

— A CHRISTIAN LEADER'S GUIDE TO —

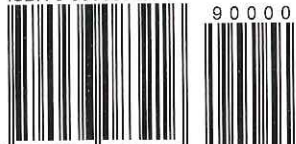
LEADING *With* LOVE

This book provides church leaders and teachers a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches about love. This understanding is essential to you as an individual leader and to the church as a whole. It will

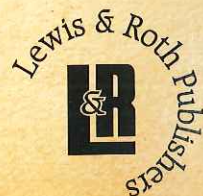
- Significantly improve your relational skills
- Enhance your effectiveness in ministry
- Diminish senseless conflict and division
- Build a healthier church
- Promote evangelism

If you lead or teach people—whether as a Sunday school teacher, youth worker, women's or men's ministry leader, Bible study leader, administrator, music director, elder, deacon, pastor, missionary, or evangelist—this book will help you become a more loving leader or teacher.

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LEADING WITH LOVE

ALEXANDER STRAUCH



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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

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.

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 rightness 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

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Chapter 3

The Motivating Power of Love

The love of Christ controls us.

2 Cor. 5:14

What motivates you to want to lead and teach people? Desire to help people, a sense of duty, enjoyment of leadership, money, the pleasure of teaching people, peer pressure? For Christian leaders, the primary answer must be love. Love is the greatest motivating power in the universe. It is at the heart of the gospel. God's love moved him to give his Son for our salvation. Love is the indispensable motivating force for all Christian service. Leadership is to be motivated by a threefold love: Christ's love for us, our love for Christ and love for others.

Motivated by the Love of Christ

In a profoundly revealing passage of Scripture, Paul discloses the single, driving, motivating force of his life:

For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. (2 Cor. 5:14-15)

Please note that Paul is not speaking about his love for Christ, but about Christ's love for him. Paul never ceased to be amazed by Christ's love for

sinner as demonstrated by his death on the cross. Christ's love totally controlled his life. It is the reason for all that Paul did.

One missionary who understood Paul's grasp of the love of Christ wrote, "If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great

**"Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life,
my all."**

—Isaac Watts

for me to make for Him."¹ Hymn writer Isaac Watts captured Paul's understanding of this love in the lyrics to *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. The hymn ends with the unforgettable line, "Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all."

Understanding the love of Christ is so essential to Christian living that Paul, in one of the most magnificent prayers in the Bible, prays that God would empower all believers to grasp the vast, incomprehensible nature of the love of Christ:

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. 3:17-19)

Although it "surpasses knowledge," the love of Christ is something we are to grasp not only intellectually but experientially, personally, and intimately. Biblical commentator Harold Hoehner highlights this paradox:

The very fact that Christ's love expressed itself in his willingness to die on behalf of sinners is in itself beyond one's comprehension. The reality of Christ's love is overwhelming to all believers.... No matter how much knowledge we have of Christ and his work, his love surpasses that knowledge. The more we know of his love, the more we are amazed by it.²

History provides many examples of leaders and teachers who tell of the motivating power of the love of Christ. Methodist preacher and pastor William Alfred Quayle, for example, recorded a conversation he had with a horseback-riding, frontier preacher to the North American settlers during the 1800s. The pioneering missionary said to Quayle,

I feel the woes of the heathen: I know the bitter barrenness of their lives; but this would not suffice to keep me among them. One gets used to heathenism and grows callous to its desperate tragedy. Not the love of man sufficeth to keep me away from my wife and from my children through these years. Only the love of Christ is competent.³

Iain Murray tells us it was the realization of Christ's love that influenced renowned preacher D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones to leave his prestigious medical career to preach God's Word:

he came to see the love of God expressed in the death of Christ in a way which overwhelmed him. Everything which was happening to him in his new spiritual life was occurring because of what had first happened to Christ.⁴

Hope MacDonald, missionary to Brazil, describes her realization of God's love:

I saw for the first time the ancient truth, "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19 KJV). How had I overlooked it? I had memorized that verse before I started school! As the reality of His love *for me* engulfed me for the first time, I wanted to get out of bed and jump for joy. I wanted to climb to the top of the roof and shout to the world, "Wake up! God loves me!" It was a moment I will never forget. Since then I have never doubted His love for me.⁵

And Hudson Taylor, founder of the China Inland Mission (now called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship) believed that if money could motivate the merchants of England to cross life-threatening oceans and enter the interior of China at great personal risk of loss of life, could not the love of Christ motivate missionaries to do the same for the sake of the gospel?⁶

The great truth we must come to again and again throughout life is this: Not that we love God, but that he first loved us and demonstrated his love by sending "his only Son into the world ... to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). This is what should most thrill our hearts and motivate us to serve others.

