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### The Relationships We Live By

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**THE RELATIONSHIPS WE LIVE BY**

**A Major Applied Project  
presented to the faculty of  
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry**

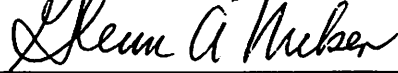
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## PREFACE

In James Dobson's newsletter he reminds us how difficult intimacy is to achieve in the last decades of the twentieth century. He says, "In both the United States and Canada, the pressures of living have almost destroyed the sense of community that each of us needs so desperately. Friends and neighbors seldom 'drop over' for unannounced visits for fear of intruding into a pressure-packed day. And even if they did, we would have to cancel appointments with the hair-dresser or the orthodontist or the car mechanic in order to entertain them. Thus, we careen through the days of our lives, being too busy for the people we love . . . even those within our own families."<sup>1</sup>

With the rise of clergy divorce, the breakdown of the family unit, the explosion of single parent families, the absence of extended family members living in close proximity, the increase of neighbors who remain strangers, the moral decline of our society in openly accepting abortion, homosexuality, euthanasia, pornography, and violence in the media, there is a growing need on the part of Christians to recapture the centrality of relationships and the values attached to them. What are the priorities of life and how do we ascertain responsible decision-making that will keep such priorities intact?

"We're constantly making choices about the way we spend our time, from the major seasons to the individual moments in our lives. We're also living with the consequences of those choices. And many of us don't like those conse-

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<sup>1</sup> James Dobson, "Family News from Dr. James Dobson," October, 1996, 1.

quences / especially when we feel there's a gap between how we're spending our time and what we feel is deeply important in our lives."<sup>2</sup>

I was surprised to discover how little was written defending the traditional concept of the hierarchical structure of relationships. The pyramid concept of placing God first, family second, church third, and work fourth, is ingrained in the hearts and minds of most Christians. Yet, very few resources are found to assist the Christian in properly understanding this widely acknowledged concept. Authors frequently make a reference to placing the family and work, under God, without any firm Biblical explanation for such conviction. Even less likely is to read an author who tackles the confusing and difficult questions which emerge as one attempts to actually live true to such ordering.

None of the books which I researched actually tackled, head-on, the issue of ordering our relationships. Contemporary authors talk increasingly about the importance of setting boundaries around our relationships. At best, Biblical references to justify and guide such boundaries are scattered and non-specific. A pastor informed me that a popular seminar leader<sup>3</sup>, a number of years back, used to teach the hierarchical structure of relationships. Unfortunately, I have not been able to obtain any books, lectures, or notes from this teacher. Another author, in a magazine article I read a number of years ago, caught my attention by declaring that the hierarchical structure of relationships was unBiblical. Though I can't recall author or magazine, such a bold declaration, without any

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen R. Covey et al., *First Things First* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 17.

<sup>3</sup> I believe his name was Bill Gothard, but am uncertain.



Biblical substantiation or alternative teaching, continued to haunt my convictions. This was the first red flag which prompted my present study.

Having spent a great deal of time reading, researching, and pondering upon the issues involved in the ordering of our relationships, according to the teachings of Scripture, I have become increasingly aware as to why there exists such a flagrant absence of material on this issue. Scripture merely presents the theological boundaries around which relationships operate. Whenever there are no clear cut, black and white, guidelines provided, the task of delivering insightful direction to the tougher conflicts in life is more open for scrutiny. Within the freedom issues of decision-making there is a greater perception of disconnectedness between one's theological foundation and the actual living of life.

Throughout my research I have had to continually inquire, "So what?" Hopefully the conclusion of this project reveals the practical results needed to be responsible decision-makers in Christ. Thinking has become more and more of a lost art in the frantic search for meaning in life. Today, computers and media do our thinking for us as we live reactive lives, victimized by the insatiable demands of our culture. Many people seem to be clueless with regards to the real meaning and purpose of life. We need to better clarify the importance of relationships and the God-given boundaries around which our relationships are managed. Christians are called to become *intentional* in centering their lives around relationships with God and others. Christians need to take an aggressive proactive stance in prioritizing their lives around the importance of nurturing relationships.

Lyle Shaller, in an article written for the Texas District of The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod, quotes Ray Oldenburg in suggesting that “most adults in North America and Europe organize their lives around three places. The first place is the home...The second place...is the place of work. The third place is . . . the core settings of informal public life.”<sup>4</sup> If this holds true, it expresses the need to clarify the Biblical importance of relationships and the God-given boundaries around which our relationships are managed.

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<sup>4</sup> Lyle Shaller, “First Place or Third Place?” Texas District Newsletter, 15 October, 1996, 1.

## **ABSTRACT**

“The Relationships We Live By” is an examination of the relationship-centered life whereby many of the traditional hierarchical ordering of relationships are evaluated and challenged. This is an analysis of the prioritization of relationships as discerned from the Scriptures.

**INTRODUCTION**  
**THE FOCUS OF LIFE**

***Life Management***

Life is extremely hectic for most active, hard working people. Full of activity, obligations, and responsibilities, life frequently offers little more than a stressful environment of demands. To further complicate this maddening rat-race, many people spend the bulk of their time pursuing the trivial. This may work well around the breakfast room table with family or friends in a game of trivial pursuit, but when such shallow and insignificant quests monopolize one's priorities and time, life spins out of control in boredom and unfulfilled satisfaction.

This frantic setting of the unimportant exacerbates the self-seeking drive for fulfillment of worldly pleasures. Out of control, boundaryless, the person victimized by this world's insatiable appetite for success ultimately falls under the weight of desire. True success, by way of happiness, peace, and joy, is discovered and experienced only in harmony with a life lived in the security and significance of its Maker. When a person travels through this world ignoring the rules of safety, then unnecessary risk and danger lurk around every corner. Likewise, when a person's journey through life holds forth no real purpose, accomplishes no goals, the trip becomes a haphazard source of satisfaction.

We are not a law unto ourselves. We have been created and redeemed by God, in Christ. We have been bought by the precious blood of the Son of God, shed on the cross. We are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; 7:23). “We don’t get caught up in the arrogance of values that blinds us to self-awareness and conscience. Our security is not based on the illusion of comparative thinking, ‘I’m better looking, I have more money, I have a better job, or I work harder than somebody else.’ Nor do we feel any less secure if we’re not as good-looking or have less money or prestige than somebody else. It’s irrelevant.”<sup>5</sup> Our security comes from the love of Christ which establishes us in an eternal relationship with God.

### ***Life Direction***

What goals or purpose should the life of a Christian accomplish?

A restive search is going on today, and almost everyone is engaged in it. The search is for meaning in life, for significance, for purpose. Captured by a meaningless job and caged inside four walls with a TV set for companionship, modern man feels trapped. We need not extend the picture except to suggest that a disintegrating anguish takes possession of people when suddenly they realize that life is empty and sterile, completely lacking in meaning for them. One single devastating question keeps begging for an answer: Why live? The author of Ecclesiastes struggled with this question long ago and wrote: ‘I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind . . . so I turned about and gave my heart up to despair.’ (1:14; 2:20)<sup>6</sup>

Christians often live with an undue sense of direction. Through faith in Christ, Christians are deeply embedded in the security of His love and the

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<sup>5</sup> Covey et al., *First Things First*, 72.

<sup>6</sup> Harry G. Coiner, “The Secret of God’s Plan,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 34 (May 1963): 261.

promises of His life everlasting. Christians are not typically oblivious concerning what life ought to be about and how life ought to be managed in some sort of generalized idealism. However, the bulk of Christians, if not all, wrestle with the *specificity* of life management as it is lived in harmony with God's expressed will.

To establish the truth of this wrestling with the proper management of relationship decisions I surveyed one hundred people. Fifty of those surveyed were clergy. I chose clergy serving as circuit counselors in the Texas District of The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod and, therefore, who were engaged in additional relationship responsibilities. I also chose to survey fifty laity who were members of Our Savior Lutheran Church in McKinney, Texas. When surveyed, clergy and laity alike affirm belief in the traditional hierarchical placement of relationships.

The vast majority confirm frequent victimization in responding to the needs of others. Nearly half of all surveyed also expressed difficulty in distinguishing between serving God and serving others. Over half find it hard to draw proper boundaries in responding to requests for one's time. By their own admission, a little over one third of those surveyed confessed failure in responding to others as a person who is led by God's clear directives.<sup>7</sup>

Because of the overwhelming lack of guidance in the daily ongoing management of life's decisions and direction, many Christians opt to simply remain oblivious to the specific challenges provided by God's Word to prioritize their lives. This apathy towards proper stewardship is further frustrated by the

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<sup>7</sup> For survey and results see Appendixes A, B, and C.

abundance of obstacles interfering with the ideal Christian response. Usually discontent with their status in this world, too many Christians are inappropriately *content* with living on the surface of life's issues; disregarding any real attempt to attain to a more in-depth purpose of life, lived under the cross.

An often repeated slogan touches upon the truth of life, "Only one life; so soon it will pass. Only what's done for Christ will last. That slogan clearly addresses our search for meaning and purpose . . . We want to make a difference in the world, but we wind up cluttering our days with routine tasks and essentially meaningless activities."<sup>8</sup>

Idealistic expectations which are unreal and impossible to maintain over the long haul may very much over complicate our life on earth. "Keep it simple stupid" expresses the wisdom to which many intellectually twisted minds need to return. The legalistic mindset, plagued with infinite rules and regulations, becomes bogged down in a quagmire of guilt and failures. This extremist view of the law stifles action with the inevitable inability to perfect one's course of direction.

Conversely, a greater temptation towards apathy lies in one's very fear of succumbing to yet more demands instead of finding relief from the already overflowing burdens placed upon one's shoulders. "Indifference pokes a slow leak in our boat as Intensity and Anxiety climb aboard."<sup>9</sup> The majority seem to feel that they have enough generalized insight into what God expects from their lives so

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<sup>8</sup> Alan E. Nelson, Five Minute Ministry (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 13.

<sup>9</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, Growing Wise In Family Life (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), 174.

that to study it in more depth would lead to an abandonment of life-long dreams. There is a strong perception that prevails in the minds of many that a commitment to the study of truth would plunge them headlong into the fate of unfulfilled desires and overwhelming failure. Many feel that to grow in their understanding of God's directives would engage them in a perpetual redirection away from life's pleasures and into the depths of unfulfillment.

On the other hand, those who do sincerely embark upon the search for identity importance often find themselves in the gripping jaws of indecision, guilt, and failure. Confused on how to draw the appropriate boundaries around the never-ending opportunities of service to others, the sincere Spirit-created desire to love one another becomes tangled in the web of "real" life. Such faithful warriors regularly recapture the commitment to serve the Lord only to reenter a world of enormous demands, which results in burying the good intentions before they have the chance to sprout into living fruit.

### ***Life Plan***

Where does all of this leave a person who sincerely and faithfully desires to grow and mature as a child of God? The church teaches that a Christian is a unique individual, loved by God by name, and gifted by God with specific time, talents, and treasures. God has a specific plan for each individual servant of Christ for utilizing the gifts from him. What is that plan? Ephesians 2:10 expresses it well, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."



What are these good works? They are works which proceed forth, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through faith in Jesus Christ. Indeed, God's Word makes it plain that "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebrews 11:6). So enabled by our faith, created and sustained by God's Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3), our lives produce the works which God has prepared in advance for us to do. The Scripture provides insight to the general nature of this fruit which God desires from our lives in His Name.

### ***Life Definition***

One of the most revealing sections of Scripture concerning the security of life is the final discourses of Jesus to His disciples. Here the Lord brings to our attention a number of important insights: "I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. . . Remain in me, and I will remain in you . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you . . ." (John 15:1, 4, 16). First and foremost, life is about a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. The tie to the Father through the Son is the most important *defining* issue of life. Without this connection to the Father, life is only an appearance, death abounds. John informs us, "Anyone who does not love remains in death" (1 John 3:14). Jesus himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

True life is defined in relationship to God. God is the source of life. This life is revealed through the Son of God. "In him [Jesus] was life, and that life was the light of man" (John 1:4). The opposite of life is death. Death is ultimately defined by Scripture as separation from an intimate relationship (connection) to

God, the source of life. Cut off from the source, life ends. We see this verified by God's account of the creation and fall. In Genesis 2:7 we read, "and God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Concerning death, we read the warning, "but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

### ***Life Lost and Regained***

The rebellion of man/woman resulted in the curse of death. Yet, we discover that upon eating of the forbidden fruit, humankind did not experience immediate physical death. What was encountered instead was separation from the intimacy of God's presence in the garden. The day man/woman ate of the tree, they died; they were cut off from the intimate presence of God as they had formerly experienced it. Physical death would result as a consequence of such separation, but the separation was the fulfillment of the warning God had given (Genesis 3).

Thus, the ending of life is not a reference to annihilation but to the state of separation. Life lived apart from God is not life in its truest sense. Separated from God, existence is gripped by a constant source of frustration, torment, and misery. Eternal separation points to the never-ending reality of death in this hellish condition.

The essence of the Gospel of life is rediscovered in humanity by grace through faith in Jesus Christ who atoned for the sins of the world. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he

dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25-26).

Observe here that physical death, which merely robs a man of his sinful body, is not death in the truest sense. Physical death is still an enemy with which we contend, but it is no longer able to separate us from the love (relationship) in which God has established us through His Son.

Scripture explicitly declares this victory in Romans 8:35-39; "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Therefore, we learn that true life, re-created in Christ Jesus, overpowers and defies even physical death. St. Paul exclaims, "Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:54b-57).

This life, regained for us who believe, is consequently the work of God in us. The Scripture expressly testifies, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). By God's grace in Christ, we become

the friends of God for which we were created. In this friendship (relationship) with God we strive to live in harmony with His presence. This new life in us longs to please God, contrary to the sinful nature in us which strives to retain us in the grip of death. Romans 8 provides an excellent commentary on the dual nature of life and death residing within us. Notice especially verses 6-8 of Paul's discourse, "The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God."

### ***Life Expressed***

Indeed, that which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit (John 3:6). Life is re-created and redefined in relationship to God through Jesus Christ. Those born of the flesh alone are not able to rise up in the significance of true life with God. Life, derived and dependent upon Christ, is expressed as an extension of God's life in and through us.

What is the nature of such life? The essential nature of God's being is love; "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16b). The Spirit controlled mind (Romans 8:9) is forever looking to God for the directives enhancing life. How might we achieve the fullest extent of the joy, peace, fulfillment which life in Christ offers in the context of this vale of tears? What should be the overall expression of our life lived under the cross? The intertwining of our need for security and significance is brought forth by the inter-connection between God's love for us and our love for others.

In the quest for the Spirit-filled life, God informs us of the fruit we will bear. Jesus refers to this outward expression of our inward relationship with God when He says, "If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing . . . This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples . . . but I chose you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last" (John 15:5,8, 16). No optional clauses are provided in this declaration from God. Just the opposite. Jesus declares, "If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned" (John 15:6). James, of course, echoes this profound reality when he writes, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

We also discover from the words of Jesus the necessary correlation between remaining in His love, obedience to His commands, and bearing fruit. To engage the love of Christ in our lives is to obey the commands of Christ. This faithful obedience is motivated and empowered by the love we have been given. And, as in a never-ending circular fashion, this love is the fulfillment of faithful obedience (the retention of love through faithful obedience). The love of God for us produces the power to obey which produces the fruit of obedience; namely, love for God expressed in our love for others. This fruition is what supplies our lives with meaning and purpose (significance) and produces within us the joy of the Lord never-ending (John 15:11).

This understanding of the fruit of obedient love is further elaborated upon by Jesus, "If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have

obeyed my Father's commands and remain in His love . . . my command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. No one has greater love than the one who lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. . . This is my command: Love each other" (John 15:10, 12-14,17).

Our Lord's summarization of the law of God exemplifies for us the all important place of relationships. Having brought us into a personal relationship with himself, Christ directs us to look upon our horizontal relationships in like fashion. We are empowered with God's love to empower others with God's love. *Herein lies our true significance in this world.* Herein lies the heartbeat of the Great Commission. This bearing of fruit in acts of obedient love toward one another enables God to use us according to His purposes and will. This brings value to our present earthly existence. Relationships are highlighted in the gracious cycle of God's activity by which He feeds us through the Word and Sacraments, and we respond in love by loving others. In this life with God, through the means of grace, God hears our needs and supplies us with whatever we need to continue in this act of love towards others (John 15:7,16).

### ***Life in Relationship***

Thus, according to Scripture, we may conclude with confidence that our importance in this world is discovered within relationships. Stephen Covey advises, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."<sup>10</sup> The focus priority of life lies in a relationship with God the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And close to this Trinitarian relationship is the super-

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<sup>10</sup> Covey et al., First Things First, 75.

natural out-flowing of a relationship with each other. This relationship-centered purpose of life is abundantly clear throughout Scripture. In other words, a person's "most basic need in life is for relationship."<sup>11</sup>

However, keeping our focus upon relationships in this world of distraction is tough. Establishing and maintaining God-pleasing relationships is hard work. A frequent complaint on the part of parish pastors concerns the inability to concentrate on nurturing relationships due to the high level of administrative business demands. One of the reasons pastors fail to draw better boundaries which prevents a relationship-centered ministry is because it is easier to take care of business than to take care of people.

Yet, the two-fold nature of love (for God and others), or, you might say the triangular nature of relationships, is underscored throughout the light of God's Word. God initiated, in His wisdom and power, the being of woman, created from man to be his helpmeet. God instituted the one flesh concept of holy marriage. God, by His grace and blessing, ordained the fulfillment and goodness of life to be founded upon both the vertical and horizontal planes of relationships.

"Our deepest need is to belong, to be in a relationship, to have a spiritual and emotional 'home.' The very nature of God is to be in relationship. 'God is love,' says 1 John 4:16. Love means relationship, the caring, committed connection of one individual to another...We are built for relationship."<sup>12</sup> It was *God* who declared it wasn't "good for man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18).

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<sup>11</sup> Henry Cloud and John Townsend, Boundaries (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 37.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

The words of John Donne, "No man is an island unto himself" are indeed an understatement in light of this reality. A person cannot find meaning in existence apart from the receiving of God's love, or the extending of God's love through the active obedience of love. John, in his first epistle, puts this truth bluntly before us when he writes,

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love . . . Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love each other, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us . . . God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. Love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him . . . We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:7-8,10-12,16b-17,19-21).

Consequently, when we enter into the life of God, our life becomes an appropriate extension of God's love. This is true both in its recipient nature and its giving nature. We become simultaneously, by God's power and grace in Jesus Christ, objects and instruments of God's love.

Scripture presents life with God as a very intimate and personal relationship, but never as a *private* one. In loving him who justifies us we seek expression of that love towards others. Those Christians who live life attempting to privatize their Christianity strive in vain to reach the fullness of life in Christ.

The nature of persons is such that love and understanding are as basic to the personality structure as are food and drink to physical well-being. Every person needs and responds to love. The depth and nature of one's experience of love or hostility conditions one's ability to relate to other persons, as well as the manner and nature of such relationship. In any understanding of how personality is



formed, deformed, or re-formed, it is necessary to take into account the experience and meaning of love in the relationship of this person to others.<sup>13</sup>

The new life in Christ is not a solo performance. It is true that each believer sustains a direct and personal relationship to God as real as if he were the only Christian in the world. But the exercise of personal faith in Christ paradoxically destroys individuality. By baptism the believer is moved from a corporate involvement with sin and death to a corporate involvement with redemption and life. By faith Christians are identified with Christ and with all believers, and the life of faith thrusts them ultimately into commitments which are corporate. Christian discipleship is membership in a divinely ordained community, and the stewardship of the Christian is an action which becomes mutual and corporate because of the very nature of the church.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Life Prioritized***

Ultimately, the priorities we set in life are determined by our comprehension of what God expects and the source from where we are able to fulfill such expectations. These expectations are guided by principles of truth contained in God's revelation. These God-given life principles are regulated around relationships. Such principles, around which we strive to live our lives in Jesus, guide us in drawing the appropriate time, talent, and treasure boundaries in which our relationships operate. These priority boundaries correlate with our understanding of what theologically is associated with the third use of God's law, namely, the law serves as a rule for the sanctified Christian life.<sup>15</sup>

Since life is relationship centered, ascertaining Scripture's teachings with regard to the relationship boundaries of life in Christ becomes vital to one's

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<sup>13</sup> Alvin J. Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 131.

<sup>14</sup> Coiner, "The Secret of God's Plan," 274.

<sup>15</sup> Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 95.

maturity in Christian decision making. One's ability to respond to the needs of others and yet say "no" to any particular request should be shaped by a proper understanding of God's revealed will concerning relationships. Our "quality of life" is realized in relationship with God and in relationship with each other. God works His life through us to extend His love beyond us.

We should rightfully prioritize the vertical relationship with God over and against our relationships with each other. Scripture leads us accordingly in placing our primary allegiance in God. Having been justified by God, we are directed in our response to the very first commandment as understood in the light of Luther's catechetical meaning, "We should love, fear, and trust in God above all things."<sup>16</sup> This naturally includes all other relationships.

But how are we to hold our relationship with God in a position of primary allegiance? Are we ever excused from loving one another in order to love God? Is it proper to speak of degrees of love? Are some relationships more important than others? Does Scripture present the traditional understanding of a hierarchical ordering of relationships? If so, how are we to understand such a structure? What are the practical implications of placing one relationship "above" another? How are we able to discern where to Scripturally draw proper boundaries around our servanthood? These questions prompt the main subject matter of this paper.

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<sup>16</sup> Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation, 9.

## CHAPTER 2

### CLARIFICATION OF THE CHRISTIAN VALUE SYSTEM

#### *Relationship-Centered Life*

How do we properly structure our lives so that the proper boundaries are drawn and appropriate priorities are kept intact in the midst of finite time and abilities? Unlike God, we are not able to be everywhere, attending to everyone's needs. Though St. Paul speaks in reference to becoming "all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Corinthians 9:20), he also recognizes the constraints in this world which prevented his attendance equally to all relationships (Romans 1:13). Acknowledgment of our inability to be everywhere for everyone solicits the desire for a truly Biblical approach to relationships with regard to fulfilling one's meaning and purpose in Christ.

Through faith in Christ, we are equipped by God's power, plan, and grace to experience the significance of our lives by expressing the love of God in relationships. As God's love compels such action we are struck with the dilemma of prioritizing the relationship opportunities given, in order that we may be effectively used by God in the lives of others. Tension is created by the finite limitations involved in actively loving all people. Anxiety is produced due to the unchangeable circumstances in life, over which one has no control. Confusion is added by much of the psychological directives in our society, whereby we are

told, "Take care of your self and prioritize your life according to what *feels* right for you." Anxiety is enhanced further through the church's teachings which present a confused structure of hierarchical priorities.

A critical analysis of the traditional hierarchical structuring of priorities needs to come under the careful scrutiny of Holy Writ. In my survey given to circuit counselors, over half of the circuit counselors responding believed that the Bible teaches the hierarchical structure of relationships; consisting of the following order: God, family, church, then work. Every laity surveyed, except one, affirmed their allegiance to this belief.<sup>17</sup> Just what does it mean that one relationship is held in a higher position than another? Are there degrees of love, and, if so, what are the guiding principles of such reality for daily living? Over all, wherein lies the value of life?

### ***Defining "Values"***

"The term *values* is a relatively recent one and is sometimes dismissed (for example, by philosopher Allan Bloom) as a piece of barbarous jargon. But everyone uses it; i.e. people in everyday life, journalists, politicians. Presidential candidates now campaign by telling crowds, 'I share your values.'"<sup>18</sup> President Clinton, in his acceptance speech during the 1996 general election, referred to the common values shared by all Americans. He stated these values as "faith, family, and work." This conveyance on the part of our country's chief executive

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<sup>17</sup> See Appendixes A, B, and C, response question 1.

<sup>18</sup> Hunter Lewis, *A Question of Values* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 7.

officer reveals the close association between our concept of values and the hierarchical structure of relationships. Contemporary authors frequently make reference to the idea of “human values.” We may readily observe that all people operate their lives out of some sort of value system. “Values underlie the way people think about the worth or importance of things, people, or items. Values are the basis by which we make our choices and decisions.”<sup>19</sup> The question which needs clarification and definitive direction is, “From where does ‘value’ derive its definition?” In other words, “What determines that which we *should* value?”

In the wealth of discussion concerning human values, reference is often made to the changing values of society. Values are seen as being in a state of flux throughout history. In the American scene, contemporary Americans are often evaluated as having lost sight of their forefather’s values. George Barna reports, “America’s values are shifting in unexpected ways: away from some traditional values, back to some traditional values that were rejected during the past two decades, and toward some new values that have not yet become ingrained in the heartbeat of the nation.”<sup>20</sup>

Even many Christians view life in contemporary society as bringing about a changing value system. Is this justified in the theological framework of the Christian faith? Does the proper and true confession of our faith allow for a new adoption of values? If so, from what reference point is that which we value deter-

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<sup>19</sup> Lyman Coleman and Denny Rydberg, Dear Me — On My Identity (Littleton, CO: Serendipity, 1989), 34.

<sup>20</sup> George Barna, The Barna Report: What Americans Believe (Ventura, CA.: Regal Books, 1991), 23.

mined to be something which a Christian *should* or *should not* value through time?

“Contemporary Americans are not only barraged by an informational overload of conflicting and ill-defined value systems; they seem increasingly unsure about how to respond. The fortunate among us have strong values, however difficult it may be to articulate or defend those values. The unfortunate suffer chronic anxiety, as described by Walter Lippmann in A Preface to Morals:

He may be very busy with many things, but he discovers one day that he is no longer sure they are worth doing...He has become involved in an elaborate routine of pleasures; and they do not seem to amuse him very much. He finds it hard to believe that doing any one thing is better than doing any other thing, or, in fact, that it is better than doing nothing at all. It occurs to him that it is a great deal of trouble to live, and that even in the best of lives the thrills are few and far between...Personal values really do matter. Without functioning values, we can hardly live at all, much less lead a purposeful and satisfying life.<sup>21</sup>

What we are searching for is a value judgment of such importance that it will dominate and color all other value choices. Cloud and Townsend recently suggested, “What we value is what we love and assign importance to.”<sup>22</sup> But the question still remains, “What *should* we value?” We indeed value that which we love, but this only creates a circular line of reasoning. For we also love what we value! Such nonsensical conclusions lead us to declare: “We value love because love is a value.” This conclusion not only grossly fails to define value, it neglects to define love as well. The question demands reply, “What determines if love, or anything else, *should* hold value for the Christian life?”

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<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Lewis, A Question of Values, 19-20.

<sup>22</sup> Cloud and Townsend, Boundaries, 43.

### ***Values Defined by the Gospel***

As we have noted in the introductory remarks, ever since the fall in the Garden of Eden, sin has entered the world and brought separation in the sentence of death. This loss of true life affirms that the greatest need of the human race lies in salvation, a restoration of the relationship with God. This need of the human race to re-enter into a harmonious relationship with the Maker points to and verifies the message of the cross as the most valuable treasure and greatest hope for the human race. Indeed, St. Paul proclaimed, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Thus, for Paul even the resurrection of Christ held importance only as it related to the crucifixion of Christ. Paul emphatically states, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

This is to affirm that the cross of Christ and the subsequent resurrection present the climatic events of all history and establish the foundation in understanding the doctrinal formulations of article four of the Augsburg Confession, namely, that we are justified by grace, through faith, in Christ alone.<sup>23</sup> What does the cross mean for us except that on the cross the sins of the world were atoned for and Christ provided the means by which we may be justified. In other words, the message of the cross and empty tomb of Christ is the core of the Gospel.

This redemptive message of the cross is nothing less than the heartbeat of the Gospel. That we are justified in the eyes of God because of the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the cross is the unique teaching of Christianity and holds

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<sup>23</sup> Theodore G. Tappert ed., The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 30.

forth before us the umbrella under which all values are obtained and evaluated. The Augsburg Confession states concisely, “we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions.”<sup>24</sup> Thus forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God is not obtainable by our own developed value systems. When we believe that Christ suffered for us, then we enter into the blessings of life and salvation (the blessings of a relationship with God). Therefore, our faith in the cross of Christ conveys the righteousness of God to us, and without such righteousness, all things whatsoever, including the values to which our life clings, are ultimately meaninglessness and trivial insignificance.<sup>25</sup> The Holy Scriptures reminds us that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Hebrews 11:6).

In the clear Christocentric teachings of Holy Writ, the cross of Christ becomes the highlight or the focal point of all that the incarnation of Christ means for the world. Because the cross of Christ is what brings true significance and meaning of life to light in our lives and enables us to retain a purposeful existence, nothing retains lasting and true value apart from this climatic event of Calvary. Real value, from the Christian perspective, is unattainable apart from the sanctity of life created by God and established anew by the death and resurrection of Christ..

Christ did not die for us because of some *intrinsic* value inherent in us. All that we are of value originated from God. We are valued because Christ died for

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



us. God doesn't love us because of our value; rather, we are valued because God loves us. This view is contrary to contemporary exegetical interpretations which classifies *man* as the pearl of great price which Christ found. In the book, Value Your Mate, the author states,

Behind the few words 'he sold all that he had' is the interpretation Jesus gave to his own impending death. His death was a purchase, a barter. No one trades something valuable for something cheap. We trade something we own for something that is more valuable to us. If it weren't more valuable in our sight, we would say, 'No deal.' Jesus, by dying, was showing in what high esteem he holds us. He values us more than His own life. 'In this is love, not that we loved God, but that God loved us and gave up His Son for us.' Jesus interprets love as value. Jesus treats us like a pearl of great value. Jesus showed us what love is. Then He said, 'Value one another as I have valued you.'<sup>26</sup>

The pearl of great price is the kingdom of heaven in Matthew 13:45 as the hidden treasure is the kingdom in verse 44. The merchant is not Christ but His people who by grace "find" the pearl. <sup>27</sup>

The acts of God in creation and, ultimately, in redemption is what brings forth the value of our lives. Value does not originate in us, but in God who creates it. Thus, our value is always correlated with our relationship with God. George Pugh is on the right track when he declares, "It is in the combination of fellowship and love that mankind experiences his own greatest value."<sup>28</sup> Specifically, it is within the fellowship and love of God, in Christ, that value is

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<sup>26</sup> Douglas McMurry, and Everett L. Worthington Jr., Value Your Mate (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 30. Oddly enough, Cloud and Townsend, in Boundaries, say basically the same thing, page 276.

