



Give Everything

*“We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also **ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters** .”*

1 John 3:16 NLT

Real love is selfless. It does not consider self first but others. As followers of Christ, we should always be ready to lay our lives down for those we call brother and sister, as well as those we don't even know or aren't saved, because Jesus has exemplified that for us. He died for people who will probably never even say His name. So where's our excuse? We have more than we should: hurt feelings, grudges, and hate. Sacrifice to us today means setting our phone down for an hour, picking up our Bible for 15 minutes, or simply going out of our way to talk to somebody who makes us a little uncomfortable or that we don't particularly like. The nature of Christ and the love He put into action is such a wild reality that we all must step into. The nature of Christ is selflessness itself. Go the extra mile for Jesus, let go of that grudge, talk to that person you don't like, and stop giving birth to hate. This is what He is urging you to do. Live out this love and believe it is true, because He lives in you. And don't believe for a second that you aren't capable, because He is right there giving you every opportunity to live it out.

Reflect

Who in your life are you finding it hardest to lay your life down for, and what's one small sacrifice you can make for them today?



Love Made Flesh

*“Dear friends, I am not writing a new commandment for you; rather it is an old one you have had from the very beginning. This old commandment, to love one another, is the same message you heard before. Yet it is also new. Jesus lived the truth of this commandment, and you also are living it. For **the darkness is disappearing, and the true light is already shining** .”*

1 John 2:7-8 NLT

This old commandment is made new because no one could truly live it out in the flesh until it was put into flesh through Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He came in the likeness of our flesh, stripped Himself of His own power, and became the perfect human, fully surrendered. Stripped of divine might, yet perfect in every way as a man and still fully God. And all of this was a choice made out of love, not obligation. Amazing. This passage reveals where Christ’s heart was when He came to dwell among us: “Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated Him to the place of highest honor and gave Him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:6-11) Out of unconditional love, He surrendered His divine power and clothed Himself in flesh, making love visible. And because of this act of love, the commandment to love became new through Him who gave His life. He is our perfect model because of what He did and everything He does in our life. And because He now lives within us, we have been given everything we need to walk just as He walked.

Reflect

In what area of your life are you still clinging to your own way instead of surrendering it to Christ like He surrendered for you?



Fullness

“No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us .”

1 John 4:12 NLT

No one has ever seen God with their eyes, but love does what sight can't do. It brings God Himself to dwell in us. Not partially, not occasionally, but fully. His love reaches its complete expression in us because He is the life living in you and I, and He is constantly drawing us near to His presence, compelling us and giving us hope. On the flipside, if you're serving the world and practicing its deeds, evil will be brought to full expression. Serving the world is really just serving yourself, because the world satisfies physical desires and produces things like idolatry, wickedness, and false worship of yourself, thinking you are the most important person in the world.

And now you have the believer, full of the Holy Spirit, completely submitted to God, living in a place of total freedom and love, serving God and not yourself. That believer is not striving or performing; they are resting in the finished work of Christ and moving from a place of overflowing, unwavering worship, not obligation. Let the full expression of the Spirit of God rise up within you, because that is His will for you.

Reflect

Are you living in the full expression of God's love, or are you allowing the world to bring something else to full expression in you?



Proven Love

“Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions .”

1 John 3:18 NLT

To say that you love someone without actually loving them is a dangerous thing, and the reason it’s dangerous is that it reduces love to an emotion. Emotions change and love does not. The danger is found in the deception. You can convince yourself that you truly love someone, while the actions you commit in secret would make you a liar. Words mean nothing without truth behind them. They only mean something when you are actively living them out. If you are not living out the truth, then you are lying, and when you say “I love you” without living it, it becomes nothing more than an illusion.

An illusion to yourself, and to the ones you claim to love. So what does love look like? It is an action fueled by grace, desire, and strength. It defeats the enemy when no one is looking, and it gives glory to God in all situations. It has integrity, honesty, and honor. It turns from temptation, runs to the feet of Jesus, and defeats all evil. One of the best things you can do to ensure you live out this love and this truth is obtaining the ability to obey when it is easy to sin.

Reflect

Does the way you live back up the love you claim, or are your words building an illusion that your actions tear down?



