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Connecting Love and Leadership

Pursue love...

1 Cor. 14:1

It is no exaggeration to say that the Bible is a book of love. The story of the gospel, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16), is the greatest love story ever told. Because of God’s great love for us, we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love our neighbor as ourself (Mark 12:30-31). While it is true that this requirement to love God and neighbor is incumbent upon all true believers, I have focused my attention on the subject of love as it applies to Christian leaders and teachers. Here’s why.

First, although Christianity is unmatched among the religions of the world in its teaching about God’s love and the requirements of love for Christian believers, Christian leaders don’t normally focus on love when they address leadership. Much good material has been written describing the leadership qualities of courage, resourcefulness, charisma, conviction, perseverance, visionary thinking, self-discipline, decisiveness. Yet few books on church leadership include anything about love. This is a tragic oversight since the New Testament makes it clear that love is indispensable to the gifts of leading and teaching. Indeed, the New Testament mandates that spiritual gifts be exercised in love. As Paul puts it, any attempt at leading and teaching apart from love is like “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1). To have all of the above leadership qualities but not love spells total failure for a Christian leader (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Second, leaders and teachers set the spiritual tone for the church. They have the power to create a more loving atmosphere within the local church. If they are lovers of God and lovers of people, their followers will more likely be lovers of God and people. If, however, leaders are self-centered, critical, proud, angry, and impersonal, the people will adopt these same ugly dispositions.

Over the years I have talked to many people who were dissatisfied with their local church but didn't know exactly why. In many of these cases, I believe the missing element was the kind of love envisioned in the New Testament. Failure to love is all too common and it creates a broad spectrum of problems, as evidenced by the strife-ridden church at Corinth. That is why Scripture insists that leaders and teachers be examples of love: "Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love" (1 Tim. 4:12). Love is vital to the local church because love is "the life-breath of the church,"¹ essential to its evangelistic witness and spiritual growth (Eph. 4:16).

Third, in the church family people must work closely together as brothers and sisters in Christ in making decisions and accomplishing tasks. At times this is difficult. Much work within the local church (and among local churches) is done in group settings: elders' and deacons' meetings, staff meetings, board meetings, committee meetings, and all-church meetings.

**"Love is the most attractive quality in the world.
And it lies at the heart of Christianity."**

—Michael Green

The longer we work together, the more we get to know one another's faults and annoying personality traits, which can make life

together frustrating. Understanding the New Testament principles of love will significantly enhance healthy group leadership, group meetings, and congregational life as a whole. Without love, we cannot live and work in harmony.

Fourth, there are many false ideas about love that need correction. In the name of love, Christians have been known to abandon their families, commit every sort of sexual sin, refuse to practice church discipline, and redefine God and salvation according to contemporary notions of love and tolerance. Instead of love being "the fulfillment of the law," it has been made the enemy of the law (Rom. 13:8-10). Instead of love abhorring "what

is evil,” it has been used to justify evil (Rom 12:9). In his classic work *Testaments of Love* Leon Morris states, “There is no end to the list of horrors that have been perpetrated in the name of love.”²

Despite these drawbacks, I firmly believe that truly understanding what the Bible says about love would significantly improve the relational skills of our church leaders and teachers and greatly enhance their effectiveness in ministry. It would diminish senseless conflict and division, promote evangelism, and produce spiritually healthy churches. Most important, it would please the Lord.

This book, therefore, is written to leaders and teachers at every level of leadership within the local church. If you lead or teach people—as a Sunday school teacher, youth worker, women’s or men’s ministry leader, Bible study leader, administrator, music director, elder, deacon, pastor, evangelist, or missionary—love is indispensable to you and your ministry. As Michael Green so beautifully reminds us, “Love is the most attractive quality in the world. And it lies at the heart of Christianity.”³ For that reason, God requires that you and I lead and teach with love and continually grow in our love for Him and for all people.

Notes

1. William Kelly, *Notes on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (London: Morrish, 1878), 220.
2. Leon Morris, *Testaments of Love* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 3.
3. Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 97.

Part One

Love Is Indispensable to
Christian Leadership

Chapter 1

Five Minus One Equals Zero

I will show you a still more excellent way.

1 Cor. 12:31

Dwight L. Moody, the Billy Graham of the 19th century, tells of his life-changing encounter with the doctrine of love. It began when Henry Moorhouse, a twenty-seven-year-old British evangelist, preached at Moody's church for a week. To everyone's surprise, Moorhouse preached seven sermons in a row on John 3:16. To prove that "God so loved the world" he preached on the love of God from Genesis to Revelation. Moody's son records his father's description of the impact of Moorhouse's preaching:

For six nights he had preached on this one text. The seventh night came, and he went into the pulpit. Every eye was upon him. He said, "Beloved friends, I have been hunting all day for a new text, but I cannot find anything so good as the old one; so we will go back to the third chapter of John and the sixteenth verse," and he preached the seventh sermon from those wonderful words, "God so loved the world." I remember the end of that sermon: "My friends," he said, "for a whole week I have been trying to tell you how much God loves you, but I cannot do it with this poor stammering tongue. If I could borrow Jacob's ladder and climb up into heaven and ask Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, to tell me how much love the Father has for the world, all he could say would be: 'God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'"¹

Unable to hold back the tears as Moorhouse preached on the love of God in sending His only Son to die for sinners, Moody confessed:

I never knew up to that time that God loved us so much. This heart of mine began to thaw out; I could not keep back the tears. It was like news from a far country: I just drank it in. So did the crowded congregation. I tell you there is one thing that draws above everything else in the world, and that is love.²

As a result of Moorhouse's influence, Moody began to study the doctrine of love. This changed his life and his preaching. He later said:

I took up that word "Love," and I do not know how many weeks I spent in studying the passages in which it occurs, till at last I could not help loving people! I had been feeding on Love so long that I was anxious to do everybody good I came in contact with.

I got full of it. It ran out my fingers. You take up the subject of love in the Bible! You will get so full of it that all you have got to do is to open your lips, and a flood of the Love of God flows out upon the meeting. There is no use trying to do church work without love. A doctor, a lawyer, may do good work without love, but God's work cannot be done without love.³

D. L. Moody could not have been more biblically correct when he said, "God's work cannot be done without love." That is the message of the most famous love chapter in the Bible, 1 Corinthians 13.

The More Excellent Way

It is universally agreed that Paul is the greatest pioneer missionary, scholar, teacher, evangelist, and hero of the faith. Yet he knew that all his brilliance, multi-giftedness, and sacrificial dedication meant nothing if it were not bathed fully in love. *No other New Testament writer spoke more about love or provided more practical leadership examples of love than Paul. Through the lifetime ministry and letters of Paul, God gave his church, and all its leaders and teachers, a model of loving leadership.* In all of Scripture nowhere is it

more clearly and forcefully stated that love is indispensable to leading and teaching than in 1 Corinthians 13.

Paul wrote this passage in response to disruptions that arose in the church of Corinth regarding spiritual gifts. To correct the church's misguided views of spiritual gifts and its overall self-destructive way of behaving, Paul promised to show the Corinthians a "more excellent way" to live (1 Cor. 12:31). He wanted them to know there is something far more important than supernatural gifts, something that transcends the most excellent gifts and performances, something that if absent will render all gifts worthless. That something is love.

The love Paul speaks of is primarily love for fellow believers. This love was defined by Jesus Christ when he gave a new commandment to all his disciples to love one another "just as" he had loved them (John 13:34-35). This love gives itself in total self-sacrifice for the good of others. Jesus exemplified this new pattern of love by humbly washing the disciples' feet (John 13:4-17) and selflessly sacrificing his life on the cross for others. John puts it this way, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers [and sisters]" (1 John 3:16).

"There is no use trying to do church work without love. A doctor, a lawyer, may do good work without love, but God's work cannot be done without love."

—D. L. Moody

To silence any doubt that love is the "more excellent way" and to jolt the Corinthians' wrong thinking about spiritual gifts, Paul uses all his rhetorical skills to communicate with eloquence and force that love is the "more excellent way." He writes:

And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Cor. 12:31–13:3)

Let's take a close look at this passage to gain a clearer understanding of what it says.

Without Love Even Heavenly Language Sounds Annoying

The purpose of spiritual gifts was to build up and unite the body. Yet the Corinthians' enthusiasm over the supernatural gift of tongues caused pride and disorder in the church body. The independent-minded Corinthians used their gifts for personal ego gratification, which caused division within the body.

To correct this distortion, Paul captures their attention by hypothetically picturing himself as “the world’s most gifted tongues-speaker,”⁴ being able to speak eloquently in “the tongues of men and of angels.” Such a gift would have greatly impressed the Corinthians. But Paul declares that even if he had such an exalted experience because of heavenly giftedness, he would be “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal”—that is, an annoying, loud, empty noise—if he did not act in love, as described in verses 4 through 7. The beauty of his miraculous speech would be distorted without the grace of love.

Paul isn't merely saying that his speech would be a clamorous noise, but that he himself would be a hollow, annoying sound. He would not be what he should be; he would be seriously deficient in his Christian life and not living according to the “more excellent way.” The reason Paul would be an empty noise is that he would be a loveless tongue-speaker. He would be using the gift of tongues to glorify and serve himself rather than to serve or build up the church, which is the goal of love (1 Cor. 8:1).

When I teach on this passage, I often use a visual illustration. I pull out from behind the pulpit a steel pot and a hammer and begin to beat on the pot as I talk about spiritual gifts and the need for love. At first, people laugh.

Knowledge without love inflates the ego and deceives the mind.

They think it is a marvelous illustration. But I keep it up. While I am banging on the pot, I keep talking about spiritual gifts. Soon

people aren't laughing or smiling anymore. They have had enough; they're annoyed and getting more agitated by the moment, but I keep banging. When it seems they can't stand it any longer, I stop and ask, “Are you annoyed? Are you enjoying this? Does it please you? Do you find it edifying? Would you like me to continue beating the pot for the remainder of the message?” No one wants me to continue beating the pot. At this point I remind

them that this is what they are like to others and to God when they use their gifts apart from love. They are nothing more than “a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”

Without Love Knowing It All Helps No One

Paul next speaks of himself hypothetically as possessing the gift of prophecy in such full measure that he would know “all” mysteries and “all” knowledge. He would thus have the theological answers to all the mysteries of God that people crave to understand. He would be a walking, talking encyclopedia of knowledge.

Some people love to display their intellect and theological superiority. They are proud of their learning and speaking ability. Such pride had become a serious problem at Corinth. Some people were arrogant because of their knowledge and puffed up with self-importance. They wanted recognition for their prophetic insights and superior wisdom, and they looked down on others with lesser knowledge and giftedness. As a result of their arrogant misuse of knowledge, they harmed the church body (1 Cor. 8).

Knowledge without love inflates the ego and deceives the mind. It can lead to intellectual snobbery, an attitude of mockery and making fun of others' views, a spirit of contempt for those with lesser knowledge, and a demeaning way of dealing with people who disagree. I know of a pastor who had a phenomenal knowledge of the Bible but who hurt many people with his doctrinal scrutiny and divided his own congregation repeatedly until there was no one left but himself. He had a big head but a little heart. His theology was as clear as ice and twice as cold. Such is the path of one who has knowledge without love.

So Paul states that even if he had all-encompassing knowledge, apart from love he would be “nothing”—a spiritual zero. He insists that a loveless prophet, a loveless scholar, or a loveless teacher is worthless to the discipling of God's people. History confirms this, as John Short observes:

Loveless faith and loveless prophecy account for some of the more tragic pages in the Christian story through the ages. It has burned

so-called heretics; it has stultified the sincere quest for truth; it has often been contentious and embittered; and it has often issued in the denial of Christian brotherhood to fellow believers.⁵

In a similar vein, George Sweeting, former president of Moody Bible Institute, makes this observation:

I have been keenly disappointed to find people more concerned about hidden mysteries than about needy people.... Too often Christians are concerned about hidden truth, but indifferent about loving difficult people.⁶

Only with love can knowledge be used according to the “more excellent way” to protect and build up the church (Eph. 4:11-16).

Without Love Risk-taking Faith Is Worthless

“Too often Christians are concerned about hidden truth, but indifferent about loving difficult people.”

—George Sweeting

The third spiritual gift Paul presents is faith (1 Cor. 12:9). He imagines himself possessing the most excellent gift of faith imaginable, “so as to remove mountains.” Like Abraham, he would believe God for the impossible and actively trust Him to do miraculous works. He would be a powerhouse of prayer, a spiritual risk taker, a virtual George Muller,⁷ greatly admired and sought by all. He would be a courageous David racing out in battle to kill the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17: 32). But even with such a powerful spiritual gift, if love is not present, the gift becomes a means of glorifying oneself rather than serving others.

Some “miracle” workers on television may claim to do the impossible by faith, but they talk more about money, success, and themselves than about the people they supposedly help. Like the self-flaunting Pharisees, they want “to be seen by others” (Matt. 6:5). They love the praise of man and want to be revered as spiritual giants who do great things for God. They use their wonderful gifts to promote themselves, not the body of Christ.

I recall a radio preacher who spoke often of the marvelous things God was doing through his broadcasts and how God miraculously provided funds without his begging for money (which can be a subtle way of begging for money). But those who knew the man personally and worked for him saw things differently. They saw a man who was obsessed with money and public image. They saw his gift of faith being used to guarantee his own financial security. They saw a man who didn't care much at all for people but who cared a lot about himself.

No wonder Paul declares so emphatically that such a powerful gift without love is worth "nothing." Paul means what he says. Without love he knew he would be spiritually fruitless rather than a spiritual powerhouse.

Without love, the Christian leader is on the wrong path of the Christian life. But when faith is combined with love, the body of Christ is built up and advances forward on the royal road, the "more excellent way" of love.

Without Love **Giving All One's Money to the Poor Is Unprofitable**

Paul next considers giving away all his worldly possessions—his home, property, furniture, savings, and all the things he cherishes most—to feed the poor. He gives it all and reduces himself to abject poverty. Surely this is the ultimate, altruistic action. Wouldn't such giving be, by definition, *love*? Not necessarily. Paul makes it clear that the most extraordinary, self-sacrificing action can be done without love.

Self-sacrifice can be done for self-interest as illustrated by Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts. This couple sold their property and gave money to the apostles to distribute to the poor (Acts 5:1-11). However, they gave without love. They weren't really concerned about the needs of the poor, but about themselves. They didn't love God or their neighbor. Like the trumpet-blowing Pharisees whom Jesus condemned in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:1-5), Ananias and Sapphira gave in order to enhance their personal prestige in the sight of the church. They gave to receive the praise of people. Their love was hypocritical love (Rom. 12:9). They gave to the poor, but without the true, inner motivating power of love, so their giving profited them nothing. Although they gave money to the poor, they were spiritually bankrupt, and God rejected their gift.

Paul says, therefore, that if he gave all he owned to the poor but did so apart from love, it would be unproductive, useless, worthless, and of no eternal value. Even after such sacrifice he would be a spiritually bankrupt man. He would not be humbly serving others, but would be serving himself.

In contrast, when one is moved by love to meet the needs of the poor, giving all of one's possessions profits everyone. Such is the love that motivated the Lord Jesus Christ to give up the riches of heaven and become poor for us. For that reason, "God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:9). Jesus gave according to the "more excellent way."

