

***Love or Die: Christ's Wake-up Call to the Church*** by Alexander Strauch, Lewis & Roth Publishers, Littleton, CO, 2015. (41 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols.)

### **1. The Church Is a Family.**

The church is to be a family of brothers and sisters characterized by humility, gentleness, peace, forgiveness, forbearance, faith, hope, and love, with love being supreme, overarching virtue. “And above all these,” writes Paul, “put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). [page 1]

### **2. Showing Love in Mindful Actions.**

First Corinthians 13, in particular, ...[is] about the fact that there is a “more excellent way” of thinking and behaving, and that the greatest theological knowledge, the most extraordinary spiritual gifts, and the most sacrificial services are profitless—even hurtful—if not motivated and colored by the spirit of Christlike love. [page 1]

### **3. Loving God and His People.**

According to our Lord, love for God and neighbor are inseparable companions (Mark 12: 29-31; Luke 10:27). It is impossible to love God and not love his people or to love his people and not love God (1 John 4:7-5:3). [page 9]

### **4. The Universal Church's One Quality – Love.**

Every local church has its own personality, identity, distinctives, gifts, and atmosphere. These differences can be observed in the various churches of the New Testament (Acts 17:11). The one quality, however, that should beautify every believer and church, regardless of giftedness or personality, is love. Thus the thing that should be of utmost concern to every believer and every church is this: Does a Christlike spirit of love permeate the atmosphere of our church? [page 11]

### **5. Loss of the First Love.**

D.A. Carson, professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, wrote an article on Revelation 2:4 titled *A Church that Does All the Right Things, But ...*

Describing this kind of church, Carson writes:

They still proclaim the truth, but no longer passionately love him who is the truth. They still perform good deeds, but no longer out of love, brotherhood, and compassion. They preserve the truth and witness courageously, but forget that love is the greatest witness to truth. It is not so much that their genuine virtues have squeezed love out, but that no amount of good works, wisdom, and discernment in matters of church disciple, patient endurance in hardship, hatred of sin, or disciplined doctrine, can ever make up for lovelessness. [pages 11-12].

## **6. No Other Religion Asks for Love.**

No political figure, from Julius Caesar to Winston Churchill, has made such demands upon his followers to love. And no religious teacher, whether Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed, ever commanded his followers to love another as he loved them and gave his life for them. No other system of theology or philosophy says so much about the divine motivation of love (and holiness), or expresses love to the degree Christ's death on the cross, or makes demands of love like the teaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles. [page 15]

## **7. Loving One Another in God's Family.**

John's magisterial proclamation that "God is love" actually supports his main appeal to love one another: "Love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). So not to love one another in the family of God is an egregious sin. [page 16]

## **8. Vitality Is Measured by Wealth of Love.**

French pastor and expositor Gaston Deluz summarizes 1 Corinthians 13 in this way: "The vitality of a church, then, is measured by the wealth of its love, not by the fanaticism of its members, the subtlety of its theology or the prosperity of its finances. But it is true that love may increase the zeal of the parishoners, inspire the theologians and improve the finances of the Church" (Gaston Deluz, *A Companion to 1 Corinthians* [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1963], 188). [page 17]

## **9. Caring for Others within the Body of Christ.**

So, we must ask, when people visit your church, do they find a warm, friendly, and welcoming atmosphere that demonstrates love for all people? Do they sense Christlike compassion and the kind of loving family community envisioned by the New Testament writers? Do they see genuine care for one another's needs, Christian hospitality, and unselfish generosity? Do they observe joy in the Lord, spiritual vitality, and people reaching out to minister to a suffering world?

Or does your church seem more like an impersonal gathering of people than a spiritual family? Do visitors sense unfriendliness and indifference? Do they see a proud, critical spirit, or an angry, contentious group of people?

Remember, there is always one who walks among the churches, unseen but seeing all. How do you imagine Christ might evaluate your local church body?

A friend of mine had to find a new church after his church closed. He lived in a large city with many evangelical churches, so he had a wide variety of churches to choose from. He's the kind of person who gets involved and sticks faithfully with his church

family, so he wasn't going to settle for just any church. After a long and frustrating search, he finally found a new church family.

I asked him what he had learned from visiting many different churches. He had a number of interesting observations, but I was most interested in why he decided on the church he chose. He said his decision was based on “the spirit of the church, its atmosphere.” All the churches he visited were doctrinally sound churches and some were excellent Bible teaching churches; however, something was missing. The church he chose had both good Bible teaching plus a loving, caring spirit among the people. In other words, he had found a loving church family of which he could be a part. [page 18]

### **10. Lacking in Love.**

What we learn from Revelation 2:4, and must never forget, is that an individual or a church can teach sound doctrine, be faithful to the gospel, be morally upright, and work hard, yet be lacking love and therefore, be displeasing to Christ. Love can grow cold while outwards religious performance still appears to be acceptable—or even praiseworthy. [page 19]

### **11. Repentance.**

What is repentance? D.A. Carson gives a good definition of *repentance*:

What I meant is not a merely intellectual change of mind or mere grief, still less doing penance, but a radical transformation of the entire person, a fundamental turn around involving mind and action and including overtones of grief, which results in “fruit in keeping with repentance.” Of course, all this assumes that man's actions are fundamentally off course and need radical change.

Through repentance, the church in Ephesus would demonstrate

- That it *accepts* Christ's evaluation of its fallen condition,
- That it has *judged itself* according to Christ's Word to be sinful and deserving of divine discipline (1 Cor. 11:31-21),
- That it *grieves over* its loss of love and displeasure to Christ (2 Cor. 7:8-10),
- That it is *turning away* from sin and *returning to* its past life of love,
- That it will, by God's grace, *take appropriate action* (2 Cor. 7:8-12). [pages 21-22]

### **12. Losing Love.**

As the Ephesian believers gradually abandoned their first love, they also abandoned, or greatly minimized, certain acts of love, kindness, compassion, care, hospitality, and prayer. Loss of love always has adverse consequences on a church's works, conduct, attitudes, and activities. The Ephesians worked hard and endured, but there were missing elements of their work that needed to be restored. [pages 22-23]

### **13. Love Permeates God’s Word.**

In the *English Standard Version* of the Bible, the different forms of the word *love* appear almost a thousand times. In addition, the concept of love occurs in the Bible many times when the actual word itself is not used. The topic of love is so vast because God is love—the author, definer, and rewarder of love. So it is only natural that love permeates his Word. [page 27]

### **14. Love Is to Think About**

Martyn Lloyd-Jones adds, “Love is something which can be contemplated .... If love does not make you think, it is not love; it is purely physical instinct. Love enjoys ruminating, dwelling upon, looking at, dissecting, analyzing and considering.... Love is to be studied, and the more you study it the more you enjoy it” (*The Unsearchable Riches of Christ: An Exposition of Ephesians 3:1 to 21* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 232-233). [page 30]

### **15. Studying Love Is life-long.**

Of course, the study of what the Bible says about love is not a one-time study, but a life-long learning process. Learning of God’s love in Christ and God’s love for us is a never-ending pursuit. It is one of the most interesting and thrilling subjects in all of Scripture. By saturating your mind with biblical love, you will know what God requires of you and you will grow in love. You will also be able to guard yourself from the loss of love and be better equipped to urge others to love. [page 31]

### **16. Continual Prayer.**

George Müller, a remarkable man of prayer, understood the necessity of ongoing prayer:

The great fault of the children of God is, *they do not continue in prayer; they do not go on praying; they do not persevere*. If they desire anything for God’s glory, they should pray until they get it. [page 33]

### **17. Our Only Motive Is the Love of Christ.**

The secret of the early Christians,  
the early Protestants, Puritans and Methodists  
was that they were taught about  
the love of Christ,  
and they became filled with the knowledge of it.  
Once a man has the love of Christ in his heart  
You need not train him to witness;  
He will do it.

He will know the power, the constraint, the motive;  
everything is already there.

It is a plain lie to suggest that people who regard this knowledge  
of the love of Christ as the supreme thing  
are useless, unhealthy mystics.

The servants of God who have most adorned  
the life and the history of the Christian Church  
have always been men who have realized  
that this is the most important thing of all,  
and they have spent hours in prayer  
seeking His face and enjoying His love.

The man who knows the love of Christ in his heart  
can do more in one hour  
than the busy type of man can do in a century.  
God forbid that we should ever  
make of activity an end in itself.

Let us realize that the motive must come first,  
and that motive must ever be  
the love of Christ.

(D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ*, 253) [page 35]

## **18. Loving One Another and Self-centered Living.**

Our battle with self-centered living demands constant confession and prayer. Prayer is one of the key means by which God works in us and accomplishes his purposes in our lives. Only by prayer and the Lord's grace can we grow and overflow with love and have victory over self-centered living. Let these solemn words of Maurice Roberts ring in our ears and move us to pray:

Then let every Christian take up the duty of Christian love with tenfold seriousness. Our life's work must be to call down heaven's help upon ourselves that we may bend towards the great command to love one another. [page 39]

## **19. Through Prayer We Enter the Presence of God.**

No one has ever enjoyed such an intimate relationship with God as did Jesus Christ, and he was preeminently a man of prayer. Likewise, the time we spend in prayer strengthens our love relationship with our Father in heaven. Through prayer, we draw close to God and enter into his very presence—the thing he desires most (Hebrews 4:16; 10:19). So if you want your love relationship with God to grow, you must seek his presence, sing his praises, read his word, and respond to him in prayer. [page 40]

## **20. Praying for Love.**

I cannot encourage you enough to make praying for love a regular part of your prayer life. Pray for increasing knowledge of God's love in Christ. Pray to excel more in love for others. Pray with others for growth in love. In your church prayer meeting or in your small group study, pray for more love for Christ and for a lost, suffering world. As you pray, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all" (1 Thessalonians 3:12). [page 40]

## **21. Teaching on Love Is Needed Today.**

Believers today still need to be taught how to love. Just as was true in New Testament times, we need regular teaching on the biblical principles of love. We need a passion for teaching and obeying the whole counsel of God on love. We need to be exhorted to practice love, not just talk about it. We need to hear teaching on the major New Testament passages on love. Such biblical instruction on love would significantly improve the love expressed in our local churches. [page 41]

## **22. Lack of Teaching on Love, a Terrible Oversight.**

In an age of biblical illiteracy, believers need to know the truth about love. Believers need to be taught the fifteen descriptions of love in 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter of the New Testament. When I was preaching in another country recently, I gave several messages on 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. When I finished speaking, an old man who had been a leading preacher in that country for many years came up to me and said he had never heard a series of sermons on the fifteen descriptions of love. Given the vital importance of love and the need to know what love is, he thought the lack of teaching on the subject was a terrible oversight on the part of preachers such as himself. [page 42]

## **23. 1 Corinthians 13 Love Descriptions.**

The love descriptions of 1 Corinthians 13 set before us an objective standard of love. The scriptural standard of love is a test of our notions of love and instructs us in how to conduct ourselves in a loving manner in marriage, church, and society. The fifteen principles of love can be summarized as follows:

*Love is*

1. Patient
2. Kind

*Love is not*

3. Envious

4. Boastful
5. Arrogant
6. Rude
7. Selfish
8. Easily Angered
9. Resentful
10. Does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but
11. Rejoices with the truth

*Love*

12. Bears all things
13. Believes all things
14. Hopes all things
15. Endures all things

*The Positive Counterpart*

- Rejoices in the blessings of others
- Promotes and praises others
- Is humble and modest
- Promotes proper decorum
- Is occupied with the good of others
- Is calm and slow to anger
- Forgives

[pages 42-43]

**24. Loving God First.**

Since we live in a society that worships at the altars of personal self-fulfillment, radical individualism, personal rights and freedom, and privacy, it is crucial to teach that the supreme duty of the believer is to love God first and foremost. Believers need practical, biblical guidance on what love for God looks like and how we are to love. We need to know the inseparable connection between loving God and obeying God as a response to love. [page 43]

**25. Self-sacrificing Love.**

Benjamin B. Warfield captures succinctly the profound truth of the Christian life of love when he writes, “Self-sacrificing love is thus made the essence of the Christian life.” [page 44]

## **26. Impoverishing Ourselves for the Love of Others.**

J.I.Packer provides a marvelous summation of love and the Christian life:

The measure and test of love to god is whole-hearted and unqualified obedience ...  
The measure and test of love to our neighbors is laying down our lives for them ...  
This sacrificial love involves giving, spending, and impoverishing ourselves up to the limit for their well-being. [page 44]

## **27. Love Begins at Home.**

Marriage provides opportunities for daily practice in the cultivation of Christlike love (Eph 5:25-33). It exposes our deplorable self-centeredness and desperate need for growth in Christlike love. The home is the best testing ground for the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. It is a tragic situation when some believers show abundant love to people at church or in the neighborhood, but fail to express the same love to their spouse or children. This should not be. Love begins at home. Therefore, I encourage you to do what some husbands and wives have done (and done successfully, I might add): pray specifically for more Christlike love for your spouse and children. [page 45]

## **28. Stirring Up One Another to Love.**

Believers cannot encourage one another to love if they don't meet together regularly as a church family. This is why the writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers to think creatively of ways to "stir up one another to love," and warns them about neglecting "to meet together, as is the habit of some" (Heb. 10:25). Our growth in love is not just an individual exercise. Love requires both a subject and an object, thus love is a corporate learning experience. We grow in love by engagement with other people, not in isolation from them. [page 46]

## **29. The Church Is a Spiritual Workshop of *Agape* Love.**

One simply cannot grow in love without the stresses and strains of life together in the household of God, the local church. The local church truly is "a spiritual workshop for the development of *agape* love" and "one of the very best laboratories in which individual believers may discover their real spiritual emptiness and begin to grow in *agape* love." If you are not a participating member of a local church, then you are not in God's school of love. [page 46]

## **30. Love Is an Indispensable Element in the Body of Christ.**

All gifts and services in the body must be exercised "in love" in order for the church to grow in a healthy manner (Eph. 4:16). Love is thus an indispensable element to every



believer's gift, work, and relationship in the body of Christ. So don't wait around for people to love you; start loving and serving others. I urge you to follow the example of Robert Cleaver Chapman who said, "My business is to love others, not to seek that others love me." Put into practice the principle of love that says, "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" (Matt. 7:12). Don't neglect your responsibility to love and stir others to love. [page 47-48]

### **31. Christ Demands of His Followers a Supernatural Love.**

Christ demands from his followers a supernatural, divine love that forgives, reconciles, and forbears—with the unlovely, with those who persecute us, hate us, with those outside our circle of church friends, with those who disagree with us, and with all people of the world. This is the love our heavenly Father displays, the love Jesus summons us to imitate. [page 48]

### **32. Making Teaching about Love a Reality.**

Someone or some group in the church needs to take responsibility to plan for teaching biblical principles of love, or it will not happen. To make teaching on love a reality, one church devoted four summer months to teaching on love. They called the program "Summer of Love" and taught the major New Testament passages on love. They dedicated a full month to teaching 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. As individuals responded to the teaching of God's Word, the atmosphere of the church began to change. What a thrill it is to witness a revival of love within a church! May we be faithful to the example of Christ and the apostles and continue to teach the "more excellent way" of love (1 Cor. 12:31). [page 49]