<sup>27</sup> See R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 544-545.

<sup>28</sup> George Edwin Pugh, The Biological Origin of Human Values (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 382.

realized. In the beginning God created man and placed him in the position of significance. He was given importance and all of creation valued his position in the garden of Paradise (Genesis 1:27-30, 2:15,19-20). This God-created value in one's identity is ever present as a basic need within humanity in order to experience the peace and joy of his originality. "The need to have value, and to know that we have value, seems to reside at the core of each of us."<sup>29</sup>

However, through the fall into sin, humanity lost the sense of value. The very essence of one's value laid in the reflective relationship with God, created in God's image as the crown of God's creation. Consequently, it was the restoration of this blurred image by Christ's vicarious atonement that regained for the Christian, as a "new creation" in Christ,<sup>30</sup> significance in the eyes of the Maker. The resultant Great Commission brought clarity and affirmation to this value regained in Christ.

The sanctity of human life may be properly viewed from both angles: the originality of man/woman as a creation of God, and humanity as the object of redemption through Jesus Christ. Yet, the elevated concept and glorious good news of the cross does not lie in the value of the sinner, for whom Christ died, but in the love of Christ who died for the sinner in order to bring re-creation in the image of God. You might say that twice, by God's gracious action and initiative, man was *given* value.

Paul exclaims, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like him in His death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Philippians 3:7-11).

Paul stresses the centrality and importance of the message of the cross of Christ. The message of the cross provides Paul's life with hope, purpose, and confidence of faith. That's why he cries in prayer, "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14). Surely to "never boast," or "glory" as the King James version translates this word, includes the refusal to place anything in higher value than Jesus and his cross.

This is consistent with the Scriptural reality that the message of the cross conveys the very power that sets us free from sin and produces within us faith and hope everlasting. As said, in regards to the central article of the Augsburg Confession, the message of the cross is one and the same with the Gospel message of Christ, "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the Gospel, not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Corinthians 1:17).

Since “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God,” the resultant value system of the unbeliever versus the Christian will be observably different (1 Corinthians 1:18). This is expected because for the Christian the message of the cross defines the concept of “value” and determines what *should* be held in value.

Anything which holds no relevance to the message of the cross holds no real or lasting value. Anything distracting from or opposing the message of Christ crucified holds no value and is to be rejected as working against the real values of life. This value clarification founded upon the message of the cross is connected to the command of Christ, “Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matthew 6:33). Only through the Gospel is one enabled to successfully pursue the Kingdom and righteousness of God.

Therefore, it has been well said, “There really is nothing of Christ’s life that can be separated from the cross . . . so that from beginning to end His life is nothing but a kind of crucifixion until finally the nails are driven through His hands and His feet and what always lurked there in the shadows becomes a final fact.”<sup>31</sup> The centrality of Christ for us lies in His humiliation so that “being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2:8). The message of the cross has indeed become for us both the power and the wisdom of God. “We preach Christ

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<sup>31</sup> William A. Buege, The Cross of Christ (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 8.

crucified: a stumbling block to Jew and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23-24).

"This is the direct opposite, not only of every human inclination, but also contrary to every human evaluation."<sup>32</sup> Consequently, that which a person is inclined to hold in value and the wisdom to evaluate such "values" will be negatively effected without the power and wisdom of God in the message of the cross of Christ. Where the Gospel has truly been received in faith, "there has been some prior smashing by God, some remolding by God of our ordinary human expectations, some leveling by God of our regular human pride, some destroying by God of our very basic human selfishness."<sup>33</sup> This smashing, molding, leveling, and destroying of sinful expectations, pride, and selfishness will certainly affect a person's value system which was formerly developed from a mind controlled by the flesh.

The value system controlled by the Spirit of Christ leads to life. The value system adopted by the sinful flesh leads to death (Romans 8:12-13). Unbelievers and Christians share some of the same values but the motivation and understanding of such shared "values" exist in total opposition. For the Christian, the message of the cross determines what is to be held in value. The motivational energy expended in retaining these values is likewise empowered by the message itself.<sup>34</sup> When a person attempts to cling to a set of values apart from

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Romans 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes."

Christ, the values adopted will inevitably, due to our inherent corruption, be fashioned after our own sinful nature and invented images of God.

Since the cross of Christ is our glory, then, “we have come to bow under the verdict of God which smashes all our own verdicts.”<sup>35</sup> This surely includes the verdict of condemnation upon all that we value in the sinful flesh and the submission to all that God values in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Therefore, everything that we hold in value is defined by the Gospel. The value of anything in the Christian life lies in its connection to the message of the cross. The more obvious and direct the connection of something to the Gospel, the higher on the value scale it *should* be placed (and conversely as well).

All that God creates is good and therefore of value. Paul touches on this teaching when he confirms that “everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive” (1 Corinthians 10:23). The point derived from this Pauline statement reflects on the distinction between the intrinsic value according to created originality and the loss of connected value as something exists unrelated to God’s plan of redemption.

### ***Values and the Gospel Illustrated***

Many examples may be put forth to illustrate this point of distinction. Money may be of value to one’s life, as lived under the cross of Christ, within the proper stewardship and management of this resource. In such light, monetary blessings enable necessary earthly provisions for the welfare of family and

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<sup>35</sup> Buege, *The Cross of Christ*, 7.

church alike. However, if life operates apart from Christ and money becomes a facilitator of this separation (i.e. enabling one to ignore godly principles or promoting alcoholism), then acquiring money is hardly a proper value in life. The “rich fool,” according to Christ, was a fool, not because he had riches, but precisely because those riches facilitated his blindness to life lived under God. Disconnected to the Gospel of life, the monetary blessings became for the rich fool a curse (hardly something to be held in value).<sup>36</sup> That’s why Christ challenged the man who was inquiring about life eternal to “sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21).

Truly, the comprehensive connection between the message of the cross and that which the Christian holds in value elevates the value of relationships. First and foremost on the value scale is the relationship with God via the message of the cross: “For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God (1 Peter 3:18). “Every person must be valued as one for whom Christ died.”<sup>37</sup>

The value we place on our relationship with others is determined by our relationship with God. Flowing out of the value of our relationship with God, we are prompted, by His love for us, to extend that love to others. Here we begin with those who have likewise received God’s love, namely the household of faith (1 Peter 2:17). God’s love prompts Christians into a life of self-sacrifice and

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<sup>36</sup> Luke 12:16-21

<sup>37</sup> Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration, 126.

service towards each other so that, in the end, “they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” (Revelation 12:11). What a striking testimony of a Christian’s confidence in the sanctity of human life. Paradoxically, life in relationship with God and others carries such a high value that death itself need not cause a Christian to shrink from its threatening presence (John 15:13).

The value placed on relationships in Christ produce a value system driven by the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus. As Paul commands, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). The foundation for this command is built by Paul upon the incarnation and crucifixion of Christ (Romans 13).

Christians not only value relationships with others who are partners in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but they also value all other relationships as an opportunity to share their lives in Christ, reaching out to all people. As this circle of relationships ever widens to include all people, we are reminded of Jesus’ own words to those who follow him, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be sons of your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:44). Indeed, the aim of such love is to share the love of God received with another person. That’s why St. Paul exclaims, “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the Gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1 Corinthians 9:22-23).

Every possession owned is held in value as determined by the stewardship of the Gospel and correlated to the importance of relationships established



with God and others. Home, work, school, neighborhoods, community living, and even the writing of this paper, are all merely the context by which God enables us to celebrate and operate in the life He has given via the cross of Christ. The overriding theme of stewardship in Christ involves the utilization of our time, talents, and treasures by which we establish, maintain, and promote the values we hold in our God-given relationship opportunities.

In order to illustrate this further, we may recognize the houses in which we live as valuable, not according to the price tag or the location, but in proportion to the environment whereby such dwellings facilitate healthy and God-pleasing relationships in Jesus Christ. Conversely, overly crowded conditions, unsafe, or unkempt houses may be valued less, not because of monetary considerations, but according to the additional stress such unhealthy climates place upon the relationships residing under its roof. This same sort of evaluation may be used with all of the things which we have and hold on a value scale of importance in this world. A very fundamental question proceeding from the message of the cross in developing a value system is, "How does such and such (i.e. the things my life desires, possesses, and involves itself with) relate to the value of my life established by God in Christ?"

The aim here is simply to verify and substantiate the legitimacy of centering our relationship decisions in the freedom of the Gospel. As life and its many subheadings have a direct link to our redemption, then real value is realized and becomes an integral and meaningful fulfillment in that which is eternal. Apart from Christ, all things ultimately travel the road of death and

destruction. Our reference point for living in this world is re-created in Christ by His death in which we are united (Romans 6:3-4).

This Gospel focal point of life determines the value of life. The meaning of life is not discovered in the absence of pain (or the presence of pleasure). Even suffering is itself often held in value as it relates to Christ. Life is not lived with the aim of avoiding suffering. When suffering itself is directly connected to the message of the cross, it is to be esteemed and will be eternally remembered and rewarded. St. Paul declares dynamically, “for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, than I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).

James, in his epistle, echoes this profound reality. He says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds . . .” (James 1:2). Peter proclaims, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:12-13). How can suffering be lifted up as an actual value in Scripture? Only by virtue of suffering’s connection to the suffering of Christ is the pain and sorrow of our life valued.

Peter elaborates, “Therefore, since Christ suffered in His body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because he who has suffered in his body is done with sin” (1 Peter 4:1). Suffering that is valued is suffering that sacrifices the pleasures of sin: “for you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do, living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing

and detestable idolatry . . . If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:3,15-16). Paul does not value the avoidance of suffering if it is aimed at avoiding "persecution for the cross of Christ" (Galatians 6:12).

### ***No True Values Apart from Christ***

All of this is to show forth the radical conclusions when value is truly defined by the cross of Christ. Something as unlikely as suffering becomes something of great value as it is linked to the power and wisdom of God, connected to the redemption worked by the cross. Likewise, universally recognized "values," such as love, integrity, truth, morality, and honor are held in value by the Christian only as they are understood and conveyed in the light of the cross. Apart from the Gospel message there are no true values to be upheld. That is, there are no Biblically acknowledged values apart from God's plan of salvation.

What does this say about the commonly recognized societal values which are categorized as existing in the "created realm" apart from the redemptive act of Christ's death and resurrection? I suggest such values are misnomers. Christians have attempted to legitimize "societal" values apart from God's revelation in Christ. But the only legitimate value is always found in connection with God's work and activity. Perverted expressions of true value do lurk in the sinful heart and become expressed in the culture and various laws of the land. These misdirected concepts of value do serve as opportunities for the Christian

to proclaim the Gospel. Paul made use of the value of believing in the unknown God as an occasion to proclaim the true God.

But this is not to recognize there are true values apart from Christ, any more than it is to recognize that Athens was through ignorance worshipping the true God (and just didn't know His name). Such an oxymoron seeks to establish a secondary plan devised by God whereby those who live contrary to His life would still enjoy relationships by operating within a God-given set of values. But this is man's inventive wishful thinking that suggests by faulty observation that there is value or joy or peace outside of and apart from God's plan of salvation.

Before God spoke a word of creation the plan was set forth. All God ordained values are consistently attached to that plan, and apart from that plan all is lost, condemned and headed for destruction. This is Paul's conclusion when he proclaims:

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 (1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

If there is no value recognized apart from the "agape" love of God in Christ ("I am nothing, I gain nothing") among God's people in faith that moves mountains or charity or speaking, then there should be no recognition of such value in the world apart from Christ.

Is it God's will that people who do not love him love each other? This question itself proposes an oxymoron like "sweet sorrow." God's will is that people love Him and in doing so, love each other. There is no revelation

concerning whether it is God's will that those who are forever condemned love each other in hell. Nor is there such a revelation (though we tend to draw such conclusions) concerning the value of the "love" expressed by those who oppose Jesus Christ. In actuality, to speak as though unbelievers are capable of expressing "agape" is questionable in Scripture. The closest we come to such a revelation may be found in Scripture's teaching concerning the "degrees of torment." But in explaining this mysterious revelation of God we must be true to the clarity of Christ's message to His disciples: "apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). In this very context Jesus is referring to his disciples "bearing fruit" and the destruction of those who oppose him.

Where does this leave the need for the first use of the law, namely, to curb the sin of society? This is kept intact. In fact, this use of the law is strengthened by the acknowledgment that the law of God is always in juxtaposition to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The law of God at work in the world enables the peaceful proclamation of the Gospel. All morals and values derive their recognition from such co-existence with this mission of the church in God's plan of salvation. If there were no salvation, no Christ, no cross, and no church, there would be no value in prolonging the destruction of this world. The moralistic and altruistic behaviors of sinful beings headed for destruction would be pointless.

Therefore, the values we hold dear are placed on a scale in *a priori* position only as they are directly correlated to the Gospel and provide the proper context for which relationships, established by God, are lived out in harmony with God's love. This is why Christians should always value highly Word and

Sacrament ministry as the means by which relationships with God himself are nurtured and sustained.

Article three of the Apology of the Augsburg Confession highlights the centrality of the cross of Christ when it says, "The opponents approve our third article, in which we confess...that this same Christ suffered and died to reconcile the Father to us."<sup>38</sup> The confessors claim that by confusing this doctrine of justification our opponents "obscure the glory and the blessings of Christ."<sup>39</sup> Thus, when the doctrine of justification is confused, we also obscure the value of the cross of Christ for us and, therefore, we confound all subsequent values as well.

We should underscore that having a set of morals might be of "value," but only under the umbrella of the cross of Christ. That is why Lutheran theology is dead-set against the "moralistic" teachings throughout so much of Christianity which are devoid of clear Gospel connections. As the Apology states, "If moral works merited the forgiveness of sins and justification, there would be no need for Christ and the promise, and everything that Paul says about the promise would be overthrown."<sup>40</sup>

### ***Values: Unchanging and Changeable***

We may also observe that certain values which are held in relationship to the Gospel are unchangeable in value status. The changeless message of the

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<sup>38</sup> Tappert ed., The Book of Concord, art. iii, par. 1,107.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., art. iv, par. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., art. iv., par. 87, 120.

Gospel insures the changeless nature of certain values which transcend all history, cultures, traditions, and peoples. Because the values are neither dependent upon social norms nor technological advancements, they will be essentially the same in any society. Examples of changeless values include relationships, love, truth, integrity, the means of grace, family, and the institution of marriage as defined and understood by the Gospel.

On the other hand, there are certain values held by a particular people, country, culture, which over time do fluctuate. These changing values are constantly re-evaluated according to their linkage to the Gospel. Such flexible values include one's specific utilization of time, talents, and treasures. "'Specific' ethical precepts are concerned with how the individual should interact with the specific customs, institutions, laws, and social norms of a particular society. These can vary widely from one society to another."<sup>41</sup> The mode of transportation, forms of recreation, houses, hobbies, and businesses, are all directed by technological advances and are in constant need of evaluative measures to ascertain the applicable connection to God's plan of salvation in Christ.

Much is written among contemporary authors concerning the values which society adopts. One author states, "The reason for feeling that we are at 'the hinge of history' is not only that certain new specific techniques provided by science have become available, but that the rate at which these techniques are becoming available and the rate of change that they bring about within society

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<sup>41</sup> Pugh, The Biological Origin of Human Values, 382.

throughout the world does not give time for testing our values by the results."<sup>42</sup>

The real testing of values does not lie in "results" but in the message of the cross by which we properly evaluate whether something *should* be adopted as a value. The unbelieving world will always have difficulty with the concept of "values" as they operate under the rule of the "lord of this world."

George Barna observes, "America continues to experience a shift in the values structure that under girds our society."<sup>43</sup> Willis Harman states, "underneath the societal change there are some value shifts. Underneath those value shifts are shifts in the most basic belief, the most fundamental premises on which the whole structure is based."<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, Harman suggests that the fundamental premises on which the whole structure is based lie in "four areas: the fundamental belief about the nature of ourselves, the fundamental belief about the nature of our neighbor or fellow man/woman, the fundamental belief about the nature of our relationship with the universe and our belief about authority."<sup>45</sup> The Gospel truly sheds light upon and provides definition for these four areas of life, inclusive of the values produced.

Luther states with regards to those things which are fashionable in the eyes of society to hold as values: "Many a person thinks he has God and everything he needs when he has money and property; in them he trusts and of them

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<sup>42</sup> Salvador E. Luria, "The Challenges of Life," in Biomedical Progress and Human Values, ed. Robert M. Kunz and Hans Fehr (Basel & Stuttgart: Berkhauser, Verlag, 1972), 37.

<sup>43</sup> Barna, The Barna Report: What Americans Believe, 148.

<sup>44</sup> Willis Harman, "Belief Systems and the Transformation in Human Values," a paper delivered at the Lutheran Brotherhood Colloquium on the Church in Future Society, Houston, Texas, January 29 – February 1, 1979, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



he boasts so stubbornly and securely that he cares for no one. Surely such a man also has a god-mammon by name (Matthew 6:24), that is, money and possessions, on which he fixes his whole heart."<sup>46</sup> This becomes the case most certainly when money or possessions are held in value apart from their linkage to Calvary. Only this linkage to the mighty cross of Christ enables a person to live in recognition of the true values of life. "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:25).

Luther elaborates further,

He who has money and property feels secure, happy, fearless, as if he were sitting in the midst of paradise. On the other hand, he who has nothing doubts and despairs as if he never heard of God. Very few there are who are cheerful, who do not fret and complain, if they do not have mammon. This desire for wealth clings and cleaves to our nature all the way to the grave. So, too, if anyone boasts of great learning, wisdom, power, prestige, family, and honor, and trusts in them, he also has a god, but not the one, true God. Notice, again, how presumptuous, secure, and proud people become because of such possessions, and how despondent when they lack them or are deprived of them. Therefore, I repeat, to have a God properly means to have something in which the heart trusts completely.<sup>47</sup>

The ultimate value of all is discovered in our harmonious relationship with God, created and built up by faith in Jesus Christ. Luther would echo that all things are held in value according to their correlation to the Gospel.

Finally, Luther speaks once more, "Behold, here you have the true honor and the true worship which please God and which He commands under penalty of eternal wrath, namely, that the heart should know no other consolation or confidence than that in him, nor let itself be torn from him, but for him should risk

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<sup>46</sup> Tappert, The Book of Concord, 365.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 365-366.

and disregard everything else on earth.”<sup>48</sup> Whenever we receive “consolation or confidence” in the values held, apart from the “consolation or confidence” in Christ, whenever we separate our value system from the proclamation of Christ crucified, our values no longer serve us. Whenever we fail to risk, disregard, endanger, and sacrifice all that we hold dear for the sake of the Gospel, then we have violated the very first and greatest command of God.

One of the most profound insights concerning value definition is from Paul Kurtz. He states, “At bottom, however, a system of values is that by reference to which our brief sojourn on the planet earth becomes meaningful. Thus, beneath the search for values, there lurks yet another question, more fundamental, more pervasive, more complex, and more urgent, namely, ‘What does existence in general and my life mean?’”<sup>49</sup> Yes! And only the message of Christ crucified and risen is able to break forth into our realities and bring clarification to our existence with meaning and purpose. Christ is the reference point by which our existence becomes meaningful. Our value system will be properly scrutinized as it is developed out of the rebirth of security and significance in Christ.

In the process of providing a definition of “value,” Lucie Barber cites Milton Rokeach, “A value is an enduring belief . . . .”<sup>50</sup> The enduring belief that brings clarification to all things, sets the standards by which all things are judged, and motivates towards living secured and significant lives, is the love of Jesus Christ

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., par. 16, 366.

<sup>49</sup> Paul Kurtz, “The Ethics of Humanism,” in Ethics and the Search for Values, ed. Luis E. Navia and Eugene Kelly (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1980), 497-498.

<sup>50</sup> Lucie W. Barber, Teaching Christian Values (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1984), 25.

for poor miserable sinners. St. Augustine held, “the true human values are those spiritual values at which we have finally arrived: contemplation, praise, love. If man is truly that creature fashioned for God, capable of God, when will he most fully attain his being, when is he most truly human, if not when he even now orients his life — his earthly life, that is, his most present one — towards this ideal of consecrated and liturgical life, which is true life, heavenly life will be?”<sup>51</sup>

Halford Luccock reminds us that “Completion in Christ meets life’s deepest need. The first great experience in life, its highest value, is not in doing but in receiving. It is in being, not acting. It is receiving the fullness of God in Christ.”<sup>52</sup> Truly those authors who search for a point of reference in value clarification are on target. Richard Niebuhr’s value theory states “whatever standpoint is taken, value can be said to be present only when the predication is made from that point of reference.”<sup>53</sup> The reference point by virtue of God’s revelation and our confessional understandings of God’s Word is the Gospel of Christ. Only in the Gospel can the rightful connection between “value” and “meaning of existence” remain unbroken.<sup>54</sup>

“To value something is to esteem it to be of worth. And values are critically important. Our values drive our choices and actions. But we can value

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<sup>51</sup> Henri Irenee Marrou, “The Resurrection and Saint Augustine’s Theology of Human Values,” in The Saint Augustine Lecture Series: Saint Augustine and the Augustinian Tradition, ed. Robert P. Russell and Benedict A. Paparella (Villanova: Villanova, 1966), 35.

<sup>52</sup> Halford E. Luccock, More Preaching Values in the Epistles of Paul, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), 235.

<sup>53</sup> David C. Grant, God the Center of Value (Ft. Worth: Texas Christian University, 1984), 35.

<sup>54</sup> Dietmar Mieth, and Jacques Pohier, “Moral Theology,” in Concilium: Changing Values and Virtues, vol. 191 (Edinburgh: C.T. & T. Clark LTD, 1987), 48, state “This means that the connection between ‘value’ and ‘meaning of existence’ cannot be broken.”

many different things — love, security, a big house, money in the bank, status, recognition, fame. Just because we value something does not necessarily mean it will create quality-of-life results.”<sup>55</sup> When what we value lies in opposition to the Gospel, then we have built our lives upon the sand, an illusion, and have set ourselves up for a fall in the midst of life’s storms. Our peace of mind and our quality of life is conveyed and governed by the Rock of Christ.

As we discover our identity in Christ, we are equipped to analyze, evaluate, discern, and adopt values consistent with our “new name” (Revelation 2:17). What better point of reference for providing the motivation and direction in the stewardship of God’s people than the Gospel? Curtis Lyon suggests the importance of highlighting the place of the cross in the counseling setting.<sup>56</sup> How much more effective will our counseling around the cross of Christ become when our entire value system is centered in the Gospel? This one normative guideline, one thematic connection linked to all values, is indeed the power unto harmonious living in the presence of God.

“God forbid, that I glory except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). What a theme for living our lives as Christians! “What an insight to see these few words as the very heart and center of our Christian faith and to insist that this Cross, intended by the devil and his world to be the final wrecking of God’s dream for man and man’s final hope before God, that this itself should now tower o’er the wrecks of time, the wrecks of all the plans and ideas and

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<sup>55</sup> Covey, *First Things First*, 26.

<sup>56</sup> Curtis H. Lyon, *Counseling At the Cross* (Milwaukee: Northwestern), 1991.

proposals [shall we add, 'and values'?] that over the years have set themselves in opposition to it!"<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Buege, The Cross of Christ, 5 (parenthetical comments mine).

**CHAPTER 3**  
**THE AFFINITY OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD AND OTHERS**

***God First***

In order to clarify and extract the issues involved in the ordering of our earthly relationships, we benefit from additional light shed on the understanding of our primary love for God. Jesus said, "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Matthew 10:37-39). The placement of God above all else verifies the essential understanding that God is the source of our lives. From His being we are given life. "You were bought at a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). From beginning to end, life, in all of its truth and essence, is the work of God. To God we owe our primary allegiance.

Strict adherence to this allegiance is required by God throughout the Scriptures. Even in the conclusion of the first commandment, the demand for "first place" in the lives of God's people is strongly highlighted: "for I, the Lord, your God am a *jealous* God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me . . ." (Exodus 20:5: italics mine). God further instructs,

If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, 'Let us go

and worship other gods' (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. You must certainly put him to death. Your hand must be the first in putting him to death, and then the hands of all the people. Stone him to death, because he tried to turn you away from the Lord your God (Deuteronomy 12:6-10).

Jesus underscored this absolute loyalty to God, above all relationships, when He said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, a man's enemies will be the members of his own household" (Matthew 10:34-36). "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters, yes, even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26).

This zero tolerance towards any idolatrous (course or refined) relationship is understood in the realization that our love for God originates with God's love for us; "This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10). There simply cannot be any real meaning or importance attached to life apart from our relationship with the Author of life himself. In the truest sense, life lived in opposition to God has died. As noted in the introduction, death is actually separation from a relationship with God. The absence of the final eternal pronouncement of death upon a soul, which comes by way of the physical death of an unbeliever, does not indicate that true life exists apart from God through Jesus Christ.

Our true life source is found in God alone. True life is appropriated through faith in Jesus Christ: "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God" (1 John 4:15). True life is extended to and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit within us: "We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of His Spirit" (1 John 4:13). Living in the confession of this Good News sustains us in total dependency upon the love of God for life itself: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us" (1 John 4:16). In this dependency, our lives strive for expression of the love we possess in God: "No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and His love is made complete in us" (1 John 4:12).

The imperatives of Scripture towards loving God above all else highlights God's intense love for us. God insists on His preeminent position in the lives of His people, lest they turn from him and lose life itself. We recall that the loss of life occurred when Eve gave preeminence to the words of Satan, and Adam gave preeminence to the words of Eve over and against the words of God to deny themselves the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3). Scripture also verifies the overriding nature of one's relationship with God when God commands Abram to "Leave your country, your people, and your father's household and go to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1). And again, when God commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac (Genesis 22).<sup>58</sup>

This preeminence of our relationship with God is verified by the promise of Christ, "I tell you the truth . . . no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or

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<sup>58</sup> Disloyalty to God on the part of Moses jeopardized his son's life in Exodus 4:24.



mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). Above our relationships of blood or faith ties is our relationship with Christ, who declares, “my mother and brothers are those who hear God’s Word and put it into practice” (Luke 8:21; cf. Matthew 12:48-50).

Therefore, trouble lurks around the corner whenever God’s people fail to retain this Lordship of God over *all* of life and its relationships. Sarah discovered this when she told her husband, “The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her” (Genesis 16:1-2). But, as King Solomon proclaimed, “Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain” (Psalm 127:1). The birth of Ismael to Abraham and Sarah surely resulted in a divided house and a divided people (Genesis 16).

On the other hand, we would be remiss if we did not equally take note that such preeminent love for God is continually directed *by God* towards the horizontal relationships in which He establishes us. John summarizes this thought well: “We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother” (1 John 4:19-21).

The Bible surely does distinguish between these two objects of love in the very command of Jesus; “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all

your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37-39).

In distinguishing love's imperative into two separate commands, we are provided the justification to view love expressions as hierarchical. One's proper relationship with others is built upon the relationship established *with God*, by God. The words "μεγαλη και πρωτη εντολη" (Matthew 22:38) definitely adds weight and importance to the command to love God. However, such differentiation is never offered to defend loving God *at the expense* of loving our brother. In other words, loving God does not ever excuse neglecting, ignoring, or hating our brother.

The love of God is viewed, then, as the foundational source of all true love expressions. Our ability to love flows forth from the receptivity of the *αγαπη* of God. Never otherwise! The love of God enables us to love God in return. This is love's immediate and primary response. However, equally true, the *αγαπη* of God always expresses itself in love towards others. Never otherwise! Thus, we come into the realization that there does not exist in Christ's conveyance of love an "either/or," but rather a "both/and" scenario. This results in the following: God loves us, we love him; we love God, we love others.

Jesus said, "All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:40). This may appear as a reduction of the Law and the Prophets to the concept of "love." In reality the teaching of Jesus raises our understanding of the commands of God to a new height. All obedience to the commands of God are expressions of unadulterated *αγαπη*. This elevation of

“love” as the fulfillment of all commandments condemns all forms of perverted obedience. Legalism, moralism, false motivational acts of kindness, and/or meaningless outward shows all are “true law reductions” which rob the foundation upon which the law is given. The primary use of the law is to reveal the nature of “flesh” which is at enmity with God. In one’s attempt to weaken the law, the pure expression of *αγαπη* is lost.

In redirecting us away from love for ourselves and towards love for God, Scripture provides the source and motivation for all *αγαπη* expressions. Our love for God, as the highest expression of *αγαπη*, verifies its source and is understood in the primary sense of allegiance. Apart from God’s love for me, self-love is narcissistic, love for others is self-centered, and love for God is idolatrous. All true love expressions flow from the love of God and are therefore in harmony with this primary relationship. Any relationship movement violating the friendship established with and by God perverts the meaning of *αγαπη*. Such perversion stems from our sinful flesh which strives against the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:6-8).

Holding God in first place provides the vehicle by which we gauge appropriate boundaries with regard to our earthly ties. That is why extra-marital affairs, even with full spousal consent, encouragement, and willing participation (i.e. group sex, wife-swapping), are always perversions of *αγαπη*. Such affairs violate the boundaries of our love for God because the pleasures of the flesh take precedence over the joy of the Lord. All boundary violations with regards to our relationship with God strike against the heart of unselfish living.

Clinging to the preeminence of one's relationship with God requires that first consideration be given to God's will concerning any other relationship action. That's why the concept of "Robin Hood" is to be rejected. Nor can we ignore the laws of the land and smuggle Bibles in cahoots with the underworld of organized crime. Neither do we steal from our neighbor to give to the church.

