

# Lovelessness

by Don Currin

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*This sermon emphasizes the critical need for love in the Church of Jesus Christ, highlighting the danger of losing the testimony of God's grace and glory due to a lack of love. The speaker delves into the concept of 'lovelessness' using Revelation chapter two as a focal point, urging the congregation to repent and return to their first love. Through powerful illustrations and biblical references, the sermon underscores the importance of unconditional, sacrificial, and relentless love for Christ, fellow believers, and the unsaved, as exemplified by Jesus. The ultimate message conveys that without love, all other spiritual endeavors are meaningless, and the legacy we leave should be one of genuine, Christ-like love.*

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**Scripture:** John 13:34, 1 Corinthians 13:2, 1 Peter 4:8, Mark 10:21, 1 John 4:20

**Topics:** "The Importance of Love in the Church", "Returning to Our First Love"

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## Description

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## Transcript

My tremendous appreciation for your kindness and having Cindy and I on this occasion. I appreciate Jeff's heart, his openness, as we corresponded on the phone. He was very enthusiastic when I said, well is there any way we could come through and see the people and perhaps have an opportunity to minister? And so he graciously consented and we're here and we felt the warmth and the encouragement from all of you as a faith family.

I want to share tonight with you something that I see as a great need in the Church of Jesus Christ in this hour, something that I feel as if many churches are ceasing to be an evangelistic witness because of a loss of. It's interesting the very text suggests that, that our Lord will remove the candlestick which is the very testimony of his grace and glory with the church if we are careless in this area. I'm speaking of the subject of lovelessness.

I want you to take your Bibles with me tonight and turn to a very familiar text in Revelation chapter number two. Thank you dear brother. Revelation chapter number two this evening.

Now no doubt whatsoever if you've been in the family of God for any period of time, you've probably heard at least one message on this series of verses. Being that now I've been saved a number of years and been in ministry as long as I have, I've heard a number of different words from this particular passage. But I direct your attention please to Revelation chapter two and verse number one.

While it may be common to some of us and we can readily interpret the content of it, perhaps there is something new tonight that we can glean and greatly benefit from. So if you would, verse number one. To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, these things says, he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks or lampstands, I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil.

And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars. And you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for my name's sake, and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.

Remember therefore from where you have fallen, repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove, remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To him who overcomes, I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God. Now I have only attended one fellowship conference in Texas. Back years ago, upon the insistence of my good friend and brother in Christ, Mack Thomason, he said, please if you have an opening in the schedule on this particular date, would you please pencil in the fellowship conference in Denton? So we had it open, and my wife and I planned to go to the conference.

And when we arrived and registered, we were given a little skinny book. And I looked at this little skinny book, and I noticed everybody got a copy of it. And I thought to myself, what they've done as a church or perhaps a fellowship, is they ordered a bunch of these to sell, and they can't get rid of all of them, so what they're doing now is they're giving away in the name of freebie.

And then I thought, well maybe that's not the case at all. Perhaps what they did is they had an overprint at the publisher, and they're just trying to get rid of them, and they sent them to the fellowship to give to everybody that registered. Well, I don't know where the idea came from, but in God's providence, I received a copy of that book.

And to be honest with you, I went back to where we were staying in the conference. I thumbed through it. I came real close to putting it in file 13, just totally disregarding it.

But I'm so glad that I began to read the first few pages. The title of the book was Love or Die by Alexander Strzok. And it's interesting, he began to bring out some things in this passage of scripture that I had never seen before.

There was a key insight in particular that had a gripping effect upon me, and little did I know it would begin a new pilgrimage in my life. You see, quite honestly, I'm speaking from my heart. If I'm going to be known for anything, if I hope in Christ to make a mark on my generation, I would pray that I would leave before

my family, as well as the family of God, a legacy of love.

And it is so essential, brethren, that we as individuals and collectively as the Church of Jesus Christ maintain this posture of caring and loving for people, because if we neglect it, there are so many Arminian churches and so many Reformed churches today, if the truth was known, while they function together in the principles of evangelicalism, there is a sense of loss. The glory of God has departed, namely because they no longer love as Jesus loved. And so I want to speak to you about this tonight, and this is a very practical message and something, I pray, that will encourage you to preserve what I sense here at Redeeming Grace Church is a reality presently.

