

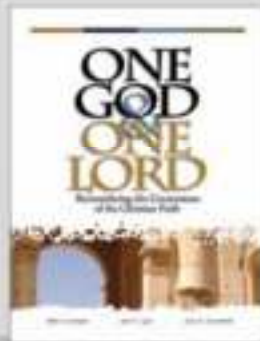
Freedom from Heart Disease | We Love Because He Loved Us First | Moved with Compassion

# THE SOWER

The quarterly magazine of Spirit & Truth Fellowship International\*

Oct/Nov/Dec 2010 | STFonline.org

**Love:  
The  
More  
Excellent  
Way**



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# Feature Articles

4	Opening Letter
5	Freedom from Spiritual Heart Disease – Dan Gallagher
10	The Contender – We Love Because He Loved Us First – John W. Schoenheit
16	The ABC’s of God – Building on Sand – Cara Hanson
19	Why Love is “Not” – John W. Schoenheit
20	Partner Profile – Corey & Marnie Green
21	Salvation Blurb - Love Yourself – John W. Schoenheit
22	Fuel for the Fire – How Do I Love You? – Renee Speakes
24	Figures of Speech – Meiosis (Belittling) – John W. Schoenehit
26	The Vine – Moved with Compassion – Michael L. Patten
29	Dear Sower

# Opening Letter

## Love: The More Excellent Way

by John W. Schoenheit

This issue of *The Sower* focuses on love. It is safe to say that love has inspired more human interest than any other subject. Literature, art, and now television and the movies are dominated by the subject of love. What attracts us to love is the infatuation of love, the feeling of love, and the dedication that love inspires in people.

You would think that because of all the attention that love gets, we would all understand it very well, but that is not the case. Oh sure, we understand the beginning stages of falling in love quite well, but that is only a small part of love. God wants us to understand, and live, love in its fullness and, (SURPRISE!), that is very hard to do. I say “surprise” because many people think that love “just happens.” They think love is an emotion that arises from within a person all by itself, appearing magically in the person’s life as an intense and almost overpowering fondness, but as I already said, that is only a small part of love.

The love that God wants us to have for each other is expressed in how we live and act all the time. It is intertwined with our feelings, but it is not itself a feeling. Actually, the love God wants us to have for each other is a choice we make based in our knowledge and our freewill. When we choose to love, we can live love all the time towards everyone. Jesus did, and so can we. The love God wants us to live is a decision we make in our minds that then flows out of our hearts, and as the Bible says, is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast, it is not proud, rude, or self-seeking. It cannot be provoked, and it does not keep a record of the wrongs it has suffered. It is “turned off” by evil, but “turned on” by the truth. It always protects, trusts, and hopes, and, like the Energizer Bunny™, it always keeps on going (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Living like that is living love, and it is hard to do. Some years ago at one of our camps for young men and women, a teenager was being particularly rude and surly. When I approached him about his attitude and behavior he apologized, saying, “I only act this way when I am hungry and tired.” It would be nice if life was easy, but it is not. We all have times when we are hungry, tired, overworked, ignored, and mistreated. Those are the times when we discover whether we really love others or not. The outward behavior that often accompanies love, such as speaking kindly to people, is a lot easier if we are rested, appreciated, and our stomach is full. But Jesus loved the unlovable, and he loved when he was not being loved in return. That is our challenge—to love all the time. I contend that if we are going to enjoy our lives and win others to Christ, we will have to love all the time. It is not easy, but greatness never is.

May you receive, understand, and radiate God’s love,

*John Schoenheit*

# Freedom from Spiritual Heart Disease

by Dan Gallagher

Despite all we know about the various causes of heart disease, and in spite of the enormous sums of money spent trying to fight it, millions of people continue to suffer and die from it every year. Heart disease is one of the leading causes of death in the western world and it is now even having a significant impact on the eastern societies. Recently I realized that I too suffer from heart disease, but my heart disease is not the type that afflicts my physical body. Just like millions of others, I suffer from a form of spiritual heart disease because my “inner heart” has been infected.

Most of us are familiar with the heart that is the organ in the center of our chest, which pumps all of our blood and is necessary for life. Similar to this central organ of our physical life, we all also have an inner “heart,” the center of all of our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. This inner heart can also be infected resulting in some very debilitating effects. Sadly, ever since the sin of Adam all of humankind has suffered from a form of spiritual infection that causes a diseased inner heart.

People who typically suffer from physical heart disease often have shortness of breath, fatigue, and weakness brought on during times of stress and exertion. Their hearts are damaged and lacking the ability to supply the body with a proper flow of blood, they lack oxygen, nutrients, and the ability to fight off sickness. Problems that affect the physical heart can soon affect the entire body. Similarly, when the inner heart is infected it also affects much of what we think and do, frequently causing us great emotional pain and oftentimes causing us to hurt others nearby.

## The Cause of Spiritual Heart Disease

Adam’s sin of rejecting and rebelling against God was so cataclysmic that its effects have since reverberated through the lives and bodies of all humankind. Adam’s sin not only damaged God’s creation, it also caused the entrance of sickness and disease, as well as thorns and thistles in the hearts of all men and women. The deadening in part of our inner hearts is a constant source of messages of unworthiness, unholiness, and inadequacy. People are continually seeking ways to alleviate this pain through self-medication and other forms of self-anesthesia. Some learn to overcome their heart disease by inflating their own image of themselves, while others seek comfort and pain relief through sensual pleasure, intoxicants, sex, and materialism, etc. The agony of this malignancy in the heart causes us to pay homage to all sorts of man-made idols, and even “good things” can become idols when we make them “ultimate things.” No matter what we do, anything other than putting God in His rightful place in our hearts only intensifies the pain of this inner heart disease.

## The Cure is Love

God, as the great physician, has provided us the prescription for the remedy that will result in complete healing and a full recovery. God’s love is a divine elixir; the only cure-all for all that ails the heart. The medicine is an injection of love, which must be administered into the very center of our hearts.

### Deuteronomy 6:5 and 6

**(5) Love** the LORD your God with all your **heart** and with all your soul and with all your strength.

**(6) These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts.**

Jesus also prescribed the same treatment when he reminded his disciples and others that God, and God alone, was to have the place of greatest prominence in our lives (Matt. 22:37-39). Adam’s sin of turning away from God created such a gaping hole in the heart of all mankind that only God can fill it. Sadly, men and women throughout the ages have devoted themselves to every type of pursuit, other than the one and only thing that provides complete healing.

## Love Prevents Idolatry

God never intended Christianity to be a part-time leisure activity, something we do only when we feel like it or when it is popular. Nominal Christians, those who are Christ's followers in name only, will never experience the cure for their heart disease. Filling our hearts with love, expressed as complete devotion to God, leaves no room in our hearts for any idols.

God designed us to worship, with the intention that He would be the object of our devotion. When God is not occupying His rightful place in a person's life, he will constantly be in search of something else to worship. It is as if the heart becomes an idol factory, mass-producing one man-made god after another. Like a Velcro-covered ball, our hearts constantly become attached to whatever draws our devotion. In times past men and women served carved totems and graven images representing unseen spirits and mystical forces. Today people still serve idols but they are idols of the heart, which is anything that takes precedence over God.<sup>1</sup>

Most Christians can recognize the idolatry involved when a person pursues the idols of money, power, and pleasure, but even good things in life can be idols when we make them the "ultimate" things. It is idolatrous whenever I assert my will above God's will, or believe my thoughts more than what God says about me. Having too high or too low of an opinion about ourselves is always idolatrous. One of the problems with inner heart disease is that it causes us to see ourselves wrongly. Only loving God fully, and experiencing His love in our hearts, brings truth and frees me from the grasp of my false gods. Idols cannot merely be torn down; they must be replaced because the nature of the heart is to worship. We must tear ourselves away from the altars of "self" and fall with full devotion before God, serving Him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Loving God in all we think, say, and do leaves no room in our hearts for idols and is the only cure for our heart disease.