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God (2 Corinthians 6:14-16a).

Engaging evil in the name of good involves a declaration that it is better to join forces with evil than to fight against it. The *αγαπη* of God makes no such decrees.

"But," a person may retort, "is not good accomplished out of evil?" Indeed, the Sovereign God is able in all things, including evil, to work "for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). However, the omnipotent, omnipresent, Sovereign Lord does not partake or participate in the evil. God simply overrules the destiny of its fruit. The Lord retains the all-seeing eye of control. Evil retains its identity as such. God does not engage in evil; He only sets boundaries in controlling the outcome. Therefore, in Christ, we are no longer victims of evil but we have become victors over evil.

As children of the light, all of our relationships succumb to the light. "This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him

there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship [friendship, intimate relationship] with him yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth” (1 John 1:5-6; parenthetical comments mine). Faith leads us to understand that the heartbeat of life involves the sacramental aspects of worship. We are entirely dependent upon the grace of God to remain anchored to the Rock of life.

We receive our focus, power, and “marching orders” from the Lord of life who enables us to truly live. The moment we enter into a relationship with the Word of life, we are instantaneously placed in a position of submission to Christ as the Lord of life. And, simultaneously, His Light brings us into fellowship with one another under the cross: “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we *have fellowship with one another*, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin” (1 John 1:7: italics mine). The love of God always includes the love of others, even though the love for God retains preeminence.

The command to “put God first” in life affirms our call to follow God’s expressed will with unconditional and sacrificial allegiance. To love God *above all* is to be committed to his life, as it is expressed in ours, at all costs. Even in the face of suffering we are to rise up and “count it pure joy”<sup>59</sup> viewing suffering as an opportunity to grow stronger in our relationship with God. Whenever any other relationship comes into direct conflict with that which God has called us to be and has equipped us to accomplish (or from which God has clearly directed us to refrain ourselves), then our relationship with God *always* takes precedence. At all times, in all situations, we are to follow His clear imperatives for action. This

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<sup>59</sup> James 1:2

fundamental act of faith, whereby faith holds firmly to the objective will of God, is the heartbeat of the Christian walk. True love is nothing more or less than a response to the love of God in Jesus Christ. Such love, by definition, will *never* lead one astray or express itself in willful neglect of the revealed will of God.

### ***The Proper Effect of Love for God***

The claim of love for God apart from love for others has no Biblical basis. The reverse holds true as well. One cannot faithfully claim true love for others apart from love for God. Such a claim might only be justified within the context of a humanistic definition of love [i.e. between two unbelieving spouses]. But, even then such love should not be viewed as encompassing the “αγαπη” of God. Though the love for God and for others are not equally expressed, as noted, they are always inclusive of one another. This paper seeks to belabor this point because it is an essential aspect in developing an understanding of the *a priori* “both/and” nature of relationships. To love the One (God) is to love all, and, to love all is to love the One. The “both/and” concept brings light to the imperative paradox conveyed by Jesus, “Serve him (the Lord) only,” and “whoever wants to be first must be your servant”<sup>60</sup>

Whatever conclusions one draws concerning our various relationships in this world ought to reflect the preeminence of one’s relationship with God. All other relationships must submit, in all things, to the supremacy of the Lordship of Christ. Even with this firm resolution, the actual working out of this supremacy is not so readily discernible. In my survey nearly half of everyone responding indi-

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<sup>60</sup> Matthew 4:10 and 20:27 respectively; parenthetical reference mine.

cated difficulty in distinguishing between serving God and serving others. Over half of the clergy surveyed expressed such difficulty. Considering these were circuit counselors one is further impressed with the prevalent confusion existing around servanthood.

Scripture leads the Christian to love God by serving God alone defined by serving others (1 John 5:1-5). Considering this understanding of the proper effect of love for God, maybe the expressed difficulty in distinguishing clearly between serving God and others is the preferable choice. The forty seven surveyed who conveyed no difficulty in distinguishing between serving God and others are possibly the ones confused about the proper effect of love for God.<sup>61</sup>

All love expressions disconnected to the love of God are superficial at best, and artificially self-centered at worst. On the other hand, true love for God never, in a reverse fashion, flows from the love of others. John reveals, "love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God".(1 John 4:7). Loving others is a proper extension of loving God. One cannot truly love God without loving others or truly love others without first loving God.

In spite of the intricate intertwining of love for God and others, these two loves are not one and the same. True love for others is a part of the definition of true love for God, not the total sum. Much more is involved in one's love for God. It is like the intimacy of a sexual relationship. True and proper sex is expressed within the confines of the marital bond. However, sexual and marital relationships are not synonymous terms. A marriage relationship includes much more

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<sup>61</sup> See Appendixes A, B, and C, response question 7.

than a sexual relationship. A proper sexual relationship *always* includes a marriage relationship. As in a purely humanistic expression of love, so also there may be a recognizable sexual expression defined apart from marriage (i.e. immoral behavior). All such sexual behaviors are inappropriate apart from holy wedlock. They are illegitimate expressions of love. In the same way, a proper loving relationship is never appropriately realized or expressed apart from the love of God.

The focus and aim of our “fellowship with one another” (1 John 1:7) is enjoined upon us by Jesus in John 15:12: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” In loving God, we are to love each other. Howard states, in regard to priorities,

I have two: God and my neighbor. They are not in sequence. It is not love God for a certain amount of time and to a certain degree and then love my neighbor. It is love God and love my neighbor. Do them both. Christ is saying, ‘Put God first.’ He is also saying, ‘Put your neighbor first.’<sup>62</sup>

Howard here expresses the truth conveyed in the “both/and” concept of the ordering of relationships, but fails to express the proper flow of love which is integral to the fulfillment of this “both/and” reality of love. God does not say “love your neighbor above all.”

Practical analogies which underscore Jesus’ ordering of these two love commands may be provided. If I were to instruct my son, “Put on your gloves and wear them when you go outside,” then we may observe the intricate connection between these two imperatives. Though they may exist apart from

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<sup>62</sup> J. Grant Howard, Balancing Life’s Demands (Portland: Multnomah, 1983), 44.



one another, they are intentionally connected so that they go “hand in glove” (pun intended). To wear his gloves outside he must first put them on. If he puts them on but fails to wear them outside then he has failed to grasp the meaning of the command. So, also, we first love God in order to truly love one another. If we attempt to love God without loving others we have failed to grasp the meaning of loving God (1 John 4:19).

The N.I.V. disregards the establishment of the purpose of the commandments provided by Jesus in John 15:17, where it is translated, “This is my command: Love each other.” The Greek text states, “ταυτα εντελλομαι υμιν, ινα αγαπατε αλληλους.” Though the New American Standard version, the Beck version, the Revised Standard version, and most other translations follow suit, I suggest there are open questions concerning the accepted appositional clause and the proper understanding of the ινα in this verse. A possible translation might be, “These things I command to you *in order that* you love one another.” The King James version accurately translates the plural ταυτα as “these things.”

Lenski says, “The Greek is able to use the plural ταυτα where the appositional clause is but a single act, ‘that you keep loving.’ In such a neuter plural the Greek seems to view the single act as composed of detailed parts: ‘keep loving’ now in one, now in another way, as each circumstance requires. This explanation would be satisfactory if we could point to other examples in which ινα is appositional to ταυτα, *yet these are lacking.*”<sup>63</sup> I agree with Lenski in

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<sup>63</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 1053, italics mine.

recognizing the unsatisfactory nature of his own explanation in view of no other available examples.

Lenski continues by saying, “For this reason, and since in the present instance the apposition really cannot be questioned [who has determined this?], one may be inclined to regard ταυτα as not only covering the ινα clause, but also as referring back and taking in the great motivation for the love of the disciples which Jesus has introduced since verse 12.”<sup>64</sup> It would seem that this “reference back” is the entire aim of ταυτα. Ταυτα is modifying the previous appointment to bear fruit, inclusive with “remaining in” Jesus and making one’s requests known to the Father, but *excluding the present ινα clause*. This view of ταυτα would understand the ινα clause as describing the *result of obedience*. A possible understanding could be, “These things I command you so that you are able to keep loving each other.”

The latter translation seems justified in light of the proper usage and explanations given for ινα.<sup>65</sup> Jesus uses ινα extensively throughout His final discourses and many of the references are open to debate concerning whether or not its primary meaning “in a final sense to denote purpose, aim, or goal (in order that, that)” should be utilized.<sup>66</sup> The fact remains, “In many cases purpose and result cannot be clearly differentiated, and hence ινα is used for the result which follows according to the purpose of the subject. or of God. As in Jewish thought,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid. (parenthetical question mine).

<sup>65</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1957), 377-379.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 377.

purpose and result are identical in declarations of the divine will."<sup>67</sup> Regardless, the textual understanding, guided by the context, is hardly effected.

The will of God that we love one another is not questioned by this grammatical debate. John 15:12 clearly expresses the command of Christ to love one another. However, this exegetical understanding of verse 17 would add credence that the ability to fulfill Christ's command to love one another lies in close association and intimate connection to remaining in a relationship with Jesus. In this light, loving one another does not merely involve obedient behavior, but the *resultant lifestyle* of obedience to all that Christ commands. Scripture documents well that the moment we enter into a relationship with God we enter into a relationship with God's people.

### ***Others Second: The Responsibility for One Another***

This reality is echoed in the entire Old and New Testament concept of public worship. In the Old Testament concept of Israel, as well as in the New Testament concept of the church, the necessary bond between God's people is established and highlighted as an integral part of enjoying life in a relationship with God. Such unification of God's people is intensified in the understanding of the Old Testament passover supper and the New Testament Eucharist celebration. Those enjoying a relationship with God find themselves actively engaged in a relationship with others. Though faith in God is presented as an intimate personal reality (i.e. accountability before God is presented primarily as an

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 378.

individual responsibility<sup>68</sup>), this religious journey involving a harmonious relationship with the Maker is never presented as a *private* affair between God and an individual alone.

So foreign is the private nature of a relationship with God, we are countless times led to understand, in both Testaments, that we are indeed our brother's keeper. It was God who called out to Cain, after the infamous murder of Abel, "Where is your brother, Abel?" To which Cain replied, "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Genesis 4:9). Indeed, we are given responsibilities to watch over, encourage, assist, admonish, and love our brother. Proverbs 25:21-22 instructs; "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you." Leviticus 19 is filled with directives concerning responsible behavior towards one's brother<sup>69</sup>.

The New Testament is likewise filled with brotherly responsibilities to watch over one another's welfare. In James 2:15 we read, "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?" The story told by Jesus of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 and the judgment scene depicted by Jesus in Matthew 25:31-46 both declare our responsibilities towards others.

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<sup>68</sup> The personal and individual nature of one's relationship with God is clearly taught in Scripture. See Romans 14:10b, 12; "For we will all stand before God's judgment seat...So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God."

<sup>69</sup> See also Deuteronomy 15:7-18. and 17:15.

Pauline passages are also replete with imperatives concerning the Christian's responsibility towards another's welfare. Paul says, "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves . . . Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality" (Romans 12:10,13). To the Philippians Paul writes, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (2:4) Furthermore, Paul advises, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowmen has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

The many passages which call us into responsible behavior towards one another also involves admonishment. We are told, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). Even the individual accountability before God is often viewed as incorporating the nature of one's relationship with others. In Ezekiel 3:18ff. the Lord instructs His prophet,

When I say to a wicked man, 'You will surely die, and you do not warn him or speak out to dissuade him from his evil ways in order to save his life, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his evil ways, he will die for his sin; but you will have saved yourself.

In Colossians we are told, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom" (3:16).

In truth, all of our God-given relationships carry unique responsibilities for which an individual is held accountable toward the eye of another's welfare. For example, the husband is enjoined to love his wife as Christ loved the church and as the husband loves himself (Ephesians 5:25-29). The wife is decreed to submit to her husband in all things as to the Lord (Ephesians 5:22-24). Children are

commanded to obey their parents in the Lord (Ephesians 6:1). Fathers are ordered not to exasperate their children (Ephesians 6:4), and parents are instructed to train their children in the Lord (Proverbs 22:6). In like fashion we have such imperatives directed at the slave/master (employee/employer) relationships (Ephesians 6:5ff.), women to women (Titus 2:4), young to elderly (Titus 2).

The *αγαπη*, created by and shared with God, in its nature, yearns to express itself through us in our love for others. As the song states: “Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love.”<sup>70</sup> In prioritizing our love for God above others, we are affirming our dependency upon God’s love to motivate and empower all other relationships. Does this dependency concept carry-forth into our earthly expressions of love? Are proper love expressions, likewise, grounded in our *a priori* relationships? In other words, am I able to properly love my children only if I properly love my spouse? Does one’s love for God’s people depend upon one’s proper love for the family? Should the ordering of relationships be renamed to the hierarchical order of dependencies? Does the ordering of relationships convey the cancellation of true love whenever hypocrisy ignores and/or neglects the *a priori* relationships?

Loving one’s spouse does appear as all-inclusive to loving others. The *a priori* placement of the spouse over others, under God, expresses the proper flow of love through one’s life. From God to me to others begins with those in closest proximity and for which I am most responsible *AND* does not cease to

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<sup>70</sup> The Lutheran Hymnal (St. Louis: Concordia, 1941), Hymn 464.

flow until it has reached the remotest enemy. This sequential dependency would beg the questions, "How can one love his enemy, if he does not love his friend? How can one love the unbeliever if he does not love his fellow believer? How can one love his fellow believer if he does not love his own children? How can one love his children, if he does not love his spouse? How can one love his spouse, if he does not love his God, who first loved him?" If one does not get the latter right, how can one get any of the former love expressions right?

Whether true love may be inappropriately denied to an *a priori* relationship and still exist in its offer to another may be debatable.<sup>71</sup> Regardless, the implied connectedness and dependency between relationships remains. This seems to be involved in Paul's statement that a bishop cannot properly manage the household of God if he can't manage his own household (i.e. especially when the management is viewed as the stewardship of God's love) (1 Timothy 3:4). We remember that refusing to forgive others excludes us from the forgiveness of God (Matthew 6:15). In this vein, refusing to forgive or love an *a priori* relationship, at the least, confuses and hinders the forgiveness and love expressed to another. All of this may be a mute point anyway. Refusal to love one's spouse (or anyone) doesn't just hinder one's love for others, but thrusts one into the darkness of unbelief, whereby one's love for God is proven insincere (1 John 4:7).

The extremely intimate connection between love for God and love for each other is greatly blurred even in our modern Christian culture:

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<sup>71</sup> Divorce may serve as a case study exemplifying this debate. However, we note that divorce was never the intent of God for His people.

A hurry-up lifestyle results in a throwaway culture. Things that should be lasting and meaningful are sacrificed on the altar of the temporary and superficial. The major fallout in such a setting is the habit of viewing relationships casually. This cavalier attitude cripples society in various ways:  
Friends walk away instead of work through.  
Partnerships dissolve rather than solve.  
Neighbors no longer visit and relax together. They erect stone walls and exist on isolated islands.  
The aged are resented, not honored.  
Husbands and wives divorce rather than persevere.  
Children are brushed aside rather than nourished; used and abused rather than cherished and cultivated.  
Caught in the vortex of all this, the most common response is to become negative and pessimistic.<sup>72</sup>

In this ungodly culture the αγαπη of God becomes withdrawn and greatly impaired.

Scripture would direct us otherwise:

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from His love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:1-8).

The profound nature of the αγαπη of God lies in its generous extension. That's why it is our love for our brother which shows forth the reality of God's love within. John connects our confidence of being recipients of this truth with the outward love revealed through our lives when he says, "We know that we have

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<sup>72</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, Growing Wise In Family Life, 173.



passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death . . . This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us” (1 John 3:14,19-20).

The obedience of love is a necessary outflow of the love of God within.

Such obedience is not an easy thing. We often think that God wants love more than obedience. In some ways, that’s true. But the obedience is the boiled down essence of love. J. Grant Howard offers a potent thought in this regard: ‘Love is knowing what He expects us to do, and doing it.’<sup>73</sup>

It may be observed that for such obedience to exist there must first be a transformation of the heart, soul, mind, but the point is that God “will not allow us to substitute nebulous sentiment for informed obedience.”<sup>74</sup>

This reality is presented at its height by Jesus in reference to the great and final judgment. In Matthew 25:31-46 Jesus distinguishes the righteous from the unrighteous by the love, or lack thereof, exhibited on earth towards others in His Name. He says,

For I was hungry and you gave me something (or nothing) to eat, I was thirsty and you gave something (or nothing) to drink, I was a stranger and you invited (or did not invite) me in, I needed clothes and you clothed (or did not clothe) me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me (or did not look after me in sickness nor visit me in prison)”.

Jesus was not adhering to the concept of work righteousness but to the axiomatic truth that the love of Christ given transforms one's life into a lover and compels one to freely give the love received. As Scripture says, “For Christ’s

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<sup>73</sup> Mark Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch (Chicago: Moody, 1990), 69.

<sup>74</sup> Howard, Balancing Life’s Demands, 68.

love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:14). "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

The sphere of grace gives the believer new motivation for living. He no longer obeys God out of fear, but out of love. The love which God the Holy Spirit produces in a believer is the basic motivation behind all of his relationships (Gal. 5:13). In the sphere of grace, the principle of love takes the place of all the laws given by God (Gal. 5:14). Paul's quotation of Leviticus 19:18 was only a restatement of Christ's declaration in Matthew 22:36-40. All of the laws of the Mosaic system hung on the principle of love. If the law of love had been practiced, there would have been no need for any other laws...It is, in essence, life governed by love . . . The law of love, then, is the first dynamic of living within the sphere of grace. Only when liberty is governed by love does it result in true spirituality.<sup>75</sup>

The *αγαπη* of God is forever seeking to give itself away in relationship. This great *αγαπη* wonder exhibits its highest expression between the very eternal relationships within the Holy Trinity.

### *Αγαπη Analysis*

It is appropriate, then, before proceeding further to provide an analysis of the Biblical concept of *αγαπη*. Surely the English term "love" can be misleading and obscure. The multiple definitions of this concept, especially in the English, contribute to this obscurity. James Moffatt strives to clarify the Scriptural understanding of "love" in his book, Love In the New Testament.<sup>76</sup> Moffatt notes that love in the Bible is a "religious" conviction and should be analyzed in that light. For Moffatt the understanding of love is realized in the truth of the death of Jesus

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<sup>75</sup> Paul Meier, Frank Minirth et al., The Workaholic and His Family (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 153.

<sup>76</sup> James Moffatt, Love In the New Testament (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1929).

Christ as the ultimate sacrifice for the world. It is less in who God is and more in what God has done that reveals the depth of love. "What marks off Christianity is not the conviction that men have discovered a new depth in love divine, but that something has happened, something which has revealed that love in a new scope and reach."<sup>77</sup>

It holds true that the activity of love is as much part of the concept of love as any definition provides. "It is no accident that Paul places love at the pinnacle of Christian virtues. Christian love, the unreserved giving of oneself for the well-being of another, without concern for personal gain, is the greatest life-changing force in the universe."<sup>78</sup> 1 Corinthians 13, the great love chapter, is quite clear on the relationship activity of love inherent in its very definition.

Confucius said, 'Don't do to somebody else what you wouldn't want them to do to you.' Not bad advice. At first it sounds very much like Jesus' words: 'Do unto others what you would have them do unto you.' But there is a very big difference. You could strictly adhere to Confucius' words without ever having to do anything at all. Not so with the words of Jesus. You cannot follow His teachings without rolling up your sleeves and getting to work.<sup>79</sup>

Moffatt points out that a true understanding of love in the New Testament is surrounded by an understanding of additional terms such as "faith, righteousness, grace, fellowship, reverence, holiness, and service."<sup>80</sup> The idea of love was complex and central to the comprehension of Christian conceptions of truth. It is well noted from the lexicon that the word is never positively used to en-

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>78</sup> Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration, 126.

<sup>79</sup> Paul Meier and Frank Minirth, What They Didn't Teach You In Seminary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson), 1993, 241.

<sup>80</sup> Moffatt, Love In the New Testament, 35.

courage the love of things.<sup>81</sup> An impersonal expression of *αγαπη* has as its object “truth” and “righteousness” as it is discovered in the nature and activity of God himself. This does not hold true for Webster’s definition of love whereby the sacrificial or unconditional conveyance of love is absent. A study of what is meant by ‘love’ in the New Testament cannot be confined to an analysis of the word and its meaning, much less to a verbal examination of the term and its usage. “Love and understanding are communicated on their deepest level through a ‘language of relationship’ rather than through verbalization.”<sup>82</sup>

Anyone, therefore, who attempts a word analysis of the Greek *αγαπη* and the English counterpart, love, is frustrated by the lack of consistency in their usage. Divided between concepts of *eros* and *philos*, Webster’s definition of this powerfully used (and abused) English word love, fails to convey the concept of such an important and central word to the New Testament as is discovered in the Greek word *αγαπη*. Maybe that is why the old King James version of 1611 chose to translate *αγαπη* with the English word “charity.” Charity was the word of choice for many years in reference to the God inspired and created concept of *αγαπη*.

The use of the English word “charity” in translating *αγαπη* surely was apropos when in 1956 the Webster dictionary provided the following definition: “in Christianity, the love of God for man or of man for his fellow man.”<sup>83</sup> However, in

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<sup>81</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 4-6.

<sup>82</sup> Lindgren, Foundations For Purposeful Church Administration, 132.

<sup>83</sup> Webster’s New World Dictionary, ed. David B. Guralnick (Cleveland, IN.: The World, 1956), 126.

evaluating the definition provided for “charity” by Webster in the 1982 edition of his dictionary, we begin to discover a definite drift away from the theological use and understanding of *αγαπη* and towards a humanistic perception. Webster in 1982 adjusts the definition for charity by omitting the previous understanding of “love of God for man” (not an insignificant omission when using this word to translate *αγαπη*). Webster simply defines charity in application to Christianity “as love for one’s fellow man.”<sup>84</sup> Of course, to understand either definition provided by Webster, in 1956 or 1982, one has to lean upon the definition which Webster provides for the word “love” and it is void of any meaningful connection to the Greek New Testament concept of *αγαπη*.<sup>85</sup>

Not that Webster was obligated to derive the definition of love from the Greek concept of *αγαπη*. However, if the translators are going to utilize the English word “love” to translate the Greek word *αγαπη*, then it is important to note that the official English definition of “love” fails to convey the meaning of the original Greek word. This is especially so when the Greek lexicon utilizes, in deference to English dictionaries, the English word “love” for the definition of *αγαπη*.<sup>86</sup> What a circular inconsistent paradox of definitions. Clearly, any word analysis cannot ascertain a thorough understanding of *αγαπη*, anymore than a

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<sup>84</sup> Webster’s New World Dictionary, ed. David B. Guralnick (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 78.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* So what’s the modern translator to do when accurately and faithfully trying to convey the English counterpart to *αγαπη*? I believe the best alternative is the adoption of a new English word; namely, the transliterated word *agape* itself. Actually the transliterated word *agape* is already widely used in Christian literature. This may be a little confusing in view of the present English word *a-gape* (pronounced differently, meaning to have one’s mouth wide open). However, many English words exist which are spelled the same yet pronounced differently and holding different meanings.

<sup>86</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 4-6.

clear comprehension of the English word “love” can be discerned by scrutinizing the Webster dictionary. One must rely heavily upon the context in which *αγαπη* is used and the examples given upon which these concepts rest.

Foundational to the New Testament’s understanding of *αγαπη* is the love expressed by God in sending His Son, a Savior: “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!” (1 John 3:1). By Jesus’ willing sacrifice and unconditional love expressed to the world via the cross we begin to grasp the nature of *αγαπη* as it finds its source in God’s very identity and activity. This great and eternally expressed love in Christ is outlined clearly in the first chapter of Ephesians.<sup>87</sup> This essential expression and demonstrative understanding of *αγαπη* is stated by Paul. “And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us . . . But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:5,8).

In recognizing God as both the source and definition of love, we are brought to the fullest insight concerning the nature of *αγαπη*. The near synonymous interchange, whereby love’s definition is God and God is defined by His love demonstrated, reveals the intimate connection between one’s being and one’s action. 2 Corinthians 13:11 refers to “the God of love” while 1 John 4:8,16 reveals “God is love.” At the least, love finds its ultimate definition in who God is and its most profound expression in what God has done in Christ.

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<sup>87</sup> Cross references are found in Ephesians 2:4; 2 Corinthians 13:13; Jude 2, 1 John 4:7,9,16 and John 3:16.

Closely associated with this conceptual understanding of God's love is the resultant usage of *αγαπη* in reference to the outflow of God's love to us and, through us, to others. Jesus instructs, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Consequently, we discover many similar statements in Scripture which intertwine the demonstration of the *αγαπη* of God towards people and people towards God by way of participating in the activity of God's love toward others. Hebrews 6:10 provides a good example of this intertwining: "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped His people and continue to help them."

The study of *αγαπη*, as it is utilized in the context of the New Testament, provides a definition which identifies *αγαπη* by the selfless giving nature it expresses. The classical Christian view of love involves altruistic and universalistic concepts. Sacrificial and nurturing characteristics of *αγαπη* are lifted up and surrounded by virtues of kindness and patience, void of any self-centered greed, jealousy, or selfishness. *Αγαπη* does not demand reciprocity and isn't based on need, emotion, attractiveness, or worthiness. Though *αγαπη* may have emotional attachments, it is driven more by the God-pleasing attitude, philosophy, and/or conscious value system from which behaviors and feelings are worked out and evaluated. Forgiveness and grace are major themes associated with *αγαπη* and are viewed as the glue that holds the *αγαπη* relationship together. Faith (*πιστις*) and *αγαπη* are intertwined in an inseparable link and at

times seem almost synonymous with one another.

Examples of the inter-link between faith and love appears in 1 Thessalonians 3:6: “good news about your faith and love,” and 5:8: “let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate.” Also, in 1 Timothy 1:14 we find this association, “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” 2 Timothy 1:13 is similar: “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus.” A final illustration of this linkage is seen in Philemon 5: “because I hear about your love and faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.”

There exists also an intimate relationship between the objects of love and the values by which we live. “All writers on love have agreed that loving something necessarily implies valuing it. Perhaps we can best see the sort of psychological state love is if we begin with this. Love, then, can be thought of as a form of valuation.”<sup>88</sup> Of course, an important distinction is made concerning the relationship between love and value.

Do we love it because we value it, or do we value it because we love it?...Christian agape is a concept of the latter sort. It is held that God's love for man is not due to the value of man, God does not love man because of a value possessed by human beings; rather, the love of God is bestowed as a gift, and human beings have value through this bestowal. Also, though man's love for God cannot (should not) be thought of in this way, men may love one another with agape: 'Freely give, as freely ye have received.' It is also held that this sort of love is higher: it is better to love without a reason, than with a reason. It is also held that one cannot love another person as a person unless one loves unconditionally, or for no reason, and thus with agape.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> John A. Brentlinger, “The Nature of Love,” in Eros, Agape, and Philia, ed. Alan Soble (New York: Paragon House, n.d.), 136.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 130 (parenthetical comment mine).



What then is the summarized true nature of ἀγάπη? Following Luther's understanding, Anders Nygren summarizes its main features thus:

agape is spontaneous and 'unmotivated;' it is 'indifferent to value,' and it is creative.' It stands 'in contrast to all activity with a eudaemonistic motive' and 'in contrast to all legalism.' Agape gives no thought of gain. Being 'indifferent to value,' it needs no encouragement from, or justification by, the perceived value of the target of love. To love someone for his worth is to love him acquisitively, not agapeistically. Christian love is 'a lost love,' the direct opposite of rational calculation.<sup>90</sup>

### ***Degrees in the Expression of Love Clarified***

We have already shown from the teachings of Jesus the classification of loving God as the "greatest and first commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38). We have sought the proper application and understanding of loving God over others. Loving God involves a higher commitment to God than anything else. Loving others implies a higher commitment to relationships over and against the things of this world. Now the question arises, "Am I to be committed to some people more than other people?" Is my love for others prioritized by God? Is the love we possess for others rightfully expressed in various degrees? If so, what are the practical applications of this differentiated love?

Αγάπη love is the umbrella expression covering all relationships in Christ. The love of God is equally aimed. The Bible specifically makes reference to God not "showing favoritism" (Acts 10:34) in the context of applying the Gospel to all people. God so loved the "world" (John 3:16). In Christ, we are provided with the motivation and the means to love all others, as exemplified and understood in

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<sup>90</sup> Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (London: SPCK, 1953), 509.

the redemptive act of the cross. There is no proper love for the world apart from the love of Christ. John says, "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). This brings the distinction between the true *αγαπη* of God, as exemplified in Christ, and the false "love" claims of the world which exist in opposition to God's love.

In loving all others, there is an inherent need for variant expressions of love. Love is appropriately applied to differing relationships and circumstances. Love is given to all, expressed to all, but not to the same degree. God expresses His love towards the world by giving His life on the cross (John 3:16). But even in God's life-giving expression of love in Christ there is observed variant degrees of opportunity and blessings demonstrated towards the recipient.

Love is not equally expressed. In the essence of love, love's nature is not distinguishable. Though love may be defined by many terms, no one term is a part of love. Love is not broken down in parts so that one loves parents with a greater part than one loves neighbors. Love always equals the total sum of its conceptual realities wherever it is extended. And where love is expressed, it is the one and same love extended elsewhere.

However, the measure of love's extension *is* distinguishable. The revelation of love in relationships is diverse and unequally yoked. There exists a clearly observable difference in love's revealing nature. Who would suggest that the love expressed to my wife should be equally expressed to my neighbor's wife? Herein lies the appropriate understanding of inequality. In a day and time

where the concept of equality is so misunderstood and abused, Christians need to consistently apply this message of love.

The love displayed by Christ toward those other than His Father reveals the same diverse expressions. In general, the Scriptures clearly teach that God, through Christ, extended His love *to the world* (John 3:16; italics mine). But more specifically, Jesus prays that the love which He enjoys with the Father is possessed by all *of His followers*. "I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them" (John 17:26; italics mine).