Love Expels Fear

*“Such love has no fear, because **perfect love expels all fear** . If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.”*

1 John 4:18 NLT

Fear cannot exist in the presence of love. But not just any love. This love mentioned in Scripture is describing a personal, perfect, and beautiful love that shines light into every dark corner of fear, guilt, and shame. And if we let this love shine upon us (Numbers 6:25) and allow it to light up every element of doubt, then what will we have to fear? Nothing! So don't let shame from the enemy tell you that you're not cleansed or that you can't be free, because it is by His blood that you are made worthy, having no fear. If you have been truly cleansed by the blood and you have fully experienced His perfect love, then you have nothing to fear.

But if you still in some way have fear, then you need to open your eyes in order to see the love that's so freeing. If you keep your eyes shut, then fear will keep you pessimistic and in a constant state of anxiety, and shame will cover itself with more shame to keep itself a secret. These will slowly but surely destroy you, crushing you underneath the weight of them. Keeping you condemned. But we know that for those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation (Romans 8:1).

Reflect

Am I condemning myself to hell or am I trusting in the finished work of the cross? Do I really believe that what Jesus did for me is sufficient enough to give me life and freedom from sin, death, and condemnation?



Born to Save

*“God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world **so that we might have eternal life through him** .”*

1 John 4:9 NLT

The humility that this verse holds is beyond comprehension. The fact that Jesus was born is even an amazing thing. He took such a humble position while also being God. He was in diapers, potty trained, taught how to talk and eat, learned how to walk. He went through all the normal things you go through when you grow up. God showed us how to live godly, like Him, by sending Himself in the form of flesh to proclaim the Good News to the whole world in such a humble way. While looking at this beautiful picture of humility that is displayed through Jesus, there is also a proclamation that is made, which makes it irrefutably true with no question about who Christ is.

He is God. And because we have eternal life through Him, that could only mean one thing: we wouldn't be able to receive eternal life through only a man. That man, that perfect man, had to have authority from God the Father. Jesus is the Word in flesh, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and God. Three in one.

Reflect

If God was willing to humble Himself to that degree for you, what pride are you still holding onto?



Grace Prevails

*“We know how much God loves us, and we have put our trust in his love. **God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them .**”*

1 John 4:16 NLT

We know that God loves us because of the choice He made: to take up residence within us. Only a loving God would legitimately, from a place of incomprehensible love, want to take up residence in our hearts. The very reason He has decided to live in us hinges on the perfect love that has been displayed through His Son Jesus. And because Christ displayed this love for us, we have the ability to just ask Him to enter in. No steps or special words to get Him to come into your heart. All it takes is confession from your mouth, a desire for Him over your flesh, and a heart humble enough to ask for His forgiveness. His love will flood your entire being, making you more like Him. Once this happens, the evidence of the Holy Spirit will rise up within you. You become different. You don't conform to your old habits anymore, and they actually start to gross you out more than they tempt you.

You begin to have more grace, grace on the person who won't speed up on the freeway, the rude service employee who just needs life spoken into them, not talked about behind their back because you can't believe how they treated you. When you start to see things from a gracious perspective, you begin to understand what true love really is. You start to look at every situation like Jesus and now you're always curious about what He would do over what your flesh is urging you to do. Love is dying to your flesh and your desires no matter what and being alive in Christ, because He is our life. Love is Christ, and Christ's love lives in you because He chose to become like us and live out what being godly is all about.

Reflect

Is Christ's love actually flooding your life, or are you still trying to earn your way into His presence?



Lovely Restoration

“Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.”

1 John 4:7 NLT

We know that when the love of God is evident in our lives, or another person’s life, it looks like this: self-sacrifice, acknowledging others before yourself, being kind even in the face of persecution, telling the truth in love, and acting like Jesus. This is what the power of grace is all about. Grace is the ability, by His power, to live free as Christ has called you to live. Grace comes from His love. His love is planted within you because you were made in His image from the beginning. Jesus came to restore this love so that we could return to a former state of glory, like in the Garden of Eden. In the beginning we were made to share in the likeness of our Creator (Genesis 1:27 and Colossians 3:10).

Christ came to restore this and show us what true Christian living looks like. The love of God is shown in us because we are His children, and this is the gift He gives us: His love. So you must make the most of every opportunity to faithfully express your love to a world that does not understand it. Don’t let fear be your master. Don’t let the pressure of the world and what it says about you affect the way Christ sees you, because you could be the greatest witness to somebody who does not know Christ. Let the world see Christ in you.

Reflect

Could someone look at your life today and see Christ in you, or would they just see you?



