



The Gentleness of Love

How treating other people as the Bible prescribes can help our marriages

Theme



- “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”—**John 13:35**
- “Having love for one another” can be variously interpreted ...
- ... or misinterpreted!
- Commandments of the law and instructions for behavior are intended to give substance to the concept of love, by spelling out what action a loving attitude produces in a particular situation
- Some “blanket” statements bear out this principle

Theme



“Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”—**Romans 13:8-10**

- This lesson is a look at some commandments that help us understand love ...
- ... with one particular application primarily in view
- Let’s begin with a familiar text

1Corinthians 13:4-8



Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

- *Conduct towards others that is impatient, harsh, envious, arrogant, rude, cruel, resentful, demeaning or that in any way elevates oneself above the other person is **not** motivated by love*
- ***Pause here;** before we go on to other texts, let's ask ourselves ...*
- *Where, and how, might we apply these principles from this text?*

1Corinthians 13:4-8—Application?



- *To fellowship in a local congregation?*
- *Isn't the relationship described by this text **the objective** of a local church?*
- *All those “rules” that we could cite that describe the organization, work and arrangement of activities in a local church do not exist for their own sakes*
- *They exist to produce **this** kind of attitude and conduct*
- *A church that is scripturally organized, doing the right work, that avoids unauthorized uses of treasury and building, having Sunday and Wednesday assemblies, etc. ... but lacking **this kind of fellowship** among its members ...*
- *... is **not** a sound church, and is **not** pleasing to God*

1Corinthians 13:4-8



Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails.

- *Where, and how, might we apply this principle?*

1Corinthians 13:4-8—Application?



- *To marriages?*
- *Isn't the relationship described by this text **the objective** of a marriage?*
- *All those “rules” that we could cite that describe the promises, rights and responsibilities of husbands and wives do not exist for their own sakes*
- *They exist to produce the kind of attitude and conduct described in this text*
- *A marriage in which the partners are faithful to each other, live together providing mutual physical satisfaction, meet responsibilities of headship and submission, etc. ... but lacking this relationship between the spouses ...*
- *... is **not** a scriptural marriage, and is **not** pleasing to God*

1Corinthians 13:4-8—Application?



- *Like most of you, I have heard a lot of “wedding sermons”*
- *They have emphasized the nature and purpose of marriage*
- *In most of them, the implication or outright assertion is that the most basic purpose of marriage is to test the determination of the two people involved to keep their marriage vows ...*
- *... no matter how miserable keeping those vows makes them ...*
- *... and even to the point of physical harm*
- ***Is God’s purpose for marriage to see how much we are willing to suffer?***

Genesis 2:18-24



“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

Genesis 2:18-24—Application?



- *What happens in this story?*
- *Yahweh **divides** the man and makes part into a “helper fit for him”*
- *The man says, “She is bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh” — “she is made of the same bones and flesh as I am ... she is fit for me”*
- *Statement of the purpose or goal of the relationship: “A man shall hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”*
- ***From:** a **separation** wrought by Yahweh to create **two beings** ...*
- *... who are made of the same bones and flesh*
- ***To:** the **aspiration** of restoring the unity: “they shall become **one flesh**”*

Romans 14:13—Application?



Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way.

- *Surely one of the ways spouses show their love for one another is by helping to correct attitudes and conduct that are unhelpful or in error*
- *The correcting message cannot be “I would have done it differently, so you have done it wrong.”*
- *Let’s not let our burning need to say to our spouses, “You’re not doing things the way I would have,” keep us from helping them do the right thing!*

Galatians 5:13-15



For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another.

Galatians 5:13-15—Application?



- *It is easy, and in some sense almost “natural,” to let a need to show that I am right and that I am superior corrupt my communication with my spouse*
- *As a Christian, and as a married man, I have rights, for sure!*
- *Is the way that I express those rights, and the way that I exercise those rights, doing damage to my relationship with my spouse?*
- *Is the way that I express those rights, and the way that I exercise those rights, drawing us closer to being “one flesh”?*
- *Exercising one’s rights as a husband or wife cannot be an acceptable reason for building barriers*

Galatians 5:22-23—Application?



