

Chapter 1

ADDRESSING LOVE CONCERNS

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. —John 14:15

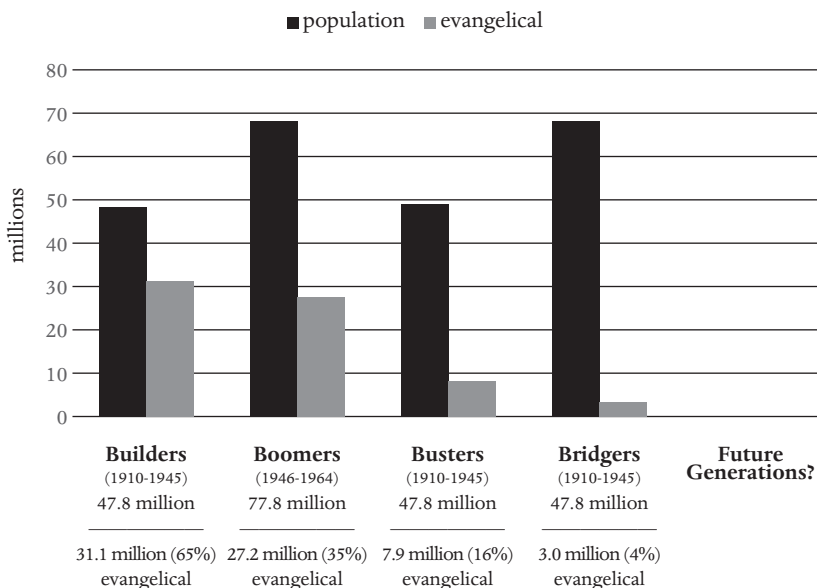
I remember vividly the night I sat there in my family room praying. I was stunned. I was shocked. Frankly, I felt as if I, and many fellow Christians, had been tricked...big time. Have you ever had a moment when things you have been working on and learning suddenly crystalize for you a bit? I was having one of those moments. Here is the question that suddenly emblazoned itself into my conscious thinking and I just could not shake it: *Is it possible that our enemy, Satan, has used “love” against us?*

The Devil Wouldn’t Mess with “Love” Would He?

Here is what I mean; the modern church has every innovation. We have buildings. We have websites, blogs, and Twitter. We have TV programs. We have social programs and counseling centers and food banks and clothes closets and latte machines and rock-climbing walls. We have a zillion Bible translations. We are without a shadow of a doubt the most “advanced” church in history. We are also the richest; a far cry from the rag tag group of misfits that both began the church and filled her early services in the book of Acts! Yet, if this chart from Thom Rainer’s wonderful book, *The Bridger Generation* is true, in sports terms we are getting blown out here,

and generationally so. The game isn't even that close. Generationally, historic Bible-believing Christianity is on a steep trajectory of decline in the United States. Why are we doing so poorly at making disciples?

Decreasing Numbers of Evangelicals¹



I began racking my brain and heart over this question and thinking hard about the church's apparent inability to impact the culture on a large scale as we apparently once did. This occupied my thinking and prayers for months. Why are we not able to reach lost people effectively? Something is broken. What is it? What in the world is going on? I do not think a lack of love is the cause as so many assert. Most Christians are very loving. Most pastors are very loving. Most churches are very loving. Christians all over the country are taking people food, funding missions, encouraging people, tweeting kind thoughts, posting Scriptures on Facebook, etc. Yes, we have our occasional in-house spats over doctrine, but that is hardly enough to overcome all the good works we collectively do. So what's wrong?

