



“LOVE’S POTENTIAL” (I Thessalonians 4:9-10)

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I. THE CHALLENGES OF **INCREASING** LOVE IN THE CHURCH

* The church is imperfect...To dwell above with saints in love, Oh that will be glory; to dwell below with saints we know, well, that’s another story. Even the 12 apostles repeatedly argued over who was the greatest.

* There are divisive people in the church

- Prov.6: ¹⁶ There are six things that the LORD hates...19 and one who sows discord among brothers.

- Titus 3:10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.

* Certain aspects of love do not always seem loving

- Those being disciplined don’t “feel” loved; Rev.3: 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.

- Those rebuked do not “feel” loved; Prov.27: 5 Open rebuke is better than secret love. 6 Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.

* The times we live in

- II Timothy 3:1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without **love**, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—

* Time

- See Acts 2:42-47; 6:1-4 (Growing pains); 11:1-3 (Religious tradition); 15:1-2 (Doctrinal debate/division); 15:36-40 (Personal challenges). The reality of life as a believer is that there will be struggles with other believers. The question is, how are you going to handle the struggle? Church relationships are like a marriage, they must endure the test of time. Vows made at a flower lined altar are only as good as those made at the altar of everyday life. And if they don’t...

* Hard-heartedness rather than humility

II. WHAT BIBLICAL LOVE LOOKS LIKE

A. The Words In Our Text

* 1st "love" = brotherly love = 5360. philadelphia, fil-ad-el-fee'ah; from G5361; fraternal affection:--brotherly love (kindness), love of the brethren.

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

* 2nd "love" = 25. agapao, ag-ap-ah'-o; perh. from agan (much) [or comp. H5689]; to love (in a social or moral sense):--(be-) love (-ed). Comp. G5368.

* We get our English word "agony" from the Greek agape. It means the absorption of every part of a person's being in one great passion. The word has little to do with emotion; it indicates love which deliberately, by an act of the will, chooses its object, and through thick or thin, regardless of the attractiveness of the object concerned, goes on loving continually, eternally. It is not affected by the worthiness or unworthiness of the one it loves.

* Number 1 and 2 are dependent on each other. Brotherly love will never continue without agape. *Philiadelphia* love is the love of deep affection, such as in friendship, family, marriage. But *agape* love goes beyond affection. It is not a love based on feeling, or family ties.

* See Eph.3:16-19

B. The Foundation Of Agape

1. It is not based on someone loving you

- I John 4: 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

- Rom.5: 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- See Acts 7:59-60

2. It puts up with imperfections

- Eph.4: 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

3. See I Corinthians 13:1-8

- One of my favorite characteristics: It keeps no record of wrongs!

4. It must be received before it can be shared

- I John 4: 19 We love because he first loved us.

5. It can only be shared through relationships

- John 3:16

- Immanuel, God with us; See I John 1:1-4

- The present mystery of the body of Christ (See I Cor.12:27; Eph.4:16).

- What's your part?

C. Practical Examples

* See Acts 2: 46-47; 4:32-35; Gal.6:10; John 13:35

* Rev.2: 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

* Consequence of not repenting? The church remains, and though it maintains its orthodox position, it loses the most important element of its testimony - LOVE. The apostle Paul had visited the church of Ephesus about 53 A.D., approx. 43 years prior to this letter to them. Paul, after visiting Ephesus, wrote the church a letter. I believe Paul's letter give us great insight as to the church's "forsaking their first love." See Ephesians 1:15b; 2:14-18; 3:16-19; 4:1-3, 15-16, 25-26; 4:31-5:2; 6:23-24.

* Ephesus was a church that, despite all its accomplishments, had lost an intimate relationship with Christ. And because the intimacy with Jesus had been forsaken, the intimacy with other believers had also been lost. Lots of good things were going on, the doctrine was sound and solid, the standard of morality in the church was exemplary, but relationships with other believers in the fellowship were not what they used to be, and the light of *love* had all but gone out.

* When we pull back relationally, love no longer increases...

III. BIBLICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR INCREASING LOVE

A. Repent/Receive (Salvation)

* Rom.5:5... God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

* I John 4: 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

* I John 4: 16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.

B. Repent/Remove

* See I Peter 1:22-2:1; Eph.4:30-32

C. Repent/Restart

* Rev.2, Ephesus; Some of us need to go back to doing the things we used to do (part of a life group, involved in a church ministry, relational beyond your own family & close friends, etc.).

D. Become Relational *For The First Time*

* Perhaps you are new to CCSP, and you were involved relationally in your former church fellowship, but for whatever reason you have not gotten involved here...

* Perhaps your former church was much smaller, and you feel lost. Could I remind us all of something, the early church grew exponentially pretty much overnight. They went from 120 to 3,120 in one day! Not long after they grew to 5,120. How did they maintain the relational aspect in the church? See Acts 2:46.

* Connecting Coaches

E. Reach Out

- Thank God for all the outreach ministries God has raised up in this church, but what the Lord has us focusing on today is outreach within the church (some have called this "inreach").

- See I John 3:17-18

CONCLUSION

* Our greatest testimony as a church is not our outreach...what happens if we go out and reach people, and then they come to church and do not experience love? Do you know I've actually had Christians tell me that after they have reached out to someone in their world, rather than inviting them to the church they attend, they tell them to go over to Calvary Chapel?

* John 13: 35 By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."