## Misunderstanding What Love Is

In English we frequently use the word "love" to describe a very strong feeling of attraction for someone or something. This can cause some confusion for people when they read the word "love" in the Bible because this is not necessarily how the word is being used. In the Bible there are two Greek words (*agape* and *phileo*) that are translated into the one English word "love." *Phileo* is the Greek word that describes the very strong emotional bond that exists between two people, the feeling of affection, fondness, and attachment. This is the feeling that exists between friends, in various degrees, depending upon the amount of closeness or intimacy. The closer or more intimate the friendship, the greater the love (*phileo*). This is a relational love, which is experienced as endearment and sentiment towards another.

The second type of "love" referred to in the Bible is represented by the Greek word *agape*. This is a type of love that people have referred to as "the love of God." It is an intense love always demonstrated by devotion, obedience, and action. The very nature of *agape* love is that it motivates you to overcome any feelings you may have in the moment because of your devotion to do what is best for another person. It is impossible to say you love someone, in the *agape* sense of love, and then not do loving things for him or her. This is the type of love that is completely selfless and is always focused on the good will of others. This type of love always seeks to do what is best for others, which is why God says "it does not envy," "it is not rude," "it is not self-seeking," and "it is not proud" (1 Cor. 13:4 and 5).

*Agape* love is the motivating force in a person's heart that always prompts us to obey God and act with godliness towards others. It activates our sense of duty and obligation to God by transforming them into actions. Jesus taught that this type of love was inseparable from obedience.

### John 14:23 and 24a

**(23)** Jesus replied, "If anyone **loves** [*agapao*]<sup>2</sup> me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will **love** [*agapao*] him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

**(24a)** He who does not **love** [*agapao*] me will not obey my teaching.

No one can really say that he loves (*agape*) God if he does not obey Him, because love towards God and actions are inseparable. There are times that I do not "feel" like doing something, but my devotion, my *agape*

love, for God causes me to override my thoughts and obey Him. Let's face it, there are many times when loving people is really hard to do. Sometimes loving others seems harder than swallowing broken glass as I bite my tongue and hold myself back from saying what I really "feel" like saying. My "honesty and authenticity" in the moment would not be a blessing to anyone, including others, God, and me. Because of my *agape* love to serve others and to always do what is best for them, I am able to overcome my desire to speak hurtful words. The temptation to sin is always attractive and enticing but our love (*agape*) for God motivates us to overcome our feelings and walk in obedience to His ways.

Although *agape* love is always expressed as obedience, we must remember that God is never interested in mere obedience, but obedience driven by a heart of devotion to Him. Obedience may be motivated by a number of things other than love. This is why God always looks on the heart of a person and never on external appearances (1 Sam. 16:7). The Pharisees erred in their strict following of the Law because their hearts were wrongly motivated. God never desired mere acts of worship but a heart of worship. They were exceptional in following much of "the letter of the Law" but they missed the "spirit" or heart of the Law, which is love, and is why they came into such sharp contention with Jesus. Walking with love (*agape*) is the complete fulfillment of the Law because then we will always do the right thing for others.

### **Galatians 5:14**

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "**Love** [*agapao*] your neighbor as yourself."

The Law, with commands such as "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and "Do not commit adultery," is completed in love (*agape*) because when we are walking with *agape* we will never disobey God or harm others (Rom. 13:9). The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love (*agapao*) one another, for he who loves (*agapao*) his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Rom. 13:8). Filling our hearts with this type of love for God and others is the divine elixir that brings complete remedy to our heart disease.

### **Learning to Love Starts with God**

I have encountered a theme that I have in common with others, that at the core of my heart I fail to grasp how much God truly loves me. Although we cognitively understand that God loves us and frequently even say, "God loves us," for many of us this has not really settled into the very core of our hearts. Unfortunately, until this happens we will continue to live with the effects of inner heart disease.

God does not love us because we deserve to be loved or because we are worthy of His love. God loves us because God is love (1 John 4:8). He cannot do anything other than love because it is His very nature. He is completely and absolutely pure love and He loves us unconditionally, without any hesitation, and without any wavering. He does not love us any more when we are good, or any less when we are bad. This is a truth that must permeate the core of our being. We are all worthy of His love only because He first loved us and has made us worthy.

### **Romans 5:8**

But God demonstrates his own **love** [*agape*] for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

When we say that God always loves us we do not mean that He always approves of us. He loves us in spite of our sin and frequently His love (*agape*) will be demonstrated by His discipline (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:7 and 9). He loves us, so He does not support our sin and sometimes lets our error correct us. When we are being obedient, we seem to "feel" His support more because He is giving us grace to support us in doing His will.

Often when I sin I feel as if God loves me less, but the problem is never with God; the feelings of unworthiness and inadequacy always come from within me. There is nothing we can do to earn more of God's love and there is nothing we can ever do to lose His love. The ultimate example of God's love (*agape*) for us was His giving of His son as a sacrifice for our redemption (John 3:16). It is beyond my understanding how great this love is, but I can accept it and trust in it.

Jesus, following in the footsteps of His Father, also demonstrated this same type of selfless love when he overcame his own desires for life and yielded to the will of the Father.

### **John 15:13**

Greater love [*agape*] has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

The record of Jesus' prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane tells us that he did not want to die, but the above verse tells us that he overcame his feelings and obeyed because of love (*agape*). Obedience unto death is the greatest demonstration of this type of love, and it is what we are also called to do for each other.

### **1 John 3:16**

This is how we know what love [*agape*] is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Sin, disobedience to God's commands, is always the result of spiritual heart disease and is caused by a shortage of love in our hearts. God tells us that if we really love Him we will obey Him and do what He tells us to do.

### **1 John 5:3a**

This is love for God: to obey his commands.

## **Love is the Measuring Rod of Our Lives**

As a building contractor for more than twenty years, I had to make sure that my work complied with the Uniform Building Code. This is a set of building standards that ensure that construction work is done safely and to prevent unscrupulous people from doing shoddy and deceptive work. The Building Inspector is the one who examines the work at various times in the construction process to ensure compliance with the standards. As followers of Christ we too will all have our work examined and inspected to see if it passes the quality standards of the Chief Inspector, Jesus Christ himself.<sup>3</sup> This will be the day when we will have to give an account of our life's work (Rom. 14:12; Heb. 4:13).

### **2 Corinthians 5:10**

For we must all **appear** before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

The word "appear" in the above verse is not to simply make an appearance like to show up at a friend's party. This is a translation of the Greek word *phanero*, which means "to be made manifest," or "visible" in the sense that we will be examined or exposed. Standing naked and completely exposed before a crowd of people is a pretty uncomfortable idea, but to be standing fully exposed before the King of Kings will be completely unnerving for some people while their life's work is scrutinized.

Thankfully, we can be completely cleansed of our sins, because Scripture declares that, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). Nevertheless, it will be very difficult for many to have their lives fully revealed before the Lord and judged for quality.

### **1 Corinthians 3:12-15**

**(12)** If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw,

**(13) his work will be shown for what it is**, because the Day will bring it to light. **It will be revealed** with fire, and the fire will **test the quality of each man's work**.

**(14)** If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

**(15)** If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

When I appear before the Lord I will not be evaluated based on how many teachings I have presented or articles I have written, nor will I be assessed on any of my earthly achievements or worldly pursuits. The measuring rod that our lives will be gauged against is the standard of love (*agape*). Did I **really** love God, demonstrated by living a life of love?

