

What's Love Got to Do with It?

<sup>9</sup> "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

<sup>10</sup> If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.

<sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

<sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

<sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command.

<sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

<sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

<sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

A few years ago Collier's Magazine published a story about a little girl in an orphanage. She was quite unattractive and had many annoying habits, which resulted in her being shunned by the children and disliked by the staff. The director of the orphanage looked for a good excuse to ship her off to some other institution. For some time it had been suspected that she was writing secret notes to people outside of the orphanage.

One afternoon their suspicions were confirmed. One of the children had reported, "I saw her write a note and hide it on a tree near the stone wall." The director hurried to the tree and found the note, then passed it silently to his assistant. The note read, "To whoever finds this: I love you." It breaks our heart to hear of this child's cry for love.

Everyone has a need to be loved. Prisons are full of people who went through the formative years of their lives not having been loved and nurtured by those most responsible for them. Experts tell us that emotionally healthy people form meaningful ties with other human beings. They don't just exchange information, they share personal things. They talk about likes and dislikes, their joys and fears. They extend themselves to help others and they know how to accept assistance when they get in over their heads. When they have important decisions to make, they get insight and support from their friends.

This is the human experience – to love and be loved. However, those same experts are telling us that there is a disturbing trend going on lately.

In a June 2006 issue of the American Sociological Review, researchers cited evidence that Americans have a third fewer close friends than just a couple of decades ago. More disturbing still, the data seemed to indicate that the number of people who have nobody to count as a close personal friend has more than doubled. The findings hold for both males and females. They are consistent for people of all races, ages, and educational levels. Even within families, the degree of intimacy has diminished considerably. All this information speaks of people who are feeling lonelier and more isolated than ever. (Melvin Newland, sermoncentral.com)

The title of my sermon might be recognizable to those of you who grew up in the 1980s as the title of a Tina Turner song. That phrase is also something to ponder in light of the human experience and the Christian life. What effect does love have on us? Is it vital and necessary just as food and water is for human nutrition? *Does human life depend on love?* I believe that it does.

Furthermore, I think that Jesus taught love as an absolute. He taught it as a command, not a suggestion. He knew that his body, the church, would not thrive and exist without a continuous flow of love between the saints.

In today's text in verses 9 through 12, it reads, "**As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.**"

I want us to look both at the love we have toward God and the resulting love we have for one another. First we need to love God. When I conduct weddings, I always tell the congregation that **LOVE IS THAT WHICH WE GIVE TO OTHERS, NOT WHAT WE EXPECT**. For example, when I ask a couple, "Why are you getting married", and the guy replies, "Because she makes me happy.", I know we have a problem. The correct answer is, "I want to marry that person so that I can love them and cherish them and give myself to them. I want to serve this person for the rest of my life. I want to bring fulfillment to them."

The same is true with our relationship with God. I know a lot of people say, "I love God". But the majority of those same people would admit that they love God because of what he does for them. We see God as one who serves our needs, gives us things. The truth of it, or love for God is **CONDITIONAL**

while God's love for us unconditional. The Bible tells us in First John 4:19, "We love him, because he first loved us." Our best response to God's love is service. Real love, whether to another person or to God is in the form of service. Serving others and serving God ends up being the greatest fulfillment we can ever experience.

We are called to exemplify this kind of love in all our relationship. Back in the 1980's Sam Rayburn - Speaker for the House of Representatives - learned that one of his friends had just lost his teenage daughter. Early the next morning Rayburn knocked on his door. "I just came by to see what I could do to help." The father replied that there was nothing to do. "Well," Rayburn said, "have you had your coffee this morning?" The man replied that they had not taken time for breakfast. So Rayburn went to work in the kitchen. While he working on making breakfast, his friend came in, and said, "Mr. Speaker, I thought you were supposed to be having breakfast at the White House this morning." "Well, I was, but I called the President and told him I had a friend who was in trouble and I couldn't come." That's what the Bible means by love. To have someone who regards you so highly that they want to be there when you need them.

The neat thing is that this is the kind of love I see in this church. I brag to people about this church, because what I have seen people do for others is way beyond typical friendship. There is a joy and gentleness among the people here that I don't often see in other congregations. There is no other explanation except to say that this is a response to the gospel.

Today the choir sang a song about the extravagant love of God that led Him to send his son to the cross on our behalf. That is the gospel message. To extend the idea of the cross and grace to include others, it means we treat others with grace and love because Christ first showed his love to us. There is a flip side to that. If we claim Christ, but are cranky and difficult with people, has the gospel really affected our lives?

If we are stingy instead of generous with other people, has Christ's love for us made a change in us? Certainly, there are times when we fail at loving others. We can get caught up in our own agenda or we can be inconsiderate and selfish at times. Sometimes someone hurts our feelings and we get offended. We don't always love others the way God loves us. This idea of loving others is something that takes time to grow and mature, and still, we often blow it. Yet Christ-like love is something that flows out of our prayer life.

Over the years, I've struggled with loving others as Christ loved me. There are two things I consistently pray for as a pastor. First, I always pray for wisdom. I never know from day to day what situations I will encounter and my best resource will be wisdom. Secondly, I pray that I will always LOVE those I am around. This one is more of a struggle because I will go a while without praying this. In time, I begin to feel resentments and I start getting cranky.

It is then that I know I need to focus on praying for LOVE. See, people will fail us and we will fail other people. Yet real love doesn't keep score and doesn't make a list of all the hurts people have tallied up against us. First Corinthians 13:5 says that **"Love keeps no record of wrong."** In verse 7, it says **"It always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres."**

Remember how you felt when someone said something bad about you? When they said something unkind to your face? When they broke off a relationship with you? Man, that hurts! It cuts to our soul. I think Paul understood that when he penned the words in First Corinthians 13. We want that hurtful person to feel the pain we are feeling. We want them to suffer. But Paul wrote, **"Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth."** (v. 6) In John 15 Jesus says **"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.... You are my friends if you do what I command."**

The first step to becoming His "friend", is to accept Him into your life. What greater friends could you ever have than the one who laid down his life for you on the cross. Could you find a better friend than the son of God? When you have formed that friendship with Christ, the other friendships around you will begin to fall into place. They won't always be perfect because we are prone to failure.