Love is a Weapon

Nov 20 Wolfe City

Intro... I'm a husband, father of twin boys, blogger, author, co-host of an Internet Radio program and a storyteller

On our Internet Radio program we recently asked our listeners to share their answer to the question – "If you could say one thing to the Church in 2011 what would it be?"

Lots of great responses.

My response: LOVE MORE.

Not the sappy kind of love my wife and I see in various chick-flicks... but LOVE that changes the world.

Love that melts hearts.

Love that touches deep inside the souls of men.

Love that brings life into the darkest and deepest pits of evil.

A love that is a weapon to destroy ALL evil.

Sound pretty good?

I want to begin with two stories.

The first was shared by Phillip Yancy – author of What's So Amazing About Grace?

Yancy met with a man for lunch and found out this man was a WWII vet. He saw a lot of action during the war and even fought at the Battle of the Bulge – a 9 day battle – from Dec. 16 – Dec. 25, 1945.

During the battle, things were so chaotic that the US troops couldn't take any prisoners so this soldier was part of a team who were instructed to go out and kill any wounded German soldiers.

As he was searching for the wounded he found a German soldier, not wounded, but simply too tired to move.

The American raised his gun, ready to blow his brains out when the German spoke in plain English, "Please let me pray first."

A little surprised, the soldier asked, "Are you a Christian?" The German replied, "I am." "I am too!"

So they sat and shared Scripture and family photos together and even prayed together.

As the soldier kept talking, Yancy pressed the soldier... "Well what did you do?"

The soldier said, "I told him, 'You're a Christian and I'm a Christian. I'll see you in Heaven.' And I blew his brains out."

That's not the outcome you expected?
Where's the happy ending? The point of reconciliation?
What do you think?

We tend to believe that Christians are loving people.

And yet so often our

"beliefs",
our doctrine,
our nationalism,
our pride,
our feelings

fill in the blank......

often get in the way of living out the very love we claim we have for others.

2nd story...

From 1968 to 1987 Rev. Wade Watts served as the President of The Oklahoma Chapter of the NAACP.

In 1979, Watts was invited to a television debate with the then Grand Master of the KKK.

The two met at the TV station. The Grand Master said later that expected to meet a 'black militant with a huge fro and African garb with a button that said "death to whitey"

Instead Watts was dressed nicely in a suit and held out his hand to the Grand Master and said, "Hello Mr Clarey. I just wanted to tell you that I love you and Jesus loves you."

Clarey was taken back and shook Watts' hand.

Clarey immediately withdrew his hand realizing he had broken the Klan rule. No touching of an "unclean" black man.

As Clarey started at his hand, Rev Watts told him, "Don't worry Johnny – it don't come off."

Clarey started to curse him out and Rev Watts looked at him and replied, "God bless you Johnny. You can't do enough to make me hate you. I'm gonna love you and pray for you whether you like it or not."

Furious, Clarey and the Klan decided to go after Watts.

They showed up at his house with their hooded sheets and yelled for Watts to come out.

Finally he did and told them, "Boys, Halloween is still four months away. I don't have any candy for you. Come back in October."

So they did come back but this time they burned crosses in his front yard and Watts came out asking if they needed hotdogs and marshmallows for their BBQ.

Not knowing what to do next, the Klan decided to set fire to Watts' church.

Clarey then called Watts up and threatened him under a disguised voice.

Watts replied, "Well hello Johnny! A man like you takes the time to call me. I'm honored. Let me do something for you. Dear Lord, please forgive Johnny for being so stupid. He's a good man and doesn't mean to be so ornery."

Finally the Klan cornered Watts in a restaurant. Clarey got in Watts' face and said, "Boy this restaurant is for white people only. We don't want you hear. Get out of here or whatever you do that chicken – we're going to do to you."

Watts looked down at his plate, picked up the chicken and kissed it.

After that the Klan left Watts alone...

Clarey said later it was the love of Watts that turned him around.

A love that is a weapon to destroy ALL evil.

Later Clarey and Watts became dear friends.

Clarey became a Christian and spoke in the same church he had set fire to earlier. And Clarey even becoming the Godfather to one of Watts daughters. THIS is the kind of love that melts hearts.

THIS is the kind of love that turns lives around.

THIS is the kind of love that is a weapon to defeat evil.

And I believe this is the kind of love that Jesus talks about when he's asked, "What is the greatest commandment?"

Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and intelligence.' This is the most important, the first on any list.

