



REFLECTIONS

January 22, 2017

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another."

John 13:34-35

Feelings of Love

What a command! Does Jesus expect us to generate feelings of love on demand? It's hard for us to grasp the meaning of love apart from the warm fuzzy feelings we have for our spouses or children. So, a *command* to love seems impossible to do at will. It makes me wonder what love really means sometimes.

Apostle John tells us, "*God is love.*" But love doesn't paint the image of God I have when I think that you and I are created in his image. I think of love as something we do because of feelings we have, not something we are. Peter seems to have struggled with the question too.

Remember the dialog when Jesus asked Peter three times, "...*do you love me?*" Each time Peter responded, "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" (John 21:15-17) Now, as your Bible studies have likely revealed, the Greek word Peter used for love was *phileo*—meaning the relationship of a friend. The Greek word Jesus used for love is *agape*—to love in a moral sense. Peter's love is a *felt* love, an affectionate love. The love Jesus used is a *willed* love, more like a commitment to serve the interest of another. But something about these differing aspects of love are troubling to me, especially when I think about what Jesus commanded, "*As I have loved you, you must love one another.*"

It's a little disappointing if I think Jesus loves me as a matter of will rather than a feeling for me. At first blush, it sounds insincere. But then I reflect a little further.

If we love our neighbor, or indeed, our enemies as a dutiful response to Jesus' command (meaning we do the right thing for their wellbeing), how might we feel afterwards? Perhaps agape love may not be inspired by feelings for a person, but it will result in feelings for them. Just remember how you feel when you have done the right thing for someone else. Now pause for a minute. Agape love is not void of feelings. It produces and embodies them.

God so loved the world that he gave... Jesus so loved the Father that he gave... both seeking wellbeing for others: neither void of feelings. Agape is not love for what is. Agape is love for what can be. So, to love one another as Jesus loved us is to serve the wellbeing of others. It is not void of feelings of love even if first driven by will.

And love on demand? Well maybe so. Serving the needs of others plants seeds that flourish and grow to make life a little better.

Love that begins as a willful act, ends with warm fuzzy feelings of love.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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