

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 5 - LESSON 40

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth:

• *Encouragement For Couples*

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| 9. Confront Sources Of Apprehension | 12. Choose Orthopraxy— <i>Right Heart</i> |
| 10. Cherish Correction | Avoid Orthodoxy— <i>Right Behavior</i> |
| 11. Submit To Spiritual Authority | 13. Let Your Love Evidence Your Faith |
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Section 5 Lesson 40

THE HOME

The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Growth:

• *Encouragement For Couples*

9. Confront Sources Of Apprehension
10. Cherish Correction
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12. Choose Orthopraxy—*Right Heart*
Avoid Orthodoxy—*Right Behavior*
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Through Bert's insight we realized how much today's followers of Jesus, especially husbands and wives, need an effective way to deal with their differences. This is one reason we wrote *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*. Please discuss this material and put its truths into practice.

For Both Husbands and Wives:

9. Confront Sources Of Apprehension

“All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained” (Philippians 3:15,16).

While we were living in Israel Mike overheard two men in our neighborhood having a heated debate. Our Jewish host Bert asked if Mike thought the relationship was being jeopardized by their strong disagreement.

Mike thought the men couldn't walk away as friends after such intense shouting. But Bert replied, “That's the way it is with Gentiles. Whenever they disagree they grow alienated and estranged from each other. That isn't so with Jewish people. Our *relationships* are more important than the *issues* we disagree with.”

We were deeply convicted by Bert's observation, and believe this is what Paul is affirming in Philippians 3:15,16.

Have you noticed the massive increase of *intolerance over interpersonal differences* that's flooding our nation? Such narrow-mindedness is the fruit of an Atomistic society. People walk away from even longstanding relationships over trivial matters. The unwillingness to “agree to disagree” is destroying marriages, families and friendships.

Within Christendom the philosophical-debate mindset of Hellenism causes people to take an adversarial approach to disagreements. For instance, when someone differs with your point of view, do you take it personally, even to the point that your affections are alienated by the perceived conflict of opinion?

Confrontation is *not* synonymous with conflict. **Biblical confrontation** enables a detrimental situation to be changed for the better, and offers a gamut of approaches from discussion to correction or admonition.

Biblical confrontation is God's way to remove apprehension.

The goals and processes involved in confrontation are *redemptive*. In other words, you confront whatever is hindering you from experiencing the type of relationship our Father desires. The aim is to *remove the hindrance*, not attack the other person or prove you're right.

Conflict, on the other hand, is related to discord and hostility. Conflict entails a "win-lose" element in which one person must be the victor while the other goes down in defeat. Although confrontation and conflict may sometimes create similar emotions, the goals of each have nothing in common.

Conflict is the key factor in competition: only one person or team can win. But this attitude can't be part of your marriage. A victory-defeat mentality robs your relational joy and directs your energy on being the winner. If you make sure you get your way and win, then your spouse loses and your intimacy evaporates.

If you've been heavily influenced by Hellenism, then you perceive interpersonal differences as a point of conflict that **you must win**. Anyone who differs with you has to be wrong. This attitude is devoid of humility, and definitely isn't in the character of Jesus.

Just remember: Besides gender, personality, and background differences, your *spiritual gifting* may cause you to perceive a situation from a different angle. Someone who is an exhorter will want to take steps to immediately bring about resolution, while a person with a mercy gift may avoid a difficult issue out of concern for the other's feelings.

Rather than trying to persuade another person to agree with your view, try to heed more consistently Paul's admonition to *let God* make the point of discussion clear. Again, remember:

Biblical confrontation is not proving one person right and the other one wrong.

In Acts 15:36-41, Paul and Barnabas argued over whether to take Mark with them on their next missionary trip: *"They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company. Barnabas took Mark and sailed for Cyprus"*(v. 39).

Even though a *"sharp disagreement"* had occurred, it didn't rupture their relationship in the way many Gentiles read into this event. This friendship was deep. It had been Barnabas who had courageously made contact with Paul after his conversion when everyone else was still fearful of him. Listen to his sound defense of the former persecutor:

*And when [Paul] had come to Jerusalem, he was trying to associate with the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But **Barnabas took hold of him and brought him to the apostles and described to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had talked to him, and how at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus** (Acts 9:26,27).*

When the Antioch disagreement arose, the faith community put the matter into the hands of God as the men headed to different destinations: *"Paul chose Silas and left, commended by the brothers to the **grace of the Lord**"* (v. 40).

It's doubtful that Barnabas denounced Paul to young Mark, for Mark later joined Paul in his ministry:

• *"My fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings, as does Mark, the **cousin of Barnabas**. (You have received instructions about him; if he comes to you, welcome him)"* (Colossians 4:10).

- “Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is **helpful to me in my ministry**” (2 Timothy 4:11).

We see Paul and Barnabas reunited as Paul defends their right as apostles to receive material aid for their service in Jesus: “Or are **Barnabas and I** the only ones required to go on working for our living?” (1 Corinthians 9:6). This query was asked of the believers in Corinth long after the Antioch disagreement.

In another situation, Paul, in a remarkable act of courage, had to confront Peter for his hypocritical fear of those who demanded followers of Jesus be circumcised: “When Peter came to Antioch, I **opposed him to his face**, because he was **in the wrong**” (Galatians 2:11).

Confrontation isn’t easy, but it’s truly an expression of brotherly love to not want a fellow Christian to go on walking in error. Paul wasn’t the exception to the nervous stomach that can accompany confrontation. You can feel the intense emotions that such encounters cost him: “I came to you in **weakness and fear**, and with **much trembling**” (1 Corinthians 2:3).

Throughout the Scriptures the ability to confront an issue while maintaining the relationship is seen as the pattern of God’s people with each other:

- “If your brother sins, **go and show him his fault**” (Matthew 18:15).
- “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. **First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift**” (Matthew 5:23,24).

Think how important this last passage is when it comes to the apprehension you may be experiencing with your spouse.

Can resistance to confront when necessary be a major weakness in your marriage? By not loving one another enough to recognize and confront your differences, you’re knocking the blossom off a covenant that was meant to glorify our Father.

You need to lovingly and courageously get past your fear to confront issues on which you disagree, especially if feelings of wounding or bitterness are festering. Your unresolved tension and apprehension are dry tinder that will unexpectedly explode into a forest fire of mutual accusation.



From our experience, we believe that God expects, and possibly even brings about, differing opinions in marriages and other close relationships to deepen and refine them. As with other things in life that you value dearly, you probably grip tightly to your opinions and beliefs with strong conviction.

But by His grace and the instruction in His Word, God expects us to work through these differences whenever possible. We must learn how to **confront with love**.

Most communication differences or issues between spouses or others in relationship can be resolved if the conflict is viewed as a *point of difference* between the parties, *i.e.*, “**We have a problem**”, not “**You have a problem.**”

If your home seems filled with disorder, squabbling children and frantic schedules, don’t accuse your spouse of



gross mismanagement or your children of blatant rebellion. Instead, define the nature of the problem: Too many activities? Late nights? Unrealistic expectations of orderliness? Too little cooperation?

Once the problem has been defined, set out possible solutions to achieve your goal. In this case it might be harmony in your home, or task delegation, or curtailing certain outside activities. Focus on identifying and solving the *problematic issue* rather than on changing your mate's or children's personality!

We in Christ are also *in each other* as members of His Body. We must permit our differences to be spoken with the intensity with which they are held without feeling threatened by the emotions expressed. Keep in mind, however, that *self-control* is a fruit of the Spirit that evidences His work in you: "*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger*" (Proverbs 15:1).

The stoic approach that Christendom inherited from the Greek philosophers frowns on any display of strong emotion. Emotional expression is biblical, as long as it's not aimed as a weapon at anyone: "*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing*" (Proverbs 12:18).

Too many couples are caught in the stoic snare or the self-pitying martyr trap. They hold in their emotions for so long that when they finally do release what's going on inside, they may express their pain destructively.

If we grasp our biblically Hebraic roots—that *relationships* are more important than *issues*—our faith can trust that in all differences "*God will make it plain.*" Just remember:

Your love for someone can't grow while apprehension is present.

[Again, please, go *together* through our book *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation* to face and eliminate relational apprehension.]

See if this scenario from *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation* is part of your experiential baggage:

Jerry Harvey, a business management specialist, illustrates the consequences of non-confrontation in his book *The Abilene Paradox and Other Meditations on Management*. One particularly sweltering afternoon in West Texas, Harvey, his wife, and her parents were sitting on the shady veranda playing dominoes. Suddenly his father-in-law piped up, "Let's go to Abilene and have dinner at the cafeteria." Abilene was fifty miles away, and their old car had no air-conditioning.

As Harvey inwardly groaned, his wife enthusiastically agreed. He asked his mother-in-law, who also consented. So off to Abilene they went. The food was lousy and the drive brutal. When they finally returned, his mother-in-law complained, "I wouldn't have gone if you all hadn't *pressured me into it.*"

Aghast, Harvey exclaimed that he'd been content to stay on the porch. His wife admitted she had gone only because she wanted to please her father. The father-in-law confessed that he had suggested the trip only because he thought they might be bored. Four people ended up doing something none of them really wanted to do because no one would speak up.

Describe your response when you face major differences with your spouse or with others. Do you feel you have to win? Are the resolutions of your differences mostly positive, or does apprehension usually remain in the hearts of those with whom you differed?

Ask your spouse and family for their comments.

From Mike especially for men:
10. Cherish Correction

***"He who listens to a life-giving rebuke
will be at home among the wise"***
(Proverbs 15:31).

Awhile back I had a very difficult breakfast meeting with someone I hadn't seen for many months. I had to tell him some painful things about himself that others who are closer to him have been fearful to mention. Inside my spirit I heard the Spirit whisper, "Who gives the life-giving rebuke?" I knew as soon as I heard the question that I'd seen the words *"life-giving rebuke"* in the Bible.

As I drove up the highway from that meeting I thought back to how I'd learned the importance of a necessary rebuke. I recalled my upbringing, in particular how my uncles used to chide us young guys when got angry if we struck out during ball-games at family picnics. (Chiding is a mild form of admonishment or criticism.)

I recognized that their intent was to help us see everything in a broader context and to not take our mistakes too seriously. I've used the same technique with my son and other young men for whom I've become a spiritual "father".

Other examples of a "life-giving rebuke" flooded my mind, mostly from my 10 years as a Naval officer. I remembered the first time I heard of "wire brushing"—taking a man into the showers and using

soap and a wire brush on him. The enlisted men in my ship detachments off Vietnam used this method to correct any of the guys who habitually shirked their duty. The victim usually became more responsible immediately.

On my drive home I was also reminded of the words of a longstanding buddy concerning our years at the retreat center in Connecticut: "If any of my friends needed to be rebuked, I'd always bring them to Mike. He wasn't afraid to tell people what he knew God wanted them to hear." I do normally tell people what I believe God would have me say in order to bring God's blessing to their life.

I also remembered the two chaplains aboard my last ship. In 1977, the year I became a follower of Jesus, they came to me with a word from God concerning His call on my life. That word was from Ezekiel, chapter 33, and they told me that God was raising me up to be a watchman:

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman... so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood" (vv. 7,8).

I realized that if I withheld a warning, God would hold me accountable. I admit I've failed in this over the years and have been left with an awful feeling of cowardice; sometimes it would cling to me for days. Then I'd sense God's forgiveness and encouragement, and press on.

The admonition to Ezekiel to warn those in sin may not apply to everyone, but Matthew 18:15 certainly does: ***"If your brother sins against you, go and show***

him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."

Everything recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures pointed to this command: ***"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets"*** (Matthew 7:12). It's an order I take seriously.

I was the most rebuked and corrected Naval officer I knew. I haven't met anyone who faced more correction than I did from men who saw some potential in me. Toward the end of my military career when I was named Navy Officer of the Year at the base where I was stationed, I learned the beauty of corrective rebuke when it's received willingly without excuse.

Don't fool yourself into believing you're beyond the need for correction. If anything, look at the kind of people Jesus chose to follow Him. None enjoyed status in the world, yet He called them His friends in their obedient trust: ***"You are my friends if you do what I command"*** (John 15:14).

Consider this humorous look at the humble, everyday people Jesus chooses for His Kingdom work.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jesus, Son of Joseph
Woodcrafter Carpenter Shop
Nazareth

FROM: Jordan Management Consultants,
Jerusalem

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of

them have now taken our battery of tests; we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale.

We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man. All of the other profiles are self-explanatory.

We wish you every success in your new venture.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants.

1. Who in your life has the freedom to correct you? When did they last do so?

2. Does it take them courage to say anything corrective to you? Ask them.

3. Do those close to you find it difficult to communicate a differing view or opinion to you? Ask them.

4. Do those close to you think you control others to get your way? Ask them.

5. Do you find yourself busy with activity yet minimal in emotional intimacy with other people? Ask them.

6. If your father or mother is still alive, ask them, "Is it a joy to have me as your child? Why?" What was their response?

7. If you work under someone's supervision, ask that person if you contribute positively to the interpersonal environment at your work place. Positive ways? Negative? How can you improve?

8. If you're married: Does your family consider you a warm, caring person? Ask them.

9. Hebrews 13:17 commands each of us: *"Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you."*

Does the leadership in your faith community know you well enough to render account to God for you? If you're in a Nicolaitan system in which the leadership has little or no contact with you or doesn't even know you at all, then you're hiding out from one of God's valuable means for your development of Christ-likeness.

If you're personally known by the leadership, ask them, "Is it a joy to have me in this faith community?" Get feedback—Ask them "why". What was their response?

level of interaction do you have with them?
Are they willing and available as godly older men to correct you if need be?

From Mike especially for men:

11. Submit To Spiritual Authority

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke God’s message to you. Reflect on the results of their way of life, and imitate their trust” (Hebrews 13:7, CJB).

The Hebraic approach commands us to weigh the fruit of a man’s life before you listen to his teaching. We explored earlier the stages a man must go through before he can become a *zaken*, a wise biblical elder. His authority as a servant-leader takes years to develop, an experiential journey of wisdom growth that has earned the deference of other men and women.

Our Father wants younger men to look to the wise counsel and leadership of older men. *“Older men [are] to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance”* (Titus 2:2). These character qualities have to be molded over time; they’re not learned in a classroom.

Satan knows that men are changed more through personal contact with role models than by any formal instruction. If you aren’t yet a *zaken*, the enemy will do all he can to keep you away from the wise so the “temperate and self-controlled behavior” that comes from love-grounded, obedient trust won’t be passed along.

Describe the nature of spiritual and family authority in your life right now. What

How well do you think you’re following God’s counsel for you in regard to spiritual leaders who can speak directly into your life?

If you’re not yet a *zaken* and have little or no close interaction with spiritual and family authority, you need to pray. You really need to find a Hebraic-style home fellowship of extended spiritual family for yourself and your family.

Be prepared to offer creative alternatives for getting together with a godly older man, such as early morning before work or opportunities when your families are together and you two men can take a walk and talk. Any perceived inconvenience will quickly be dispelled as you form a bond of mutual trust.

We’ll deal more fully with spiritual authority when we discuss home fellowships.

For Both Husbands and Wives:

**12. Choose Orthopraxy-*Right Heart*
Avoid Orthodoxy-*Right Behavior***

“Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their

money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. Calling His disciples to Him, Jesus said, 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on'” (Mark 12:41-44).

Can you picture the scene described above? Most Nicolaitan faith communities would esteem someone who popped substantial funds into the collection plate. But our Lord commends the *motive of the heart* (see 2 Corinthians 9:7).

We realize that the word “orthodox” is weighted with powerful emotions in many areas of Christendom. The word itself refers to sound religious doctrine. There’s nothing wrong with a desire to uphold truth.

But sadly, orthodoxy has devolved into a mentality that is *only concerned with being right*. For these people, right behavior is valued regardless of the condition of the heart. As a result orthodoxy focuses inordinately on *right* laws, *right* creed, *right* behavior.

A certain degree of orthodoxy is necessary in order to apply Scriptural commands and principles to your life. But, as with many of the Pharisees, people get caught up with *knowing about* their religion, and judge others based on preconceived standards of “correct behavior”.

To truly follow Jesus, we need to focus on the biblical importance of “orthopraxy.” Orthopraxy may be defined as

the way our love for Jesus is expressed in the enactment of our lives.

Orthopraxy causes us to regard life and people more and more from the perspective of God’s *loving kindness* and moves us to act in accordance with His love.

Keep in mind that the Hebrew language emphasizes the verb or action, while English emphasizes the noun or subject. Because of this difference, English lends itself more to the “what” of orthodoxy than to “why” of orthopraxy.

Compare Two Jewish Farmers

God’s Word testifies to His heart’s concern for the poor and for the strangers who own no property. That loving kindness prompted Him to present precise commands to those who were blessed with crops:

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God (Leviticus 23:22).

Suppose you were living in 200 BC and you met a Jewish farmer who viewed his life from an *orthodoxy* perspective. You notice his harvested fields and see that he didn’t go back a second time to glean them. You ask him why he didn’t, and he replies, “Because God commands me not to.”

Then you go a little further down the road and meet an *orthopractic* farmer who hasn’t gleaned his fields either. In answer to your question he gladly responds, “My Father loves the poor and the unfortunate. Out of love for Him and for them I don’t go back over my fields.”

Can you see the difference? **Same behavior...entirely different motive.** And motive is everything with our God, because it answers the “why” of an action according to His heart.

Two examples from James clarify this distinction:

*Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to **look after orphans and widows in their distress** and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world (1:27).*

*Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ **but does nothing** about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.** But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will **show you my faith by what I do** (2:15-18).*

Is James emphasizing *orthodoxy* or *orthopraxy*?

If you’ve grown in the character of Jesus, you’re motivated to love and care for others as He would.

The orthopraxy of loving response to meet the needs of the least fortunate holds great weight with Jesus. In fact, obeying our Father’s will to extend His love through action will be the criteria for the final judgment:

*Then the King will say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are **blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation***

*of the world. For I was hungry and you **gave Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave Me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited Me in, I needed clothes and you clothed Me, I was sick and you looked after Me, I was in prison and you came to visit Me.**’... ‘I tell you the truth, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me**’ (Matthew 25:34-40).*

Will we be judged by our orthodox assertions, or by the actions our love for Jesus produces?

At this point we’d like to share a point of concern for home schoolers and children in Christian schools.

We’ve noticed inordinate self-righteous pride in a number of children who are products of home schooling and Christian schools. We believe there is an over-emphasis on *right behavior* rather than a *right heart*. So many of these children proudly evaluate themselves by their academic success rather than by the service of a loving, humble heart. We encounter too many who disdain people who don’t measure up to their standards.

Also, if you’re educating your children at home, there needs to come a time when the policing aspect of the Holy Spirit is permitted to convict your children. Too many mothers remain the conscience of their child for too long, hindering spiritual maturation. We encourage you to prayerfully and diligently consider how to instill orthopraxy in your children.

Scrutinize your life. Take a look at not only the good things you *do*, but more importantly, *your motives*. Describe two or three aspects of your Christian lifestyle and *why* you do what you do.

Ask your spouse and family for their comments.

For Both Husbands and Wives:

13. Let Your Love Evidence Your Faith

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

¶ Love is patient, love is kind.

It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1 Corinthians 13:1-7).

Within contemporary Christendom the issue of biblical love has its orthodoxy and orthopraxy adherents:

The orthodox discusses love, the orthoprax lives it.

The Hebrew Bible cascades with evidence that our God desired a vital love relationship with His people: “**Love [ahav] the Lord your God with *all your***

***heart and with all your soul and with all your strength*” (Deuteronomy 6:5).**

If you recall, the Hebrew word for love, *ahav* [ah-HAHV], overflows with passion and yearning for the beloved’s presence. *Ahav*, appearing 250 times in the Older Testament, focuses on the unfathomable love and tender mercies of God. It’s the powerful devotion of emotional attachment that God sought from His chosen people.

This same ardent, passionate love is that which Jesus calls for when He reiterates Deuteronomy 6:5: “**Love [agape] the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind**” (Matthew 22:37). Every fiber of your being is to cry out in longing to intimately know Him and be known by Him as a Bridegroom does His beloved.

The word *agape* [ah-GAH-pay] in the above verse is the Newer Testament equivalent of *ahav*. This sacrificial devotion is the grace of God that flows forth from Jesus’ followers. This type of love is unique because it *meets the need* of the beloved even if he doesn’t know the need exists.