Further distinctive love expressions, of an exclusive nature, are revealed in the primary relationships developed by Jesus. We see a unique quality of Jesus' love expressed in reference to one of the disciples, John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23). This specialized love expression was likewise extended to the mother of Jesus, "When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, 'Dear woman, here is your son,' and to the disciple, 'here is your mother'" (John 19:26-27). We also learn of a special love relationship between the Lord and Lazarus, "So the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick'" (John 11:3). And we further read of a special bond between Jesus and Lazarus' two sisters, "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (John 11:5).

In this light, we also take note of the variant relationship bonds formed by Jesus to the exclusion of others. We observe seventy-two disciples sent out by Jesus, over and above the generalized crowd of believers (Luke 10). We notice

the twelve disciples chosen as apostles over and against the seventy-two. And, we detect a more intimate relationship with three of the disciples, James, John, and Peter. (An even more intimate relationship with John has already been noted.)

This relationship distinctiveness is brought out elsewhere in Scripture. The story of Joseph, as recorded in Genesis, reveals the special relationship Jacob had with his young son: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him” (Genesis 37:3-4).

Was this inclination of “greater” love towards Joseph, on his father’s behalf, a sin? The Bible does not indicate a preference. In Scripture’s typical realism, the account is recorded. But, considering that the Lord himself, as shown earlier, was inclined to express His love towards the apostle John in more intimate fashion than the rest, we ought not be hasty in condemning Jacob’s strong attachment to Joseph. The brothers surely sinned by responding in hate and hateful behavior towards Joseph. Of course, the Sovereign Lord reigned supreme in His majestic plans and even used this very scenario of Jacob’s special endearment towards one son, as Joseph testified: “it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you . . . God sent me ahead of you to preserve for

you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So, then, it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:5,7-8).<sup>91</sup>

Another illustrative account in Scripture reveals the individualized expression of love within the family unit. In the prodigal son account, we read of the father giving a celebration for the return of the lost son. The eldest son, who had remained faithfully at home, grew resentful and jealous. The father loved both sons. However, one of the points of the story involved the variant expression of the father's love towards the wayward child which had been customized to fit the particular relationship situation (Luke 15:11-32).

The ramifications for these observations lie in the mystery of God's grace. All throughout Scripture there is the clear underscoring of God's sovereign decisions to draw certain individuals into a closer relationship with himself, over and against others (i.e. Abraham, Moses, Paul). This mystery is brought to its fullest conclusion by Paul in reference to the children of Isaac in the Old Testament: "Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls, she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' Just as it is written: 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated'" (Romans 9:11-12).

All of this is to underscore that love, though ultimately excludes no one in its offer, is expressed in divergent intensities. Love is rooted in God's love and flows forth through one's life to others. This flow naturally touches those closest

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<sup>91</sup> The differentiated love of Jacob towards his wives, Leah and Rachel, provides another case in point. Interestingly, the Lord blessed Leah with children because she "was not loved" as Rachel (Genesis 29:31).

connected relationships with love's most intimate and powerful expressions. However, the living spring of water which Christ supplies does not run dry (John 4:10-14). This overflowing fountain of eternal love winds its way through all relationships until every enemy has encountered the love which knows no end. As St. Paul so explicitly states, "Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:8). Inconceivable to the Scriptures is the prompting by God's Spirit to withhold love towards another for whom Christ has died. The Spirit of God creates and enables such love (Galatians 5:22).

Often confusion concerning love's unique expressions is created by a person's faulty understanding and discernment of love. A closer look at God's Word reveals the depth of this reality. If God himself is love, then, love derives its definition and appropriate expressions from God. Nothing which God does defies or contradicts His nature of love. "God so loved the world" is an indisputable teaching of Scripture (John 3:16). Therefore, the judgmental and righteous anger displayed by Christ in cleansing the temple, the plagues upon Egypt, the great flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and even the existence of hell itself, all exist in harmony with God's love. The love and justice of God are not pitted against each other, as though God were schizophrenic in nature. They are two sides of the same coin. Perfect love conveys perfect justice just as perfect justice conveys perfect love.

There are proper times for anger, rebuke and rejection, so there are proper times for the withholding of certain expressions of love. But, all God-directed love expressions are extensions of God's love and provide confirmation

that His love abides in us. John reflects on this truth when he claims, “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother” (1 John 3:10). And again John reflects, “And this is his command: to believe in the Name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us. Those who obey his commands live in him and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us” (1 John 3:23-24).

Therefore, we are to love everyone with the same love we have been given in Christ (i.e. the same love is given to all), but we are not to love all *in the same way*. Within this diversity of love expressions, there develops a hierarchical structure from which love flows. Only with regard to the flow of God's love through one's life is it fitting to speak in terms of a “higher” earthly relationship, over and against another. Relationships are not viewed “higher” in the sense of requiring love at *the expense of giving love* to another (i.e. we are equally commanded to love our enemy as our spouse).

Actually the terms “higher” and “lower” are misnomers in reference to the distinctions between earthly relationships. Only one's relationship with God is Biblically spoken of as “higher” in the truest sense over and against others. Earthly relationships are distinguished by the proximity of their ties and the consequential responsibilities attached to those ties. Love typically flows from the closest to the most distant. The “ordering of relationships” refers then to the need of love to flow in harmony with its variant expressions. Loving others never

relieves one of love's responsibilities towards another. Paul instructed: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

Love is viewed as the fulfillment of the law. In this sense, love is understood as being greater than other commands. Love is not greater in the sense of overruling other commandments, as though one is pitted against another. Likewise, love is not presented by God in the sense of a utilitarian mindset, whereby the law of love which produces the greatest happiness overrides the so-called lesser principles/laws of life, such as happens in active euthanasia. Certain Christians refer to the "higher law of love," utilizing Christ's summarized version of the law as their basis. Paul surely refers to love, in reference to faith and hope, as the "greatest" (1 Corinthians 13:13). However, the Pauline context is not a reference to obedience, but to love as the foundational source of faith and hope. Love is conveyed by Christ as the fulfillment of the law, not as an overriding or replacement law (Mark 12:29-31).

James' epistle states: "whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it" (2:10). Thus, James rules out the possible understanding that to obey the "higher" command justifies the breaking of a "lower." Instead, to break the "lower" involves a breaking of the "higher." This insight exists in harmony with the unification of thought which unites one's primary allegiance to God with the consequent outflow of loving others.

In this vein, the Lord surely did not say, "Love God, then spouse, then children, then others." Jesus didn't even say, "Love God, then neighbor." He



simply said “The most important one” is love for God, and “the second” is love for neighbor. “There is no commandment greater than *these*” (Mark 12:29,31: italics mine). The point stressed lies in the close connection between all love expressions. Love is the fulfillment of the law. Love has its roots in the love for God and develops from there into love for others. Love for God and for others go hand in glove (with the glove being the all-enveloping love of God in which all true love expressions are embedded). The moment the love for God is set aflame, *the one and same moment*, the other is kindled.

We may also observe that love is referenced by Christ as a “new” command.<sup>92</sup> In what sense is it new? Lenski offers these insights: “By εντολη Jesus means a precept, a behest, *einen Auftrag*, not a legal command after the order of Moses . . . It is ‘new,’ *καινη*, as regards the old legal requirements, not *νεα*, as never having existed before.”<sup>93</sup> The newness is discovered in the foundation of this command, “just as I loved you.” The fulfilling expression of God’s love for the disciples, exemplified by Christ in His sacrificial life and death, provides the newest understanding and motivation for loving one another.

The command of Christ towards love presents a dynamically fresh concept of obedience and hangs all legal responses upon the apron strings of God’s love for man (Matthew 22:40). “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

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<sup>92</sup> John 13:34; 1 John 7, 8; (cf. 2 John 5).

<sup>93</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel, 960.

Thus, it is within this *αγαπη* framework that Jesus categorizes loving God as greater than loving others (Matthew 22:37-40).

Scripture also refers to a “greater love” which points to the highest expression of love. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). How are we to understand this profound description of love? If we are to view love as existing in degrees, then we are forced to conclude that the sacrificing of one’s life for anyone other than God involves the grossest form of idolatry. If in the act of sacrificing myself for another there *exists* the greater love then I may only sacrifice myself for God alone.

This logical progression of thought serves to reveal the hideous nature of misinterpretation. Love does not *exist* in degrees. Love is love. Either one possesses the love of God, and the consequent love for others, or it is absent. Does this mean that I can fully love God to the same degree that He loves me. No! As a sinner and saint my love falls far short of God’s love. But as revealed by this study, when we speak of our inability to love God to the same “degree” we are not talking about the essence of love but the extension of love.

The Bible is consistently clear that the absence of love for others reveals the absence of love for God. It also reveals the oneness of the nature of love held for God and others, which originates in God’s love. John says, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 John 4:20). This is verified by Jesus’ acknowledgment that the very same love shared between the Father and the Son is to be shared with the disciples (John 17:23,26). “This is how we

know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers” (1 John 3:16).

Though love is love wherever it is expressed, love is known by its expression. Such expression will reveal not only love’s existence but also the uniqueness of the relationship it engulfs. Thus, love for God will compel love’s highest expressions. All love is unknown apart from its expressions in a relationship.

Therefore, though love does not *exist* in degrees, the expressions of love are viewed in various degrees. In this light, the words of Jesus may be understood as, “There is no greater love expression (action prompted by love) on the part of man than to sacrifice his life for another.” This is the ultimate *αγαπη* expression of sacrificial and unconditional commitment towards another. In this view, degrees of love refer to the evaluation of love’s demonstrative behavior.

What overall effect does this have upon one’s hierarchical ordering of relationships? Though love exists equally in its nature, it is not appropriately expressed with equal intensity and focus. This distinction assists us in our individualistic responsibilities to “love one another.” Without this clarification of expression, there would be neither distinction between one’s love for God and one’s love for the neighbor, nor for the spouse as for the stranger, nor for the believer as for the unbeliever. Prioritizing relationships is a necessary endeavor within the stewardship of God’s love.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE PRIORITIZATION OF RELATIONSHIPS

As Christ prioritized relationships, so God guides us to do the same. On the one hand, the Lord instructs His people to love all people, even one's enemies (Luke 6:27). And, on the other hand, there is a distinct emphasis towards loving fellow Christians. We are to "show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers" (1 Peter 2:17). As St. Paul directs to the Galatians, "as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10).

In what sense does Paul use the concept "especially" to fellow Christians? Paul uses the Greek word *μαλιστα* which means "most of all, above all".<sup>94</sup> Paul is not suggesting that we love believers at the *expense* of loving unbelievers. As our love for God is viewed as an *a priori* love expression, so our love for fellow believers is viewed as such, over and against love conveyed towards those outside of the faith. This is not an "either/or" but a "both/and" concept of love displayed. This Pauline suggestion is prompted by the originality of love and its proper outflow. If we cannot love each other in the church, how are we to effectively display a united love for those outside?<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 490.

<sup>95</sup> The same argument extends to the settling of disputes. Paul says, "If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? . . . But instead, one brother goes to law against another, and this in front of unbelievers!" (1 Corinthians 6:1,6).

This same testimonial understanding of love's flow is provided in Paul's directives to Timothy concerning the qualifications for the bishop: "He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Though Paul here does not specifically refer to love which enables the appropriate management of one's household, he does adequately convey the *a priori* concept. A bishop is not to manage his family well at the exclusion of managing the church family well (as though one is pitted against another); rather, the management of the church family flows out of the successful management of a bishop's family.

Because God loves us, we love God. Because we love God, we love our families. And, because we love God, we not only love *our* family, but also, *His* greater family, the church. Furthermore, because we love God, we not only love our families and His family, but also His creation, specifically those for whom He died. Viewing this hierarchical understanding of the source and flow of God's love as *exclusive* in nature is tragic, even if we exclude one in the name of loving another. God's love in us incorporates the full extent of God's outpouring of love to all people.

This *a priori* concept of "both/and" in the expression of love underscores the reality of the inherent distinctiveness of relationships. Though we may possess the love of God extended to all, we surely do not express such love to the stranger in the identical fashion as to the friend. Nor do we love our neighbor as we love our spouse or children or parents. Nor do we love those who scorn

the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the same intensity as we love those who cherish the “old rugged cross”.

What we are observing is that there is indeed a hierarchy of relationships designed by God and conveyed in His Word. This hierarchical view is focused on the variant expressions of the love we hold for others, under the umbrella of our love for God. These love expressions are related to the fulfillment of one’s individual relationship responsibilities as outlined by God’s Word.

Here the confusing usage of viewing relationships in a “higher or lower” sense returns to haunt the truth of love. Perverted understandings of love for God propose monastic living, or celibacy, as a “higher” way of living than marriage. Other perversions of love suggest that the single person cannot rise to the “higher” way of living as expressed in holy wedlock. Such distortions in understanding love presents love’s relationships at odds with one another. A proper view of the hierarchy of relationships simply conveys the closeness of two individuals and the consequent responsibilities in love’s response.

Great heresies arise when one’s value is derived, not from the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but from one’s love response. In reality, all relationships of love are expressive of the value realized in God’s love demonstrated in the cross of Christ. There is no hierarchy of value placed on love’s response. Was it more valuable for Jesus to express His love to His mother than for him to express His love to the thief on the cross? Scripture does not lead us to draw such conclusions.

On the other hand, in attending to His mother's future relationship needs, Jesus was fulfilling His specific responsibilities as a son who honored His mother. Did Jesus love all the other mothers less by not expressing specific provisions for their future? Surely not! Maybe a more appropriate classification of the ordering of relationships would be "the hierarchical responsibilities of love."

Unfortunately, even with such reclassification, clarity is not all-conclusive. The moment we decide to lock in upon responsibilities as the distinguishing feature in one's variant love expressions, we come face to face with the intermingling of one's relationship responsibilities. For instance, what are the *unique* responsibilities to one's family? If the answer lies in providing food and shelter, then we would recall Scriptural directives towards feeding the poor, providing shelter for the homeless, attending to the less fortunate, and visiting the imprisoned (as noted in the judgment scene depicted by Christ in Matthew 25:31-46). Yet, one is neither able to feed and shelter the entire world nor feed all prisoners. Discernment is needed to elicit an appropriate love response. The "both/and" concept in the *a priori* ordering of relationships is brought to our attention alongside of the principles of stewardship.

To whomever love is expressed, regardless of individualistic relationship responsibilities, it is always expressive of the value one places upon God's love for the self. God's love is always expressive of who He is in His nature and will. Thus, the love in which God establishes His people is always expressive of whom they are as new creatures in Christ (Ephesians 2:10). In other words, the expression of God's love in us is neither at odds with our true identity as God's

people nor with the demonstration of God's will in our lives, as it is lived out in the fulfillment of our relationship responsibilities.

All relationships are intertwined and interdependent upon each other so that one is never without the other. Thus, if one is married, one has not attained to a "higher" love expression. On the other hand, the unique context of one's marital relationship provides one with the opportunity to responsibly reveal the love which has been given in Christ, first and foremost to one's spouse. If one is unable to express the love of Christ to one's spouse, with whom one has become "one flesh," then, it is less likely that one will properly express the love of Christ to others. Even when such love happens, it is entangled in the inconsistencies of the sinner/saint reality .

This remains true for each relationship established in which one faithfully expresses God's love. *The hierarchical ordering of relationships refers to the order of relationship responsibilities which has been placed in one's hands, by God's grace, in order that God's love may flow freely in and through one's life.* A Christian strives to develop relationships whereby the love of Christ is expressed to all, without endangering the relationships out of which such love flows.

Such prioritizing of relationships may be illustrated as follows: The love for all is motivated by the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ. This love overflows through one's life to the spouse, uniting the two in holy wedlock. In this union of love, the love of Christ overflows to the children, uniting the family relationships. In this union of love, the love of Christ overflows through the family to other families who share the love of Christ, uniting them together as the Body



of Christ. In this union of love, the love of Christ overflows through the church to the other families of the world, for whom Christ also died, with the goal of uniting with them, in faith. *Thus, the love of God in Christ is the sum expression of life lived by faith.*

### ***Relationship Boundaries***

All of this is to underscore that each and every relationship provides a unique connection to another living being, and the love shared is expressive of that connection established by God. Every relationship connection is different and operates within a determined set of boundaries, guided by the Word of the Lord. Love permeates all relationships. However, love is expressed uniquely in a variety of appropriate God-given roles. Each individual serves in a multitude of roles which carry separate and unique responsibilities. Sometimes, for the sake of Christ, one's responsibility towards a certain relationship is to walk away from it. "When we are not able to effectively set boundaries for ourselves, we are apt to ultimately lose control of our lives."<sup>96</sup> "A world with no lines is a chaotic world . . . By closing our libidinal and possessional horizons, moral limits likewise help protect us from our own passions and ambitions, which are inherently insatiable. A world with no limits is a world of perpetual misery."<sup>97</sup>

Yet, of those surveyed, over half of clergy and laity found it difficult to know where to draw proper boundaries in the many requests from people of one's time. Unnecessary guilt is frequently experienced, especially on the part of

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<sup>96</sup> Meier and Minirth, What They Didn't Teach You In Seminary, 185.

<sup>97</sup> Eviatar Zerubavel, The Fine Line (New York: The Free, 1991), 119.

the laity surveyed, in responding in the negative to be present for one in order to be with another. Over half of all surveyed expressed a confusion on how to discern the proper relationship response to another's needs or demands. The majority simply respond to the one "'yelling' the loudest."<sup>98</sup>

If we utilize the hierarchical ordering of relationships as an excuse to put down others or to neglect the love for others (which we may view as *less* important relationships), then we have fallen prey to the self-centered focus of the Pharisees who conveyed their love towards those who would love them in return. Love is best kept pure within the challenge to look beyond the obvious easy targets and into the nightmare of rejection. Otherwise, we have failed to comprehend the value of the cross. Motivated by the Gospel of Jesus, love seeks for unconditional expression in all of our relationships.

As we grow and mature in the depth of God's love expressed to us in Christ, the less we are able to contain or restrain such love. God's love seeks fulfillment in giving itself away. If we value the expression of love over love itself, we are apt to focus our love upon the anticipated return. When we fall into this temptation, we have been seduced away from a life of sacrifice and faith prompted by the love of Christ for us (John 15:12-13). Such law motivated love brings condemnation. But the Gospel sets one free from a life of tyranny, enslaved by the demands of a work-righteous love.

Love motivated by the Gospel is also mutually exchanged. Indeed, the bond of friendship in Christ involves a mutual expression of love in the sharing of

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<sup>98</sup> See Appendixes A, B, and C.

sacrificial acts. The distinction has been pointed out that “we are responsible to others and *for ourselves*.”<sup>99</sup>

Problems arise when boundaries of responsibility are confused. We are to *love* one another, not *be* one another. I can’t feel your feelings for you. I can’t think for you. I can’t behave for you. I can’t work through the disappointment that limits bring for you. In short, I can’t grow for you; only you can. Likewise, you can’t grow for me. The Biblical mandate for our own personal growth is ‘Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose’ (Philippians 2:12-13). You are responsible for *yourself*. I am responsible for *myself*.<sup>100</sup>

In this light, we should note that the existence of boundaries underscores the realization that there are limits to one’s relationship responsibilities. Often we are tempted to fulfill someone else’s responsibilities while neglecting our own. One example in Scripture in this regard is Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro. In Genesis 18, when Jethro discerned the impossible task of a single man to sit in judgment over Israel’s disputes, he said, “What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you” (18:17-18). Jethro proceeded to outline a plan of delegation whereby Moses could administer justice through using the assistance of others. Jethro’s plan illustrates the necessary limitations of relationship responsibilities.

Relationship boundaries are very specifically individualized. For instance, the relationship boundaries within which a father operates will be different

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<sup>99</sup> Cloud and Townsend, Boundaries, 30.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

towards his son then towards his daughter. Not limited to gender differentiation, a child's temperament, behavior, and attitude will appropriately influence the boundaries around which a parent expresses love. The common understanding of "tough love" towards rebellious teenagers is a case in point. Another involves the boundaries which God commands around sexual relationships (Leviticus 18) and around relationships with one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:9-18).

In short, boundaries are not walls. The Bible does not say that we are to be 'walled off' from others; in fact, it says that we are to be 'one' with them (John 17:11). We are to be in community with them. But in every community, all members have their own space and property. The important thing is that property lines be permeable enough to allow passing and strong enough to keep out danger . . . You do not exist in a vacuum. You exist in relation to God and others. Your boundaries define you in relation to others. The whole concept of boundaries has to do with the fact that we exist in relationship. Therefore, boundaries are really about relationship, and finally about love.<sup>101</sup>

The revelation of God's activities assure and assist us in the boundaries of our love expressions for each other. The drawing of appropriate boundaries around various relationships, determined by the nature of the responsibilities inherent in a specific relationship, expresses the integrity of the *a priori* relationship we have with God himself. To live without such boundaries is to express our love at the expense of God's love in us. In other words, to express our love ignoring the boundaries of God's revealed truth is idolatrous. When love expressed denies the objective truth of God in Christ, then love has ceased to be the true love of God. The oxymoron which presents love as disconnected to the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 32, 100.

truth of God strikes against the heart of the Gospel and makes nonsense out of the death of God on the cross.

The axiomatic connection between the truth and love of God is revealed by St. John in his brief, but powerful, second epistle. John addresses his letter:

. . . to the chosen lady and her children, *whom I love in the truth, and not I only, but also all who know the truth, because of the truth which lives in us* and will be with us forever. Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father's Son, *will be with us in truth and love*. It has given me great joy to find some of your *children walking in the truth, just as the Father commanded us*. And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. *I ask that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love* (2 John 1:1-6; italics mine).

Notice the almost circular connection between love and truth. John surely understands these two realities as intimately connected and inseparably linked. Therefore, we do not love at the expense of truth; conversely, love is the fulfillment of truth. Nor do we confess the truth at the expense of love; conversely, truth is fulfilled in the expression of love.

Cloud and Townsend summarize the issue of God and boundaries well:

The concept of boundaries comes from the very nature of God. God defines himself as a distinct, separate being, and He is responsible for himself. He defines and takes responsibility for His personality by telling us what He thinks, feels, plans, allows, will not allow, likes, and dislikes.

He also defines himself as separate from His creation and from us. He differentiates himself from others. He tells us who He is and who He is not . . . He has boundaries within the Trinity. The Father,

Son, and the Spirit are one, but at the same time they are distinct persons with their own boundaries. Each one has His own personhood and responsibilities, as well as a connection and love for one another (John 17:24).

God also limits what He will allow in His yard. He confronts sin and allows consequences for behavior. He guards His house and will not allow evil things to go on there . . . The 'gates' of His boundaries open and close appropriately. In the same way He gave us His 'likeness'(Gen. 1:26), He gave us personal responsibility within limits. He wants us . . . to be responsible stewards over the life He has given us. To do that, we need to develop boundaries like God's.<sup>102</sup>

Indeed, the problem of drawing proper boundaries is not so easily solved. As we have learned, Christ prioritized His time and drew boundaries around His relationships. In doing so, Christ gave greater emphasis to those He held, by choice, in more intimate proximity. Though He truly loved all people, He often expressed His love actively towards those in the closest proximity to His mission of life. This mission of Christ determined the circle of friendships which He developed. So, too, we are led to express our love with the greatest intensity towards those relationships in which God has given us and out of which God blesses our lives with a due sense of purpose. As God commissions us to "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28:19), so He sends us out into the world *together*, just as He sent His disciples out on their mission, two by two (Luke 10:1).

### ***Families First, Under God***

The stark reality which illumines and probably surprises our "flesh" the most is that the love of Christ in us is directed, by God, to be expressed *simultaneously* towards all people (i.e. love your spouse, children, neighbor, love the stranger, love your enemy). However, it is equally true that in directing His

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

people to love all, God never indicates that the responsibilities inherent in specific relationships are to be ignored. The fulfillment of love towards others involves the unique responsibilities conveyed in specific relationships. Even though there may not be found a specific passage in Scripture whereby God directs His people to place the family above the church, there are clear and sufficient directives which exhibit the importance of certain relationships (including family) over and against others. Surely the whole concept of Israel's existence, over and against other nations, places greater emphasis on the inter-relationships of God's people. In addition, a person's responsibilities towards various individual relationships are not equalized simply by the imperative to love all people.

A survey conducted of 1,600 employees at two businesses in Boston concluded, "Thirty-six percent of fathers and 37 percent of mothers said they felt 'a lot of stress' trying to keep work and family life in balance."<sup>103</sup>

If managing your time is managing your life, and if our calendars reflect who and what we truly value, most of us would have to admit we're not doing a very good job with our families. This is especially true, of course, of the family 'breadwinner,' be that husband, wife, or both . . . In a world which is continually changing and continually placing new demands upon us, it is important that we schedule and plan time for our spouses, our children, and our parents. Residual time is hardly the way to express the value to you of this most important and vital portion of the body and its divinely ordained relationship . . . Family relationships are second to none in priority - except God.<sup>104</sup>

In my own survey just a little less than half expressed difficulty in placing family obligations above one's work responsibilities. Way over half, the highest re-

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<sup>103</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Edward R. Dayton, Tools for Time Management (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 68-69.

sponse received in the affirmative from the clergy, expressed difficulty in saying “no” to serving someone in order to be with the family.<sup>105</sup>

Howard Hendricks wrote, “Early on I committed myself to the goal that even if I was never known as a great writer, speaker, or seminary professor, I wanted to be known as an adequate father and husband. People can always be ministered to by others perhaps more effectively, but I am my wife’s only husband, my children’s only father.”<sup>106</sup> Russell Weise comments, “I began in the office of the public ministry with the thought that I was on ‘call’ at anytime, anyplace to care and to have compassion on all people. Their needs were always to supersede my own or my families.”<sup>107</sup>

We have already seen how a vast majority of the one hundred people surveyed responded affirmatively that the Bible teaches the hierarchical structure of relationships consisting of God first, family second, church third, and work fourth.<sup>108</sup> Whether such a view is Biblical depends on how one defines this structural concept. Minirth and Meier do teach that the priorities of life consist of “#1: God, #2: Your Spouse, #3: Your children, #4: Other people, and #5: Yourself.”<sup>109</sup>

Do the Scriptures testify that God’s people ought to place their family first in importance under their allegiance to God? And, likewise, are we to love our families more than we love others?

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<sup>105</sup> See Appendixes A, B, and C response questions 2 and 4.

<sup>106</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 173.

<sup>107</sup> Russell J. Weise, “Burnout in the Pastoral Ministry: The Need for Clear Boundaries” (D.Min. thesis, Concordia Seminary, 1993), 35.

<sup>108</sup> For survey results, see appendixes A, B, and C, response question 1.

<sup>109</sup> Meier & Minirth, What They Didn’t Teach You In Seminary, 30-32.



The Christian family is differentiated from the 'secular' family because it has an entirely different view of life itself. It allows God to determine what comes first. It uses His scale of values in putting a price tag on all things.<sup>110</sup>

The Word of God does convey that we are to be more closely knitted together in our families than with others. This means we are to hold them closer in relationship than others. Furthermore, in the sense of allegiance, bonding, loyalty, and responsibilities, we indeed may refer to loving our families second only to our love for God. The man of God should "organize his time so that his family shall never feel that they are merely incidental" in his life's ambitions.<sup>111</sup>

We may observe how Scripture elevates the nature of relationships existing between individual family members above others. This elevated nature of family relationship is stressed in the many laws forbidding sexual relationships with family members other than one's spouse (Leviticus 20). The importance of the God-ordained family relationship is underscored in the laws forbidding sexual adulterous relationships with others (Leviticus 20:10). Especially is the *a priori* nature of the family elevated in Scripture when the mere "cursing" of one's parents (or attacking of one's parents, Exodus 21:15) brings forth the death penalty (Leviticus 20:9).

Still, the *a priori* understanding of placing the family members above all others does not always *appear* to be consistent with the rest of Scripture's testimony. For instance, just prior to instructing wives to submit to their husbands, St. Paul instructs all Christians to "submit to one another out of reverence

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<sup>110</sup> Oscar E. Feucht, ed., Helping Families Through the Church (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 19.

<sup>111</sup> William H. Leach, Handbook of Church Management (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1958), 354.

for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). And prior to stating that the husband should love his wife, as Christ loved the Church, St. Paul instructs all Christians to "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2).

Does this contextual observation lead us to disregard any meaningful distinction which Paul is making with regards to the unique spousal relationship? I think not! Just the opposite. If Paul intended to say nothing more than what he had already instructed to everyone in general, then his specific elaboration upon the marriage bond would appear redundant. Paul clearly is elevating the marriage relationship as both dependent upon the *a priori* nature of Christ's love and, consequently, as exemplary for all relationships.

On the other hand, we stray too far from Paul's wider context if we elevate the spousal relationship to the extent that it involves an "either/or" concept of relationships. As with our love for God and for others, so also our *a priori* love for our families involve a "both/and" concept of relationships. In other words, loving one's wife includes loving one's children which includes loving other families. This understanding has profound ramifications for the practical expressions involved in loving others. First and foremost, the reality and nature of God's love in us does not give way to using itself as an excuse. No inappropriate failure of love is excusable in light of some, so called, "higher" love expression.

This conclusion is not without its practical difficulties. Often the difficulties are created by the illusion of what seems like unloving behavior towards another.

Is it unloving towards one's neighbor to decline an opportunity to assist him on a particular evening with his problems in order to assist one's family with their trials? On what does such decisions depend? Love surely calls for constant compromises on one's part in striving to operate within the limitations of finite time and abilities. The nature of love seeks to freely give itself away. Because of the generous nature of love, love is likewise sacrificial and unconditional in its purity. Those closest in relationships face the greatest challenge in the sacrifices and commitments of love.

This understanding of love compels one to look beyond self, one's own personal needs, in order to allow love to be expressed. Sometimes love is expressed through one's activities. Other times love is expressed by sacrificing one's own involvement in order to allow someone else the opportunity to show love to another. One thing is clear: love continually seeks to engage and entangle us with others in relationships.

The primary power and appropriate motivation of any relationship is the outward flow of God's love through us. Relationships involve a give and take where love flows through two people to each other. However, love never stops with just the two. Love overflows into three and four and five and more. As love expands and encircles more people, the limitations of the expressions of love grow in complexity.

In spite of the necessary boundaries drawn around love expressions, love remains an all-inclusive concept. Thus, an ignoring of opportunities to express the love of Christ to anyone is rejected. The bottom line understanding of true

Christian wisdom and stewardship involves the discernment of the appropriate utilization of time, talents, and treasures in the receiving and giving of God's love in Christ.

In the *a priori* "both/and concept" of relationships, opting to attend to the family relationships is not ever chosen at the expense of attending to the neighbor. In other words, the "both/and" nature of relationships does not pit two relationships against each other. One might think in terms of the old cliché, "all in good time." Herein, partly, lies the elements of wisdom to discern when it may be appropriate to attend to a particular relationship at another time. Wisdom shows forth the need to respond in love to all, and yet to prioritize such responses within the scope of human limitations.

Developing one's confidence concerning such discernment arises out of time spent with God. Specifically, time spent feeding upon the Word of God is the means by which the Spirit of God enlightens us in the love of Christ. Meditating upon this revelation from God and making one's requests known to God in prayer provides the setting out of which the boundaries of love are drawn in confidence. Jesus intimately connects remaining in the truth and praying to our love responses towards one another (John 15:1-17). "The family who prays together, stays together," has been offered as a treasure of wisdom. Also true is "the family who searches God's Word together in prayer, expresses their love together in reaching beyond themselves to others."

In the same vein, the child of God who truly seeks to live life void of weak and confusing decision-making will take to heart the Scripture's conveyance:

“But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (Psalm 1:2). Confident discernment concerning the boundaries of relationships are not available through oblivious and apathetic treatment of God’s Word. Jesus prayed in regards to His followers, “Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth” (John 17:17). This sanctification enables the love of God to flow properly in and through our lives (John 17:20-26).

Thus, awareness not only of our responsibilities but also of our God-given opportunities is strengthened in correlation to the blessings of open eyes and ears. As Christ proclaimed, “Blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear” (Matthew 18:16). Awareness of the windows of opportunities which God provides becomes imperative to our appropriate love responses. The sacrificial giving of ourselves in love creates the flexibility of responding to the windows opened by God’s sovereign will. The person of faith does not operate with a pagan concept of “luck, coincidence, or by-chance.” There is purpose and meaning in all of life created in Christ Jesus. Wisdom, couched in continual prayer, attempts to perceive and evaluate time limitations around which windows of opportunities are framed.

But what if the window of opportunity will apparently close within approximately the same time frame? Given “all” things equal, the *a priori* relationship takes precedence. This equality refers not merely to the equality of the opportunity of time but also the equality of the opportunity itself. Even in this theoretical and unlikely scenario, attending to the relationship of priority does not entirely ex-clude the other. Only the type of response is colored by such

limitations. Maybe one is not able to respond in person, but settles for a phone call, letter, or solicit-ing someone else to take one's place. The point is that love calls for a response when the opportunity arises. To walk away from an open door to let God's love flow is to discredit the love God has so graciously given.

"All" things being equal or not, the proper loving response is never determined simply by weighing the "greater" need or the more apt opportunity. This implies a certain amount of freedom and a great deal of discernment in specific situations. The love of Christ has freed us from the bondage to sin whereby our selfish nature is unable to heed the promptings of love's call. Such freedom enables us to take ownership of love's decisions and discourages victimization or reactivity decision-making. The conclusion of this paper aims at explicating the practical dilemmas involved in exercising such freedom.

### ***Spouse First, In Family***

We recall that, even in the Garden of Paradise, God placed one person in a relationship with another human being as He set about to create Eve out of and for Adam (Genesis 2:18-24). Already in the beginning, the Lord institutes marriage and ordains that "a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Genesis 2:24). In this "one flesh" concept we discover the *a priori* nature of holy wedlock. Thus, existing within the family priority, the marriage bond is elevated by God as the most intimate and connected of all relationship bonds. Jesus affirms this by His teaching concerning divorce. He says, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law, . . . Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate"

(Mark 10:5,9). This marriage decree elevates holy wedlock far above any other relationship bond.

In the same spirit, Paul writes to wives, “submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church . . . Now as the Church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Ephesians 5:22-24). Such imperative submission exemplified by the Church’s submission to Christ shows forth the *a priori* nature of the husband’s relationship to the wife. So also the concept of headship reveals the understanding of allegiance in this *a priori* relationship.

In similar fashion, Paul directs the husbands, “love your wives, just as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her . . . In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself . . . (Ephesians 5:25-33). By comparing the husband’s love for his wife with both Christ’s love for the Church and love for himself, God leads us to understand the *a priori* nature of the wife’s relationship to the husband. No other relationship, outside of Christ himself to His people, should capture the nature of the marriage bond in its commitment, intimacy, or intensity.

Furthermore, the profound inseparable bond created by God’s design between a husband and wife verifies the uniqueness of this relationship and its elevated position in God’s eyes before all relationships. This becomes extremely evident in the instructions of Paul:

If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and his is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband has been sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife has been sanctified through her believing husband (1 Corinthians 7:12-14).

However, we also notice the *a priori* nature of the relationship with believers versus unbelievers when Paul instructs, "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). The violation of the proper flow of God's love in the ordering of relationships may not be the primary reason, but one reason in the forbidding of a Christian to enter into a marital relationship with an unbeliever in the first place (2 Corinthians 6:14). This shows the intermingling of the factors involved in placing importance upon individual relationships, namely, family and faith.

Scripture is not as cut and dry as we would desire. When black and white distinctions are absent, Scripture leads us away from legalism towards the freedom response of love. Such freedom verifies the "both/and" nature of *a priori* relationships and discounts the "either/or" mind set. Turning us away from the love expressions of "first/then" towards the all encompassing "first/and," the Lord compels us to "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8).

In this *a priori* relationship with one's spouse, we note the "leaving" of one's parents in order to "cleave" to the spouse. Although this does not decrease the importance of one's parents, it does elevate the importance of one's



spouse above parental relationships. Of course, the proper understanding of this elevated importance needs clarification. We recall that to love and serve God above all else means that God retains a preeminent place in one's life. All other relationships are established under His will and in harmony with His life. Consequently, when the spousal relationship is placed above other earthly relationships, including parental relationships, then no other relationship is allowed to come between or create interference with this God-ordained relationship. No relationship (be it friend or family) is properly retained detrimental to the spousal relationship bond. This is underscored by God's decree, "Let no one put asunder" (Mark 10:9).

Certainly a person will continue to hold dear the other relationships in life and seek to appropriately nurture and sustain them. Scripture does not instruct one to love spouse at the exclusion of loving others. Nor does it imply that the parental relationship is of lesser importance. Such a relationship retains its position of importance in its own right. But the nature of the parental/offspring relationship dramatically changes with the marriage or maturity of a child. Ideally, all other relationships are maintained and formed under the unity of the marriage bond and, therefore, are mutually shared and supported by marriage partners. Indeed, some relationships established by either spouse may be completely absent to the other (i.e. work relationships), but such relationships ought not be unknown to the other. A mutual sharing in the *communications* of life informs all relationship opportunities whereby God establishes and uses one in Christ.

A spouse is frequently robbed of the joy in being effectively used by God because of a breakdown in healthy communication. A couple does well to openly share God's power and grace as it is experienced in the individual identities of the two. The tendency to privatize one's spiritual journey, even hiding it from one's spouse, creates division, repression, resentment, distance, and misunderstandings between married couples. Failure to share Christ, and His great acts in one's lives, often leads to the establishment of ungodly relationships and the nurturing of "hidden" agendas which are further kept from a spouse. Satan finds an open inroad into the marriage relationship when communication is damaged. How ironic that couples are often good at keeping parental relationships from interfering with their bond but are oblivious to letting their worst enemy, the devil, create interference in their marriage. Let me repeat, husband and wife grow apart when they do not share together what God is doing in their individual lives.

When God, through Paul, admonishes husbands to love their wives "as they love their own bodies" (Ephesians 5:25), he is not revealing any substantially new revelation, apart from the command of Jesus to "love our neighbors, as ourselves" (Matthew 19:19). However, in the context of the marriage relationship the application of this great command is a reminder that husbands are not to allow even their own appropriate personal needs to interfere with loving their wives. This substantiates the point which views Jesus' command as the "second" and not the "second and third." We are directed by God's love for us to love and be committed to others as much as we already are to ourselves.

## ***Parental/Offspring Relationships***

Even within the “family first, under God” concept, we have noted the a *priori* nature of the spousal relationship in reference to the parents/children relationship.

Research indicates that many pastors relate to their wives and children as a unit, making little distinction between wife and children as they express love and affection. This is partly due to the common concerns and interests the mother has for the children and how she communicates their needs to the husband - father. The wife's individual needs for love and affection become merged and submerged in the children's needs as the husband fails to make distinctions. The reverse is not true, however, as the husband is perceived by the wife as an individual, separate from the children's needs and concerns.<sup>112</sup>

Awareness of the Biblical ordering of relationships assists one in striving towards communicating the distinctiveness of relationships within the family.

With regards to the parental/offspring relationships, Scripture is clear as to the special commitment and endearment involved. Paul speaks towards this responsibility when he instructs, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother — which is the first commandment with a promise — that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on earth” (Ephesians 6:2). To leave parents and unite with a spouse does mean that the former relationship changes. We are no longer to maintain a relationship of dependency upon our parents. We are to establish instead a cleaving relationship with our spouse, allowing no other relationship to produce interference with that which God has established.

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<sup>112</sup> David Martin, “Forgotten Members: The Pastor's Family,” in *Growth In Ministry*, ed. Thomas E. Kadel, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 145.

However, it still needs to be underscored that we love our parents no “less” than before. Only the expression of such devoted love has matured and changed its focus, away from loving obedience and towards faithful acknowledgment and respect. We are to continue to honor our parents until death. Jesus told the grown rich ruler, among other things, “Honor your father and your mother.” To which the man replied, “All these I have kept since I was a boy” (Luke 18:20-21).

No relationship, including the spousal, ought to be allowed to interfere with one’s responsibility to honor God-given parents. (Again we highlight that no relationship is properly used as an excuse to ignore God-given responsibilities towards another.) God emphatically decreed in the Old Testament, “Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death . . . Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death” (Exodus 21:15,17; cf. Leviticus 20:9). Jesus, in quoting this Old Testament decree, makes a point of the Pharisees’ hypocrisy in failing to provide assistance to one’s parents by claiming their time as “devoted to God.” Jesus said, “Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of tradition. You hypocrites!” (Matthew 15:3-7).

Children are always viewed as blessings of God given to husband and wife: “Children’s children are a crown to the aged” (Proverbs 17:6a). The responsibility to train up our children in the Lord and teach them the Lord’s righteousness enjoins upon us the exercise of faithful stewardship of time, treasures, and resources towards the raising of our children. To neglect, abuse, or reject our offspring and/or parents is abominable in the eyes of the Lord. Paul instructs,

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

The close ties between parents and offspring are verified in Paul’s letter to Timothy, where he states, “But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God . . . If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:4,8).

The general priesthood of all believers do not have the direct responsibility to provide loving support for those in need. The family of such a person has been given this directive from God. This is verified in our church’s teachings when it is taught among us that it is the parents who have the primary responsibility in teaching God’s Word to their offspring.<sup>113</sup> Luther promoted this teaching by the writing of his small catechism “as the head of the family should teach them in a simple way to his household.”<sup>114</sup> The congregation of believers stands beside the parents to support them in this endeavor by means of the collective spiritual gifts of God’s people. The church also stands alongside of families in need to assist them in their time of difficulties.

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<sup>113</sup> Deuteronomy 6:6-9 states, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates.”

<sup>114</sup> Martin Luther, Luther’s Small Catechism (St. Louis: Concordia, 1943), 5.

### ***Extended Family Relationships***

Paul's instruction to Timothy quoted in the above section is very insightful in showing forth the *a priori* nature of family relationships, inclusive of extended family members. The American Versions, following after the King James Version, uses the word "nephews" instead of the more contemporary versions use of "grandchildren." This is justified in the 1611 English whereby the definition of nephew was inclusive of grandchildren.<sup>115</sup>

The point introduced here is that the parental/offspring relationship ties are extended to the grandparents/grandchildren, *and beyond*. In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul states, "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially his own family, he has denied the faith." The inclusion of extended family members appears to be sustained in the *a priori* nature of family relationships. A word analysis of the Greek terms used in this passage does call for some limitations in its application.<sup>116</sup>

Are all extended relatives included in this concept, i.e. aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins? The particular passage at hand is primarily focused upon the grandparent/grandchildren extension (verse 4) and expands further to include all who are "dependents" living in the household of a believer. This may include any number of servants, friends, and/or extended family members. When Paul says, "especially his own family," a distinction between dependents who are blood relatives and those who are not appears to be underscored. This

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<sup>115</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 656.

<sup>116</sup> Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, for a study of *εκγονα* (verse 4), *των ιδιων*, and *των οικειων* (verse 8) see 237, 370, 559 respectively.

distinction is highlighted, not to exclude those dependents unrelated by blood, but to bring the absurdity of neglecting those who are. Again we must emphasize the concept of “God-given opportunity” and the “both/and” nature of the *a priori* relationships established by God's grace. The temptation towards an “either/or” concept of relationships or towards a legalism, which creates unnecessary guilt and inactivity, is to be rejected.

In spite of the limitations inherent in this passage from Paul, Scripture uplifts the close ties associated with blood kin. Particularly the concept of extended families seems to be centered in the brother/sister ties. Whether or not the reference is to one's parent's brothers/sisters (uncles/aunts) or the children of such (cousins) or to the children of one's own brothers/sisters (nephews/nieces), Scripture acknowledges a more intimate tie with relatives. The elevated tie between such extended family members appears to rest upon the mutual blood and name connecting two people. Even Joseph's brothers recognized this in their infamous action of selling Joseph into slavery. Judah says, “Come, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” (Genesis 37:27)

We likewise see the importance of these blood relatives in the admonitions of the Lord in Leviticus 18 which forbid sexual relationships with these extended relatives. Important God-given ties are also noted in relation to the rules for priests:

A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband - for her he may make himself unclean. (Leviticus 21:1-3).

Notice here how the definition of a close relative is mingled with the concept of dependency as in 1 Timothy 5:8.

The Lord continues His instructions to the priests by saying, "He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself" (Leviticus 21:4). We are provided with the implication that it is the "blood ties" which elevate such relatives to the *a priori* position of family relationships. However, the implication is far from being legalistically applied when one considers that the wife of one's father is also forbidden territory (Leviticus 18:8).

And, conversely, it was the duty of the Israelite to enter into marriage with his brother's wife, in the event of the brother's death, in order to preserve his name and descendants. Legalism might infer that since the wife is technically unrelated, as far as blood, then there would be no special obligations or responsibilities in the event of a brother's death. That is clearly not the case.

The concept of dependency is closely connected to this expectation of responsibility to the brother's widow. Scripture says, "If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family" (Deuteronomy 25:5). The condition of "living together" implies an interdependency between the two brother's families. The contextual concept of family here seems to be primarily limited to the those living in the same household. Historical records, as in the case of Onan (Genesis 38:8) and Ruth (1:12), appear to expand this duty to the nearest living kinsman.



There are a number of noteworthy examples of brother/sister relationships in the New Testament. The most memorable is Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:5). Others which are brought to our attention in the New Testament include the brothers of Jesus (Matthew 12:47), James and John, the sons of Zebedee (Matthew 10:2), and Andrew, the brother of Peter (Mark 1:16). But in all of these observations the New Testament remains silent concerning specific instructions about these elevated relationship connections.

Instead, the New Testament seems, for all practical purposes, to elevate the fellow believers in Christ, Jew or Gentile, to the *a priori* brother relationship position. More often than not, both the Old and New Testaments, in referring to the “brother” relationship, is a reference to the spiritual union shared in God. Continually, believers are elevated to the position of brotherhood (i.e., Hebrews 13:23 where Timothy is called “our brother”), and no sharp distinction may be drawn. Jesus implies this when he says, “For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother” (Matthew 12:50). These recognized hazy boundaries, guarding against a rigid legalism, further promotes the extension of love wherever the opportunity is given. What Scripture does affirm is that the opportunity of love is first and foremost provided within the family (blood and spiritual) in which God has planted us.

The inclusion of adult brothers/sisters in the position of the family ordering of relationships is the shakiest whenever such a brother and sister is not one’s dependent nor shares one’s faith in God. Under such circumstances the *a priori* position of fellow believers, as the greater family, becomes a more intimate rela-

tionship in the flow of God's love, then the ungodly blood brother. If a Christian spouse is instructed to let the unbelieving spouse exit the marriage then how much more would a brother or sister part ways in light of ungodliness and unbelief?

In general, Paul's admonition to the Corinthians would be extended to family members. Paul says,

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6:14-15).

Solomon reminds us, "Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father, and do not go to your brother's house when disaster strikes you - better a neighbor nearby than a brother far away" (Proverbs 27:10).

### ***Church As Extended Family***

We may be surprised to read, "Most pastors' wives claim their husbands place them no higher than second place — not under God, but behind the ministry."<sup>117</sup> In my own survey the clergy express confusion between serving God and serving the church.<sup>118</sup> When we confess that the church ought to hold third place or, rather, first place under our allegiance to the immediate family ties, much confusion is often created. Such convictions need clarification for us to receive beneficial guidance in our daily Christian decision-making endeavors.

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<sup>117</sup> Meier and Minirth, What They Didn't Teach You In Seminary, 109.

<sup>118</sup> See Appendix B, response question 3.

This confusion most likely creates the biggest tension in the parsonage.

The following pressure points reveal some of the aspects of this tension:

The 'never at home' pressure. Time management is consistently the most troublesome issue ministers and our families report.

The 'church above all' pressure. Congregational bigamy, being 'married' to a spouse and a job at same time, is the home front result of worshipping our work.

The 'equal love for all' pressure.<sup>119</sup>

Surely it is difficult to distinguish clearly between serving family and others.

Leach claims, "it is well nigh impossible to separate his (a pastor's) professional life from his home life."<sup>120</sup> However, Leach says elsewhere,

The minister may be the servant of the church, but before he became a minister God made him a man and his first responsibility before God is to protect that manhood. He is a husband and father as well as a minister and he has the obligation to fulfill the functions of that relationship. Ministers are busy men in these days, but the minister who allows himself to become so busy that he cannot play the part of a husband and father is just too busy.<sup>121</sup>

"The minister, perhaps more than any other professional, is at risk for diffuse role boundaries which allows the stress and pressure of ministry to spill over into his/her family life."<sup>122</sup> This lack of boundaries on the part of pastors leads to gross confusion in relationship boundaries. Barbour calls this enmeshment with the congregation where there is an "inability to distinguish distinct boundaries between the family and the parish."<sup>123</sup> Hulme notes, "The conflict of

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<sup>119</sup> Robert D. Dale, Pastoral Leadership (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 214.

<sup>120</sup> Leach, Handbook of Church Management, 339.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 353-354.

<sup>122</sup> Samuel Moy and H. Newton Malony, "An Empirical Study of Ministers' Children and Families," Journal of Psychology and Christianity 6 (Spring, 1987): 53.

<sup>123</sup> Joseph Barbour, "Source of Marital Stress in the Clergy" (Ph.D. diss., St. Louis University, 1990), 98.

loyalties between family obligations and congregational obligations is difficult to avoid under normal circumstances, but when the pastor exploits his family to satisfy his own need for success, it is even worse."<sup>124</sup> David Martin states,

Pastors who place a higher intrinsic value on their work than on the more 'mundane' family affairs pose a strong threat to their wives and children. How does the family compete with God? This can be a volatile issue for many wives and children. Their value of the family is in direct conflict with the husband's. The husband's argument can be disarming and very frustrating to his family when he asks, 'Don't you expect me to put God first in my life?' But is there not a confusion between God and work in this statement?"<sup>125</sup>

In this quagmire of confusion, Christians are typically robbed of the joy of freedom and the peace of conscience in Christ. Such latent anxiety reveals itself in either false guilt or apathetic decision-making. The long term effect is usually evident by observable victimization and/or reactivity lifestyles. Ali Hazm, one thousand years ago, noted, "Everything we do is an effort to avoid anxiety."<sup>126</sup> To whatever extent this holds true, such active avoidance of anxiety creates false motivational responses of love and/or blind spots to the need for appropriate love expressions. Saying yes to opportunities when our hearts say no or saying no when God has called and equipped us to respond in the affirmative is frequently produced by the anxiety of indecision and confusion surrounding our walk with the Lord.

Extremely valuable to the seeker of wisdom is a distinction between sacramental and sacrificial aspects of "church." Herein lies the proper distinction

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<sup>124</sup> William E. Hulme, Your Pastor's Problems (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 79.

<sup>125</sup> Martin, "Forgotten Members: The Pastor's Family," 145 (not to mention between God and church).

<sup>126</sup> Gary L. Carver, "Uncertain Certainties," Preaching: The Professional Journal for Preachers 12 (November - December, 1996) 37, quoting from Cecil Osborne's book, How To Love Yourself.

between serving “God,” who commands first place, and serving the “church” (God’s people). Nearly half of the laity surveyed conveyed confusion in distinguishing between obligations to God and church.<sup>127</sup> Not limited to confusion on the part of laity alone, clergy often speak with confusion concerning this distinction. Eighteen of the forty three clergy responding affirmed this confusion.<sup>128</sup> One moment a certain “church” act is declared to be expressive of one’s greater allegiance to God, and the next moment one is declining such service in the name of love for the family. Does this involve merely a hodge-podge of what “seems” right at the moment?

We need to carefully scrutinize wherein lies the overall expression of our love for God in distinction from our love for God’s people. The tension which exists between the two is resolved in the Lutheran understanding of the difference between sacramental and sacrificial acts of the church. Those sacramental acts involve us in the direct and essential feeding of God’s grace and power via Word and sacrament ministry. The establishing and nurturing of our faith in Christ lies in the domain of our primary relationship with God. As the third commandment brings to our attention, love for God above all involves the hearing of God’s Word so that “we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.”<sup>129</sup> When we engage ourselves in public worship around the Word and Sacraments, we are exercising our primary allegiance to God. Such responses to the gracious invitation of Christ to receive

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<sup>127</sup> See Appendix C, response question 3.

<sup>128</sup> See Appendix B, response question 3.

<sup>129</sup> Luther, Luther’s Small Catechism with Explanation, 10.

His presence of forgiveness, life, and salvation involve us in the highest of all priorities, with which no other relationship should be allowed to interfere.

At the same moment our response to such gracious establishment and feeding of life in Christ engages us simultaneously with others. This simultaneous involvement is highlighted in the public nature of worship. If the ministry of Word and Sacrament consisted of private time with God or family devotional endeavors, then one would be less likely to confuse the issues involved in the ordering of relationships. But God calls, gathers, and enlightens us in the presence of His people and simultaneously calls upon us to be active in service to one another. Because of this intimately connected design of God's wisdom, one should be cautious in over distinguishing between the closely associated sacramental and sacrificial aspects of life in the church.

Nevertheless, this distinction is of utmost importance. While it remains true that receiving God, void of any response, is to maintain a dead faith (James 2:26), receiving God *because* of one's response is to maintain a self-righteousness (Romans 3:21-22). Faith and good works are enabled simultaneous, yet faith continues to hold the *a priori* position. Likewise the establishing of our lives in God's love, by the love of God for us, produces the response of love in us. God's activity upon our lives simultaneously creates love's activity through us, towards others. <sup>130</sup>

The clear distinction between God's actions and our response helps us

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<sup>130</sup> The importance of understanding the *a priori* nature of God's activity upon us in creating our activity is revealed in the often confused teaching concerning self-love, whereby it is taught that one is unable to love God without first loving self (see below, section entitled, "The Love of Self").

with regards to our responsibilities and commitments to earthly relationships. Attending to one's relationship with God by worshipping and receiving the blessings of Christ takes precedence over all relationships. Failing to properly distinguish between the sacramental and sacrificial aspects of church confuses the distinctiveness of the *a priori* nature of our relationship established with God.

It is not uncommon for husbands and wives to drift into an idolatrous relationship with each other. Scott Peck describes this well,

It is the search for God in human romantic relationships that is, I think, one of the greatest problems we have in this and other cultures. What we do is to look to our spouse or lover to be a god unto us. We look to our spouse or lover to meet all of our needs, to fulfill us, to bring us a lasting Heaven on earth. And it never works. And among the reasons it never works, whether or not we're aware when we do this, is that we are violating the First Commandment, which says, 'I am the Lord thy God, and thou shalt not have any other gods before me.'<sup>131</sup>

Maintaining and nurturing our relationship with God sustains us in the deepest of humility. Such humility keeps us dependent upon the means of grace which enables us to live totally surrendered lives. God's transforming love compels one to extend His life and love to other relationships.

Therefore, when family needs, activities, and demands interfere with one's relationship with God (hearing, receiving and praying), then there exists a breakdown of the *a priori* nature of loving God above all. In the same fashion, the *a priori* nature of loving the family in closest intimacy of all earthly relationships is broken down whenever church activities, functions, and demands interfere with the relationships essential to the family's well-being.

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<sup>131</sup> Scott M. Peck, Further Along the Road Less Traveled (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 224.

When the term “church” is utilized by the hierarchical listing of relationships, then the concept elicits the image of the institution itself, as ordained by Christ, rather than the saints who collectively comprise the institution. This concept of “church” as an institution of Christ rightfully includes both sacramental and sacrificial aspects of the family of God. Therefore for the sake of meaningful relationship distinctions, the term of choice utilized in the ordering of relationships with regards to the church is best derived from Paul’s inspired instruction to believers: “. . . as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the *family of believers*” (Galatians 6:10; italics mine).

The term “family of believers” not only better communicates the proper Biblical intent in the ordering of relationships, but this term also serves to incorporate the wider understanding of the “brotherhood of believers” (1 Peter 2:17) and not merely the fellowship of the local congregation. Just as there may be observed further *a priori* relationship distinctions within the concept of the family ties (i.e. spouse and parental/ offspring relationships), so also within the greater family of God there are noteworthy distinctions to be observed concerning *a priori* relationships (i.e. Lutheran towards Baptist Christians).

Is the Christian’s first obligation of stewardship to the local congregation to whom one is united in faith and under whose hand one is fed? When such is presented as a legally binding duty, then the freedom conveyed by Christ and enjoyed by His followers is violated. However, there are Scriptural reasons to establish the *a priori* nature of the local congregation within the wider family of



believers. Paul seems to imply such by his words to the Thessalonians: "May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else" (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Beginning with those joined together in fellowship and further extended to everyone else conveys the "both/and" concept of love expressions.

Prioritizing relationships with those who regularly worship and confess the truth together may be observed from the pastoral vantage point. Paul, in speaking to the spiritual leaders of the Ephesian church, instructs,

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God . . . savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from among your own number men will arise and distort the truth . . ." (Acts 20:28-29).

Though these elders may be recognized as serving over the universal church of God, Paul specifically focuses their attention and stewardship towards those believers over which they specifically have been called to shepherd.

And though not directly stated, Paul's detailed lists of instructions to Timothy and Titus are surely to be directed by these young elders to the specific local group of believers living under their pastoral authority. This is vividly brought forward in the instructions of Paul to Timothy, "Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them . . ." (2 Timothy 2:14). Obviously the reference to "them" refers to the believers under Timothy's pastoral care. Once again, this *a priori* condition of relationship is not exclusive in nature. Whenever Timothy and/or Titus would encounter a fellow believer who was not a member of their flock, the same love would be extended.

Observations verifying *a priori* relationships existing *within* the local church of believers may also be seen concerning the lay and clergy relationship. Surely the laity are to show forth love and respect to all alike, but the Scriptures specifically bring the following injunction: “Anyone who receives instruction in the word must share all good things with his instructor” (Galatians 6:6). Likewise, “The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching” (1 Timothy 5:17). These instructions definitely imply an *a priori* relationship between pastor/people whom God has brought together.

Further relationships between individual believers are lifted up and underscored, not at the expense of the unity of all believers, but as unique unto the responsibilities inherent in the ordering of relationships. Outside of the pastor/people notation, the New Testament churches are called upon repeatedly to take care of the widows and the poor among them. We see this established by the choosing of seven deacons to oversee the care of widows and the distribution of food in Acts 6. Paul instructs Timothy, “Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need” (5:3). James confirms the *a priori* nature of such relationships when he states, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress . . .” (James 1:27).

Closely associated with this focus upon the poor and widows is the attention paid to anyone in need and to one’s individual contributions towards the collective whole. In Jerusalem all believers were unified and shared everything they had in common. Therefore, “there was no needy persons among them”

(Acts 4:34). Even when Paul refers to the individual gifts of the Holy Spirit given among Christians, he reminds them that “to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given *for the common good*” (1 Corinthians 12:7: italics mine). And Paul adds,

God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Corinthians 12:24-25).

The entire context of Paul’s directives are in reference to the unity and love displayed in the context of the local congregation. Not that a local fellowship of believers is to remain blind and apathetic to the needs of other churches. Indeed, Paul, in encouraging the Corinthian church to collect funds for the Church of Jerusalem, says,

Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. Then there will be equality (2 Corinthians 8:13-14).

Just as Christians are to look beyond themselves to their own families, and their families are to look beyond themselves to the greater family of believers, so too the local congregation of believers is to look beyond itself to other congregations. Far from an “either/or” situation, this is not even a “first/ then” scenario. As always, simultaneously, whenever a Christian congregation is formed, she is to look to the needs of those among her while at the same time looking beyond her own needs to those around her, beginning with the household of faith. Peter calls upon us to “Love the brotherhood of believers.” (1 Peter 2:17) Even newly formed, subsidized, congregations of our Synod are required

to set aside offerings for the church-at-large from the beginning rather than wait until they become self-supporting.

