

The Spirit and Relationships

Message 3 in 4 part series

Relationships in the body of Christ are to be marked by love and unity.

- How can we love others God's way?
- How can we do God's will in loving the unlovely?
- How can we who are so different become one/united?

We cannot escape the very clear message from the Scriptures that LOVE AND UNITY are linked to the very heart of God – that is expressed in the Trinity between the Father, Son and Spirit.

Therefore, in the community of the faithful, God's family – in relationships between or among God's people – it is no surprise that one of the Spirit's main roles or ministries within us and among our communities (eg an OM team) will be to manifest this divine nature of love and unity.

The one all important difference between the “old” and the “new” is the Presence of the Spirit. It is no longer a time just when God's people know His laws (eg “Love the Lord your God with all your heart”) but it is now a time when God's people have the power to do God's laws/will. God the Spirit dwells within us in order that He might work out through us the divine nature.

God's will is clear: the distinguishing mark of the community of His people is LOVE AND UNITY.

It is also true that God now makes this happen through His Spirit. See Gal.5:22; Eph.4:3,4; Rom.15:30.

The fact that this doesn't always happen within our family – that God's people fail to love one another in truth, and allow divisions and disunity to remain – doesn't show that yet once again God has failed in His plan. Rather it shows us that we are still

allowing sin to remain and that we need continually to turn from our evil ways through the power of the Spirit.

How does God work in this present age to make love a reality in the body of Christ?

- God's Gift: Rom.5:5; 1 John 2:15 ("the love of the Father")
- Experience of God's love: 1 John 3:1; 1 John 4:9-10
- God's command to be obeyed by all Jesus' followers: John 13:34,35; 1 John 3:23
- Reality/fact: Gal.5:22; 1 Thess.1:3; 3:6; Col.1:2
- Teaching: 1 Cor.13:4-8a
- Exhortations: 1 Thess.3:12; 4:9,10; 1 John 3:10-18; 4:7
- Prayer: Phil.1:9; Eph.3:16-19; cf. Eph.6:18

What does loving the brethren look like in real-life?

- See the Person of Jesus of Nazareth – fully God, yet also fully Man, God's Servant/Apostle whom God anointed with His Spirit – see Luke 3:21,22; 4:1,14.

Jesus was full of the Spirit – by the Spirit, Jesus did the Father's will in all things. And this included in loving His beloved disciples to the very end – see John 13:1.

How did Jesus, full of the Spirit of love, show His love for His brethren?

- leading them as a loving Shepherd
- communicating with them, eg not leaving them in the dark about what was ahead of them even if they were dull of hearing
- rebuking them, eg when they lacked faith, or for their self-centred divisive spirit
- protecting them, eg from the attacks of the evil one through His enemies
- praying for them
- encouraging and comforting them, eg when faced with all the threats
- trusting in them, eg sending them out on mission even when they were still caught in their old ways
- showing patience and perseverance with them, eg when they were so slow of heart to believe

How does loving one another look in team life?

What are your expectations?

How are you longing to be loved by your fellow-team members (whether this is already a reality most of the time or just some of the time)?

How will loving others (especially one another on the team) become a reality in our lives?

“By the Spirit”

- reminding us of Jesus’ command, ie the Father’s will
- convicting us for our lovelessness – leading us to repentance, working with us to help us remove whatever hinders true expressions of love for others (including self-hate)
- persevering with us so that we grow in our love for one another
- through our stepping out in faith to obey God’s command, believing in and relying upon the Spirit’s Presence dwelling within to enable/empower us to do the impossible that the spiritual power from the indwelling of God’s Spirit begins to flow.

Our part then will always be to respond in obedience to the convicting work of God’s Spirit:

- to repent, ie “to change our minds”, seeing our disobedience as God’s sees it, learning to hate every loveless way in our lives
- to confess our sin, ie to admit to unloving attitudes, words, ways etc.
- to confess our sin to one another
- to do the works of love **ASKING FOR THE SPIRIT’S HELP** – Luke 11:13

Probably some or all of you will need to take specific steps during this retreat in response to God’s Word. Don’t put it off, or think: “I know I will fail again, so why do anything about it? I’m just a failure!” Or, “That person on my team is such a difficult person. I’ve tried, but it never works out.” Respond by faith, and in obedience to God’s Word, refusing to allow tough or painful experiences to keep you from moving forward.

God would have us continually open to the stirring of His Spirit within us so that through our lives and our community, He might manifest the reality of a transformed

community of love. It doesn't come naturally. It isn't easy. But thank God, it isn't impossible.

It is happening already. Be thankful for what already is. Don't hold on to a perfectionistic expectation, as if loving one another in the family of God is to be an unbroken experience of perfect love at all times.

Rejoice in what is already.

But don't stop there. Work hard by the Spirit to keep growing in love for one another.

LOVE AND UNITY are inseparably linked together. The more we love one another in truth, the more we will taste true oneness in the body.

- God's Gift: 1 Cor.12:4-13
- God's will: Eph.4:3 "unity of the Spirit"
- Exhortation: Eph.4:3; Phil.2:1-4
- Prayer: John 17:21; cf. Eph.6:18

HOW ARE WE TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER AND TO WALK IN UNITY?

- By repenting from our sinful ways, returning to God in confession, receiving the cleansing and forgiveness through the wonderful work of Christ
- By believing in and relying upon the work of the Spirit, stepping out in faith to do acts of love and unity as the Spirit leads

1999 OM Romania team retreat