again.

The other event occurred last weekend. Lenny B. Robinson, 51, also known as the Rt. 29 Batman, was driving his Batmobile on Interstate 70 near Hagerstown. He suddenly had engine trouble and tried to pull off into the median strip. Some people he had just met at a gas station pulled in behind him and put their flashers on. But his vehicle was still sticking out a bit into the fast lane, and a Toyota Camry slammed into his car, hitting him. He died at the scene. For years Robinson, dressed as the Caped Crusader and driving his custom-made car, tried to bring happiness to hundreds of sick children at area hospitals. He handed out Batman stickers and toys and spoke about courage and doing the right thing.

A few years ago he told a reporter, "I'm just doing it for the kids. It feels like I have a responsibility that's beyond a normal person. And that responsibility is to be there for the kids, to be strong for them, and to make them smile and distract them as much as I can."

Here is an example of sacrificial love. This man spent tens of thousands of dollars of his own money on his costume, his car, and the gifts he gave out to kids. He did it to make a difference in the lives of sick children.

This is a good example of the kind of love Jesus commands in John 13.

John 13:34-35 (NIV) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

The word love is used too freely in our culture. It is used to describe too many things. For example, I have used it to describe the following. I love my wife. I love root beer. I love watching the snow fall. I love talking to people about their relationship with God. I love stories of self-sacrifice, like the Batman story. I love to ride my bicycle. I love the smell of homemade bread baking.

I use the one word love to describe how I feel about both my wife and root beer, but the meaning behind the word is different.

The meaning behind "I love you" involves a focus.

The focus of my love for my wife is her. When I tell my wife, "I love you," I feel compassion for her. I want to meet her need. If I can do anything to help, I will, in order to meet her need and relieve whatever negative feelings she is having. She is the focus of my love.

My love for root beer also involves a focus. The focus of my love of root beer is me. I like that taste of root beer. My motive is to get more of that for ME.

When I say, "I love root beer," the focus is on me, not the root beer. I don't care what the root beer is thinking. I don't care how the root beer is feeling. Maybe the root beer wants to be in a clear bottle instead of a brown bottle. I don't care. It doesn't matter to me what kind of bottle it is in. I don't care if the root beer is sad because it's in a brown bottle. I just want more root beer to drink.

So my love for my wife and my love for root beer have a different focus. You could say it a different way.

"I Love you," can be selfish, but Jesus' love is not.

Jesus loves us unselfishly. He volunteered to be our Savior. He volunteered to face the cross on behalf of our sins.

John 10:11 (NIV) "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

James, in his Bible letter, points out that many conflicts between people are caused by self-centered desires. I want my way. You want your way. The two ways disagree with each other, so we argue, each trying to win their way. As long as we are focused on what we want, instead of what the other needs, we will not love like Jesus.

Jesus commands us to love like He does. His focus is us. His love is unselfish. He calls us to focus on each other. So if you come to church regularly just to meet your need for Christian support, you are not fulfilling Jesus' command.

Jesus came out of love for US. He came to meet our need. He came to give His life on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus' focus is us. Jesus loves us. Jesus loves you. He met your need for a Savior by dying on the cross for your sins. When Jesus says, "I love you," you can know He means it. He proved His love by dying for you.

Has anyone ever said to you, "I love you," and left you wondering what he or she meant by that phrase? Maybe you were left wondering because the person's actions did not seem very much caring about your feelings or needs. You should then pause and carefully examine those actions for the true motive, the true focus of their "I love you" statement.

When someone says, "I love you", you need to figure out how they mean that. Most of us have experienced people who say, "I love you" but you realize they do so out of selfish motives. They are trying to manipulate you, trying to get something from you. They are thinking about their own desires and needs, not your desires or needs. They aren't thinking about what is best for you, even though they say, "I love you." They may not be thinking at all. Some people use "I love you" as a way to say goodbye on the phone. It is just something they say that has not much meaning behind it at all.

You teenagers and young adults will likely someday hear someone say, "I love you". You need to be aware that some people will say those words out of no concern for you.

They just want something from you. Their love, such as it is, is a selfish love, with no real concern about what is best for you. They want something from you. And when you no longer give what they want, they'll be gone. They'll look somewhere else for someone to give them what they want.

So here is a warning. Don't give away what you can't get back until you figure out the focus of the other person's love.

Jack Meadors tells a wonderful story of an incident that occurred during the Special Olympics. Nine children lined up for the 100 yard dash. The gun sounded and the race was off. But only a few yards into the race, one of the children fell and began to cry. The other eight children stopped running and came back help the boy who fell. The children lifted him up together, and, arm in arm, they ran together across the finish line. The children demonstrated the kind of love we are to live towards each other in the church.