Should Christians engage in loving support of other Christian (heterodox) congregations who do not share their identical confessions? The answer to this question is dependent upon the definition provided of "loving support." Paul reached out to many congregations which were involved with gross heresy. He sought to admonish and correct them. In doing so, Paul typically began by thanking them: "I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:4).

Jesus used approximately the same format in His messages to the seven churches, recorded in Revelation. First and foremost, we ought to thank God for the faith in His Son in whomever it is found. We ought to commend those who lift up the Son of God and trust in His death and resurrection for salvation. To the extent that our "loving support" brings glory to God and commendation for the truth in fellow believers, we may properly recognize unity wherever it exists in love and truth through Christ.

At the same time, in "loving support" of all believers, we are to follow Scripture's imperatives in bringing a word of admonition, instruction, and condemnation towards all that defies, denies, and rejects the truth embodied through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul says, "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently" (Galatians 6:1). The goal of all believers is to enter into a deeper and more perfect unity of faith and love in the forgiveness and truth of Christ.

James calls on us to remember: "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:20). In fulfilling this responsibility towards those caught in error we are mindful of our limitations. In today's contemporary universal media exposure to virtually all believers everywhere, we are hard pressed to respond individually to each Christian we observe drenched in error.

Paul pleads, "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). It should be noted that Paul is pleading for unity among believers in the *local* congregation. However, his appeal is extended to all Christians everywhere by the words of our Lord himself, when He prays, "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20).

What about those who actively engage in bringing divisions to the body of Christ? A distinction seems in order between those who are blinded to the full confessional truth (out of ignorance or even stubborn blindness) but truly express and live a life of love in the true God, and those who claim faith and love in Christ but behave and live as unrepentant sinners. Those who, refuse not only to repent of their ungodliness, but also in their persistence to sin, teach others to do the same, are set aside to themselves in the ordering of relationships. Heretics, hypocrites, and impenitent sinners are categorized separately. There is a distinction between apostasy and heterodox Christians. This occurs in Christi-

anity's distinction between cults and denominational entities. The point stressed here is that there exists a greater relationship responsibility towards those with whom we share the faith than with those who are bent on destroying the faith.

The relationship we enjoy with those united in faith widens and strengthens the family bonds which tie us together. One may properly view the fellowship enjoyed with other Christians as simply an extension of one's immediate family (considering one's family members are Christian). Indeed, Christ prophesied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields - and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

The local congregation provides the context where love is best able to be actively expressed. Love does not exist in abstract or theoretical equations of behavior. Love involves "hands-on" reality whereby one "rolls up his sleeves" and activates the love within. Theoretically and theologically we may speak of loving "all" people. But as Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 without the activity of love "it profits me nothing." Love exists as mere verbiage until, at the least, we are in prayer, desiring the opportunities to express God's love. The local congregation gives believers these opportunities. Given the opportunity, love responds in appropriate behavior towards any one, exclusive of no one.

Our relationships with fellow believers reveal the awesome love of God under which we live and love. Our highest respect and love expressions are

offered towards all who faithfully and obediently love the Lord. In this regard, Paul commends fellow Christians to various others. To the Roman Christians he says, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way *worthy of the saints* and to give her any help she may need from you" (Romans 16:1-2; italics mine). Paul writes to Philemon in regards to his runaway slave, Onesimus, on the occasion of the slave's return: "Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good, no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, *as a dear brother*. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord" (Philemon 15-16: italics mine).

#### ***Work Fourth, A Misnomer***

When President Clinton included work as an American value held alongside of faith and family, he was expressing the common, but confusing, mixture of values held with regard to relationships, God ordained institutions and responsible living. All three of these are held in value by those who live under the cross of Christ. But not all three are equally yoked. Nor are the terms themselves clearly defined. There is an interdependence between these concepts out of which arises the centrality of relationships. Christians need to clarify the purpose for which the institution of the family and the ethical concepts of work are valued.

Utilizing the right terms does not always correlate with right understanding. Does faith refer to a relationship with God, or a belief in man, or the American dream? Most likely, President Clinton was including the value of church, as an institution, under his concept of faith. If so, this mixture reveals the

ongoing confusion between one's commitment to God and one's commitment to the church. Does President Clinton hold to the value of family as expressive of the relationships represented in this concept, or, merely as an institution? Does he place family first, under God, because of his total dependency upon God or because he "feels" especially close to his mother?

These questions reveal the semantic confusion in the generally adopted belief systems of American and Christian values. My survey verifies this confusion in that eighty four out of ninety three clergy and laity responding convey the belief that the Bible teaches work as the fourth priority in the "hierarchical structure of relationships." The majority of people I surveyed denied difficulty in placing family obligations over work.<sup>132</sup> Without further defining "obligations" one is not able to confidently confirm what is meant by the reply. Many may feel that work itself is a fulfillment of family obligations. Work is one way that a person responsibly takes care of both family and church obligations.

Relationships are at the heart of our value system. Work itself does not express a relationship. Work provides a means and context by which one attends to relationship issues. Work is part of the resources over which one's stewardship of life remains relationship-centered in Christ. Work is a vehicle by which God opens doors of opportunities for attending to the relationships of life. *To repeat, work itself is not a relationship.*

Often, people, especially the self-employed, work in an environment that is virtually exclusive of other people. Sitting behind a computer, working on an

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<sup>132</sup> See appendixes A, B, and C, response questions 1 and 2.



engine, or similar isolated settings reveals the concept of “work” to be only indirectly connected to relationships. Relationships established through work connections are a by-product of work itself.

Work is a value, but work should be viewed as a secondary value in that it supports the primary value of relationships established by God. Thus, the common placement of work in the ordering of relationships is a misnomer. As such, the term “work” only serves to confuse the issue. Consequently, the placement of work under the family and church produces hypocritical confession whereby the practicing of what is preached is in continual conflict with reality.

In other words, when an employer requires (without options) that one spends a significant amount of time traveling, or transfers one to a new location, away from extended family and friends, it may not be in the best interest of the family’s needs (at least not recognized in the present). However, the family is called upon to sacrifice their needs in order to conform to the need for a stable job. There is an endless array of demands placed upon an employee which requires family needs to go unmet at any particular moment. The same observations may be made with regards to the needs of the greater family of God, the church. In the face of such demands, if one does not quit work, does this mean his/her job has become more important than the family? Not necessarily. Careful evaluation is always called for in such specific scenarios.

Consider the following scenario. A man is required by his company to travel to Australia for six months. He is there on temporary assignment and cannot take his family. It is too far and expensive to travel home on weekends. The

family will have to survive in his absence for the duration of the six months. The wife is terrified at the prospect of being alone, especially at night. She is pregnant with their fourth child and may go into labor at any time. The baby will surely be born in the absence of the father. The older son has a major sporting event which the father will miss. In many large and small ways this family's dependence upon the physical and emotional support of this man is challenged.

Regardless of individual decisions which a family chooses in any particular work situation, work is merely the context in which relationship responsibilities are attended to. If the context of one's work does not allow the attendance to relationship responsibilities, then the consideration of a different employment would definitely be in order. One should seek constant evaluation, analyzing whether or not one's choice of employment enhances or hinders the proper flow and expression of love in Jesus Christ. Only then is one able to draw proper boundaries around one's vocation.

The confusion created in the traditional placement of work as a priority under God, family, and church, has resulted in its fair share of unnecessary guilt. Such guilt usually produces anger or apathy towards the real relationship issues of life in Christ. Such guilt can also produce unfortunate depression and despair. Drawing the appropriate boundaries around our work issues in order to hold to the proper ordering of our relationships is difficult enough, without compounding the situation further by holding to work as a priority held in conflict with family and church. *Work should be evaluated as a God-given opportunity towards responsible behavior in attending to relationships with God, family, fellow Christians,*

*and others.* Work should not be viewed as the fulfillment of a relationship. Providing for the physical necessities of life is part of a “bread winner’s” responsibilities towards his primary relationships (including supporting the work of God’s Kingdom); however, earning the money itself is not a fulfillment of such obligation.

Work involves various relationship connections. These include employer/employee and consumer/competitor relationships. Such relationships are analyzed and individually categorized on various places in the ordering determined by the presence or absence of blood and spiritual ties. The point being made is not that employer/employee relationships are non-existent, nor that they are unimportant. All relationships are valued in correlation to one’s relationship with Christ. But the value of such relationships are not prioritized according to work connections. Work connections simply fall within the normal ordering of relationships.

For instance, one may work for himself, for his father, in partnership with his spouse, with his children, a fellow Christian, or an unbeliever. As an employee, the obligation to fulfill one’s duties to the best of one’s ability is part of the Christian work ethic. Laziness, poor stewardship of time or talents, and dishonesty are condemned as inappropriate behavior on the part of the Christian. Above and beyond the stated duties of one’s job, relationship responsibilities are determined by a fellow worker’s placement in the ordering of relationships. This truth is especially evident in the pastoral office whereby pastors do not fulfill their individual responsibilities to God or God’s people simply by virtue of fulfilling their

work obligations. On the other hand, the pastoral office does provide the highest context for attaining to such relationship responsibilities.

There are a significant number of families who live in constant confusion concerning the boundaries which should be drawn between work and home. Spouses often disagree on the meaning of placing family above work. "Betty has strong feelings that her husband has neglected her and the family. He spends so little time at home. Yet even when he is there, she feels the constant anxiety that he may be called away at any moment to respond to some parish crisis."<sup>133</sup>

Many pastors could be characterized as absentee fathers and husbands, a phenomenon which has been descriptive of many professional men. Evening calls, meetings, and counseling sessions intervene in the life of the family, since there are no clear distinctions such as a nine-to-five workday . . . Time that he promised to spend with the wife and family is frequently interrupted by emergency situations and unanticipated counseling opportunities.<sup>134</sup>

Pastors and their families need to live in constant awareness of the significance of their lives, as it is lived in the security of Christ's love. Though organizational time management skills are helpful, no amount of preparation will prevent the need to juggle time in order to respond to the unexpected God-given opportunities. Awareness of the importance of one's life in Christ and the priorities of love which drive and motivate one's response is imperative for wise action.

Martin provides a profound insight concerning the use of one's time. He says,

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<sup>133</sup> Martin, "Forgotten Members: The Pastor's Family," 144.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

The statement 'I don't spend much time with my family, but it's the quality of time I spend with them that is important to me' is another myth that many people accept without realizing that time has no intrinsic value. The 'quality' of any time shared with a wife and children is inevitably a question of the quality of their relationships and how that time is used in nurturing these relationships. That takes time.<sup>135</sup>

Concerning work's placement on the hierarchical ordering of relationships, work itself, like time, has no intrinsic value. Work is surely lifted up as a value in the commands of God (2 Thessalonians 3:10), but only as it is connected to one's living under the cross of Christ and contributing to one's expressions of love in Christ. Work which is ungodly, dishonorable, couched in laziness, dishonesty, or selfishness is hardly an asset to one's relationship in Christ.

Work as an opportunity in Christ is never pitted against or accomplished at the expense of family relationships. God-pleasing work enables one to be a responsible provider and supporter of the family (home and church).

Most middle-class Americans tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship. As a result, their meanings and values are distorted. Their relationships disintegrate faster than they can keep them in repair, and their life-styles resemble a cast of characters in search of a plot.<sup>136</sup>

Utilizing one's God-given time and talent in a work environment enables the "pulling of one's own weight," as Paul testified in regards to his own life (1 Thessalonians 2:9).

This "pulling of one's own weight" prevents one from becoming an unnecessary burden upon others in order that the unavoidable burdens of life

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Gordon Dahl, Work, Play, and Worship In A Leisure-Oriented Society (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972), 12.

may be attended to without hindrance. Scripture instructs, "Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else, *for each one should carry his own load*" (Galatians 6:5: italics mine). And this Scriptural directive comes in the context of the imperative command, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Work, then, becomes one context out of which a person's significance is realized or discounted. On the continuum of value, in as much as work promotes the importance of one's relationship with God and others, it is valuable. In as much as our jobs become a liability by interfering with God-ordained relationships, work is reduced to one of the "things of this world." In this way work merely compounds the darkness and destruction which seeks to grip one's life. Properly ordained, work should enhance one's opportunities to let the light of Christ's love shine.

The problem of discerning the proper boundaries around work issues in order to appropriately take care of relationships will never be a simple task. But this task beckons for attention.

Dr. David G. Congo surveyed ministers in thirty-two denominations in thirty-eight states to discover the significant factors involved in ministry burnout. His study isolated a number of significant factors involved in burnout. Of the pastor's surveyed:  
70 percent worked more than sixty hours per week.  
85 percent spent two or less evenings per week at home.  
75 percent less than one evening a month purely for social time with their wives and other couples.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Frank Minirth, et al., How To Beat Burnout (Chicago: Moody, 1986): 83.

Many pastors grow weary in well-doing due to a lack of confidence in drawing God-pleasing boundaries around the relationships with which they attend in the tasks performed.

Christian workers have to evaluate the work and opportunities that come to them with the question, 'Is that what the Lord wants me to do at this time, or am I doing it just because it *seems* like such a great opportunity and need?' What the Lord leads you to do is not always the same as what you want to do *for* him, especially if you are doing it in order that He or others might be more pleased with you, or that He or others might remain pleased with you.<sup>138</sup>

Discovering the centrality of relationships and the responsibilities and opportunities that each presents builds confidence before the Lord concerning the boundaries drawn.

Just as one can do good through structure, so one can assure that the 'being good' of the gospel comes to a 'doing good' by new priorities of life and a new arrangement of the day. In many Christian traditions a key word is vocation. The impulse behind the Christian vocation is the forgiven life. Some people just drift through life. They say 'another day, another dollar, back to the salt mines; back to the treadmill.' They represent, at best, a living under the law of God, or, at worst, a lawless mentality. In order for agape love to shape my doing good, something has to happen.<sup>139</sup>

The idea of Christian vocation, once restricted to the concept of full-time church work, was expanded in the Reformation. Luther noted that all appropriate vocations served God. The reformers recaptured the idea of vocation. "Christian vocation, the calling of every Christian to live the Christian life, the life of Christian faith, was a liberating notion for people."<sup>140</sup> The concept of work took on an entirely new meaning as Christians sought to serve God throughout everyday

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Martin E. Marty, Being Good and Doing Good (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 81.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

life, not in church activity only. "Each morning one rose with the sign of the cross as a commitment to the way of the cross . . . In this faith, each day takes on God-given meaning and motives, thanks to the Gospel of God's grace in Christ."<sup>141</sup>

The life which is ordered and centered around relationships in God lives in the light of an entirely new perspective shed on life. In the words of C. S. Lewis, written in his Letters to An American Lady:

Don't be too easily convinced that God really wants you to do all sorts of work you needn't do. Each must do his duty 'in that state of life to what God has called him.' Remember that a belief in the virtues of doing for doing's sake is characteristically feminine, characteristically American, and characteristically modern: so that *three veils* may divide you from the correct view! There can be intemperance in work just as in drink. What feels like zeal may be only fidgets or even the flattering of one's self importance . . . By doing what 'one's station and its duties' does not demand, one can make oneself less fit for the duties it *does* demand, and so commit some injustice. Just you give Mary a little chance as well as Martha.<sup>142</sup>

When work is viewed as a context in which God uses us to promote and maintain relationships then we are better able to evaluate and draw appropriate boundaries around work issues which seek to rob us of the joy of serving others.

### ***Unbelievers***

There is a great emphasis today upon the mission driven church. This view seeks to elevate the church's existence around the Great Commission of Jesus (Matthew 28:18-20). Michael Green says,

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 81-82.

<sup>142</sup> C. S. Lewis, Letters To An American Lady (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 53.



The enthusiasm to evangelize, which marked the early Christian, is one of the most remarkable things in the history of religions. Here were men and women of every rank and station in life, of every country in the known world, so convinced that they had discovered the riddle of the universe, so sure of the one true God whom they had come to know, that nothing must stand in the way of their passing on this good news to others.<sup>143</sup>

We would be remiss if we did not include unbelievers in our ordering of relationships, especially as it relates to our responsibilities to express the love of Christ to all people.

Here also the “both/and” concept remains intact. God loves us on account of Christ. As a result, we love God and share His love with those significant others in His greater family. So we seek to share His love with all the world. The Great Commission leaves us no doubt that God expects His people to engage in the task of being a light to the nations.

Pertinent to our study is that the enthusiasm towards evangelism in the early church was not because . . .

it was advisable for them to do so, nor because it was the socially responsible thing to do. They did not do it primarily for humanitarian or agathistic utilitarian reasons. They did it because of the overwhelming experience of the love of God which they had received through Jesus Christ. The discovery that the ultimate force in the universe was Love, and that this Love had stooped to

the very nadir of self-abasement for human good, had an effect on those who believed it, which nothing could remove.<sup>144</sup>

Church Growth gurus have sufficiently emphasized the church’s need to realize her mission in fulfilling the Great Commission. However, in stressing the call to extend the love of Christ to the world, the integrity of our relationship with God

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<sup>143</sup> Michael Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 236.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

and each other is frequently jeopardized.<sup>145</sup> In recalling that Christ came “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10), we need to remember that, with regard to *Christ’s* mission, the entire world was lost. In our situation there lies a two-fold mission reality: first, to share the truth of His love with fellow brothers in Christ and, secondly, to extend His love in the truth to those who yet know him.

The “both/and” understanding of this responsibility to be “the salt of the earth” (Matthew 5:13) is reflected in the way the church conducts her business. Every ounce of time, talents, and treasures offered in the institution of the church ought to have a direct connection to the establishment and maintenance of relationships. First and foremost is the sacramental aspects of God’s work, where individuals are established and sustained in a relationship with God in Christ. Paul says, “Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance” (Acts 20:32).

Second is the sacrificial aspects of our response whereby God blesses us to be a blessing towards each other and towards the world around us. This response always holds “unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Hebrews 10:23). The “both/and” nature of this imperative reminds us that our love for others flows from the integrity of our love for God.

The “both/and” concept of relationships impresses upon us the responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission of our Lord as we share the “hope we profess” to the world in which we live.

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<sup>145</sup> An excellent book on this subject is by David F. Wells, No Place For Truth (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

So then you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone . . . being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:19-22).

We are *together* in mission. We are not to share the love of Christ with each other *at the expense* of extending it to the world of unbelievers. We are together, bonded and unified, to present the light of Christ to the nations. Christ sent His disciples out, two by two (Mark 6:7). Christ emphasized the power of joint prayer (Matthew 18:19) and the promise of His special presence in the togetherness of His people (Matthew 18:20). Yet, all of us would be grossly remiss in our purpose if we were to neglect the responsibility to express the agape of God in Christ to the world around us.

In sharing the Gospel with our unbelieving neighbors, we are mindful of our limited "fellowship" with those in the world. The term "fellowship" is likely a misnomer as it is applied to unbelievers. For actually, we are not in fellowship at all with those who remain in darkness. Paul writes:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial. What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? . . . Therefore come out from them and be separate (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).

Jesus verified the need for distinguishing between the believer and the unbeliever in Matthew 18, when He said, with regards to the impenitent, "treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (verse 17).

Our relationship as fellow citizens with unbelievers in this world is limited to our shared humanity as expressed through our civic and social responsi-

bilities and the Christian's desire to give testimony to Jesus Christ. In this regard, we are obedient to the laws of the land when they do not directly conflict with our integrity in God (Romans 13). "To everyone" we are to show "proper respect" (1 Peter 2:17). Peter frames the Christian's integrity in relating to the unbeliever by saying, "For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men" (1 Peter 2:15). Evangelism efforts may find some kind of open door through charitable expressions, but for a person to be "won" for Christ, the Holy Spirit convicts the heart of the recipient through the Word we proclaim. Our faithfulness to proclaim the Word in truth and love is rooted in our own relationship with God in Christ and not in the hideous nature of our sinful flesh which defies any truly altruistic behavior.

Paul also recognizes the inevitable and appropriate mixing of unbeliever and believer in the routines of life. He says, "If some unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:27). Paul recognizes the desire of the church in inviting unbelievers to hear the Word of Christ. He says in this regard:

But if an unbeliever or someone who does not understand comes in while everybody is prophesying, he will be convinced by all that he is a sinner and will be judged by all, and the secrets of his heart will be laid bare. So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, 'God is really among you!' (1 Corinthians 14:24).

Finally, Paul recognizes the distinguishing nature between a believer and an unbeliever when he states, in spite of the *a priori* nature of the marital bond, "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15).

## ***Enemies of the Cross***

Unique in the ordering of relationships is the listing of the enemies of Christ. There is a Biblical precedent for distinguishing between those who do not believe from those who actively “kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:5: K.J.V.).

God limits His exposure to evil, impenitent people, as should we. Scripture is full of admonitions to separate ourselves from people who act in destructive ways (Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:9-13). In doing so, we are not depicted as being unloving. Separating ourselves protects love, because we are taking a stand against things that destroy love.<sup>146</sup>

Jesus refers to this when He teaches, “Do not give dogs what is sacred, do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces” (Matthew 7:6).

Paul also uses the term “dogs” to describe those who work against the Gospel. He warns his fellow Christians to “Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh” (Philippians 3:2). To “watch out for” surely implies the calling to a distinctive type of relationship. We are to be on our guard against such enemies by the placement of strict relationship boundaries in order to safe guard the truth. Paul further elaborates to the Philippian Christians:

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and *take note of those* who live according to the pattern we gave you. For, as I have often told you before and now say again, even with tears, many live as *enemies of the cross of Christ*. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things (Philippians 3:17-19: italics mine).

What does “take not of those” who do not live as “enemies of the cross of Christ” mean except in order to distance from such people who do, by the drawing of

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<sup>146</sup> Cloud and Townsend, Boundaries, 43-44.

tight boundaries around such relationships? Cloud and Townsend suggest:

Two aspects of limits stand out when it comes to creating better boundaries. The first is setting limits on others. This is the component that we most often hear about when we talk about boundaries. In reality, setting limits on others is a misnomer. We can't do that. What we can do is set limits on our own exposure to people who are behaving poorly; we can't change them or make them behave right.

Our model is God. He does not really 'set limits' on people to 'make them' behave. God sets standards, but He lets people be who they are and then separates himself from them when they misbehave, saying in effect, 'You can be that way if you choose, but you cannot come into my house.' Heaven is a place for the repentant, and all are welcome.<sup>147</sup>

This is precisely the issue of breaking fellowship with those who do not remain in the truth. Peter says, "It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: 'A dog returns to its vomit,' and 'A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud'" (2 Peter 2:21-22).

One may rightfully debate, from a justification viewpoint, that the empowering grace of God in Christ is able to transform enemies of God into friends, but, from a sanctification point of view, Cloud and Townsend convey accurately the position of impenitent sinners to God and His people. One thing that is Biblically clear in the reality of the bondage of the will: God respects our no. Consequently, God would lead us to respect the no which others have expressed to him. Respect does not mean condone, partake, or accept as unchangeable by God's power. But it does mean that our relationship with a person

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 43.

who willfully refuses to repent is negatively impacted by such rejection of God's truth.

When King Solomon reveals that "there are six things the Lord hates," the last of which is "a man who stirs up dissension among brothers" (Proverbs 6: 16,19), a line of demarcation seems to be in order between the unbelieving sinner and the hypocritical sinner. Neither are repentant. Yet, one is passive in denying the faith, while the other is either a hypocritical saint in disguise (wolf in sheep's clothing, Matthew 7:15) or aggressively hateful towards the Christian religion. The latter "enemies of the cross" (Philippians 3:18) receive the harshest treatment by Christ and the Scriptures. Apparently hardened by their unbelief and willful actions of sin, these individuals live their lives as soldiers of the great enemy, Satan (John 8:44). Strong words are used in Scripture to describe such diabolical individuals.

Though Christ prays for unity among Christians (John 17:21), Scripture calls us to:

Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. *Keep away*

*from them.* For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people (Romans 16:17-18: italics mine).

I know that traditionally our church has lumped all heterodox Christians in this Pauline camp. I question the appropriateness of that decision. I, too, am confident that, by virtue of certain false teachings and teachers, many heterodox Christians live as enemies of the cross. I also recognize that there are many who grew up in other denominations and who faithfully aspire to the Gospel of our

Lord Jesus Christ, in spite of confusion on many important doctrinal points. The same could be recognized among Lutherans. Paul, in his letters, dealt continually with false doctrine which had crept in among the people. He was much more gentle and patient with the followers of such false teachings than he was with those who led them astray.

To those who were enticed by false teachings to stray from “The Way,”<sup>148</sup> Paul called for unity of faith and maturity of love in the knowledge and truth of Christ. He admonished his fellow Christians to move beyond spiritual infancy whereby they were “. . . tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Ephesians 4: 14). By the descriptive words Paul uses to describe those who lead God’s people astray from the truth, he categorizes such people differently from the average Christian ascribing in ignorance to doctrinal error. Paul warns, “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore, *do not be partners with them*” (Ephesians 5:7: italics mine).

The importance of this Pauline notation to the ordering of relationships lies in the imperative command, “Keep away from them.” This is hardly an encouragement to enter into a relationship with them. Such a command forbids us to engage in a relationship with such individuals. John is equally strong in his statement against “deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.” He says, “Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist” (2

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<sup>148</sup> “The Way” was used in reference to those who believed in Jesus Christ (Acts 9:2).



John 7). Yet, in calling them deceivers, John does not seem to be talking about the average unbeliever who denies Christ. John says, "Anyone who runs ahead and does not *continue* in the teaching of Christ, does not have God" (2 John 9: italics mine).

Cult members, who were former Christians, are placed in this category. John explicitly instructs us, "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching [of Christ], do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 John 10-11; parenthetical comment, mine). Does this mean that I have sinned by welcoming my unbelieving neighbor into my house? I don't think so! Unless, of course, my welcome somehow condones or partakes of his ungodliness. John is referring to one who brings a contrary teaching to Christ and seeks to pass this teaching along (i.e. "his wicked work").

These passages clearly differentiate the "enemy of the cross" from those unbelievers who passively ignore the cross. Not that the latter one's destiny holds hope, apart from conversion, but our relationship responsibilities towards those actively engaged against Christ are viewed differently in Scripture. The point of distinction lies in the connection to faith and integrity. As far as the fellowship of faith is concerned, we are to draw sharp and distinct boundaries around our relationship with those who would destroy the faith. The aim of such clear boundaries is to give testimony to the condemnation of all who deny the Lord. John is very clear on this matter:

. . . even now many antichrists have come . . . They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us . . . Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist, he denies the Father and the Son . . . I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. (1 John 2:18b-19,22,26; cf. 4:1-3).

In this same vein, John is so bold as to exclude some from the prayers of God's people. He writes:

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death (1 John 5:16-17).

The understanding of the "sin that leads to death" is surely a controversy. "The wages of sin is death . . ." (Romans 6:23). But the context of 1 John, in speaking about a "brother's" sin, would appear to be in reference to the "antichrists" who willfully turn away and reject the faith they once received. John is suggesting that the prayer, requesting God's forgiveness and life to reign upon such sinners, is out of order in the face of their impenitence. Peter would agree with regards to "those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority" (2 Peter 2:10).

In reference to those who willfully live out-of-control lives, according to the sinful flesh, "having a form of godliness but denying its power", Paul instructs, "Have nothing to do with them" (2 Timothy 3:5). Pertinent to our discussion concerning Scripture's distinction between the enemy of the cross and the indifferent unbeliever are Paul's words "having a form of godliness." Once again, Paul appears to be dealing with hypocritical Christians who operate among the

household of faith and yet live contrary to the life of faith in Christ. "Have nothing to do with them," is properly understood in church discipline where such persons are excluded from the "fellowship" of believers.

Christ instructed the church to draw distinctions between those in fellowship and those who were impenitent. In the familiar words of Matthew 18, Christ says, "if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector." Such a person would then be considered an outcast, excluded from the fellowship of repentant sinners and true believers in Christ. To Titus, Paul instructs:

For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach, and that for the sake of dishonest gain . . . Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned (Titus 1:10-11 ; 3:10).

In like fashion, Paul reminds the Corinthians:

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat . . . Expel the wicked man from among you (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

Clearly, Paul's instruction above is most succinct in delineating the distinction to be drawn between unbelievers of the world and the enemies of Christ. Another Pauline indication of this distinction between unbelievers and enemies is: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate

family, he has denied the faith and is *worse than an unbeliever*" (1 Timothy 5:8; italics mine).

We are to reject entering into fellowship or even friendship with those who strive against Christ and His people. Paul declares, "If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him" (1 Corinthians 16:22). Another strong statement from Paul is provided to the Galatians in reference to those who were trying to throw Christians into confusion by perverting the gospel of Christ. Paul says, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!" In order to emphasize this truth, Paul repeats it (Galatians 1:6-9). Paul recognized that there were "false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ" who were servants of Satan masquerading as "servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve" (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

The harshest admonitions and instructions concerning one's relationships with the enemies of God are provided through Moses:

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, 'Let us follow other gods' (gods you have not known) 'and let us worship them,' you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer . . . That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God, . . . you must purge the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 13:1-5).

In addition, this same death sentence hung over an entire town which had allowed itself to be led astray by such wicked men; "you must certainly put to the sword all who live in that town. Destroy it completely, both its people and its livestock" (Deuteronomy 13:15).

God himself at times displays this same attitude. He dealt more severely with the false prophets who led His people astray than He dealt with all of the unbelieving prophets of the world's religions (Jeremiah 14:14; 23:1-40). Jesus intimated the same attitude when He said, in reference to those who reject the Gospel delivered by His disciples, "it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town" (Luke 10:12). God is harder on those who tear down the relationships of His people than He is on those who simply ignore and fail to support such relationships.

David, in expressing his intense love for God's truth, prays,

If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name. Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies" (Psalm 139:19-22).

