

Lifebyte 49

Marriage As A Covenant Lifestyle (Part 3)

Living Righteously In The Days of Chastisement

Topic 1. *So You Talked About It...*

Topic 2. *Are You Looking To Jesus Or Yourself?*

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*Jesus must remain in heaven
until the time comes for God to restore everything,
as He promised long ago through His holy prophets.* (Acts 3:21)



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Topic 1. So You Talked About It...

We realize from contact with some of you that you may not be benefiting as much as you could from Lifebyte 47, **Marriage As A Covenant Lifestyle**. First, picture the two of us. As the Holy Spirit prompts us, we write lessons in accordance with His Word. These are designed to help individuals and families become more like our Lord Jesus as they're *put into practice*. In essence, the materials He gives us are designed to help you change through His Spirit and *be transformed* as the character of Jesus increases in you and your fleshly self decreases.

This process *is* discomfoting as you learn to resist the lifelong guidance of your sin nature-controlled soul and become a person whose spirit is being led by the Holy Spirit. If you truly want to follow Jesus, this transformation into His nature is non-optional, "*For as many as are **being led** by the Spirit of God, **these are sons of God***" (Romans 8:14).

The reality in each of us is that EVERYTHING in your sin nature resists you becoming more like Jesus: "*For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are **in conflict with each other**, so that you do not do what you want*" (Galatians 5:17).

Since the Apostle Paul emphasized this reality of opposition in our spiritual life, you need to quit moaning over the changes you must yield to in order to become more like Jesus. Or, are you among the rebellious of heart who are saying, "Lord, I want to be Yours, but let me go on enjoying the sin I entertain. My sins make me happy, and I'm sure Your grace will overlook them."

If you want to remain dominated by your sin nature but still believe you're okay

with God, please heed this truth, and then consider whether it applies to you: "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have **crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires***" (Galatians 5:24).

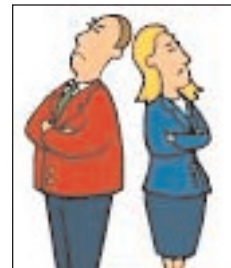
In the feedback we've received as a result of Lifebyte 47 (and other teachings), we've discovered that some people are dramatically changed by what they've internalized, while for others nothing happens. Some of this is a mystery to us since we can't discern the "soil" of anyone's heart, that is, how deliberate they are in wanting to be more like Jesus in their daily lives. How much are *you* prepared to forfeit to be like Jesus (see Matthew 13:44-46)? Are you prepared to forfeit *everything* for Him and for His gospel?

As our Lord so often summed up at the end of His parables, if you have **ears to hear**, then **hear!** This repeated phrase is an imperative, a command, a non-optional directive that means to listen intently, then *take action* according to the will of our Father! So many believe that because they've read or heard something, that's all the "action" they need to do. Not so! Our Lord never spoke unless it was for a purpose: that His words be **applied** in the lives of those who heard.

Perhaps we can provide some insight if the teachings we share seem irrelevant or meaningless to you. Here are some common responses of people who are in this category:

1. "We talked about it."

Remember, the Hebrew method of effecting attitudinal and behavioral change is to use discussion with the intent of *applying* that which the Spirit reveals.



Many of you are using discussion to render *your own opinions* about the content. What does sharing your opinion really get you? The framework which guides your opinions is your old unchanged nature, which won't be transformed just by you voicing your opinion.

Can it be that your reliance on your opinions is a sign that you don't have the Holy Spirit, or that your sin nature is overruling Him? *"The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14). Be diligent and judge yourself by what comes out of your mouth (see Luke 6:45). Your very words reveal whether you speak from your spirit or your soul. And, don't be reluctant to give each other feedback.

The only opinion that really matters is that of our Lord Jesus! His Spirit makes known His character qualities which are lacking in you so that you can humble yourself before Him and yield to His "chisel". If the Spirit of Jesus is dwelling within you, then intentionally focus on the areas of His Word that He's nudging your heart to follow through on — and set aside proffering your opinions.

2. "I'm glad to read materials like yours because I love knowing more about spiritual things!"

We aim this point especially at you younger people (under 50). During all those years of public education, including college, you were trained to be the center of your world. You got ahead in school because it was designed *not* to train and change you, but to add to your knowledge base. In other words, you learned specific sets of information so that you could pass tests. More study got you

ahead in the system, but that on which you were tested was probably forgotten as soon as you laid down your pen.