Don't take it for granted. Strive to maintain it, but even to see it envelop more and more the lives and the families of your congregation. Now here's a few thoughts.

What was so significant about Mr. Strzok's exposition was his comments on the phrase, you have left your first love. What he expounds from the original language was quite enlightening. As a matter of fact, I would almost say it resulted in a paradigm shift theologically for me in this area of love.

He says that first love, in verse 4, means you have abandoned the love you had at the first. You say, big deal, I understand that. I know what you're saying there.

I've always believed what he is saying is being said in the text, but listen carefully. He went on to say that literally translated, the text reads, you have abandoned your love the first. Now why is that so important? Well, for many years I had learned and I had preached that the emphasis in the Greek language was on the object of love, and therefore I assumed he was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But the more I begin to meditate on what he was saying that the original said, and then the implication that he drew from the text, I recognize that the emphasis in the original was not on the object, but the nature of love. The nature of love. This is important, friend, listen carefully.

He mentions that the emphasis is on this adjective first. So the love that they had abandoned refers to their love as it was first expressed at the beginning of their life together as a church body. You see, the love here is referring, is not referring to a person, but to a type or expression of love.

So bottom line, what Jesus is saying is that you've abandoned the love that you had at the first. In other words, it was not who they had neglected, but a certain kind, a nature of love they had neglected. Let me illustrate, I once again draw from Strach's book, Love or Die.

He gives the example, a true story of a young minister who came to a church on one occasion. He had a great deal of passion. He seemed to be inclined to connect with the people.

He came to the early service prayer meeting and he entered into the spirit of prayer. He prayed for the people. He prayed that God's blessing would come and help the people that morning.

He really seemed to have a legitimate interest. He got in the pulpit. He had a great gift of communication.

It seemed to really resonate in the minds and hearts of the congregation that morning. Afterwards, he stood at the back door and he gave a warm embrace, either literally or verbally, to everyone that exited the church building. A family invited him to dinner that day and he gladly accepted their invitation, went and sat around the table and engaged in meaningful, savory conversation.

It was a wonderful time of fellowship. And finally, later in the afternoon, he dismissed himself and he left. Fifteen years later, the same minister came back to the same church.

This time he insisted that he had to have a motel room when the people had offered a place in someone's home. He came to the early morning prayer meeting that Sunday morning when he was to speak, but during the prayer time he remained conspicuously silent. He didn't seem to enter into the spirit.

There wasn't that connectivity like he had formally expressed 15 years earlier. That morning, as he stood before the people, it was more of just an academic outline with no heart in his preaching. Afterwards, he stood at the back door.

He greeted people as they came out, but only with superficial pleasantries. Later that day, someone said, would you come to lunch? He said, I'm sorry, I have some things to attend to, and he excused himself, got in his car, and sped off. Now, something had happened to this man.

There are certain things that you'll note when you compare the two times that he was in the church. First of all, he did not pray with meaning. He did not pray at all as he did formally.

He didn't spend time with the brothers and sisters as he had previously. He left the church as soon as possible that day, and even his message that he preached that second time was scripted, not heartfelt. Something had happened.

As Alexander Strzok points out, he had lost the love that he had previously displayed. Jesus would have said to the minister, I have this against you that you have abandoned the love you had at the first. It wasn't Christ.

It wasn't an object. It was the type, the kind, the texture of the love that he had formally demonstrated before these people. Now, listen carefully.

Another significant thing I found in the text was that Christ is addressing a particular object as the first love. Now, I'm just going to piggyback on what I've said in the way of introduction here. He said, I had assumed, or personally, I had assumed for years that the love that was left was their love for Christ.

But it's interesting, a closer look at the text once again reveals that the object of love is not mentioned. This is important. Listen, the passage does not say you've left Christ or you've left your love for fellow believers.

Once again, Strzok comments, it is best to understand Jesus to mean Christian love in general, which would include love for God, love for one another, and love for the unsaved. You see, according to our Lord, Strzok says, love for God and neighbor are inseparable companions. Mark 12, verse 29-31 and Luke 10, verse 27 underscore this.

