

## New Life's call to love – like God loves

“God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. <sup>17</sup>And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect. ...we are like Jesus here in this world...  
<sup>19</sup> We love each other because he loved us first. <sup>20</sup>If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a Christian brother or sister, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? <sup>21</sup>And he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their Christian brothers and sisters.”

1 John 4:16-21 NLT

For the last couple of months we have been learning the Biblical definition of “church” during our Sunday morning messages. Each week as I have been preparing my heart to speak (and even as I write this article) I sense the Lord's inner stirring and His desire to meet human need with Holy Spirit empowered humans – ones called Christians individually, and Church – collectively. Jesus' words written here through the apostle John, declare that “*we are to be like Christ in this world.*” These are not the human words of wishful thinking, but rather are the purposes of God for His Church – to be His hands; the physical expression of Immanuel (which means, God with us.) The name Church means, “*called out ones.*” Jesus' Church is called to live out the “Immanuel Principle” in this world. To use a well worn but true statement, “We are the only Jesus people will ever see.”

Pastor Jerry Cook suggests the following as a “working definition” of church. “*The church is Spirit-filled people, equipped to serve, meeting needs everywhere in Jesus' name.*” This definition helps us to understand what we are about as Christ followers – to serve others. It helps us to see how - through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. It helps us to see who – every one of Jesus' followers are called to be ministers. It helps us to see where – everywhere Jesus' followers go – we are called to be His hands – to be Jesus in that given situation. That is living out the Immanuel Principle.

This definition helps us to see the “why” behind spiritual gifts, the “why” Jesus directs us to regularly meet together, and the “what” new Life is striving for. Spiritual gifts are given to Jesus' followers to empower us to meet needs in our families, neighborhoods, workplaces etc. They are given to us so that we can be life giving parents, neighbors, co workers and friends. In every situation of life where there is a human need and a human representative of Jesus – there is hope and possibility. The gatherings of Jesus' Church then are to be representative times of “rest and restoration.” We meet together to worship our Lord, to experience the restorative touch of His hand, and to be equipped through His Word. After these regular R & R meetings, the church scatters again to our homes, neighborhoods, jobs and places of recreation as ministers/servants. Our goal then is to see people brought to “wholeness” in Jesus' name. The fruit of wholeness is neighborliness – reaching out to others in Jesus' name. Being neighbors like the Good Samaritan is what we are about.

Pastor Dave