Hate the Hate

*“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don’t love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see? And **he has given us this command: Those who love God must also love their fellow believers .**”*

1 John 4:20-21 NLT

If you claim to be a child of God yet you hate a fellow believer, the love of God is not in you. This is because we are made in the image of God. If we cannot see each other the way we ought to, the way that the Lord commands, when we say we “hate” someone, whether they be a believer or not, we are really saying that we hate God. There is no hatred in our Lord, and there is nothing about His creation that is to be hated, but rather that we praise Him through it. Remember, Jesus came in the form of human flesh to dwell among us, to be the perfect example for all of us. So if we hate someone in the flesh, we hate what God has created. This commandment is so much heavier than it appears on paper. Here’s why: just generally being hateful is not a reflection of His character, and you are not walking in His light.

Sometimes we like to justify our hatred as righteous anger, and before you say that your anger is righteous, remember Jesus got angry only a couple of times in His entire life. So before you think your anger is righteous, think again. Don’t create a false representation of what a Christ follower is. We must be careful with what we say we “hate.” In the end, the only thing we should hate is sin. Sin is death. And remember, hating something doesn’t only mean you say that you hate it, it’s the actual action of hatred, which there is no love in. Search your heart and be of a humble mind so that you don’t hold resentment, bitterness, or hatred toward anybody. Be the example that Christ wants you to be. Just love.

Reflect

Is there someone in your life, or even something about yourself, that you are not seeing with God’s eyes, causing you to hate?



Love to Death

“And this is his commandment: We must believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he commanded us.”

1 John 3:23 NLT

The love that has been commanded of us to act out comes from Jesus’s example of perfect, righteous living. This means we have to be willing to die for one another, to lay aside our wants and desires for the benefit of someone, whether they’re your enemy or your family. There shouldn’t be a difference in the way you treat anybody, because Jesus treated everybody according to love. Sacrificial love. And we ought to do the same. How is this love obtainable? You must first believe. A lot of you hearing that might think, “Well, that’s easy, even the demons believe.” Still, it’s not as easy as you think. Demons are aware, but they don’t have belief like the believer does. Belief means that no matter what hits you, or how hard a decision is that you have to make, or what happens to your body, it doesn’t matter compared to the glory that He has waiting for you. Nothing that we are affected by in this life matters in the end, and what matters most is that we act like Christ, like He has commanded us to do, and that we believe He has given us the power to do so.

So when somebody gives you a dirty look, where is your belief? When somebody cuts you off on the road, where is your belief? When a family member says something cutting to you and you cut them off, where is your belief? Is your belief set in the things that you can do to protect yourself, or the things that you can do to benefit yourself, or how you’re going to clap back at that family member because they said something that you didn’t like, or is your belief set in the things of God, holding true to the belief that no matter what happens to you, it has no effect on your identity in Christ? Your identity in Christ means that you are overcoming every form of evil with love, especially when the evil is directed toward you, because that’s when it’s hardest to fight off evil (Romans 12:21). Be His mouthpiece, be the hands and feet of Jesus, and spread His holy name with no shame.

Reflect

Is your identity in Christ bigger than the feelings and emotions that came from Adam and Eve?



Binding Love

“We love each other because he loved us first.”

1 John 4:19 NLT

Our love, which flows from Jesus, binds us together as one family under the authority of Christ. His love in us is supposed to produce a constant outflow of actionable, faithful, pure love, especially for one another as believers. We also know that His love is in us if we have the evidence of love, whether that’s for a fellow believer or in how we react to hardships and frustrations. But if there is no evidence of love to be found in you, then God is not living in you, and you are not part of Christ’s family. “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

You have been “called,” meaning you have the will to either reject the light or walk in freedom, away from sin, shame, and the things of your past. To be part of the royal family of God, pick up the call, answer the door, and lay down your life. He’s right there waiting to hold you, give you strength, and clothe you with grace.

Reflect

Is the evidence of Christ’s love being shown in an undeniable way, or would somebody who isn’t a believer never guess that you are a Christian?



Atonement for All

“He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.”

1 John 2:2 NLT

This verse right here is a beautiful reminder of where our identity is found, and more so, how our identity is found. It is found in Him and in His sacrifice. We must also keep in mind that this sacrifice is out there for those who do not know Him, those who hate Him, and those who won't even say His name. People like that, Jesus died and paid for their sin. We're talking about a person who is literally sending themselves to hell. Why would Jesus make such a great sacrifice for a person like that? Because we are made in His image, and He wants His creation to be reconciled. This is what real, profound love looks like, and it's still your choice to follow it or not. If salvation was an obligation and not a gift, then it wouldn't be worth dying to your flesh for.