As a result of this kind of training, you go through our material or even the Bible for that matter, with the intent of accumulating more knowledge. But a mind full of facts will never change your life, nor will you ever become more like Jesus *in character*. Until you put what you know *into practice* — sacrificially pouring yourself out to bless others — your transformation into Christ's likeness will be hindered. It's what you *do* to meet the needs of others that both our Lord Jesus and James affirm (see Matthew 25:32-46; James 2:14-26). Before you quote Scripture at anyone, go *live it* first!

3. "Ever since I've sought to be more like Jesus, I've become more unhappy."

You need to remind yourself that the Humanist influence behind public education bathed your motivations to pursue whatever would make you "happy". You envision God as your "Great Storehouse" whose sole goal is to satisfy your desires. This lie has deluded a lot of Christians whose illusions need to be shattered. The deceptive "health and wealth gospel" and the "church growth movement" were spawned on the lie of *self-gratification* that nullifies Jesus' pattern of *self-denial*.

Pursuit of *happiness* in spiritual matters is like having bad breath. Everyone who truly follows in Jesus' steps is aware that you're afflicted with it as your driving motivation — even if its presence is indiscernible to you. What you need is someone in your life who has the loving courage to tell you how vile you spiritually smell! Be aware that God's means of helping you become more like Jesus is the refining fire of *suffering*, not happi-

ness (see Hebrews 2:10; Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:15-17; 1 Peter 2:21). Suffering is intended by Him to be your change-agent. Please, embrace it and don't grumble! (See 1 Corinthians 10:11.)

4. "I really don't like to be inconvenienced."

This point is connected to the previous one. If you're intent on pursuing your own happiness, you'll avoid any form of inconvenience — any adjustment of your time or energy that calls for the "extra mile". This is why we can state so resolutely that *in over 30 years of following Jesus, we've NEVER met any person or couple who ever matured in Christ if they didn't use the early morning to pursue Him together*. If you can't get up early to seek Him in love through prayer and His Word and whatever resources you have, and to discuss with a loved one the changes our Lord wants to make in your lives, you will NEVER be transformed into His character as He calls for.

If you refuse to make your pursuit of the character of Jesus first in the morning, when will you do this? Nothing will ever become important to you that you don't do daily. The higher its priority to you, the sooner you'll get to it. How can you fully belong to the Jesus you profess if you don't pursue Him daily no matter what the inconvenience?

In order to nurture your spirit, you need an extended morning period that is sufficient to come before Him with earnest heart (see Hebrews 11:6). He's waiting to help you bring about the changes He yearns to make in you, particularly as He's in your midst with someone else who loves both Him and you!

For you young married men who are failing to diligently seek God so that your marriage will grow more in the way Jesus

intends, a consequence of *unfulfillment* will weigh upon you. You and your wife will live as parallel railroad tracks, going perhaps in the same direction but not intersecting in spiritual union as a covenant in Jesus. You've made your own personal convenience an *idol*, and our Lord will have no idols before Him. Therefore, don't be surprised if you encounter frustration on the job because you're neglecting your responsibility at home.

5. "I don't diligently take my thoughts captive; instead, I entertain and chew on them."

This one act of resistance to our Lord's will, which is *taking your thoughts captive and bringing them into obedience to Jesus*, keeps so many from experiencing the love and belonging which other people extend to them. Remember this paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 10:21: "*You cannot hear from the Spirit of the Lord and demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Holy Spirit and the demons as well.*"

One of the most common ways Christians keep themselves from experiencing the love and belonging that's offered by others is **self-deprecation** — you put yourself down. You, who are made in the image of God and for whom Jesus died, knock yourself because you believe the *lying voice of demons*.

If you don't take your thoughts captive and make them thoughts that Jesus would have, you provide the fertile soil for strongholds to establish themselves:

- 1) Satanic-inspired **THOUGHTS** are introduced into your mind.
- 2) Entertaining these thoughts brings on **EMOTIONS**.
- 3) Giving in to these emotions eventually leads to taking some sort of **ACTION**.

- 4) Continued participation in this behavior causes you to develop a **HABIT**.
- 5) Once a habit is developed, a **STRONGHOLD** is built by that spirit.

And, when fortresses of demonic influence — strongholds — have been built in your mind, will, and emotions, your:

- HEARING from God is altered;
- BELIEF in God is shaken;
- DESIRES are distorted;
- ACTIONS are disobedient;
- RELATIONSHIPS are debased.

