

Beware: This Emotion Will Quickly Poison Your Love

I recently gave a message to our congregation in Boca Raton, Florida, on covenant community. The readers of this news and teaching letter are familiar with my views on enforcing standards in the body of the Messiah. There are many reasons why this is not done, though it is strongly enjoined in many biblical texts. The Jewish context of these texts make the importance of discipline very clear (see Matt. 18:15 and following; Gal. 6:1,2; 1 Cor. 5, 6).

I have also consistently argued that the New Covenant Scriptures both exhort and assume that those who accept the Gospel will live out their New Covenant faith in covenant community. One is neither obedient to Yeshua nor has really embraced the meaning of the Gospel of the kingdom unless one becomes rooted in community. Loving community is the primary manifestation of the kingdom and the truth of the Gospel. We see this in the early chapters of Acts and the amazing description of the organic nature of congregational life described as a corporate body (1 Cor. 12). This is also made very clear in the corporate nature of celebrating the *Shulchan Adonai*, the table of the Lord, in the broken bread and red wine.

John's Exhortations to Love

The Gospel of John and John's first letter contain the Bible's greatest exhortations to love one another in the life of congregational community. For John, this is the acid test of whether or not we are really believers. In preparing for the message, I believe I gained a new insight into a key problem that has to be addressed. After many verses exhorting us to love, stating that this is a commandment of Yeshua, that it is a proof of whether or not we are believers, that it shows

whether or not we are born of God, John says:

So we have come to know and trust in the love that God has for us. God is love. Now whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

In this way, love is made perfect among us, so that we should have boldness on the Day of Judgment. For just as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and the one who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love, because He first loved us.

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar (1 John 4:16b-20a, TLV).

Throughout his letter, John is writing about our relationships one to another, or what we might call the corporate dimension of body life. Why does he then switch to the issue of an individual's fear of judgment? As I reflected on this question, I came to realize that the fear of judgment paralyzes us so that we cannot love. People fear that they are not really accepted in God's love. They also fear judgment and criticism from others. They experience such judgment as a punishment. For some, the anticipation of such rejection is mentally torturous. The fear of judgment, which is to be handled by real repentance and forgiveness, makes it impossible to love, whether the fear is of the judgment or rejection by others or lack of confidence in God. So John brings helpful analysis to the question of why we do not love.

Loving Confrontation and the Fear of Judgment

Loving confrontation for sin and the enforcing of standards takes courage. This courage should be motivated by love. We confront in love according to Galatians 6, Matthew 18:15 and following, and other passages because we care more about the other than about his or her possible reaction to us. Yet so

often I have spoken to members of congregations about the standards of the Bible, that we are all responsible to confront sin when it is serious. The person often says, "I could not do that." Why? Because, "It would make the situation worse; it will ruin a relationship; the other will become angry." We fear the reaction of their anger and rejection. Please note: Love does not confront every little thing, but love also covers a multitude of minor sins (see 1 Pet. 4:8)

The Bible commands us to love and to have courage. Our motivation to confront another must not be because they have hurt or offended us. We have to deal with our own issues through identifying with our crucified Messiah. Then we have the power to pray as Yeshua and to say, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." When we have been healed and motivated by love, we are then able to bring loving correction. Avoiding confrontation when there is sin is the opposite of love. It is mere humanistic sentiment.

Some years ago, I was having a conversation with a young leader and one of our senior leaders, Michael Rudolph, who has been part of our team for over 32 years. The young leader asked how my colleague was so well able to confront those who needed it in our congregation. The young leader explained how he got butterflies in his stomach and avoided confrontation. Only when things were at a level that he could not stand it did he finally confront, but with lots of emotion, and probably not in the most helpful way. Michael said he never had these fears. His trust in God and his Word was so great that he had just come to the point that he knew to obey. The response of the one being confronted was his own responsibility before God. Michael would act in loving confrontation without any pangs at all. I was amazed. I have not known someone before or since that has been so able to follow the Scriptures on the nature of love with the implications of loving confrontation and enforcing standards. I have watched Michael's consistency in this for all these

years.

Leaders are called to bring their people to such confidence in the love of God and freedom from the fear of judgment that the congregation will come to a place of high standards through the influence of members on one another.

I don't think I have ever read or heard someone mention the corporate implications of the passage on perfect love. We often find failure to confront due to fear and lack of love and courage. Then some falsely claim this tolerance is loving, that we do not want to embarrass the other. Such fear motivates us to allow ourselves to hear gossip and say nothing. It fosters an unsafe community.

It should go without saying that biblical love is compassionate and that the law is the structure for love, the outworking of love, without which, love is not biblical love but mere humanistic sentiment. Yeshua said that if we loved Him, we would keep His commandments. This is a Jewish understanding of love, grace and commandments. {eo}

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