Interestingly, David was confident concerning the appropriate nature of this prayer when he concludes, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (139:23-24). Solomon reminds us that there is a "time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven: . . . a time to love and a *time to hate*, a time for war and a time for peace" (Ecclesiastes 3:1,8; italics mine). And yet it was also King Solomon who instructed:

Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the Lord will see and disapprove and turn His wrath away from him. Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of the wicked, for the evil man has no future hope, and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out (Proverbs 24:17-20).

Along these lines, Luther said:

He (a Christian) looks at his enemy with eyes of mercy and grace and wishes him no evil. And though his enemy is bitter and angry with him, he thinks: This big fellow is a wretched person. He is already damned. Why should you wish him much evil? If he stays as he is, he is the devil's own. He pities the man and would like to save him. Others look at their enemies with hatred, envy, and arrogance.<sup>149</sup>

Most are very familiar with the provocative teaching of Christ when he commanded:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you . . . do to others as you would have them do unto you . . . If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-36; cf. Matthew 5:11, 38-48).

Knowing that we were ungrateful enemies according to the flesh prior to Christ setting us free (Ephesians 2:1-3) keeps us humbled in expressing the love of God towards anyone with whom the Lord gives us an opportunity, even *our* enemies. Hence, the enemies of the cross do most definitely appear in the ordering of our relationships. The noteworthy difference with regards to the enemies of the cross is that our love is largely demonstrated by our "fellowship" distance, by our admonishments, by our separation and opposition to such enemies; just as God's love was demonstrated in His judgmental acts upon earth. The love we have for God is a testimony against such willful sinners. His

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<sup>149</sup> Martin Luther, What Luther Says: An Anthology, vol. 1, compiler Ewald M Plass (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 462 (parenthetical comments mine).

love in us refuses to give way to the acceptance, condoning, or partaking of ungodliness.

Though tight boundaries separate us from the enemies of Christ, God's love compels us to remain open and sensitive to the opportunities to bring testimony of His love. Whenever there are opportunities given to let the light of Christ shine, let us shine! If this light is rejected, spurned, ignored, or responded to with the darkness of hate, bitterness or jealousy, so much brighter is the light distinguished from the darkness. Christ promises in this scenario that great will be the reward for those who faithfully love His enemies (Luke 6:35).

Even St. Paul, with all of his strong admonitions to withdraw and watch out for the enemies of Christ, instructs:

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, leave room for God's wrath . . . On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:14, 17-21).

Paul was quoting from Solomon who added the additional promise, "and the Lord will reward you" (Proverbs 25:22).

With regards to the truth and integrity of "fellowship" with Christ, there can be no compromises, no wishy-washy dealing with sin and sinners who deny the faith. This imperative way of handling the enemies of the cross is essential to the spiritual safety and well-being of God's people. Spiritual leaders need to follow suit, being swift and firm in separating themselves from those who are enemies

of the cross, and patiently bearing up with those who are immature in their relationships with God and each other.

With regards to the world and marketplace in which the believer lives (i.e. on the streets, in the neighborhoods, in the Good Samaritan opportunities presented), the believer is not to return evil for evil, nor spit on one's enemies, nor persecute those who hate, or do any evil of any sort. Our integrity in the love of Christ absolutely forbids it! Paul emphatically states: "as we have opportunity, let us do good to *all people*" (Galatians 6:10; emphasis mine).

Since the only hope sinners have is the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our stance against impenitent sinners provides hope that the Lord may use us to convey His law in order to convict their hearts and turn them from their wickedness. This testimonial action against them is verified by the Lord's instruction to his disciples: "If people do not welcome you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave their town, as a testimony against them" (Luke 9:5; 10:10-12). Paul further instructs, in regards to an impenitent's sexual immorality, "hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 5:5). The aim in all our expressions of appropriate love is restoration; restoration of one's relationship with God, restoration of one's relationship with the brother in Christ.

### ***The Old Order Refined and Redefined***

It has been well said, "Most of the time, I just don't enjoy life. For every one thing I do, I can think of ten things I don't do, and it makes me feel guilty. The constant stress of trying to decide what I should do in the middle of all I



could do creates a constant tension. How can I know what's most important? How can I do it? How can I enjoy it?"<sup>150</sup> The problem with justifying any Biblical concept in the ordering of relationships has been suggested by Littleton, "no single passage of Scripture spells out a list of priorities."<sup>151</sup> However, no single passage is needed in light of the wealth of passages which shed light on the priorities surrounding relationships.

When one thinks in reference of God first, family second, church third, work fourth, one is typically thinking in terms of *prioritizing our priorities*. That itself is a confusing misnomer. Do our priorities consist of relationships or institutions or concepts or things of this world? The Bible would move us to view life as centered in and around relationships. Whatever structural presentation one offers, our declarations ought to view relationships with God and significant others as more important than the *institutions* of church and work. There is a definite need for further clarification, as verified by my survey, in order to relieve the inevitable confusion and misunderstanding surrounding any structural hierarchy.<sup>152</sup>

Life revolves around relationships. Everything else is set in place to serve, promote, and sustain such relationships. The Garden of Eden was the setting by which male and female, in relationship with God and each other, would live in security and significance forever. Stewardship is ultimately the management of life in a relationship with God and others. Church and work as institutions are

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<sup>150</sup> Covey, First Things First, 18.

<sup>151</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 117.

<sup>152</sup> See Appendixes B and C.

contextual assets in fulfilling relationship responsibilities. The institution of the church becomes inappropriately valued and prioritized when it is allowed to interfere with one's relationship responsibilities. Any institution is rightfully viewed as a great blessing of God when it serves the fulfillment of relationship responsibilities. Church is rightfully esteemed in one's life when it is viewed as the setting by which one's relationship with God is created and sustained, where one's relationship with God's people is meaningfully realized. Out of the church's setting of relationships, one's life is empowered, motivated, and unified to attend to all other relationship issues.

The "first/then" concept of the traditional structure of priorities would entice one to ignore public worship and Christian fellowship in the name of the family. If the family is placed before the church, then the family's needs of rest, relaxation and solitary togetherness takes precedence. Not only does this bespeak of a confusion between loving God above all (including the family) and loving His people, but it also suggests that the relationship responsibilities towards one's brother in Christ can be properly ignored, neglected, and even rejected in the name of the family. Nowhere in Scripture is such a suggestion indicated. The Biblically expressed "both/and" concept of the ordering of relationships comes to grips with this confusion and proposes that out of one's love for God flows a continual stream of love for others.

This love is poured out upon the family and nurtured by the greater family in Christ. This love overflows into all of the world. To dam the waters of life at any juncture along the pathway of love is to create a backwash of stagnant waters.

Such stagnancy robs one's life of the peace and joy embedded in the security and significant issues of relationships. The foulness of such stagnancy creates fear, guilt, rejection, and doubts which moves life away from relationships and towards the temporal satisfaction found in the things of this world.

Every person gives himself to those things in life that seem most important to him, the things which make life worthwhile. This is what Viktor Frankl refers to as the 'willing to meaning' that surges up in every life. A person's interest is captured by his personal goals; he gives his time and energy toward their realization; they assume top priority in his scale of values. No person can be fully understood apart from a knowledge of his goals. One's goals may be focused in the business world, the farm, the family, personal pleasure, wealth, social acceptance, or some great cause or movement; but that to which a person gives himself becomes an essential aspect of understanding the person himself.<sup>153</sup>

In echoing this truth, this paper promotes the Biblical goal of centering one's life around relationship opportunities and holding to the resultant values which promote those relationships in Christ. The challenge ever remains for the Christian to "move from secondary to primary goals, and utilize his interests and talents for more noble ends."<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Lindgren, Foundations For Purposeful Church Administration, 133.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

The person who dives into ice water to save a child whom she does not know and who does so as a concerned human being, perhaps controlled by the love of Christ, has engaged in a sacrifice that has risked much - after the model of Christ. That act is a channeling of God's grace or Christ-like love into a world of need. Yet there are days when spontaneity is not enough. There are many people who are not momentarily screaming and drowning and getting attention in the press. They are elderly people living out their last days in segregation. Their resources have dwindled, their friends are dying off, they fear or are resigned, they can be exploited by uncaring professionals, death is their only promised visitor. I am not going to be spontaneously aware of them 365 days of the year. But the love of God in Christ can give me eyes to see and power to sustain concern and care for such people . . . To deal with human needs in a sustained way is not to be content with impersonal distance, with hiring professionals for the world of depressing sights that I cannot endure very often. It is a way of extending the impulse of love.<sup>155</sup>

Many important things that contribute to our overall objectives and give richness and meaning to life don't tend to act upon us or press us. Because they're not 'urgent,' they are the things that we must act upon.<sup>156</sup>

It has been well stated, "The more clearly the church understands its central purpose, the more likely it is to recognize any specific need related to that purpose."<sup>157</sup> This truth holds even greater application as applied to the individual Christian's journey through life. When the centrality of relationships is grasped, those needs standing the closest in proximity to one's true significance are most readily recognized.

Persons are not only the object of God's love, but also the means through whom the living Christ is made known today. The Scriptures are clear that the love for God is to be shown through love for persons . . . God's treasure (love) is lodged in the earthen vessel of

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<sup>155</sup> Marty, Being Good and Doing Good, 80.

<sup>156</sup> Covey, First Things First, 36.

<sup>157</sup> Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration, 73.

Christian persons, who are to act in such a way that His love is influential in all relationships.<sup>158</sup>

God first! And consequently, others second. The simultaneous combustion of God's love in our lives explodes bursting forth into infinite particles of thoughts, words, and deeds towards others. The "both/and" concept in the ordering of relationships serves a two-fold purpose. First, it underscores the equally coexisting nature of the agape extensions through us. Second, it brings to light the nature of the Scriptural priorities in the unique and individualized expressions of love.

J. Grant Howard's book captures well the difficulties in the "either/or" view of priorities. Though his conclusions are not as centered in relationships nor as specific in the ordering of such relationships, he does capture the heart of the problem inherent in the traditional hierarchical structure. He writes:

God wants to be central in my life. This makes knowing him a top priority. He is important.

God wants to be significant in my life. This makes relating His truth to every aspect of my person a top priority. I am important.

God wants me to know and do His will in each of the relationships that surrounds me. This makes my responsibilities in each of these areas (i.e. the world, family, work, government, and church) a top priority. They are all important.

All these coexist as simultaneous responsibilities rather than sequential priorities.<sup>159</sup>

This may be another way of saying some of the same things which this paper has suggested. On the other hand, in Howard's analysis of priorities, there is a

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>159</sup> Howard, Balancing Life's Demands, 68.

gross neglect of the practical reality. Though all relationships have importance to the self, not all relationships carry the same thrust and Biblical responsibilities to one's life.

Howard refers to "significant neighbors" in reference to those immediate and regular relationship contacts. But his distinctions between family members, church members, unbelieving neighbors down the street, and the people with which one works is nebulous. The purpose of such systematic ordering of our relationships is never to limit love, but rather to expand love's expressions without neglecting the unique and individualistic opportunities at hand. Sometimes we are better at expressing our love to the stranger than to the person in intimate contact. Other times we neglect the stranger out of selfish obsession with those in the closest relationship to us. Both extremes are condemned in the admonitions of Scripture to love others as one's self.

It has been well said, "Called people possess an unwavering sense of purpose."<sup>160</sup> Bridget Herman, a European living in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote:

When we read the lives of saints, we are struck by a certain large leisure which went hand in hand with a remarkable effectiveness. They were never hurried; they did comparatively few things, and these not necessarily striking or important; and they troubled very little about their influence. Yet they always seemed to hit the mark; every bit of their life told; their simplest actions had a distinction, an exquisiteness which suggested the artist. The reason is not far to seek. Their sainthood lay in their habit of referring the smallest actions to God. They lived in God; they acted from a pure motive of love towards God. They were as free from self-regard as from slavery to the good opinion of others. God saw and God rewarded; what else needed they? They possessed God and possessed

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<sup>160</sup> Gordon MacDonald, Ordering Your Private World (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 55.

themselves in God. Hence the inalienable dignity of these meek, quiet figures that seem to produce such marvelous effects with such humble materials.<sup>161</sup>

Two fundamental questions need to be answered in our daily quest for meaning. “Whose am I, to whom do I belong, wherein lies my security?” and “Why am I here, what’s the purpose, the significance, of my life on earth?” Both answers center in Christ who lives in me and through me.

The typical traditional viewpoint expresses itself in terms of the ordering of one’s priorities. Herein lies much of the confusion. One may, and should, convey that God, family, church, and work are important priorities towards the fulfillment of life in Christ. However, when one seeks to order these priorities, clarification becomes difficult. Because God and family are important, church and work are important. Within the priorities centered in God and family, church and work find their proper meaning and existence. Church and work are integral parts of one’s priority placement of God and family. Whenever one attempts to draw succinct lines of demarcation around God, family, church, and work, as though they are separate and distinct from each other, then the strength of practical decision-making becomes hazy. Unnecessary guilt is a by-product of teachings which do not succumb to the clarifications of Scripture.

In reference to the priorities of the Christian life, decision-making is benefited by the Scriptural relationship-centered focus. Utilizing Scriptural imperatives, directives, and admonitions given towards relationship issues, one is able to ascertain the proper ordering of relationships. This ordering is perti-

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<sup>161</sup> E. Bridget Herman, Creative Prayer (Cincinnati: Forward Movement, no date), 16.

ment to confident relationship boundaries and decisions, as one operates within the freedom of love's responses in Christ. The ordering of relationships seeks to underscore the importance of fulfilling the responsibilities towards all relationships without using any one specific relationship as an excuse for neglecting another.

In the light of the findings of this paper, the following order of relationships is rooted in Scripture:

1. God (first and foremost, in whom all other relationships find their meaning and appropriate existence.)

2. **and** all others

A. family

a. spouse

b. parents/offspring/dependents

c. extended

B. family of believers

a. the "fellowship" of the localized Body of Christ (inclusive of pastor/people and Christians with special needs)

b. the "fellowship" of the extended Body of Christ

c. all other true believers in Christ (heterodox)

C. unbelievers

a. in the immediate context of life

b. to the ends of the world

c. enemies of the cross



## CHAPTER 5

### THE ABSENCE OF SELF / SELF-LOVE ANALYSIS

Mark Littleton makes an interesting statement with regards to the ordering of relationships without any reference to substantiate it. He says, "Years ago, there was much debate about 'the order of priorities.' Usually when asked, a student would put them in a sequential order: God first, family second, work third, church fourth."<sup>162</sup> Then Littleton proceeds to say,

What about the 'self?' It was rarely discussed. It was almost as though we were embarrassed to mention the subject. Somehow making ourselves a priority was selfish, the flesh. Yet, in reality we all put ourselves very high up on the priority list...Shouldn't our priorities include 'us'?<sup>163</sup>

The "self" rightfully does not appear on the scale in the ordering of relationships. One does not have a relationship with one's self. A relationship implies two people. The whole concept of the ordering of relationships is in reference to the priorities which the self establishes in conjunction with others.

We *are* under obligation to take care of ourselves. Scripture testifies, "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? . . . honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). And we might add "and with your emotions, your mind, your soul." But

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<sup>162</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 115.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 115-116.

St. Paul's specific insight is given in reference to one's willful partaking in sin (the ultimate act of irresponsibility towards one's relationship with God). The generalized need for self-care speaks against the sin of self-neglect. The need to be responsible towards one's own health and care issues is not a call for self-focus. "The challenge of our time is to find that focus that is beyond ourselves."<sup>164</sup>

What most Lutherans might call the "cult" of self-love in contemporary Christian circles received its impetus with the rise of Robert Schuller. In his books he refers to self-love and self-esteem as necessary ingredients in order to love God or others. He goes as far as to say:

the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be proclaimed as a theology of self-esteem . . . the core of sin is a lack of self-esteem . . . For once a person believes he is an 'unworthy sinner,' it is doubtful if he can really honestly accept the saving grace God offers in Jesus Christ.<sup>165</sup>

Others have followed suit with Schuller's "new founded" theology of the self. Even Lindgren says, "Let us not forget that the experiencing of genuine love and understanding on a human level opens the door for accepting God's love on a divine level."<sup>166</sup>

Fortunately, enough time has elapsed since this new craze was emphasized by these Christian leaders so that such innovative heresy has been adequately challenged from a Scriptural foundation. The concept itself is not new. Luther wrestled with the undue sense of importance theologians were placing upon the self. He said, "This deceit can be covered and adorned with a

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<sup>164</sup> L. David Brown, Take Care (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 74.

<sup>165</sup> Robert H. Schuller, Self-Esteem: The New Reformation (Waco: Word, 1982), 47,98.

<sup>166</sup> Lindgren, Foundations for Purposeful Church Administration, 126.

good life, so that man begins to think he is pure and free, while beneath lies the wicked filth which theologians call self-love.”<sup>167</sup>

Anders Nygren wrote:

It should not need to be said that the commandment of self-love is alien to the New Testament commandment of love . . . Self-love is excluded by Paul's fundamental principle. 'The love of God which is in Christ Jesus' (Rom.8:39) is for him the archetype of all that can rightly be called Agape, and it is characteristic of this love that it gives itself, sacrifices itself. It is thus the direct opposite of acquisitive love.<sup>168</sup>

Don Matzat's agrees with Nygren and underscores the need to develop the concept of "Christ esteem" in his book bearing the same title.<sup>169</sup> Matzat quotes Watchman Nee: "Lord, I see it now! Not only what I have done is wrong; *I am wrong!*"<sup>170</sup> The proper regard for one's self is derived from one's faith in Jesus Christ and His word of truth. This faith dynamic recreates the definition of self as it exists in relationship to God and others, never as a totally autonomous being.

How refreshing then to read an author who includes, under self-care tips, the questions:

Have you done something good - physically, psychologically, or spiritually - for one person this week? . . . How many times has envy affected you this year? . . . Did you talk with your spouse (or, if single, a close friend or relative) three times this week about your feelings? . . . Did you share your burdens with a friend this week? . . . And did you do at least one specific thing this week to become

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<sup>167</sup> Luther's Works: Selected Psalms, Vol. 14, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955), 149.

<sup>168</sup> Anders Nygren, Agape and Eros (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1982), 100,130.

<sup>169</sup> Don Matzat, Christ Esteem (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1990).

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 (emphasis mine).

closer to a relative - a parent, brother, sister, or other close relative?<sup>171</sup>

All of these questions serve to center the issue of health around relationships.

“The age in which we are living is a self-involved, ‘me’ generation. The selfish part of this age can be mentally unhealthy.”<sup>172</sup>

There is much confusion on the distinction between self-love, self-esteem, narcissism, self-regard, self-acceptance and self-denial. Lewis Smedes provides helpful insights when he says:

our self can be either a *means* or an *end*. If we make our self the *end*, the ultimate goal, the final aim of our striving, we are in conflict with agapic love. Love does not seek its self as the living end. Instead love is the power that drives us to seek our selves as a *means* to being agents of love.<sup>173</sup>

When Christ commanded his followers to love one’s neighbor “as” one’s self, He was referring to the axiomatic love of self. Along the same lines, Paul says, “husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it . . .” (Ephesians 5:28-29).

Contextually, Jesus and Paul were simply utilizing the analogy of the normal care and attention given to the self as exemplary for how one ought to care and attend to others. Jesus was not making a profound third command to love self, nor was He advocating that the flesh was capable of any real self-love.

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<sup>171</sup> Minirth, How To Beat Burnout, 120-122, 124.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>173</sup> Lewis B. Smedes, Love Within Limits (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 54.

Paul was not making a naïve statement which ignored the self-hatred and destructively suicidal actions of the flesh against the body.

Smedes reminds us that we “must separate end from means” with regard to self-care. He writes:

First consider what happens when we make our selves the *end* or goal of our seeking. Self becomes the supreme good. Our ideal self becomes the standard for judging everything that happens to us and everything we do. If the self we seek as the end of life is the commercialized model of success, power, and wealth which contemporary materialism urges on us, we size up people brutally and crudely. But whenever the self is the ultimate, we tend to see other people as instruments for our growth. Even when our ideal self is noble and good, we are inclined to evaluate people in terms of how they can help us in our climb towards our ideal self. Indeed, when our ideal is the sanctified self, the morally good self, we tend to assess our relationships with people by this standard: how can this contact, acquaintance, friendship contribute to my drive to become the ideal person? The source of all the evils connected with self-seeking is that we turn our ideal self into an idol and expect other people to dance around it.<sup>174</sup>

It may hold true that a disregard for self prohibits a true regard and love for others, but our love for God is not dependent upon self-worth, self-appreciation, or self-love. Just the opposite is true. There is no true and positive self identity apart from God's power and grace. All true love flows from God's love for us. Without God's love which transforms our selfish nature we not only are unable to love God and our neighbor, but we also cannot possibly love ourselves aright.

Not self-love, but rather God's love is initially needed. God's gracious love towards me is what ignites the fire of His love within me producing the explosion of love upward, inward, and outward to those around. When Jesus said, “By their

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

fruit you will know them” (Matthew 7:20; John 15:8), He was speaking of the fruit of God's love within.

Littleton disregards the simple and often used acronym offered to assist in keeping the right focus in life, namely, J-O-Y (Jesus first, Others second, Yourself last). He says, “Sounds really great! But when I thought about it, I realized, ‘That’s impossible! It sounds pious, but it’s ridiculous! No one could live up to that.’”<sup>175</sup> Littleton's characterization of putting one's self first trivializes the real point being made. In trying to establish the need to prioritize one's self, Littleton asks, “Whose sandwich did we so carefully prepare and pack for lunch? Whose teeth did we brush? Whose car did we clean and shine with Turtle Wax on Saturday afternoon?”<sup>176</sup>

The truth behind the acronym J-O-Y is the essence of agape love. God is the one who demonstrates and defines such love for us. 1 Corinthians 13:5 reveals that the nature of love is not self-seeking, does not insist on its own rights or ways. God calls upon us and enables us to exercise agape love. In the selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional giving nature of agape, one is indeed called to “deny himself, pick up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). Impossible? Such self-denial defies the natural flesh. Jesus was very clear on this reality when He said, “Apart from me you can do nothing!” (John 15:5). Jesus spoke these words in the context of bearing the fruit of love.

“J-O-Y” is a call for us to heed the words of God: “Do nothing out of selfish

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<sup>175</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 116.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others *better* than yourselves” (Philippians 2:3: italics mine). The impossibility for the old adam to attain this and the impractical considerations concerning its application do not repudiate its truth. The truth stands: “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away” (Luke 21:33). Jesus promises: “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it” (Luke 11:28).

Scripture continually directs us towards a concern for others. Even in the acknowledgment of the need to take care of one's self, Scripture directs: “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:4). This directive is given immediately after the directive to consider others “better” than one's self (2:3); and immediately prior to lifting up the incarnation, suffering, and death of Christ as the exemplar of selfless love.

Paul writes:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross (2:5-8).

So wherein lies the practical application of “J-O-Y” for our lives?

Whenever my needs come in direct conflict with the needs of others, agape seeks to sacrifice my needs for the sake of the others. By direct conflict I am referring to the situation that requires the laying aside of one or the other's needs. This laying aside may be momentarily or eternally necessary.

Our Lord professed and demonstrated, “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). If the need to protect

and sustain one's earthly life is laid aside for the sake of another, then there are no earthly needs providing exceptions to this agape expression. This is the way of our Savior, who suffered and died for us. That's why Scripture testifies: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18), even the fear of death itself.

Only in the confidence of Christ's love for us can we operate with such a selfless focus. This confidence declares:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:35-39).

All we do seeks to reflect this great love of Christ. So that even brushing one's teeth or cleaning the car does not imply the absence of putting others first.

Eating in order that one may have the strength to assist another reveals agapic love. One may prefer sleep or a bath, but in the event of a some crisis, one may find himself sitting next to a hospital bed all night. This is the way of agape love. Shall we cast it aside as impractical piety? The Lord surely does not.

Taking care of self is always viewed in connection to our relationship with God and others. An integral aspect of one's stewardship of life is self-care, but only as such care promotes the proper management of relationships. That's the Christian way, as impractical as it may be deemed. God will, usually through others, take care of one's needs (Matthew 6:25-34).



Christ himself obviously operated with self imposed boundaries and limits. He denied himself many things, including life itself, for the sake of others. He also took care of himself, often withdrawing to a solitary place for prayer and relaxation (Luke 5:16; Mark 1:35; 6:46; Luke 6:12; Matthew 14:22). He encouraged His disciples to do the same (Mark 6:31). As Oswald points out, "Jesus did not allow His caring to completely overextend him so that He had no energy for primary things."<sup>177</sup>

On the other hand, Jesus' constant focus and attention was upon His Father. Contrary to Charles Rassieur, who says, "Ministry that joyfully copes with stress is grounded in centered self-identity. The recovery of self is the essential prerequisite for all ministry."<sup>178</sup> Jesus' call to "deny" one's self is a clear command to say "no" to self! Jesus said, "for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me" (John 5:30).

A helpful way to grasp the proper understanding of the self lies in Smedes distinction between self-denial and self-discipline. Smedes writes:

Many people combine a kind of self-denial with self-worship. Self-denial of this sort says No only to *things*; it is really self-discipline. We exercise even if we hate doing it; we do not smoke; we turn down the rich food we love to eat; we deny ourselves for the sake of a healthy body. We work seven days a week; we enroll in university courses; we give up movies, television, and socializing in order to become more productive. We resist sexual temptation; we turn down unethical financial opportunities; we exercise our wills in order to become morally better. All these sorts of denials have in common that they are disciplines, not self-denials. They are de-

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<sup>177</sup> Roy Oswald, Clergy Self-Care: Finding A Balance for Effective Ministry (Alban Institute, 1991), 17.

<sup>178</sup> As quoted by Weise, Burnout in the Pastoral Ministry, 81.

nials of things, not a denial of the self. Their spiritual value depends wholly on one question: are they for the self as an end, or for the self as a means of love.<sup>179</sup>

Even Abraham Maslow, one of the fathers of modern psychology, changed his view from holding “self-actualization” as the highest human experience, to “self-transcendence” or “living for a purpose higher than self.”<sup>180</sup> As Covey further reflects:

We settle for the illusion society sells us that meaning is self-focus - self-esteem, self-development, self-improvement - it's 'what I want,' 'let me do my own thing,' 'I did it my way.' But the wisdom literature of thousands of years of history repeatedly validates the reality that the greatest fulfillment in improving ourselves comes in our empowerment to more effectively reach out and help others. Quality of life is inside-out. Meaning is in contribution, in living for something higher than self. And the results of the illusion and the reality are as different as the Dead Sea - a stagnant end in itself where there's no outlet and no life - and the Red Sea, where the waters flow on and nurture abundant life along the way.<sup>181</sup>

We need to underscore the reality that drawing boundaries and setting limits on one's particular responses to people's needs are far from uncaring or selfish. In reality, “Appropriate boundaries actually increase our ability to care about others.”<sup>182</sup> Selfishness is putting our desires and needs out in front of others, rather than trusting God to supply us, through others, with what we need. Stewardship is taking proper care of the provisions God has given us in order to attend to the responsibilities of our relationships. Sometimes one is prompted by God's love to decline assistance to others in the overall management of one's

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<sup>179</sup> Smedes, Love Within Limits, 56.

<sup>180</sup> Covey, First Things First, 49.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>182</sup> Cloud & Townsend, Boundaries, 103.

relationship obligations.

Those who think that denying self is synonymous with neglecting self are usually seduced into the psychological analysis which views the sacrificing of one's own needs as being purely motivated by one's upbringing and cultural conditioning. Such quasi-theologians forget that we have been directed by God's Word to convey such a selfless attitude. Jesus was assertive and yet denied himself. He placed His Father first and others second, as He died upon the cross for the sins of all. He denied himself His rights as the Son of God and His power to save himself.

But Jesus did assert His authority, His love, His friendships, His mission, and His needs in being faithful to His Father. Far from neglecting himself, Jesus often withdrew from the great crowds and their pressing needs. Assertiveness is not just making one's needs known or standing up for one's own desires and rights. Assertiveness is asserting who we are and letting nothing interfere with why we are here. Sometimes the greatest interference arises from our own sinful selfishness. In the face of such self-centered distractions we must assert our faith in order to persevere in our focus upon God and others.

As synergism is to blatant work righteousness, so the natural man's love for self is to blatant selfishness. A person who fails to deny himself may not become a victim to the needs of others, he is too distracted in the victimization of his own fleshly desires and needs. Self-control and self-discipline, inherent in a healthy and joy filled life, requires self-denial. If the meeting of one's needs interferes with attending to the responsibilities of one's relationships with God or

others, then life has drifted into the natural man's self-centered focus. If neglecting one's needs interferes with attending to the responsibilities of one's relationship with God or others, then life has also become self-absorbed out of focus. That's why people with low self-esteem frequently display self-centered lives. Such people are easily self-absorbed in the trauma of self-hatred.

J-O-Y reminds us that the fulfilled joyful life is relationship centered. To live life alone, apart from others, physically, emotionally, or spiritually is to live in the jaws of death and separation. God and others are necessities for the enjoyment of life and self. "It is not good that man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). That declaration of God stands eternally. Self is considered last. When Jesus said, "The last will be first," He indicated that those who loved God above all *and* others second (even the Gentiles) would be elevated in the Kingdom forever. For "whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever loses his life will preserve it" (Luke 17:33). Not because self is unimportant, but because self is realized in relationship with God and others through Christ.

## CHAPTER 6

### RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

The Christian operates under the freedom of love.

Great things are in store for the person who overcomes himself, and if this experience happens to only a few of us it is not God who sets the limitations, but our human nature. God is incredibly generous. To all His children He would give vast spiritual joys and riches, a deeper understanding of life, and resources to meet its problems - but there are few takers.<sup>183</sup>

“Too often we have right answers to the wrong questions. The right question can be more important than the right answer.”<sup>184</sup> The all-encompassing question is, “Do we love God, as He has first loved us?” All pure love is ultimately an expression of the *a priori* love we hold for God.