Here is what I have noticed and experienced time and time again. **There is a lot of love being displayed out there, but it is generally the kind the culture will accept.** Stay with me now, as this point is

central to the overall premise of this book. In my opinion, over the last several decades the Christian church has been taught to love according to cultural definitions and expressions and for the most part has abandoned the type of love we need the most right now. We have been taught to put on happy faces, say happy things, and at all cost be happy. “That’s what attracts people,” we are told. We have been taught to overlook sin and only talk about grace, nod non-threateningly at immorality while extolling the virtues of tolerance, and comfort but never, ever confront. I humbly suggest that true biblical love does not leave people in darkness and sin. True biblical love recognizes the true biblical issue responsible for man’s misery and meets it head on. Yet, there is the problem. The modern church does just about everything but gently deal with the thing that, in my opinion, takes the most love...the sinful heart.

Consider this hard to understand but poignant dichotomy: every time we see a cross, we are reminded of both the wrath and love of God! The Law required death for sin; that is why we needed a Savior. Jesus came to save his people from their sins (Mt 1:21). In other words, Jesus came to heal broken hearts, bind up the wounded, and set captives free. We read that and realize we need to love people like that. However, in keeping with His mission to seek and save the lost, Jesus healed, fixed wounds, and set captives free from sin—the very thing that separates man from God. Isn’t that the whole point of His coming? Isn’t that what the Gospel is all about?

So back to my original question: is it possible that our enemy has used our understandable desire to love broken people against us? I really believe this is the case. Love that corrects sin according to the Moral Law of God is not tolerated in our culture and many times in the church either. This type of preaching and ministry is called hateful. Therefore, true love, the love that Jesus displayed, is now considered unloving. Biblical love has been redefined and turned 180 degrees. Calling people to repent and turn from sin and to God that they might be saved is actually considered a not-so-loving thing to do. It does not fit the cultural narrative of sin affirmation, and it does not fit the current church mindset to be nice at all costs. Somehow we must recover the truth that it is love that compels a Christian to minister the Gospel. This mighty motive for our warfare (love) must not be fleshy; it must be thoroughly biblical as we will see. However, what happens when we surrender biblical love and allow it to be redefined and used against us? For example:

- Is it considered loving to discipline an unruly or rebellious child?
- Is it considered loving to hand out a Gospel tract?
- Is it considered loving to take hungry people some food?
- Is it considered loving to tell a practicing homosexual to repent or risk hell?
- Is it considered loving to publicly reprove a president who says to Planned Parenthood, “God bless you!”?
- Is it considered loving to preach about sin and the judgment of God?
- Is it considered loving to walk with a grieving family who has lost a loved one?
- Is it considered loving to warn sinners of the coming Day of Wrath?
- Is it considered loving to stand outside an abortion clinic to pray, proclaim the Gospel, and try to convince those entering to change their minds?
- It is considered loving to give to the homeless and into good mission work?

So how did you score on this little quiz? For me, each answer was a resounding “Yes!”—Ten out of ten. How do you think most of culture would have scored? Most of Christian culture? I would imagine there would be quite a few uncomfortable “no’s.” Could we be in the process of being deceived by the Deceiver? That would not be fair would it?

The Character of our Enemy

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” (Ge 3:1)

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Co 4:3–4)

When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. (Mt 13:19)

*No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.
(2 Co 11:14)*

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (Jn 8:44)

You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us. (Eph 2:1–4)

When the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. (Re 20:7–8)

The great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. (Re 12:9)

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Pe 5:8)

Our enemy, the devil, does not play fair. He is a deceiver, a liar, vicious, prideful, and hateful. He is out to destroy Christ's church and drag as many souls as he can to the lake of fire with him (Re 20:10). He uses trickery, craftiness, and slick designs to deceive God's people if he can. He camouflages himself with light. His work might sometimes seem loving and tender and tolerant and noble. He loves ways that "seem right to man but end in death." (Pr 14:12, author's paraphrase). He remains at work in the sons of disobedience; this is why the church must not allow enemies of Christ to dictate ministry! Would our enemy

mess with love? Friends, I believe he has and I believe he has done so with great success. As in all things, we need to recapture a biblical sense of what true love is.