God tells us that no matter how spiritually powerfully we walk, even having enough faith to move a mountain, if my motivation is not love then “**I am nothing**” (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Without love all of my talents and gifts, and all the sweat of my brow, adds up to a big fat “zero” in God’s ledger books. God has given us the ultimate gift, the gift of salvation and everlasting life, and, like any investor, He expects us to properly steward that gift by providing Him a return on His investment in the form of a life of loving Him and others.

Many Christians are familiar with the Scripture that says that “God is love” and “perfect love drives out fear” (1 John 4:18), but far too many fail to understand that the context of this section of Scripture is about the “day of judgment” when we will appear before Christ’s throne.

### **1 John 4:16-18**

**(16)** And so we know and rely on the **love** God has for us. **God is love**. Whoever **lives in love** lives in God, and God in him.

**(17)** In this way, **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.

**(18)** There is **no fear in love**. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in **love**.

We will have confidence before him, and no fear, when we have lived a life of love.

## **Immunized from Heart Disease**

When we fail to grasp God’s complete love for us we seek out our own salvation, our wholeness, through avenues other than Him. The more we inoculate our hearts with the truth of God’s great love for us, the more complete and whole we become, and the more we are able to love others. When God’s love permeates our minds and hearts we become convinced that there is no good thing He would ever withhold from us. We free ourselves from idols, die to ourselves, and lose ourselves to Him. No longer having the need to erect walls of self-protection or to retreat across a moat into the bastion of self-defense, we are freed from heart disease, living with hearts fully devoted to God.

### **Notes:**

1. See Ezekiel 14:2-7. God tells us that idols occupy the heart.
2. *Agape* is the noun and *agapao* is the verb form of the same root word.
3. There are some who have erroneously taught that the judgment seat, the Greek work *bema*, is only a place where rewards will be handed out to Christians. The *bema* actually is a place for examination, and at times rewards were dispensed from it as well as punishment.

**Read online at  
TruthOrTradition.com/HeartDisease**

# The Contender

## We Love Because He Loved Us First

by John W. Schoenheit

### Loving Others is Difficult

I do not love like I would like to. I have angry outbursts, get impatient (especially in lines), and wrestle with thoughts I would rather not think in the first place. Furthermore, I know I am not alone. It seems that every day I see others like me, people who really want to love God but who do not love God as fully as they want to. Even the best of us do not love as often and as fervently as we would like to. And then there are those Christians who are not even trying hard to be loving—with predictable negative results.

Being loving is the most difficult thing any person can do. Most cultures, including our Western culture, idolize people who are “rough and tough,” who live life by their own rules and get ahead by being hot tempered, quick witted, and hard fisted. But living like that is easy compared to being loving. For example, it is easy to get angry and use obscenity, which is why so many people live that way; it takes little effort to behave like that. On the other hand, try having no temper. Try taking abuse with no anger or obscenity in return. Remember, God says love “is not easily provoked” (1 Cor. 13:5 KJV).

At this point we need to understand “provoked.” It is translated from the Greek word *paroxunō* (Strong’s #3947; pronounced par-ox-oo’-no), which, like many words, has several different meanings. It can mean to rouse or stimulate, and it is used that way in Acts 17:16 (ESV) when Paul’s “spirit was provoked” when he saw all the idols in Athens. In that sense it means motivated, moved, stirred, or roused, and many things can stir or rouse us. That is not what 1 Corinthians 13:5 is speaking of. It can also have the meaning of one person purposely arousing another person by picking on, vexing, irritating, or challenging him and that is the meaning of “provoke” in 1 Corinthians 13:5. It does not mean that evil or injustice does not motivate us to right the wrong. It does mean that the evil that others do to us is not what causes us to react; instead, we act if it is the godly thing to do. Both God and Jesus had righteous anger in certain situations, but being “provoked” is when someone prods, pokes, and attacks us until we finally lose our temper and attack back. Jesus was never “provoked,” and that is the standard we must have for ourselves because that is love.

If we really want to learn what love “looks like,” we have to study the life of Jesus Christ. One small aspect of love, and a good example, is not being provoked. If anyone had a reason to lash out in anger at people it was Jesus. The more innocent a person is when he or she is attacked, the more the attack usually hurts. Jesus was completely innocent, and over and over again he could have lost his temper and attacked those who slandered him, but he did not. Jesus set the bar very high for the rest of us, and his behavior should be the goal to which we aspire.

Even just that one behavior-goal of love, to not be provoked, seems to be so hard to reach that many translators cannot seem to grasp it. The Greek text in 1 Corinthians 13:5 is only two words, *ou paroxunō*, which mean “not provoked.” Versions such as the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*, the NASB, and *Young’s Literal Translation* say only: “is not provoked.” But not being provoked seems to be such a high standard that many versions, including the *King James Version*, add the word “easily” and read, “...is not easily provoked...” This makes it seem like it is okay to be provoked as long as we are not “easily” provoked.

Thank God that Jesus did not think it was okay for him to be provoked as long as he was not “easily” provoked. If he did, it is quite likely that early-on in his ministry his enemies would have crossed the “easily” line and suffered severe consequences. Thankfully, Jesus knew what we all should know, that love “is not provoked,” period. The scholar and commentator R. C. H. Lenski writes: “[Love] is not embittered or enraged by abuse, wrong, insult, injury.”<sup>1</sup> That is being honest with the text, and now we have to work hard to live that way. But not being provoked is only one aspect of love in the list in 1 Corinthians 13, which itself does not describe every aspect of love. Every Christian owes it to God, to Jesus, and to himself or herself to strive to attain the goal of love and love completely, entirely, and not just part-way.

## **Love is a High Standard**

God is love, and God cannot compromise Himself or what love is. The behaviors that define love are high standards because they are what love is, and if they were not high, they would not define love. If we take the list of behaviors in 1 Corinthians 13 that help us to understand what love is, and “water them down,” or weaken them, we do not have love. How loving would “love” be if it was “usually patient, mostly kind, only envious sometimes, did not brag much, was almost never arrogant, only occasionally acted improperly, and was not too selfish?” If that were God’s list that defined love, then almost everyone would be loving already. No one would have to work very hard or sacrifice much to live a loving life. Of course, if a list like that defined love, it would also define God and how He would behave toward us, because “God is love.” What if God was “usually” patient with us, kind to us only some of the time, and occasionally acted improperly towards us? That would be disastrous.

God is love, and God tells us what love is so we can strive to be loving, but also so we can understand Him. Everything He tells us to do, He already is and does. Jesus did them too, and it was hard for him. If we are going to draw strength from Jesus’ example and the way he lived his life, we have to believe Scripture when it says that Jesus was made like us and was tempted like we are. It is erroneous and unhelpful to think, “Jesus was the Son of God so it was easy for him, but I just cannot do it.” It is accurate and helpful to think, “Jesus was as human as I am, and faced temptations without giving in, so I can too.” That kind of thinking helps us to focus, get serious, and expect success. Sure we will fail sometimes, but we will fail much less if we focus our lives and make a diligent effort to succeed. Scripture says Jesus was made just like we are and was tempted like we are.

### **Hebrews 2:17a**

For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way...

### **Hebrews 4:15**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Do we really believe that Jesus was tempted “in every way, just as we are,” or do we believe that somehow he did not really go through what we go through in life? How angry do you get when someone lies about you? Do you think Jesus was tempted to get angry too? But he did not. Why? How did he love so much?