Without Love The Ultimate Sacrifice of One's Life Is Pointless

Finally, Paul envisions himself as the ultimate hero of the faith. In an act of supreme sacrifice, he surrenders his body to the painful flames of martyrdom for Christ. Such a sacrifice would certainly inspire other believers to faithfulness, greater dedication, and courage. It would provide a powerful witness of the gospel to nonbelievers. But Paul warns us that even suffering and martyrdom for Christ can be done for the wrong reasons.

Some people take great pride in suffering for their faith. For others, it is worth dying in order to be remembered as a hero of the faith. In the early years of Christianity, becoming a martyr became at times a means of achieving great fame. One historian comments, "It soon was clear to all Christians that extraordinary fame and honor attached to martyrdom."⁸ Some martyrs, like Ignatius, were showered with adulations before their martyrdom. Not that Ignatius sought martyrdom for personal praise, but he illustrates that it could be a temptation to some to seek to be immortalized in the annals of church history as a martyr for Christ. It was said of Polycarp, who was burned alive, that his bones were "more valuable than precious stones and finer than refined gold" and his grave became a sacred place to gather.⁹ Recognizing the potential for such adulation, Paul finds it necessary to say that offering up one's life apart from love is a worthless sacrifice, an empty religious show, a hollow performance.

When it is motivated by the welfare of others and the glory of Christ, however, martyrdom becomes the ultimate sacrifice of love. Jonathan Edwards, in his book *Charity and Its Fruits*, summarizes God's perspective on love and self-sacrifice this way:

[God] delights in little things when they spring from sincere love to himself. A cup of cold water given to a disciple in sincere love is worth more in God's sight than all one's goods given to feed the poor, yea, than the wealth of a kingdom given away, or a body offered up in the flames, without love.¹⁰

Only when martyrdom is the result of love for God and others is it the "more excellent way."

Divine Mathematics

Imagine for a moment what the Corinthians must have thought when they first heard Paul's words read publicly in the congregational meeting. They probably couldn't believe their ears! Paul's message was contrary to their entire way of thinking and behaving. They were deficient in love and they didn't even realize it! Their pride of knowledge and miraculous gifts had deceived them.

D. A. Carson, Bible commentator and professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, describes Paul's reasoning in this passage in terms of "divine mathematics." According to divine mathematics, "five minus one equals zero."¹¹ Or, as George Sweeting remarks, "gifts, minus love, equals zero."¹²

Author Jerry Bridges, giving a vivid illustration of divine mathematics, asks his readers to do this:

Write down, either in your imagination or on a sheet of paper, a row of zeros. Keep adding zeros until you have filled a whole line on the page. What do they add up to? Exactly nothing! Even if you were to write a thousand of them, they would still be nothing. But put a positive number in front of them and immediately they have value. This is the way it is with our gifts and faith and zeal. They are the zeros on

the page. Without love, they count for nothing. But put love in front of them and immediately they have value. And just as the number two gives more value to a row of zeros than the number one does, so more and more love can add exponentially greater value to our gifts.¹³

Without love, our most extraordinary gifts and highest achievements are ultimately fruitless to the church and before God. In Paul's way of thinking, nothing has lasting spiritual value unless it springs from love.

A Modern Paraphrase

Picturing himself as the most extraordinary teacher or leader to ever live, Paul would say:

If I were the most gifted communicator to ever preach,
so that millions of people were moved by my oratory,
but didn't have love, I would be an annoying, empty wind-bag
before God and people.

If I had the most charismatic personality, so that
everyone was drawn to me like a powerful magnet, but
didn't have Christlike love, I would be a phony, a dud.

If I were the greatest visionary leader the church has ever heard,
but didn't have love, I would be misguided and lost.

If I were the bestselling author on theology and church growth,
but didn't have love, I would be an empty-headed failure.

If I sacrificially gave all my waking hours to discipling
future leaders, but did it without love,
I would be a false guide and model.

Notes to Chapter 1

1. William R. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody* (Chicago: Revell, 1900), 140. Also see Dwight Lyman Moody, *New Sermons, Addresses and Prayers* (Chicago: Goodspeed, 1877), 178.
2. Moody, *The Life of Dwight L. Moody*, 139.
3. Richard Ellsworth Day, *Bush Aglow: The Life Story of Dwight Lyman Moody, Commoner of Northfield* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1936), 146; see also D. L. Moody, *Pleasure and Profit in Bible Study* (Chicago: The Bible Institute Colportage Association, 1895), 87.
4. Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 458.
5. John Short, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Arthur C. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1953), 10:170.
6. George Sweeting, *Love Is the Greatest* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 40.
7. George Muller was the founder and director of the Ashley Down Orphanage in Bristol, England; 122,683 orphans passed through this orphanage. Many biographies have been written on Muller's life of faith and prayer.
8. Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 182.
9. *Martyrdom of S. Polycarp*, 18.
10. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (1852; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 61-62.
11. D. A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1987), 60.
12. Sweeting, *Love Is the Greatest*, 117.
13. Jerry Bridges, *Growing Your Faith* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004), 164-65.

Chapter 2

Love or Die

*But I have this against you, that you have abandoned
the love you had at first.*

Rev. 2:4

My own life-changing experience with love came when a friend gave me a copy of the book *Brother Indeed*, the biography of Robert C. Chapman from Barnstaple, England.¹ Apart from the Bible, no one has influenced my thinking about love and leadership more than Robert Chapman.

In his day, some called him an “apostle of love,” and Charles Haddon Spurgeon referred to him as “the saintliest man I ever knew.”

Robert Chapman left his profession as a lawyer in London to become pastor of a small Particular Baptist church in Barnstaple. This contentious little congregation had gone through three different pastors in the eighteen months prior to Chapman’s arrival. The story of how Chapman completely turned around this fighting church by his love, patience, and Bible teaching ministry is an inspiring account of loving leadership. The church eventually became a large, harmonious church. It was known throughout England for its love, missionary outreach, and compassionate ministries to the poor.

By the end of his life, at age ninety-nine, Chapman had become so well known for his loving disposition and wisdom that a letter from abroad addressed simply to “R. C. Chapman, University of Love, England,” was correctly delivered to his home.

Before Chapman arrived, the church in Barnstaple was proud of its doctrinal distinctives and church polity, but it was dying of lovelessness.

When Robert Chapman came, he breathed the life-breath of love into the church. It soon radiated with love for Christ, love for one another, love for the truth of the gospel, and love for the lost. It became a university of love.

In Revelation 2, we read of another church that was proud of its righteousness and faithfulness, but was about ready to die for lack of love. Our Lord himself tells the church and its leaders to repent and allow the life-breath of love to flow back into its body. Read carefully the solemn words and warning of Jesus Christ to the church at Ephesus:

I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.... But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. (Rev. 2:1-2, 4-5)

Commendation and Condemnation

Our Lord begins by commending the church of Ephesus for its good deeds, hard work, steadfastness in the faith, intolerance of heresy, zeal for doctrinal purity, and patient endurance under persecution. There is much to

In light of all the commendable qualities of this church, Christ's criticism might seem trivial. But in His eyes, the very inner heartbeat of the church's life was lost.

commend in this church, and we should prize its exemplary qualities. It would seem that all was well. The Ephesians could have written a book on successful church ministry. However, all was not well. Something was

fundamentally wrong. With divine penetrating insight into the true spiritual state of this outwardly successful church, Jesus Christ turned from commendation to condemnation. He says, "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first."

In light of all the commendable qualities of this church, Christ's criticism might seem trivial. But in his eyes, the very heartbeat of the church's life was lost.

Loss of First Love

At one time the church thrived with genuine love. But this had changed. There was still some measure of love left because they fought for the truth of the gospel and did good works (Rev. 2:2-3,6). But their love was not what it once was. Indeed, instead of growing stronger and deeper as it should, their love had waned. They had works, but the joy, creativity, responsiveness, and energy that love produces had disappeared. The quality of their love had changed, and this became apparent even in their works. Jesus rebukes them and calls them to “do the works you did at first.” He admonishes them to remember from where they “have fallen” (Rev. 2:5).

An earnest love makes us willing to give up our lives for one another.

The object of this love is not specifically stated in the text. It does not say love for Christ or love for fellow believers. So it is best to understand Jesus to mean love in general (love for Christ, one another, and the lost).

The kind of love required by God of His people is total, undivided love (Deut. 6:4-6). We are to love God with *all* our heart and soul and mind (Matt. 22:37). Furthermore, according to the book of Revelation, the relationship between Jesus Christ and his church is that of a marriage relationship; Christ is the bridegroom and the church is the bride.² The response of the bride, the church, is to be joyous, undivided devotion to Christ the bridegroom. At Ephesus, the bride had lost important qualities of her love. The joy to worship, the hunger to know him better through his word, the desire to understand his love more fully, the thirst to grow spiritually, and the love of singing his praises and praying was lost.

The kind of love required among believers is to love one another as Jesus loved us. It is an earnest love (1 Peter 1:22) that makes us willing to give up our lives for one another (1 John 3:16). At Ephesus, the Lord was looking for his people to be sacrificially caring for one another’s needs, opening their homes to one another, living like an extended family, joyously serving one another, praying fervently for one another, crossing racial boundaries, and enjoying life together in the church and home. But their love had withered away.

Amy Carmichael, who rescued abused children and provided a home for them through her Dohnavur Fellowship in India, recognized the deadly potential of loss of love among her coworkers. She laid down guidelines for

the Sisters of the Common Life, the women who worked together with her in the orphanage:

Unlove is deadly. It is a cancer. It may kill slowly but it always kills in the end. Let us fear it, fear to give room to it as we should fear to nurse a cobra. It is deadlier than any cobra. And just as one minute drop of the almost invisible cobra venom spreads swiftly all over the body of one into whom it has been injected, so one drop of the gall of unlove in my heart or yours, however unseen, has a terrible power of spreading all through our Family, for we are one body—we are parts of one another.

We owe it to the younger ones to teach them the truth that united prayer is impossible, unless there be loyal love. If unlove be discovered anywhere, stop everything and put it right, if possible at once.³

The kind of love required by Christ is love for all people (1 Thess. 3:12). This love seeks to meet peoples' physical and spiritual needs. It is the love displayed by the Good Samaritan to an unknown dying man (Luke 10: 30-37). It is the love expressed in evangelism and reaching out to the lost. It is the love Paul felt for Israel: "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom. 9:2-3). This love for the lost and the needy had shriveled away to nothing at Ephesus.

Tragically, the church at Ephesus had changed. It had abandoned its first love, and something had to be done or the Lord would judge his church. "No wonder," writes Puritan preacher Nathaniel Vincent, "that Satan, who labors to destroy churches, endeavors to kill love."⁴

Christ's Remedy for Diminished Love

Jesus calls upon the church to do three things immediately or, he says, "I will come and remove your lampstand." Although the exact meaning of this judgment is debated, the seriousness of the situation is alarmingly clear. Unless there is a change, Christ will come and will act in judgment against this local church.

Loss of love is sin. In Revelation 2:4-5 Jesus both rebukes and offers a remedy:

1. remember therefore from where you have fallen
2. repent
3. do the works you did at first

The situation was not past repairing, but the church had to take immediate action to rekindle the original flame of love. Failure to act would spell disaster for the church. The Lord ominously warns, “If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.” This warning demonstrates how seriously Jesus takes loss of love. He threatens that if they do not repent, he will come and remove their lampstand out of its place. That is, he will bring the existence of the local church to an end.

A Wake-up Call to All Churches and Leaders

The letters to the seven churches trumpet Christ’s wake-up call to all churches and Christian leaders (Revelation 2–3). Jesus warns the local church at Ephesus and its leaders that they can work hard, fight heresy, have spiritual gifts, teach sound doctrine, and yet be deficient in love and on the verge of divine discipline. Since love is absolutely essential to the survival of the local church, its leaders must guard their own heartfelt love for Christ and continually monitor and encourage the church’s love.

Guarding One’s Own Love for Christ

When the leaders lose their love, it will not be very long before the people do. So leaders must first guard their own love relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ in order to protect the church from loss of love. There is no substitute for wholehearted, growing love for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is our first and most fundamental duty. The Ephesian believers thought their doctrinal orthodoxy was sufficient. But it was not. If we do not actively protect and cultivate our love for God and Christ,

“No wonder that Satan, who labors to destroy churches, endeavors to kill love.”

—Nathaniel Vincent

all other loves wane: Our love for fellow Christians, our love for the needy, our love for the lost, and our love for the truth.

The Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer, who, with his wife Edith, modeled Christian love in remarkable ways through their open home in Switzerland, understood the importance of love:

We must ask, *Do I fight merely for doctrinal faithfulness?* This is like the wife who never sleeps with anybody else but never shows love to her own husband. Is that a sufficient relationship in marriage? No, ten thousand times no. Yet if I am a Christian who speaks and acts for doctrinal faithfulness but do not show love to my divine bridegroom, I am in the same place as such a wife. What God wants from us is not only doctrinal faithfulness, but our love day by day. Not in theory, mind you, but in practice.⁵

C. H. Mackintosh, whose books on the Pentateuch are considered the standard for devotional commentaries, relates sound advice regarding love for Christ as the essential requirement:

If I allow my work to get between my heart and the Master, it will be little worth. We can only effectually serve Christ as we are enjoying Him. It is while the heart dwells upon His powerful attractions that the hands perform the most acceptable service to His name.... True, he may preach a sermon, deliver a lecture, utter prayers, write a book, and go through the entire routine of outward service, and yet not minister Christ. The man who will present Christ to others must be occupied with Christ for himself.⁶

Love for God and Christ is foundational to a proper love for everything else. Love for God is the “great and first commandment” (Matt. 22:38).

Guarding against Externalism and Ritualism

We need to protect the church against the tendency to trust in external forms, religious rituals, traditions, and rules, while we neglect the vital elements of true love for Christ and one another.

The Ephesian believers, you can be sure, attended church, knew their doctrine, rejected false teachers, did good deeds, lived upright lives, prayed and sang, but the inner zeal and devotion of their love was dwindling to nothing. External performance had replaced true, inner, heart faith and love. The love for Christ and neighbor that they once had was gone. Thus their religion became more external than internal. It became more mechanical than heartfelt:

They still proclaim the truth, but no longer passionately love him who is the truth. They still perform good deeds, but no longer out of love, brotherhood, and compassion. They preserve the truth and witness courageously, but forget that love is the great witness to truth. It is not so much that their genuine virtues have squeezed love out, but that no amount of good works, wisdom, and discernment in matters of church discipline, patient endurance in hardship, hatred of sin, or disciplined doctrine, can ever make up for lovelessness.⁷

Leading the Church in Repentance and Renewal

In a sin-saturated world, repentance and spiritual revitalization are never-ending tasks. So let the leaders and teachers of the church be prepared to lead the congregation in repentance for lovelessness and hypocritical love (Rom. 12:9). Love can be revived and grow afresh (Rev. 2:5). The fire can be rekindled. Lives can be rededicated to Christ and one another. The fresh life of love can be breathed into prayer, Bible study, evangelism, worship, and fellowship with others. To that end let us continually pray and work. As Puritan preacher Nathaniel Vincent prayed:

O love! How much want is there of you in the Church of Christ! And how much does the Church feel for this want! It groans, it languishes, it dies daily because of your absence. Return, O love, return! Repair breaches, restore paths to dwell in, edify the old ways and places, and raise up the foundations of many generations.⁸

Notes to Chapter 2

1. Frank Holmes, *Brother Indeed: The Life of Robert Cleaver Chapman* (London: Victory Press, 1956). Holmes's biography is out of print. For a new biography see, Robert L. Peterson, *Robert Chapman* (Littleton, Colo.: Lewis & Roth, 1995). For a short summary of Chapman's life and some of the remarkable ways he dealt with people, see Robert L. Peterson and Alexander Strauch, *Agape Leadership: Lessons in Spiritual Leadership from the Life of R. C. Chapman* (Littleton, Colo.: Lewis & Roth, 1991).
2. Rev. 19:7, 9; 21:9; 22:17.
3. Houghton, *Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur: The Story of a Lover and Her Beloved* (1979; reprint ed., Fort Washington, Pa., Christian Literature Crusade, 1992), 219.
4. Nathaniel Vincent, *A Discourse Concerning Love* (1684; reprint ed., Morgan, Pa: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 94.
5. Francis Schaeffer, *The Church before the Watching World* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1971), 60.
6. C. H. Mackintosh, *Genesis to Deuteronomy: Notes on the Pentateuch* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux, 1972), 155.
7. D. A. Carson, "A Church that Does All the Right Things, but . . ." *Christianity Today* (June 29, 1979): 30.
8. Vincent, *A Discourse Concerning Love*, 88.

