

## Withholding Love

*Sin is withholding love—the highest good—  
from anyone, at any time, for any reason,  
in any circumstance.*

**I**n a technical sense, when we sin, we “miss the mark.”<sup>26</sup> While missing the mark is the technical definition of sin, the practical meaning of sin is *withholding love*. Withholding love is missing the mark. What is the target? Loving people (including God) perfectly. Love is the bullseye, and it is the only mark set out for us. God has *commanded us* to make perfect scores in the area of love. Oh that we would grasp this; how would it change the world? In what place would it not have the most profound impacts?

### *The Cross: The Greatest Expression of Love*

Jesus taught that all the commands of the Old Testament are based on love (all 613 of them; cf. Matthew 22:40). Therefore, sin must be, in a practical outworking, withholding love; sin is the antithesis of love. Couple this truth with the definitions of the previous principles, and we should conclude that a

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<sup>26</sup> “STRONGS NT 266: ἁμαρτία,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed Sept. 12, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G266&t=KJV>.

helpful, day-to-day definition of sin to be: *withholding the highest good from any person, at any time, for any reason.*

We must daily commit to giving love not only to God in our thoughts and actions but also to people. People that annoy us, mistreat us, don't like us, don't understand us, don't want to understand us, and even actively work against us. Christ expects—yes expects—love from His people to flow to others. Loving others does not mean that we cannot do things like correct and even rebuke in love when needed, but those seem to come easier to us than showing love to undeserving people as described in the Sermon on the Plain. Jesus commanded in that sermon, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27 b, 28). Paul told the Roman church, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil” (Romans 12:17 a). It has been my experience that whichever act of love seems the most difficult to express in a situation is often the best one. In other words, at the point of delivery, the *highest good* directed to an undeserving person is the thing that is *most difficult* to do. Giving undue love to others only becomes natural when practiced for long periods of time. It falls out of practice faster than any good habit.

“Loving people perfectly” is such a short phrase, but it is something we fail at often. Love easily vanishes from our lives day after day. It's hard to work back into life as well after long periods of absence; we seem to quickly get comfortable in our failings. We then begin to live long periods of our lives in cynicism, unforgiveness, pride, gossiping, criticizing and indifference towards people. It starts slowly, almost without notice, but sin's goal is to steal everything good. If our flippant attitude regarding love persists, we run the risk of having our consciences moved utterly off the mark of love. We then substitute a human-made standard in its place. God's standard is exchanged for a humanistic one, an easier one; one that is met with our human efforts alone, a sinful one. These personal, relative, and humanistic measurements “ease our minds” away from God and drive our hearts to the world. We begin to embrace a comfortable counterfeit, a relaxed replacement instead of the perfect standard of God. But these substitutes are not finished with just lowering the mark—that's evil enough, but instead, they help to

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degrade other holy character traits too. They become a spiritual cancer to our lives as we get further away from God. These times add up and may culminate in a life spent with an unloving heart toward God and people. Ask those who have turned their backs on the way of the faith; often they allowed a hardness of heart to begin regarding a person in the faith (or a group of people). This hardness may facilitate a total turn from the Lord.

We must fight our entire lives for love. The unwillingness to do so is to live a life of sin. It may not “feel” that way, but it is that way. All of us will miss the mark continually. When we fall from perfection, we need to live in grace, forgiveness, and love toward one another. However, when we identify a move away from *perfect love* for others, we need to recognize it quickly and fearlessly. We need to confess, repair relationships, repent (change), and love again. If we choose the sinful attitudes, they will seek the goal of death of every interaction, relationship, marriage, and ultimately every second of our lives.

I will write about relying on God more than a handful of times. What does relying on God mean? To accomplish repentance (a change of mind) and behavioral change by living in love, we should place our hope “entirely” in the person of God. We look like God only through His work in us. Holiness is the work of God in our lives. We are to humble ourselves and admit, “God, I cannot do anything apart from you.” For this is what Jesus told us: “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart from me you can accomplish nothing” (John 15:5). We need to remember that we have access to the love Jesus loved us with: The Holy Spirit is working 24/7 in our lives—perfectly. There is no potential in God. In other words, everything He does is perfectly complete and cannot be improved upon. He cannot live in us more fully or work in us better.

You and I could be used to change the world in ways we cannot even imagine through the outflow of His love through us, but God will not use us in these ways if we refuse to be a vessel of love. Love must be found in our lives and aimed directly at others. Our refusal may thwart and keep us from our best and most useful purposes (cf. Ephesians 2:10).

### *Love...Really?*

Many men in America think the word “love” is too “mushy.” Expressive love makes us feel “funny”; therefore, our lives are not governed by it. (So much for the idea that men are “not governed by emotions.”) Maybe the reason it feels so mushy is that it is so regularly foreign to us. When love attempts to come into our lives, we are quick to push it away. In contrast, Jesus, The Ultimate—The Supreme—The Perfect man’s Man, “felt” love toward people and he was motivated to be born on earth, teach, speak, live, and die for others (cf., John 3:16; Mark 10:21).