But there is a second to set alongside it: 'Love others as well as you love yourself.' These two commands are pegs; everything in God's Law and the Prophets hangs from them." (Matthew 22)

And beyond just neighbors (as many translations use) – Jesus even calls us to love "others" including our enemies!

Matthew 5:43-44 "You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.'

I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst.

Jesus seems to lump everyone into this "People we should love" category.

But why?

Why does Jesus care so much about us loving others?

Matthew 5:44-46 "When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves.

This is what God does. He gives his best - the sun to warm and the rain to nourish-to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty.

If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that."

It's because we were created in the image of God.

And when we love our neighbors – and love the unloveable we are becoming our true selves.

Our God-created selves.

We're becoming who God created us to be!

And in becoming our God-created selves... we let the world see exactly who God is. We become his hands and feet!

Jesus drives this home again in John 13 as he's spending his last few hours with his disciples.

John 13:34-35 "Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples - when they see the love you have for each other."

John 15:12 "This is my command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends."

So not only does Jesus say love God and love others... and love your enemies... but he ups the challenge...

LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

And how has Jesus loved us? He laid down his life for us. He died for us.... while we were STILL sinners.

Not after we cleaned up our act and got things right.

Nope – God's grace chases after us long before we even know it's out there.

So how do we do it?

How do we love those who get under our skin? How do we love the unlovable? How do we love those who burn crosses in our front yard and set fire to our church? How do we love in a way that says, "Father forgive them because they don't know they're being ornery?

Three ideas...

- 1. Realize how much God loves YOU. We can't give away what we haven't received ourselves. Jesus says that he loves us so much he leaves the 99 others to chase after us. We're ALL the 1% in his mind. Think on his grace, his love, his mercy. Remind yourself every day how truly loved you are.
- 2. Realize that God loves EVERYONE just as much. You are special and you are the treasure of God's eye... but so is all of creation. Each person matters just as much to God. Each person, no matter how much you despise them is created in the image of God.
- 3. Realize that we GET to share the love of God with the world. It's not a duty, it's not a to-do list. But it's a privilege as the children of God to go out and share God's love with a broken world. It's what God has called us to do. That's why we don't simply say a

prayer, accept his grace, and then get an escape hatch out of here. We GET to be Jesus to those around us. We GET to be his hands and feet. We GET to be Agents of Reconciliation... We GET to help reconcile people to God. We GET to be The Insurgency of Love.

- 4. Get outside your comfort zone and get to know others. Get to know their story. If we knew everyone's story... We'd be a lot more willing to forgive and love.
- 5. Destroy the labels. No one really wants to be known by their label! Divorced. Drunkard. Cheat. Liar. Abuser. Thief. Black. White. Republican. Democrat. We want to be known as people. And yet we're so ready to attach them to other people. That's why Paul tells us –

Words like Jewish and non-Jewish, religious and irreligious, insider and outsider, uncivilized and uncouth, slave and free, mean nothing. From now on everyone is defined by Christ, everyone is included in Christ. Colossians 3:11

When we can destroy the labels in our lives we're one step closer to loving people as human beings created in the image of God.

Story of Rwanda

This first photo you see two men. Innocent on the left and Gasperd on the right.

In 1994, as part of the Rwandan Genocide – when an estimated 800,000 people were killed – Innocent killed Gasperd's brother on the very spot where they're now standing.

Today they stand, holding hands, as reconciled friends.

On their arms, a simple message: "Love is a weapon to destroy evil"

This photo and the next ones were all taken by Jeremy Cowart.

Each photo shows a victim and an oppressor. Each photo shows people who have reconciled through love.

Each photo shows a message - one says, "Truth restores trust." Others include "Forgiveness releases fear" and "We restored our humanity."

Cowart said: "My favorite moment with every photo is seeing the moment when they laugh and you can tell these people really have reconciled. It's not a front. There is true friendship that has been rebuilt after genocide."

"In America, we can't even forgive someone if they take our parking spot. But these individuals have forgiven the people who ripped away some of the most precious things in life – family, security, innocence. That's the kind of love I pray I can show my boys.

That's the kind of love I pray I can live out to my wife.

That's the kind of love I pray I can live out to my neighbors and co-workers and even my enemies.

So what about you?

Where's the rub? When do you find it hardest to love others?

- Hurt?
- Doctrine?
- Nationalism?
- Pride?
- Politics?
- Strangers?

Imagine what this kind of love could do in your family.

Imagine how it might change your relationship with your kids or your spouse.

Imagine how this kind of love could change your neighborhood – your church – your city.

Imagine if as Christians we were truly known for our love of others – counter culture to everything society knows.