Chapter 4

Patient and Kind

Love is patient and kind.

1 Cor. 13:4

Imagine more than three hundred Christians from forty different nations and various denominational backgrounds living together twenty-four hours a day. Imagine them working together in extremely tight quarters, most of them for two years, some for even longer. Imagine them doing all of this as unpaid volunteers! Such is life aboard the ship *MV Doulos*.

For the past twenty-seven years, the *Doulos* has sailed around the world stopping at ports in more than a hundred countries and serving as a Christian book exhibit and conference center visited by eighteen million people. The *Doulos*, and two other similar ships, are the result of the vision of George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization (known as OM).¹ OM was one of the first, short-term mission organizations and has trained more than 150,000 people in missions.

The volunteers who serve on the ship are ordinary people. They have the same weaknesses and character flaws as other human beings. They experience aboard the *Doulos* the same difficulties people experience ashore. The only difference is that on the ship there is no running away from conflict. How can they live and work together under such extreme conditions without destroying one another? The answer: love.

From the very start of OM, George Verwer preached that without a “revolution of love”² the vision for the ships and for the thousands of short-term literature teams would be an impossible dream. The kind of love necessary for working together on these ships is not a sentimental, fluffy love.

It is Calvary's selfless, self-sacrificing love. It is the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7: love that is patient and kind, love that does not envy or boast, is not arrogant or rude, does not insist on its own way, and is not irritable or resentful. It is Christlike love.

Instructions, Not Poetry

First Corinthians 13 is not a theoretical discourse on love or a flowery hymn glorifying the feelings of love. Paul was not a romantic poet. He was an apostle of Jesus Christ—a global missionary, church planter, pastor, and teacher. These words are a critical part of his instruction and correction to the church at Corinth, which was being torn apart by loveless behavior.

In order to help the Corinthians understand their own deficiencies and the “more excellent way,” Paul lists fifteen positive and negative descriptions of love. In the Greek text, all of these descriptions are verbs describing what love does and doesn't do. In English, these descriptions are often translated as adjectives.

Love is

1. patient
2. kind

Love is *not*

3. envious
4. boastful
5. arrogant
6. rude
7. selfish
8. easily angered
9. resentful
10. joyful over wrongdoing

Love

11. rejoices with the truth
12. bears all things

13. believes all things
14. hopes all things
15. endures all things

These fifteen qualities beautifully portray the character and behavior of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to pattern our love and leadership after him (1 John 2:6). With Christ living and working within us through the Holy Spirit, the same behaviors should be true of us—whether we are elders, pastors, deacons, youth workers, Sunday school teachers, music directors, missionaries, evangelists, Bible study leaders, or church administrators.

In our ministry with people, these qualities should be uppermost in our mind. One of the most important chapters in the Bible for life in the local church and for Christian leadership is 1 Corinthians 13. It defines how we should behave in marriage, friendship, church, and society. It describes what our character should be like—and *in Christian ministry, character is everything*.

Paul didn't just write pretty words about love, he lived them, and the Corinthians saw the truth of these words in his life.

Love Is Patient

If we were to ask our Lord, "What is a loving Christian leader like?" he would first answer, "patient and kind." So Paul begins and ends his love catalog with the patient, enduring nature of love (1 Cor. 13:4, 7). In an imperfect world, a leader must be characterized by patience.

The Greek verb for patience denotes "longsuffering" or "forbearance," particularly in respect to personal injuries or wrongs suffered. The Christian spirit of love does not seek to retaliate. It is not quick to anger.

God himself is the supreme example of longsuffering.³ When we are tempted to be impatient with others, we should stop and think about the gracious longsuffering of God with us and our many wrongs against him. In light of his patience toward us, who are we to think that we cannot patiently bear with the weaknesses and failures of others—or the wrongs they may have done to us?

God himself is the supreme example of longsuffering.

Lack of patience is a serious deficiency in a Christian leader. Our work with people is primarily a spiritual work, so it must be done God's way, with great patience and care. An impatient leader is as destructive to people as an impatient father is to his children or as an impatient shepherd is to his sheep.

Patience is needed because life is full of frustrations, hurts, and injustices. In fact, it is impossible to lead people without eventually being attacked. People will assail their leaders' character, criticize their decisions, speak evil behind their backs, and take advantage of their love.

In response to such attacks, love suffers long. So Paul instructs the Lord's servant to be patient when wronged:

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. (2 Tim. 2:24-26)

Also, patience is needed when dealing with people's many weaknesses and failures. We must have patience to bear with those who are slow to

A lack of patience in a Christian leader is a serious deficiency. An impatient leader is as destructive to people as an impatient father is to his children or as an impatient shepherd is to his sheep.

learn, resistant to change, weak in faith, quick to complain, forgetful of their responsibilities, emotionally unstable, fearful, or wayward. Paul teaches that we are to "admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, *be patient with them all*" (1 Thess. 5:14). Also, Paul instructs Timothy:

"preach the word ... reprove, rebuke, and exhort, *with complete patience*" (2 Tim. 4:2; italics added).

Patient Leaders in Action

Being patient doesn't imply passivity or a refusal to confront people's sins or problems. Without his patient pastoral leadership, Paul and the Corinthians would have gone their separate ways. Instead, his firm yet patient handling of the problems preserved the relationship. When the Corinthians

unjustly criticized him, Paul didn't give up on them, cut them off, become vindictive, return evil for evil, or express anger in a sinful way. Instead, he answered their criticisms, confronted their sins, and warned of discipline. What is even more remarkable is that he did so with true patience and heartfelt love.

Paul, therefore, could say to the Corinthians that his leadership was marked by patience, kindness, and love:

We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way ... [by] patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love. (2 Cor. 6:3-4, 6)

Patience is just as important in church leadership today as it was in Paul's day. Many times a leader's patience is put to the test. Robert Chapman, for example, was well known for his love. And like all loving leaders, he showed remarkable patience with difficult people and problems.

Perhaps his patience and love was most evident when a clash developed in a prominent church in Plymouth, England, between two powerful personalities: John Nelson Darby, the architect of dispensational theology, and Benjamin W. Newton, the primary teacher of the church. When Darby and Newton were unable to reconcile their differences, Darby announced plans to start a new, rival church in Plymouth. Darby's proposal alarmed many people within the church, as well as those who attended churches associated with it. Because of Robert Chapman's love for both men, he felt compelled to seek reconciliation. He urged Darby not to proceed with his intentions, but Darby refused to heed Chapman's advice.

Darby's action created two similar congregations in Plymouth of about equal size. These churches continued to be at odds with each other, which caused other churches of similar beliefs to choose sides. Then, a year later, John Darby made more serious accusations against B. W. Newton's doctrine. In time, Newton recognized his doctrinal error and publicly confessed his wrong. But Darby and his colleagues insisted that Newton's reversal was not genuine. Over time they were able to influence many other churches to exclude Newton and his church from their circle. Newton recognized defeat and left the church in Plymouth permanently, but the battle was far from over. It would escalate beyond all reasonable proportion, as church

fight often do, causing untold heartache. People on both sides were heart-broken over the bitter division and made continued attempts at reconciliation, but to no avail. A meeting of twelve influential leaders convened to try to resolve the growing divisions. During the meeting, Robert Chapman made one of his most memorable statements. He challenged John Darby: “You should have waited longer before separating,” referring to Darby’s inability to resolve his conflict with B. W. Newton.

“I waited six months,” Darby replied.

Chapman’s reply was uncharacteristically testy: “But if it had been at Barnstaple, we should have waited six years.”

History proved Darby to be impatient and harsh—not only with B. W. Newton but with many others.⁷ Although some began to speak of Darby in less than gracious terms and refuse him fellowship, Robert Chapman did not. His love for John Darby remained unabated. Instead of disparaging Christian brothers and sisters who followed Darby, he referred to them as “brethren dearly beloved and longed for.” Chapman’s sorrow was genuine because he lived according to the “more excellent way.”

Love Is Kind

Paul’s first two descriptions of love are paired together and balance each other perfectly: Love suffers long (the passive quality) and love shows kindness (the active quality). Patience and kindness are two sides of the same coin of love. “You can no more have love without kindness than you can have springtime without flowers,” writes W. Graham Scroggie.⁸

Kindness is a readiness to do good, to help, to relieve burdens, to be useful, to serve, to be tender, and to be sympathetic to others. It has been said, “Kindness is love in work clothes.”

God is kind to all,⁹ and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ on earth demonstrated abundant and compassionate kindness. The gospels are replete with stories of his kindness to needy men and women: Jesus touched a man, whom Luke the physician described as “full of leprosy” (Luke 5: 12-13). William Lane accurately describes this as “an unheard-of act of compassion.”¹⁰ When Jesus encountered a deformed woman bent over by disease and a demonic agent, “he laid his hands upon her” (Luke 13:13). He touched the eyes of the blind and fed the multitudes. He made time to

stop and bless little children. Jesus ate and talked with the most hated people of his day, the tax collectors. A notoriously immoral woman found kindness and mercy at his feet (Luke 7:37-39). Acts 10:38 sums up the work of Jesus this way: “He went about doing good.”

The Power of Kindness

Scripture insists that all those who lead and teach the Lord’s people are servants who must be kind to everyone (2 Tim. 2:24). “As servants of God,” Paul writes, “we commend ourselves in every way” by patience and kindness (2 Cor. 6:4, 6).

Augustine, in his book *Confessions*, describes how even during his unconverted days, the renowned preacher and bishop, Ambrose, moved him more by kindness than even by excellent preaching:

That “man of God” received me like a father and expressed pleasure at my coming with a kindness most fitting in a bishop. I began to like him, at first indeed not as a teacher of the truth, for I had absolutely no confidence in your Church, but as a human being who was kind to me.¹³

Loving leaders are kind, even to people who criticize, antagonize, or oppose them. It was said of Thomas Cranmer, an archbishop of the Church of England: “To do him any wrong was to beget a kindness from him.”¹⁴

Leadership without kindness is a disaster. The Old Testament account of King Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, for example, illustrates how unkindness ruined a king. Before Rehoboam was coronated, the people of Israel came to him and demanded to know the spirit in which he would rule them because his father’s rule ended in harsh oppression. Before answering the people, he rightly consulted with the elders—experienced men who had served his father and knew good and bad leadership principles. They counseled Rehoboam to lead with a kindly disposition. They said, “If you will be good [kind] to this people and please them and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever” (2 Chron. 10:7).

Disregarding the wisdom and experience of these older men, Rehoboam rejected their counsel. He foolishly chose the counsel of his young, inexperienced friends to treat the people with a harsh, heavy hand (2 Chron.

10:10-11). As a result, the nation divided in civil war. The people wanted a kind king, not a harsh one. And people are no different today. Kindness is a key to leading people effectively.

If we want to reach and influence people for Jesus Christ, we must cultivate a kindly disposition. Acts of kindness impact people in big ways and

If we want to reach and influence people for Jesus Christ, we must cultivate a kindly disposition.

capture their attention: a card sent to one who is sick, a concerned phone call, an invitation to dinner, a readiness to help relieve a burden, a caring voice, a gentle touch, a thoughtful gesture, a

simple expression of interest in another's concerns, a visit. The way of kindness is the "more excellent way."

Notes to Chapter 4

1. The other ships are the MV *Logos* (1970–88), which sank off the coast of Chili, and the MV *Logos II* (sailing since 1990). A newly acquired ship is *Logos Hope*, which will replace *Logos II*. To read the thrilling stories of two of these ships see Elaine Rhoton, *The Doulos Story* (Carlisle, England: OM Pub., 1998) and Elaine Rhoton, *The Logos Story* (Waynesboro, Ga.: OM Lit., 1988).

2. George Verwer, *The Revolution of Love* (Waynesboro, Ga.: OM Lit., 1993).

3. Ex. 34:6; Isa. 7:13; Jer. 15:15; Rom. 2:4; 9:22; Gal. 5:22; 1 Tim. 1:16; 2 Peter 3:9, 15.

4. Jonathan D. Burnham, *A Story of Conflict: The Controversial Relationship between Benjamin Wills Newton and John Nelson Darby* (Waynesboro, Ga.: Paternoster Press/Authentic Media, 2004).

5. W. Graham Scroggie, *The Love Life: A Study of 1 Corinthians 13* (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 39.

6. Ruth 2:20; 2 Sam. 9:3; Ps. 106:7; 145:17; Luke 6:35; Rom. 2:4; 11:22; Eph. 2:7; Titus 3:4; 1 Peter 2:3.

7. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), 87.

8. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 88.

9. Alfred Tennyson, *Queen Mary* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1875), 194.

Chapter 5

Not Envious or Boastful

Love does not envy or boast.

1 Cor. 13:4

On Paul's second missionary journey he traveled to the city of Corinth, where he stayed for eighteen months (Acts 18:11). Corinth at the time was a prosperous Roman colony, and Paul viewed it as a strategic city for the advancement of the gospel. It was a miniature Rome, a booming, wealthy commercial center. Corinth could offer its citizens and travelers all the pleasures of a free-minded, cosmopolitan city. People in that culture valued success through wealth, personal status seeking, competitive individualism, wisdom, and knowledge. This value system not only permeated the culture but also adversely influenced the church. According to one commentator, "The problem was not that the church was in Corinth but that too much of Corinth was in the church."¹

When Paul wrote 1 Corinthians some three and a half years after leaving that city, he had to address serious problems within the congregation. At the root of these problems were the worldly attitudes and beliefs that were inherently hostile to the gospel of the cross of Christ and its wisdom.

As a result of numerous sins in the church, Paul is compelled to take a negative tack, describing eight character qualities that are inconsistent with love. These eight qualities—all betraying a sinful lack of love—divided the church at Corinth just as they divide churches today.