Also, the thoughts of living our lives motivated by love may feel just too complicated to us and, ironically, too simple at the same time. Too complicated because men want the facts and a corresponding to-do-list in life; men want to solve problems and to do it quickly and efficiently. But love is “patient.” It frequently demands much time, sacrifice, and long-suffering, and to a much higher degree than men are willing to tolerate. We prefer, as I used to say to my subordinate managers when I ran a business, “Make a list; work the list.” or “Set the goals; hit the marks.” Love will not lower itself to these managerial, business, earthly mindsets.

At a staff meeting, while I was working at a church, we reworked all of our ministries’ mission statements. We did this to help ensure that we were focused on the right ideas and ministry efforts. The elders revised the church’s mission statement to read, “We desire to equip the saints for the work of the ministry until we obtain the unity of the faith.”<sup>27</sup> Being over men’s ministries, I reworded the men’s ministry statement. I came up with, “Equipping men to maximize their potential in Christ.”<sup>28</sup> “Not bad.”, I thought in a staff meeting. I came up with it quickly and it was accepted even more rapidly. The quickness of its acceptability reinforced the idea that I must have been on target with my ministry intentions, right? A week later, I read this quote from Gayle D. Erwin:

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<sup>27</sup> Mission statement of Fellowship of Huntsville, accessed Sept. 11, 2019, <https://fohc.org>.

<sup>28</sup> Men’s Ministry Mission Statement, Fellowship of Huntsville Church, accessed Sept. 11, 2019 at 8:45 am, <https://fohc.org/church/mens-ministry>.

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*“[Love] ‘is what the Bible is all about.’ Incredible! With this much prominence for love of God and love of one’s neighbor, I was shocked to find that such a statement was missing from the great doctrinal statements of denominations, missing from the great systematic theologies, missing from the creedal statements, and most unfortunate, missing from our daily lives.”<sup>29</sup>*

I realized then that I did not focus on the mark! I did not have the right motivation for the men’s ministry. “Love” was missing from my mind, motivation, writing and actions as Gayle had charged.

I often leave love out of the equation, not by intention, but none the less, missing. If love is not in my direct lines of thinking, teaching, communications, thoughts, and heart, the evidence proves me out. Jesus taught on love. He was motivated by love. He loved. He is love. His most famous words of all time have the supreme idea of love in them. Why was it missing again from my thoughts that day?

If this seems real to you too, how then will we properly govern our personal lives and affairs and help in the lives and matters of others? We must be *supremely purposeful* in keeping love at the forefront of our minds. Love needs to become *The Defacto Thought*. It should be our first thought every day if we plan to lead like Christ. How could it be otherwise? “Jesus has given only one identifying mark of his followers [. ...] It is only my love for other people that properly ‘brands me.’”<sup>30</sup>

A part of repentance is the confession of sin. I confess here to my fellow brothers and sisters (and other members of the world-wide Church) that love has not always motivated my actions; it just got away from me. I didn’t set out to forget about love; I just found it missing again. I plan to change in very purposeful ways in the future and ask for your forgiveness now. (I just updated the men’s ministry statement to read, “In Brotherly Love, Equipping Men to

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<sup>29</sup> Gayle D. Erwin, *The Jesus Style* (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua Publishing, 2009 ed.), 27.

<sup>30</sup> Gayle D. Erwin, *The Jesus Style* (Cathedral City, CA: Yahshua Publishing, 2009 ed.), 25.

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Maximize Their Potential in Christ.”<sup>31</sup>)

We know love falls out of its rightful place quickly. But what will our defense be when we give an account of our lives to The Most High? It is the most basic, fundamental, important idea in all of the Bible. Let us stop withholding it and start showing it. Showing love in concrete ways is our highest calling; to not do so is the most elemental of oversights and complacency in purpose. I think we must, in the days ahead, be in constant repentance for every act of withholding love from our neighbor. If we do not—yes nurture—love, most of us are going to see huge chunks of our lives and efforts wiped out for reward as we give our accounts to Jesus on That Day of Evaluation.

### Scripture Passages

John 14:21

Luke 6:35, 36

### Questions

- 1) What are the two things necessary for us to show love to Jesus, according to the first sentence in John 14:21?
- 2) Why are these things absolute?
- 3) What are the three things that will happen as we live lives of love toward Jesus?

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<sup>31</sup> Men’s Ministry, Fellowship of Huntsville Church, accessed Sept. 11, 2019 at 8:52 am, <https://fchc.org/church/mens-ministry>.

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- 4) Jesus taught us *how* to have a great reward in Luke 6:35. What is it?
  
- 5) Read part of the Sermon on the Plain from Luke 6:17-49. Name all examples (types) of people we are to show love to from the passage.
  
- 6) Think about the sins that he has forgiven you of—specifically—for a minute. God has forgiven you of all of these sins if you have trusted in Jesus. Which of those same sins—that you are guilty of—do you hold against others?
  
- 7) What sins do you take offense at the most? What sins do you hold against people the easiest?
  
- 8) Think about loving people outside of your family. Is love governing your life?

#### Aim Point

- 1) Confess if you have been withholding love from people. Be specific. This was covered in Principle 2 as well. If you are still sinning against your fellow man, confess that to God. Let Him know that you need His help to stop thinking sinfully of others.
  
- 2) Write the greatest commands verses (Mark 12:30-31) on paper and place them somewhere where you will interact with them everyday. Begin to pray everyday for God to make you an agent of His love to people outside your

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family. (Your family should be a given; if not, pray for that also.)