But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

- *There is no requirement in the law of God, and no permission given in the law of God, for a Christian to treat his spouse with, or show to his spouse, any quality of character except the fruit described in this text*

Ephesians 4:1-3—Application?



... walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

- *Sometimes we have to respond to things said or done by a spouse that are unfair, or that we may misinterpret as being inappropriate*
- *To influence a spouse to treat us fairly, we have to be patient and to put up with things that may be unpleasant or hurtful*
- *We do not have God's permission to respond harshly or "in kind" to provocations, or to show our spouses disrespect because of them*

Ephesians 4:31-32



Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:31-32—Application?



- *If you have been married for any length of time, your spouse has given you gifts and done you favors that you did not earn and do not deserve*
- *If you are a Christian, Jesus has done things for you that you could not possibly earn, of which you are spectacularly unworthy*
- *In a particular moment, as the result of a particular interaction with your spouse, you may feel that your spouse does not deserve to be treated with respect, or deserve to be forgiven*
- *But the way to improve your relationship so that those negative interactions are eventually ended is to show kindheartedness, tenderness and forgiveness*

Ephesians 5:21, 22, 25—Application?



Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ ... Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her.

- *All relationships among Christians require submission*
- *Marriage most of all*
- *A wife submits to her husband because she trusts him as her leader and example of submission*
- *A husband submits to his wife by putting her above himself, following the example of Christ's sacrifice for the church*

Colossians 3:12-15



Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:12-15—Application?



- *When a spouse offends us, or does us wrong in some way, we must be willing to forgive*
- *We must have a strong desire to get back on satisfactory terms with the spouse*
- *The existence of a barrier between ourselves and our spouse must bother us more than the fact that we have been treated unfairly*

1Peter 3:8-9—Application?



Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

- *Even between husbands and wives who are working toward a “one flesh” relationship, there are going to be differences, some of which are going to be important and make it difficult to find common ground*
- *The way to minimize those differences, and to help both of us do the right things, is to approach the differences with humility, to treat each other with kindness and to be sympathetic and supportive to each other*

Various texts



Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves—**Romans 12:10**

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all – **Romans 12:15-17**

If anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ—**Galatians 6:1**

Hosea 2:14-20



Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. And there I will give her her vineyards and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. And there she shall answer as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me “My Husband,” and no longer will you call me “My Baal.” For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. And I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the LORD.

Hosea 2:14-20—Application?



- *Verses 1-13 in this chapter are a recitation of Israel's sins*
- *But now, Yahweh's response to those sins will be, "I will allure her, and speak tenderly to her ..."*
- *Instead of Israel calling Yahweh "my Baal" ("my Lord"), which was the way wives referred to their husbands in Semitic languages, she will refer to Yahweh as "my husband" ("my is," my man")*
- *Yahweh will not talk down to her as to a disobedient wife—who, by the way, deserves to have God talk down to her*
- *Instead, he will **bring himself down to her level**, as in the Garden: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"*

Hosea 2:14-20—Application?



- *Immediately (verses 18-20) the prophetic message becomes Messianic (see **Isaiah chapters 11, 65, 66**)—a kingdom in which conflict is abolished*
- *This change in the way God exercises his role as husband becomes a prophecy of the kind of husband Christ will be to his church: “Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her” (**Ephesians 5:25**)*
- *The response of God in Christ to human wickedness is to lower himself: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (**Romans 5:8**)*
- *In Christ’s kingdom, “There is no male and female” (**Galatians 3:28**)*
- *In Christ’s kingdom, the headship of the husband imitates the headship of Christ: self-sacrificial service, lowering himself to the level of his wife*

Closing thoughts



- *Sometimes love has to show disapproval of the other person*
- *Perhaps rarely, even strong disapproval*
- *But it is never true that the best way to get another person—especially a spouse—to change is to show disrespect or contempt, to talk down to the other person, to display a haughty or superior demeanor*
- *Jesus acquired power to save us and change us by lowering himself to serve us; and following his example is the way we influence and change others*
- *A marriage that lacks the qualities of humble service defined in these texts is **not acceptable to God**, and needs to be corrected by repentance and change*