Paul plainly states that love is *not*

1. envious
2. boastful

3. arrogant
4. rude
5. selfish
6. easily angered
7. unforgiving
8. joyful over wrongdoing

These eight vices are totally incompatible with love. In brief, they express the self-centered life that tears apart relationships and spoils the unity that should characterize every local church. Paul's list serves as an objective standard to correct our selfish behaviors and to guide us on the "more excellent way."

Love Does Not Envy

Topping Paul's list is a vice that has wrecked countless relationships and split many churches—envy or jealousy. Jealousy divided the church at

**Envy is totally incompatible with love.
It destroys love, and with it a leader's character.**

Corinth, and it belied the Corinthians' empty boast of being spiritual people: "For while there is jealousy

and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?" (1 Cor. 3:3).

Envy makes one resentful of others' good fortune. It covets others' gifts, possessions, or positions of influence. It is suspicious and critical of another's popularity. Nathaniel Vincent pointedly expresses the tormenting, selfish spirit of envy:

How much of hell is there in the temper of an envious man! The happiness of another is his misery, the good of another is his affliction. He looks upon the virtue of another with an evil eye, and is as sorry at the praise of another as if that praise were taken away from himself. Envy makes him a hater of his neighbor, and his own tormentor.²

Envy is totally incompatible with love. It destroys love—and with it, a leader's character.

Envy Is Destructive

The account of King Saul and David provides a vivid illustration of the destructive power of envy in a leader's life. Initially Saul loved David, but almost immediately after the shepherd boy's stunning victory over the giant Goliath, the king became envious of him.

There was much to envy about David. He was young, handsome, strong, brilliant, talented, and popular. A successful warrior, he was abundantly blessed by God in all that he did, and "his name was highly esteemed" (1 Sam. 18:30). He was so popular and greatly admired that the women sang, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7).

This comparison of Saul's victories with David's greater achievements enraged the king and stirred up the vilest passions of jealousy. He came to hate David and opposed him at every turn. He spoke evil against him at every opportunity and thought only of David's downfall. Rather than repent of his envy and seek God's help in acknowledging David as God's gift to the nation, Saul gave full vent to his sin. His envy led to discontentment, paranoid thinking, personal misery, and murderous scheming. In the end, Saul destroyed himself and lost his kingdom. His life proved that where there is envy and jealousy there is not love.

None of us are immune from petty, self-centered envy. Even the most committed missionaries and servants of the Lord have struggled with this sin. George Muller was the founder of the Ashley Down orphanage in Bristol, England. While co-pastoring with Henry Craik at a church in Bristol, England, George Muller saw that people enjoyed the other man's teaching more than his own. Henry Craik was not only an excellent Bible teacher, but he was also a first rate classical and Hebrew scholar. Unlike King Saul, however, Muller was a man of extraordinary faith and prayer. He confessed his envious feelings toward his co-worker and confronted his sin:

When in the year 1832, I saw how some preferred my beloved friend's ministry to my own, I determined, in the strength of God, to rejoice in this, instead of envying him. I said, with John the Baptist, "A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven" (John 3:27). This resisting the devil hindered separation of heart.³

George Muller's and Henry Craik's friendship lasted for thirty-six years, until Craik died.⁴ Although both were strong, multi-gifted men with quite different personalities, their long relationship was a public testimony to the power of Christian love. Muller was well known for his many lifelong friendships with people like Hudson Taylor, Charles Spurgeon, D. L. Moody, Robert Chapman, and others. Envious people, unfortunately, have few real friends and many conflicts.

We need to be aware that envy is a prevalent sin among the Lord's people and Christian leaders. Pastors can go to bizarre extremes to eliminate from the church gifted people who threaten them. Churches can envy other churches that are larger or are growing rapidly. Missionaries can envy other missionaries who are more fruitful or better supported. Bible study leaders can envy more popular Bible study leaders; singers can envy other singers who sing more often or receive louder applause; elders can envy fellow elders who shine brighter in leadership ability or knowledge; and deacons can envy fellow deacons who serve more effectively or are sought out for help more frequently.

Love Rejoices in Others

Love "does not burn with envy."⁵ Love is large-hearted, other-oriented, content, and full of good will toward others. "When love sees someone who is popular, successful, beautiful, or talented, it is glad for them and never jealous or envious."⁶ Brotherly love tries to "outdo one another in showing honor" (Rom. 12:10).

The loving Barnabas, Paul's co-worker, for example, rejoiced over Paul's greater giftedness and invited him into significant ministry opportunities as a colaborer teaching in the church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-26). The loving Jonathan, King Saul's son, differed greatly from his envious father. He admired and valued David's leadership abilities. He was willing to jeopardize his own future role as a king (1 Sam. 23:16-17) in order to protect and promote David's cause.

As Christian leaders, our commitment to love should prompt us to consciously rejoice over the successes and talents of others. We should seek to advance the ministry opportunities available to others and treat their strengths and gifts as if they were our own (1 Cor. 12:25-26). When feelings of envy toward others arise, we must confess those feelings for what

they are—sin and self-centeredness. Like George Muller, we must be determined, in the strength of God, to rejoice in the other person's success. We will be happier and more content and God will be pleased when we think and act according to the "more excellent way."

Love Does Not Boast

Like the sin of envy, boasting, or bragging, is a sinful preoccupation with oneself. Braggarts crave attention. They want others to praise their abilities, knowledge, successes, and even their sufferings for God. Because they desire recognition, they speak too highly and too much of themselves, although they may have nothing significant to say.

Boasting has long been a serious problem among religious people. The sanctimonious, trumpet-blowing Pharisees shamelessly craved the attention of people. They were religious show-offs. Jesus pointed out how they loved the front seats in the synagogue, respectful greetings on the street, and praise for their public acts of piety. Likewise, believers in the church at Corinth boasted about their superior wisdom, their favorite teacher's speaking skills, and their extraordinary spiritual experiences. They were full of themselves, not full of love.

Such boasting is still a problem today. I clearly remember a missionary evangelist who came to my home, along with others, for dinner. For three hours he never stopped talking about himself, his ministries, and his success. He told us how hard he worked, how far and wide he traveled, and how blessed he was of God. Not once, however, during the long evening meal did he inquire about others at the table. He was a boaster.

Another time I was at a church conference that had hundreds of book and ministry exhibits. Our book table was next to a ministry booth featuring an internationally known pastor and author. The entire time he was at his booth he talked nonstop about himself. We couldn't help but overhear him praise himself for two full days. He told every person he talked to how large his church was, how many people were on his staff, and how large the church budget was. He wasn't even subtle about dropping the names of the famous people he knew and places he had preached. He was a braggart.

Boasting, however, helps no one. We speak of "empty boasting," but in fact, as Scroggie says, "There is no other kind of boasting. The very nature

and essence of a boast is emptiness. Boasting is always an advertisement of poverty.”⁷ Boasting does not build up or serve the church community. Boasting does not honor Christ. Rather, it intimidates and it divides people. It provokes others to envy. Boasting is particularly abhorrent in a leader. It mars a leader’s character. We wouldn’t want people in the church to follow such an example. Braggarts blatantly disregard God’s prohibition against self-praise: “Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips” (Prov. 27:2).

Braggarts build themselves up, jealous people tear others down, but loving people build others up.

Love Promotes and Praises Others

Love promotes and praises others. It is self-effacing and shies away from speaking of itself. So those who are possessed of Christ’s love delight in focusing attention on others, in pushing others to center stage, and in sharing the spotlight of attention.

In the context of thinking about spiritual giftedness, Paul writes, “I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment” (Rom. 12:3). This doesn’t imply that we never talk about ourselves or allow others to inquire about our interests or ministries. There’s a fine line between speaking about ourselves in a nonboastful way and boasting in a sinful, self-centered way. Like

**Braggarts build themselves up,
jealous people tear others down,
but only loving people
build others up.**

Paul and Barnabas, missionaries need to report on God’s work through their labors to those who support them (Acts 14:27; 15:3). Skillful teachers often use illustrations taken from their personal experiences to communicate effectively

without boasting (Gal. 2:1-14). The difference is that braggarts use people to fulfill their own need for attention and praise.

A missionary friend on the way back to Africa found himself on board a ship with the young Billy Graham and witnessed love that does not brag. Graham was on his way to the London Crusade. As the two men met and talked together during their voyage, something about Graham touched my friend deeply. Graham asked questions about my friend’s life and ministry in Africa; he was genuinely interested in his work. My friend particularly

observed that Graham rarely spoke about himself or his phenomenal experiences as an evangelist. At the end of their voyage, the missionary asked the young evangelist how he could pray for him, and the answer was, “Pray that I will be a humble man.” That prayer many years ago reflected a heart of wisdom and love. Decades later it is apparent that pride of gift or success is not a criticism that has been leveled against Billy Graham.

“Boasting is always an advertisement of poverty.”
—W. Graham Scroggie

There is something to learn from his example. *Humble people are not self-absorbed braggarts.* Instead, they promote and praise others according to the “more excellent way” of love.

Notes to Chapter 5

1. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2003), 8.
2. Nathaniel Vincent, *A Discourse Concerning Love* (1684; reprint ed., Morgan, Pa.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1998), 82.
3. W. Elfe Tayler, *Passages from the Diary and Letters of Henry Craik of Bristol* (London: Paternoster, n.d.), xiii.
4. His biographer notes:

No feature of Mr. Craik's character was more conspicuous than that of love. It beamed forth in his countenance, it betrayed itself in the very tones of his voice, and his life was a practical comment on that word, “Do good to all.” Hence his earnestness of manner in preaching; hence his acute sensibility in contemplating the prospects of humanity; hence his intense sympathy with the sorrows of others, and his extreme affection towards his friends, and especially the members of his family. Surely a more loving, sympathizing spirit has rarely left this world.

Tayler, *Passages from the Diary and Letters of Henry Craik of Bristol*, 307.

5. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 1048.
6. John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 340.
7. W. Graham Scroggie, *The Love Life: A Study of 1 Corinthians 13* (London: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 40.

Chapter 7

Not Selfish or Easily Angered

Love ... does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable.

1 Cor. 13:5

The Bible doesn't hide the fact that even among the apostles, selfish attitudes and power struggles existed. James and John, for example, thinking exclusively of themselves, asked Jesus to give them places of highest honor in the kingdom: "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory" (Mark 10:37). James and John were "card-carrying members of the 'self-seekers' club."¹ Their request immediately sparked conflict among the other disciples, as selfish ambition always does. Mark records that "when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John." They became indignant because they, too, were self-seekers and craved positions of power and glory for themselves.

This incident shows how little they understood their Lord's ways and how much they had yet to learn about loving and serving one another as brothers. "James and John want to sit on thrones in power and glory," writes John Stott; "Jesus knows that he must hang on a cross in weakness and shame. The antithesis is total."²

Love Is Not Preoccupied with Self

The fifth negative statement aims at selfishness, the root of many of our problems, a vice totally incompatible with Christian love and leadership. Love, 1 Corinthians 13:5 states, "does not insist on its own way." This means

that love does not seek its own interests or its own advantage. Love “is not preoccupied with the interest of the self.”³ This is especially important to understand because we live in an age of radical individualism. People in many modern Western societies are consumed with their own self-interest. They place themselves at the center of the universe, which is the rightful place of God. This all-consuming focus on self is completely contrary to Christian love.

If Jesus had sought his own advantage there would have been no cross. But the Scripture says, “Christ did not please himself” (Rom. 15:3). Our Lord came not to be served but to serve: “I am among you as the one who serves” (Luke 22:27).

Paul, too, did not seek his own way. If he had, he would never have endured all the grief involved in spreading the gospel and caring for the churches. But because of his love for Christ, expressed through love for others, he could say, “I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many” (1 Cor. 10:33). “For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all” (1 Cor. 9:19). “I seek not what is yours but you. . . . I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:14-15).

This was not an easy example for the Corinthian believers to follow. In stark contrast, they insisted on their rights and freedoms to eat foods offered to pagan idols, even if taking such liberties hurt the conscience of their weaker brothers and sisters (1 Cor. 8-10). They didn’t understand the spirit

“Christ did not please himself.”

Rom. 15:3

of love that says, “If food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Cor. 8:13). It didn’t matter to them that “if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love” (Rom. 14:15). They used their marvelous liberties and gifts for their own selfish ends rather than for the good of the whole community.

As self-seekers, they also didn’t understand Christian ministry or the servant role of a Christian leader or teacher. Some at Corinth even viewed Paul’s suffering and selfless life as an example of weakness and failure. Their view of Christian leadership was power and rulership, not weakness and servanthood; therefore, they doubted his apostleship. These same misconceptions about true Christian leadership persist today.

Love Is Occupied with Others

The great enemy of every shepherd is a selfish heart. A wonderful New Testament model of a loving leader and teacher is Barnabas. He was not a self-oriented throne seeker. Luke records that he was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (Acts 11:24). Being full of the Holy Spirit, he was characterized by love (Gal. 5:22) and all the qualities of love described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Barnabas thought more of what was best for the new church than his own prominence and security.

The first time we meet Barnabas in the New Testament he is selling land and giving the money to the poor saints in Jerusalem (Acts 4:36-37). Generosity toward others naturally flows out of love. As Robert Law says, “Love is the giving impulse.”⁴

But what is most impressive about Barnabas is how he shared his leadership position and ministry with Paul. Barnabas had been sent by the leaders in Jerusalem to help with the newly established church in Antioch. It was an exciting place to be. God was doing new things among the Gentiles, and Barnabas was at the center of the action. Yet he thought more of what was best for the new church than his own prominence and security.

Believing that the church needed Paul’s extraordinary giftedness, Barnabas traveled, at great personal sacrifice, to the city of Tarsus to find Paul and invite him to Antioch to teach. This meant Barnabas would be sharing his teaching and leadership role with Paul, who was far more gifted. Barnabas pushed Paul forward, and later Paul became the more prominent of the two. As one preacher aptly observed, “Barnabas was not a ministry hog.” He didn’t have to do all the ministering or get all the glory. Barnabas was not a throne seeker; he was a washer of feet (John 13:14). He was a lifter of people, not a limiter of people (Acts 11:19-24). He was a giver, not a taker. His love was the “giving variety,” not the “getting variety.”⁵

Barnabas was truly a loving Christian leader and teacher. He was not jealous of Paul, nor did he brag of his status as an apostle or of his own spirituality. He was not arrogant, rude, or selfish, but he gave himself for the benefit of others. No wonder the people called him “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36; 11:23). He exemplified the motto: “Great things can happen when you don’t care who gets the credit.” Great things happened

in the church at Antioch through Barnabas and Paul—and continue to happen in the church today—because of unselfish teachers and leaders.

A modern day Barnabas is John Stott, former rector of All Souls Church in London, honorary chaplain to the Queen of England, and author of many excellent biblical commentaries. A missions professor recounts that while walking through an airport, he saw an elderly man sitting in the airport chapel with a large pile of letters at his side, writing. It was John Stott. Like a loving shepherd, Stott wrote and encouraged many people, especially young people. And like Barnabas, John Stott is well known as a gracious servant of God who shared his teaching and leading ministry with others.⁶

Stott's lowly servant heart is illustrated by an account given by one of his Latin American colleagues who translated Spanish for him while he was speaking in Cuba:

... after I finished five days of translating for [John Stott], he invited me to do some birdwatching with him but I fell very ill. What a privilege it was to be fed, cared for, prayed over, comforted and affectionately ministered to by him. I have the impression that the chambermaids in the hotel where we stayed thought that I must be an extremely important person because I was being taken care of by a distinguished white, Anglo-Saxon gentleman—something they had never seen before.⁷

Loving leaders and teachers—whether Sunday school teachers or missionary evangelists—unselfishly give their time, energy, and possessions to help people. They put themselves out to serve others, they reach out to people in need, they are self-forgetful and ultimately self-renouncing. They don't belong to themselves and they are not concerned about being unfairly treated; they are not worried about being repaid or even properly thanked. They are godly people who look not only to their own interests, but also to the interests of others (Phil. 2:4).

