

# **LOVE IN RELATIONSHIP**

## ***1 Corinthians 13:7***

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**November 16, 2008**

**PURPOSE** – To teach how love values relationships through its ministries of protection and covering.

**MAIN IDEA** – Because God has shown us a love which protects & trusts, we extend such love to others – protecting their gifts & ministry; trusting them in hope of relationship.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Read 1 Corinthians 13

1. Mark Driscoll, a pastor in Seattle, once preached a sermon titled, “THE SWORD & THE TROWEL”.

- It was drawn from Nehemiah 4 – a time when God’s people were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, (those walls are a Scriptural metaphor for building the church). They were rebuilding these walls at a time when OPPOSITION WAS RAMPANT. It was dangerous work. The builders were outside, exposed to attack from enemies.

So Nehemiah, the project manager, set up teams of people – some who would guard with spears & bows; others who would do the construction. Some workers, however, - those who carried materials – did BOTH! In one hand these workers had a trowel for BUILDING; and strapped to their side, a sword for PROTECTING.

- (i) Driscoll used this image to teach that, in the Christian life, there are always things that we are BUILDING & PROTECTING at the same time – things like marriage, family, business, ministry – we build people, we build greeters, we build “Kids for Christ”, “Students with a Purpose”. That’s the church – building PEOPLE through relationships. But marriage, family, business & ministry too need to be PROTECTED – from the values of the world, the deceptions of evil, the lusts of the heart. There are forces out there that DESTROY marriage, home, business & ministry.

- So, as Christians, we serve God with both trowel & sword in hand.

2. Today's descriptions of love MATCH the trowel & the sword.

Love always protects (sword) / love always trusts (trowel) ...

... for the sake of building – NOT A WALL – PEOPLE through relationship!

(i) That's what the CHURCH is – Jerusalem today – relationships in Jesus - at home, here, into the community

= relationships of trust, belonging, care, purpose, encouragement, vision, holiness, – so we go and change this world together, as God would have it be!

LOVE INVESTS IN PEOPLE & RELATIONSHIPS – and so love always protects; love always trusts  
(let's look at these two phrases)

## II. LOVE ALWAYS PROTECTS

1. Love always “protects” – The word in Greek – “stego” means “to cover”. It's used to describe a roof.

This fall I got a new roof on my house & garage – so I can relate to this word. Feels good. Things are protected beneath the roof – = no leaks, no wood rot (those boards replaced), things underneath are safe, no damage.

(i) Love protects by “sheltering” others ... you may be tempted to say something derogatory about someone, but then you decide it's not loving to day - so “you put a LID on it”.

A. That's the sense of this word. Love holds things within. “Love BEARS all things” (KJV)

B. Like the verse from 1 Peter 4 – “*Love covers a multitude of sins*”.

2. Jesus illustrates this love with the woman caught in adultery. The men there were ready to stone her. They were using her to try to trap Jesus.

Jesus loves this woman by protecting her. He steps in. He shelters. He commands these men to look into their own hearts before they throw a stone at her: “*Let him who is without sin cast the first stone*”. He was like a ROOF over this battered, broken woman – who indeed was adulterous. But Jesus cared for her as a person, her future – what might become of her life. In this protection, he cultivates relationship with her.

He Himself could have, but didn't, cast stones. He chose to protect her – FOR WHO SHE MIGHT BECOME ... “Go & sin no more”.

(i) God's love in Jesus does that for all of us – it covers a multitude of sins.

The Hebrew word in the Old Testament meaning, “to make atonement” – KAPHAR – literally means ‘to cover’. Jesus’ death on the Cross was a sacrifice that fulfilled the purpose of the Jewish Day of Atonement – celebrated each year in the temple. The sins of the people were covered by a blood offering from an animal sacrifice. Blood represents life and that blood SUBSTITUTED for the PENALTY OF DEATH that sin BRINGS. This blood was brought into the Temple’s holiest room – the Holy of Holies. So the blood was spread on the Ark of the Covenant located in that room – on the Mercy Seat. It became a covering for the sin of the people.

