

Love One Another

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

A certain psychiatrist was once asked, "After 50 years in practice, what have you learned?" He shrugged his shoulders and answered, "People just don't like each other." This flash of insight, sad to say, is true. And the reason is, we really *are* unlovely. It's easy not to like each other because there's so little to like and so much to dislike. Sin has corrupted not just our minds, but our entire personalities. It's no different today than it was eons ago. People are all the same, always the same, unlovely and unlikable.

"While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." God doesn't save the righteous, the lovely, the good people. He came to save sinners. He came to call to Himself people who are unlovely, people who are difficult or impossible to like. This is God's transcendent love being expressed. The Son came to selflessly, sacrificially take on humiliation, shame, suffering and sin and death so that unlovely, unlikable people can be brought into fellowship with an ineffably holy God. This is scandalous. It's too radical to comprehend. It's too . . . transcendent. It's beyond us.

If we're following Jesus, God calls us to love others, even the unlovely. Why? Is that some kind of exercise He's forced on us? No. It's because as God loves the unlovely, we're to imitate Him. God loves us unconditionally, that is, He loves us as we are, failures, flawed, unlovely creatures. So we're to love others unconditionally, that is, as they are. We love the unlovely with Jesus' own love being expressed in us, through us.

Love, biblical love that is, isn't an emotion. It's doing something for another, doing something that involves personal sacrifice. It's helping others with their needs. It's protecting them, forgiving them, edifying them, making allowances for their failures and imperfections. It's teaching them, exhorting them, warning them, blessing them. Love comforts, and it intercedes. Love rejoices when others rejoice and weeps when others weep. Love shows mercy to others—to *all* others. If we've received grace, we extend grace to others. In love, we pursue a life of extending salvation to others.

Love doesn't criticize or, worse, mock others. It doesn't seek revenge or seek "justice" for wrongs. Love thinks, "But for God's grace, I might be just like [he, she] is," and so we overlook the faults of others. Only the humble person is able to love others; proud, self-righteous people cannot love others, they're too occupied with themselves. And only those who are truly regenerated and living obediently can love others; professing Christians, that is, nominal Christians, cannot love others, because the Spirit of Jesus doesn't dwell in them. Without love, a profession of salvation is a sham. Loving others reveals that we're real, our faith is genuine and we're truly saved. Loving others expresses righteousness.

Love is also an attitude. We live in a messy world. Everything everywhere is corrupted by sin and by invisible, wicked beings. If we have a biblical worldview, we understand this and we overcome it by remaining committed to obeying Jesus and striving to be like Him. And so we maintain an attitude of love. We deliberately determine that we're going to love others. So we see others, as we encounter them, not as unlikable, unlovely people but as creatures whom God loves. And if God can love them, so can we.

Loving others is also loving Jesus. “**We love Him because He first loved us,**” and His love must find expression in us. So we love as He loves, and that exalts Him. Being like Jesus is the worship of Jesus. Anyone can sing songs of love for Jesus, unsaved popular singers do that all the time. We show our love for Jesus by being like Him and loving others as He loves. As Jesus is the Suffering Servant who loves others regardless how much he must suffer to do that, we too embrace suffering as a necessary component of loving others. Loving others is costly. Loving others is risky, and there may be painful consequences, but that’s part of what loving others involves.

We need to see that the commandments to love God and to love others are inextricably bound together. There’s no loving God without loving others. And there’s no loving others unless there’s first a love for God. We don’t love others only when or if they’re lovely or likable. We love them even though they are—and always will be—unlovely and unlikable. So let me say it this way: We love others precisely because we love God, and because we love God we are able to love others.

God created us to reflect His beautiful Person. Sin prevents that. But Jesus came to create in us a new kind of person, a new creation that is capable of reflecting God’s glory and so to glorify God. We express our new life in Christ in many ways, such as by being obedient, loyal, etc, but especially by showing love, biblical love. That’s because the chief characteristic of God that differentiates Him from all other supernatural beings is . . . love. God is good. God also created us to live in community. We all, having descended from Adam, are really brothers and sisters. So loving others fulfills our creational purpose.

Dear reader, Jesus came to reveal and express God’s love. And this is love: The Son left heaven and came to earth in human form to suffer shame, torture and a horrible, agonizing death for *wicked* people! Not just unlovely and unlikable people, but for ghastly wicked people. And for people who only for a host of other reasons don’t murder and steal and deceive but whose soul is nevertheless just as rebellious and filled with lust and hate, and who really deserve to be cast into hell. The Son came purposely to save such people. Can we grasp that the essence of salvation is love.

There is no greater purpose in life, no more exalted way to live, than for us also to pursue a life of love. We have to want to do it or it doesn’t happen. We have to *commit* to doing it. And we do it for the glory of God.