

# How We Must Love to Overcome Our Bitter Image

The night of November 28, I had a powerful dream. In my dream, President Obama was in town in what seemed to be a large shopping mall to make an announcement about the deaths resulting from a terrorist attack.

As they attempted to film him, he kept breaking down and weeping, overcome with grief and a broken heart for what had happened. Each time, the production crew would be forced to shut down. Quite suddenly the Lord filled my heart with overwhelming love for this man, Barack Obama, and then called me to stand with the president as he made the announcement in order to support him emotionally and to openly demonstrate love and unity before the nation.

I chose a moment to approach him when only one Secret Service agent stood by him for protection. As the president stood behind the podium, I walked right up, unopposed, took his hand and said, "Mr. President, I've never agreed with your policies, but I'm here to support you. Would it be all right for me to stand with you before the nation?"

Overcome with gratitude, he grasped my hand, broke down and nearly cried. I saw myself with my arm around him under the lights and cameras. He seemed to engage deeply and latched onto me like a drowning man reaching out for help. He agreed that I could stand with him so I began telling the stage hands to remove the lectern so that people could see us standing together with nothing to obscure the view.

I've pondered the meaning of this dream for weeks now and I can come to only one conclusion. We cannot prevail for the kingdom of God in this hour by spewing the kind of negativity and hatred I hear coming from the mouths of Christians on a

daily basis. Our calling is, and always has been, to radically and completely love even those with whom we strenuously disagree or whom we regard as enemies.

This does not mean that we deny or overlook evil. This does not mean that we must surrender to ungodly philosophies. It does not mean that we must give up foundational principles of Scripture or even of the constitution of our nation. It does not mean that we cannot speak out regarding the issues of the day. It only conditions *how* we do so and with what kind of tone.

Love does not require that we approve of or accept wickedness. I am father to three and grandfather to 20. I know that no matter what my children do, whether or not their behavior reflects our family values and beliefs, the intensity of my love and the sacrifices I am willing to make for them never diminish. Can we not grant this same kind of love to any and all in the name of Father God as we represent Him who loves more deeply and completely than we ever can? Is that not why Jesus died in our place while we were yet sinners?

Bitterness can produce only bitter fruit. The anger of man can never produce the righteousness of God (James 1:20). Or Proverbs 16:7, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." Will we be peacemakers or will we allow ourselves to be seduced by the spirit of religion that clothes hatred in robes of righteousness and falsely teaches us that we must be angry or hateful in order to win?

Do we truly believe that light exposes darkness? Do we really believe in the power of the Holy Spirit to convict? Do we truly trust that love wins because love is light and light overcomes darkness?

If we did have genuine faith in these things, then how might it change our behavior and our approach to those with whom we

disagree? Love may cost us something. It certainly cost Jesus. But are we willing to make the sacrifices? And doesn't this require that we cultivate real faith in what we say we believe?

We have a bitter image to overcome in this world. It's time we actually did it. {eoa}

**R. Loren Sandford** *is the senior pastor of New Song Church and Ministries in Denver, Colorado. He has a bachelor's degree in music and a master of divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. He has authored a number of books, including Understanding Prophetic People: Blessings and Problems with the Prophetic Gift, Visions of the Coming Days: What to Look for and How to Prepare, and his most recent, Yes There's More: A Return to Childlike Faith and a Deeper Experience of God.*