He said it is possible, impossible to love God and not love his people or to love his people and not love God. Now, to be clear before we move on, what the passage is saying, men and women, is the love, this love encompasses all relationships. In other words, it's not just our relationship vertically with Christ and with our Father, but also our relationship horizontally with the saints of God and people who are unregenerate in our community.

It encompasses all people. We are to love as Jesus loved. Therefore, this is what I want you to see.

It is so troubling, what is so troubling about the passage is that Christ says, if you do not repent of your cold, stale, lifeless, mechanical love, I will come to you quickly and I will remove the candlestick out of its place. This warns of a judgment, listen now, this warns, can God judge the church? Can the Lord Jesus Christ measure or mete out judgment against the church? Absolutely. This underscores the fact that our sovereign Lord will bring a judgment upon any church that suddenly begins to wane in their love for people in general.

And therefore, because of their lovelessness, they stand at risk of losing the candlestick, which is the very nature of God's presence with them that validates their witness in the eyes of the world. Listen, it is interesting as you study this, you see today the examples, Christianity, particularly in North America, is strong with churches that in one sense are no better than the Masonic Lodge. They have no witness.

They have no testimony whatsoever. Formality has replaced force. Superficiality has replaced spiritual reality.

Therefore, what they do is they just go to the motions they may give. They may have a mission board, but there is no passion because there is such a profound lack of love. My wife and I, years ago, we were in transition.

HeartCry had left Muscle Shoals and I had asked Brother Washer, I said, I have an Alzheimer's mother that we just got moved down to Alabama. And of course, that was a whole experience in itself. It was horrible.

Worst thing I've ever gone through because mother just took on an entirely different nature in her state of malady, you know, with dementia and all, and said things to me that she had never said before using very, very bad language. And it was horrible. And so I asked Paul, I said, you know, I need to take care of my mother.

He said, look, brother, he said, you stay there. And of course, two girls were both engaged and they got married. So he said, you can continue to work with HeartCry and stay there in Alabama.

I was very appreciative. But our dilemma was where are we going to go to church? Now, in our neck of the woods, they're in Florence, Sheffield, Tusculumbia and Muscle Shoals, the Quad City. They're probably in the outside parameter of that about 100,000 people.

And we've got all kinds of churches. And so we thought, what are we looking for in a church? I'm not picky. I was not looking for perfection, but there were five things in my heart that were non-negotiables I could not compromise.

Number one, I was looking for a solid, theological, theologically foundational evangelical faith church. Secondly, I was looking for a church that preached a clear biblical gospel, a biblical gospel. Thirdly, I had a firm conviction in not just in the inerrancy of scripture, but in the sufficiency of scripture.

Why is it that we don't do certain things as the world does? Because we believe that truth is what God has ordained to help me and set them free, not gimmicks and trinkets and methods that the world suggests. So you see, this thing of the sufficiency of the scripture was very, very important to us. Fourthly, I wanted to be a part of a congregation that believed and practiced biblical, restorative church discipline.

And the fifth thing I was looking for was a community of love. They didn't just say that they loved each other, but you could see it in the tangible proof of accountability and oversight and care and sacrifice. Now, you would have thought in our neck of the woods, if I can use that expression, we would have had beaucoups of churches, you know, to choose from.

But there were only two, perhaps three, that resembled this in some measure. Consequently, our response was we started a church. Not perfect.

We never feel as if we're better than anyone else in the community. But these things, for conscience's sake, were very important to us. We wanted a church, though, once again, I underscore, a church that genuinely loved one another.

Love was very obvious in the faith family. Now, what I want to do for the next few moments is I want to give you three things to just basically hang our thoughts on. Number one, I want you to consider with me the nature of this love.

The love that Christ commends, what is the real nature of that love? What is he talking about? Secondly, I want to talk about three primary relationships. Once again, I've already mentioned these, but now let's just expound on them. Three different relationships that this love encompasses.

And then fourthly, in closing tonight, we're going to once again look at the indictment of Jesus, that if we do not love like we had at the first, we will die. Your testimony to others individually and collectively will die. It will diminish and ultimately die.

So we begin tonight by just talking about for a few moments the nature of the love that Christ desires. And once again, we look back in verse number four, very familiar phrase there that we're most of us are very familiar with. When Christ said, I have somewhat against you because you have left your first love.