And if it was an obligation, it would look something like: “Accept salvation because you suck and you have to,” instead of: “In spite of you sucking, Jesus wants you to live to the fullest and has given you the ability to live and love like Him, but if you don't want to, that's your choice.” If it was an obligation, it would also just look like a set of rules, ceremonies, and discipline that won't last for eternity. Thank God that is not the case, and that when we accept this gift, it will give us life and life abundant. Follow the call of Jesus. He is waiting with open arms.

Reflect

Knowing Jesus died even for those who reject Him, does that change how you see the people who reject you?



Die So Love Can Live

*“This is real love—not that we loved God, but that **he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins** .”*

1 John 4:10 NLT

The washing away of our sin by His act of great love is what makes it possible for us to live free from bondage and love Him like we ought to. Real love was shown through Christ in order for us to have a clear understanding of what life in God is supposed to look like. This real love, which has been shown to us, is the hope and belief of every person who knows Christ as their Lord. We believe in this hope because of the great work that the Lord does in our lives, and not only our lives, but also in the lives of others who love Jesus. Now, since He has done this for us, we can embody the love that was shown on the cross.

The road to salvation that has been built was paid for through His blood. Because He loved us first, our lives should reflect His love in every area once we join the family of God. Let the love that He loved you with first be shown through you to everybody that you meet. Let nobody doubt that you are a child of God. It's crazy to think that the love we get to live out isn't something we obtain through rough and tough work, rather it's a gift given to you, so you no longer have to walk in darkness with hope in a futile love. His love endures forever.

Reflect

Are you for real about showing His love, or is it not something you actually want to express?



Let Love Prove It

*“But anyone who does not love does not know God, **for God is love** .”*

1 John 4:8 NLT

To have true love in your heart is to know the Father's character. When God's love is alive in your heart, it proves just how much you know Him, how much you want to get to know the Lord, and of course how you love others. To have no love in your heart means that you do not know Him, because God's love proves who God is to you through knowledge that overflows because of the love He put in your heart. Unfortunately, for some, no matter how much they know about God, their actions don't always align with what they know. Whereas someone who maybe doesn't know Bible verses by heart can actually prove themselves to be more righteous than someone who values knowledge over virtue. Loving God, and knowing God and Scripture, go hand in hand. Knowledge is the proof of love, and love should also prove how much you know the Father and how much you want to know about Him.

Both love and knowledge should be able to testify about the other. Knowledge should never be without love, because that would only mean you understand the Scriptures but don't actually apply them, or in another case, you're still stuck in sin. Love, on the other hand, will naturally produce knowledge that is beneficial for you, because you have first obtained love. And you cannot merely have love with no knowledge, because knowledge is the evidence of love. You can say, “I love God,” but do you know God? Does your knowledge about God prove how much you love Him, or does it make you prideful because you “know so much”? Love and knowledge must both be equally alive and present in the heart of the believer.

Reflect

Have you let your knowledge about God cause you to perceive yourself as better than others because you know so much, or have you let love be the driving factor within the knowledge He has granted you?



Abundant Sacrifice

*“If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion— **how can God’s love be in that person?** ”*

1 John 3:17 NLT

Your natural instinct as a believer, being full of His love, should always be to respond with compassion to someone in genuine need. If your first instinct isn’t compassion, knowing in your heart that you are capable of providing help but you choose not to, then it might be time for a heart check. Take a look at the widow’s offering in Mark 12. This woman’s offering, at first glance, seems pretty much meaningless, she gave only two mites. But this was all she had, yet she gave it all. When you give, don’t look at it as something merely material, even though that’s what it may look like on the surface. Giving is a sacrificial act through what you give materially, because you should be giving out of gratefulness for what God has already given you. Material possessions and money are worthless and garbage when compared to the glory of Christ (Philippians 3:8). This is why we shouldn’t think twice when someone is in need, it doesn’t belong to you in the first place.

He gave you everything you have. This proves that giving with the intention of making an actual impact on somebody, regardless of how it affects you financially, blesses far more than just giving the minimum amount of what you are capable of giving. And this is the point, it’s not about you and what you’re capable of giving or what makes financial sense to you. What matters most is the effect it has on the kingdom of God. If you give all that you have, how can you expect that He won’t bless you in that effort? If your heart wants to give to someone, and it comes from a place of compassion and a genuine desire to care for that person, it glorifies God. Remember, He gave His life so that we could have life abundantly. Share this abundance that He gifted to you through His Son, Jesus Christ, whether that’s your money, your time, or your expertise, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflect

Are you worried that you’ll be left hanging on the edge of a cliff if you give sacrificially, or do you trust that if you share His abundance, it will actually fulfill you?