False Love and False Conversions

The ramifications of getting love wrong are enormous. The enemy has us so focused on circumstances and felt needs that we are missing the bigger (and more important) picture. Not only does this mindset affect our public witness within the culture, it also impacts our liturgies. For example, think about how many churches call people to salvation. For those of you who believe in altar calls (not all do), how often have you seen and heard and maybe even issued an appeal to unsaved people based on life's tough circumstances, without any mention of personal sin? This false, or at best, incomplete sense of love drives the church to minimize that which is considered offensive (personal sin) and maximize that which comforts (a better life), even during the Gospel call! Come to Jesus and experience all that life has to offer! Come to Jesus and He'll heal your wounds! Come to Jesus and begin to walk in purpose! Are these statements true? Actually they are, from a Kingdom perspective. Those of us in Christ do in fact experience better lives, even if that means suffering for His sake. He does heal our wounds. We do find our purpose: obeying Him and keeping His commandments (Ecc 12:13); but should these be the reasons we call people to Christ?

So many people come to our altars because of life's tough circumstances (one must never make light of those), but not necessarily because they can see their personal sins against God as exceedingly sinful (Ro 7:13, KJV). Why? Because we don't teach that anymore. We do not teach about God's wrath. We do not teach about the coming judgment. We rarely mention the fear of the Lord. The last thing we want our church attendees to do is tremble and quake at the thought of having offended a holy God. The problem is that brokenness over life's issues, though painful, in and of itself does not save. In our attempts to love, sometimes this critical nuance is missed. In order to be saved, one must truly repent. If we do not love enough to lay down the pseudo-therapy and Dr. Philisms and address the reason that Christ came to this earth in the first place (to deal with man's sin), our unsaved hearers are in danger of being falsely converted. In my opinion, that is worse than simply being lost.

In Love with Love

I continue to be amazed at the love of *love* in the culture and interestingly, within the Christian church. The world pushes against the Kingdom of God using the “all we need is love” mantra. We hear about loving health care for a mother who wants to abort her child, loving laws to allow same-sex adults to marry, loving methods to kill elderly people (euthanasia), and loving research on human embryos that will save lives. So often, the church falls right in line. So many people seem to be in love with *love*. As I write, a few weeks ago there was a public display of this phenomenon during the 2014 Grammy awards. Several homosexual couples (along with some heterosexual couples) were “married” live by Queen Latifah on national television, complete with tears, cheers, affirmations, and unmistakable chastisements of any who could not see that this was all very loving. It was very sad. It is heartbreaking to see how far our nation has sped away from biblical foundations and a true love for Jesus.

Precious reader, for the Christian, love has teeth. What I mean is love must be tethered to Scripture; it must be lawful. So let’s chew on this: does love cover a multitude of sins? “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, **since love covers a multitude of sins.**” (1 Pe 4:8, emphasis mine) Yes! Love forgives when wronged, which is what that means. Is love the highest virtue? “So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; **but the greatest of these is love.**” (1 Co 13:13, emphasis mine) Yes! But again, what is love? “Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.**” (1 Jn 4:8, emphasis mine) Is God love? He sure is... but again, Scripture tells us how God loves, who He loves, and what He hates and despises as well.

The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall behold his face.
(Ps 11:5–7)

Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free; the LORD

opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. (Ps 146:5–8)

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. **For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.**” (Heb 12:1–6, emphasis mine)*

A full-orbed view of the love of God must take into account the biblical fact that God “hates.” God hates sin so much that Christ had to die and that there is a coming judgment where the hatred of God towards sin will be fully manifest (as many will be thrown into hell), just as the love of God towards the redeemed will be fully manifest (many inherit eternal life in heaven).

