

No: Six

Subject: Tough Love

Editor's note: This is the second in a three part series.

In our last column, we began examining seven expressions of true Biblical love. A thorough search of the Scriptures reveals that Christlike love has both tender and tough expressions. The first virtue of love we considered is that love is unmerited, gracious, and seeks the benefits of others. Most of our culture would agree with this tender side of love. God's word commands us to be forgiving, gracious, and merciful. But that is only one side of the coin and unless we include both sides, the church may well be crippled in its application of love.

There is another side of Biblical love that is often rejected because it feels unloving, intolerant, and judgmental. In this piece and in the one to follow we will examine six more expressions of love that might surprise us.

1. Love must be biblically informed. The apostle Paul prays for the Philippians that their "love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." (Philippians 1:9-10) We should desire that our love grow by leaps and bounds, but that can only take place when we learn how to love. The Greek word for "real knowledge" refers to a mature or advanced knowledge. The more we grow in our understanding of Scripture, the more we will mature in our ability to love the way God wants us to love. Christ-like love is not empty sentimentalism. It's deeply anchored in and regulated by God's word. Only through a love that is well informed by Scripture can we love in ways that please Him.

2. Love must be honest and truthful. The writer of Proverbs tells us that the "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." (Proverbs 27:6) This tells us that an enemy (lit., "one who hates") may seem to be a friend by his many kisses, and a true friend (lit., "one who loves") may seem to be an enemy by the wounds he inflicts by his willingness to speak truth. Paul had this experience with the Galatians and he responded this way: "So have I become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (Galatians 4:16)

3. Love must include hate. This sounds shocking, but it's exactly what Paul told the Romans who were confused about how to love. He instructed them to "Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good" (Romans 12:9). So, for love to be without hypocrisy, it must include hate. But hatred for what?

Hatred for evil.

Evil is the enemy of God and the enemy of love, and it is to be as fervently abhorred as love is to be fervently coveted. It is for that reason the psalmist commands, "Hate evil, you who love the Lord." (Ps. 97:10) Only when we hate what God hates will we love what God loves.

4. Love confronts sin. There are many verses that command us to confront sin. "If anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness." (Galatians 6:1). The word for restore was used in the first century to describe the setting of broken bones. We also see that Pastors and church leaders are to be "rebuked in the presence of all, so that the rest will be fearful of sinning." (1 Timothy 5:20) James tells us that "if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." Luke instructs us in the same way: "Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him." (Luke 17:3)

5. Love must include discipline. Are we loving parents? The writer of Proverbs describes parental love this way: "He who withholds his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently." (Proverbs 13:24). The bible teaches that careful and consistent discipline is loving, whether modern "experts" agree or not.

To withhold punishment from a child when it is deserved is to encourage the child in sin and thus to contribute to his eventual ruin. The parent who spares the rod of discipline might think he is acting in love, but God says it's hatred. The parent who genuinely loves his child does not condone naughtiness, but disciplines the child promptly.

So, we find that a careful search of God's Word that true love is both tender and tough.

There's one more characteristic of love that can cripple the church -- and we will examine that next week in the final column on this topic.

You might be surprised what it is.
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