

The Christian Perception of Other People

Matthew 22:34-39 [NIV] *“Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’”*

Perceptions that people have of other human beings can be dramatically different.

One elderly coloured lady expressed her perception of others this way.

“I’m a Christian; in my world there are no strangers, just brothers and sisters. Some of them I have not yet met.”

One man in contrast said his motto was *“Don’t trust anyone and always carry an equalizer with you at all times.”*

I will leave it to your imagination as to what he meant by an *“equalizer”* !!!

If our attitude towards self is the most important that resides in our mind, no doubt the second most important attitude is the way we view or perceive other human beings.

Some people we may like, others we find difficult to like.

If we had to fill in the following blank in response to the question what would we write?

In my own personal view and perception people are basically
until proved otherwise.

What then is the source of our perception of other people?

Firstly, we have inherited attitudes that we formed by osmosis from our parents when we heard them talking about other people.

These *“parent tapes”* tend to play insistently, however softly in our minds, for the rest of our lives.

Proverbs 22:6 [NIV] *“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.”*

The perceptions we receive as a child will stay with us throughout our life unless they are deliberately re-formed in our mind.

Our perceptions of others are shaped by those who love us and by those who refuse to love us.

The master vision of others is provided by the message, life and person of Jesus Christ.

Christians are called to be channels of love to one another.

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 true sign of a Christian is the love they have for other Christians.

This love is one of the fruits of the active presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Galatians 5:22 [NIV] *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,”*

Just as God created human beings to be the object of His love, desiring to share His love with us, we also must share this love with others.

John 7:37-39 [NIV] *“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*

The fruit of love that the Holy Spirit generates in us cannot be static; it must flow out to others.

The perspective that Jesus Christ taught and illustrated in His life was love towards every human being, a sacrificial love.

Romans 5:8 [NIV] *“But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”*

Jesus Christ’s sacrifice was an act of love.

John 3:16-17 [NIV] *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

Jesus Christ died for all human beings.

John 15:12-13 [NIV] *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

We are to follow the example that Jesus Christ set.

Romans 12:1 [NIV] *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”*

Because of the great love that God has shown us in Jesus Christ’s sacrifice of love.

We should reflect that sacrificial love by laying down our life [our time is our life] for others.

To really love someone personal sacrifice is always involved.

Such a sacrifice is totally alien to our normal perspective of life, our selfish human nature.

Romans 12:2 [NIV] *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the **renewing of your mind**. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

A renewing and re-focusing of our mind is needed.

Jesus’ love was **not** a blind love but super-sighted because it saw beyond appearances.

This love calls buried goodness and giftedness out of the depths of people.

Luke 19:1-10 [NIV] *“Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but being a short man he could not, because of the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said*

to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a 'sinner'." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost."

It is true and always will be true, each of us needs a little love and a little understanding from other people who are in our life.

Jesus Christ understood the isolation and lack of love that Zacchaeus' job brought him.

Until this love and understanding was shown by Jesus, the real personality of Zacchaeus was hidden from others.

Zacchaeus was totally misunderstood.

Notice the religious leaders and the crowd in general did **not** see the real Zacchaeus.

They did **not** have this perception that Jesus had.

Somehow I feel that the little man and his world were never the same again.

What about Mary Magdalene?

Luke 8:1-2 [NIV] "After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;"

Whatever her past, the love and understanding Jesus personally showed her changed her life dramatically.

Mary was present and available to the needs of Jesus, she loved boldly and recklessly.

Matthew 27:56 [NIV] "Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons."

Mary stood bravely on Calvary as Jesus was dying.

She must have been taunted by those who knew her past and ridiculed her for new religious posture and piety.

Matthew 27:61 [NIV] "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb."

It was Mary who assisted at the burial of Jesus.

Matthew 28:1-10 [NIV] "After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men. The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you." So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshipped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

The importance of Mary Magdalene in the whole resurrection story is very clear.

Like Zacchaeus, the depths of strength and a fierce loyalty in loving had been called out of this great and strong woman by the love Jesus had shown to her.

Countless others had the same experience because of the love Jesus showed them, his neighbours.

It seems that the empathy that Jesus had was the key to the dramatic changes in the lives of these people who met with Him.

Empathy starts with listening and an intuitive reading of the uniqueness of another human being.

Empathy asks only one question: What is it like to be you?

Empathy is getting inside the skin of other human beings, walking in their shoes, perceiving and experiencing reality as it looks through their eyes.

Empathy offers no advice but only understanding.

Empathy demands that we leave our selfish world with its thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs, and go to where the other person lives and listen to their thoughts, feelings, values and beliefs.

When we identify with another person in this way we are already supplying the love that is the primary need everyone has.

John 15:12-13 [NIV] *“My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”*

The first essential gift of love for our neighbour is the gift of ourselves, our time, which is our life.

If we **don't** offer our true and authentic self we are **not** offering love, only a charade, pretence and sham.

The second essential gift of love is to affirm the other person's worth.

We must appreciate and reflect back to the other person their unique goodness and giftedness. Making a contribution to their all-important self-image.

At the beginning of this article I asked you to fill in your personal view and perception of other people.

“Other people are basically until proved otherwise.”

One certain word could be *“needy”*.

No matter how people may try to conceal it, we all need understanding and love from others.

We can only provide for this hunger in others if we have the same perspective of others as Jesus Christ has and illustrated during His human life on earth.