Love Is Not Easily Provoked

A remarkable quality of love is that it is not easily provoked to an emotional state of anger. "It is not irritable." This is an eminently practical virtue for

a leader. Leaders have to deal with a lot of difficult situations. There will always be plenty of fuel to provoke a leader to anger, irritability, offense, bitterness, and resentment. This is why one of the biblical qualifications for an elder is that he not be “quick-tempered” (Titus 1:7). Shepherds can’t be kicking or killing the sheep because they are upset.

This doesn’t mean that one never gets angry or irritated with people. The Bible doesn’t say love does not get angry; it says love is not easily provoked to anger or irritation. There is righteous, controlled anger motivated by love and opposed to evil and falsehood that senselessly destroys people.⁸ But love is not provoked in a destructive sense

“The heart of man is exceedingly prone to undue and sinful anger, being naturally full of pride and selfishness.”

—Jonathan Edwards

because of wrong motives. “The heart of man,” says Jonathan Edwards, “is exceedingly prone to undue and sinful anger, being naturally full of pride and selfishness.”⁹ This anger is incompatible with love.

A seminary professor tells the story of being at a restaurant with a pastor when the server accidentally poured water over the pastor’s suit. The pastor angrily snapped at the server, giving full vent to his displeasure. After cleaning up, the professor leaned over and whispered to the pastor, “Maybe we should witness to her of the love of Christ.” The pastor got the message.

A loving heart (like Christ’s) would immediately have felt compassion for the server and thought more of her feelings than of a soiled suit. It would have sought to ease the tension by downplaying the situation and reassuring the server. The incident could have easily been turned into a positive witness for Christ. Instead, the pastor thought only of himself and his suit. He was easily provoked.

Outside the church, such leaders misrepresent Christ and give his people a bad name in the world. And within the church, it is easy to see how those who are easily provoked to anger carelessly frighten, hurt, and divide people. They invite and accentuate conflict.

Angry people are focused not on others but on their own emotions and issues. When leaders are angry, problems are exaggerated, miscommunication and misunderstanding abound, and objectivity and reason disappear. When anger rules, small problems become big explosions that can blow a church to pieces. I am convinced that *much more damage is done to our churches by out-of-control anger than we care to admit*. It is a big problem.

The devil is a master at using anger to ruin churches and families, and he can often provoke godly leaders to do destructive things to others. None of us are immune from hurting people with our anger. Henry Drummond insightfully observes that anger is “the vice of the virtuous.” Consider how quick we are to downplay and justify our angry outbursts toward others:

We are inclined to look upon bad temper as a very harmless weakness. . . . And yet here, right in the heart of this analysis of love, it finds a place; and the Bible again and again returns to condemn it as one of the most destructive elements in human nature.

The peculiarity of ill temper is that it is the vice of the virtuous. It is often the one blot on an otherwise noble character. You know men who are all but perfect, and women who would be entirely perfect, but for an easily ruffled, quick-tempered, or “touchy” disposition. The compatibility of ill temper with high moral character is one of the strangest and saddest problems of ethics¹⁰ [italics added].

As Christians, when we face conflict and relational pain we are to be Spirit-controlled and self-controlled (Gal. 5:22-23). Out-of-control anger is the work of the flesh and the devil (Gal. 5:19-20; Eph. 4:30-32). There is an old saying that when you spill over a vase, what’s inside is what comes out. When you are dealing with someone who is disagreeable or thoughtless, or who simply sees things differently than you do, what comes out of *you*? Take this matter seriously before the Lord and guard yourself from any self-justification.¹¹ The Scripture says, “Let every person be . . . slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness that God requires” (James 1:19-20).

Love Is Calm and Slow to Anger

Loving leaders are not irritated by every little disagreement or frustration. The reason for this is that love, as we have already seen, is *patient*. Love suffers long with the wrongs inflicted by others. Those who control their anger control potentially explosive situations and bring healing to damaged emotions: “He who is slow to anger quiets contention” (Prov. 15:18).

Martyn Lloyd-Jones tells how Hudson Taylor was slow to anger and irritation. In China, standing at the bank of a large river, Hudson Taylor

called for a riverboat to take him across the river. As the boat arrived at shore, a wealthy Chinese man came up behind Taylor in a hurry to get into the boat. The man pushed Hudson Taylor aside with such force that he fell into the mud. Horrified by what he had seen, the boatman refused to allow the wealthy man to board his boat because Taylor had been first to call for his services and was a foreigner who deserved, by Chinese customs, to be treated with respect. The rich man didn't realize Hudson Taylor was a foreigner because of his Chinese dress. When he realized what he had done, he instantly apologized. Hudson Taylor didn't react with irritation or anger; instead, he graciously invited the man to join him in the boat and witnessed to him of Christ's love.¹² He responded to a provoking situation according to the "more excellent way."

Notes to Chapter 7

1. Lewis B. Smedes, *Love Within Limits: Realizing Selfless Love in a Selfish World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 42.
2. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986), 286.
3. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 1050.
4. Robert Law, *The Tests of Life: A Study of the First Epistle of St. John* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914), 72.
5. I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 126.
6. Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2001), 21.
7. *Ibid.*, 454.
8. Num. 16:15; Ps. 7:11; Nahum 1:2, 6; John 2:13-17; Eph. 4:26.
9. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (1852; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 201.
10. Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (1874, reprint ed., Burlington, Ont.: Inspirational Promotions, n.d.), 21-22.
11. Jonathan Edwards remarks, "Men are often [accustomed] to plead zeal for religion, and for duty, and for the honour of God, as the cause of their indignation, when it is only their own private interest that is concerned and affected.

It is remarkable how forward men are to appear, as if they were zealous for God and righteousness, in cases wherein their honour, or will, or interest has been touched, and to make pretence of this in injuring others or complaining of them” (Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, 198).

12. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), 1:281-82.

Part Three

The Works of a Loving Leader

Chapter 10

Expressing Love and Affection

*I hold you in my heart.... I yearn for you all
with the affection of Christ Jesus.*

Phil. 1:7-8

A family friend attended a Bible-teaching church but moved away for several years. When she returned, she noticed a wonderful, exciting change. The church was still a Bible-teaching church, but over the years it had grown in love. The people were friendlier, more welcoming, and hospitable. They hugged one another, they were more caring, and they took care of needy members. An atmosphere of loving affection was palpable throughout the congregation.

Putting Love in Words

The love in this church was seen in words, deeds, and displays of affection. The fact is, *love must express itself; it cannot remain silent.* When his Son was on the earth, the Father cried out from heaven, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17). Jesus verbally expressed his love for his Father and his disciples: “I love the Father” (John 14:31); “so have I loved you” (John 15:9). Jesus asked Peter, “Do you love me?” Three times Peter replied, “I love you” (John 21:15-17).

Expressions of heartfelt love such as these set the tone for the entire New Testament.

Expressing Gratitude

Loving people are full of gratitude and they express it openly. Of all the New Testament writers, Paul most frequently speaks of his love for his co-workers and converts. Throughout his letters, Paul freely expresses appreciation and recognizes his fellow workers for their service to him and to God for the sake of the gospel. He does not hold back acknowledgment and praise. He is deeply grateful for all of them and everything they have done.

Romans 16 provides an extended example of Paul's lavish public praise for personal friendships and the works of others:

- ◆ Phoebe, a servant of the church (Rom. 16:1)
- ◆ Prisca and Aquila ... who risked their necks for my life (Rom. 16:3-4)
- ◆ Mary, who has worked hard for you (Rom. 16:6)
- ◆ Andronicus and Junia ... well known to the apostles" (Rom. 16:7)
- ◆ Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord (Rom. 16:8)
- ◆ Apelles, who is approved in Christ (Rom. 16:10)
- ◆ Tryphaena and Tryphosa, workers in the Lord (Rom. 16:12)
- ◆ The beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord (Rom. 16:12)
- ◆ Rufus, chosen in the Lord (Rom. 16:13)
- ◆ Gaius ... host to me and to the whole church (Rom. 16:23)

Other letters of Paul provide further examples:

- ◆ The household of Stephanas ... [who] devoted themselves to the service of the saints (1 Cor. 16:15)
- ◆ Tychicus ... faithful minister in the Lord (Eph. 6:21)
- ◆ But you know of Timothy's proven worth (Phil. 2:22)
- ◆ Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier (Phil. 2:25)
- ◆ Epaphras our beloved fellow servant ... a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf (Col. 1:7)
- ◆ Tychicus ... a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord (Col. 4:7)

- ◆ Onesimus, our faithful and beloved brother (Col. 4:9)
- ◆ Epaphras ... a servant of Christ Jesus ... always struggling on your behalf in his prayers (Col. 4:12)
- ◆ Luke the beloved physician (Col. 4:14)
- ◆ Titus, my true child in a common faith (Titus 1:4)
- ◆ Philemon our beloved fellow worker ... the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you (Philem. 1, 7)

God is verbal, and he created us to be verbal creatures. So in our ministry we must learn to be generous with our words of praise and thanks. We need to let people know we are thankful to God for them. They should not be left guessing about what we think. They need to hear from us.

Leaders who speak only when there is something negative to say or to disapprove are not effective. People need to hear positive words of appreciation and love—such words build healthy Christian community. Just as people need oxygen in order to breathe, they need a fresh breath of affirmation and acknowledgement to nurture their souls. As leaders, we should aspire to be like Barnabas, who continually encouraged other people with Scripture and with gracious words of affirmation.

I know of a couple who spent thirty-five years voluntarily serving as Sunday school superintendents in a local church. Many in leadership admitted this couple was irreplaceable, but when they retired, no one even said thank you. There was no public acknowledgment; there were no phone calls or letters of appreciation. They were devastated by silent ingratitude, and understandably so! Members of the body of Christ should relate to one another in active community, not passive isolation.

Leaders who speak only when there is something negative to say or to disapprove are not effective. People need to hear positive words of appreciation and love.

The church should be a place where people express love and appreciation, thank one another, and encourage one another.

Expressing Heartfelt Love

To his converts, Paul often expresses deep affection through intensely emotional words. He writes with the voice of a tender shepherd, not that of an

aloof professional religious official or hardened zealot interested only in the cause. Even when he corrects and disciplines Paul is fatherly and pastoral, tender and tearful, sympathetic and caring. Notice how many verses there are that express his loving heart and affectionate leadership style:

- ◆ I rejoice over you. (Rom. 16:19)
- ◆ I hold you in my heart. (Phil. 1:7)
- ◆ I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. (Phil. 1:8)
- ◆ My brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown. (Phil. 4:1)
- ◆ Being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. (1 Thess. 2:8)
- ◆ My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you, I wish I could be present with you now. (Gal. 4:19-20)
- ◆ My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. (1 Cor. 16:24)
- ◆ I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears ... to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. (2 Cor. 2:4)
- ◆ We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians; our heart is wide open. (2 Cor. 6:11)
- ◆ You are in our hearts, to die together and to live together. (2 Cor. 7:3)
- ◆ Because I do not love you? God knows I do! (2 Cor. 11:11)
- ◆ I seek not what is yours but you. (2 Cor. 12:14)
- ◆ I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls. If I love you more, am I to be loved less? (2 Cor. 12:15)
- ◆ And may the Lord make you increase ... in love for one another ... as we do for you. (1 Thess. 3:12)
- ◆ I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. (Philem. 12)

Paul expressed his deep-seated affection for his converts by his generous use of terms of endearment. No less than twenty-four times Paul addresses his readers as “beloved.”¹ It is no empty platitude or mere politeness. The term expresses intimacy, affection, and love. Paul’s friends and converts were his dearly beloved brothers and sisters. They were his family. They were bound intimately together by the same Spirit. Beloved of God,² they were also beloved of Paul.

Leaders and teachers in the church should not be reluctant to use loving family language to express the reality of their relationship to one another. This was the normal practice of the early Christians. The terms *brothers*, *brother*, or *sister* occur approximately 250 times throughout the New Testament. In an ancient Christian dialogue, a Latin work titled *Octavius*, the pagan Caecilius criticized the Christians because “hardly have they met when they love each other.... Indiscriminately they call each other brother and sister.”³ What a blessing it would be for us to be so accused! People today as much as ever need to hear words of family love and connectedness. Such intimate, familial language is biblical, and it reflects the love of the New Testament church.

Showing Physical Signs of Affection

One physical expression of Christian love is the “kiss of love,” and it is “one of the beautiful customs of the early Christians.”⁴ Peter urged his readers to “Greet one another with the kiss of love” (1 Peter 5:14), which is a practical outworking of his earlier instructions to love one another fervently as brothers and sisters:

- ◆ Love one another earnestly from a pure heart (1 Peter 1:22)
- ◆ Love the brotherhood (1 Peter 2:17)
- ◆ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly (1 Peter 4:8)

This “kiss of love,” which Paul also refers to as a “holy kiss,”⁵ is an outward, physical sign of “mutuality ... oneness of status and identity which all Christians share across divisions of race, class, and gender.”⁶ But it is a “holy” kiss, not a sensual kiss. It is to be expressed with respect and in all purity.

Whether we apply the “kiss of love” with an actual kiss, hug, or hearty handshake, we are commanded to greet brothers and sisters affectionately. Our greetings to one another should visibly express the reality of our family oneness and love. So let us not be impersonal, standoffish, or cold. Let us not take one another for granted. People need physical expressions of love as well as words of love. This physical expression of love is one concrete,

practical way we live out the New Testament command to love “one another earnestly” (1 Peter 4:8).

John Stott, a naturally reserved and proper Englishman, has learned from his extensive world travels, especially to Latin America and Africa, to enjoy the affectionate physical embrace of fellow believers. In closing a letter to a friend, he quips: I “send you a greeting and a hug (I’m now a life-member of the Institute of Hug Therapy!).”⁷

Paul too was a member of the “Institute of Hug Therapy.” At the end of Paul’s farewell message to the Ephesian elders, Luke records: “And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him” (Acts 20:37).

The children in our churches need to feel expressions of love too. Our Lord Jesus welcomed children. They were a joy to him. He was not too busy to pay attention to them. He touched, prayed for, and blessed them (Matt. 19:13-15). Mothers and children felt comfortable coming to Jesus because his nature was welcoming and affectionate. Let us also be protective of and loving toward children.

The local church is “the household of God” (1 Tim. 3:15) and should be filled with loving words and demonstrations of familial affection. Sadly,

**Don’t take anyone for granted.
God doesn’t!**

the atmosphere in some churches is more like a funeral home than a loving family home. There is little affection and warmth. Legitimate emotional feelings are suffocated. People hardly know one another. They keep their distance, and the only display of affection is a speedy handshake before exiting the church doors. Such behavior is not authentic Christian brotherhood and sisterhood. It does not represent people who are faithful to the “new commandment.”

