

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

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Number: 30

Verses: John 13:34-35

Topic: As I Have Loved You...

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John 13:34-35 (EMTV)

34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. **35** By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 15:12 (EMTV)

12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 15:17 (EMTV)

17 These things I command you, that you may love one another.

In this last bible study in the series we are going to look at Jesus' phrase: "as I have loved you" - which describes the *how* and *how much* of our love for one another.

What do we find about Jesus love for His disciples?

1. Jesus loved them to the end and to the uttermost (John 13:1)
2. Jesus served them and washed their feet (John 13:1-17)
3. Jesus called them "friends" not "servants" (John 15:13-15)
4. Jesus deliberately laid down His life for them (John 10:11,15 and 15:13)
5. Jesus sent the Comforter to be with them and in them (John chapters 14-16) and filled them with the Holy Spirit (John 20:22)
6. Jesus sent them into the world with a trusted mission as His personal witnesses and representatives. (John 20:21)
7. Jesus sought out and restored fallen and broken Peter and the other disciples who had failed Him in his hour of need. (John 21:15-19)

Of course we know many other things as well such as that Jesus chose them, lived with them, rebuked storms for them, and trained them to pray and to engage in ministry. However it is the seven things above that stand out to me most as indicating Jesus' love for His disciples.

These seven things indicate that Jesus had a total and irrevocable commitment to these eleven men with all their weaknesses, failings and misunderstandings. Jesus did not regard His disciples as slaves or as employees on a contract. There is no impression that they were there in order to build up Jesus' ego (after all He did wash their feet). They were friends, real friends, for whom He chose to lay down His life!

Here we find the fullness of Deity in bodily form befriending smelly Galilean fishermen!

Jesus did not pretend about this divine-human friendship. It was real and genuine and went all the way to the Cross. God befriended us in Christ! Indeed God genuinely seeks friendship with us, real friendship with us, just as He did with Abraham!

James 2:23 (EMTV)

23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." And he was called a friend of God.

This quest for friendship, deep, real life-long and committed friendship, lies at the heart of the Christian life. We are to love others as Christ loved us! This is the new commandment of the New Covenant.

Jesus was totally committed to His friends and even His last words on the Cross were at times directed to them (and to God). Friendship was never out of the mind of Jesus! And the friends of Jesus also included others such as Mary, Martha and Lazarus (John 11:11).

The application to us is that friendship is not a side issue. Friends are not a secondary matter, something you have "if you have time". If you are making disciples then you are simultaneously making friends and you should love those disciples as you love yourself. Thus we discover that ministry without true friendship is not fully Christian ministry.

Even the workaholic Paul was committed to his friendships with people like Timothy and Titus and was restless unless he could see them:

2 Corinthians 2:13 (HCSB)

13 I had no rest in my spirit because I did not find my brother Titus, but I said good-bye to them and left for Macedonia.

So we see that groups of friends such as the disciples of Jesus and the companions of Paul had key roles in the spread of the gospel. These strong friendships demonstrated and proved the love of God in Christ!

Christianity is not grounded in philosophy it is grounded in personal covenant friendships between the members of the Trinity, between God and man and between individual Christians in love! If you subtract love from Christianity, then the whole thing simply vanishes! For Christ came to bring reconciliation, that is, He came to fix the friendship.

If Christians are to love each other as Christ loved us then we will have to change just about everything we do at church! We need to ask questions about how we love one another, encourage one another and build one another up in the faith. This is not just the job of the pastor! Every Christian is to live in love, which means that every Christian is to build some life-long committed friendships with fellow-believers.

Church can no longer just be a theater full of spiritual spectators. We have to get to know the name and even the life of the person next to us in the pew. And we have to move into small groups and micro-communities where we can, in faith, exercise the gifts of the Spirit in love.

This brings us back to the concept of the “household” that was discussed earlier in this series. The twenty or thirty people that we know well and who we are prepared to have in our kitchen at home at various times (depending on the size of your kitchen).

For Jesus it seem it was His mother and brothers and sisters, the twelve disciples, Mary, Martha and Lazarus and some others. Perhaps in His case it may have been 70 or even 120 or so. But for most of us it will be a much smaller number of people. These are the people we are to decide are “our folk”. They are the people we will have a life-long commitment to. These are the folk whose feet we will wash, whom we will serve and whom we will die for. Even if we travel in ministry we will come back and seek these people out again.

