



Why We Fail to Achieve Biblical Love

"Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold."

— *Matthew 24:12*

It does not matter what our former life was like or how buried in evil and sin our background may have been, but there is a common crossroads of crisis at which every Believer eventually arrives. At some point we find ourselves staring into God's Word knowing that we have fallen short. We have to face the fact that Scripture plainly reveals that some aspect of our life or behavior is incontrovertibly in conflict with God's Word and ways, and it is usually that one thing which is the absolute most difficult personal issue, the sin which we are the most hesitant to even acknowledge because it has become such a basic part of our character that we can hardly imagine changing it. I arrived at one of these intersections when it came to certain relationships. I knew that what God commanded in His Word and how I lived and behaved in regard to this issue was at the very least a contradiction, and if I were totally honest, was in actuality hypocrisy.

As a Christian teenager entering high school I first experienced this conflict with the issue of lust. Now I know that no one is old enough to know what it was like when I went to high school a millennia or so ago, so let me provide the proper context: Abraham Lincoln had just been re-elected to a second term, scientists had finally discovered fire, and the Dead Sea was only sick. (Yes, it only had a mild cough and fever so we just thought it had the flu. It was very sad when it died.) But in terms of high school it was the age of the mini-skirt.

Yes, the Southern California high school I attended was populated by several thousand students, 53% of which were female and came to

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school every day determined to out-do each other in their best mini-skirts. And it did not go unnoticed by the boys. In fact, I got sort of angry about it. Have you ever had a spiritual issue where you prayed a little too directly, maybe even a little too angrily?

I raged, "Lord, what is this requirement You have laid down in Your Word that I'm not supposed to lust after girls? It is completely contradictory to the way you made us! You created us both physiologically and psychologically to behave and be attracted in this manner, so how can You just say not to do it? What **REALLY** bothers me is that You would just unilaterally command me **NOT** to lust and not bother to provide instruction how to accomplish this! It's just not fair!" And you know, I could almost swear I heard muffled giggling from Heaven.

The Holy Spirit directed me to a single verse, which I still quote from the NIV as that was the translation I used at the time, but it basically works out the same in all the major translations...

*"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."
— Job 31:1 (NIV)*

Why would I make "a covenant with my eyes" when it comes to lust? Wait a minute...you don't mean that lust is the by-product of how I choose to look at them, do you? You mean because I fixate on them as sex objects I am fueling my own, incorrect feelings? Oh, no! You don't mean that in order to deal with lust I have to change the way I look at them, do you? You mean I have to stop looking at them as sex objects and start treating them with the respect of normal human beings? Oh, man! Does that mean I should actually be treating those girls in my youth group like sisters in the Lord?"

This was one of my first lessons in the true purpose of God's Word, that when we put God's Word into practice it changes behavior, and the proof of a biblically right change in behavior is in a change in our

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personal relationships. If I was going to address the issue of lust it would involve putting God's Word into practice to such a degree that it doesn't just change my thinking, it doesn't just alter my behavior, but it ultimately becomes visible in my changed personal relationships with others.

*All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for **training in righteousness**; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

— 2 Timothy 3:16–17

What do these goals of the purpose of God's Word all have in common? They are all focused on changing behavior. Truth be told, the proof we are handling God's Word correctly is nowhere proven more than by changes to our personal behavior resulting in visibly changed personal relationships. This is one of the most effective measurements proving that we are not merely reading God's Word but putting it into practice.

Three of the most common Bible study approaches can be characterized as "informational", "instructional", and "inspirational".

"Informational" study is the gathering of facts, the study of God's Word which does not necessarily result in a changed life. The world is full of scholars and Bible experts who have studied God's Word all their life yet remained unchanged because they merely see it as history or literature. Those who approach Scripture exclusively for informational purposes never allow God's Word to penetrate their heart.

"Instructional" study takes it up a notch by seeking knowledge that will change or strengthen what we believe. Particularly for new Believers this approach can change behavior provided what is learned is actually put into practice. There is quite a difference between knowing how God wants us to live and behave versus actually doing it.

"Inspirational" study is most often used during times of emotional duress or heightened personal need. We might call this "devotional" reading wherein we search God's Word (most often the Psalms) for inspiration. We are not necessarily looking for information and neither is instruction often desired during such times. We want a "lift" or bit of encouragement.

We certainly need to understand God's Word informationally and in terms of instruction, and without doubt there are times when inspiration is desperately needed, but we must not lose sight of our ultimate goal where the study of Scripture is concerned. The \$5 seminary term is "incarnational" study.

This refers to taking God's Word to the level of the heart resulting not only in changed living but changed relationships. Just as Christ was incarnated as the Word who became flesh, so it is our goal that the Word become an inseparable part of us, that we are permanently changed going forward. This is achieved when we believe without hesitation that God is speaking to us through His Word, that we "hear" the voice of God through His Word. As it has often been observed, prayer is how we speak to God, Scripture is how He speaks back.

The Believer no longer treats their Bible merely as information, instruction, or even inspiration because they sincerely put into practice the fact that the Word is Christ Himself. And if we personally recognize the voice of Christ in the Word, we arrive at that crossroads of whether to continue our own way or forsake it for His way. If we choose to practice His Word instead of merely being aware of it, our behavior can no longer continue "business as usual" and will ultimately reveal itself in our changed relationships with others. Perhaps this is revealed nowhere better than by Christ Himself.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

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— *John 13:34–35*

God's Word ("*a new commandment*") has the ultimate goal not just to change behavior ("*love one another*"), but is visibly proven by changed relationships ("*By this all men will know that you are My disciples...*").

I have to say, however, that this commandment disturbed me as much as my conundrum with lust. In a sad personal replay of personal angst, I found myself staring at the biblical requirement to "*love one another, even as I have loved you*" and found my life profoundly in conflict with the way I lived versus what God commanded. I prayed a little too directly again in anger, "Lord, what is this requirement that I love like Jesus? That's impossible! He is Jesus, Your Son! How can I, the furthest thing from Jesus, a mere mortal with all my built-in limitations, possibly be expected to love like Him? More so, why would You demand this of me and not even give me a clue of how to achieve it? Your requirement is impossible!"

This time I could swear there was almost multitudinous laughter from heaven, and once again the Holy Spirit directed me to a single verse.

But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

— *1 Timothy 1:5*

Where does biblical love come from, love in the character of Christ Himself? Here we have it: "*a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*".

What exactly is "*a pure heart*"? To properly understand how God's Word defines "pure", whenever you come across this word or one of its variants just substitute "unpolluted by sin". This is describing a heart unpolluted by sin, a heart which will not abide any room for sin to reside within it. Would you drink a cup of water which contained just a single drop of poison? Neither will a pure heart tolerate co-existence of sin. But how does one attain such an achievement?

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How do you know what sin is? By what is it defined and made known to you? God's Word. A pure heart is the result of applying God's Word to the heart. It is what occurs when we refuse to allow sin residence in our heart, to live exclusively according to His Word in direct opposition to sin.

What exactly is "*a good conscience*"? We have moved from the heart to the mind, the place where the conscience resides, that place where we know intellectually that we have a decision to make. Will I do it God's way or my way? Will I yield to His desire or to my desire? Will I listen to the world or will I listen to Him? A good conscience is proven by always choosing God's way rather than our own. And how is this achieved? It is the application of God's Word to our mind. It is always acting in accordance with His Word, deciding not to follow our own inclination but by faith to trust in His Word and ways in direct opposition to the tug of our own.

What exactly is "*a sincere faith*"? A lot of people have the wrong notion of the meaning of "faith". They liken it to blowing out the candles on their birthday cake and wishing really hard for a pony. To understand the biblical definition, whenever you find the word "faith" in either Testament just substitute "faithfulness". (Hebrews 11 is not really a hall of fame for "faith" as it is "faithfulness" in spite of the circumstances.) In this case, we have moved from the heart and mind to the soul, to being "sincerely faithful".

This is the expression of an uncompromising life which walks exclusively on God's path refusing to deviate to the right or left for even a few steps. It is an expression of lifestyle. How do we know the correct path? How do we know how to walk exclusively according to His Word and ways? It is the application of God's Word to our soul.

Biblical love is achieved by the application of God's Word to the heart so as to be rid of the pollutive effects of sin, by the application of

God's Word to the mind so as to choose to live by faith according to His ways rather than our own, and by the application of God's Word to our soul so as to walk His path and no other.

Why is it that we fail to love like Christ? Because we are compromised in one or more of these areas. It is impossible to achieve biblical, Christ-like love when we allow sin to live side-by-side with our Christianity. It is impossible to love biblically when we "mostly" choose to live according to His Word and ways but not exclusively. It is impossible to love biblically when we "mostly" walk His path but all too often pursue diversions. It is impossible to fulfill the commandment to love like Christ only because we fail to allow His Word to take hold of us incarnationally by putting His Word into practice from the heart, mind, and soul.

There are two great concepts taught throughout Scripture: love and truth. Ultimately we must learn that biblical love is defined by biblical truth. We cannot know the biblical definition of love apart from its being defined by biblical truth. To love like Christ is a lifetime sanctification process which is achieved by the application of His Truth to attain "*a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*".

In a sad reversal of this fundamental truth we are seeing how, in these Last Days in the shadow of Christ's Return, that Christ's prediction of love in the End Times is coming true.

"Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold."

— *Matthew 24:12*

The forsaking of God's Word from the heart, soul, and mind – here termed "*lawlessness*" – is just as much the defining characteristic of the unfaithful as obedience to same is for the faithful. The proof of disallowing the working of God's Word in one's life is ultimately proven by the very same standard and becomes visible in one's personal relationships. If the world is increasingly becoming a less loving place,

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it is only because the Church has become so by rejecting the Word just as the world has.

In His Love,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org