"I love you" can be selfish, but Jesus' love is not. **"I Love you," can be conditional.**

You will learn that when some people say, "I love you," they mean "I will act loving towards you ...

- ... if you speak nicely to me.
- ... if you send show gratitude for what I do.
- ... if do something equally nice for me in return.

Our society teaches us to say, "I will love you if... you do a certain thing or behave a certain way... or if you are the right kind of person."

"I Love you," can be conditional, but Jesus' love is not.

Jesus died for everyone. He loved the unlovely, those rejected by society, those who were difficult to love.

Jesus' death paid for all sins of all those who will receive Him as their Savior. He did not love only those who were nice to Him or respected Him or treated Him well, or believed in Him.

Jesus showed this love to everyone. He did not show it only to those who were nice to Him or respected Him or treated Him well, or believed in Him. He loved the unlovely, those rejected by society, those who were difficult to love.

"I love you" can be conditional, but Jesus' love is not.

"I Love you," can be temporary, but Jesus' love is not.

Jesus rose from the dead after He died on the cross. He is still loving His disciples. He is praying for us, guiding us, caring for us, encouraging us, protecting us, empowering us. He is still doing what is needed to meet our needs. He will love us until we are perfect, until we are united with Him in heaven. He will love us beyond that... for all eternity.

A father overheard one of his children say to another, "if you do that, dad won't love you any more." Then the father called all of his children together and said to them: "I shall always love you. When you do what is right, I love you with a glad heart. And when you do what is wrong, I still love you, but with a sad heart."

Jesus never gives up on his disciples. He loves us in spite of our weaknesses, problems, and imperfections.

Jesus makes one more point. **The world will know we are Jesus' followers by the love we show towards each other.** Love is to be the mark of the church. There are people the world over who admire the ethics of Jesus. They admire the sacrifice of Jesus, giving Himself on the cross. They look to the church to see that same kind of love.

That is how they judge us. The world doesn't judge the Christian church by its great preaching or its great singing or its beautiful buildings. What the world judges us on is our love for each other. And well they should. If we don't have that, then we don't have anything they want. That is the first good news many of them will listen to. And many of them don't listen to the message of salvation because they don't see us loving each other.

Jesus calls us to lay aside our pride, our selfishness, and our fears to live out His love for each other in His church. We can talk about how much we love people -- but the bottom line is whether we care enough to know their needs and then do our best to meet them. That is what Jesus did for us.

While we should strive to love everyone around us, there is a special relationship between Christians. He calls US, Christians, to love each other as brothers and sisters. This love looks out for each other, watches over each other, encourages each other in spiritual matters, and more... all because of our relationship to each other.

Many years ago our family went to the beach. There were many children playing on the beach and in the water. I didn't pay much attention to most of them. But two I watched very closely. The reason I did so was because they were my sons. They were part of my family. I have a special love for them and was watching over them.

The same is to be true of the church. We are to have a special concern for each other because we are all members of Jesus' family.

In the church, among each other...

If you say something that hurts another's feelings. Apologize.

If you embarrass someone, apologize.

If you lose your temper. You apologize.

If you have trouble working with another person. Walk away.

Start asking God to help you see the good qualities in that person.

Start praying for that person.

Compliment that person on the good qualities.

These are things we ought to do for each other. This is love. Ignoring these things is NOT love. Jesus is commanding us to love each other. Jesus is commanding action, not feelings. You can't command a person to feel a feeling.

The world thinks of love as a feeling. We know it to be an action. You cannot command a feeling. Jesus commands an action. He commands that we act with compassion and caring towards each other. He commands that we help meet each other's needs. He commands us to love each other as He loves us.

Our love must not be mere words, but actions.

1 John 3:18 (NIV) "...let us not love with word... but in deed..."

This is the love Jesus expressed when He died on the cross. He demonstrated His love for us. He acted to meet our need for a Savior.

Now, as His followers, He commands us to so love each other. Whatever else we do as a church, this must be priority. Worship is not the priority. How can we truly worship God acceptably if we ignore this great command of Jesus.

Evangelism is not the priority. Why would we try to win people to Jesus and bring them into His church if His church did not fulfill this command. Let's send them to a loving church if we will not fulfill this command.

This command appears 50 times in the Bible. Nothing else even comes close. This must be the priority of every church, but certainly of our church. And to be the priority at our church it must be your individual priority. You must know it, think it, pray it, and do it.