Let me stir up your mind in the way of remembrance again. Once again, the text speaks of a special kind of love, a love that is unique in nature and very simply put, practically conveyed. The love is the love of Christ.

The love that Jesus has, we are to emulate. We are to love as he loved. What are you saying? He is saying that Ephesus does not love with this kind of love.

The love that Jesus loved with. Now, can you believe and ask you this question, think about it. Is it possible for the church to love as Jesus loved? Believe that you said, man, that that's a standard.

It's almost infinite. I mean, there's absolutely no way that we could love the way Jesus loves, but it's interesting that that's exactly what Paul commands the saints at Ephesus to do. You remember the verse there in Ephesians chapter five, verses one and two, listen to this.

Paul said, be there for followers of God as dear children and walk in love as Christ also have loved us and have given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savor. Did you catch it? He said it is possible for these believers in Ephesus to love as Jesus loved. He's commanding.

This is a divine directive here. He says there and walk in love as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us. Now, I will say this in the way of clarifying this challenge.

I do not believe that we can reach that standard of perfection that Christ loves his elect or loves people with, but I do believe that we through the spirit, by virtue of the fact that we have a divine nature, we've been translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of the son he loves. We have the capacity to come remarkably close. We cannot use as an excuse that's beyond my reach.

It is not through the spirit. We can maintain consistency in this area. Now you say, well, how did Jesus love? Can I just give you a few things to think about for a moment? First of all, he loved you and I unconditionally, unconditionally.

Now here's the question like, why did Jesus love you? Some people might think, well, the reason Jesus loved me is because he saw some inherent good in me. There was something within me that apparently he took delight in that he assessed as desirable and consequently he showed his love toward me accordingly. I hope you don't believe that.

There was nothing within you, nothing inherent, nothing that you had cultivated through some performance of your own spirituality that merited his love for you. Somebody else might raise their hand and say, I know the reason that Jesus loved me is because he knew that one day I would receive him as my personal savior. Well, now we certainly don't minimize the importance of him being omniscient.

Okay. He knows all things. They end from the beginning.

However, though, that is not why he said his love upon you is because he knew that one day you would repent of your sin and believe his finished work for your salvation. Now, this is so profound. You is the reason that this encompasses the entire scripture.

Why did Jesus love you and love me? Are you ready for this? Because he loves you. Now that's the glory of love. Go figure.

I mean, you can't explain that even theologically. You beyond our comprehension that he put his love on us for no other reason than he just took pleasure in doing it. Kind of sobers you up, doesn't it? Makes you want to live for the praise of the glory of his grace.

He loved us unconditionally. And guess what? That's the way I'm to love the most undesirable people in my life. In a sense, we were all undesirable in his eyes, were we not? But he still loved us.

And God, the audacity of you, you're telling me you're charging me to love the people that I dislike the most, like Jesus loves me. What did the text say? Secondly, another thing about this love is notice the sacrificial nature of it. I mean, the infinite price was paid.

The blood was shed. The death was accomplished, the death of deaths for you and I. Substitution and atonement was offered to us as an act of sheer mercy. And it's all predicated on the principle of sacrifice.

Here's what I believe, friend. I think everything we do, our prayer life, our witnessing, everything we do in life, we should do with gusto, with great passion. Because you see, the way we live, the way we give should reflect the value that we put on the cross.

And the value of the cross is that his atonement was predicated upon sacrifice. You have no idea. Let it soak in for just a moment.

At least get just a brief glancing taste of it. Jesus loves sinners like you and me. I thought about the other day.

Think about it. I'm just speaking to you here. Listen, I'm not going to hell.

I am not going to suffer the wrath of God. That's love and based on his sacrifice. Thirdly, you see something else and that is his love was relentless.

It was faithful. I could not read. Listen, every time I come to John 13, you remember that the disciples are around the table.

It's the last supper. And John gives us this depiction of Christ's love for his own. It says that the Lord Jesus loved his own even unto the end.

Now, get a load of that. No matter how much I fail, regardless of all the glitches and idiosyncrasies and abounding inconsistencies and hypocrisy in my life, he loves me even unto the end. And Lord, did I hear you correctly? You said I'm to love like that? I'm to love my enemies.

