

Servant Newsletter



David L. Lane is the Senior Minister of Dallas' Marsalis Avenue Church of Christ.

A MINISTERIAL PERSPECTIVE

Radical Hospitality in the Kingdom of God

INTRODUCTION

Vibrant, fruitful, growing Christian churches practice Radical Hospitality! The words radical and hospitality are not usually linked together in one sentence. But in the Christian Church, these two words should walk hand in hand.

Radical means "drastically different from ordinary practice, outside the normal." Radical Hospitality is more than common politeness to newcomers, name tags for greeters, a few visitor parking spaces, or the excitement that someone new has been added to our fellowship, although these things are important.

Radical Hospitality is a spiritual initiative, the practice of an active genuine love, a graciousness that has nothing to do with self-interest, an opening of ourselves and our fellowship to receive others, even those who may look different, talk different, and smell different than we do. Radical Hospitality means we pray, plan, prepare, and work toward the purpose of helping

others receive what we have received in Christ, with unconditional love and acceptance". [1]

There is forever etched within the context of this text, three tremendous truths that I propose to use as foundational stones on which to build this sermonical castle.

They are

- (1) LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FREELY
- (2) LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FULLY
- (3) LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FERVENTLY.

LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FREELY

Romans 15:5-7

Paul's instruction in Romans 15:5-7 is based on insights taught by Jesus in John 15:12,13 when he taught "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. These things I command you, that ye love one another".

These things I command you, that ye love one another”.

To love freely, is to “will” to treat your brother the way God treats you. Some of us have what I call the "IF KIND OF LOVE"? I will Love you if....

1. If I can manipulate you and control you.
2. If you will succumb to my every beckoning call.
3. If I can use you to my advantage.
4. If you will agree with me, and believe the same things I believe.
5. If you will act deserving and grateful for my love.
6. If you don't stub your toe morally.
7. If you will promise me, you will never make that mistake again.
8. If you skin is a certain color and your IQ is at a certain level.

Some of us, possess a "BECAUSE OF" kind of love. I love you because....

1. Because of who you are. You are my relative, my customer, my long time friend.
2. Because of what you have. You've got power, position, prestige, prominence, and possession.

When you get to where you can't do for me, then I ain't got no use for you.

3. Because of what you do for me, and how you make me feel. You make the bells ring, stars fall, bombs burst, and the earth shake. You make me feel good, look good because you light up my life. But when that handsome body turn fat and forty, bald and bulgy and that figure 8 turns to figure O. When the lights flicker and the earth don't shake. I don't need you any longer, so I trade you in for a later model. That is the demonstration of a because of kind of love.

There are others who have "AN UNTIL KIND OF LOVE." I love you until...

1. Until you disagree with me.
2. Until you disappoint me
3. Until you make a mistake morally or get in trouble with the law.
4. Until you discover the truth about me or that I discover that you don't like me.
5. Until I find somebody who caters to me better than you do.

But the Lord, has "AN IN SPITE OF KIND OF LOVE". God loves us in spite of us.

1. In spite of who you are or what you were.
2. In spite of what you have
3. In spite of your fumbings, stumbings and fallings. [2]

As a child of God I don't love you because of who you are, but because of who I am. *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of ocmpassion from him, how dewelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1Jno. 3:14-18).*

The God who loves me is ...
 too holy to be defiled
 too eternal to be transient
 too sure to fail
 too truthful to lie
 too exact to error--
 too wise to be deceived--
 too infallible to make a mistake--

too strong to be defeated--
 too powerful to be dethroned--
 too alert to be surprised--
 too near to be far away--
 too punctual to be late--
 too watchful to sleep--
 too mindful to forget--
 too right to be wrong--
 too merciful to be mean--
 too loving to be unkind--

GOD IS LOVE, in order to be God-like, we must be loving and see people the way God sees them. Everybody you meet, with their hurts, habits and hang-ups is a place where God desires to dwell!

LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FULLY

The verb "Accept" means "to receive wholeheartedly, to warmly welcome them to yourself, to grant admission into your heart, to look beyond anything superficial and to be willing and open to build relationships."^[3] In short, to love people just as they are, not for what we intend or hope that they would be

Karen Carpenter seemed to struggle with the issue of acceptance when she wrote a song entitled "Love Me For What I Am." The chorus speaks volumes to struggling souls: "You've got to love me / For what I am / For simply being me / Don't love me / For what you intend / Or hope that I will be."^[1] Those are not just lyrics to a song, but the reality for too many people struggling to survive in the twenty first century.

In a strong church with genuine "mind of Christ" fellowship, the strong bear the weaknesses of the weak. The weak believers are described in Romans 14 as those who judge, grumble, complain, murmur, and criticize. The weak are essentially those who still trust in a legalistic behavior, and DEMAND THAT WE

ALL SEE EVERYTHING THE SAME WAY.

The truth of the matter is that all of us are a bit prejudiced. The sooner we admit it, the better off we will become. The major problem that we deal with as we are confronted by prejudice is that when we hear the word 'prejudice', we immediately think about racial prejudice. Race is not the only way we discriminate, or prejudge people. We place labels on people and react to the labels without ever getting to know the person.

