

Eternity Daily Bible Study

The Importance Of Love

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Number: 26

Verses: 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Hebrews 6:10

Topic: Your Love Equals Your Ministry

Date: 26th August 2011

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clashing cymbal. (2) And though I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. (3) And though I give away all my possessions to feed the poor, and though I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.*

Hebrews 6:10 *For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.*

If you do not have love, you do not have a valid ministry, even if you have powerful revelations, prophesy, do miracles, give to the poor and have mighty faith (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 above). On the other hand even a little bit of love, under difficult circumstances, constitutes a ministry that is not forgotten by God (Hebrews 6:10 above).

Knowledge, power and ability are helpful things to have however, on their own, these things do not constitute Christian ministry if they are separated from love. And "effectiveness" and "strategy" do not constitute Christian ministry if they are selfish and corporate in nature! A large crowd and much approval does not validate a ministry for "so they treated the false prophets" (Luke 6:26).

Even a compelling idea or vision for world-transformation is not necessarily a ministry, unless the vision is driven by love and carried out as part of a loving community.

Ministry must proceed from God's love and be done in love and out of love, not out of necessity, not out of feelings, and not from a good idea or even out of a compelling need.

However once you have love, then by all means deploy knowledge, faith, and administrative skills in the service of love. Yet the love must still be primary!

Just a word of caution, love may not be separated from the truth. So a valid ministry speaks the truth in love. For instance, you cannot discard big chunks of Scripture in the name of love.

Love should guide your actions and directions in ministry. The areas where you can most completely show agape love are the places where you should focus your ministry. For instance some former drug addicts end up with a huge compassion and love for drug addicts and this love directs their ministry. Or someone may have a great love of children or the people of the Congo or for a certain church. Let your love lead you!

On the other hand if there is an area where you do not have love, you either need to pray for such love, or to leave that ministry area alone. Do not go where your love cannot stay with you and lead you and motivate you. For instance if you do not like administration at all and it just makes you grumpy, upset and unreasonable, then obviously you should not even consider a ministry of church administration!

Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth and the Spirit of love then His leading and His plans will ALWAYS involve both love and truth. If we are walking in the Spirit we will simultaneously be walking in love. The Holy Spirit will never lead you any other way. For instance the Holy Spirit will never lead you to commit a selfish or hateful act.

Human reasoning is often selfish. The budget is often the bottom line. On the other hand, God's reasoning is loving, truthful, kind and wise:

James 3:17-18 *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. (18) Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those making peace.*

If you were to walk only in love, where would that lead you? To the cross? To your neighborhood? To generosity? To hospitality? Follow love, righteousness and peace!

I am tired and weary of the power games of religion and of corporate decisions about strategic directions in ministry. Where is the love in that? James and John did not heal the lame man as part of a program, campaign or strategic decision, they healed the lame man because that was where God's love was flowing in that moment!

You have to follow God's calling, God's love and God's truth. You need to be like Jesus and just do the things that you see the Heavenly Father doing. It is not up to our will. It is better to teach the truth to three people than ear-tickling humbug to three thousand!

Ministry is not about our reputations, or about the offerings, or about human approval, its about the glory of God made manifest in loving actions:

Galatians 5:13 *For you, brothers were called to freedom; only do not use freedom for an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.*

The true servants of God are those who serve in love. If we serve in pride we are not serving as we should. We are all merely "unworthy servants just doing as we ought".

Luke 17:10 *So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'*

Love is your first duty. Other things (such as ensuring attendance) are secondary! "Getting people to come to church" is way less important than loving them and serving them. Church is first and foremost a loving community of faith that walks in the truth. It is not a religious theatre that has to be filled by good marketing!

Love also answers the question of how much ministry you can undertake. You can only do as much ministry as love allows and you can only do as little ministry as love allows.

On one hand, if you are so busy and hurried that listening to others and caring for them is virtually impossible, then you are doing too much for God! If the fruit of the Spirit start "falling off the tree" through stress, and you are impatient and impossible – then you are doing too much ministry. Love does not allow you to be always hurried!

On the other hand if you are isolated from others, selfish and inward and never hospitable then you are not loving enough! You need to open up, be more loving, take more risks of love and do more ministry. Get away from the TV, turn off the computer, and move out of the office and start getting face-to-face with real human beings and meeting their obvious needs. Love does not allow you to always cruise along in selfish mode!

One of the more interesting verses in 1 Corinthians 13 says: *"And though I give away all my possessions to feed the poor, and though I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."*(verse 3) . How can someone give everything to the poor and still be unloving?

Ananias and Sapphira are an example of such behavior. In Acts 5:1-11 they sell their land and give the money to the apostles for distribution to the poor and apparently state that "they sold everything" (when in fact they had kept some for themselves). It was not retaining some of the money that was the problem. Rather it was the lie that they had "given the full price of the land" when in fact they had not!

Why did they tell this lie and try to deceive God? Probably because it would have made them appear to be very religious and brought high approval in the fledgling Christian community. The gift was not done in order to love others, but rather as public evidence of how spiritual they were! Their huge gift was simply a form of spiritual self-promotion!

What they should have said was something like: "We sold the land for X and kept Y amount for our living expenses and are giving the remainder to the poor." but that would not have sounded quite as good, besides they might have been trying to out-score Barnabas (see end of Acts 4).

Love is the only right motive for ministry. Ministry not motivated by love, is simply not ministry. Indeed it is "as nothing". If you cast out demons, do mighty miracles and so on but have not love you might end up being called "a worker of iniquity" (Matthew 7).

Paul says love of Christ "constrained" his work for the Lord:

2 Corinthians 5:13-15 *For if we are out of our mind, it is to God; or if we are in our senses, it is for you. (14) For the love of Christ constrains us, judging this, that if one died for all, then all died; (15) and He died for all, that the living ones may live no more to themselves, but to Him who died for them and having been raised.*

The Greek word here (sunecho) means to press, straiten (as in a straitjacket) or even to imprison. The love of Christ was so overpowering that it totally dictated Paul's every action in ministry. Paul could not move outside those prison walls, outside the straitjacket of love! Your ministry is not constrained by your budget but rather it is constrained by your love of Christ and of one another!

Blessings,

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