I'm to love a saint that I dislike. I'm to love sacrificially. I'm to live love even to the end, just recklessly and relentlessly in spite of the fact that these people seem to be just an obnoxious eyesore to me ongoingly in my relationship.

Now, listen, Finn, this is the type of love that is underscored here in Revelation chapter number two. Now, here's something else I want you to see, and that is these three primary relationships that this love encompasses. Number one is vertically our love for Christ.

I believe hands down there is no competition that this is the greatest mark of regeneration. If somehow in the evil heart of a depraved sinner, there is such a work of grace wrought and imparting of a divine nature that God gives you the desire, the propensity to love God. The greatest evidence of salvation is a love for God.

Now, you remember the text in first Corinthians chapter 16 verse 22 that said, if any man loved not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema maranatha. It means let him be damned at the appearing of Christ. Love grows out of this relationship through regeneration.

And so we build upon it. It's cultivated greater knowledge. Experiential knowledge is acquired.

Listen, regeneration produces a love for Christ that surpasses our ability to love the Savior, our ability to love the Savior. The real capacity for him to love him comes from his love being poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That's what Romans 5 says.

It means literally shed abroad and our hearts are poured out abundantly by his spirit is the love of God. Then there are those who love loving Christ, but they don't love Christ. They're caught up in this sentimentalism, but they know nothing of the reality of the love that the work of his spirit and regeneration produces in their heart.

Consequently, when that love is encountered, it has a reciprocating effect that we love him in return. We love him because he first loved us, you see. But how can we measure our love for the Savior? It's interesting.

Listen carefully. It is most accurately measured by our love for people. By our love for people.

Now that moves me to the second point, the second relationship, and that is the church or my fellow saints. You recall the text in 1 John chapter 4 verses 20 and 21. Let me read it in your hearing here.

John says, if a man say I love God and hates his brother, he is a liar for he that loves not his brother whom he has seen. How can he love God whom he had not seen? And this commandment have we from him that he who loves God loves his brother also. There are some people that are very tenacious, you know, in observing certain things in their life, whether it pertains to theology or spirituality, and they could care less who they offend in the upholding of their sometimes secondary or peripheral issues.

But they violate a higher standard when they become mean spirited, and that is they have altogether forsaken the law of love. I'm speaking here in your beloved state back some years ago up in the Bangor area. I'm invited by pastors fellowship to come and address a number of pastors and their wives, and we have a service one night where everybody gathers in, and I emphasize the importance of love.

Now this particular group of preachers, you know, have the reputation as being what we might call ultra-separatists. In other words, if I have fellowship with someone that they don't like because they assess them as a compromiser, then they won't have fellowship with me either. It's what we call second degree separation.

And so these guys have a tendency to be very narrow-minded, very strict, and they major a lot on these secondary or peripheral issues. Now that night I addressed them, and even before we ever came into the auditorium, I went around greeted everyone, and listen, I really showed them it was a genuine love. I really cared for these men.

I listened to them. I appreciated them and their wives, but when I preached that night, I said, gentlemen, I know that whatsoever is not of faith is sin. And some of you, you know, there are certain things that are not cardinal doctrines in the Word of God that are very important to you.

Okay, I respect that. If that's what God has shown you, and you've had your conscience bound by those areas, I respect that, and I'm not asking you to negotiate or compromise whatsoever. But I said, gentlemen, here's the problem.

In the process of upholding your standard of separation in some areas that really are secondary, could it be that you're so strong in maintaining your standards that you have negotiated or compromised a higher standard, and that is you do not love? And I said, quite honestly, some of us here tonight, you've lost your own children because you don't love them, because in the process of upholding certain things that are so important to you, which are important, you don't want to compromise your conscience, but in the process of doing that, what you've done is you've shown a mean spirit of disposition toward your own children. And you know what I heard later? Some of them, even though their kids were still in the home, they were 10,000 miles in their spirit from their children. It's interesting, such a wave of brokenness took place that night, and this group is used to having an altar call.