Motivated by Love for Christ

Knowing Christ and grasping his great love compels us to serve him, but even more, it causes us to love him. We love him because he first loved us (1 John 4:19), and he gives us the ability to love others. Love is to be our chief motivation for serving people. It is to be the sustaining power that enables us to endure the many difficulties of leadership.

Our Lord says the "great and first commandment" is to love God with the totality of our being—"with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:35-40).

There is hardly anything better we can do for those we lead than to love the Lord Jesus Christ supremely and keep our love relationship with him fresh and growing every day!

Jesus Christ is to be the supreme object of our affections. More than anything or anyone else in the world he is to be loved, treasured, and enjoyed. He is to be loved above all other people, even our closest family members: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter

more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37).

When our leadership is motivated by love for God and Christ, we are most pleasing to God and most effective with people. You may be a highly skilled public speaker and a dynamic leader, but if you don't love God first and foremost, you will not be pleasing to him. Your leadership will not be godly or Spirit-empowered leadership. Ministry for ministry's sake does not please God; rather, it is ministry born of love for him that is pleasing and acceptable (1 Cor. 13:1-3). "All the commandments," writes David Jones, "are to be performed out of love for him, even the service of neighbor as well as the service of worship."⁷

We should, of course, seek to continually improve our skills in leadership, personal discipline, time management, interpersonal relationships, and teaching. But above all these things, we should seek to increase our knowledge and enjoyment of Christ and deepen our love for him (Phil. 3: 8-14). After all, the deeper our love for him the more we will become like him in love and the more we will be able to teach others to love.

There is, therefore, hardly anything better we can do for those we lead than to love the Lord Jesus Christ supremely and keep our love relationship with him fresh and growing every day! Out of this blessed and holy

love relationship will come a greater manifestation of God's love in us, shining out to others and drawing them to Christ.

Amy Carmichael lived such a life of love:

the love of God within her was so powerful a magnet that all through her life others were drawn irresistibly to her. It was little wonder that the Hindus began to call her "the child-catching Missie Ammal," and they truly believed that she used some mysterious powder which drugged their children and made them long to be near her.⁸

Caring for the Lord's people is not always a pleasant experience. The very people we pour our lives out to serve are imperfect and sinful. They can turn on us and attack maliciously. They can be unreasonable, demanding, and ungrateful.

Two of the most godly leaders ever to have graced this world were Moses and David, yet at times people complained bitterly about them and even were ready to kill them. It is no different for leaders of God's people today. An elder in a church told me how he had experienced numerous abuses during the many years he had served his local church. He had been physically choked, punched, had his jaw broken, been spit on, cursed at, falsely accused, and threatened with a lawsuit.

If money could motivate the merchants of England to cross life-threatening oceans and enter the interior of China at great personal risk of the loss of life, could not the love of Christ motivate the missionaries to do the same for the sake of the gospel?

This kind of abusive treatment by people helps explain why so many pastors and church workers become bitter and disillusioned with people and leave the work of the Lord. But when our service is motivated by love for Christ, we will be better able to persevere and find greater fulfillment in our labors. Oswald Chambers, author of the classic devotional *My Utmost for His Highest*, said it well:

The work of feeding and tending sheep is hard work, arduous work, and love for the sheep alone will not do it; you must have a consuming love for the Great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ. Then He will flow through you in a passion of love and draw men to Himself.⁹

Here, then, is a key to endurance in spiritual leadership: We must serve people out of love for Christ. When we do, we will have joy in the work, and, most important, our service will be acceptable and pleasing to God. Being motivated, therefore, by the love of Christ and love for Christ is essential to Christian leadership. It is the starting point for all Christian service.