Being loving is the highest and most noble goal God could ask of us, but it requires so much of us that we often give up and give in to our flesh and sin nature. Compared to being loving, being “tough,” “hard,” “distant,” “cool,” or “self-made” is easy. The world does not tell us how hard it is to be loving and that only the strongest and most focused people are regularly successful at it. Rarely on television or in movies, are people accurately portrayed going through the great inner struggle it takes to obey God and be loving. It takes a lot of time talking to yourself and to God, and usually the support of close friends, to be loving. However, that determination, strength, and struggle are not shown, and instead the movies show loving people as weaklings, or show them being taken advantage of by others. Let’s be clear about this: loving people get “taken advantage of” all the time. Loving people get screamed at and cussed at without screaming and cussing back. Loving people give their time to others and are usually not given much in return. Loving people often give other people the benefit of the doubt, and as a result lose money and possessions. Loving people get slandered and do not retaliate, sometimes losing their reputations.

If we examine the life of Christ we see this modeled perfectly. To the world, he was the ultimate chump, a do-gooder who got little in return. Many of his disciples were glad to tag along while he did miracles and other exciting stuff, but left him when he asked for a commitment from them (John 6:66). He was accused of being a blasphemer or having demons so many times that many thought “...he deceives the people” (John 7:12). The religious authorities accused him of being an illegitimate child (John 8:41). One of his closest men stole the money that people had given to support his ministry (John 12:6). When his teaching threatened the religious establishment, they found false witnesses to testify against him (Matt. 26:59 and 60), then pressured the governor to execute him (John 19:12). The governor knew he was innocent, but had him tortured and killed

anyway (Matt. 27:18-26). Jesus ended his life on earth in unspeakable agony, being mocked and abused, with even his clothes being taken as booty by the enemy (John 19:23 and 24).

In reading the above paragraph we see the difference between the real and the imagined. “Being loving” sounds so right and wonderful that many people say it is what they want to do, but when they are being abused or taken advantage of, it suddenly is not fun at all and in fact is exceedingly difficult. Thus, in real situations, being loving often is replaced by self-centered behaviors such as avenging ourselves and striking back. Of course there is the other difficult side of love, which involves restraining our fleshly desires. Like a baby who will not eat vegetables or take a bath, our flesh often desires what is not good for us or others. The loving person masters his or her flesh, while the worldly person gives in to overeating, oversleeping, sexual desires, abuse of alcohol, and other such things. Once again, we see it is more difficult to be loving than to look “hot,” to tempt others (or be a source of envy), and to give in to the flesh. Being loving is harder than being worldly.

People who truly love are not provoked, so it is easy for others to think that somehow they have hardened their hearts so that being abused and taken advantage of does not hurt. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, loving people hurt far worse than the hard-hearted people of the world ever hurt. Developing the sensitivity to be truly loving means being easily hurt as well. Loving people want the world to be loving too, which is why they “hunger and thirst for righteousness” (Matt. 5:6) and why they have “longed for his [Jesus’] appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8).<sup>2</sup>

To the world, living in a loving manner that means being abused and taken advantage of is stupid and weak. That is one reason it is hard to find examples of truly loving people. For example, showing movies of people engaged in the struggle to be loving in a Christian way would not draw crowds and pack theaters; as a promoter might say, “there is no money in it.” That should not surprise us. Worldly people are not interested in the effort, pain, and sacrifice it takes to be loving, so why would they want to see movies about it?

If we are going to love the way God wants us to, we have to quit making excuses for ourselves when we fail, and strive to be loving with the same intensity a champion athlete has in working for a goal or a soldier has in battle when he fights to stay alive. A half-hearted effort will not get us the result we want. Pushing ourselves to be loving will often consume our lives, but the result is worth it.

## God Loves Us

Being loving is so difficult that anything that helps us accomplish it is very welcome. There are a lot of things that help us to be loving, and all of them are valuable. For example, it is very helpful to know that although loving people are often taken advantage of in this life, there are great rewards in the future for being loving. There is one thing, however, that seems to be fundamental to success, and that is knowing that we are loved by God.

### 1 John 4:19

We love because he [God] first loved us.

Child psychologists know how to raise a mean child: be mean to him/her first. Similarly, if people think God has been unloving to them, they will often be unloving to others, or at least struggle with being loving. This is not a mystery, and it is a major reason that so many people struggle with being loving—they do not feel loved by God. If a person feels that God is unloving, unhelpful, distant, and uncaring, then he or she will have a difficult time obeying the commandment to love others. In contrast, people who feel loved by God in the depths of their hearts can reflect that love even if they are in very difficult circumstances. That is why 1 John 4:19 says that we love **because** God first loved us.

If we do not know that God loves us, then we will serve Him, not as a loving Father, but as a demanding God. Once we understand this we can better understand people such as the Pharisees. The Pharisees seemed to be an enigma because they worked so hard to obey God’s laws, but somehow did not manage to love His people. Here is what Jesus said to them.

### Matthew 23:23

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your

spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.

How did it happen that the religious leaders cared so much about keeping the little specific regulations of the Law but missed the heart of it: loving God and His people? In part, the answer lies in the fact that they never understood that God loved them. To them, God only “loved” (to them, “accepted”) the people who kept all the details of the Law. Thus they were always hard on themselves and others. They could not reflect to others a love they did not feel themselves. They did not love “because” they did not understand God’s love for them. Jesus told a parable that expresses what that situation is like.

#### **Luke 18:10-14**

(10) “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

(11) The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.

(12) I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

(13) “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

(14) “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

The paradigm in which the Pharisee lived only allowed him to see what the tax collector did not do. He missed the fact that this tax collector was in the Temple to pray and talk with his God and ask for God’s mercy. God was obviously very real to this tax collector, even if he did not manage to obey the whole Law. Even if the Pharisee thought the tax collector’s actions were wrong, he should have noticed that he wanted to receive God’s mercy and therefore taken him aside to speak to him and encourage him to change his life. The Pharisee himself did not really feel loved by God and so he could not truly love others around him.

### **Love Blockers**

We all know the wonderful feeling of being loved, how it touches our soul, warms our heart, and makes life easier. So why, since God says He loves us, does life seem so hard and heavy, and we struggle with loving others? I assert that many times we mentally acknowledge that God loves us, but at some level we do not believe it, or at least we question it. There seems to be so much “evidence” that God does not really love us. Dan Allender puts it this way:

...why do so many people seem to love so poorly? Part of the answer is that few are...that grateful to God for the work of the Cross. Instead, most of us are somewhat irritated with God that He has not done more to resolve our struggles with an outstanding mortgage debt—or with the debt that is owed to us by a parent who abused us. To be honest, few Christians are that overwhelmed by the power of the gospel to save our souls from hell, because the unpleasant consequences of living in a fallen world feel too much like a hell in which God refuses to intervene.<sup>3</sup>

Allender has made a great point. Many people think that God often fails them. But that kind of thinking has to be dealt with and corrected. God does not “fail us,” He loves us, and if we love “because” God first loved us, then we should make it a priority to understand God’s love for us. We need to be able to answer questions such as, “If God loves me, why do so many prayers seem to go unanswered? Why do I have problems He does not seem to help with? Why are disasters, killing, disease, and hatred so prevalent in the world? Why does He not protect me, my family, and my friends?”

We must be comfortable with asking God the questions we have, and then be diligent and patient in getting the answers. We are not alone in having feelings such as these. Job was a righteous man, and he marveled that

he was so afflicted while evil people seemed to do so well. He asked,

**Job 21:7**

Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power?

Jeremiah the prophet asked,

**Jeremiah 12:1**

You are always righteous, O LORD, when I bring a case before you. Yet I would speak with you about your justice: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?

Habakkuk had questions, too.

**Habakkuk 1:2a-4, 13 (abridged)**

(2) How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen?