How to Get Started

To create a more loving atmosphere in your local church or in a group you lead, start by regularly praying for growth in love. Use these Scriptures as a guide in your prayers:

- ◆ And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more. (Phil. 1:9)
- ◆ And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. (1 Thess. 3:12)
- ◆ [I pray] that you ... may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. (Eph. 3:18-19)

Even if your church or group is a loving body, you always can excel still “more and more” in love (1 Thess. 4:10). Teach what the Bible says about love. How often do people hear a careful exposition of 1 Corinthians 13, Ephesians 3:14-19 and 4:1-16, or 1 John 4:7-21? Most church-goers do not know the biblical demands of love and need in-depth teaching on this subject. Challenge the people you lead to grow in love.

An atmosphere of love doesn't come by teaching alone. Church leaders need to model love. There are teachers, musicians, and others in the church who have voluntarily served for years. They need to know that their faithfulness to God and the congregation is appreciated. Express your gratitude to them and encourage

The church is to be a life-transforming community where people grow and become more like their loving Lord.

others to do the same. There are people who clean, repair, and maintain the church building; don't let them go unnoticed. They should be thanked verbally or with a gift or card. Don't take anyone for granted. God doesn't!

Don't allow your church to be a place where members of the body of Christ have only superficial interaction, or worse, where they come and go without even speaking to one another. Again, it is your responsibility to lead by example. The church is not a business corporation, military institution, or government agency. It is the “household of God,” so act accordingly. Reach out to others in love. Greet them with a “kiss of love,” an affectionate hug, or a “holy handshake.” Make it a point to remember people's names.

The church is to be a close-knit family of brothers and sisters who express Christ's love to one another. It is to be a life-transforming community where people grow and become more like their loving Lord. Your church can become a more loving community and experience greater unity as you teach and lead with love.

Notes to Chapter 10

1. The term *beloved* is used nine times by John, seven by Peter, three by James, and three by Jude.
2. Rom. 1:7; 1 Thess. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13.
3. *The Octavius of Marcus Minucius Felix*, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, eds. Johannes Quasten et al., trans. G. W. Clarke (New York: Newman, 1974), 64.
4. Paul A. Cedar, *James; 1, 2 Peter; and Jude*, The Communicator's Commentary (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984), 11:200.
5. Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26.
6. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 1346.
7. Timothy Dudley-Smith, *John Stott: A Global Ministry* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2001), 441.

Chapter 13

Laboring in Prayer

*Epaphras greets you, always struggling
on your behalf in his prayers.*

Col. 4:12

Loving leadership is incomplete without intercessory prayer. The Scripture says, “Let love be genuine,” and then goes on to say, “be constant in prayer” (Rom. 12:9, 12). Praying for people is an act of love. Genuine love desires to pray for people. Hypocritical love promises to pray but doesn’t.

Prayer requires effort. When we pray for people, we focus our thoughts on them; we take their burdens upon ourselves; we intercede before God for them; we sacrifice our time for them; we commit ourselves to their well-being. We demonstrate true care and compassion.

Martyn Lloyd Jones reminds us that prayer can be one of the most difficult things we do in the Christian life:

When a man is speaking to God he is at his very acme. It is the highest activity of the human soul, and therefore it is at the same time the ultimate test of a man’s true spiritual condition. There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life. Everything we do in the Christian life is easier than prayer.¹

Difficult though it may be, prayer is motivated by love. Paul’s love for his converts, for example, drove him to pray for them continually.² D. A. Carson says what motivated Paul to pray was “a passion for people.”³ Describing Paul’s love for the new believers at Thessalonica, he writes:

Here is a Christian so committed to the well-being of other Christians, especially new Christians, that he is simply burning up inside to be with them, to help them, to nurture them, to feed them, to stabilize them, to establish an adequate foundation for them. Small wonder, then, that he devotes himself to praying for them when he finds he cannot visit them personally.⁴

Carson summarizes Paul's motivation and challenges us to grow in love that overflows in intercessory prayer for others:

Paul's prayer is the product of his passion for people. His unaffected fervency in prayer is not whipped-up emotionalism but the overflow of his love for brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus.

That means that if we are to improve our praying, we must strengthen our loving. As we grow in disciplined, self-sacrificing love, so we will grow in intercessory prayer. Superficially fervent prayers devoid of such love are finally phony, hollow, shallow.⁵

Paul is an example of a loving leader who labored in prayer. Compelled to pray not only for the saved but also for the lost, he burned with love for Israel and prayed for her salvation: "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom.10:1). Christian leaders likewise need to pray for the lost.

Paul's companion Epaphras is another inspiring example of a loving leader who fervently prayed for those he loved. While Epaphras was with Paul in the city of Rome, Paul wrote to the church in Colossae and told them about the prayers of Epaphras on their behalf:

Epaphras . . . greets you, always struggling on your behalf in his prayers, that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. For I bear him witness that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and in Hierapolis. (Col. 4:12-13)

Note that Epaphras was "always struggling" in prayer for his beloved people. Other translations render the phrase this way: "He is continually wrestling in prayer for you,"⁶ he "never stops battling for you" in prayer (NJB). "It was not an occasional, listless prayer on their behalf," comments D. Edmond

Hiebert, “but a constant burden of intercession. Regularly and repeatedly he bore them up before the throne of grace.”⁷

How blessed the believers in Colossae were to have such a faithful, loving shepherd. The intercessory prayers of Ephaphras for his countrymen flowed out of his love for them and followed in the footsteps of his mentor, who constantly prayed for all those under his pastoral care. As H. C. G. Moule states, “Epaphras was Paul’s true scholar in the school of intercession.”⁸

How to Get Started

While spontaneous prayer has its place in our lives, there is also a need for disciplined, intercessory prayer. Paul appeals to the believers in Rome to actively *wrestle* in prayer to God for his safety and travel: “I appeal to you ... by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf” (Rom. 15:30). Notice that Paul appeals to them for prayer “by the love of the Spirit.” If they love him, they will pray for him. But this love is not some short-lived, sentimental feeling for a missionary. This love is the love produced by God the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the source of this love. It is the love that all believers should have for one another. The “love of the Spirit” would thus be the power that moves them to “strive” in disciplined intercessory prayer for the needs of a person they love.

“There is nothing that tells the truth about us as Christian people so much as our prayer life.”

—D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Disciplined prayer is a particularly urgent challenge today, for the busyness of life leaves little time for it unless we make it a priority and plan for it. It is all too common for leaders to neglect the patient ministry of prayer both for and with others. George Verwer, founder of Operation Mobilization, observes,

But if there is any doctrine to which we pay only lip service in our churches, it has to be the doctrine of prayer. I have ministered in thousands of churches ... in Europe, North America, and around the world and I have never ceased to be amazed at the neglect of true, heart-felt, corporate prayer. There are some beautiful exceptions, of course, but they are few by comparison.⁹

D. A. Carson concurs and adds that prayerlessness “is out of step with the Bible that portrays what Christian living should be”:

What is both surprising and depressing is the sheer prayerlessness that characterizes so much of the Western church. It is surprising, because it is out of step with the Bible that portrays what Christian living should be; it is depressing, because it frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial.¹⁰

Lack of intercessory prayer is not only a sign of lovelessness, it is an indication of our failure to see the dark spiritual realities surrounding us. Prayer is critical because we are at war “against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” So we must “take up the full armor of God” (Eph. 6:12-13) and, being fully armored, persevere in Spirit-empowered prayer:

praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel. (Eph. 6:18-19)

Let us not be prayerless leaders, but let us be vigilant. Paul and Epaphras were “alert” soldiers of Jesus Christ. They both prayed “for all the saints,”

“Prayerlessness ... frequently coexists with abounding Christian activity that somehow seems hollow, frivolous, and superficial.”

—D. A. Carson

“at all times,” and “with all perseverance.” We likewise must be alert and pray for all the saints under our care. Failure to pray is serious negligence of both our privilege

and our responsibility as leaders, teachers, and ministers of the gospel. The prophet Samuel considered prayerlessness on the part of a leader of God’s people to be sin: “Far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you” (1 Sam. 12:23).

In every congregation, spiritual problems and physical needs exist for which the only solution is believing, persistent prayer. There are those suf-

fering daily physical pain, some facing life-threatening illness, others dealing with heartbreaking family problems. Many need prayer because they struggle with addictions or sins that are enslaving them and ruining their relationships. Some are not yet saved and need salvation.

When confronted with a problem that his disciples could not resolve, a boy tormented by an evil spirit, our Lord said, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:29). Thus we must believe that “the prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working” (James 5:16) or we will not put forth the effort to labor in prayer for the needs of others.

Samuel considered prayerlessness on the part of a leader of God’s people to be sin.

The best teachers and preachers labor to improve their teaching skills, and they should. Competent leaders and administrators seek to continually improve their leadership abilities, and they should. So, too, believer priests should labor to improve their intercessory prayer ministry. Below are a few suggestions to help you begin praying for those you teach and lead.

Information

To pray intelligently, we need information; we need current prayer requests. Hudson Taylor, a missionary with extensive experience in striving in prayer for hundreds of missionaries in the most trying situations conceivable, taught that information from missionaries was vital to keeping prayer alive on the home front. A. J. Broomhall, Taylor’s biographer, writes,

When Christians knew what was going on they rose to the occasion and joined in. When feeling out of touch, their gifts and even praying seemed to dwindle. Information led to dedication—of their whole lives in many instances.¹¹

As a loving leader, make a deliberate effort to learn the heart-felt needs of those you lead and teach. Don’t assume you know their problems and concerns. Ask! Love cares and wants to know. This will stir your heart to pray and help energize your prayers. Let people know you pray for them and need their prayer requests. But because many people are reluctant to talk about their real needs, you will need to be the one to take the initiative.

Finally, do not tell people you will pray for them and then fail to do it. That is hypocritical love. Genuine love takes the promises of prayer to heart and follows through in keeping those promises.

Prayer List

To labor effectively in intercessory prayer for others, you will need to develop a prayer list of names and needs. Since most of us don't have a photographic memory, we need to write down prayer requests. If you are among those responsible for the whole congregation, you will be praying for many people and needs. To do this effectively, use the church directory of names to conscientiously and systematically pray "for all the saints" (Eph. 6:18). Pray for your missionaries as well (Eph. 6:19-20). And don't forget to put your enemies on a prayer list too. Jesus says to love your enemies by praying for them (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:28). D. A. Carson aptly observes, "All of us would be wiser if we would resolve never to put people down, except on our prayer lists."¹²

Biblical Prayer

If at times you don't know how to pray for those you lead, look in your Bible. It is the very best prayer guide. You can use the prayers of Scripture in praying for others (and yourself). Here are some examples:

- ◆ O LORD God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love ... I now pray before you day and night for the people of Israel your servants, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Even I and my father's house have sinned. We have acted very corruptly against you and have not kept the commandments, the statutes, and the rules that you commanded your servant Moses. (Neh. 1:5-8)
- ◆ I am praying for them ... they are yours ... Holy Father.... I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.... Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth ... that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me. (John 17:9, 11, 15, 17, 23)

- ◆ Remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe. (Eph. 1:16-19)
- ◆ It is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. (Phil. 1:9-11)
- ◆ We have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (Col. 1:9-10)
- ◆ To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him. (2 Thess. 1:11-12)
- ◆ May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all ... so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thess. 3:12-13)

You can take these very words and apply them to the people you are praying for. This will give your prayers a solid, scriptural foundation. You will be confident that you are praying the will of God for others and you will know what God wants for them. Praying the words of Scripture puts life in your prayers.

Out of love for those you lead, commit yourself to improving your intercessory prayer. Ask yourself, *If those I lead were dependent on my prayers,*

how would they do? Or, If our missionaries were dependent on my prayers, how would they do?

To strengthen your prayer life, take your Bible concordance and look up all the verses on prayer to see what God wants you to know about prayer. Read books on prayer and talk to others to get practical ideas. Pray with mature believers, and learn from hearing them. Make a prayer list of those for whom you will pray regularly and set aside a place and time to do it. Even five or ten minutes a day of faithful prayer for those under your care will yield great benefits. Some prayer is better than no prayer. As you practice the discipline of prayer and see many marvelous answers from the Lord, and as you grow in love, you will become more devoted to prayer.

Like the disciples, we can ask our Lord to teach us to pray (Luke 11:1), and then faithfully obey the commands of Scripture to pray at all times, with perseverance, for all the saints (Eph. 6:18).

Notes to Chapter 13

1. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1971), 2:46.
2. Rom. 1:9-10; 2 Cor. 13:7, 9; Eph. 1:16; Phil. 1:3-4; Col. 1:3, 9; 1 Thess. 1:2; 3:10; 2 Thess. 1:11.
3. D. A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1992), 79.
4. *Ibid.*, 81.
5. *Ibid.*, 85.
6. F. F. Bruce, *The Letters of Paul: An Expanded Paraphrase* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 259.
7. D. Edmond Hiebert, "Epaphras, Man of Prayer," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (January-March 1979): 59.
8. H. C. G. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon*, CBSC (Cambridge: University Press, 1906), 141.
9. George Verwer, "Whatever Happened to the Prayer Meeting?" *SurgeUp* (www.thinkwow.com/surgeup/whatever_happened.htm. Accessed Oct. 3, 2005).
10. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 9.
11. A. J. Broomhall, *Hudson Taylor and China's Open Century*, vol. 5: *Refiner's Fire* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), 342.
12. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 29.

Chapter 14

Feeding Hungry Souls

Do you love me? . . . Feed my sheep.

John 21:17

Good shepherds love their sheep and spare no effort when leading them to green pastures and clear water. For the lazy shepherd, however, any pasture or water hole will do. In the Old Testament, God has strong words for lazy shepherds. In Ezekiel, God condemned Israel's leaders for neglecting to feed his people (Ezek. 34:2). In Hosea, the priests failed to teach God's law thus God cried out, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6). But someday, God promises Israel, "I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15).

Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd—a shepherd after God's own heart who poured out his life feeding people the Word of God. Thus they called him "Teacher." Even now, from heaven, Jesus Christ gives spiritual gifts to enable some to feed his flock (Eph. 4:11-16). Because he loves his people, he wants them to have his nourishing words, "the words of life" (John 6: 63, 68), so they can grow to maturity and reproduce themselves. Loving leaders and teachers likewise will devote their lives to feeding God's flock.

Love Teaches and Strengthens

When we see pictures of emaciated, starving children our hearts grieve and we want to help. So, too, our hearts should grieve when we see God's people emaciated and starving spiritually because of a famine of the Word of God.

We should want to take immediate action because *love always seeks to provide loved ones' needs and the greatest need people have is for the Word of God.* The Lord himself says: "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8:3). The Word of God provides the message of eternal salvation and the guidelines for the Christian life (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

Love for people compels us to preach and teach God's Word. It empowers us to exhaust ourselves in reading, study, and preparation for teaching.

Love cannot bear to see loved ones in spiritual poverty, starving for the Word of God, and it will not leave them in ignorance.

It inspires us to sacrifice significant amounts of time in teaching one-on-one, or in small groups, or in full congregational meetings. It

gives us the desire to educate all people, young and old, educated and uneducated. Love cannot bear to see loved ones in spiritual poverty, starving for the Word of God, and it will not leave them in ignorance.