We can discriminate on the basis of ancestry.

We can discriminate on the basis of appearance.

We can discriminate on the basis of age.

We can discriminate on the basis of achievement.

We can discriminate on the basis of affluence.

In the kingdom of God we judge people based on **extra-biblical standards**. We could not accept a person due to issues that are not really biblical. Romans 14:1 says, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters." The Message translation renders it thusly. "Welcome with open arms fellow believers who don't see things the way you do. And don't jump all over them every time they do or say something you don't agree with". We tend to draw the line where it should not be drawn. We major on the minor, and minor on the major. There are some things that are not matters of principles, but only preferences. They are more a matter of taste than a matter of theology. We place theological labels on our brothers and sisters in the faith, react to the label without seeking to know the person and what he believes. We place each other in camps based on rumors, reputation, hearsay and fear, without documentation. We label ministers as conservative, ultra conservative, moderate, and liberal. When a minister is placed in a camp his congregation is automatically placed in the same camp.

The issue of judging people based on extra-biblical standards can be seen in our fellowship by

congregations who base fellowship on one cup versus many cups, Handclapping (not just rhythmic hand clapping, any kind) versus hand waving. One song leader versus multiple song leaders, saying amen too loud versus being silent in the worship. Having communion at the beginning of service versus at the end.

The restoration fathers came up with a formula which, when used consistently, can avoid division over none essential items. "In essentials unity. In non essentials liberty, In all things charity." The essentials are those core doctrines which, when violated, will cause one to be lost, because they are outside the will and word of God. All other issues must be seen as non-essentials, and for those we have liberty. But even when we can't agree on those issues we should agree to disagree in love.

Secondly, we judge each other based on **external appearance**. We find it hard to accept others just because they look, talk, dress and act differently. James 2:1-4 strongly condemns this attitude: *"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,' have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?"* There's a sad observation that the rich tends to attract the rich and the poor tends to attract the poor. Somehow, getting the rich and the poor together in a congregation seems like mixing oil and water.

Thirdly, **we judge people based on exaggerated notions**. We often do not accept a person because of our first impression of them. Again I remind you that we place labels on people and react to the labels without ever getting to know the person. We fear each other because we don't know each other. We don't

know each other because we don't associate with each other. We don't associate with each other because we fear each other. It thus becomes a vicious cycle.

Have you not observed someone being prejudiced toward someone and reacting to them, that way? We meet someone and prejudge them, place a label on them, react to the label and never know the person. Then somehow God orchestrates the events of your life to the point that you are forced to associate and get to know that person. You find your self saying something rather silly, "You know he's a pretty good person once you get to know him." But the truth of the matter is he was a good person all along, but your prejudiced hindered you from seeing it.

Fourthly, we judge people on excessive estimation. We judge people based on things that are impossible to assess. For example, we cannot judge a person's motives. According to 1 Corinthians 4:3-5, *"My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God."* We can judge his actions but not his heart. It is only the Lord who can weigh a person's motives.

III. LOVE AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER FERVENTLY

The word "bear" (in the Greek) does not just mean to bear in the sense of putting up with and forbearing with an attitude of tolerance. It means to bear the weak along, to support them, to carry them along as a father or mother would carry a child-in love and tenderness, understanding and care. [5]

Peter in pointed and powerful dialogue reminds us in 1 Peter 1:22 *"Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart*

fervently." The word "fervent" describes the striving of an athlete. The kind of energy that an athlete puts into racing toward the finish line to win the race is the fervency or energy expected of us in loving and forbearing one another.

My mind reflects on the little boy in rural America who put a bumble bee in a Prince Albert tobacco can. He put the can in his hip pocket and went into school thinking he would have some fun with somebody with that bumble bee. However, when he sat down, somehow the bumble bee got out and stung him on his backside. He stood up and begin to make a commotion. The teacher said Johnny sit down. He scrummed in pain and embarrassment. She said "Johnny, I said sit down". He said "Miss Adams, there is something going on back here, you don't know anything about."

Almost everybody you meet has something going on with them, we don't know anything about. There is not a person you meet that is not struggling to overcome some hurt, habit or hang-up.

Trials have made visitation to their house and knock on the door of their soul.

Agony has aggravated them,
 Burdens have bothered them,
 Crisis have cut them,
 Disaster has devastated them,
 Enemies have envied them,
 Fear has frustrated them,
 Grief has gripped them,

Hurts have hounded them,
 Jealousy has jarred them,
 Loneliness has walked with them,
 Misery has mesmerized them,
 Opposition has oppressed them,
 Problems have pounded them,
 Suffering and sorrow has sickened them,
 Trials and tribulations have terrified them,
 The clouds of disappointments has over shadowed them,
 The rains of failure have descended upon them,
 depression has pricked their heart,
 Adversity has rattled the windows of their soul and
 Joy has lost their address.

Be kind to everybody you meet, because
 EVERYBODY HAS SOMETHING GOING ON WITH
 THEM, THAT WE DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT.

END NOTES ON FILE: