

Robert Chapman: Apostle of Love by Robert L. Peterson, Lewis & Roth Publishers, Colorado Springs, CO: 1995. (47 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

1. Loving One Another as Christ Loved.

The word *love*, which so clings to any account of Chapman's life, refers to an attitude of caring, giving of himself that marked his long life. He understood the concept of Christian love as few others have. His life illustrated Christ's new commandment that we "love one another, even as I have loved you" (John 13:34, nasb); it was the very heartbeat of true Christianity. [pages 13-14]

2. A Giant in the Knowledge of God.

Robert Chapman became one of the most respected Christians of nineteenth-century Britain. He was a lifelong friend and mentor to George Müller, the founder of the large orphanage system at Bristol. He was an advisor to J. Hudson Taylor, who used him as a referee for China Inland Mission. His acquaintance C.H. Spurgeon called him "the saintliest man I ever knew." An Anglican clergyman wrote after a stay at Chapman's rest home, "For the first time I heard Robert Chapman expound the Scriptures. Deep called to deep as he warmed to his subject. The impression made on my mind is almost all that I can remember, as I took no notes; but as his Bible closed I felt like an infant in the knowledge of God, compared with a giant like this." [page 14]

3. Determined to *Live* Christ.

Robert Chapman was not a noted orator, but he became a good preacher; he was not known as a theologian, but he was a thorough student of the Bible; he was not famous as a hymn writer, but many of his hymns are still sung. What then made Chapman so beloved and effective in his time? Quite simply, his utter devotion to Christ and his determination to *live* Christ. These were the driving forces in his life. From these flowed his other attributes, his balanced outlook, and most of all the love for which he was best known. In return, people loved him and God honored him with good health, a long life, and inward peace. [page 15]

4. Communion Remembrance Meetings.

Chapman began attending the weekly communion service at John Street Chapel on Sunday evenings. Not many members of the congregation did this; most preferred to attend the more formal monthly communion service held on a Sunday morning. Little is known of how Harington Evans conducted this evening service; we do not know who served the elements and whether the meeting was open to any believer who wished to contribute in prayer or a brief word. But if Chapman's subsequent style for these remembrance meetings is a reflection of Evans'—and it probably was—the meeting must have encouraged open participation. Chapman loved this time in which people worshiped God from their hearts. It was a time of prayer, worship, and remembrance of Christ's work at Calvary—a type of meeting different from preaching and teaching services. When Chapman established his own ministry a few years later, he always stressed the importance of this type of meeting for all believers. [page 28]

5. The Natural Gift of Chapman's Voice.

After hearing his first sermons some of Chapman's friends offered the opinion that he would never be a good preacher. This undoubtedly caused him a lot of anguish, and his reply was telling: "There are many who preach Christ, but not so many live Christ. My great aim will be to *live* Christ." This became his goal: to love Christ, to love and care for the poor, and to carry God's message of salvation. Chapman gradually developed his own style of preaching with Evans' help and was later recognized later as a good preacher. He had one quite remarkable natural gift: his voice. It was deep and resonant, and throughout his life many people remarked on it. Through the years he learned to use it with great effect in public reading as well as preaching. [page 29]

6. A Retreat Home with the Gift of Encouragement.

Chapman had chosen his course before he came [to Barnstaple]. His goals extended far beyond pastoring Ebenezer Chapel. He had already decided to make the entire town his parish. The pockets of poverty reminded him of the London slums and his heart went out to their residents. But had yet another goal. In London he had seen and heard about many missionaries and

preachers who had become weary and discouraged from overwork, yet had no place to flee to for rest and temporary relief from their responsibilities. Chapman wanted to make his home a resting place for such missionaries and other servants of the Lord. Like Barnabas of the New Testament, Chapman had the gift of encouragement. If he could pray with these workers, talk to them, listen to them, and provide them with a retreat, perhaps they could return to their tasks with renewed enthusiasm. [page 45]

7. His Way of Life Was to Imitate Christ.

It may be difficult for many of us to identify with Chapman. A man of culture and high intelligence from a family of wealth and influence, he now poured himself into the hearts and souls of poor and ignorant people. Having built a successful career and developed stimulating friendships, and being accustomed to the comforts of life, he now ate food and shared the discomforts of the poverty-stricken. Even some of his colleagues in the work felt he had gone to the unnecessary, even senseless, extremes. But the imitation of Christ was Chapman's chosen way of life. [page 48]

8. Communion.

Chapman changed both the style and frequency of the communion service at Ebenezer. He felt it desirable to celebrate the Lord's Supper, as communion was usually called, each Sunday in the manner he had learned at John Street Chapel. He wanted the observance to be not a solemn ritual, but a worship service in which all members of the church could openly participate as they felt led by the Holy Spirit. Someone would suggest singing a hymn; one of the men might speak briefly on a portion of Scripture; then perhaps the congregation would sing another hymn; another man would pray; and so forth as people felt led. The bread and cup would then be taken, passed hand to hand. Chapman or another recognized teacher who might be present would then teach from the Scriptures. This would be a single service, lasting perhaps two hours. Chapman never asserted that a definite pattern for the Lord's Supper was decreed in Scripture. He did, however, insist that the service be focused on the cross and that it should not be considered a rite that provided saving grace to the participants. [page 51-52]

9. The First Missionary Trip.

In 1838 Chapman made plans to return to Spain. Pick and Hancock would go with him. This was the time during which the flock Chapman was shepherding lacked its own building, but he felt confident enough in the leadership present in the congregation to leave for a few months. Knowing that any public preaching in Spain would be severely limited and perhaps impossible, he planned to walk throughout the country, talking to individuals about Christ and giving them Bibles. He would carry just his backpack containing some clothes and smuggled Bibles.

There is an interesting dilemma here. Chapman decided to break the law of the land and he seemed to have had no misgivings about it. When man's law violates God's law, he believed that God's law must prevail. Chapman was also quite aware of the response of Peter and other apostles in a similar situation recorded in Acts 5:27-29. [page 67]

10. Be a Student of the Bible, Immerse in It, Be the Center of One's Life.

Chapman did the majority of the preaching for the Assembly until his last decade of life. His own technique for preparing a sermon was to make copious notes during his daily meditations. These would fix in his mind what he would say, but he seems not to have used any notes when preaching. He insisted that any teacher or preacher be first of all a student of the Bible; he must be consistently immersed in it and keep it at the center of his life. No one was allowed to develop ideas in isolation from the Assembly, although much latitude was allowed. When someone preached in a way that was not particularly helpful, Chapman or another elder would speak to the person. [page 75]

11. Loving to Sing.

In addition to the emphasis on Biblical preaching and weekly observance of the Lord's supper, the Christians at Bear Street Chapel also loved to sing. They had no piano and the hymnal they used provided no musical accompaniment—not uncommon at the time. Chapman and others among the Brethren wrote many of the hymns sung at Bear Street Chapel. Most of

these composers simply wrote the words and fit them to existing tunes, so a melody often had to serve many different hymns. The Assembly decided to have midweek singing practice for those who loved to sing and could take the lead on Sundays. The practice was usually held at Chapman's home.

[pages 76-77]

12. Bear Street Chapel Was a Complete Church.

Thus the Assembly at Bear Street Chapel began a long tradition of social work. The Assembly was a complete church. Demonstrating a New Testament spirit of love and vitality, it had good preaching from the Bible, a separate time for worship and remembrance, active involvement by members who loved each other, a large Sunday School, evangelistic concern for the people of the community, and a concern for the material needs of the poor. It was a church alive. [page 79]

13. God Arranged Things for Each Day.

Chapman frequently told people that he had many trials of faith but that trials are sent to strengthen faith. His retreat for the Lord's servants was one arena in which his faith was tested. Often his guests or their friends sent money or provisions to Chapman. Sometimes, however, provisions ran low and there was no money to buy supplies. Anxious when he first started his hospitality ministry, Chapman came to understand that God was arranging things for each day. When the funds ran out, he would pray about it and soon there would be money for food. Child-like dependence on God became a habit and he tried to convey to his friends that this was the natural attitude of a child of God. [page 81]

14. Washing One Another's Feet [Shoes/Boots].

One of Chapman's customs was to clean the shoes or boots of his visitors. After showing arriving guests to their rooms, he would instruct them to leave their footwear outside their door so that he could clean them by the next morning. Typically they objected to his doing such a menial task, but he was quite insistent. One guest recorded Chapman's answer to his objections: "It is not the custom in our day to wash one another's feet; that which most

nearly corresponds to this command of the Lord is to clean each other's boots." [page 82]

15. Christian Unity Struggles.

A divergence of views on Christian unity had developed among the Assemblies. By then J. N. Darby, who believed the church age was at an end, was promoting the view that Christians should separate themselves from all existing churches and their organizations. He also argued that the Assemblies should be strongly interconnected. These were not Chapman's views, nor those of Groves, Müller, Craik, or many other leaders in the new movement, but Darby—a constant traveler among the Assemblies and a prolific pamphleteer—was quite successful in spreading his beliefs. At the end of 1845 a troubling event occurred. Darby, following a conflict with B.W. Newton, set up a rival assembly in Plymouth, a move that brought the question of unity into sharp focus. Chapman attempted to mediate with Darby, but to no avail. The strife and confusion in Plymouth increased and at the end of 1847 Newton left the city under a cloud. Of all the prominent figures among the Brethren, Darby was the best known and most influential in Ireland. [page 92]

16. Lifestyle of Poverty Covenant between God and Chapman.

Although he [Chapman] had given away his fortune and had no fixed income, Chapman did not believe that all God's children must do the same. Chapman's chosen lifestyle of poverty was a covenant between himself and God. He did not press it upon his friends. [page 99]

17. Nonessential Issues Did Not Create Division.

"[We] daily contributed each to the other's treasure of grace and truth. In regard to the Scriptures that have been fulfilled, our unity of judgment was blessedly complete; as to what is yet to be fulfilled, we attained to an excellent measure of unity ... We always waited on God together for His mind ... If judgment did not agree, we waited on God to give us oneness of mind, and neither of us ever took a step against the judgment of the other—hence no strife, no bitterness!"

This latter statement refers to the fact that Chapman and Hake did not agree on the interpretation of some prophecies. Chapman, for example, had taken the post-tribulational position for the rapture of the church, a position at variance with most of his friends. Although nonessential issues such as this frequently cause enmity between Christian friends, neither Chapman and Hake permitted them to cause unhappiness between them. Their Christlike love overrode all disagreements. [page 134]

18. Loved Proverbs.

Chapman used proverbs in his teaching, not only because he personally enjoyed doing it, but also because he knew, as Jesus knew, that pithy saying are easier to remember than straight prose. [page 138]

19. “Satisfied and Full.”

When someone asked Chapman how he was feeling, or if at the end of a meal someone asked if he had had enough to eat, one of his favorite replies was simply “Satisfied and full.” If the inquirer didn’t know what was coming next, he soon learned, for Chapman would merrily add, “satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord” (Deuteronomy 33:23). [page 140]

20. Provoked to Love and Good Works.

John Knox McEwen, a pioneering evangelist in Nova Scotia, related the following story. Chapman and Hake had invited him to come to their home of rest. On the first day of his visit, McEwen was talking with Chapman while Hake was absent. During a pause in the conversation Chapman said, “Mr. Hake is a very provoking brother. He has been provoking me all morning.” McEwen was quite startled to hear this remark coming from man whose kindness was well known. But his surprise did not last long, for Chapman continued, “Mr. Hake has been provoking me all morning to love and good works” (see Hebrews 10:24). [page 140]

21. Bible Passage Memorization.

In order to urge acquaintances to memorize Bible verses so they would be readily accessible for meditation or use in conversation, Chapman often quoted the first part of the verse and waited for the one addressed to complete it. This approach could be quite threatening to a person unable to

give the answer, but Chapman seems always to have done this with such sensitivity that people were not offended. A guest who stayed at Chapman's house when Chapman was ninety-eight years old heard the following exchange with another visitor: "Let patience have her _____." The answer was given after some hesitation, so Chapman repeated it with emphasis: "...perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing." Then he added a few words to help fix James 1:4 in mind. This visitor later said, "I used to think, as I sat listening, that I would much rather hearken to Mr. Robert Chapman expounding God's Word than the most gifted Hebrew and Greek Doctor of Divinity that could be found." [pages 140-141]

22. The Bible Has All the News Necessary.

The mature Chapman's preferred reading was in the Bible. He did not occupy himself with much with daily newspapers. One day a newsboy asked him to buy a newspaper. Chapman asked, "Does it give yesterday's news?"

Oh no, sir!" the boy replied.

"Has it today's news?"

"Yes sir!"

"And has it tomorrow's news?" Chapman held up his bible to the surprised boy and said, "This book gives me the news of yesterday, today, and tomorrow as well!"

Someone once asked Chapman if he had read a certain new book. Chapman laid his hand on his Bible and lovingly replied, "I have not finished this yet." [page 142]

23. The Lord Always Before Him.

Chapman knew that one who is called to give himself entirely to the Lord's work holds a special place of responsibility. This is how he put it:

The servant of the Lord Jesus must be instant in season and out of season, knowing that he is the Lord's messenger to everyone with whom he has to do, and ever learning of the Lord; seeing that he is to be continually ministering to others, he must be receiving fresh supplies from the God of all grace through all channels. Meditation on

the Word and prayer should occupy the chief part of his time. In his public ministry and in his private conversation he should aim at hearts and consciences, seeking in every way to magnify Christ and abase the creature. In short, he should set the Lord always before him, and so walk in His steps as to represent Him to every eye. [page 145]

24. Intercessory Prayer.

He [Chapman] regarded intercessory prayer as a special ministry. he said, “It is well for a child of God to pray for himself, but a more excellent thing to pray for others.” His list of those to pray for was practically endless; he would pray for them by name. [pages 148-149]

25. The Training of Children.

Although he had no children of his own, Chapman was very conscious of children and as concerned for them as for anyone. “Ask not merely for their conversion,” he would advise parents, “but that they may be well-pleasing children of God and servants of Christ.” In one of his last sermons, which was directed toward the training of children by their parents, he said, “there are so many people who are satisfied with just knowing they are saved. Tell them not to be satisfied with this. I want them to study the Word, and grow in the knowledge of God. Tell them I want them to become intimate with the Lord Jesus Christ.” [page 149]

26. Starting and Ending on Time.

Being sensitive to other people’s need is not always easy, but Chapman was sensitive and thoughtful. An example of his thoughtfulness was his habit of beginning and ending meetings on time; he knew that many in attendance were servants who were expected to be back at a certain hour. [page 151]

27. Determined to *Live* Christ.

Thus the years passed for Robert Chapman—years of giving, years of peace, years of love. Some Christian leaders gain fame as orators, evangelists, organizers, or theologians. But few achieve lasting fame as apostles of love. This is what Chapman achieved because of his determination to *live* Christ. [page 155]

28. Charles Haddon Spurgeon's Opinion.

Spurgeon called Chapman the saintliest man he ever knew, and greatly valued Chapman's book *Choice Sayings*. [page 158]

29. Denham Smith's Opinion.

Denham Smith, a well-known evangelist, also became a good friend of Chapman. Smith's work centered around Dublin after the religious revival that swept the British Isles in 1859. Smith once told Chapman that someone should write his biography. Chapman replied, "It is being written and will be published in the morning." Expressing his views on biographies on another occasion, Chapman said, "If you want the perfect model biography, you may find it in Genesis 5:21-24 and Hebrews 11:5." Who was this perfect model? Enoch, who walked with God. [page 161]

30. Chapman's Marvelous Voice.

Wright especially remembered Chapman's marvelous voice and how his simple delivery and inflection of voice rendered a great sympathy for the gospel message. He recalled someone saying, "To hear Mr. Chapman only read a psalm is as good as a sermon." Wright continued:

Doubtless the flexibility and skillful inflections of his voice had something to do with it; still more, his unusual grasp of deeper meanings of Holy Scripture. But ... I believe the true explanation is to be found in the intense reverence for and love of the God-breathed words ... One result of his listening so intently to the voice of God was that Mr. Chapman excelled in the habit of speaking to God in prayer. [page 162]

31. Training from God's Word.

Chapman received no formal theological training, but that was not unusual in his day. Many clergymen of the Church of England received almost none. He had learned at the feet of Harington Evans and must have studied many writings of the great reformers. Although he developed much of his Scriptural understanding during interaction with his friends, Chapman's theology was Bible-derived. [page 165]

32. Objected to Philosophy of Higher Criticism.

Although Chapman is remembered for his gentle and forgiving spirit, he occasionally used biting wit to emphasize specific points, such as his objection to higher criticism. About 1860 higher criticism of the Bible was attracting adherents in Britain, and C.H. Spurgeon had run into much opposition when he preached strongly against it. (Higher criticism is the philosophy that starts from the following assumptions: the Bible is not the inspired Word of God, but a collection of stories designed to illustrate certain truths; many Biblical characters never existed; and many events described in the Bible never happened.) [page 166]

33. The Bible Being the Focus of One's Reading.

Chapman did not trust anyone else's writings until they proved their consistency with the Bible. His admonitions to people to make the Bible their focus of reading probably reflected this aspect of his personality. There is also a very human tendency, even in Christian circles, to dwell on and argue over people's writings, sometimes to the near exclusion of reading God's Word. Doubtlessly this is the primary reason why Chapman published very little. [page 167]

34. Life in Christ Is the Common Bond for Christians.

To Chapman, a proper appreciation of the Christian life began at the cross of Christ, and contemplation of it was important to a proper walk before God. That is why he so appreciated a weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. His concept of the unity of the church meant that believers of all persuasions, provided they do not imbibe essential doctrinal error, comprised the true church and hence free to cross denominational lines in seeking fellowship and worship. He believed that *life* in Christ, not the degree of understanding of Scripture—as important as that is—is the common bond in Christ. [pages 168-169]

35. Chapman's View of the Rapture.

Chapman, together with George Müller and a small number of other leaders among the Brethren, did not believe that the Scriptures told of a secret rapture of all believers before a period of great tribulation on earth. They

believed that the church as a whole must go through the period of tribulation. William Hake did not agree with Chapman's views and once told Chapman of a conversation he had with someone who was assured that the Lord might come (initiating the rapture) at any moment. Chapman replied, "Well, brother Hake, I am ready, but it's not in the Bible. [page 171]"

36. His Last Years Were the Best.

During his last decade Chapman often said that those were the best days of his life. He often prayed that his last years might be best and God answered His servant's prayer. Chapman reminded his friends that "the present times are the best for all of us; since our lot is cast in them, there is abundant grace to enable us to fully please God." He determined not to become a crotchety old man who looked back at opportunities lost or what might have been. There was still abundant grace for living and pleasing God, and Chapman sought to serve the Lord as long as he was physically able. [page 177]

37. Live Long for Christ's Service.

J. Norman Case said that when he visited Chapman in June of 1900, Chapman told him that during the first years of his Christian life he had become convinced that God was going to spare him to an old age—for His service. Chapman thus resolved that when he was old, he would not be prevented from spiritual service because of bodily infirmity. This explains why Chapman was so diligent throughout his life to take early morning walks and baths. [page 179]

38. Cold Bath, Scriptures, Walk, Rest, then Callers.

He rises usually about 3 a.m., takes a cold bath, and spends the rest of his time till 6:30 in reading the scriptures and intercessory prayer, then taking a morning walk in company with Mr. Pearce (his true helper) and any of his friends who were disposed to go for about twenty minutes ... After the [noon] meal he rests until 2:30 p.m. usually, being then open to receive callers, either from outside or friends staying in the house, who seek his counsel and advice on various matters. He partakes of tea at 6 p.m., and retires generally a little after 8 p.m. [page 180]

39. Chapman's and Saunders' Tuesday and Friday Meetings.

The subject for study on Tuesday is generally left for anyone to suggest, while Friday evening is spent in reviewing the subject taken for the [Thursday] District Meeting. In this meeting Mr. Chapman is seen in best form, his faculties being especially active, and his interest so keen and so well maintained throughout. The meeting is opened by singing a hymn, then usually Mr. Chapman leads in prayer. Mr. Saunders then reads the portion of Scripture to be studied, following with a brief exposition of the whole. Then Mr. Chapman and he will together enlarge on the subject; following this, the meeting becomes somewhat conversational. [page 180-181]

40. I Have No Will but His.

On the day before he died he dictated to Mr. Pearce a statement to be read at the annual fellowship meeting at Barnstaple: "I bow to the sovereignty of God my heavenly Father; I have no will but His. We know that God is love, and if, with the love which there is no measure, there be conjoined wisdom which makes no mistakes, what becomes us, His children, but to be full of thankfulness. We have the whole heart of Christ; it is all ours.

On June 12, 1902, Robert Cleaver Chapman, God's servant, went to his rest. [page 182-183]

41. Being a Servant-leader.

Chapman said that the man of God is one who makes it the business of his life to please God. This definition fits Chapman well. Pleasing God and living Christ were his objectives. Striving toward those goals enabled him to become a true leader—that is to say, a servant-leader. His long life of service and concern for others testify to his Christlike character. He was indeed an apostle of love. [page 187]

42. The Lord Will Provide.

Chapman did not expect others to copy his particular lifestyle of dependence on God's provision for his material needs, but he did want Christians to live out the faith granted them and believe that dependence on God's help should not be unusual. He took to heart the promise, "The Lord will

provide” (Genesis 22:14, nasb), and the Lord did provide for him and his work. [page 189]

43. Not Necessary to Please Everyone.

Chapman’s great love of Christ was reflected in his actions and attitudes toward people. He had a great concern for their material as well as spiritual welfare and was able to love and care for people when they were unlovable. He realized, however, that Christlike love does not mean that it is necessary to *please* everyone. He once said, “My chief desire is to please Him. If I please my brethren, I am glad. If I fail, I am not disappointed. [page 189]

44. God Gave Chapman Godly Wisdom.

God used this yielded man to shepherd His flock, to teach believers and unbelievers, to heal wounds, and to restore and refresh His workers. God gave him godly wisdom and the ability to deal wisely with men. One selection from *Choice Sayings* reads, “If love sees a fault, love will reprove in faithfulness the fault it sees. I say sees, for love is discerning.” He defines love this way: The love we speak of is meek and lowly; behaves itself wisely and edifies; bearing with the foolish and self-conceited, while it shuns their folly. [page 189]

45. Had Wise Counsel.

He was so unbiased that people had great confidence in his wise counsel, which kept many families and churches together. His wisdom and intercession in prayer was part of the spiritual strength of the Müller orphanages in Bristol and the China Inland Mission of Hudson Taylor. [page 189]

46. Home Address: University of Love.

Robert Chapman became famous for his exceptional love, grace, and truth. He became so well known in England that a letter from abroad was delivered correctly to him, addressed only to “R.C. Chapman, University of Love, England.” He became famous as an apostle of love. [page 190]

47. Love Touched All His Actions.

This servant of God was sound in doctrine and right in attitude. Love touched all his actions and this love sprang from his devotion to Christ. God has, in Robert Chapman, given us an example of a man who lived out the Christian life. [page 190]