All of that was a foreshadowing / sign of Jesus’ ministry. He is both our great High Priest before God – who has gone into the heavenly temple; and our Sacrifice whose blood covers for our sins – “makes atonement” – For all who are sorry for sin and put faith in that blood, He PROTECTS us from the curse of sin - condemnation before the holiness & justice of God which would otherwise condemn us to eternal death - hell.

So His sacrificial love covers a multitude of sins. That same love, God calls us to share with others. So the Spirit of love is to cover. Love protects.

Here are some practical ways how:

3. Love protects by refusing to gossip about others.

Ephesians 4:29 – *“Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.”*

- (i) People do stupid things; wrong things. They may offend you, often unknowingly. But don’t talk to anyone else about that. If it’s a significant offense, talk directly to the person himself or herself – and work things out. If you can’t, put a lid on it, forgive silently – and be sure that your heart is FOR that person!

A. Refusing to gossip protects the unity of the church. It protects people & relationships in the church. For as soon as you bad-mouth someone to another person, you are creating DIVISION – you are forcing that person to decide whether they should side with your opinion, or that person/ situation you’re complaining about.

Love protects the unity of the church by refusing to speak badly about others. Go directly to people, with the desire to work things out.

(SHORT CAVEAT – this does not refer to issues of ABUSE – verbal, sexual, physical. Love does not protect the abuse of power. If you’ve spoken to that person and they refuse to change, then you don’t put a lid on that. Go speak to someone who has some authority to do something about it. That’s not gossip. That’s love – taking care of yourself and loving that person by holding them accountable. )

But it’s in the everyday RUB of life with broken people that love protects by not gossiping.

#### A COUPLE OF OTHER APPLICATIONS:

#### 4. Love protects with special care for the VULNERABLE.

James 1:28 - *“Religion that is pure & undefiled before God is to care for the orphan and widow”*. Some in society are more easily hurt than others – love has a heart for them.

Husbands are to protect your wives. If the kids speak disrespectfully to her, step in and put that child in his place. If the kids complain about her, do not sympathize. You tell them to speak directly to their mother; you affirm her love for them; you indicate your support for her.

Parents, protect your children – in the quality of the food you feed them; in wisdom about the company they keep; in limiting screen time; in training them how to guard their heart & body for their future spouse.

Love always protects the more vulnerable.

#### 5. And another group of people the Bible highlights for protection – leaders in ministry.

You know, if the Devil wants to take apart any Christian ministry – school, home, church ... he goes after leaders. Bust up a marriage, you greatly damage a family. Disgrace a principal, a pastor, an elder – you immobilize a school & church.

- So leaders are afforded a measure of protection in Scripture.

(i) 1 Timothy 5:19 – *“Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses.”*

- Paul writes these words recognizing that ministry leaders are going to get criticized. What better way to slow down ministry! The devil gets some less-mature, easily-influenced person to rise up hot & bothered by a church leader.

- But unless that person’s concern is validated by 2 or 3 others, ignore it – don’t give it the time of day. That leader needs to be protected. They’re doing Kingdom work. Don’t allow the criticisms of others to slow down the joy and commitment of your ministry leaders.

## LOVE PROTECTS THOSE WHO WORK HARD IN THE CHRISTIAN CAUSE

- You don't give equal time & weight to the sideline-critic.

(ii) Love protects the unity of the church, the holiness of the vulnerable, the vision & industry of the ministry-leader ... That's the SWORD ... now the TROWEL!

### III. LOVE ALWAYS TRUSTS

#### 1. LOVE ALWAYS TRUSTS.

After Jesus protects the woman caught in adultery, He says, "Go & sin no more". He invests in her. He expresses faith in her. (The Greek word here is the one we typically translate "believe".)

That's the sense of this 2<sup>nd</sup> phrase. LOVE BUILDS PEOPLE BY PUTTING TRUST IN THEM.

(i) Women, men just feed on this! There's no better way to charge their batteries than to say, "Honey, I trust you to handle that challenge. You can do it!" – that pumps them up!

