

## Living as a Church III

### (Love in Conflict and Discontentment)

As you are all aware, we have been engaged in a most relevant and practical study of the church.

That institution for which our LJC gave His life, that institution that is designed to be a central feature of the Christian life.

We have covered quite a lot of ground as we have examined the Scriptures in order to formulate in our minds a proper Biblical theology of the church.

#### I. Church as the N/C Community

- Behind the curtain (Eph 3:10); foundational text
- Theological Identity: N/C Community/universal and local/visible and invisible/using OT and NT/figurative and expressive

#### II. The Faith of the Church

- Beginning of confessions/creeds etc.
- Practical use
- Proper place
- What we believe

#### III. Membership

#### IV. Worship

#### V. Mission

#### VI. Preaching and Prayer

#### VII. Unity in diversity

That brings us today to a more practical view of our study where we will examine the “living” part of our class’s title {Love in Conflict and Discontentment}.

\*How do we “live together” as the N/C community/the body of JC/the household of God as a group of people united by faith to the risen, glorified Christ, yet infected by the remaining corruption of IS and objects of the wrath of the devil.

Knowing that conflict/discontentment/aggravation/irritation with one another is more than a possibility, it is inevitable?

\*How do we function in that reality? More than that, how do we prosper/grow/develop beings conformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ?

(Eph 4:15) “Growing up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”

I am hopeful you sense the gravity of what we will take up today.

I am hopeful as well that you will find encouragement and help as you seek “with full purpose of heart to remain faithful to the Lord” and his church, even when you encounter conflict and discontentment.

## I. A Guiding Text

In approaching a very broad and complex subject, it is always good to have a guiding principle to help us stay on point/to keep focused on the mission, if you will. We find just that in a very simple but powerful text of Scripture in the book of Galatians.

(Gal 5) {Background/Context}

(Read vs 1-6)

(vs 6) Serves as an expression of the central thrust of Galatians. Faith in Paul’s mind is an abandonment to Christ and Christ alone/attached to Christ/in union with Christ, and that “faith,” that reality finds expression in love. Love to God/love to man, simple but profound.

Paul wants them to know that union with Christ/faith working through/expressed in love is all that matters as they deal with all the false teaching that they are being exposed to.

It’s interesting that Paul links the two. Could have just said “faith,” (Rom 5:1) but Paul’s theology as well as other Apostolic writers understands saving faith as active. Faith works.

(JA 2:24) “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.”

And that active working faith is expressed in/tempered by love! {even in the way we speak to one another}

(Eph 4:15) “Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ.”

\*Now that is what I want to do this morning as we think about this practical reality. Conflict and discontentment in the church must needs be met (honestly and transparently) by faith expressed, working through love.

Must be our focus/conviction/priority/passion.

With our guiding text as a backdrop let’s consider in our second major heading.

## II. Priority and Nature of Love

The fact that loving relationships are to mark the Christian community is beyond dispute. You know that, but I think it would be helpful to broadly survey just a few texts to awaken our hearts and consciences to that reality afresh.

Note with me the following:

1. Priority of Love in the Saving Purposes of God.

(JN 3:16) "God so loved the world, etc."

2. Priority of Love in Obedience

(Matt 22:36-40) {Read}

(Jn 14:15) "If you love me..."

(Jn 14:21) "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.."

(Rom 13:10) "love is the fulfillment of the law"

3. Priority of Love in Christ's Relationship to the Church

(Eph 5:25) "Husbands, love your wives..." "that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word.. so that.. He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.. that she might be holy and blameless."

4. Priority of Love in the Exercise of Spiritual Gifts in the Church

(1 Cor 13:4-8a) {Read}

5. Priority of Love in the Eschaton (New Heavens/New Earth)

Same chapter (vs 8b -)

6. Priority of Love in the Unity and Life of the Church

(Col 3:12-14) {Read}

Turn/Read (Eph 4:15-16)

Now, you know that, I trust you believe that.

But for further clarification, let us consider briefly the nature of this love that permeates the N/T Scriptures.

Without getting lost in the weeds of a technical word study, let me just state the obvious. There are several dimensions of love that we see in the Bible, and those dimensions of love are verified in your own experience as humans.

Romantic/Intimate affectionate love/familial love/parental love. The different aspects of love have different words to express those various emphasis.

But there is another dimension of love that is predominant in the N/T. Agape love, a disposition of benevolence toward another person to do them good, regardless.

Unconditional/determinate love. {Affections/emotions are not divorced, not a cold, unfeeling/robotic love, but not determined by feelings and emotions, but of the will!}

\*What we might call principled love.