Motivated by Love for People

Hours before his death, after washing their feet, Jesus gave his disciples “a new commandment”:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

One simply cannot understand Christian living, evangelism, or church leadership without grasping the new commandment. Note that Jesus didn’t merely say “love one another.” He said something far more profound: Love one another “just as I have loved you.” Jesus sets his own example of love. His love is a love for the unlovely as well as the lovely. It is a caring, serving love. It gives itself unselfishly for the good of others. That is why he gave us the example of washing the disciples’ feet and of sacrificing his life on the cross. He was establishing a new pattern of love.

John explains the full implication of imitating Jesus’ love when he writes, “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers” (1 John 3:16). Benjamin B. Warfield says, “Self-sacrificing love is thus made the essence of the Christian life.”¹⁰

The new commandment applies to every Christian, and especially to leaders and teachers. All of our work—leading, teaching, correcting, protecting, speaking, serving, motivating, organizing, planning, visiting, praying, counseling, or evangelizing—is to be shaped by the new commandment. We are to love others as Jesus loved. We are to love as the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

More than any other leader in the New Testament, Paul displayed Jesus’ self-sacrificing love for those he taught and led. Paul’s handling of the tur-

bulent church at Corinth illustrates his love-motivated leadership. The church at Corinth caused Paul much heartache. Most of us would have given up and walked away in anger, yet despite the grief they caused him, Paul repeatedly affirmed his love for them.

Commentator Paul Barnett remarks, “Historically, few ministers can have suffered at the hands of their congregations as much as Paul had from the behavior of the Corinthians. Yet he continued to hold them in his heart.”¹¹

In 2 Corinthians Paul says, “I said before that you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” (2 Cor. 7:3). Later in the same letter he writes, “I seek not what is yours but you. . . . I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls” (2 Cor. 12:14-15). James Denny refers to this as “one of the most movingly tender passages in the whole Bible.”¹² Denny goes on to say, “‘Not yours, but you’ is the motto of every minister who has learned of Christ.”¹³

From his extensive study of 2 Corinthians, which reveals Paul’s heart and life, Philip Hughes writes, “No man on earth had a warmer and more devoted heart than the Apostle Paul. Love was the impulse of his whole life and ministry as Christ’s Apostle.”¹⁴

Paul had enormous giftedness, but it was his love that allowed him to “endure all things” (1 Cor. 13:7) and deal effectively with troubled people. It is no different for Christian leaders and teachers today. Consider, for example, Anthony Norris Groves, a missionary to Iraq and India. He has been called the “Father of Faith Missions.” Like Paul, he suffered much for Christ. Yet one of the shining qualities of his life was his selfless love for people. This love was rooted in his love for Christ.

Biographer Robert Dann noted how Groves’ love for people made him a great missionary despite his weaknesses:

He was not a gifted evangelist, nor a natural orator. He was not particularly sociable, and he often found relationships painful. He was never a great organizer or administrator; he was not physically or mentally tough. . . . One might think he was not cut out to be a missionary at all. But he had one quality that more than made up for his deficien-

“Self-sacrificing love is thus made the essence of the Christian life.”

—B. B. Warfield

cies: he knew how to love. Love was the key to everything: "I feel there is something in love so *hallowing*; it kills that hateful selfishness which twines round all that is human." It was love that drew people to Christ—not ceremonies or rules or customs, or even doctrines, but love. And it was love that drew people to Norris Groves.¹⁵

John Christian Arulappan, an Indian evangelist and church planter who saw thousands converted and many churches established in India, also affirms Groves' influence of love. He writes: "He loved me sincerely as his dear child in Christ Jesus. I never knew anyone who loved me so for the sake of the Lord Jesus."¹⁶

Love motivated leadership will make an impact because people are hungry for love. This point was brought home to me by two friends who planted a church. Soon after the church had been established, they organized a question and answer session for the new congregation. During the meeting, a young lady who had recently become a Christian asked them this question: "Would you be willing to die for me?"

Her question caught them completely off guard. Not wanting to be glib, they gave her a wise response. They told her they first needed to examine their own hearts honestly before God to see if they really loved her that much. After they had done that, they would answer her. This young convert's question was a thoroughly biblical question. How would you have answered her?

Notes to Chapter 3

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