#### 2. Now there's a RISK in this, right?

We know people don't always handle things. Who knows how that woman went into her future life. Addictive patterns of behavior are hard to break. So it's easy to be skeptical. In fact, in our world today it's pretty hard not to be – cause we're fed so much news about the FOIBLES of people. Sometimes we even take pride in being someone who never gets the "wool pulled over my eyes".

(i) But here's the thing about love. Love wants to BUILD PEOPLE. So love is prepared & inclined to give them a chance – to take that risk of disappointment:

A. Lewis Smedes writes: *"There is a careless streak in love. Love is ready to believe. It doesn't worry too much about being cheated, because it has eyes only for the other person – their needs; (their potential). If love seems a little naïve, it is not for lack of experience with people, but because love does not bother to calculate the odds on people. Love just zeroes in on them as people with needs ... and potential"*

- In that sense, love always trusts.

(Like Charlie Brown, running up to kick that football held by Lucy – over & over again. You think: "Charlie – why you doin' that? ... She's going to pull it away again! ... you gotta know better." But Charlie thinking, "Maybe she'll become a better person. I'll put some trust in her. I'll risk flipping out again.") There's that bit of Charlie Brown in love.

3. But love always trusts, not just for the sake of building PEOPLE, but also for the sake of building RELATIONSHIPS – building unity & vision in Christ.

That's the work of the church. Those are the walls of Jerusalem (trowel).

- Relationships are built through trust
  - = CULTIVATING TRANSPARENCY with one another
  - = Investing dreams in each other; seeking support & encouragement.

(i) One of the common complaints about the church – you've heard it – is that this is an organization that people must “dress up” to be part of. (I'm not talking about clothes!). Dress up with smiles & happiness. “The church is not a place you can actually be real.”

- So we aren't ... at adequate depths.

A. All of us –people - are like the proverbial ICEBERG! = 1/10 above the surface.

That's the part we see – sports / news / weather / kids

But then there's the 9/10ths below the surface.

= dreams, disappointments, family relationships, trials, angers, prides, secret thoughts, hopes & ambitions, our frustrations & temptation, our deep joys.

(ii) Connecting with one another at that 9/10ths level is what builds relationships – unity, encouragement, a sense of BELONGING to one another as followers of Jesus.

- That's what Christ came to bring us – that's the work of the church.

#### 4. THAT TAKES TRUST!

> “Can I trust you to know who I am?”

What if you don't like me? What if you reject me? ... I'll just keep that to myself!

BUT LOVE TAKES THOSE RISKS

- Not foolishly ... but again with an INCLINATION toward letting people know who you are – for the sake of building relationship.

When people know who you are they can ENCOURAGE & pray for you, join & work with you, grieve & rejoice with you.

... And in that unity Christ is present – His support / encouragement / grace & truth

LOVE always TRUSTS – for the sake of people & relationships

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Back in the 1970's, a popular book written by John Powell was titled, "Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I Am?"

And the short answer of the book was: "Cause if I tell you who I am and you don't like who I am ... THAT'S ALL I GOT!" (So I'll keep it to myself)

- So let me finish with this thought that can help us give to others a love that always trusts:

1. As Christians, WHO WE ARE IS NOT ALL WE'VE GOT! This is the meaning of salvation!

Through Jesus, we've met a God who loves you – in spite of who you are; in spite ANY way ANY person treats us (like that woman caught in adultery).

- (i) He's loves you with a love that covers your failures & weaknesses. He protects you.
- (ii) He's loves you with a love that TRUSTS – that is invested in your future & who you might become as a person.

THAT LOVE IS HERE ... TODAY. THAT LOVE IS PRESENT – to know & receive.

2. The Bible states, "God's PERFECT LOVE casts out fear" (I Jn. 4)

- it gives us a foundation to love others.

We can risk trusting others - & build in them as PEOPLE

We can trust others to know us – the REAL ME - because God's love is always there for me, no matter how you respond. And so we BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

3. We love because He first loved us – with a love that protects & trusts.

THAT IS THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

Today, I invite you to live IN – and then, LIVE OUT this love of God.

AMEN!