### **33. A Needed Example of Christ's Love.**

We encourage love in others by our example, and we learn the most about love when we see it lived out in the lives of people. Paul, for example, provided the church in Corinth with a much-needed example of Christlike love for them to see and imitate. That is why—without any pride or boasting—he could urge the believers in Corinth to "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). It is also why Paul commends Timothy for following his example of love (2 Tim 3:10) and instructs him to be an example of love to others (1 Tim. 4:12). [page 51]

### **34. Leaders Modeling Love for God and for People.**

One of the greatest needs in our churches today is for living examples of Christlike love. A church is blessed indeed if it has leaders who model love for God and love for people. Such leaders delight to worship and sing praises to God. They pray faithfully for the

people, visit the sick, care for the needy, evangelize, teach God's Word, and sacrifice their time and money generously for the sake of others. [page 55]

### **35. Leaders Set the Tone for a Church's Love.**

Church leaders set the tone for the church community. If local church leaders love, the people will love. If they are thoughtful, kind, and caring, the people will be thoughtful, kind, and caring. If they raise the awareness of people's needs and establish organizational structures through which people can serve needy members (Acts 6;1-7), the people will respond. If leaders create an environment of love and hold themselves and others accountable to love, the people will flourish spiritually and many will imitate their example. Even other churches may see and be spurred on to greater love (1 Thess. 1:7). [page 55]

### **36. Parents Set the Tone of Love in the Home.**

If Christian parents love, serve, and reach out to people, they will, in most cases, produce children who love, serve, and reach out to help others. Many of the leaders and workers in churches today had parents who sacrificially loved and served God's people. These leaders and workers saw loving service modeled in their homes by their parents and have followed that example. A number of missionaries on the field today are products of missionary parents. In a few cases, fourth and fifth generation missionaries are serving today. [page 56]

### **37. Distracted with Much Serving.**

It is easy to become so busy that we have no time for God and no time for God and no time for the Word and prayer. The director of a world mission organization recognizes this risk and has on his desk a sign that reads, "Beware of the barrenness of a busy life." The right balance is difficult to achieve, but we must recognize the danger of being "distracted with much serving" (Luke 10:40). [page 59]

### **38. Choosing the "Good Portion" in Life.**

David Gooding, the former professor of Greek at Queens College in Belfast, Ireland, reminds us that we must make a deliberate, conscious choice to choose the "good portion" in life which will never be taken away from us:

We cannot do everything: there is not enough time. Like Mary, therefore, we shall have to choose and choose very deliberately. Life's affairs will not automatically sort themselves into a true order of priorities. If we do not consistently insist on making 'sitting at the Lord's feet and listening to his word' our number one necessity, a thousand and one other things and duties, all claiming to be prior necessities, will tyrannize our time and energies and rob us of the 'good part' in life. [page 60]

### **39. Guard Against Undermining the Spirit of Love.**

In order to avoid becoming like the Ephesians who needed to repent of their loss of love, heed the practical advice of Jonathan Edwards:

A Christian should at all times keep a strong guard against everything that tends to overthrow or corrupt or undermine a spirit of love. That which hinders love to men, will hinder the exercise of love to God .... If love is the sum of Christianity, surely those things which overthrow love are exceedingly unbecoming [to] Christians. [page 63]

### **40. Obey God and Serve People.**

Studying love is exciting, being taught the doctrines of love is enlightening, praying about love is heart moving, and seeing love modeled is motivating, but in the end, we must lovingly obey God and sacrificially serve people. We must be practitioners of love, not theorists. We must be doers of love, not talkers. We must forge a connection between words and actions. [page 65]

### **41. Inspiring Others to Love.**

If you want to love as Christ loved, commit yourself to love as he loved (Eph. 5:2; 1 John 3:16). If you want to pursue love, commit yourself to the pursuit of biblical love (1 Cor. 14:1). If you want to do all things in love, commit yourself to thinking and acting in ways that inspire love in others (Heb. 10:24). [page 66-67]