I didn't call for an altar call, but the men came, many of their wives came in tears. This is huge. You see, throughout the New Testament, and particularly in the Pauline epistles, you find it's like Paul is a constant battering ram, underscoring, emphasizing, consistently love.

I see this in many ranks today. It's not just among, say, independent Baptists or Southern Baptists, but even some Reformed Baptists and some Presbyterians, I might add, that I fear that while they are contending for the faith, they have become contentious with the faithful. They're not known as men who allow truth to govern their life, and that truth is couched in love, but they're known more as fighters.

Their character is more polemical than passionate. Someone said years ago, you only love God as much as you love the Christian you dislike the most. Is that true? The Bible says that God is love, and he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.

Think about it for a moment. You only love God as much as you do the you dislike the most. Sobering to think of, isn't it? I was in West Virginia one time and preaching in a small church and had talked about the importance of love, and once again, this was more of a Reformed group that didn't give an altar call or an invitation, but immediately, as soon as the message was over, some of the people went right to their knees and some to their face, and one of them was one of the elders.

He had been bent out of shape toward a family that had been coming to the church, didn't like this family, didn't like their ways, and so here he is on his face before the people there, and he begins to confess, and he says, Lord, I am sorry for the way that I've responded to this family, for tonight I've recognized that in your kind providence you sent this family to our church to teach me to love, and I missed it. I've missed it, and that's what I'm seeing in my life these days. It's amazing how good God is in bringing some of the most cantankerous, if I could call them, heavenly sandpaper people into my life to perfect the life of Christ in me.

Oh, friend, listen, if I like and love everybody that likes and loves me, what glory for God is in that, you know? My former pastor that I was with a few weeks ago, he was pastoring a church up in Virginia. He said, man, I had a family in the church that just, they talked behind my back. They would come and shake my hand and sometimes warmly embrace me, but he said, I'd get one report after another from different people in the church how they were just chewing me up, and so he said, I come to the book of Proverbs one day, and I read this proverb, a gift given in secret pacifies anger, and he said, God spoke to me.

He said, I ordered this very beautiful, and for me, a very expensive bouquet of flowers. There was nothing going on in their life, no anniversary, anything. I just had it delivered to their residence with a note attached, dear so-and-so, I've been thinking of you.

I want you to know I love you, and I thank God for you in my ministry. Sincerely, Pastor. He said from that day forward, it was remarkable.

It silenced them, and they turned out to be some of my greatest supporters in the church. Now, you know what that is? That's New Testament Christianity. There's also this thing of the unsaved relationship.

Mark chapter 10, listen carefully, we're almost finished. Mark 10, verse 21, then Jesus, speaking of the rich young ruler, beholding him, Jesus beholding him, loved him, and said unto him, one thing thou lackest, go thy way, sell whatever you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven. Jesus looked upon him and loved him.

In Matthew's gospel, chapter 9, verses 10 and 11, it says, and it came to pass, as Jesus said, meet in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came, sat down with him and his disciples, and when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, why eat your master with publicans and sinners? Because

he loved those people. You see, Jesus never looked at eating with sinners as a compromise. His love surpassed what the Pharisees would think about him.

I don't know how many of you read Brother Charles's book, *The Law of Christ*. Tremendous illustration there. He draws from church history from the life of Evangeline Booth.

I don't know if you recall or not, if you read the book, but powerful illustration. I want to share a portion of that with you. Listen to how the story goes.

Miss Booth is reporting. She said, one morning, I stood outside the large iron gate of a local police court and prison. There were people waiting there, some out of curiosity and some because they had a relative inside.

Let me stop there. Evangeline Booth ultimately took over the army for her father. She was an open air evangelist.

Now, you know, how we reconcile that with our theology, friend, you know, we might have some difficulty, but she had a love for souls and she was faithful and discharging the good news of Christ to those around her. And here she is outside the prison one morning, looking on, looking for an opportunity to minister. And she goes on to say, I waited expectantly for the opening of the gate.

I heard the shuffling of heavy feet. They came close. And then I heard sounds of loud voices and one, especially that got louder and louder and more shrill.

It was the voice of a woman. The gates opened wide and I witnessed a sight, which if eternity could wash away from my mind, time never can. It was a woman, two policemen walked in front of her and two behind.