God's people need spiritual food and nourishment to grow and reproduce. This is why Paul tells Timothy to make the teaching of Scripture central to his ministry: "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching [based on Scripture]" (1 Tim. 4:13). Commentator William Mounce accurately states, "Leadership in the apostolic church was largely based on proper teaching."¹

Barnabas is a wonderful example of a loving leader with a passion for building others up through the Scripture. The first Christians called him "son of exhortation" (Acts 4:36). By the Word of the Lord, Barnabas lifted people's spirits. He strengthened and challenged their faith. He inspired fresh courage and commitment to Christ (Acts 11:23). He educated new believers in Christ (Acts 11:26; 13:1). His love for teaching the gospel drove him to seek out Paul in the city of Tarsus and bring him to Antioch so the new church there would have the best instruction possible. Together, Paul and Barnabas could teach the Word and build a mature, healthy flock.

A modern day Barnabas is Robert Chapman, who left his legal profession to become pastor of a small, troubled, Baptist congregation in Barnstaple, England. Despite his excellent skills with people, shepherding the church in Barnstaple would prove to be a challenging task. To start with, he had to overcome potentially explosive doctrinal differences between himself and the congregation.

It is remarkable that Ebenezer Chapel invited him to become pastor, since he had never been a Baptist and did not share many of the church's strict views. Given the doctrinal tensions between Robert Chapman and the church, the situation at Ebenezer seemed doomed to failure. He was likely to be the fourth pastor to leave in less than two years.

But that did not happen. Robert Chapman firmly believed that unless he had the liberty to teach God's Word, there could be no ministry for him at Ebenezer Chapel. So he wisely laid down one nonnegotiable condition before accepting the pastorate at Ebenezer. That condition is best explained by Chapman himself:

When I was invited to leave London and go to minister the Word of God in Ebenezer Chapel, then occupied by a community of Strict Baptists, I consented to do so, naming one condition only—that I should be free to teach all I found written in the Scriptures.²

To their credit, the people agreed to this condition and Robert Chapman began his sixty-year ministry in Barnstaple. Gradually the church changed under his straightforward, consistent Bible teaching. As the years passed, it became a mature, influential congregation of believers, planting many churches and having a broad mission outreach to Spain, India, and China.

“Leadership in the apostolic church was largely based on proper teaching.”

—William Mounce

Love demands that we meet people's basic need to hear the Word of God (Deut. 8:3). What a colossal failure it is for church shepherds to do everything but feed God's flock. The Bible is the believers' food. Continual nourishment through the milk and the meat of God's Word is what they need for protection and growth. Loving leaders and teachers will labor diligently to meet that need.

Love Makes Teachers More Effective

Love not only motivates leaders to teach, it makes them more effective in their teaching. Good teachers need a caring rapport with their students, a loving character and personality, and a passion for their subject.

A Love for Students

Howard Hendricks, professor of Christian education at Dallas Seminary and popular speaker, has taught thousands of people how to improve their teaching. He tells this story of his Sunday school teacher, Walt.

Walt loved kids and he loved the Word of God. In a tough, inner-city environment, he walked the streets looking for unchurched kids to invite to his Sunday school class. In time, Walt was taking thirteen neighborhood boys to his class. Most of these boys received Christ, and eleven of them eventually entered full-time Christian ministry. One of these was Howard Hendricks. Walt wasn't an intellectual giant, nor did he have a particularly engaging personality; so what was it about him that reached these boys and impacted them for eternity? Hendricks says, "Actually, I can't tell you much of what Walt said to us, but I can tell you everything about him ... because he loved me for Christ's sake. He loved me more than my parents did."³

Good teachers love their students and give themselves unselfishly to their education. They care about their students. They respect and value them. They know and understand them. Loving teachers are dedicated to their students' education. Like Paul, they can say, "we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us" (1 Thess. 2:8).

Evangelical educators concur that love and respect for students is essential to life-changing instruction:

No substitute exists for a teacher's love for his or her students. ... Teaching is far more than getting across content; it also calls for communicating a genuine personal interest in and love for each student.⁴

A Loving Disposition

Good teachers must connect with their students. To do this, they must be the kind of loving people described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. People respond positively to teachers who display the characteristics of Christlike love.

Humble. In college I had a Christian teacher who regularly boasted in class about his advanced knowledge and prestigious publications. He was intelligent and a good lecturer, but he was not a Christlike teacher. Rather,

he was arrogant and boastful, his tone of voice was condescending, he was full of himself rather than the Holy Spirit, he was trying to impress rather than edify. He was “a noisy gong ... a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor. 13:1).

In contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ said, “learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). Everyone who heard Jesus teach knew that he was not like other teachers. He spoke with absolute authority, yet humbly and graciously, without arrogance. As a result, people from every level of society were drawn to him: men and women, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, healthy and sick, religious and nonreligious; even the outcasts of society were welcomed and enjoyed hearing his gracious words.

Love makes us better teachers because it makes us humble and modest. Love makes us servants of our students, not rulers over them. Love is willing to accept correction, to change, to improve, and to admit mistakes. Love helps us to realize that we don’t know it all. Like Paul, we must confess, “we know in part and we prophesy in part” and “now we see in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:9, 12).

Love requires that we guard ourselves against pride in the pulpit and in the classroom. “Pride repels, humility attracts... Effectiveness in teaching calls for humility in attitude.”⁵ A humble spirit makes us better representatives of Jesus Christ and his doctrine and makes people more receptive to our teaching. As John Oman warns, “unless the pulpit is the place where you are the humblest in giving God’s message, it is certain to be the place where you are vainest in giving your own.”⁶

Patient and kind. In a survey of college students preparing to be teachers, the students listed “love for and patience with pupils” as two of the most important qualities of a good teacher.⁷ Love enables teachers to be patient and kind (1 Cor. 13:4), to suffer long with difficult people – even opponents (2 Tim. 2:24-26), and to endure problem people, like the stubborn Corinthians. Loving teachers take pains to help those who are slow to learn. They seek to draw in those who are disinterested. They demonstrate care and understanding for the special needs of some.

The Bible is difficult for most people to understand and retain (2 Peter 3:15-16); thus teachers need extraordinary patience. Many of the great doctrines we believe and teach are learned only by years—indeed, a lifetime—of learning line upon line, precept upon precept (Isa. 28:10, 13). Furthermore, new people come to our churches or Bible studies with doctrinal

deficiencies or errors. If we are not patient and kind in dealing with them, we will drive them off before we have the opportunity to teach them.

As teachers, we must reason with people and persuade them. If we speak with graciousness, patience, and kindness, we will be more likely to convince them of the truth. Dogmatic, harsh attitudes, on the other hand, will repel and alienate people and make our teaching ineffective and unfruitful (2 Peter 1:8).

Tender and compassionate. When Jesus saw the crowds, “he had compassion on them ... and began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34). Loving teachers, like Paul, treat people with tenderness and compassion. Paul likened himself to “a nursing mother taking care of her own children” (1 Thess. 2:7).

Wilson Thomas Hogg, first president of Greenville College, comments on the importance of speaking the truth with tenderness and love:

Tenderness will win hearts so hardened that nothing else can move them. Truth spoken in love goes directly to the heart of the hearer and calls forth a kind response.... It overcomes prejudice and hardness.... It melts and wins where the most logical argument, the most terrible warning, and the severest threatening would produce no more impression than the falling of dew upon a block of granite.⁸

The truth of Wilson Hogg’s statement was brought home to me at my baptism. I invited a long-time friend to witness my baptism and to hear a missionary speaker. The speaker was an Irishman who had served many years in Angola, Africa. My friend was a hardened unbeliever who came only because I asked him. He had heard gospel sermons before, and I had talked to him many times about the gospel, without any response. But after hearing the missionary speak, he asked, “Who is this man? I have never heard such a gracious and sincere speaker. I would like to meet him.” Such a reaction was completely out of character for my friend. What drew this disinterested sinner was that, like Jesus, the missionary was “gentle and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:29).

Slow to anger. Love is not easily irritated or angered by disagreement or opposition (1 Cor. 13:5). Good teachers are approachable and easy to talk to; they are not irritable, defensive, or quick to argue with people who disagree.

How we teach can be just as important as what we teach. We must not lose our temper, scold our students, yell at them, or seek revenge because they offend us. If we do, we give the devil the opportunity to ruin our teaching ministry (Eph. 4:26-27). We hurt rather than help our students and we lose our credibility. Angry preachers and teachers generate fear and stifle the spirit of inquiry, especially in children and adolescents.

Gracious. Loving teachers and leaders are not rude or ill-mannered (1 Cor. 13:5). They do not shame people publicly, interrupt them, insult them, talk over them, or bully them. They don't abuse their authority or intimidate people. They are careful in their speech and mindful of proper dress and decorum, particularly with members of the opposite sex. They are tactful, courteous, and polite. They recognize the value of other people's time and effort.

Balancing truth and love. Being compassionate and tenderhearted does not mean compromising the truth. Never! The biblical balance always maintains truth *and* love. The two are not to be separated (1 Cor. 13:1-3; Eph. 4:14-16; 2 John 3). John Stott offers insightful observations on the correct balance:

Some leaders are great champions of the truth and anxious to fight for it, but display little love. Others are great advocates of love, but have no equal commitment to truth, as Jesus and his apostles had. Truth is hard if it is not softened by love, and love is soft if it is not strengthened by the truth.⁹

Whether we are defending, proclaiming, instructing, or informally sharing divine truth with others, we must always wrap it in love. We must always speak "the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15). To Timothy, a true son in the faith, Paul writes, "Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). So we see that "Timothy's maintenance of orthodox teaching must be accompanied and backed up by a genuine Christian way of life involving faith in God and love to others,"¹⁰ as Howard Marshall expounds.

"Truth is hard if it is not softened by love, and love is soft if it is not strengthened by the truth."

—John Stott

Love for Studying and Communicating God's Word

The “great and first commandment” (Matt. 22:38) is to love God with all our heart and soul and mind. This love for God produces love for the study of his Word and motivates us to improve our ability to communicate it. Love for God’s Word sets the heart on fire to always keep studying.

Gaining proficiency in God's Word. Good teachers love their subject and continue to learn. John Stott writes, “There is no doubt that the best teachers in any field of knowledge are those who remain students all their lives.”¹¹

A remarkable example of a lifelong student of Scripture is a ninety-seven-year-old man who teaches our church’s seniors. He still loves to read, study, and teach the Word. Whenever I am with him, he talks of the Scriptures and the commentators he has read. We must never think of ourselves as too old to learn or to grow.

Love for God and his Word makes us lifelong students and thirsty learners. With customary insight, Charles Spurgeon warns of the tragedy when a teacher loses the desire to learn and study:

We have all great need of much hard study if our ministry is to be good for anything.... He who has ceased to learn has ceased to teach. He who no longer sows in the study will no more reap in the pulpit.¹²

Howard Hendricks warns simply: “If you stop growing today, you stop teaching tomorrow.”¹³

Paul Stanley and Robert Clinton, in their book *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life*, say that one of the primary reasons many Christian leaders and teachers do not finish their lives for Christ effectively is that at some point they stop growing in knowledge and in love for Christ.

We have observed that most people cease learning by the age of forty. By that we mean they no longer actively pursue knowledge, understanding, and experience that will enhance their capacity to grow and contribute to others. Most simply rest on what they already know. But those who finish well maintain a *positive learning attitude* all their lives.

Many people, particularly leaders, plateau. They become satisfied with where they are and with what they know. This often occurs after

they attain enough to be comfortable or can maintain a relatively secure and predictable future. But this contradicts the biblical principle of stewardship.¹⁴

In light of this natural tendency, Paul's charge to Timothy, after telling him to devote himself to teaching, bears repeating:

Practice these things, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim. 4:15-16)

When we lose our zeal for knowledge, we lose our zest for teaching. When we stop growing, we stop influencing others. When we're not excited about Scripture, we don't excite others. If we expect to challenge the hearts and minds of men and women of the next generation, our hearts and minds must be challenged also. We cannot influence people for God if we are not learning, changing, and growing. Teachers who love God and love to study his Word reproduce this love in others.

Growing in the ability to communicate effectively. Love for God's people and his Word compels us to continually improve our communication skills so we may more effectively deliver the truth. Howard Hendricks warns,

If you are going to bore people, don't bore them with the Gospel. Bore them with calculus, bore them with earth science, bore them with world history. But it is a sin to bore people with the Gospel.¹⁵

There are very few naturally great preachers and teachers. Most of us are average teachers who continually need to improve our teaching and preaching skills. Yet the temptation is to be satisfied with our current level of competence and fruitfulness. If we love people and the holy Scriptures, however, we will never want to stop striving for improvement.

John MacArthur Jr. has been teaching the Bible through various media to large audiences of people for nearly forty years. In all this time he has not grown stale but is more passionate and more skilled than when he began. Love for the Word of God and love for his listeners motivates his commitment to excellence.

How to Get Started

Sheep are nearly incapable of properly feeding and watering themselves. Without a shepherd, they would soon be without pasture and water and starve to death or die of thirst. So, as author and pastor Charles Jefferson reminds us,

everything depends on the proper feeding of the sheep. Unless wisely fed they become emaciated and sick, and the wealth invested in them is squandered. When Ezekiel presents a picture of the bad shepherd, the first stroke of his brush is—“he does not feed the flock.”¹⁶

Here are a few ideas to help you improve your teaching. First, if you are part of a leadership team responsible for leading and teaching people, *lay out a clear biblical philosophy of teaching and preaching the Scriptures*. Also, regularly evaluate your teaching ministry and plan for the future. Be sure the content of your teaching is biblical, challenging, applicable, and relevant to the people. Don't let it become haphazard or ineffective. Be able to say as Paul did, “I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). Also, regularly evaluate your teaching ministry and plan for the future. The sheep will suffer if you neglect this essential duty.

Second, to improve your teaching, listen to the expository teaching of excellent preachers and teachers, and make their tapes or CDs available to others. This has helped me immensely in my personal walk with the Lord as well as in my preaching. As I listen to the world's greatest preachers, they

Regularly evaluate your teaching ministry and plan for the future.

enrich my soul and demonstrate how to apply the Word of God to people's lives. They help me think of ways to illustrate dif-

ferent concepts, to be relevant, to organize a passage of Scripture, and to deliver the material with spiritual power and vitality.

Third, always be building a library of Bible study tools to help you study the Scriptures. Of course, the most important thing is to have a good Bible. This is your primary source for feeding God's people. You will also need a good concordance, Bible dictionaries, quality commentaries, and other resources. There are good software programs as well as an increasing number of Bible study tools available online at no cost.¹⁷

Fourth, there are many books and other materials available to help you improve your preaching and teaching. Call a seminary or Bible college and ask the professor of homiletics for suggestions. Use these materials and make them available to others in your church. If possible, take a course on homiletics. Even if you have been to Bible school or seminary, you never outgrow your need for fresh ideas on improving your delivery of the truth. Seeing their leaders and teachers grow is greatly encouraging to people and encourages them to grow too.

Fifth, listen to yourself. Even the best preachers unwittingly fall into bad habits. Listening to yourself on audiotape, or even better, watching a videotape can help you correct annoying habits that hinder communication. Don't worry that this practice might cause pride; it will definitely keep you humble! Even the best teachers need to improve their skills.

