



SO LOVE

By Becky Combee

The Scripture says that God SO loved the world. The word SO is very important. To describe a magnificent celebration, we'd say it was SO exciting. We might also say that someone was SO enthusiastic and SO cooperative. We might be SO disappointed over an event. Well, **God loved the world SO much** that He sacrificed His only begotten Son.

This kind of sacrificial love is in the heart of every Christian. The day we were born again God poured His SO love into our spirit. We may never fully grasp the extent of it, yet every day, we can yield to His "SO love" and grow stronger and stronger.

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul urged them to increase and abound in love.¹ He noted that they were already walking in brotherly love, but urged them to increase more and more.² In his second letter, he wrote that their love toward each other did abound. Obviously, they took his first words to heart, working diligently to continue loving one another and to increase in this love.

Jesus commanded the disciples to love one another in the same way that He had loved them.³ The apostle Paul repeated this to the church at Ephesus reminding them that Christ's love was a sacrificial love.⁴ **Sacrificial love is UNSELFISH.** It considers the needs of others, valuing their desires before its own.⁵ The heart of sacrificial love always

AW, GOD, DO I HAVE TO?

By Suzanne D. Williams

*Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until **seventy times seven.** (Mt 18:21-22)*

I had a bad day. You know, one of those where even the dog doesn't cooperate? Well, 'round about 10 a.m., I exploded. I screamed at everyone within a two-mile vicinity. And regretted it afterward.

You know the drill. "I should never have ... and now they will always think of me like ..." Regret is a good thing, though, because it got me thinking about forgiveness and repentance. "Lord," I said, in a sort of prayer, "Seventy times seven is REALLY hard to do."

It looks good on paper. As Christians, we should be all "turn the other cheek," "love the unlovely," etcetera. Except I've seen anger and offense creep into the church. Someone lit into me the other day over something trivial, and I was taken aback. But struck harder by the thought I was supposed to pray for them and move on. And I don't mean pray they'll trip.

The Bible says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."¹ We love to quote that, picturing lightning

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asks, "What do you need? How can I help your?" It does not just add your desire to the list of things it will do. It puts you at the top of the list.

The Message Bible aptly advises, "Practice being second fiddle."⁶ The key word is "practice." Sometimes life is all about me, what I need, I want, I must have, and we make excuses to cover our selfishness. Our words focus on us, passing the blame onto others. This is SO sad and SO wrong. Certainly, we need to practice unselfishness.

Unselfishness is the key to a successful marriage. When the wife blames the husband and the husband blames the wife, SO love is compromised and peace is thwarted. If she defends herself, noting how tired she is after "caring for HIS children," conflict replaces harmony. Suddenly, they are HIS children, instead of OUR kids. In contrast, when the husband excuses himself because he had a long and difficult day at the office, he causes discord at home. Without the SO love of God in control of our lives, the blame game

continues and peace escapes.

The SO love of God must dominate our lives.

SO love is always kind. It does that which is beneficial and constructive. It refuses destructive behavior, but instead, edifies, builds up and enhances. It never yields to that which is immoral or illegal, yet it is quick to forgive those who repent of such behavior. Jesus' SO love forgives the guilty without any thought of retaliation or revenge. It refuses angry, harsh words and vindictive responses. It understands silence, honors truth, and stands firm without wavering.

SO LOVE NEVER FAILS! Selfishness, anger, and retaliation guarantee loss. Vindictive behavior promotes failure. Unkindness is the foundation of disaster. BUT SO LOVE paves the path of peace and fills our heart with joy. It does not accuse anyone saying "You are wrong." It simply says God is right and follows after Him.

"God SO LOVED the world, and I will SO LOVE them, too."

.....¹1Th 3:12 ²1Th 4:9-10 ³Jn 15:12 ⁴Eph 5:2 ⁵Php 2:3 ⁶Rm 12:10

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bolts striking someone and God up there beating his chest, "Bwahaha!" Truth is, He's more apt to show them mercy if they'll receive it. Fixing the other person is not our job.

I heard speaker, Joyce Meyer, say she spent years trying to fix her husband, Dave, only to realize it didn't work and she was the only one who was miserable. This helped me with my own relationships. I am apt to blow up first then swim in my regret for several days. But if I let God handle the one who's antagonizing me, if my prayer is, "Give me a clean heart, O God," and not, "Let Sister So-and-so stump her toe," I can place myself in the Holy Spirit's control and overcome those awful moments.

Overcome them and defeat them. Because God's instructions to us are tougher than simply not fighting back. God said to forgive "seventy times seven," then He said to "**Love** your enemies, **bless** them that curse you, **do good** to them that

hate you, and **pray** for them which spitefully use you, and persecute you."²

"Aw, God, do I have to?"

Yep. And notice, all of those things require ACTION on our part. To DO GOOD we must actually DO something. To BLESS someone, to PRAY for them, we must speak peaceful words. To show God's love we must be the antithesis of everything our flesh and mind asks us to do. I heard a preacher say, "The nose doesn't have to associate with the armpit," referring to the body of Christ. So, take comfort that your prayer doesn't mean you have to spend a day with Mr. Grumpy, it does mean we must seek to react differently. To actually crucify our flesh.³

And become like Jesus, who loved the least of men, but faced the devil in faith and power and won. We grow strong in Christ. Strong enough to love when, at that moment, it's the last ... the hardest thing we will ever do.

.....¹Rm 12:19 ²Mt 5:44 ³Gal 5:24