(3) Why do you tolerate wrong?

(4) The wicked hem in the righteous, so that justice is perverted.

(13) Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?

In this life we will not get answers to every question we have about why things happen on earth the way they do. However, we must not allow that to keep us from deeply knowing and experiencing God's love for us. For example, we know (or should know) that many problems on earth today are due to the spiritual war that rages around us between God and the Devil. Other problems are caused by man's freewill decisions that are not wise or godly. Other problems, such as those associated with aging and some sicknesses, are due to the fallen nature of the world. Still other problems are caused by unrealistic expectations: thinking that God will do things He will not do, and then being disappointed when He does not do them. Still other problems are due to poor theology that makes God look somehow evil and this causes us to doubt or fear Him, for example, believing that God burns unsaved people in hell forever.<sup>4</sup> No wonder God tells us to get wisdom. If we are wise it is much easier to see and understand the love God has for us.

**Proverbs 4:7**

Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding.

**Jesus Shows Us Love**

Some of the clearest statements about God that allow us to see Him and love Him were spoken by Jesus Christ. Jesus spoke them at the last supper, only hours before he was arrested. He was preparing his disciples for ministry without him, and he made some statements that we must have living in our hearts.

**John 14:7a**

If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.

**John 14:9b**

Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

There is so much theological fog drifting through the centuries that it is no wonder people doubt God's love and His goodness.<sup>5</sup> But if we keep Jesus' words in mind, the fog clears. Jesus only did good for people, and loved them from his heart. He was only supportive, only loving, only protective, only giving, only helpful, and if we have seen Jesus, we have seen our God. He loves us so much He gave His Son for us even when we were still hostile to Him. He loves us so much He set things up so that our sins could be paid for by someone else. He loves us so much He promises us a wonderful everlasting future we do not deserve. If we took the time to think

about it, we could come up with a huge list of, “He loves us so much that...”

We know if we really love God or not, or if we have concerns, doubts, or anger with God that blocks His love from warming our hearts to the end that we can reflect it to others. If we love God, let’s work hard to fully reflect that love back into the world and love others. If we have problems with God, let’s deal with them straight-on, ask the hard questions, and do the work we need to do so we can feel, and live in, His love for us. God says He loves us, and He never lies.

**Notes:**

1. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN. 1963), p. 558.
2. The Greek text of 2 Timothy 4:8 reads, “loved his appearing.” People love his appearing in many ways, including by living a loving life in anticipation of being rewarded at his coming, and by longing for him to come. Thus, in this context, “longing” for the appearing of Jesus Christ is implied in “loving” his appearing.
3. Dan Allender and Tremper Longman, *Bold Love* (Navpress, Colorado Springs, CO, 1992), p. 43.
4. For further study visit [TruthOrTradition.com/hell](http://TruthOrTradition.com/hell) and see our book *Is There Death After Life?* Also, see the entry on Revelation 20:10 in our free online commentary to the REV® Bible at [STFonline.org/REV](http://STFonline.org/REV)
5. People often blame God for things He did not do, and expect things from Him He says are our responsibility, not His. See [TruthOrTradition.com/DontBlameGod](http://TruthOrTradition.com/DontBlameGod) for further study and our book, *Don’t Blame God! A Biblical Answer to the Problem of Evil, Sin, and Suffering*.

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# The ABC's of God

## Building on Sand

by Cara Hanson

### **Isaiah 51:15**

For I am the LORD your God, who churns up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD Almighty is his name.

*It was a perfect beach day. The sun was warming our skin just enough to make us feel like melted butter dripping down corn on the cob. The cool ocean wind unfurled our hair, now raised flags wildly whipping in the salty air. Seagulls soared against the blue canvas, screeching out their melancholy song to remind us that we were buffeted from the chaos of the civilized world. I closed my eyes and sank deeper into my relaxing bath of sand. And then the screaming began. No, it wasn't a swimmer in jeopardy, calling out desperate pleas for help to the shore. It was my children.*

All of that stuff at the beginning was a romantic notion of the beach, which I still cling to while trying to adjust to bringing three small children to my former peaceful sanctuary. I used to have just a few items to bring with me: towel, sunscreen, books, and water bottle. Once you have kids, it would be easier if you could just transfer the entire beach to your backyard. After packing shovels, buckets, sunglasses, towels, sweatshirts, snacks, and other essentials, I think we actually bring more to the beach than we leave at home. But we somehow make up for that by bringing half of the beach home and tracking it through the house. God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17), and if you need a visual aid, simply come look at our floors during the summertime.

I used to be able to sleep on the beach for hours, only waking up when the tide came in and tickled my feet with its curled fingers. Now that I'm forced to stay awake, I've noticed that the beach provides us with many biblical lessons. Besides, who has time to relax on the beach when there are sandcastles to build? Building a sandcastle is the best way to understand the words of Jesus as he described the building techniques of the wise man and the foolish man in the gospel of Matthew.

### **Matthew 7:24-27**

**(24)** “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

**(25)** The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

**(26)** But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.

**(27)** The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Even the best sandcastle in the world will eventually be demolished by the rising tide. Younger children especially are not amused when their hard work of building a sandcastle goes sailing out to sea. They rant and rave, often at the ocean, as though its waves were evil thieves who snuck into shore, clutched the castles with soggy arms, and stole away into the abyss, forever unpunished for their misdeeds. People who do not put the words of Jesus into action are often just as surprised when their lives start crumbling down around them. Perhaps we need to spend more time building sandcastles, if only to understand what our Lord was trying to tell us.

The concept of building a castle out of sand seems outlandish. The countryside of Europe is still dotted with majestic castles that are centuries old, thanks to their solid rock foundations. Their perpetual beauty seems in stark contrast with the modern world changing around them (what could be more incongruous than a fast food

restaurant next door to a medieval castle?). But these castles endure because they were built on rock. Yet, people spend hours laboring to build castles—the largest of all houses—out of *sand*, which will only be swept out to sea. I guess people would feel silly saying, “Let’s go build a sand-shack.” So to save face, parents everywhere are forced into an unofficial contest to see who can labor more in vain to build the biggest and best castle—made of sand.

### **1 Corinthians 15:58**

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that **your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

Our kids were content with their small pails and shovels until another family arrived with enough equipment to build an actual Swiss chalet. My siblings and I used to build sandcastles with our bare hands, but that was irrelevant at this point, now that the Swiss Family Robinson had apparently showed up to throw down a challenge. Nevertheless, I deftly demonstrated to our children that if you pack down the damp sand *very firmly* in the pail and tip it over *very carefully*, you will have...a pile of mud that does not even remotely resemble a castle. But hey, if you stick a flag at the top, it looks like...a pile of mud with a flag at the top. The kids couldn’t even hide their disgust at our disappointing piece of sandy real estate. Meanwhile, our new “neighbors” were loudly and rather obnoxiously rubbing in the fact that their chalet was making our “castle” look more like an ant hill.

Suddenly, God decided to provide me with yet another biblical lesson, as He drowned out their antics with His voice.

### **Psalm 93:3 and 4**

(3) The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.

(4) Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea—the LORD on high is mighty.

### **Psalm 29:3 and 4**

(3) The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

(4) The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic.

What was that awesome noise? The waves were rolling in like thunder, and in them I heard the majesty and power of God Almighty! The tide was starting to come in, and everyone was in a rush to save their creations. *Dig a moat! Come on, hurry!* Oh, how could we be so foolish to think we could deceive the boundary of the sea? A foundation of *sand*? Doesn’t the sea have a right to take back what is rightly its own?