The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question 42 states: “What is the essence of the Ten Commandments?” The answer is, “The essence of the Ten Commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to love everyone else as we love ourselves.” Bingo! Love, both towards God and towards others, must be lawful. It is tethered to God’s Moral Law. If not, it can mean anything to anyone. Love is more than a smile or a tender voice. Love is patient and kind, but love also rejoices in truth (1 Co 13:4–6). I believe everything Christ did He did out of love for the Father and love for us. Sometimes that love healed, sometimes that love encouraged, but sometimes that love challenged and rebuked. It was always, however, connected to the Law of God; the ethical and moral standards of God.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) is a good example. In it we find wonderful things like the true definition of blessings and the command to love our enemies, but we also see a magnifying of the Law

and Christ taking the standards up a notch. He taught that adultery can be done not just with the body but also with the eyes, that unlawful anger equals murder, and He issues stronger standards for divorce. Paul said it wonderfully: “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.” (Ro 13:8–10)

To love others as ourselves is to love them according to the commandments. This is true, powerful, biblical love. This is the kind of love that will encourage, expose, demonstrate care and promote Spirit-conviction. Yes, the Law of Christ is to love one another (cf. Gal 6:2; 1 Jn 3:23, 4:21)! I am suggesting that when we define that love biblically, it is always according to holiness and truth. When Jesus gave the commandments to the rich young ruler, and challenged him to the point he walked away, it was because He loved him (Mk 10:21). May we emulate the Lord’s example.

Loving God and Others...Lawfully

Let us keep looking at love from this perspective. Consider the Great Commandment: “One of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.’” (Mt 22:35–40)

I submit that loving God according to Scripture is so much more than warm feelings, tears, and tingly sensations. God is not a boyfriend or girlfriend. He is our King. Loving God is founded on a loving obedience and a firm, biblical knowledge of who He is! According to Jesus, who quotes Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18, these verses sum up the Law of God. Again, as Paul wrote in Romans 13, the Law of God gives us a framework on how to love! To love God this way meant one would do a few things to demonstrate that love. If we consider the context of the verses our Lord is quoting, a few points stand out. Here are the verses:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. And when the LORD your God brings you into the land that he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give you—with great and good cities that you did not build, and houses full of all good things that you did not fill, and cisterns that you did not dig, and vineyards and olive trees that you did not plant—and when you eat and are full, then take care lest you forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Dt 6:4–12)

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD. (Le 19:18)

Loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength involves seeing Him as the one true God (Dt 6:4), discipling our family (Deut 6:6-7a), and saturating our lives with His Word (Dt 6:7b-9)! Loving God this way should be seen as a requirement, not a request (Dt 10:12)! This is echoed in the New Testament: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” (Jn 14:15) “By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome.” (1 Jn 5:2–3)

Hearts that truly burn with the Great Commandment also burn with a desire to obey Him. This type of heart also loves God’s Word, for to love His Word is to love Christ! The immediate context of Leviticus 19:18 is serving others in holiness, which demonstrates true love! Being generous (Lev 19:9-10), refusing to steal, rob, or oppress your neighbor (Lev 19:11-13), telling the truth and guarding one’s tongue (Lev 19:15-16), and not hating in one’s heart (Lev 19:17) are all covered. Again, love is lawful; it has meaning.

As stated previously, the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:1-17) also describe the love of God. The essence of the Ten Commandments is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and to love everyone else as we love ourselves. In other words, the moral laws of God are worship instructions! They are not just the standards by which man will be judged (Jas 2:10-12); they are also the blueprint by which God is loved! The first four obviously give the basics of a honest love towards God:

- I. You shall have no other gods before me.
- II. You shall not make for yourself a carved image.
- III. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
- IV. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

These commandments describe a heart that truly and passionately loves God and a heart that puts Him first above anything and anyone! Can you think of anything or anyone that has risen above Christ in your life? They describe a love-based worship according to Scripture instead of by man-made ideas. Are you striving to praise Him and worship Him according to Scripture? They describe a reverence of His name and His reputation. How do you feel when His name is taken in vain? When people make jokes and His name becomes a curse word in the culture, what goes through your mind? When His Word and commands are laughed at, marginalized, ridiculed, called antiquated and irrelevant, does that stir something in you? We are called to make His name great! These wonderful verses describe a life that so prioritizes God that He certainly gets one day in seven for His worship. Is church service on the Lord's Day a priority because you desire to keep the Christian Sabbath? Is your Sunday (or some other day of the week if you must) "set apart" for His worship? Let us now look at the last six commandments as we consider loving others lawfully:

- V. Honor your father and mother.
- VI. You shall not murder.
- VII. You shall not commit adultery.
- VIII. You shall not steal.
- IX. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
- X. You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.

