

Love, Love, Love.....

by Bubba Garner

You don't have to go very long without hearing the word love. Somebody says, "I love this place" or "I love that car." There are songs about love, poems about love, shows and movies about love. And you would think that a people who use the word so frequently would have a better concept of love. But we seem to be a generation consumed with just the opposite—hatred, anger, bitterness, wrath, malice, and evil intent. Perhaps we really don't know what love is or worse, we know what it is and are not practicing it.

Out of all the things Jesus could have left with His disciples, He chose a lesson that He knew they would never forget. It was not another sermon or parable or miracle; it was a demonstration of love. Just hours before His arrest, while the apostles were arguing among themselves, Jesus got up from the table where they were eating, girded himself with a towel and washed their feet (John 13). It is in this same chapter that Jesus tells us what love is and then tells us how to go practice it.

Love is a commandment. What did Jesus say after stooping to serve and washing their feet? "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another" (John 13:34). It was not a new suggestion or a new possibility or option. It was a commandment.

We must get past this idea that love is nothing more than an emotion that we cannot control or a feeling that we fall into or out of. Love is a decision, a choice, a commandment that you either chose to obey or disobey. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God" (Deut. 6:5) is a commandment. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Lev. 19:18) is a commandment. "Love one another even as I have loved you" is a commandment. It is not just our hearts that are involved here. Love has to do with the will. Will you obey?

Love must be elevated to a new level. Lest anyone be tempted to think that love that is commanded becomes forced and void of any sincerity, Jesus demands a certain kind of love. We are to love one another "even as I have loved you" (John 13:34). That means that our love ought to be extended to each other in the same manner that He extended it to us. We must be willing to freely give what God has freely given to us.

That's why Jesus calls this a "new" commandment. If our love for one another doesn't meet the standard of Jesus' love for us, then it is not love at all. Remember, He had just washed the disciples' feet. The Son of God! And the whole point of the exercise was that if He washed their feet, then what excuse could you possibly give for not washing your brother's feet? Loving as Jesus loved means serving and stooping. It sometimes involves sleepless nights, inconvenient interruptions, and even the possibility that you will be taken advantage of. But when we are the hardest to love is when we need love the most.

Love is the badge of the believer. "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). Soldiers are known by their uniforms. Athletes are recognized by their numbers. Christians are known by their love for one another. This is our distinguishing characteristic, the mark of our discipleship. It's not wearing a WWJD bracelet or a cross around your neck. It's not the number of passages you have memorized or how marked-up your Bible is. It's not some great display of power or courage. Jesus said that people will recognize who we are to the extent that we love one another as He has loved us.

When the Romans tried to break the spirit of the early Christians and crush their youth faith, they recognized something different about them, something that kept them banded together. One officer wrote, "They love before they know each other. Their Master makes them believe they are brothers." I wonder if the same thing could be said about us? If we can't love each other whom we have seen, how can we ever love God whom we have not seen (1 John 4:20)?

Before His death, Jesus instructed His disciples to love one another. Wouldn't you love for Him to find us doing just that when He returns to take us home?