Too frequently people live as though they are powerless to do anything about their choices in life. “None of us likes to be told that he is more free — and therefore more responsible — than he would like to think.”<sup>185</sup> The truth is, in the absence of clear-cut, black and white answers to the questions concerning the “when & where” of relationship responses, a person operates under the general principles of freedom bestowed upon us by a loving God. “In the first place,

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<sup>183</sup> W. Maxey Jarmen, *A Businessman Looks At the Bible* (Westwood, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1945), 157.

<sup>184</sup> Dayton, *Tools for Time Management*, 136.

<sup>185</sup> Hulme, *Your Pastor's Problems*, 147.

whether an activity is inconsequential or not is determined as much by our attitude toward it as by the activity itself."<sup>186</sup> Motivation (why do we do what we do?) is an important and compelling reality throughout Scripture (Colossians 2:1-3; 3:22-23; Ephesians 6:6).

Ted Engstrom and Alec MacKenzie in their book, Managing Your Time, offered this observation:

Most people are not aware of what actually occupies their time. Yet it makes little sense to attempt to solve a problem without first assessing its nature and extent. And, as an early sage observed, a problem well stated is half solved. So with time. When we discover what we actually are doing with it, our task is half done.<sup>187</sup>

Ephesians 5:15-16 reminds us to "be very careful, then, how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil." The question needing daily reflection is, "Why are we doing these things, and how is it affecting our commitment to build God's kingdom and love him and our neighbors as ourselves?"<sup>188</sup>

More essential than working on attitudes and behaviors is examining the paradigms out of which those attitudes and behaviors flow. 'The unexamined life is not worth living,' observed Plato. But the number of people who come out of our leadership development programs saying 'I haven't thought that deeply in years!' is astonishing. As human beings, we're trying - sometimes with disastrous results - to run our businesses, raise our children, teach our students, be involved in relationships without giving serious and careful consideration to the roots out of which the fruits in our lives are growing. And somehow time management is something of a mechanical skill, segmented from these vital things we spend our time trying to do.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> As quoted by Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 73.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>189</sup> Covey, First Things First, 30.

## ***Time Management***

The proliferation of time management books, seminars, and organizational insights in the last few decades shows forth the tendency of the contemporary life to be lived victimized by the demands and schedules cast upon one in the hustle bustle of daily routines. My survey verifies servanthood prompted by those who are yelling the loudest for one's time.<sup>190</sup> Becoming super organized and in control of one's moment by moment schedule does not, in itself, create the joy of living. Peace and joy are the fruits of the Spirit-filled life which brings a due sense of purpose in responding, with urgency and enthusiasm, to life's opportunities.

Why is it that so often our first things aren't first? For years we've been given methods, techniques, tools, and information on how to manage and control our time. We've been told that if we keep working harder, learn to do things better and faster, use some new device or tool, or file or organize in a particular way, then we'll be able to do it all. So we buy the new planner, go to the new class, read the new book. We learn it, apply it, try harder, and what happens? For most of the people we meet, the result is increased frustration and guilt . . . My friends and family want more of me - but how do I give it to them? . . . There's too much to do - and it's all good. How do I choose?<sup>191</sup>

Flexibility is a real gem among the treasures of time and relational opportunities. "Traditional time management suggests that by doing things more efficiently you'll eventually gain control of your life, and that increased control will bring the peace and fulfillment you're looking for. We disagree. Basing our happiness on our ability to control everything is futile."<sup>192</sup> There are no hard and fast

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<sup>190</sup> See Appendixes A, B, and C, response questions 9 - 10.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

rules, no firm, rigid agendas, no legalistic or analytical formulas which provide easy answers to the difficult questions concerning the boundaries of life.

Uptight families cease to function properly. When dad is tense and mom is irritable, the kids have no trouble deciphering the message: Shut up and don't mess around. What happens down deep inside is tragic. Relationships break down. Feelings start getting internalized and confused. Negotiations are strained. Fear builds up as tension mounts. Communication is finally reduced to looks, frowns, shrugs, sarcastic jabs, and put-downs. Cooperation and teamwork fall by the wayside. Extremes emerge - long periods of silence periodically interrupted by shouting matches. Far from a haven of rest, such a home becomes a hell on earth.<sup>193</sup>

There are excellent books written on the managing of one's time and organizing one's priorities. Yet, most of these "time" gurus do not suggest what priorities one should hold to in life. I have read very few which indicate that the use of time should be relationship oriented, reflecting a relationship centered life. Organizing one's time and prioritizing one's day to day achievements prior to clarifying one's purpose and meaning in life is like the proverbial "placing the cart before the horse." It would be better to be unorganized in a life focused upon strengthening relationships, then systematically busy accomplishing nothing of eternal value. Littleton puts it this way, "The goal of time management is not productivity, but building relationships that build the kingdom of God."<sup>194</sup>

Though Covey ignores the love of Christ as the overall life force, he does move his readers away from the "traditional prescriptions of faster, harder, smarter, and more," and towards a "principle-centered approach."<sup>195</sup> Covey's

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<sup>193</sup> Swindoll, Growing Wise In Family Life, 175.

<sup>194</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 191.

<sup>195</sup> Covey, First Things First, 12.



approach does underscore that “more important than how fast you’re going, is where you’re headed.” Or, to put it another way, “It’s much more a matter of what you do and why you do it, than how fast you get it done.”<sup>196</sup>

Jesus said,

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (Matthew 6:19-21).

A study of this passage reveals it to be related to a focus upon one’s relationship with God and others. Littleton recounts, “Someone once told me the way to store up treasure in heaven is to invest in something going to heaven. That’s your family, your church, yourself, the people around you.”<sup>197</sup>

Paul offers this sage advise, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things” (Colossians 3:1-2). What else is Paul referring to except the characteristics of faith, love, hope, peace, and joy as it is experienced and demonstrated in and through relationships. Indeed, Colossians 3:5-11 admonishes against those things that interfere and destroy earthly relationships in Christ. Colossians 3:12ff. provides directives for establishing and maintaining God-pleasing relationships in Christ. We conclude that it is beneficial for us to evaluate our time and priorities with an eye towards relationships.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Littleton, Escaping the Time Crunch, 173.

One of the problems recognized by time managers is the difficulty leaders have in saying “no” to the legitimate needs and opportunities presented for their time and attention. My survey verifies this difficulty.<sup>198</sup> Not being infinitely equipped to respond to all people at all times, it is imperative that one is able to respond in the negative without unnecessary guilt and remorse. One needs to recall that though God is infinitely equipped to respond positively to all people at all times, He chooses to refrain. “A can’t-say-no syndrome *distracts* leaders from their basic life objectives. Leaders never will have time to do everything that others want them to.”<sup>199</sup>

The reasons one usually finds it so difficult to say no are many and varied. Most time management books reflect on such. The primary reason suggested by this paper concerns the oblivious mindset of most people in attaining to the real significance of life through relationships. Not that attending to every relationship demand or opportunity is desirable, or even possible, but that living with the awareness of the proper responsibilities within the ordering of relationships enables mature decision-making.

Wisdom understands that an appropriate no to one opportunity really becomes an appropriate yes to another. This holds true even if one’s “yes” seeks to provide the needed rest, relaxation, and nurturing that the self needs. This enables one to be better equipped to attend to the relationships of life from a better frame of heart, mind, and soul. Confidence in our relationship responses is

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<sup>198</sup> See Appendix B, response question 4.

<sup>199</sup> Kenneth A. Erickson, Christian Time Management (St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), 33.

enhanced by the proper goals adopted towards reflecting the life of Christ within.

In order to budget the use of time properly, one must first have clear criteria for wise decision-making and a due sense of purpose.

Putting first things first is an issue at the very heart of life. Almost all of us feel torn by the things we want to do, by the demands placed on us, by the many responsibilities we have. We all feel challenged by the day-to-day and moment-by-moment decisions we must make regarding the best use of our time.<sup>200</sup>

Covey reminds us:

. . . decisions are easier when it's a question of 'good' or 'bad'. We can easily see how some ways we could spend our time are wasteful, mind-numbing, even destructive. But for most of us, the issue is not between the 'good' and the 'bad,' but between the 'good' and the 'best.' So often, the enemy of the best is the good.<sup>201</sup>

In this light, Gordon MacDonald's father once told him, "Your challenge will not be separating out the good from the bad, but in grabbing the best out of all the possible good."<sup>202</sup> MacDonald further reflects on his father's wisdom:

That demands, as it did in the ministry of our Lord, a sense of our mission. What are we called to do? What do we do best with our time? What are the necessities without which we cannot get along? Everything else has to be considered negotiable: Discretionary, not necessary.<sup>203</sup>

In his autobiography, While It Is Yet Day, Elton Trueblood writes:

A public man, though he is necessarily available at many times, must learn to hide. If he is always available, he is not worth enough when he is available. I once wrote a chapter in the Cincinnati Union Station, but that was itself a form of hiding because nobody knew who the man with the writing pad was. Consequently nobody approached me during five wonderful hours until the departure of

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<sup>200</sup> Covey, First Things First, 18.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> MacDonald, Ordering Your Private World, 82.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 83.

the next train to Richmond. We must use the time which we have because even at best there is never enough.<sup>204</sup>

How true this holds in the midst of life's possibilities. Covey offers more helpful insight concerning the tension of life. He says:

Our struggle to put first things first can be characterized by the contrast between two powerful tools that direct us: the clock and the compass. The clock represents our commitments, appointments, schedules, goals, activities - what we do with, and how we manage our time. The compass represents our vision, values, principles, mission, conscience, direction - what we feel is important and how we lead our lives. The struggle comes when we sense a gap between the clock and the compass - when what we do doesn't contribute to what is most important in our lives.<sup>205</sup>

"The Christian's goals are faith's response to God's imperative, and thus reflect an additional dimension: our part in God's plan."<sup>206</sup> God's imperative is viewed from the perspective of love, as Jesus summarized the entire law around relationships with God and others. It may also be viewed from the perspective of the

Great Commission given by Christ to His disciples, "Go and make disciples (lovers of God and others) of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20: parenthetical comments mine).

No better summary of the Christian's wise time management may be offered than presented by Dayton:

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<sup>204</sup> Elton Trueblood, While It Is Yet Day (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 67.

<sup>205</sup> Covey, First Things First, 19-20.

<sup>206</sup> Dayton, Tools for Time Management, 81.

Investing your time is investing your life. For the Christian time investment must be based on Biblical priorities. The order of those Biblical priorities is:

1. Commitment to Christ.
2. Commitment to the Body of Christ, His Church, and the people who make it up.
3. Commitment to the work of Christ.

Many Christians have the order mixed up. They forget that Christianity is basically a *relationship*. God is much more interested in what we are than what we accomplish, and what we *are* is measured by our relationships - kindness, righteousness, lovingness, goodness, are all attributes we have in a relationship to other persons.<sup>207</sup>

Very frequently what we know as the truth of life finds difficulty being translated into the living of life.

The fact that we know it, and that it doesn't get translated into the fabric of our daily lives, is the frustration of the gap between the compass and the clock. Our problem, as one put it, 'is to get at the wisdom we already have.' . . . most people really want to . . . put people ahead of schedules, compasses before clocks. They want to lead lives of meaning and contribution. They want to live, love, learn, and leave a legacy with balance and joy. But more often than not, traditional time management gets in the way. Calendars and schedules and . . . planners keep us focused on the urgent instead of the important. They create guilt when we don't stick to the schedule or check off all the 'to do's' on the list. They stifle flexibility and spontaneity. They often create misalignment between what really matters most and the way we live our daily lives.<sup>208</sup>

Christ is the embodiment of the truth of our lives. He proclaimed, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). In him, alone, we discover the focus and importance of living. In him, alone, "we live and move and have our being . . . we are His offspring" (Acts 17:28). In light of the centrality of relationships, the words and wisdom of St. Paul to the Ephesian Christians are apropos:

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>208</sup> Covey, First Things First, 73.

Live life, then, with a due sense of responsibility, not as men (and women) who do not know the meaning and purpose of life but as those who do. Make the best use of your time, despite all the difficulties of these days (Ephesians 5:15-16; Phillips).

## CONCLUSION

There are many occasions in the life of a Christian whereby the prompting of God's Spirit, through the Word of God, leads one to say "no" to a particular relationship opportunity. We may readily agree to this as we recall Scripture's admonition: "Do not be yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Corinthians 6:14). God most definitely leads one to withdraw from certain relationships as He guides the formation of others.

The complicating challenge, as well as the accompanying confusion, involves a particular relationship opportunity, which appears God-pleasing and God-anointing, but is presented in direct conflict with another apparently God-blessed relationship opportunity. When someone has need for one's presence and assistance, and, at the same time, another's emergency calls for one's attention, what is the proper love response? Either response would appear to conflict with one's commitment of love. If one opts to respond to either opportunity, then such action would appear to be at the neglect of one's responsibilities towards the other. How does one consistently retain the proper flow of love's direction without neglecting the opportunities of love's expressions?

God's love is not only self-giving by nature, it is inherently sacrificial. God's love in one's life, motivating and enabling relationship responses, operates within the finite limitations of humanity. This love, as it may or may not exist in two parties, strives for appropriate compromises in the specific time and

particular response produced. One's need for relationship attention is frequently sacrificed for the sake of another.

What if there are no willing compromises entertained by others? How does one respond with confidence in relationship decisions to the disappointment on the part of another? There are not black and white answers to guide us in our daily opportunities. We are free in Christ from the enslavement of selfishness towards the freedom of love (Romans 7:25). This freedom enables us to respond effectively within our God-given abilities. Our limitations require boundaries.

The bottom line concerns one's motivation in responding to a particular opportunity over and against another. Only by the grace of God do we respond appropriately at all. The love of Christ assures that a proper response of love's expression is forthcoming. Our goal to "make the most of every opportunity" (Ephesians 5:16) remains intact as we pray for God to guide and use us in effectively making a difference in the lives of others.

Our baptism calls for daily renewal as we drown the old adam in the waters of life. Our new adam arises in the strength and wisdom of Christ, through the power of the Spirit. We are to drench our lives in prayer and dig deeply into the Word of God. Herein our minds are recreated and our hearts are renewed. A life of continual growth through faith in Christ is essential for managing the relationships over which God has placed us. Without a life embedded in the Word and love of God, we are unable to properly or adequately attend to the relationships which God has given us.



In the nuts and bolts of life, one often does not have the opportunity to pray through or reflect upon one's love expressions prior to an appropriate response given. Many relationship responses are solicited on the spur of the moment in the panic of life. Many of our responses occur by "second nature," with little if any forethought. Life lived on the edge is always more challenging than life spent in slumber. Life lived is always tougher than life dreamed. Life actively engaged with others always produces the unanticipated need to respond. Many decisions are made in companionship to the very actions which such decisions require. Sometimes a situation solicits a knee-jerk reaction. Often, to hesitate is to miss the opportunity provided.

The overall confidence we possess in life is derived, not from the "rightness" of our decisions, but from the Spirit of God who fills our hearts with the love of Jesus. As Paul says, "In him (Christ) and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (Ephesians 3:12: parenthetical comment mine). In this life we share in Christ we are "controlled, not by the sinful nature, but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Romans 8:9). The commitment to our *a priori* relationship with God calls forth attentive listening, hearing, and talking with God. Receiving and responding to God's gracious gift of life through the means of grace is essential in developing a life-style congruent with the significance of one's relationships with others.

The confidence that one's decisions are made in accordance to God's will and are reflective of His love is derived from the nature of one's individual rela-

tionship with God. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-2). Living under the umbrella of God's forgiveness one is compelled to actively engage in the expressions of love toward others. To this aim one is invited to "ask, and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open to you" (Matthew 7:7-11). Hearing and responding to God in daily prayer is, of necessity, a vital ingredient to confident relationship responses.

The Epistle of James further elaborates on the need to ask God for the wisdom required to make God-pleasing decisions:

If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." James further shows that our confidence in the Lord is applied to our asking, when he says, "But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord, he is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does (James 1:5-8).

Paul says, "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful" (Colossians 4:2).

James' entire epistle is focused upon the relationship-centered life which is reflective of true faith in Christ. In his emphasis on appropriate relationship responses we find that his elaboration upon wisdom is very apropos:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of

mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness (James 3:13-17).

And yet, we still find life's decisions tough. Sure they are! If we were perfectly attuned to the mind of God we would no longer be carrying around this body of death (2 Corinthians 4:7-12). As we live our lives in a perpetual dependency and trust in God to guide and keep us, we continually discover the wisdom to appropriately attend to relationships. As King Solomon instructed: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

There are many times when one appears to be between "a rock and hard place" as one tends to the opportunities which God reveals. Relying in confident faith upon the means of grace, one is well supplied with the power and wisdom to manage life's affairs in a way that is pleasing to God. Each situation is unique unto itself. Much of the wisdom needed reveals itself in the midst of the juggling of life's opportunities, as one lives in the freedom of relationship decisions. Such freedom is always mindful of the God-given responsibilities attached to individual relationships and of the finite limitations attached to one's humanity.

Maybe a person does respond to a present emergency in spite of the spouse's immediate need for attention. In responding, a commitment is simultaneously set in place to attend to the spouse's needs in a timely and appropriate fashion. Usually a time-pressing relationship need (i.e. a crisis, an emergency) determines one's initial and immediate response. That is consistent with making the most of every opportunity. Such gut reactive responses may serve

equally as a catalyst in clarifying additional needs that are crying for one's attention.

Appropriate and loving compromises are part of any healthy relationship. However, due to the all-encompassing *a priori* nature of one's relationship with God, no compromises are to be entertained which violate the clearly defined behaviors and responsibilities in which God calls for His people to engage. The revealed will of God, wherever it sheds light, is to be kept clear and intact. The more mature one's understanding of God's revealed will, the more one is able to respond in confidence to another, void of unnecessary guilt feelings or shame.

Or perhaps one says "no" to an emergency situation of another because there has arisen an emergency/crisis in one's own family. One may recognize this as unfortunate timing, but leaving the side of one person who is in crisis to rush to the side of another in crisis is not a violation of the love of God. In such a scenario, one has allowed the proper flow of God's love to direct and determine the responsibility to respond. As always, in one's inability to respond personally to any particular opportunity, proper delegation and communication within the Body of Christ is appropriate. Paul reminds us, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

Ultimately one faces the need to let God control, lead, and guide the expressions of love. When one clearly fails or sins against relationships, the need for honest confession and repentance accompanies the need to clarify what caused an inadequate response. 1 John 1:8-10 is helpful to remember:

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and His word has no place in our lives.

Unfortunately, the real difficult decisions do not come in the context of emergencies (which are few and far between), but in the day to day routine of touching lives. This is where full-time pastors are the most apt to become frustrated and confused in drawing boundaries. Just how much time is called for from a husband and father to maintain healthy family relationships (the family would like as much time as they can get)? Because there are no pat answers concerning the amount of time a person should give to one's family, there is the tendency for perpetual guilt feelings (some arising from within, some thrown one's way by others). My survey substantiated the frequent guilt associated with servanthood.<sup>209</sup>

The motives of the heart will carry the weight of the guilt. If one is living a life of constant self-reflection and one's motives for attending to relationships are compelled by the love of Christ, then one will adequately clarify the appropriate response in any given opportunity. If one's desires do not conform to such motive clarification, then one should embark upon self-evaluation leading to confession, absolution and amendment.

A compelling analytical question begging for answers might be, "Why does one feel like saying 'yes' when one should have said 'no' or 'no' when one should have said 'yes'?" We all carry baggage from our past. We all have fears

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<sup>209</sup> See Appendixes A, B, and C, response question 6.

with which to attend. We all have selfish desires which beckon to have their way (Romans 7:15-25). Much of our decision making is influenced by the sinful nature, world, and Satan. Ultimately these enemies of Christ seek to destroy rather than to bless our relationships. Awareness is needed. Self evaluation elevates awareness of the sinful flesh, awareness of the motives that compel one's specific desire of response, awareness of one's failures in responding, and awareness of the proper flow of God's love and grace in and through one's life.

Beyond awareness, one moves into healthy decision making whereby one, through repentance and faith, consciously chooses to follow the way of the Lord. The important factor enveloping one's individual sanctified decisions in responding is not so much that one has chosen to respond to a particular need, but that, in responding, one has not failed to see the opportunities presented with others as well. In recognizing additional opportunities, one has already set in motion an appropriate response for the moments which lie ahead.

Life is lived in the midst of relationships. Life is about relationships. Life is centered in relationships. Nothing more and nothing less. One is never truly alone. God is ever present. When one is alone with God the aloneness is never meant to be a selfish aloneness, but a nurturing aloneness whereby one is re-energized for the relationships which God bestows. Life is focused upon relationships. Earthly things merely serve as the context out of which relationships are lived. The context simply determines the particular resources with which one has been blessed to attend to the relationships at hand. One's talents and treasures are assets serving as catalysts in promoting relationships.

Relationships can be risky. Relationships call for the sacrifice and commitment of love. Relationships require time, energy, and other resources. Relationships may increase our fears, our feelings of failure, our doubts, and our troubles. Relationships always call for sacrifice. Sacrifice always calls for suffering. To suffer is to experience loss of some sort. To sacrifice is to willingly experience a loss.

The essence of true life is discovered only in the giving and receiving of relationships. The security of life is discovered in the preeminent relationship with our Maker, through faith in His Son, our Savior, Jesus Christ. This security of life produces the peace of God which passes understanding (Philippians 4:7). The significance of life on earth is discovered in the perpetual formation of relationships with others in God. This significance of life produces the joy of living in the Lord. Nehemiah aptly responded to God's people with the words: "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Nehemiah 8:10). As we attend to fulfilling the purpose of our lives on earth by sharing the love of Christ in all relationships, then life overflows with joy unending. And in the peace and joy of God we find the strength that is needed in order to meet the struggles of our relationships head-on.

What are we to conclude from all of this? The confusion which is created by the awesome responsibilities to love everyone while attending to specific and unique relationship issues within the limitations of time, energy, and wisdom, typically results in spiritual distancing. The maneuver of keeping God's Word at arm's length is usually motivated by the guilt and hopelessness descending upon

the person who attempts to operate within the strength of one's flesh. Never able to attain to perfection, people often sink into the failure syndrome of guilt and despair. Or the fear of failure presses people into a privatized spirituality which strives to keep Christianity "doctrine focused" instead of "relationship centered." In actuality, the two are dependent upon each other.

In a catch-22 fashion, we may recognize that the same time constraints which challenge the practical applications of the hierarchical view of relationships is what led to the need for such ordering in the first place. One's limitations in responding to the needs of others is not reduced by simply doing away with the prioritizing of relationships. Any time there is a proper "yes" relationship response, there are a multitude of "no" responses. God does not direct us specifically when, where, and how to attend to each other's needs. It is all the more imperative, due to our limitations, that we develop a confident understanding of how we are to properly prioritize our opportunities and so guard against being victimized in our relationship decisions by the desires of the flesh or the wishes of another.

This paper has sought to dig deeper at the Scriptural directives for managing one's relationships in Christ. The breakdown of families, within the context of a highly, technological, and mobile society, demands a fresh insight from the Word of God concerning the ordering of relationships. Especially those who are highly committed to relationships in full-time ministry need guidance and clarity from God's Word in order to develop and maintain confidence in meeting the responsibilities of the pastoral office. The answers needed today are not so



easily discerned. Luther is credited, in a different context, with the words, "If one must err, then err on the side of love." Complementing this advice, I would contribute a necessary addendum: "If one must choose between two loves, then err on the side of the *a priori* relationship given by God." We are desperately in need of such affirmation in today's lonely and confused society.

Additional reflective practical considerations applicable to making relationship decisions include the following:

Am I neglecting an *a priori* relationship in order to reach out to another? Is this same need I am seeking to meet in one, going unmet in the *a priori* relationship?

Is the meeting of a *a priori* relationship needs being met at the expense of other relationships for which I am responsible? The meeting of the *a priori* needs aims at multiplying meeting the needs of others. The goal is to keep the pipeline of God's love flowing freely through me to all.

Am I distinguishing properly between my love for others and love's responsibilities of expression? The needs and opportunities are endless. I could knock on doors every night and make a difference in the lives of others, but in doing so I would inevitably neglect other opportunities to express my love. Love expressions must be prioritized, choices have to be made.

In the relationship decisions I make is there a healthy balance to be observed in my responses? Over focusing on any one relationship may reveal a selfish motive on my part, i.e. a dysfunctional selfish drive for meeting my own needs or an arrogance that I am one's "salvation" in a particular situation.

In fulfilling my significance to love others in Christ, have I neglected my identity/security issues of remaining rooted in Christ?

Are any red flags (warnings that something is wrong) raised? Do I have peace in my relationships? Am I a good steward of the self? Do I have joy in my relationships? Am I a good steward of others?

Prayerfully, as family members in relationship, we may move further away from a life which reduces one's family obligations to simply supplying the ne-

cessary physical provisions. Hopefully, as church members in relationship, we may move further away from the endless nightmare focus of programmatic busyness or the “belly button” self-serving focus of meeting one’s own needs.

Sociologist and historian Carle Zimmerman compared the deterioration and ultimate disintegration of various cultures with the parallel in the decline of the family unit in America. “His study identified specific patterns of behavior that typified the final stages of the disintegration of each culture. Just before each culture fell into total disarray, certain conditions became prominent.”<sup>210</sup> Dr. Zimmerman outlined various elements which led to the demise of the family unit. Among the destructive elements were:

- Increased and rapid, easy, ‘causeless’ divorce. (Guilty and innocent party theory became a pure fiction.)
- Decreased number of children, population decay, and increased public disrespect for parents and parenthood.
- Elimination of the real meaning of the marriage ceremony.
- Popularity of pessimistic doctrines about the early heroes.
- Breaking down of most inhibitions against adultery.
- Revolts of youth against parents so that parenthood became more and more difficult for those who did try to raise children.
- Rapid rise and spread of juvenile delinquency.
- Common acceptance of all forms of sex perversions.

All that sounds strangely familiar, doesn’t it? . . . Domestic deterioration is happening. We must now focus not on how bad things have gotten, how weak and needy families are, but rather on how we can build strength back into the home. What specifically can be done to stop the cycle, to turn the tide, to get families...back on course?<sup>211</sup>

It is my hope and prayer that this evaluative study on the Biblical ordering of relationships will assist all of us in a deeper awareness concerning the right

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<sup>210</sup> Swindoll, Growing Wise In Family Life, 33.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

focus of life in Christ. The bottom line is conveyed well in the words of the ancient philosopher Goethe: "Things which matter most must never be at the mercy of things which matter least."<sup>212</sup> To this end, may God bless this paper.

Soli deo Gloria!

***May we keep ourselves in God's  
love as we wait for the mercy of our Lord  
Jesus Christ to bring us to eternal life.  
(Jude 20)***

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<sup>212</sup> Stephen R. Covey, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 146.

## APPENDIX A:

### RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT:

Greetings! I am currently engaged in working on my major paper in fulfillment of my Doctor of Ministry degree at Concordia Theological Seminary, St. Louis. I would be most obliged if you could manage to take a moment and respond to the following survey. A self-addressed stamped envelope is provided to return to me when it is completed. I have kept this survey simple in order to encourage your response. Thank you for your time.

#### TRUE OR FALSE:

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. I believe that the Bible affirms the hierarchical structure of relationships which consists of the following order:

- a. God
- b. family
- c. church
- d. work

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I find it difficult to place my family obligations above my work obligations.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. I find it difficult to distinguish between my obligations to God and my obligations to the church.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. I find it difficult in certain situations to say no to someone with a legitimate need for my time in order to be with my family.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. I find it difficult to know where to draw proper boundaries in the many requests from people of my time.

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. I have frequently felt guilty for having said no to someone in order to be with someone else.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. It is difficult to distinguish between serving God and serving others.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. When proposed with two seemingly legitimate relationship demands upon my time, I am perplexed as to which one I should respond.

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. In responding to relationship needs around me, I am often a victim to those who are "yelling" the loudest.

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. Overall, I would categorize my response to others as a victim then as a person who is led by God's clear directives.

## APPENDIX B

### RESULTS OF THE SURVEY GIVEN TO THE CLERGY

50 clergy surveyed, 43 responded

1. 35 affirm the hierarchical structure of God, Family, Church, Work as Biblical  
7 reject  
1 doesn't know
2. 21 affirm the difficulty in placing family obligations over work obligations  
22 reject
3. 18 affirm the difficulty in distinguishing between obligations to God and Church  
25 reject
4. 38 affirm the difficulty in saying no to someone in need in order to say yes to be with the family  
5 reject
5. 22 affirm the difficulty in knowing where to draw boundaries in responding to people  
21 reject
6. 17 affirm frequently feeling guilty for having said no to someone  
26 reject
7. 23 affirm the difficulty in distinguishing between serving God and others  
20 reject
8. 22 affirm perplexity when having to choose between two relationship demands  
21 reject
9. 25 affirm frequently responding as a victim to the person yelling the loudest  
18 reject
10. 10 affirm overall response to others as a victim  
33 reject

## APPENDIX C

### RESULTS OF THE SURVEY GIVEN TO THE LAITY

50 clergy surveyed, 43 responded

1. 49 affirm the hierarchical structure of God, Family, Church, Work as Biblical  
1 rejects
2. 15 affirm the difficulty in placing family obligations over work obligations  
35 reject
3. 23 affirm the difficulty in distinguishing between obligations to God and Church  
26 reject
4. 40 affirm the difficulty in saying no to someone in need in order to say yes to be with the family  
10 reject
5. 31 affirm the difficulty in knowing where to draw boundaries in responding to people  
18 reject  
1 did not respond
6. 31 affirm frequently feeling guilty for having said no to someone  
19 reject
7. 23 affirm the difficulty in distinguishing between serving God and others  
27 reject
8. 41 affirm perplexity when having to choose between two relationship demands  
9 reject
9. 38 affirm frequently responding as a victim to the person yelling the loudest  
12 reject
10. 24 affirm overall response to others as a victim  
26 reject

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