Again, read Paul's words in Romans: "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." (Ro 13:8–10) To love our neighbor is to love according to the Word, for the Christian must do all things according to the Word (2 Ti 3:16-17). The Apostle Paul uses the commandments to describe "doing no wrong" to a neighbor, and calls that a love that fulfills the Law. Loving your neighbor as yourself must be done according to the Law of God. We are not free to make it up as we go along. It is important to understand that God, who is love (1 Jn 4:8), gets to define love. *According to Scripture, love must be...according to Scripture.* We do not get to love only according to our feelings or by cultural norms and just call it love. If it does not line up with prescribed definitions and patterns, it simply is not love! Remember, the culture calls good evil and evil good...so love has been redefined by culture to suit. Far from being irrelevant in our times, the Law of God is used to define and sum up true, biblical love; "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Ga 5:14) The Apostles always understood love to be according to the commandment:

By this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him...Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. (1 Jn 2:3-4, 9-10)

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 Jn 4:20–21)

So based on the commandments, lawful love towards others has a basic framework. First, we must strive to honor our parents (fifth commandment). To honor parents is to show them reverence, respect, and deference. This is more than just saying, "I love you." Remember,

love has teeth! It is to obey them when under their covering and to maintain a submissive posture even as adults. It is to speak well of them, speak respectfully to them, and to refuse to allow dishonor concerning them. God was so serious about the hearts of the parents and children remaining connected through this sort of honor, He said, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.” In the New Testament He says, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’” (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1-3) In other words, circumstantial blessings and length of life was tied to honoring parents! This is one way we love them lawfully. Honoring parents teaches the children to be honorable themselves. I have yet to see a fruit-bearing home without honor towards mom and dad.

Lawful love also includes protecting others physically (sixth commandment). The Bible declares, “You shall not murder.” This includes refusing to cause harm to a person’s body unless in defense of yourself or another. This also includes any type of unbiblical anger or hatred, which is seen by Christ as murder (Mt 5:21-22). So having a “murderous” spirit or an out of control temper moves one too close to violating this commandment in my opinion, and it sure isn’t a loving sight! To murder is **never** a loving option.

Having pure friendships and physical relationships (seventh commandment) is another way we love others. This commandment (you shall not commit adultery) includes any kind of sexual sin. To stray outside God’s design for sexuality is, by definition, unloving. It is not loving to defile the marriage bed. Love does no wrong to a neighbor, therefore fornication is unloving. Homosexuality is unloving. Any form of sexual deviance is unloving. The world is working to redefine love, but now you know that love is according to the Law.

Being honest in dealings with others includes never stealing from them (eighth commandment). Yes, “You shall not steal” is a form of love! Walking in integrity with others is a way of loving them. There is nothing loving about theft in any form. So protecting what belongs to another is a form of biblical love. This applies to individuals and institutions. It even applies to God. Do we dare rob God and call it love?

Being truthful at all times is the essence of the ninth commandment. The New Testament also declares that we must speak the truth in love

(Eph 4:15)! “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” means that telling the truth is loving! The opposite is also true: to lie is to show animosity not love. In fact, lying is one of the seven deadly sins in Proverbs 6. This is why we must preach and teach the truth and why we must hate falsehood. It is not loving to hide truth. It is not loving to let someone stumble around in deception and darkness. This also means when we are asked to tell what happened we must tell the truth.