### **Jeremiah 5:22**

Should you not fear me?” declares the LORD. “Should you not tremble in my presence? I made the sand a boundary for the sea, an everlasting barrier it cannot cross. The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail; they may roar, but they cannot cross it.

After all that hard work, the sea came bursting through its doors, rushed in, and in its uncontained excitement wiped out the whole “neighborhood,” moats and all. In an instant, I realized that the size and quality of the houses did not matter; without a solid foundation they were both completely obliterated.

When lives are built on anything other than The Cornerstone, Jesus Christ, the labor is in vain. It’s like putting suntan lotion on children before they play in the sand. They roll in the sand and come out looking like graham cracker pie crusts. Then the sand gets in the food, and you can’t just pretend it’s some organic granola. You go in the water to wash it off, and as soon as you emerge, you’re a walking mud pie. Why is it that we can

understand the futility of this phenomenon, but sometimes we don't get it when we disobey the Lord and our lives collapse like a dilapidated sandcastle?

Jesus certainly spent a lot of time around water and boats, so I like to think that he was a beach lover, just like me. Even though he would not have had the sand sculpting tools of today, it is possible that he experimented with the qualities of sand the old fashioned way, by hands-on experience. With all of the times that he was by the water, I can imagine him sometimes turning his weary face into the breeze, inhaling the moist air, and stooping down to draw his fingers through the gritty sand of the shore. Perhaps at some point, he even packed down the damp sand *very firmly* in a bucket, tipped it over *very carefully*, and discovered...a pile of mud that did not even remotely resemble a castle. I daresay that even if Jesus had built a sandcastle, it eventually would have been destroyed. But a smile would have cracked on his sun-kissed face, during the enlightening moment as his sandy creation was washed away, and his heavenly Father revealed the importance of a solid foundation.

**Read more of these great articles by Cara Hanson at  
[TruthOrTradition.com/abc](http://TruthOrTradition.com/abc)**

# Why Love is “Not”

by John W. Schoenheit

If we consider the list of things that describe love in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, there are fifteen attributes listed. Eight of them, more than half, are worded in the negative, what love is “not.”

There is a good reason for that, and it is the same reason that eight of the Ten Commandments are worded in the negative as “You shall not...” It is generally very easy to understand, and obey, things that are worded in the negative. Take for example the third commandment, that you shall “not” make for yourself an idol. God could have said, “You will worship only Me,” or “You shall only have Me as your God,” but commands like that are regularly debated and considered unclear.

God does in fact make statements similar to those in other places in the Bible, and historically people have questioned what “worship” means. If a person relies on something for spiritual strength is it then a “god” to him? When God says “not” to make an idol, there is little debate about whether someone has obeyed or not. Is there a man-made image or statue in the vicinity that people are praying or sacrificing to? If so, someone has disobeyed God. When it comes to love, love does not envy; love does not brag, is not puffed up, does not act unbecomingly, is not self-seeking, is not provoked, does not keep a record of wrongs, and does not rejoice in unrighteousness. These statements are clear, and greatly help us to understand what love is and to evaluate when we, or another, is being loving.

**For further study see our video series on “Love: The More Excellent Way” at  
[TruthOrTradition.com/series13](http://TruthOrTradition.com/series13)**

# Partner Profile

Corey & Marnie Green

Partnering with this ministry did not come as an immediate decision. Having come out of another church bruised and battered by a set of onerous rules of man disguised as “God’s Word,” we “lurked” for a while. Leary of any organization, we knew we did not want to sow seed anywhere else than on good ground:

**Luke 8:15**

But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

God’s Word tells us that He will not withhold anything that is good from us if we walk uprightly.

**Psalm 40:11 (KJV)**

Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.

**Psalm 84:11 (KJV)**

For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

**Proverbs 3:27 (KJV)**

Withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it.

This ministry goes all out to do and produce good to all who God considers “due.” The resources available to us in print, audio, video and in person at the myriad of events, is abundant (Ephesians 3:20-style)! We can’t believe how much this ministry freely gives to those who hunger and thirst after the things God has prepared.

**Psalm 34:8 (ASV)**

Oh taste and see that Jehovah is good: Blessed is the man that taketh refuge in him.

One of the most settling teachings we heard early on was about “Building an Enduring Work of Truth” (available at [TruthOrTradition.com/building](http://TruthOrTradition.com/building)). At first we thought, “Oh no! Not another outfit that thinks it has cornered the market on Truth!” Quite the contrary. We loved how Dan Gallagher used the analogy of how truth is like holding a baby bird in our hands—we don’t hold it so loosely that it easily escapes, nor do we hold it so tightly that we squeeze the life out of it. We were captured by the tremendous amount of objectivity and, more importantly, humility in which those who teach at Spirit & Truth Fellowship handle the Scriptures. As we learn and grow, we change previous notions and positions as God reveals the depth of His Word to our understanding. It’s okay to say, “Yes I used to be convinced the Word said such and such, but now I believe it says thus and here is why.”

In today’s climate of uncertain investment vehicles, we will continue to sow seed in the good soil of those who handle God’s Treasure (His Word) with the precious diligence it deserves. Thank you Spirit & Truth for your continued noble and good hearts with which you handle this precious treasure!!!

Blessings,  
Corey & Marnie Green  
Orlando, Florida

# Love Yourself

by John W. Schoenheit

According to the Bible, the first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30). The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). Some people love themselves quite effectively. They take very good care of their bodies and minds by taking regular breaks from work, going on vacations, eating right, exercising regularly, and more.

By far the best way to love yourself, however, is to take the necessary steps to have everlasting life. After all, even if you take the best possible care of yourself, you will still get old, feeble, and wrinkled, and will eventually die.

If there were a spa that guaranteed healthy, youthful looking bodies no matter how old we were, the place would be packed. But God promises much more than that! He promises us healthy, energetic bodies that never die (bodies like Christ's resurrected body—Phil. 3:21). When Jesus Christ comes back with the trumpet call of God, taking us to be with him, our bodies will be changed from perishable to imperishable; from dishonorable to glorious; from weak to powerful; and from natural to spiritual (1 Cor. 15:42-44).

It is not loving yourself to constantly eat junk food and to never exercise, and it is certainly not loving yourself to ignore the chance to live forever. God wants us to live forever with Him, so He has made the way easy and the directions plain:

## **Romans 10:9**

That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

If you have not yet made Jesus Christ your Lord and guaranteed yourself everlasting life, why not do so right now? There is no better way to love yourself.

**Watch a quick 10-minute video on how and why to get saved.  
This video goes further in-depth and answers common questions.  
[TruthOrTradition.com/becoming](http://TruthOrTradition.com/becoming)**

# Fuel for the Fire

## How Do I Love You?

by Renee Speakes

How do I love you? Let me tell you the ways: I am patient with you. I am kind to you. I am not rude to you. I confront you when you do wrong and---

SCREECH. Whoa, back up there. Confrontation can be loving? It's really not the first thing that comes to mind when most people think of the concept. It's the other manifestations of love that come to mind: the kindness, the patience, the trust, and so on. But there's a little tidbit right in the middle of 1 Corinthians 13:

### **1 Corinthians 13:6**

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

Well, there you have it. Love does not delight in evil, but *rejoices* with the truth. Sometimes all of the kindness and patience in the world won't bring the truth to light. There is often the need for confrontation—and even for sacrifice. For example:

### **John 3:16a**

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...

Most people know this verse. But have you ever stopped to think about what it means? Love isn't a bed of roses, is it? Sometimes it means giving up things that matter to us; God certainly didn't sacrifice His son because He *wanted* to. But for the love He held for mankind, He made a tremendous sacrifice. He sent His son to atone for *our* sins. And what's to be said about love after that?