One stalwart man firmly held the right arm and the other, the left. Her hair was uncombed and matted. Her right temple was blackened with bruises, clots of dry blood stood up on her left temple.

Her clothes were torn and bloodstained. She tried to wrench her arms from the grasp of the policemen. The very atmosphere of the morning was laden with curses and oaths.

She tossed her head wildly as the six policemen dragged her down the passageway. What, Evangeline Booth asked the question, what can I do? One more moment and the golden opportunity to be of help would be gone. Could I offer a prayer? No, there was not time.

Could I sing? It would be absurd. Could I give her money? She could not take it. Could I quote a verse of scripture? She would not heed it.

Whenever the police were taken off their guard by an extraordinary action and relaxed their grasp, she said, I do not know. But with one wrench, she freed her arms and she clasped her hands as the wind spread her matted hair and she looked toward the gray skies and said, my gods. Now, what precipitated this exclamation of saying, my God, was the fact that Evangeline Booth had taken a step forward and kissed her on the cheek.

Miss Booth said she looked around wildly for a moment and then said, my God, who kissed me? My God, who kissed me? Nobody has kissed me since my mother died. Lifting her tattered apron, she buried her face in her hands and like a little lamb, she was led to the vehicle which took her to prison. Later, Miss Booth said, I went to the prison in hope of seeing her and at the door stood the warden.

When I approached him, he said, we think her mind is gone. She does nothing but pace up and down herself, asking me every time I go in, if I know who kissed her. Miss Booth said, would you let me go in and see her? I'm her only and best friend.

She said, the door was open and I slipped in. By this time, her face was clean. Her eyes were large and beautiful.

And she said, do you know who kissed me? And then she told me her story. When I was a little girl, seven years old, my widowed mother died. She died very poor.

Although she was a gentile birth, she died in a back basement in the dark. When she was dying, she called me to her. She took my little face in her hands and kissed it and said to me, my poor little girl, my defenseless little girl.

Oh God, have pity on my little girl. And when I'm going to protect her and take care of her from that day to this, nobody ever put a kiss up on my face until recently. Then again, she asked me, do you know who kissed me? I said, it was I who kissed you.

Then I told her of him whose life was so much more tender than mine could ever be and how he went to the cross and bore our sins upon himself and was wounded for our transgressions that he might put the kiss of pardon upon our brow. Now here's the beauty of the story. What a blessed benediction.

Miss Booth reported in Christ, she found light and joy and comfort and salvation and healing and love. Listen, before she was released from the prison, the warden testified not only to the change in her life, but to its beauty. She was made, remarkably made through Christ, the means of salvation to numbers of others who were down as low as she had been and who were bound with heavy fetters as those with which she herself had been bound.

Only a kiss. So I close with this, and that is Christ's ultimatum. Love or forget your testimony, forget your witnessing.

God may use his word and the gospel, the power of the gospel to still save in spite of you, but you're going to have a very difficult time connecting with people and bring them to the Savior. If you've approached the name of the Lord by your lovelessness. Interestingly enough, friend, when you study the New Testament, in particular, what the Savior says about love and the gospels, you understand why this is so vital in the functionality of the church.

The spirit of God emphasize emphasis is abundantly clear. Think about just a few references here. John 13 verses 34 and 35, a new commandment.

Jesus said, I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another by this show all men know that you're my disciples. If you're doctrinally sound. Is that what it says? No, they will know it because of your love one to another.

In first Corinthians chapter 13 verses two and three, the apostle Paul says, and though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith so that I can remove mountains and have not charity or love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned and have not charity, listen, it profits me nothing. I really believe that this should be blazed across the doorpost of our churches as we exit the building.

Charity never fails your systematic theology. As far as your testimony is concerned, your cleverness and communication. But I'm more from experience and it's painstaking.

It cuts deep against my flesh. But if I maintain a composure of love for him, love never fails. Listen, one man put it like this.

Without love, even heavenly tongues sound annoying. Without love, knowing it all theologically helps no one. Without love, powerful risk-taking faith is worthless.

Without love, think about it, brother, without love, giving everything to the poor is fruitless. Without love, even the ultimate sacrifice of one's life is pointless. Peter wraps it up in these words, 1 Peter 4 and verse 8, and above all things, it's one of four passages where love, in spite of the disciplines and the principles and the things that are being shared and laid down as a source of nourishment and sanctification for the church, four times love supersedes it all.