To refuse to operate in envy and jealousy towards others is another way of loving them according to the tenth commandment. “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.” (Ex 20:17) As Dave Ramsey often says on his talk show, “Jealousy and envy are nasty, horrible emotions. Jealousy says, ‘I want what you have.’ Envy says, ‘Since I can’t have it, neither can you.’” We read of this sort of envious spirit on the prostitute who was the mother of the dead son in 1 Kings 3. So consumed with her hatred because the other prostitute had what she did not, that when Solomon suggested dividing up the living child, her reply was, “he shall be neither mine nor yours; divide him.” (1 Ki 3:26) The Bible declares, “a tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot” (Pr 14:30) and “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.” (Jas 3:16)

So hopefully, we can see that true biblical love is always according to the commandments. **The Law of Christ is the command to love one another. The law of God gives us a holy framework for how to do that.** God created love and God defines it. When the church begins to “love others” by affirming sin, murder, and perversity it violates the laws of God and cannot, by definition, be loving.

I know that this sounds like the *Grace vs. Law* battle, which in my opinion is in many ways unnecessary. One leads to the other and one is regulated by the other. Simply put, *if we have Law but not love, we become pharisaical, mean-spirited, and legalistic. If we have love but not Law, our love becomes perverse, idolatrous, and offensive to God.* The loss of the prophetic voice can be traced to an understandable desire to love others, but also to a throwing overboard of God’s commandments. Ironically, these are the very commandments that show us how to truly love.

For Clarity

Someone will surely say at this point that “love is patient and kind.” Amen! No chapter on love would be complete without 1 Corinthians 13. Let’s read it.

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. 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 ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (1 Co 13:1–13)

Love is without a doubt, the greatest of all virtues. It is patient and kind. It bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things. It never fails! Please note again, though, that it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth (1 Co 13:6). Also please note the context of this chapter. 1 Corinthians is a letter penned by Paul to, in large part, straighten out the messes that the church in Corinth had made. In the context of spiritual gifts, Paul exhorts that each gift should be used in love. 1 Corinthians 13 is essentially a pause in the midst of detailed, didactic instruction to remind the hearer that spiritual gifts must be used for building up one another in love. It was addressed to Christians to adjust their attitudes and promote loving change in a church that badly needed it.

I am advocating for a loving declaration of what thus says the Lord to those lost in darkness. 1 Corinthians 13 in no way prohibits the believer from declaring the fullness of God’s Word. Therefore, with patience,

kindness, gentleness, and respect, we must declare the whole counsel of God. I am not arguing for rudeness by Christians; I'm arguing for fidelity to Scripture. I cannot think of a more loving thing to give others than the precious, soul-converting truths of God's holy Word.

The Bottom Line about Love

Just in case I have failed to communicate this love-thing properly, here is just a bit more Bible. *Warning, this entire book is packed with Scripture!*

Dear Reader, if We Truly Feel This Way...

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. (1 Jn 4:7)

This commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother. (1 Jn 4:21)

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Eph 5:1–2)

He said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Mt 22:37–39)

And if We Truly Understand the Magnitude of This...

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (1 Jn 4:9–11)

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned,

but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (Jn 3:16–18)

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. (Ro 5:8–9)

Then We Must Be Compelled by Love Because of This...

You have heard that it was said to those of old, “You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.” But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, “You fool!” will be liable to the hell of fire. (Mt 5:21–22)

He has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment. (Jn 5:27–29)

But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed. He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. (Ro 2:5–8)

We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. (2 Co 5:10–11)

Just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment. (Heb 9:27)

By the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Pe 3:7–10)

The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death. (Re 21:7–8)

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead. (Ac 17:30–31)

A Prayer to Close This Chapter

Lord, help us love like you did and remember how serious eternity is. May the church recapture her prophetic voice. May we love enough to warn men of judgment that they might tremble again before your Word and flee to the cross of Christ for salvation by grace through faith alone! “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.” (1 Jn 4:18)