

How do we Love One Another?

The quality of healthy churches that is the fruit and the genesis of all the others is *loving relationships*. In John 13:34-35, Jesus said, "I give you a *new* commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." St. Paul reminds us that love is fundamental to our membership in the body of Christ "for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25 and I Corinthians 12:25-27).

Most of us consider our church a loving community (or we wouldn't belong). Yet, Schwarz and Schalk conclude from their studies of over 5,000 Christian churches, that this is the area where most churches "extravagantly overestimate" their strength.¹ Many churches have developed cliques that seem comfortable, warm and open to regular members but are inaccessible to newcomers. We need to improve our loving relationships to become disciples of Jesus who help Jesus make disciples. To begin, we might ask several questions:

Do we live in harmony? "Be at peace with one another" (Mark 9:50). "Live in harmony with one another" (Romans 12:16). "Lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:1).

Do we forgive one another? "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32). "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them" (John 20:23).

Do we encourage one another? "Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Hebrews 10:24). "Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing" (I Thessalonians 5:11).

Do we pray for one another? "Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective" (James 5:16).

Do we welcome others? "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Romans 15:7).

Do we teach one another? "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom" (Colossians 3:16).

Do we serve one another? "Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received" (1 Peter 4:10). "Become slaves to one another for the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, "You shall love your

¹ Christian A. Schwarz and Christoph Schalk, Implementation Guide to Natural Church Development (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1998) at 116.

neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:13-14). "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Do we help one another to grow along our Christian spiritual paths? This question summarizes the others. In The Road Less-Traveled, Scott Peck says love is helping another person to grow spiritually. Is there anything more loving than helping to draw someone into a deeper relationship with Jesus? Steven Curtis Chapman's song, "(I Will) Carry You to Jesus" is truly a love song.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). The way that Jesus showed his greatest love for people was by helping them become his disciples. "Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, ... 'Come, follow me'" (Mark 10:21). We are called to love others by helping Jesus make new and stronger disciples (Matthew 28:19-20).

"We know love by this, that Jesus laid down his life for us--and we ought to lay down our lives for one another" (1 John 3:16). True love is not just a *feeling* that overwhelms us – but a fruit, action or deed. "Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action" ((1 John 3:18). "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).