

LOVE FROM ABOVE
(Fullness of Joy through Biblical Fellowship in Christ)
Studies in 1 John

'Body Language'

Some cable news networks have started to feature a new kind of analysis after politicians speak publicly. An expert in 'body language' will critique the speakers' facial expressions, mannerisms, and body movement to determine any honesty and sincerity or evasiveness and lies. It may be an imperfect science but there does seem to be something to the theory of 'body language' analysis. It doesn't take an expert in the field to know that people often don't say with their mouths what they really feel in their hearts. In our increasingly evasive and dishonest world, it's becoming very difficult to be sure what some people truly mean with the words that they say and don't say to you. How refreshing to converse with someone today whose 'yea' means 'yea' and their 'nay' means 'nay'! However, when attempting to communicate with an evasive, non-committal, or even dishonest person, having at least a working knowledge of 'body language' would be helpful in discerning the true intentions behind the audible utterances.

For instance, a certain 'professing Christian' told people they really loved a certain pastor and his ministry. However, this person also aggressively contacts people to mislead them about that pastor and his church to get people to desert church 'A' for church 'B'. Now, that person also vigorously professes to love the Lord, their former church, and that pastor! What's the truth? The set jaw, furrowed brow, reddened face and protruding veins of the neck project 'body language' that shouts the truth about the garbled message being sent. Scriptures are loud and clear about real love that should flow out of a Spirit-filled Christian's life in *1 Corinthians 13:1-8*. Scripture is also clear about bitterness of heart and how essential it is to put a lid on that poisoned verbal well (*Ephesians 4:29-32, James 3:9-12*). A heart that is overflowing with such wicked attitudes is one from which springs, not only deceptive words about love, but also hypocritical acts that poison others and grieve God. Loving actions speak louder than just words (*1 John 3:18*). Loving words accompanied by malice and neglect manifests a dysfunctional soul hiding beneath a religious facade. Jesus insists that we both '*speaking the truth in love*' (*Ephesians 4:15*) and show the truth in love by graciously ministering and fellowshiping together as 'the body of Christ': *"...the whole body (of Christ), joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love"* (*Ephesians 4:16-17*). As you communicate daily with others around you, do the words of your mouth and the body language of your life harmonize with a spiritual consistency that draws others to Christ and helps believers grow in grace? Synchronizing your talk and your 'walk' according to God's Word sends a very refreshing message of 'I love you' to the Lord above and the people you meet every day.

'Lay Down Your Life, Love'

(Spiritual Maturity Through Sacrificial Love)

1 John 3:16-24

'A Hardened Heart'

(The blockage of love-flow to others)

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?" **3:17**

The Lord Jesus Christ set the standard for what true love is – total commitment and personal, physical, sacrifice to rescue those who can't save themselves. How does this differ from 'love' seen in the secular world today?

This passage implies that when we knowingly refuse to sacrificially love (agape) other Christians in need we do damage to our heart as well as to those we don't help. Discuss what apparently happens to our heart when we 'sin by omission' (see James 4:17)?

Do you think Christians are more likely to give to secular causes than to God's causes? (If so, why do you think this is so?)

'A Healthy Heart'

(The steady pulse of a clear conscience)

"My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him. For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things. Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God." 3:18-21

Have you ever experienced or know an example of 'loving words' that lacked action to prove it was sincere? Without mentioning names, what's your opinion of the one whose nice talk was contradicted by their lack of corresponding conduct?

What spiritual benefits come to the Christian who speaks and acts in love to those in need of help and encouragement?

Some Christians, even after doing all they can, feel guilty about not doing more. What comfort does v 20 give to the very sensitive believer who speaks and shows love and yet still feels so inadequate? (What 'spiritual gift' is most likely to feel this way?)

How does performing acts of loving-kindness affect a Christian's 'eternal security' and 'spiritual confidence' in the Lord? Discuss how meeting practical needs promotes one's spiritual growth.

'A Wholesome Heart'

(The agape love flow of a healthy heart)

"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another as He gave us commandment. Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit Whom He has given us." 3:22-24

Discuss the relationship between showing agape love to other Christians and getting answers to our prayers. Why would failure to generously help God's people and His work negate God's blessing in our life?

To guard against a 'social gospel' (just doing nice things for others) John stresses that true faith has two factors that validate it –

- 1) Saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and**
- 2) Genuine, agape love for other believers.**

Many Christians or churches have an imbalance toward one or the other. What kind of believer or church results from an over emphasis on #1 to the neglect of #2? What about imbalance the other way? Which way do you think you tend to lean? What should you do to regain equilibrium in your faith?

"Keeping His commandments (in the immediate context – believe right and love right) is the key to 'abiding in Him' (a stable, secure, vital personal relationship with Christ). What does the word 'this' in v 25 refer to? How does our obedience (or lack thereof in showing agape love) directly affect the Holy Spirit's presence in us?"