

Putting Love Top on Your List

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He was one of the most cantankerous men I had ever known. When all the church wished to move forward into a new area of ministry, you could count on him confronting the elders about it in a negative way. In fact, “negative” was his middle name. Our system of decision-making did not allow his views to be buried in a hidden vote, but brought him straight into contact with the leaders, with whom he almost always disagreed. Time after time there he was, the only “aginner.”

What did we do?

The leaders decided not to solve the problem administratively, by a system change. No, we were looking for a heart change. We felt we should confront him directly in the hope that he could become the man God wanted him to be. Much to our surprise, it worked! He received our admonition with amazing calm.

He appreciated our concern. And he completely reset his life and renewed his sense of commitment to the church. At the end of it all, our greatest leadership curmudgeon became one of our most reliable allies. Love won out.



Why should we desire love above administrative solutions?

First of all, love is the highest mark of maturity. Therefore, not loving the other members of the church is a sign of our immaturity. There may be problems with the other person that are inexcusable, but no problem makes love impossible. In fact, it might be love that calls for helping the offending person see the right way, if you can do it with grace. Or, in other cases, it might mean overlooking his or her fault.

Second, love is the “perfect bond of unity,” the glue that keeps the church together, according to the apostle Paul (Col. 3:14). Do you want unity in the church? Of course you do. But love is critical to make that happen. A church that does not major on love is headed toward disruption. Nothing bonds like love as it works itself out in forgiveness and acceptance.

Third, love is the way of blessing because it is grounded in humility.

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4)

God says that the humble person is the blessed person. “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Pet. 5:5). A church is always in need of more grace. More grace comes from more humility toward each other. And humility toward others is, in essence, love at work.

Finally, love is the reasonable return for what God has given you. “Forgive each other as God, for Christ’s sake, has forgiven you” (Col. 3:13; Rom. 15:7). Christians should never forget God’s mercy toward them. If you have experienced the love of God, it is natural for you to extend the same toward others.

You can love more

When the apostle Paul wrote the Thessalonian church, he was writing to people he loved dearly. “We proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children” (1 Thess. 2:7). Love made ministry to them possible. But it was important that they would have the vision for love’s powerful effects. Therefore Paul appeals to them to excel in love themselves:

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more. (1 Thess. 4:10)

I am often surprised when I find churches that want to be good teaching churches, aggressive evangelistic churches, energetic missions-minded churches, but who have no plan for increasing love among its members. This is a great mistake. A church that works hard on love will have all the rest thrown in.

There will be much that your church will find impossible to achieve, but nothing can stop you from becoming the most loving church that has ever existed. Do all you can to “excel still more” in the virtue of love.