



## Daily Devotionals

[click here to go to website – stmatthewsrichmond.org](http://stmatthewsrichmond.org)

### 1 JOHN 4:20-21 LOVING GOD

*20 If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*

What does it take for us to love our brothers and sisters in the church community? As believers with a working knowledge of Scripture we know that all human beings were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and therefore should represent their Creator to us no matter how defiled or distorted that image may be. God loves all people, even those who reject him, and his love was graphically manifested in the death of Jesus Christ for their reconciliation to him (John 3:16). In the Church God gathers his people and pours out his Spirit upon them in order that they might exhibit the fruit of love in their lives together (Galatians 5:22). God ordains that we love others out of gratitude for the gift of love he has bestowed upon us and in obedience to him as a show of our love for him (John 14:23). It is through our love for one another that the Nature of God is to be made known in the world by his people (John 13:35). Since God is love, loving others is the practical manner by which we conform our lives to the will of God and provide a healthy contrast to the way of the unbelieving world (1 John 4:7-8). The knowledge and the reasoning are all there in Scripture, what we lack is the discipline of repentance.

A community changes as the members of the community are transformed. The church will never be what it is supposed to be if its members do not commit to living their lives throughout the week in obedience to God's will. The simple logic is that if one lives his life by the rules of a fallen and self-driven world six days and 23 hours a week, those practices will form the practices of his life and be unaffected by enduring one hour of church. In fact, even that one hour will become characterized by worldly thinking and acting. No wonder there are those in the church who get angry if "their" pew is occupied, the choir never sings their favorite hymn, the preacher preaches too long, the temperature is not right, the acolyte is chewing gum, or some mother has not taken her crying baby to the nursery. Where is the love? The answer is that the love is where it is all week - centered on one's self. When that happens, not only are we not loving God, we are not even worshiping him.

Loving God is not found in sentiment but in action. We love God by loving those whom God loves. It is a matter of the will. We repent of our self-focused attitudes and actions and dedicate ourselves to allowing the Spirit to transform our thinking and doing into the way of God. We are freely given the gift of grace, but it takes strenuous work and discipline to open and receive that gift. If we are to truly love our neighbor, even our brothers and sisters in the Church, then we must discipline ourselves to do so. Feelings cannot cause us to act in an other-centered way because how we feel motivates our action. By contrast, our actions can cause us to reassess our feelings because as we serve another and invest ourselves in them they increasingly become the object of our affection.

**Heavenly Father, make me an instrument of your love. Through your Spirit transform my life into the life of service to others that will manifest your Nature to the world. In this time of turmoil and conflict in the church may**

**the eyes of my mind and my heart be focused on you and not on what my neighbors may be doing to me or those with whom I identify. In all things make me a lover of souls. Amen.**

*Chuck*+