Devoid of selfish motive, *agape* expresses deep compassion and concern for the one who is so loved. Out of all the other Greek “love” terms, only *agape* represents God’s love toward man and the believer’s love toward God and those he or she serves on His behalf. You can sense the *emotional depth* of this relationship our Lord wants with His own!

Why Do We Agape God? Because He First Agape(d) Us.

If you’re a follower of Jesus, then only one vital element of that relationship stands out to express your covenant union: responsive love.

When we are **united with the Messiah Jesus...** what matters is **trusting faithfulness** expressing itself **through love** (Galatians 5:6, CJB).

How often the reassuring truth of Romans 8:28 is quoted. Yet keep in mind the two requirements Paul cites for the promise to find fulfillment: “*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*” The promise of this verse is for those who agape God and are actively living out His purposes.

Agape doesn't mean that you give the one you love whatever they desire. Rather, because of the depth of your concern for your beloved's ultimate well-being, you meet their *true need*. This is the kind of love our heavenly Father proved to mankind when He sent His only Son to pay the penalty for our depraved sinfulness (see John 3:16).

The ultimate test of agape love comes when we face persecution or mistreatment. Our natural tendency would be to defend ourselves or even retaliate. But the way of Jesus' love is strikingly different: “**Love [agape] your enemies and pray for those who persecute you**” (Matthew 5:44).

There is no way we can conjure up this kind of love on our own. We must humble ourselves to receive His agape as we repent and turn to Him through Jesus in trust, for only God has such unselfish love. Only our Lord and our King can fill us with the grace to fulfill His command to love.

His love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit Who abides in those who have become His own (Galatians 5:22). The presence of this self-sacrificial love is the visible evidence of His grace at work in us. It is this agape love that compels and

empowers us to obey Him:

- “If you love [agape] Me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15).
- “This is how we know what love [agape] is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers”(1 John 3:16).

The same kind of agape love that Christ showers on His Bride, the Church, is God's requirement for husbands toward their wives: “Each one of you also **must love [agape] his wife as he loves himself**” (Ephesians 5:33).

Our Lord knows the humility it takes for a husband to ask Him for a love that serves his wife's best interest. And in God's sight it's useless for a man to say “I love you” or to give romantic cards if his priorities and decisions don't reflect the self-sacrifice that agape demands.

The word “love” appears repeatedly in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13. In each instance it is agape love. Since this passage is so often read at weddings, think about what is called for in the relationship of the new husband and wife as they grow in their pilgrimage together.

[Mike]: If you've read our workbook **Demolishing Strongholds**, you may remember my own testimony of how strongholds hindered my ability to experience God's love and to share it with others. Before my deliverance from demonic strongholds, Sue would often comment to me, “You have great zeal, but no love.” As you read my experience, take hope for yourself that our Lord is just waiting to intervene with His loving power!

...As I read my Bible on the morning of November 29, 1989, one day before the prophesied date, I pondered Paul's prayer

for the Ephesians (3:16-19): “I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being **rooted and established in love**, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp **how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge** — that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”

...As I sat there quietly in my recliner, I was convicted that the amount of the love of Jesus that I’d ever felt, even after many years in ministry, was about the size of a decimal point. The love I’d perceived had no depth, breadth, or width to it, and it certainly didn’t surpass my knowledge.

...In February, 1990, I received a letter from my friend Karl in Washington State. He wrote that God had shown him in prayer that our ministry was being hindered by a *spirit of deceit*. Sue and I prayed, but had no discernment that he was right.

Several more months went by. Another friend, Mark, recommended a book entitled *The Three Battlegrounds* by Francis Frangipane. I purchased the book and as I reclined with it in the solitude of my study, my eyes fell upon these words: “Once a person is deceived, **he does not recognize** that he is deceived, **because he has been deceived!**”

As I pondered those words I could hear the Holy Spirit say, “Mike, you do have a spirit of deceit. Now renounce it in the name of Jesus.” As I began to pray, a vision appeared right in front of me. The vision appeared as an object that looked like a big black rock about five feet high and five feet wide. On it was written the word “**DECEIT**.” As I prayed, renouncing the spirit of deceit, a veneer like an onion skin fell off the object. Underneath this veneer was the word “**REJECTION**.”