Sixth, have someone close to you evaluate your teaching and preaching. Don't let others in your audience know you are doing this, as it will distract them from listening to the content of your teaching. My wife has been one of my best critics, and it hasn't ruined our marriage yet.

Finally, teachers and preachers need to "abound in love" if they are to be fruitful in their work. Charles Spurgeon says:

Assuredly, we must abound in love. It is a hard thing for some preachers to saturate and perfume their sermons with love; for their natures are hard, or cold, or coarse, or selfish. We are none of us all that we ought to be, but some are specially poverty-stricken in point of love. They do not "naturally care" for the souls of men, as Paul puts it. To all, but especially to the harder sort, I would say, Be doubly earnest as to holy charity, for without this you will be no more than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. Love is power. The Holy Spirit, for the most part, works by our affection. Love men to Christ; faith accomplishes much, but love is the actual instrument by which faith works out its desires in the Name of the Lord of love.

And I am sure that, until we heartily love our work, and love the people with whom we are working, we shall not accomplish much.¹⁸

Notes to Chapter 14

1. William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 392.
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11. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 180.
12. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry* (1900; reprint ed., London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 236.
13. Hendricks, *Teaching to Change Lives*, 17.
14. Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton, *Connecting: The Mentoring Relationships You Need to Succeed in Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 222.
15. Quoted in Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt, *Creative Bible Teaching*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998), 218.
16. Charles Edward Jefferson, *The Minister as Shepherd* (1912; reprint ed., Fin-castle, N.J: Scripture Truth, n.d.), 59-60.
17. Internet sites include www.bible.org (home of the NET Bible), www.biblegateway.com, www.bibleplaces.com, and www.biblestudytools.net. Software programs such as Logos and BibleWorks also offer many helpful features.
18. Spurgeon, *An All-Round Ministry*, 192-93.

Chapter 17

Managing Conflict a ‘More Excellent Way’

Love covers a multitude of sins.

1 Peter 4:8

The first sin recorded in Genesis after Adam’s and Eve’s disobedience is that of Cain killing his brother Abel. Humans have been killing each other ever since. One of the dreadful consequences of “sin” entering the world (Rom. 5:12) is human warfare, and our history can be traced through endless wars and divisions.

Unfortunately, the same is true of God’s people. What’s worse, our battles are not even always over major issues such as unorthodox versus orthodox doctrine or liberal versus conservative views. Bible-believing churches that enjoy 95 percent agreement on all fundamental doctrinal issues will fight and divide over the most petty differences. Jewish philosopher Benedict de Spinoza made this distressing observation about Christians and the way they quarrel:

I have often wondered, that persons who make boast of professing the Christian religion, namely, love, joy, peace, temperance, and charity to all men, should quarrel with such rancorous animosity, and display daily towards one another such bitter hatred, that this, rather than the virtues which they claim, is the readiest criteria of their faith.¹

One of Satan’s most successful strategies for keeping churches weak and ineffective is infighting and unresolved conflicts. *This is a life-and-death issue in our local churches.* So as a Christian leader, you will not only have

to face many conflicts, you will have to manage them according to biblical principles.

How Love Handles Conflict

There is nothing wrong with Christians disagreeing with one another or trying to persuade another of the rightness of a particular position. What is wrong, however, is loveless conflict that ends in hate and bitterness. “But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another” (Gal. 5:15). *You as a leader need to be able to teach the principles of Christian love that help reduce, temper, and heal conflict.* But before you can teach those principles to others, you must first know them and model them in your own life.

In his book *The Mark of the Christian*, Francis Schaeffer, speaking from years of experience, says it is important to recognize the significance of not just the disagreement at hand but the words, actions, and attitudes displayed in the midst of the conflict:

I have observed one thing *among true Christians* in their differences in many countries: What divides and severs true Christian groups and Christians—what leaves a bitterness that can last for 20, 30, 40 years (or for 50 or 60 years in a son’s or daughter’s memory)—is not the issue of doctrine or belief that caused the differences in the first place. Invariably, it is a lack of love—and the bitter things that are said by true Christians in the midst of differences.²

Love promotes the virtues that unite (patience, kindness, humility, forgiveness) and prohibits the many vices that divide and accentuate disagreement (jealousy, arrogance, selfishness, unforgiveness). No wonder Paul points to the “more excellent way” of love as a solution to the conflicts among the Christians at Corinth. The fifteen descriptions that explain the way of love should be read in the light of church conflict (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Love Acts under the Control of the Holy Spirit

When facing conflict, the first and most important thing to remember is this: Be Spirit-controlled, not out of control.³ Do not allow yourself to be

controlled by the flesh and the devil. The flesh produces nothing but strife, anger, and division: “Now the works of the flesh are evident ... enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy” (Gal. 5: 19-21). If, however, you are controlled by the Holy Spirit, you will act in love and with self-control. You will be kind, gentle, patient, and peaceful (Gal. 5:22-23). A Spirit-controlled leader handles conflict according to the “more excellent way.”

Love Curbs the Destructive Power of Anger

In any conflict, beware of anger (Eph. 4:26-27). Uncontrolled anger kills love and divides people. Beware especially of angry words, which only inflame passions and distort the issues being debated. When people become angry, they often don't care what they say or do. They throw unloving words around like daggers that wound and kill; they use them to get revenge. Such words hurt deeply and can stick in someone's mind for a lifetime.

When facing conflict, be Spirit-controlled, not out of control.

Church leaders need to remember that as ones who are supposed to be examples of God's love, they are in the construction business, not the destruction business. Psalm 145:8 says, “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” Loving leaders reflect God's character to others and are not easily provoked to anger (1 Cor. 13:5). They are slow to anger and patient. Love should govern the way we talk and respond to people. When involved in sharp disagreement with a brother or sister, for example, we should choose our words carefully, soften the polemics, and control our emotions. Remember James 1:19: “be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger” (James 1:19). Unfortunately, when disputes arise, many Christians reinterpret this passage to mean “slow to hear, quick to speak, quick to become angry.”

Love Acts with a Humble Spirit

Behind most church fights and unresolved divisions is ugly human pride. And the worst kind of pride is religious pride, the Pharisaical pride of self-righteousness and superiority.

The Bible says, “By insolence [pride] comes nothing but strife” (Prov. 13:10). Because of pride, Diotrephes, for example, liked to put himself first (3 John 9). He was selfish. Loving leaders are selfless. They are “not arrogant” (1 Cor. 13:4). They don’t have an inflated opinion of themselves or an ego that stirs up strife.

When dealing with the Philippian church, Paul’s solution is for each person to adopt Christ’s attitude of humility (Phil. 2:5): “Have this mind

**Love should govern the way we talk
and respond to people.**

among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” This attitude of humility is essential to tempering conflict, to resolving differences, to really hear-

ing other people, to seeing our own faults, to submitting one to another, and to forgiving and reconciling. Peter puts it this way: “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another” (1 Peter 5:5).

Imagine a large room full of pianos. If you were to tune all of them with one tuning fork, they all would be in perfect tune with each other. But if you were to tune the pianos one with another, they would soon be out of tune with each other. The same is true in the local church. Each believer is to tune his or her attitude to Christ’s attitude, and that attitude is humility. There is a saying, “attitude is everything,” but for the Christian, it must be taken one step further: “Christ’s attitude is everything.”

Love Pursues Peace

Peacemaking is an act of love blessed by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:9). It is necessary for the unity and growth of the local church. To the struggling Christians in Rome, Paul writes, “Let love be genuine.... If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:9, 18). Later he adds, “let us pursue what makes for peace” (Rom. 14:19). And to encourage unity among Jew and Gentile believers, Paul writes, “Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:1-3). Church leaders, then, are to aggressively pursue peace and harmony in the church. They must be peacemakers, not fighters. That is why the qualifications for church elders require them to be “not violent but gentle” and “not quarrelsome” (1 Tim. 3:3).

Peacemaking is hard work. It takes a lot of wisdom and self-control. It means putting the good of others first. Denying themselves, peacemakers make every effort to guide those in conflict toward constructive solutions, justice, and Christian reconciliation (Phil 4:2-3). Sadly, they are often misunderstood and maligned as compromisers and people pleasers.

When we talk about peacemaking, however, we are not talking about peace at any price or surrendering truth under the guise of love. That is not true peace. Dennis Johnson warns of the risks of such so-called peace:

God's peace does not peacefully coexist with falsehood, sham, or injustice; so God's peacemakers cannot simply ignore peace-destroying sin and error, any more than a surgeon can simply close up an infected wound: an abscess is bound to develop.⁴

We must remember that many church conflicts are not about the central truths of the gospel but are about secondary issues, personality clashes, program changes. These can and should be peacefully resolved by Spirit-filled, loving leaders. One such leader confronted his church, which was at war with itself. This pastor stood up and publicly declared: "It is time to 'wage peace.'" Waging peace is hard, self-sacrificing work, but it must be done.

Love Covers a Multitude of Sins

With his typical humor, Howard Hendricks remarks, "Many of us are like porcupines trying to huddle together on a bitter cold night to keep each other warm, but we continually poke and hurt each other the closer we get." At no time do we as brothers and sisters "poke and hurt each other" more painfully than during conflict. Without fervent love we could not survive such injuries and maintain family unity. That is why Peter writes, "Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8).

**"Waging peace" is hard,
self-sacrificing work....**

Love covers all kinds of offenses, hurts, annoyances, disappointments, and sins that we all suffer because of others. Only love has the power to freely and repeatedly forgive, to truly seek to understand people's weaknesses and complexities, to put things into proper perspective, and to put

a blanket over other people's faults. Jesus' love for his disciples covered their many sins. He understood their weaknesses, but his love covered them all; otherwise, he couldn't have lived with them.

This is in no way to imply that love ignores or condones sin. Love covers a multitude of sins, not all sins. At times, love requires exposure and discipline of sin for the welfare of an individual as well as the church. Love knows when to cover and when to expose for the purpose of redemption and restoration.

Paul's way of saying "love covers" is to say that love is not resentful (1 Cor. 13:5). Clinging to grievances and wounds keeps conflicts from being resolved. Love refuses to keep a record of injuries and offenses, but chooses to forgive. Forgiveness is one of the most important qualities of love (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13).

Loving leaders will not hold grudges or perpetuate warfare with those who have caused injury or offense. They demonstrate great understanding of people and their problems. They forgive and reconcile. They cover a multitude of sins.

Because love forgives, it brings healing. In the words of Scripture, it overcomes evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

Love Considers the Welfare of Weaker Believers

From the beginning of the Christian era, believers have fought over their freedoms in Christ. Among Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, intense

Loving leaders demonstrate great understanding of people and their problems.

conflicts arose over food regulations and observance of holy days. Paul describes these as conflicts over "opinions" or "disputable matters" (Rom. 14:1). By this he means their disagreements were not over

fundamental doctrines but rather secondary matters of personal conscience. Christians today still quarrel over these marginal issues.

Foremost among the principles Paul lays down for resolving this kind of conflict is love: "For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died" (Rom. 14:15). Thus love does not "injure" or "destroy" fellow believers over secondary issues such as food. Love does not seek its own advantage (1 Cor. 13:5). Love denies itself for the good of the con-

science of another. As the Scripture reminds us, "Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For Christ did not please himself" (Rom. 15:2-3).

Love protects weak and misguided brothers and sisters (Rom. 14:15). The lifestyle of love requires a believer to put aside legitimate exercise of one's liberties for the spiritual welfare of a weak believer. Love says, "if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" (1 Cor. 8:13). Pride and selfishness, however, refuse to forgo one's rights and freedoms for the sake of a weaker believer. The loveless use of freedom is always destructive to others as well as to oneself. The scriptural answer to the misuse of Christian liberties is this: "Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). As leaders and teachers, we are to model the kind of love that will sacrifice personal freedom to serve the good of others, "and not to please ourselves" (Rom. 15:1).

Love Blesses One's Enemies

Jesus teaches that there's nothing special about loving people who love you. Even those who have no love for most people often love those who love them. What is truly distinct and divine and righteous is loving those who hate you and oppose you. This kind of love, Jesus declares, makes us most like our heavenly Father:

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt. 5:44-48; also Luke 6:27-28)

Following our Lord's extraordinary teaching, Paul writes:

- ◆ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. (Rom. 12:14)

- ♦ If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink [an act of kindness]; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head [shaming the person by kindness and thus perhaps changing his mind]. (Rom. 12:20)

It doesn't matter whether those who hate you are hostile unbelievers or believers. You are still to bless them, pray for them, show mercy to them in their need, and win them with lovingkindness. Jonathan Edwards reminds us that the very "nature of love is good-will" toward others.⁵ This good will extends even to our enemies.

Love Does Not Seek Personal Retaliation or Revenge

When their feelings have been hurt, people often feel justified in doing anything they want in retaliation. They can leave the church, divide the body,

Scripture prohibits the spirit of retaliation, the get-even mentality that plagues human nature with the clear command: Repay no one evil for evil.

explode with uncontrolled anger, cut people off, lie, hate, and backbite. They try to justify the most wicked, sinful behavior with the simple excuse, "But I've been hurt!" Scripture, however, prohibits the spirit of retaliation, the get-even

mentality that plagues human nature with the clear command: "Repay no one evil for evil" (Rom. 12:17; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 3:9). When insulted, we are not to return the insult; when attacked, we are not to retaliate; when criticized, we are not to slander; when hurt, we are not to strike back.

The Scripture further forbids seeking personal, private revenge or taking justice into our own hands: "Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'" (Rom. 12:19). It is God's prerogative to punish evil, and he will see to it. Remember, too, that he has established human government and courts to judge and punish evildoers (Rom. 13:1-7).

Rather than seeking retribution, Christians are to "overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). As leaders, we are to set the example and win over evil with kindness and forgiveness, trusting in God's justice to make matters right in the end.

Why Greater Controversy Calls for Greater Love

Conflict with brothers and sisters in Christ tests the genuine depths of our love, yet we often fail to exhibit Christ's love. Francis Schaffer, who faced plenty of controversy in his life, reminds us of what we often forget: The more difficult and potentially explosive the controversy among true believers, the greater the need to display more love, not less:

The more serious the wrongness is, the more important it is to exhibit the holiness of God, to speak out concerning what is wrong. At the same time, the more serious the differences become, the more important it becomes that we look to the Holy Spirit to enable us to show love to the true Christians with whom we must differ. If it is only a minor difference, showing love does not take much conscious consideration. But where the difference becomes really important, it becomes proportionately more important to speak for God's holiness. And it becomes increasingly important in that place to show the world that we still love each other.

Humanly we function in exactly the opposite direction: In the less important differences we show more love toward true Christians, but as the difference gets into more important areas, we tend to show less love. The reverse must be the case: As the differences among true Christians get greater, we must consciously love and show a love which has some manifestation the world may see.⁶

How naturally we revert to our old, fleshly ways (Gal. 5:20). This should not be. Conflicts provide opportunities to obey the biblical commands to love and to model love in action. Use these opportunities to grow in love and teach others to love.

Notes to Chapter 17

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4. Dennis E. Johnson, "Peacemakers," appendix in John M. Frame, *Evangelical Reunion* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1991), 171.
5. Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits* (1852; reprint ed., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 196.
6. Schaeffer, *The Mark of the Christian*, 27.