

Strangely Warmed

A few weeks ago I went inside a mud-brick hut in a remote Guatemalan village and knelt beside a sick old woman who hasn't walked for months. I had traveled to Guatemala with 20 Americans to host a conference, and we watched God perform miracles. But the image from the trip that stuck with me the longest was of this two-room house that had an outdoor fireplace for cooking and no running water.

The old woman thanked us in Spanish as she lay on a cot close to the dirt floor. "You have done what Jesus asked," she said, faintly smiling. "You have visited the sick."

Pastor Morales, my host that week, clasped the woman's bony wrist and wept as he prayed for her pain to subside. Then he made an observation I will never forget.

"Of all the things we need in this village," he told us, "what we need most is more love."

I had come to visit the poor, but in that moment Jesus visited me. I grabbed a post next to the wall, turned my head and began to sob. I didn't understand it then, but the compassion of Christ was welling up inside me and spilling out.

It was painful, but it felt good. When it was time for us to leave I walked outside, scooted the chickens out from under my feet and wiped away my tears. From that point I felt as if I were seeing through new eyes. My love—which had grown cold over time—had been reheated in a crude house with no kitchen.

I returned from Guatemala with a simple realization: Real Christianity is about being a channel of God's selfless, agape love. If I want to be a minister of Jesus, then my love needs to be at the right temperature.

Although the Bible says that loving God and people should be our top priority, we tend to focus on secondary issues. Many of us major in faith, miracles or our favorite pet doctrines, yet the New Testament says that if we don't have love we are just making a lot of useless racket (see 1 Cor. 13:1-3).

The core of the gospel message is not about church-growth strategies, faith formulas, spiritual-warfare techniques, religious dress codes or the latest revelations about the end times. Why do we complicate what is so simple?

Lately I've watched respected church leaders fight each other, break fellowship over nonessential theological points, take each other to court, flippantly divorce their wives, assassinate each other's character and engage in cutthroat competition for money and influence. Then they go on stage and teach people how to hear God's voice and experience miracles.

Loveless Christianity is a counterfeit. When we preach the gospel without the love of God, we stage our own noisy gong show.

It's time for a love revival. If your love has cooled, check your heart for resentment. If you're holding a grudge, let it go. If you've judged someone, pray for them the next time you are tempted to criticize.

If you have broken fellowship with a Christian brother or sister, swallow your pride and make things right. If you need to make a private confession or a public apology, don't wait any longer.

And if you really want God's love to melt your heart, I suggest you pray for an orphan, a widow, a prisoner or anyone who's sick, poor, lonely or discouraged.

If you run out of ideas, I can offer directions to a little mud hut in Guatemala.