As I stared at it, God began to show me

painful memories of my childhood — many of which I had forgotten. As I watched the scenes unfold, a growing sense of humiliation welled up inside me. Then the Holy Spirit revealed, “Those feelings of humiliation laid the foundation for the stronghold of rejection to be built in you. Now renounce that spirit’s influence in your life.” I renounced the spirit of rejection in the name of Jesus, and the black object disappeared. I was changed, but I was uncertain in what way.

The day after my vision and subsequent deliverance from the spirits of deceit and rejection, I participated in a difficult meeting with a group of congregation leaders.... They became extremely antagonistic toward me. At that moment **I realized that I loved them despite their reaction to me. I realized that without the spirit of rejection influencing me, I was able to love them rather than respond negatively to them.**

[If you’re having trouble experiencing love and giving love, we encourage you to go through the **Demolishing Strongholds** workbook].

The Intense Agape of Your Pilgrimage To Salvation

In Lesson 27 we discussed the stipulations of the Gospel of the Covenant. Jesus speaks of *intense determination* to forsake all to discover His purposes and joyfully walk in them in obedient trust:

*The Kingdom of Heaven is like a **treasure hidden in a field**. A man found it, hid it again, then **in great joy went and sold everything he owned, and bought that field** (Matthew 13:44).*

We live in terrible times that need steadfast, determined people who will love no matter what. Jesus warned us of days like these: “**And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow**

cold. But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved” (Matthew 24:12,13).

Beginning with your marriage and household all the way to those who hate you, this is your calling: You must *love* as Jesus does so that others will see and respond to His love in you.

Give Yourself An Agape Test

At the end of his second letter to the followers of Jesus in Corinth, Paul challenges them: *“Examine yourselves to see whether you are living a life of loving trust; test yourselves. Do you not realize that the agape love of Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?”* (2 Corinthians 13:5, paraphrase).

Is your loving trust in Jesus producing a life of increasing *agape* love toward Him and toward others? Yes or no? Describe how you live to benefit others. Is your “love” sacrificial? Would you be the first to jump on the hand grenade?

Ask your spouse or others close to you if they see the sacrificial love of Jesus growing in you.

For you husbands: Describe your love for your wife. Is it strong and sacrificial? Are you having trouble loving her?

Ask your wife for her feedback.

For you wives: Describe the love you experience from your husband. Is it strong

and sacrificial? Are you making it easy for him to love you?

Ask your husband for his feedback.

May each person reading this hear their name proclaimed before the hosts of heaven and rejoice as they hear our Lord declare, *“You are welcome, because you acted in love toward the least of these...”*

For Both Husbands and Wives:

14. Know Your Spiritual Gifts And Use Them

“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines” (1 Corinthians 12:7,11).

We mentioned that tensions in a marriage can be brought about by failure to understand the different spiritual gifts of each spouse. We wrote our book, **God’s Instruments For War: Discovering and Coordinating Spiritual Gifts as Weapons of Warfare**, with that issue in mind: to help people walk day by day in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We encourage you to use this material, a free download at our website. It will help you to not only identify the gift(s) the Holy Spirit has apportioned to you, but also to coordinate your gifting with your spouse’s and that of others close to you in the faith.

Do you know your spiritual gifts and use them for the good of others? Yes or no? If yes, what are they?

Do you know your spouse's gifts and help him/her use them for the good of others? Yes or no? If yes, what are they?

Do you know your believing children's gifts, and do you help them use their gifts for the good of others? Yes or no? If yes, what are they?

Do you know the spiritual gifts of those close to you in the faith and help them use them for the good of others? Yes or no? If yes, what are they?

If you've answered 'no' to any of the above, please explore *God's Instruments For War* so that you, your family and your extended spiritual family can together serve our Lord's purposes in His love and power.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will” (Romans 12:2).

If you've discovered things in this lesson that need to be changed in you:

1. Repent of any sin (Psalms 103:11,12; Isaiah 43:25).
2. Don't let up on seeking the Spirit's help until the way that is in the character of Jesus is formed in you (Matthew 7:7,8).
3. And don't lose sight that our Father is merciful and longsuffering. If you stay repentant, He will continue to readily forgive and restore (Isaiah 30:18).

Don't stop on your pilgrimage until the character of Jesus is formed in you! Press on, dear ones:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2).