

Beyond Just Getting Along
January 13, 2013

It's the start of a new year. It is a natural time to look back and ahead. It is a good time to look back at our year and see how cluttered it has become. It is a good time to look forward and re-establish our priorities. It is a good time to bring our lives back into alignment with our priorities. Over the course of a year our lives get full and busy and we can become distracted from those things that are most important to us, and most important to our Savior.

This happens in churches too. Churches can get busy doing so many things that they lose sight of the things that matter most to Jesus. I'm not saying we have, but this time of the year is a good time to remind ourselves of the priorities that Jesus gives us as His church.

One of the priorities of Jesus for His church is that we love one another.

While churches look different from each other, they should all have this priority. Before Jesus faced the cross, He knew that His followers would come together as this new thing called the church. He did not make it's structure a priority.

Churches throughout the world differ from each other in shape, differ in their organizational and leadership structure. There is much freedom in Christianity to vary what churches look like and how they function. Jesus didn't give us a defined shape for organizing churches. But He DID give us a defined priority for how we are to relate to each other as a church. That priority He stated this way.

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

Later in the conversation that night, Jesus repeated this new command.

John 15:12-13 (NIV) My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

And then again...

John 15:17 (NIV) This is my command: Love each other.

Now if this was so important to Jesus, you would think it would have been important in the first churches. You would think that it would be emphasized in the Bible in those letters addressed to Christians and churches. You would expect to see it often. And you would be right.

Romans 12:10 (NIV) Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.

Romans 13:8 (NIV) Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another...

Galatians 5:13 (NIV) You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.

Ephesians 1:15-16 (NIV) For this reason, ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you...

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...

1 Thessalonians 4:9 (NIV) Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NIV) We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing.

Philemon 1:4-5 (NIV) I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

1 Peter 1:22 (NIV) Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.

1 John 3:11 (NIV) This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another.

These are not all the passages that speak to this priority love in the church. There are more. There are also passages that give us more detail about what this looks like. For instance...

It must be a reactive love. We must react to each other's needs with caring and help. When someone is sick, in trouble, injured, grieving, we must seek to help.

Romans 12:13 (NIV) Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Romans 12:15 (NIV) Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

This is love reacts to needs. You see a need and offer help. You see something that needs to be done, and you do it. The parent of a church member dies, and you know a sympathy card would be helpful. There is illness in a family and you take a casserole over. You don't have to ask first if it is needed.

In addition to being reactive, our love for each other **(It) must be a proactive love.** It looks to the needs that all people or all Christians have. For example, Paul is writing to a church he had not planted and had not been to before. He writes to these Christians he had never met...

Colossians 1:9 (NIV) ... since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

He is praying this for them because every Christian needs this. Every Christian needs to be filled with the knowledge of God's will. They needed it. Every person here needs it. So you can pray this for each other.

It must be a servicing love. Each of us has a job or jobs to do in the church. This benefits us all.

Ephesians 4:16 (NIV) From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

As you take responsibility to serve in the church you help build up the church in love. Every person has a part to play. No service is insignificant. No person is insignificant. You love each other through serving.

It must be a cooperative love. It must be a humble love.

Romans 12:16 (NIV) Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud... Do not be conceited.

Ephesians 4:2 (NIV) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

It must be a forgiving love.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

It is here in the church family that we learn to live out this new love. Note that I said learn. It is not a love that comes naturally. All Christians are in need of learning to live out this love. Every new Christian must learn to love as Jesus did. Every experienced Christian is still learning to love as Jesus did.

No Christian is perfect. We say things and do things that hurt each other. We say things and do things that offend others. Stick around here long enough, and likely someone will say or do something that offends you. It might possibly be me.

We have lost people before because they expect things to be perfect. They expect everyone to be fully mature in Christ Jesus. Yet, someone hurt their feelings. They did not know they were supposed to do this.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV) Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Instead, they got mad and left the church. They got mad and left the church. And some have never come back. It is only years later that I find out what happened. They missed this central message, this priority of Jesus when they became a Christian. Maybe they missed it because we didn't stress it enough.

I'm stressing today. Jesus is stressing it today. Don't expect each other to be perfect. Instead, expect that someone is going to slip up. Someone is going to say something or do something that hurts you or offends you or insults you. Determine today that when it happens you are not going to leave. Instead, you are going to do one of these, in this order.

When someone hurts or insults you:

1) Talk it out with God first.

Pray about this situation. Humble yourself before God. Forget about "my honor", or "the respect I deserve", or "my rights". You have no cause for such attitudes before God. Take this problem to Him.

2) Overlook it.

If a state of humility before God, you can agree with God that you will overlook this. Give it to God to do with as He sees fit, and you go on as if it never occurred. Give others the benefit of the doubt and assume they did not mean what they said, or did not mean to hurt you. If the person did mean to hurt you, likely they will do so again. That will be the time to do something other than overlook it.

3) If you can't overlook it, then go to the person, humbly, gently, politely, and confront them with the offense.

Give them the opportunity to grieve and make amends. Be ready and willing to forgive them and reconcile with them.

God's goal is always reconciliation.

God sought reconciliation with each of us through Jesus. God's goal is always reconciliation. That should be our goal too.

So don't go and chew the person out. Don't go and get anything off your chest. Don't go and hurt them like they hurt you. Go to them for the purpose of reconciliation. Go to them with the hope of reconciling a relationship. Go to them to build a friendship. That's the kind of love Jesus is commanding us. Look again at His command.

John 13:34-35 (NIV) "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Note that what validates us as Jesus' followers are not miracles. What validates us are not missions and missionary endeavors. It is not our worship, our buildings, our numbers, our preaching, our Bible studies, or our good works in the community. What validates us as followers of Jesus is our love for each other. This love is a lot more than an attitude of "Let's just get along."

Let me suggest you make it a goal to pray for each other. That's a good place to start in this new year. Pray for each other. **Pray for every person in the church**. You have a church directory. Use it as a prayer list.

Thank God for this person, for his/her faith, for his/her part in our church family. Thank God for his or her service in the church.

We should take an aggressive approach to relationships within the church not being content with just getting along, but to pursue reconciliation and build genuine friendship.

It will take... it will take a love like Jesus. But then, that's why the Holy Spirit is inside us.

Invitation

We are to love each other as Jesus loves us. We can see examples of Jesus' love for people all through the biographies of Jesus in the Bible. But the greatest demonstration of His love was His voluntary death on the cross.

Jesus died for you. Jesus died for me. Jesus died that we might be forgiven of our sins and reconciled to God. Having been reconciled we can fellowship with God and will inherit eternal life with God.

Today you can receive forgiveness of your sins if you will receive Jesus as your Savior and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.