

November 11, 2010

Developing Christ's Likeness: A Life of Loving Intensity

*"Love the Lord your God with **ALL** your heart and with **ALL** your soul and with **ALL** your strength and with **ALL** your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27)*

The word "**ALL**" in the above passage can be defined as: in all respects; without reservation, without exception. In other words, our Lord wants the whole entirety of love from your heart, soul, strength, and mind.

- For those without the Spirit of Christ, this command is impossible to keep.
- For those who are more dedicated to their denomination or religious practices than to Jesus as Lord and Savior, this command is impossible to keep.
- For those who have the Spirit of Jesus within them, obeying this command is possible IF His Spirit rules your mind, will and emotions, that is, your soul, It must be His Spirit rather than your sin nature or strongholds ruling you if this kind of wholehearted love is to encompass your life. After all, love is the first fruit of His Spirit's rule in your soul (Galatians 5:22). This is why it's paramount that you be stronghold-free, with **ALL** the ruts of old demonic-induced attitudes and behaviors filled in. Otherwise a foothold area of deceit may insinuate itself when you give way to the old familiar responses from when you were influenced by darkness.

We have to admit a certain source of sorrow for us. Many of the people our Father has used us to help over the years appreciated our assistance in getting them out of their various problems. BUT, since they weren't willing to love the Lord with **ALL** their being or look to express love in pleasing Him, they failed to acquire the Christ-like character we were attempting to impart. (See Romans 12:1,2.) Rather than looking to serve our Lord's gracious purposes, they went on their own way after their immediate problem was solved. Even many who go through our workbook *Demolishing Strongholds* end up in a worse state afterwards (Luke 11:26) because they refused to heed our Lord's command in Luke 10:27, above. Neglecting to press in with **ALL** that's within them to acquire the love of Jesus, they miss developing His character — and therefore fall back into demonic bondage that's even worse.

Christ-like character isn't just a modified set of behaviors as so many throughout Christendom seem to believe. "Christian behavior" often translates into what a person does when they're with other Christians. You can observe this on any given Sunday morning. Rather, the character of Jesus combines love-based **motivation** with the **behavior** that pleases our Lord. As with the motivation of Jesus, our Lord's character motivates His own into action that brings glory to our Father (John 15:8). And, developing the loving character of Jesus is an ongoing process as we learn and apply His commands (John 14:21).

Christ-like character is who you are from the inside out.

What separates a follower of Jesus from a self-proclaimed, in-name-only "Christian" is that the former has an *intensity of heart* to become more like Jesus. That one goal—to keep becoming like his or her Lord and thus bring pleasure to our Father — leads to responsive, activated love that's seen in a life that seeks to do His will. A person who calls himself a Christian yet lives for himself pursues a religion of complacency — involvement in practices and programs that perpetuate his spiritual lethargy. If they read the Bible or listen to teachings, it's to gain knowledge *without* the scriptural responsibility to put it into practice. Jesus addresses such people with the rebuke He imparted to the religious leaders of His day: ***"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about Me, yet you refuse to come to Me to have life. I know that you do not have the LOVE OF GOD in your hearts"*** (John 5:39,40,42). By their selective, self-serving religious practices they violate Luke 10:27 — they are unwilling to love with **ALL**.

We've noted in previous writings that to serve our Father's children as an elder/ shepherd, or to be the wife of one who serves in this way, calls for years of intense dedication with the goal of developing ever-increasing Christ-likeness through His indwelling Spirit. During the preparatory years a couple must be the first line of helping each other become more like Jesus, growing in sacrificial love and forgiveness toward one another. If they're blessed with older couples in their lives along the way, as we've been privileged to have over the years, as well as friends with like devotion to Jesus, the ongoing transformation process into the character of Jesus is made that much easier.

If you're an elder shepherd of our Father's children, we encourage you to scrutinize your own life along with that of your spouse. Are you equally intent on pursuing the Spirit of Christ in you to have His way in transforming and refining your love and character? In the earliest Church, a man ministered out of what the Lord had formed in his marriage. That's why Paul so often addresses husbands and wives so that their relationship would reflect the kind of love expressed by Jesus for His bride, the collective called-out ones. How well does your marriage reveal the character of Jesus in you together? Does He have **ALL** of your love? If not, cry out to Him with your whole heart and soul — He's eager to answer that kind of prayer!

If you're a shepherd whose marriage does reflect the character of Jesus because of your years of mutual desire and yieldedness to become like Him, don't be reluctant to correct those you serve who lack the intensity and devoted determination that are needed for Christ-like character to grow. Out of loving devotion to those in your fellowship family, heed the command of Jesus: ***"If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him"*** (Luke 17:3).

***Authentic fellowship is made possible by repentant people
whose focused desire is to become like their Lord
and to serve Him with ALL their heart and soul.***

An older shepherd is pregnant with wisdom to pass along — wisdom that younger people need. That's why *respect* for these men is so fervently called for in younger people: ***“We ask you to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change.”*** (1Thessalonians 5:12, CJB). Confrontation helps those who are acting unwisely to recognize their folly and its consequences and thus be willing to change course.

From a biblical perspective, respect also means hearing with an intent to follow through: ***“Let yourself be persuaded by the ones leading you and submit to them. They watch on behalf of your souls as those who will be rendering an account, in order that they may do this with joy, and not groaning, for this would be profitless to you.”*** (Hebrews 13:17, literal translation)

We realize that most of you are not part of a fellowship family that's guided by an older shepherd who, along with his wife, represents years of loving determination to become more like Jesus in character. Many of you are still enmeshed in religious systems where older people have little or no daily interaction with you to role model the intensity of dedication which Luke 10:27 commands. You're discovering that you're set back when you don't have older, wiser people in your life who've given their **ALL** for themselves and their marriage to grow in reflecting the character of Jesus. But your faithful, compassionate Father knows this!

NEVER let the lack of role models stop you from seeking THE Source of **ALL** love Who lives within you. The Spirit of Christ empowers you to LOVE the Lord your God with **ALL** your heart, soul, strength and mind; and, to love your neighbor as yourself. Only Jesus can do *through* you what you can never do in your own strength. His love through you is a power that controls your motivation and behaviors, and ultimately leads to actions toward others through which your Father is glorified. **ALL** is the key....

Your servants for His joy,
Mike & Sue