This is a much bigger concept than a “social circle”. And its way more commitment than just “befriending” someone on Facebook. This is “I will push your wheelchair and change your diapers when you are old” stuff. Without that kind of love you do not really have love and without agape love, your ministry is as nothing.

This kind of deep commitment to others is lacking in our highly mobile and very self-centered society. Our lives tend to be more about our career, status, image, agenda and finances than about each other. In fact we are terrified of intimacy and deride it using phrases such as “living in each others pockets”.

I am not suggesting that we all sell everything and join a Christian commune in Oregon. However I am saying, and very strongly, that we need to factor our close friends and their human needs into our lives in very significant ways. We need to budget for giving. We need to practice hospitality. We need to have people in our home for more than an hour or two a month. We need to take down the walls and let people into our existence.

On the surface, friendship seems extremely inconvenient. We help people move and we hurt our back in the process. We lend money and it doesn't come back. We cook nice food and everyone arrives late and it is ruined. But what sort of inconvenience is that compared to the Cross?

I still miss my Bosch hammer drill that I had in the Philippines and a few other items “loaned” to friends but those losses are just small potatoes. Christian friendship and brotherly love is way, way, way more important than mere possessions!

Loving others as Christ has loved us is a spiritual goal that we are commanded to aspire to. It is indeed very difficult but it is not at all optional. It is not just for St. Francis of Assisi, rather, as we have seen in this series, it is for every single Christian convert from day one on to maturity in Christ.

You simply cannot be obedient to God and opt out of loving people. You may not live in a selfish Christian bubble. You are absolutely required to care for your brothers and sisters in Christ and to “wash their feet”. However you probably don't have to jump on the next plane to India. God will show you what to do. God Himself will teach you how to love one another (1 Thessalonians 4:9) if you submit to Him in this area.

In these final few paragraphs I am going to challenge you to reflect deeply on the amount of love that you are "living out" in your life. I will use Minda and I as an example of what can be done by two very ordinary people, not to condemn you but to show you what can be achieved within the confines of a very modest suburban existence without running off to join a commune. I'm not trying to boast but merely to show you what can be done, and what you can do also.

We grow large quantities of vegetables which we give away to others, especially those in need. When we need something done around the house we employ unemployed friends who have construction skills so we can augment their income and we pay above market rates. Once a month we have a prayer meeting with about twenty folk in the house. People come and go continually for prayer and counseling. When people come here they feel at peace. Somehow God turns up here, and we are no better than anyone else.

The neighbors, even non-Christians feel free to drop around. We give to missionaries and they often stay in our house when they are traveling through Los Angeles. We take people in when they are in distress and house them for up to months at a time (for instance, in a few days time we will be opening up our house to a family who have a child with brittle-bone disease and they may stay with us for a year).

Our friends around the world know that we will give freely when we have the means to give. They also know that our means are limited and we feel free to tell them so. We don't have a "God-complex" and we are not trying to rescue anyone. In fact everything seems very ordinary, easy and completely natural. There is no thought of "earning brownie points". Every square inch of the house gets used for ministry and from my home office I have an online ministry that touches 1.2 million people per year.

Minda and I are just two middle-aged missionaries on an average income and we do not even have extroverted personalities (we are both nerds). We just act according to our conscience, helping some people and not helping others. We let go of some things in order to do others (for instance we don't get to watch much TV). But it is not all duty and sacrifice either, because we feel tremendously blessed and even when we make financial mistakes God seems to out-bless our silliness.

Yes, there are times when we are tired, irritable and imperfect. We are not any more attractive, holy or sanctified than anyone else. We are just living out what we believe God wants us to do. We are completely and utterly unexceptional and ordinary. Yet I believe that, because of the wonderful grace of God, we are able to live out a loving Christian lifestyle. We can meet the challenges of love because God helps us.

I say this not to shame you but rather to challenge you and to inform you that it can be done; even in a big fast city, even on a budget, even by two very boring people and even in the midst of the challenges of ministry. You just have to obey the Holy Spirit and let agape love into your life and gradually tune selfishness out of your actions and reactions. It isn't some kind of complicated philosophy, paradigm or revolution. It feels more like sanctified common sense in daily living. Now go out and try it!

(John 13:17 - *If you know these things blessed are you if you do them!*)

Blessings,

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