Love Completes Everything

“Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other .”

1 John 4:11 NLT

Not only are we commanded to love one another because His love is so great and amazing for us, but because His love for you and for me is the pure motivation to love others, and it's always perfect and personal. It's not only a command that we must fall in line with, it's also an opportunity to know the Creator by walking in love. We continue to learn more about God as we are compelled to live like Him. Submit to this love that calls you to itself every day, with open arms ready to sanctify, laying down your own inconveniences, fleshly urges, and expunging every little bit of sin.

If you want this love to motivate you to be like Him, then you must be close to Him every single day, and you must have unwavering desire, hope, and strength. God sent His only Son so that we could have a perfect representation of Christian living. God gave up His Son, the sin of the world was placed upon His shoulders, and He died a criminal's death so that you and I could have a complete life. That is the love that we are commanded to live out in our everyday lives. Jesus is the very reason you're able to live differently, holy.

Reflect

Are you running to the love that calls you to itself with open arms, or are you keeping it at arm's length?



Loving Correction

“We always pray for you, and we constantly thank God for you, for we hear that your faith in Christ Jesus is strong and that you love all of God's people.”

Colossians 1:3 NLT

An important thing to notice about Paul is that before he even thinks of opening with correction, he assures the people of Colosse, informing them of the prayers for their people, and gives thanks to God the Father for them. He builds them up with the truth of who they are by telling them what they bring to the table. In the same way, when we see another believer fall into sin, or go back to sin in a habitual manner, whatever the case may be, the goal is to always meet them with love and build them up before you correct them. Doing this shows them that you see their worth so that they don't feel like they aren't worth anything. For example, if you tell a fellow believer they have anger issues before reminding them of who they are in Christ, what's the reaction going to be? Defensiveness. Shame. Shutting down. They hear “you're the problem” instead of “you're not who this anger says you are.” Lead with identity first, and the correction stops feeling like an attack; it becomes an invitation to walk in what's already true instead of a weapon to take them out.

This is what makes correction so effective when it's needed. A person who is far from the Lord is more likely to receive correction when you first remind them of what's true about Christ's work in their life. Paul isn't just praying for them to have knowledge. He's praying that their knowledge of Christ would prove itself in a life built on the finished work of Christ. A lot of the times the reason someone needs correction in their life is because they've lost sight of the value that Christ gave them when they became saved. This is why affirmation of their identity in Christ before correction of an evil behavior is so vital. Edify them by spurring them on, inviting them to a Bible study, speaking scripture over their life, simple things but centered around Jesus. You can be the bridge between somebody coming back to Christ with a fire burning brighter than ever, or you can be responsible for the reason they will never come back. While correction feels good, it feels like you're doing justice; think again, because you are representing a Holy God. Be careful. Be vigilant. Be watchful. Be loving. Be courageous. Be gracious.

Reflect

Before you address someone's sin, are you reminding them first of who they are in Christ, or just pointing out what's wrong?



Giving Thanks

*“For we have heard of **your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people** , which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.”*

Colossians 1:4-5 NLT

We now have the why for Paul's gratitude for the city of Colosse. The reasoning behind why you are thankful for a group of people or an individual matters more than you think. It must come from somewhere and it needs to have meaning. In this particular verse, Paul's reasoning stems from the Colossians' faith in Christ and their love for all of God's people, those who put their trust in Jesus. Their love and faith have the ability, because of the power of Jesus Christ, to influence those around them. This is where Paul's gratitude stems from: who they are in Christ. Their faith and love are sourced from something bigger than themselves: what God has already reserved for those who trust in Jesus. That's the hope they're standing on, the expectation of a reward waiting for them in heaven.

The importance of having grounded reasoning is for the purpose of bringing about humility and real gratitude into your heart because of someone else's example. Real gratitude doesn't just look like words or stating the obvious, for example “I'm so grateful for my Christian friend.” Why are you grateful in the first place? Are you just saying it just so that it's said? Real gratitude is brought about because you are touched in such a way that you are legitimately moved into a state of gratitude and humility. This state of being allows you to see things that you otherwise wouldn't have seen before. For example: it can cause you to check your heart for impurities, become more passionate for learning about Christ and actually become more like Him, and teach you to love others more like Jesus.

Reflect

Are you just saying you're grateful so that it's said, or has someone's walk with Christ actually humbled you?