And here is Peter in verse 8 saying, and above all things have fervent, you know what the word fervent love there means? It's the Greek word extended. In other words, I don't say from afar, I love you, but I am willing to sacrifice that I might tangibly express my love for you in a sacrificial manner. For love covers a multitude of sins.

It's a good place to stop. As I've mentioned to the Hebert family and perhaps maybe one or two others, I'm very indebted to brother Charles Leiter and brother Bob Jennings. What really disarmed me in regard to my strong view theologically, which was not greatly biblical, was the fact that these men showed me Christ, the Christ likeness exuded from their life.

And I remember particularly with Bob Jennings one summer, we would go to his church almost every summer, I think 13 years, we went back and looked. I'd been there nine times in 13 years and our kids were growing up, his kids were growing up, and so we would live with them for four or five days at a time. My two boys went through a season of rebellion.

My second son Aaron, who is a pastor today in Florida, he was in a rebellious state. And we went to the Highway M Chapel there in Sedalia, Missouri. Little did I know that Bob Jennings was being used of God to impact my boy.

My son Aaron, on his church blog, will write an article periodically. And a few years ago he wrote this article entitled Authentic Love. He said, I remember the first time that my dad brought me to Highway M Chapel in Sedalia, Missouri, I was in culture shock.

The pastor and his family lived a very simple life, one which was foreign to my way of thinking. Every summer we visited Sedalia and every summer I spent time little by little with Bob Jennings. I vividly recall listening to Bob speak of the wonders of Jesus and knowing that this humble pastor had absolute confidence in the truth which he declared because he truly knew the one who is truth.

Listen, there was no pomp, fancy frills, arrogance, or fraud in Bob Jennings. What you saw you got. A man who loved Jesus, loved scripture, loved prayer, loved his family, and loved people.

He said, I will never forget one time in particular. During my season of rebellion in my late teens, we made our annual trip to Sedalia. The first day of the meeting, Bob came out outside to toss the football with me.

He was not an athlete and probably rarely picked up a football. That day though, he saw tossing a football with a stuck-up kid as a means of presenting the love of Jesus to that very kid, me. What he set out to do, he accomplished, and I will never forget that authentic love of Christ that I saw that day and every day in Bob Jennings.

And thank God bypassed me as Aaron's father to impact him through the life of this humble pastor, Bob Jennings. My son later recorded the 10 most influential people in his life that had the greatest investment in his life spiritually Bob ranked number six. I'm indebted to that man.

A friend don't miss the point. What kind of legacy do you want to leave your children, your family, and your church family, and those that are in your own circle of influence? Will they be able to point their finger and say, if there's one thing in spite of their idiosyncrasies and glitches in their personality, if there's one thing that's most outstanding that I felt the effects of, is that as a man or woman that loves as Jesus loved. Let's pray together.

Our Father in heaven, we're grateful tonight that we have such a worthy example in the Lord Jesus. I can scarce take it in when I recognize that you set your divine electing love on me, Lord. But I'm so glad you did because I could not help myself.

And even in my limited knowledge of you, Lord Jesus, I could not, I had no capacity to love you or show any gesture of love towards you. But you did something for me. And through that expression, that great expression of your love in bearing the cross on my behalf and being willing to be crushed by the wrath of God, that gesture of love was displayed before my spiritual eyes by the precious work of the very spirit of love that you sent.

And I thank you tonight that I have been slain I have been held captive by love. And this is a very formidable challenge for you to tell me in turn to love people the way you love me. Help me, Lord, to take this to heart.

And I pray for brothers and sisters here tonight, Lord, that perhaps you've spoken to. I've asked Lord that they too would aspire to be epistles of holy love and loving others sacrificially the way the Savior has loved them. Lord, if we could only take the time to enumerate the dastardly deeds of our evil heart and to think that you would look beyond that and convey love to us should sober us up long enough to really take into consideration, Lord, just how important it is and how pleasing to you it is that we love as your son loved.

So I would pray tonight to use this message, Lord, to bring glory to yourself. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.

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