### **John 15:13**

Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

Just from these two verses, we learn something about love that isn't always manifested in the world around us: that it can require that we sacrifice, sometimes ultimately, for the sake of our friends, for our Lord's sake, or for our brothers and sisters in Christ. But as they say, "sometimes dying is the easy part."

What about *confrontation*? Admittedly, most people don't like it. Some would prefer to glide through life on fuzzy, happy thoughts. But part of *love* is confrontation. If we had no one to point it out to us when we were sinning, how could we put a stop to it? We may realize our error after some time, and some loss, but where is the *love* in watching a friend stumble and fall and saying nothing?

Today's society is breeding an image of love as a perfect answer to every problem—love can cure feelings of rejection, can mend a bad day, and can make every problem seem somehow less overwhelming. Subsequently, those who believe this begin to develop an assumption of what love is: that it is, in a word, *smooth*. That if you love someone, or are *in* love with someone, you will not fight with them, argue with them or feel any despair whatsoever when in their presence.

Think about it: especially in the fictional influences we're absorbing these days, relationships are depicted as near-instant attraction followed by one big blow-out fight, which is quickly and easily resolved and leads to a peaceful, happily-ever-after future (for example, most "chick-flick" movies). Although *some* of these relationships are less idealistic, regardless, whenever we take in a relationship that *is* depicted in that way, it's planting a small seed in our brains. And that begins to grow! How many relationships, both romantic and platonic, are ruined by small skirmishes or confrontations that cause one person or the other—or both—to believe something must be tragically, irreversibly flawed because, heaven forbid, there was an *argument*?

Has God ever been angered with His children? Why, yes, He has! Read Judges! Those boys and girls (the Israelites, not the judges, though I'm sure they had their flaws) were sinning and betraying God every generation or so...sometimes more than once! Was God moved to anger? You bet! But there is something every parent knows, at least on some level, and God manifests it perfectly: discipline.

So, does that mean it's hopeless? That we need to unplug the television, burn our books and start a riot against relationships? Well, no. But the very first thing we need to do is to realize that *love does not equal absolute peace*. So throw out those delusions that have been breeding since the last time you read that fantastic novel where the hero and heroine were in this polished state of utopian love. WAKE UP, DREAMER! The only place where you're going to find the meaning of real love—in its perfect manifest form—is the *Bible*! Our God is a God of love; our God *is love*! Where else can we learn what love truly is than at the feet of the one who first birthed it inside us?

In a world that nurtures the image of love as perfect harmony, even flawless congruency, it's difficult to reconcile the teeth-and-nails love that God often showed His people throughout the Old Testament—as they sinned against Him over and over. Example: starting at the death of Joshua, the phrase, “The Israelites did evil in the sight of the LORD” is repeated seven times in the first thirteen chapters of Judges alone!<sup>1</sup> And God had to discipline them by allowing them to face the natural consequences that their choices invoked.

At times we can feel *awful* for confronting our friends and family, the people we love. But let's face the honest truth as presented by the Word of God: *love is not a fairytale*. It is not without conflict, it does not take a terrible life and make it instantly right again. What we are required to do is to make certain that when we *do* confront those we love, it is *in* love.

God is love, and we are meant to be in His image; if that requires playing against man's inherent sin nature, then so be it. We are children of the Most High, images of love...and warriors fighting for truth. Be ready to go out there and speak the truth in love...even if it means setting someone on the right path by way of some sharp words! And don't forget, our heavenly Father watches us always with the love of a father—that all-consuming, chastising affection that says, “How do I love you, my children? Let me tell you the ways...”

**Note:**

1. Judges 2:11, 3:7, 3:12, 4:1, 6:1, 10:6, and 13:1.

# Figures of Speech

## Meiosis (Belittling)

by John W. Schoenheit

The ability to communicate with words is one thing that sets mankind apart from all other creatures. God is the Author of language, and no one has ever used language as precisely as God does in the Bible, including His use of figures of speech, of which there are more than 200 varieties in Scripture.<sup>1</sup> When most people say, “a figure of speech,” they are speaking in general terms of something that is not true to fact. However, genuine “figures of speech” are legitimate grammatical and lexical forms that add emphasis and feeling to what we say and write. In the Bible, God uses figures of speech to emphasize things that He wants us to see as important. Many people who read the Bible never think to ask themselves, “How do we know what God wants emphasized in His Word?” God uses figures of speech to put emphasis where He wants emphasis, so it is important that we recognize and properly interpret the figures of speech in the Bible. Knowing the figures of speech God uses in the Bible helps us to understand the true meaning of Scripture and enables us to more fully enjoy its richness.

The figure of speech we are going to study in this issue of *The Sower* is *Meiosis*. In English, “*meiosis*” is a homonym, which means that another word is spelled the same but has a completely different meaning. In biology, “*meiosis*” is a type of cell division. However, in grammar, “*meiosis*” refers to a purposeful belittling of something. Bullinger notes that *meiosis* was at one time also referred to as *litotes*, but in modern grammar *litotes* has been separated from *meiosis* and is defined as the figure of speech in which something is expressed by negating or denying its opposite. For example, instead of saying a person is a good singer, we might say that he or she is “not bad.” Or, if we are familiar with something we might say, “I am not unfamiliar with that.” Or, if we feel that two things are similar, we might say, “That is not unlike...”

One of the places the fallen nature of the world is clearly demonstrated is in language. Words degrade over time, from honorable to dishonorable meanings. A book could be filled with examples, but a few will suffice. The word “story” was originally short for “history,” but because so many “histories” are embellished or even entirely untrue, the word has come to mean an account that has been invented or a tale or fable such as *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. The word “cunning” once meant “knowing,” but because knowledge has often been used for selfish or evil purposes, it has come to mean “knowledge characterized by trickery, craft, or wiliness.” A “villain” used to mean a servant in a villa or country house, but so many of those servants were dishonest, it has taken on its current meaning. Given the downward and worldly trend in language, it is not surprising that we often see the figures of speech in the Bible used in an elevated sense compared with how they are used today, and *meiosis* is no exception.

In modern grammar, *meiosis* is a belittling of something to achieve an effect that catches our attention. Thus, for example, a psychiatrist is intelligent and well educated, but is often called a “shrink.” An auto mechanic is someone who is mechanically inclined and competent (if he wants to be in business long), but we refer to him as a “grease monkey.” This belittling catches our attention but can be ungodly and hurtful. In contrast to the belittling of the world, E. W. Bullinger points out that when *meiosis* is used in the Bible, the belittling always serves to lift someone or something else up. In other words, the purpose of the belittling is not just to put one thing down, as often happens today, but rather to lift something else up.

### **Genesis 18:27 (ESV)**

Abraham answered [God] and said, “Behold, I have undertaken to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.

In this *meiosis*, Abraham calls himself “dust and ashes,” making himself smaller in order to magnify God.

### **Numbers 13:33 (ESV)**

[The spies said], And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the

Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.”

Moses had sent spies into the land of Israel, but when they came back they lost their courage to fight, comparing themselves to the Canaanites in a belittling way by referring to themselves as “grasshoppers,” which they did to elevate the strength of the enemy.

**1 Samuel 24:14 (ESV)**

After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea!

King Saul of Israel took his army and tried to capture David, who was in the territory of Judah. When David had the chance to safely speak with Saul, he magnified Saul by referring to him as the King of Israel while referring to himself as a dead dog and as a flea.

**Isaiah 40:15a (ESV)**

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales;...

The prophet Isaiah compares the greatness of God to the people of this earth. Compared to God, the people are only a drop from a bucket, or the dust on the scales. The scales were the balances used in buying and selling, and were of the kind that we often see being held by the statue of “Justice” that is in many courthouses—a blindfolded woman holding a set of scales. On those scales, the dust does not even cause the scale to move.

