

# THE KINGDOM BUILDER



## STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES

### How Does the Love of God Abide in Him?

Do you have a verse or two in the Bible that you rather wish was not in there? I think all of us do. Like, maybe, “*love your enemies*” (Matthew 5:44) or forgiving people “*seventy times seven*” (Matthew 18:22) or “*regard one another as more important than yourselves*” (Philippians 2:3)? These verses are like spiritual “thorns in the flesh” that continue to expose our lingering sinful, fleshly natures.

But there is another verse in the Bible that I also wish was not in there. And I expect when I share it with you, you might wish it gone too.

In the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy, Scarecrow, Lion, and Tin Man are cowering before the Wizard. Dorothy’s dog Toto runs over to a curtain and pulls it back exposing a mere man pretending to be the great and powerful wizard. Do you remember what this man said to all of them as they stood there staring at him in shock? Still trying to perpetuate the fraud, still acting the part of the Wizard, he yells out over the loud speaker, “Ignore that man behind the curtain!” Well, after reading this verse, it will be very difficult to “ignore the man behind the curtain.” The jig will be up. The real you will be exposed. And if you are like me, when the curtain is pulled back, you will not at all like what others will see.

This troubling passage is found in 1 John 3:17 and it says (are you ready?), “*But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*” Ouch!

“*Whoever...*”—Does whoever include me? Whoever?

“*has the world’s goods...*”—Any goods? Does

He mean surplus goods that I do not need or want—goods that if I gave them away would not affect my lifestyle? Or does this include worldly goods that I like and want to keep?

“*and sees his brother...*”—Any brother? Living anywhere in the world?

“*in need...*”—Any material need? Like hunger? Or thirst? Or nakedness? Or sickness? Or persecution?

“*and closes his heart against him...*”—You mean if I refuse to do something about his need?

“*how does the love of God abide in him?*”—Are you asking how does the love of God abide in me?

Do you mean that unless I use my material possessions to meet people’s needs when I am aware of them, John is calling my love of God into question? I think it does. Ouch—no, double ouch!

Does this mean whenever I walk by a homeless person, I am supposed to respond to that need? What about when I see or hear about believers in other parts of the world who are suffering terribly? Is the love of God supposed to move me to do something about it with the worldly possessions I

have at my disposal? When I hear about an orphan boy in Haiti who needs food, are you saying if the love of God is abiding in me, I will send him the \$15 a month he needs?

Jesus said it this way,

*“For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.” Then the righteous will answer Him, “Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” The King will answer and say to them, “Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.”*

*Matthew 25:35-40*

Do you mean in a very real sense when I look into the face of a suffering and needy believer I am looking into the face of Christ? And if I were to help that needy person using my worldly goods, I am actually giving to Jesus? Proverbs 19:17 says, *“He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord”* (NIV).

James 1:27 says, *“Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress.”* *“Pure religion”* is helping the helpless in their time of need. James goes on to ask in James 2:15-16, *“If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”*

Or still echoing in the background is John’s piercing question, *“But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”*

Is closing your heart against the poor as easy for you as it is for me? Are you able to see a need and in a matter of seconds, feel compassion and

then almost instantly dismiss it with thoughts like, “Well, it is probably their own fault that they are in this mess anyway. They need to learn the hard lesson that God wants to teach them.”

Or, “If I helped them out with some money, they would probably just use it for alcohol or drugs, but not for food. That would not be a good use of God’s money.”

Or, “The needs in that country are so massive that my little bit of money will not really make any difference—so why give anything?”

Or, my personal inclination, just look the other way and ignore them. The feelings of sadness and pity for the plight of the needy that might lead me to actually do something about their need, I have learned, will pass quite quickly if I just ignore them.

A family I know had allocated to each member of the family a certain sum of money to be used to meet the need of someone whose path they cross. As they were discussing what and how the help was going to be given, one of them spoke up and said, “You know just in the few minutes we have been discussing this, I have already come up with several ways to help.” Other family members chimed in that they were thinking of ways to give too. Once you have a mindset that I have money to help and I want to get involved in making a difference in someone’s life that has a need, the needs and the opportunities seem to appear at every turn.

What has changed? Were these needs not there before this meeting? No, the needs were there. What was not there was the mindset that, *“I am here on this earth to help those in need and I have some money set aside to do it with.”* It is a heart change that all of us need. For some of us with substantial wealth, we may need major heart surgery to extract ourselves from our tight grip on our possessions so that they can be used to impact the lives of people whom God has put in our path and graciously given us the funds to help.

Just try it. Allocate a certain sum of money—for example \$10,000—and give yourself sixty days to find and meet the need of a person or people who the Lord brings into your life. You will learn a few things with this little exercise. One, God will show you more needs than your \$10,000 can meet. Two, you will be personally and deeply impacted by seeing the results in the lives of those who have been the beneficiaries of your kindness and

generosity. Three, you will want to do it again. It is addictive! Start small and as God softens your heart and loosens your grip on your worldly possessions, your giving and need meeting efforts as well as your enthusiasm to give will grow.

After completing this giving exercise, get your Bible back out and re-read 1 John 3:17, “*But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?*” You will find that this verse no longer convicts and haunts you. It only affirms you and confirms your love for God. Now you can say, “I have the world’s goods and I am constantly opening my heart and my hands to help my brothers in need and in so doing the love of God is manifested in my acts of love and kindness to those in need!”

If we have a surplus and know people who have a shortfall—and everyone that is reading this book does—when we start giving to meet those needs we will rejoice over the words of 1 John 3:17 instead of

feeling condemned by them. And that is a much better way to feel about the Word of God and a much better way to live.



*E. G. “Jay” Link, is the President of Stewardship Ministries, a teaching, training and mentoring ministry for professional advisors and ministry leaders to equip them to effectively serve believers who have accumulated surplus, material possessions. He is the author of three books, “Spiritual Thoughts on Material Things: Thirty Days of Food for Thought,” “To Whom Much is Given: Navigating the Ten Life Dilemmas Affluent Christians Face” and “Family Wealth Counseling: Getting to the Heart of the Matter.” Mr. Link may be reached via email at [jlink@StewardshipMinistries.org](mailto:jlink@StewardshipMinistries.org).*