

Every year at the national Southern Baptist Convention, the group considers resolutions that have been submitted. These resolutions usually concern social issues that are topics of debate in our country. The news media often reports the adopted resolutions as if all Southern Baptists believe and support the resolution. The truth is that the resolutions only reflect what a majority of those present at the convention approved. The resolutions have no authority on any Southern Baptist Church, Baptist state convention, or Baptist association. These resolutions have no authority over anyone. They have no power.

The same is true of any New Year's resolutions you make. They have no power. They reflect what you hope will happen in the new year. You hope you will exercise more. You hope you will eat less. You hope you will improve your relationships. The resolutions you make express your desire to change. But they have no power in themselves to accomplish your hopes.

I'm not going to ask you if you made any resolutions this year, or how many are still working at them one week into the new year. We all know how hard it can be to make big changes in the midst of our normally busy lives.

But as I said last week, I am encouraging you to work at some small change that has a better chance of succeeding than a big change. These are changes God definitely wants you to make. His priorities for you may or may not be that you exercise more. But he definitely wants to see change in you in the areas we are looking at in our study of 1 Timothy.

Paul has written to Timothy, who is serving in the church at Ephesus. Timothy is probably in his late thirties, with much practical experience. But he is younger than the elders of the church. So how is he to help lead this church? Paul tells him how in the letter.

1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV) Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life (behavior), in love, in faith and in purity.

We covered the first two of these five topics last Sunday. If you missed that sermon you can read it on our website. Or we will be glad to print you a copy. This morning, we are considering the third area Paul writes of, love.

The meaning of this word in this context can be difficult for us to understand. That is because the word love is so overused in our culture. We speak of loving a spouse, loving a sibling, loving ice cream, or loving a TV show. We usually do NOT mean the same thing in all these uses of the word love. I hope you love your spouse in a different way, and to a different degree, than you love a TV show.

There is no Bible passage that gives us a dictionary definition of the word love as it is used in the Bible. But we can look at various passages for clues to how it is used. To begin, let us go to the command to love.

John 13:34 (NIV) A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

This is what Jesus is looking for from us. Paul, too, was looking for such love in the churches. We see this in several of his letters.

Colossians 1:3-4 (NIV) **We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints...**

This is one of the three key characteristics of a growing Christian. Note again what Jesus says about this love.

John 13:34 (NIV) A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

The day following this statement, Jesus would die on the cross for them. But that was future to this statement. Notice he speaks here in the past tense. They were to love each other as He had already loved them. How had He already loved them?

They had been traveling the country with Jesus for three years. In that time they had observed his character. They witnessed his words, his behavior, his love, his faith, and his purity, the same things Paul wrote to Timothy. In that time he had lived out His love for them

In some ways they were not easy to love. We know something about these men from the gospel accounts in the New Testament. They were a varied group. Four of them had been partners as fishermen. The others, likely, came from different occupations. One was a hated tax collector. Another was a radical zealot. They all followed Jesus, but they were not friends to each other. They did not get along well with each other.

There were lots of friction and arguments among them. Each thought he was better than the others. They argued about which of them was greatest. They competed to see which of them Jesus would choose as his chief of staff. They bossed around the people who crowded to see Jesus. They tried to control this new movement. One time they even ordered a man to quit casting out demons in the name of Jesus because he was not one of their group. These were not like Jesus at all.

Yet through all of that, Jesus loved them. He accepted them rather than belittle them. He had compassion toward them, treated them kindly, and did not condemn them for their sins. He loved them daily. He loved them consistently.

Jesus loved His disciples as a friend.

This is what Jesus meant in John 13:34. Just as he had loved them in many little ways daily for three years, now they were to love each other in all the little ways that friends do.

Indeed, this is what we see in the rest of the New Testament. We see this kind of love. It is this love that Christians are commanded to live out towards each other. This is an active love of Christian to Christian as friends. It isn't based on feelings. You don't have to feel like for each other. This is an act of the will.

Probably the best description of this love comes to us from Paul in his letter to the church of Philippi.

Philippians 2:4 (NIV) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

He is speaking to Christians about their relationship with other Christians. If you become a loving person, that will carry over to your treatment of non-Christians. But the primary object of this love is other Christians. This is specific in the letter to the church of Galatia.

Galatians 6:10 (NIV) Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

As a follower of Jesus, it matters how you treat every person. But we have a special obligation to other Christians. These relationships come first. Our relationships with each other as believers, are to be a priority.

Philippians 2:4 (NIV) Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

We naturally look to our own interests. It takes a determined act of our will to focus on each other's interests. We must sacrifice ourselves for each other. That is the example of Jesus outlined in the next verses in that passage.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NIV) Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped (held onto), but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Jesus did not think only of himself, but became the God/Man to provide the savior we needed. He put our needs above His wants. This is what we are to do. We are to be growing in this sacrificial love toward each other.

Christian love is us looking out for each other.

Our love towards each other is to be an active concern for each other's spiritual and physical wellbeing. This requires that we make room in our hearts, and minds, and lives for others.

But what specific kinds of actions make up this love?

There are many “one another” and “each other” commands in the New Testament.

- Honor each other (Romans 12:10),
- Contribute to each other's needs (Romans 12:13),
- Show hospitality to one another (Romans 12:13),
- Rejoice in each other's joys (Romans 12:15),
- Weep with each other in grief (Romans 12:15),
- Pursue harmony with each other in spite of differences (Romans 12:16),
- Persistently strive for agreement in thorny issues (2 Corinthians 13:11),
- Serve each other (Galatians 5:13),
- Bear with each other's weaknesses and immaturity (Ephesians 4:2),
- Cover each other's many sins with forgiveness (1 Peter 4:8; Colossians 3:13),
- Encourage each other to press on in the mission of love (Hebrews 10:24),

It is going to cost us something to fulfill these commands. We must sacrifice ourselves for the good of each other.

We need to show up on Sundays thinking about others, not just ourselves.

This is beyond simply being nice and polite to each other on Sundays at church. This is taking a genuine interest in others and their needs.

- > Think about the situation of the other.
- > Think about the known or imagined needs of this person.
- > Pray for this person, for these needs.
- > Make contact with the person. "I am praying for you."
- > Send cards, notes, or emails of encouragement.
- > Provide things to help meet the need. You might make a meal, mow their grass, provide a gas gift card, etc.
- > Forgive them if they have sinned against you.
- > Be a coach/mentor if they are struggling with sin

Love is easiest on Sunday morning. It is most convenient when you are here and others are here to take an interest in each other's lives. But I believe Jesus expects us to love each other all week long.

If we would serve Jesus more faithfully in 2018, we must be growing in our concern for each other. We should be models to each other of this obedience.

How much thought do you give to other Christians, even on Sunday mornings?

How can you love each other outside of Sunday gatherings?

How seriously do you think about each other's needs and pray for each other?

Do you do anything other than pray?

It may be that this is the area of change God most wants to see in you this year.

Jesus knows all the answers to all of these questions concerning you. Jesus knows everything about you... EVERYTHING.

He knows all your sins. He knows your sinful words, sinful acts, sinful thoughts, sinful desires. He knows what you have done that you should not have done. He knows what you have left undone that you should have done. He knows every sin, every flaw in your character. And still He loves you with an active love, to lead you to the truth, to help you trust and obey God.

Isn't it time to respond with repentant faith?