\*Love someone for a reason.

\*Covenant love.

\*Feelings/emotions/affections will vary depending on the context. {love your enemy}

\*\*It is that understanding of love that flows out of our Lord's instruction in the SOM.

Turn (Matt 5:43f) {Read}

There is a determination to love people/to do good to them regardless of what they have done or not done, regardless of how you feel toward them. We are to replicate this selfless/principled love in the church. THIS CHURCH

I can't do this.

You are right. This love is alien to our fallen humanity. {selfish not selfless, all about me}

What do I do? Enter faith.

That brings us to our third major heading.

### III. The Necessity of Faith

Remember our guiding text "faith working through love." Paul couples them/joins them together, so it must be in our experience as we encounter conflict and discontent in our corporate life together.

\*Strength and sufficiency to exercise selfless/unconditional love must come from faith. That gift from God that unites us to the LJC! That makes us partakers of the divine nature.

And in order to give us more helpful insight I want to narrow our focus. {faith is a broad subject}

**First:** Focus on the Cross

As our example of unconditional/selfless/sacrificial love, and the power that flows from it. To help us in this daunting task of exercising a love that is foreign to us by nature. Epitomized in (1 Pet 2:18f) {Read}

First, we are called to replicate our Lord's deportment as He suffered on that tree. {"Follow in His steps"}

Reveiled, Suffered {"Love is not provoked," "Love does not take into account a wrong suffered."}

Second, On the cross our Lord procured for us the power to follow in His steps. (vs. 24)

Brethren, you must believe it/must exercise faith in the truth of this text.

(1 Cor 1) Tells us that "Christ crucified" is the power of God and the wisdom of God. That is more than an objective theological proposition. That is an operative principle in your heart if you are a Christian. That same power that raised Jesus from the dead is operative in you. (Eph 1:19-20)

**Second:** Faith Must Focus on the Crown

You must focus on/you must believe/you must trust in the sovereign active kingly rule of Jesus Christ.

Over your life personally and over the church corporately.

(Matt 28:19) "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."

(Phil 2:9) "At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, every tongue, ..."

\*Or go back to (1 Pet 2:25)

"For you were straying like sheep but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls."

{Pastor/bishop (1 Pet 5:4)}

Furthermore

He is presently/personally active in the discharge of His kingly rule. {in/through and by the HS}

I recommend you read the letters to the seven churches (Rev 2-3) with particular focus on the personal pronouns.

By the “One who walks among the lampstands.” “I know your deeds.” “I have this against you.” “I am coming to you.” “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”

(Matt 18) “Where two or three.”

(Matt 28) “I am with you always.”

What’s the point?

#### IV. Practical Implications

There are, I’m sure, a myriad of implications and applications we could pursue, but I only want to emphasize one thing.

\*\*All of the foundational truth that we laid this AM will not help you in dealing with inevitable conflict and discontentment that you will encounter as we live together as a church. Knowing the truth/believing the truth is not sufficient. We must all be “doers of the Word and not hearers only.”

(Rom 8:13) “If ye by the Spirit.”

(Eph 6:10) Answer of God – put it on, take it up.

\*Conflict – you must act as love acts, patient, kind, is not provoked.

You must entrust your pain, your hurt feelings, your sense of injustice, to your chief pastor and shepherd, Jesus Christ, and leave it there. {“Love covers a multitude of sins (1 Pet 4:8)}  
{When gospel dynamics no longer rule the day, descend into chaos.}

\*Discontent – Just no pleased with the way the church is run on a multitude of fronts. Worship/music/songs & hymns/SS program/various ministries in the church/children’s program/outreach to the community/ and the list goes on. {Result, cloud of depressive discontent}

Let me just say this, when you are tempted to discontentment {didn’t say IF}, you must refocus your mind on things unseen and eternal.

\*What’s behind the curtain, the spiritual dynamics in the church. {walk by faith}

\*(Eph 3:10)

\*This should be a humbling reality for us. What's going on here when we meet is bigger than me, more important than my likes and dislikes. {So, I just accept and embrace ??, sloppiness, lack of attention to detail? NO. Does not rule out constructive criticism.}

\*Perhaps the most crucial spiritual reality to focus on is Christ's rule over the church and the implications thereof.

\*Do you believe it?

\*If you really believe it, you trust Him to fix it. He rules/overrules His flawed servants. If He wants something done, it will happen.

\*If you allow discontentment to breed, it will produce disaffection.