Christlike Witnesses

*“You learned about the Good News from Epaphras, our beloved co-worker. He is Christ's faithful servant, and he is helping us on your behalf. He has told us about **the love for others that the Holy Spirit has given you** .”*

Colossians 1:7-8 NLT

Here we are shown another great example of gratitude and edification for others, which is shared between Paul and Epaphras. Epaphras shares with Paul the great love that the Colossians have through the power of the Holy Spirit. He doesn't tell Paul all the shortcomings of the Colossians first, he doesn't gossip, he doesn't slander, and he doesn't prop himself up to make himself seem more important to Paul. There is such great value found in someone who can give you accurate details about other holy people, without destroying their reputation but at the same time still bringing about correction through love. This shows not only restraint but a submission to the virtue of patience (James 1:4). Notice how Paul addresses things. First he meets and greets them with love, and only after he has done so does he shift into correction. A correction backed by the love of Jesus.

He had plenty of ammunition to call them out and pretty much destroy them, but he led with love first. Jesus does the same thing with the churches of Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira in Revelation 2. Each one gets real, specific praise before Jesus ever brings the rebuke. Paul imitates Christ even in how he addresses and greets whoever he's writing to in his letters. We must have this same kind of imitation as Paul commands in 1 Corinthians 11:1. We should have the same attitude towards other fellow believers in our life who fall short. It might feel good to only correct them thinking that you're doing it out of love because you are “telling them the truth.” Is that really always the case? Think about it. What does your heart posture look like in those moments? Are you calling them out just to prove a point or some theological stance? The worst case scenario: you have a posture of anger that you deem righteous. You are trying to bring about justice that only God can provide. If the correction and judgment you are bringing aren't backed by love, then your flesh is what's really at work, and you are weaponizing Scripture for the benefit of being right instead of bringing them out of the darkness.

Reflect

Is correction with the goal of being correct your motivator, or does the love of Christ, which brings people out of the darkness, motivate you?



The Advocate

*“I want you to know how much I have agonized for you and for the church at Laodicea, and for many other believers who have never met me personally. I want them to be encouraged and **knit together by strong ties of love** . I want them to have complete confidence that they understand God's mysterious plan, which is Christ himself.”*

Colossians 2:1-2 NLT

The striking thing to notice in this passage about Paul is that he agonized not only for the church at Laodicea, but also for others he had never even met. Why? Because he understood the body of Christ as one. As long as Paul was doing something because the Lord told him to, it did not matter to him. It didn't matter to him whether he was suffering for someone he knew personally or a stranger entirely. This is one thing that we can lose sight of, because we think “what's in it for me?” The thing that mattered to Paul was the kingdom. Paul took joy in the process of struggle. This is a wonderful display of love that continues to echo across generations. We can never lose sight of this kind of love. Self-sacrificial love. Culture will try to get you to lose sight of it, whether that be through setting up a ton of personal boundaries or prioritizing ourselves first, when we are actually called to esteem others above ourselves and put their needs before our own. Jesus is the one who cares for you entirely, completely, and perfectly. You don't need anybody, any methods of psychology, or anything else to tell you who you are. Christ should be everything that you are, so you don't have to rely on anything that culture says you must be. Don't be the shoe that fits in a culture that is subject to evil.

The world has its own definition of normal and moral, and it will hand it to you whether you ask for it or not. But the choice is yours. Choose the world and you will be separated from Him. Culture says look out for yourself, protect yourself, make sure you come first. What did Jesus say? What did Jesus do? Certainly none of that. What example did He leave behind? His life. His ministry. His cross. As He was being nailed to the cross, He asked the Father to forgive the very people crucifying Him. In spite of being crucified, He did not complain, threaten, or defend Himself. Imagine if Jesus had simply given up and told everyone He'd had enough. Imagine if He'd fought to prove Himself right in front of those calling for His death. Imagine if He'd reminded them of every good thing He'd done and demanded the same in return. Jesus didn't have to do any of that. He endured because it was the Father's will. He endured because He loves us so much and wants everyone to be brought back to a former glory. Despite society, we can look back at what Jesus did and be encouraged by His love. Paul understood this, and his mission was to echo Christ. He understood the purpose behind every struggle, and he never identified with the struggle itself. This is because Jesus was his identity. Paul had everything he needed. Jesus. We too have absolutely everything we need in Jesus as long as we live in Him.

Reflect

If Jesus never had to defend Himself, prove He was right, or demand fair treatment, what does it say about your own need for those things?