**1 Corinthians 15:9 (ESV)**

For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Paul belittles himself, calling himself the least of the apostles, but why he does that is not clear in the verse. However, if we continue to read, we see that Paul’s purpose was to magnify God’s grace: “But by the grace of God I am what I am...” (1 Cor. 15:10a).

**Note:**

1. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1968).

**For many more figures of speech used in the Bible visit  
[TruthOrTradition.com/figures](http://TruthOrTradition.com/figures)**

# The Vine

## Moved with Compassion

by Michael L. Patten

Comprehending the vastness of God's love is a life-long endeavor. In one respect the Scriptures are His love letter to mankind which is rich beyond compare. One aspect of God's love for us is His compassion. Compassion is like the active ingredients in medicine. Medicines are made up of *active ingredients*, which produce an effect, as well as components that are *carriers* helping the body process the drug.

Our God uses the examples of both a father's and mother's love to draw a picture in our minds of how He actively cares for us.

### **Psalm 103:13**

As a father has **compassion** on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

One of the ways a father actively loves his children is by providing for and protecting them, while a mother's love is expressed in the many ways she nurtures and sustains her children.

### **Isaiah 49:15**

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no **compassion** on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!

The English word *compassion* comes to us from Latin and is described as "co-suffering."<sup>1</sup> Compassion has also been described as, "a mixed passion, compounded of love and sorrow."<sup>2</sup> It is the emotion that wells up in us due to our love for and empathy on behalf of another. This dynamic is portrayed in Paul's opening comments to those at Corinth in his second letter to them. Compassion is the active ingredient that will bring comfort to those in trouble.

### **2 Corinthians 1:3-5**

(3) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

(4) who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

(5) For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.

It is the desire of God to bring comfort to those in trouble out of His great compassion for mankind. In verse 4 above the word **trouble** is translated from the Greek word *thlipsis*, which has been defined as, "*distress caused by painful pressure.*"<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Paul encourages those he has brought up in the gospel to comfort others with the comfort they have received due to God's compassion.

Compassion is the deep feeling of love and empathy which puts in motion that (comfort) which will alleviate the distress caused by painful pressure. Paul had experienced this from God and in turn extended it to those at Corinth. Now he is encouraging them to do so for others. The first occurrence of *thlipsis* in the New Testament occurs in *The Parable of the Sower* and depicts this understanding of distress that causes painful pressure.

### **Matthew 13:20 and 21**

(20) The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and

at once receives it with joy.

(21) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble (*thlipsis*) or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.

Jesus Christ established the pattern of being moved with compassion to bring comfort, that is, relief from the distress and painful pressure. What he learned from God he taught to us so we can follow his ways.

### **John 15:15**

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

A study of the Greek word *splagchnizomai* and its connection to many of the miracles Jesus performed is an illustration that compassion is the active ingredient of God's love.

### **Matthew 14:14**

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had **compassion** (*splagchnizomai*, Strong's #4697), on them and healed their sick.

Even though Jesus had just learned of John the Baptist's death and needed time to be alone to process his own grief, when he saw the crowds who had pursued him, he was moved with compassion and healed their sick.

### **Matthew 20:30-34**

(30) Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

(31) The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

(32) Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

(33) "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

(34) Jesus had **compassion** on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him.

Once again we see a miracle of healing brought to bear as a result of compassion from the heart of our Lord. God's love welling up in Jesus brought comfort to these two blind men and they received their sight.

### **Luke 7:12-15**

(12) As he approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her.

(13) When the Lord saw her, his **heart went out** (*splagchnizomai*) to her and he said, "Don't cry."

(14) Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, "Young man, I say to you, get up!"

(15) The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother.

Seeing this woman's desperate situation, Jesus' response was visceral. His love and empathy for this widow resulted in her being comforted by her son being brought back to life. The active ingredient present for the working of miracles is compassion.

The local fellowship can be a breeding ground for this wonderful provision of God. I was reminded of this recently when an individual in our fellowship announced that her back was hurting. When prayer was suggested, everyone in the group was surrounding her with hands laid on in seconds. As we allow ourselves to empathize with the distress of others and respond with the love of God our compassion can bring deliverance with signs, miracles, and wonders.

**Notes:**

1. Wikipedia.com
2. Noah Webster, *American Dictionary of the English Language 1828*, Foundation for American Christian Education, San Francisco, CA, 1996.
3. R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretations of I and II Corinthians*, Augsburg Pub. House, pg. 817.

**Read the latest Network News at  
[STFonline.org/news](http://STFonline.org/news)**

# Dear Sower

## **YouTube Channel Feedback**

Here is some of the feedback we are getting on our YouTube video channel:

I love the New Testament overviews! God bless! Thanks for these videos...

Thank you guys for being around to minister to our ears and hearts...

Your videos are extremely enjoyable and educational. Just in the last day of finding your channel, I have learned so much...

Your channel has helped me take my Bible study to another deeper, meaningful level. Thank you and God bless!

### **Editor's Note:**

Our YouTube video channel, [TruthOrTradition.com/youtube](http://TruthOrTradition.com/youtube), continues to average about 600 videos played per day by people from all over the globe. So far, we have had just over 400,000 of our YouTube videos played. Thanks to your support, we are freely sowing the Word of God all over the World!

## **Speaking in Tongues**

Thank you so much for the time and effort you put into these videos (our speaking in tongues series). This is how I and a number of others in our fellowship learned how to speak in tongues – so simple – but we didn't know to just speak it – trying to control too much I guess!!!

Lord bless your ministry to Him!  
Cathy

### **Editor's Note:**

To watch this video series on Speaking in Tongues: What It Is Not, What It Is, What Is It For and How To Do It, visit [TruthOrTradition.com/series14](http://TruthOrTradition.com/series14)

## **Always Reading The Sower**

I am always reading the Sower Magazine. It gives me strength and knowledge for my spiritual life. I praise the Lord for your work and your ministry.

God bless you,  
Rev. Van Cung Tum  
Myanmar

### **Editor's Note:**

Check out back issues of The Sower magazine online in PDF and Flash formats. Go online at [STFonline.org/sower](http://STFonline.org/sower)

## **The Sower & Audio Teachings**

I love The Sower and the Teaching of the Month, so keep them coming. I am going to be starting a radio talk show program, so you can keep that in your prayers. God has been opening up the doors for me to do so. It should be fun and challenging.

God bless you,

Jim Dunn  
Newport, RI

### **Don't Blame God**

I lead a small Bible study and we went through the Don't Blame God video series. It was very enlightening.

Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!  
The Courvilles

**Editor's Note:**

To watch this video series visit [TruthOrTradition.com/series1](http://TruthOrTradition.com/series1)

### **Women's Sower Outreach**

I was happy to receive the fine issue of The Sower (Should Women Be Silent in the Church?) a couple of weeks ago! Thank you for sending it. I was inspired by the marvelous articles.

Gratefully,  
Julie  
First Baptist Church  
Decatur, GA

**Editor's Note:**

We located about 200 women in key ministry positions and sent them a copies of the May/June 2010 Sower. We have received some wonderful feedback from this outreach effort!

### **God's Grace in our Videos**

I see God's grace in your videos. A lot of people ministering on YouTube don't seem to be doing it in love and God's grace, but in anger or just for the sake of argument (a comment left on our YouTube channel).

**Send us your Feedback**  
**Do you have questions about the Bible?**  
**Comments about our articles, audio teachings & videos?**

**We would love to hear from you!**  
**Email us at [STF@STFonline.org](mailto:STF@STFonline.org)**