

#179 “How to Really Love One Another”

by Brent Barnett

www.relevantbibleteaching.com

John 13:34-35 says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” There are many things that identify believers and set them apart from the world, but the one thing that trumps all the rest is when believers love one another as Christ loves them.

The early church understood Christlike love and fellowship. Acts 2:44-47 says,

“And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

The picture here is of organic, real life, day to day love and care among believers such that they even sold off their excess possessions so that those who lacked could have what they needed. Too often in the church, it is assumed that, if someone has a need, they must not be organized, they must lack faith, or they must be in sin. Too often we treat people who are hurting and suffering by judging them, alienating them, and ignoring them, hoping they, like a pesky insect, will just go away and leave us alone to worship and praise God. This is not love. The early church loved being around each other, not because it was the right thing to do in a legalistic sense, but because they really enjoyed one another. Their hearts were full of gladness, sincerity, and the praise of God. This wasn't a fake ritualistic thing that “good Christians” do. They loved what they were doing because they loved their adopted family in Christ. At its essence, the early church was one big extended family with a great many brothers and sisters in the Lord. Surely, it wasn't perfect, but it was a happy place, a place where people knew that their needs would be cared for, that they would be loved unconditionally, and where the love of God overflowed to their own personal relationships. This picture of fellowship, harmony, joy, unity, and sacrifice in the early church is so appealing, yet too often our own church experience today is not even close to that. I can testify that being part of the family of God and being loved and cared for is one of the sweetest and most fulfilling experiences on earth. It is a microcosm of what we will experience in heaven one day when we are united with brothers and sisters from all times who have loved Jesus. Until we as a body learn to love, church will be a mere shell of what it is supposed to be. When we do learn to love, we will experience God's family the way it was meant to be.

The other day as I was leaving the house, my one and half year old son stood in the window hoping to catch one last glimpse of Daddy before I pulled out of the driveway.

His little eyes were looking around and around until he spotted me in the driver's seat of the car. Then when he saw me wave back to him, he got the biggest, giddiest smile on his face you could imagine, and he started waving back with a crazy, unreserved enthusiasm. My heart was so warmed as God graciously gave me a picture and experience of what real love is. Of course, we know that Christ dying on the cross is the ultimate picture of love and care, but perhaps we make it overly theological and overly complex. My son was thrilled with me for me. I brought him joy, and he brought me joy. The love described in John 13 is just that, being fond of someone (<http://www.studylight.org/isb/view.cgi?number=25>). When we actually like other people because we know that we are forever liked by Christ, we can't help but care for them, be compassionate to them, be forgiving toward them, and be interested in their lives. Some people ask questions because it is a form of small talk. Others ask them because they really want to know because they really care. Some ask to have us over for a meal to "fellowship" with us, while others actually like us and want to spend time with us free from any selfish agenda. Some believe counseling is simply spouting off a Bible verse, while others take the time to listen, to learn, to know, to feel, and to care. We don't go to church to be forgotten, though many churches are now catered to that approach. Rather, we go to church to be remembered, which implies, first and foremost, that we are known. Yet we cannot be truly known unless we are truly loved because we are more than the summation of our personal life stories. We are sons and daughters of God, and in that and that alone, there ought to be so much to like, to enjoy, to praise God for, and to care to get to know.

What it would be like to walk into the assembly of extended spiritual family members and actually be liked and welcomed with the same shameless and sincere enthusiasm that my son expressed for me that morning not too long ago! That is how God feels about us, it is how we should feel about our Father, and it is how we should care for one another. As He loved us, so we should love.