If you wallow in this soulish fetid swamp, you will NEVER make it to the top of the relational pyramid in the power of the Holy Spirit to experience **Christ-like love**. Your ongoing resistance to the truth of God's love for you will also hinder those close to you from pressing on in victory.

If you're determined to believe the demonic lies, then in a hellish prison you'll stay until YOU take your thoughts captive and bring them into obedience to Jesus. Our loving Lord wants you to hear *only from Him* and to resist any thoughts that are not His. His Spirit in you has given you this power. Only YOU can choose to capture and cast down those self-reproaching thoughts, replacing them with His powerful truth!

6. "If I confront my grown children about their sinful lives, they won't come over. They'll keep my grandchildren away from me."

Too many of you older folks are beset by a prison of fear. You've told us that you're afraid to confront your biological (or even spiritual) children because you're afraid you'll lose access to your grandchildren. But have you considered *God's* perspective? Your fear to confront

your loved ones about their sin is condemning them to *continue* in that sin, perhaps *never* repenting and turning to our Father for forgiveness through the sacrifice of His Son. Isn't their *eternal* destiny more important to you than your own earthly gratification?

Your refusal to love enough to confront their sin is sin on *your* part. You suffer in fear and apprehension that you'll say or do something that will tick your children off and prompt them to retaliate by withholding your grandkids. But your non-confrontation reveals that your love for your grandchildren is greater than your love for your Lord and His desire that they repent and come to Him. You've made your grandchildren an idol in your life to the extent that you're even willing to disobey God in order to have access to them.

Your primary life responsibility is to love the Lord your God wholly in obedient trust, heading for the narrow gate yourself. And, as you go, to do whatever is necessary in the Spirit—*correct, rebuke and encourage with great patience and careful instruction*—to help your family join you in receiving a heavenly welcome. Why would you ever want to be family on earth if you won't be family in heaven?

Consider *in your spirit* what God is commanding you in these verses:

"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect...But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit"

(Romans 12:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18).

Topic 2. Are You Looking To Jesus Or Yourself?

On January 13, in an e-mail entitled, *Would You Like to Get Married?*, we mentioned an offer we'd made to a specific couple: to take part with them in a *Covenant marriage ceremony* to renew their vows as we ourselves had done in Jerusalem in 1994. Recently we joyfully shared in this Covenant commitment with Leo and Lillie Mann, who are in our extended spiritual family. Their hearts were overflowing with loving desire to do this because they're filled with grateful appreciation for all that our Lord Jesus has been doing to deepen and purify their love for each other.

Mike had asked them if they were *prepared* to commit themselves in a Covenant ceremony. We smiled as they looked at each other with the same loving expression the two of us had in Jerusalem 14 years ago, and replied emphatically, "We're ready!"

As with any covenant, it isn't the ceremony itself that's as important as the purposeful determination of the heart toward our Lord Jesus *and* each other. And we can attest with joy that they have a heart for both!!!

If you remember, the covenant ceremony *ratifies* the condition of a couple's love for each other — they're in mutual committed agreement that this covenant will permanently stand. The daily *pressing on ahead* without looking back at the past is how that covenant is lived out. It's a deliberate choice of heartfelt obedient trust that the Spirit of Christ in them will work as they continue to see each other through their heavenly Father's eyes!

"Now the Lord [Jesus] is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord [Jesus] is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces beholding as in a mirror [Jesus's] glory, are being transformed into the same likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Spirit of the Lord [Jesus]"
(2 Corinthians 3:17,18)

Why is 2 Corinthians 3:17,18 so vital?

This testimony about the Manns isn't intended just to bring you delight as you read about a joyful happening in the lives of some particular followers of Jesus! We are hoping that YOU will seriously put yourselves in their shoes and examine your own marriage (or encourage a couple dear to you) to prayerfully consider if it's time for your marriage to be renewed as an *intentional covenant* before our Father.

In preparation for their Covenant celebration we gave Leo and Lillie the above Corinthians passage to reflect on together. Remember, in a Covenant marriage the partners are dedicating themselves to the purpose that their marriage will *increasingly reflect the love of Jesus*, our heavenly Bridegroom. Whatever the Spirit of Jesus within each marriage partner desires to change in order for them to be more like Him is to be the *love-based motivation* of their covenant together.

A covenant means that there is "union". And, within a covenant union of marriage, the husband and wife are purposing to live in union together with the Jesus in them. Only with this understanding of *covenant* privilege and responsibility can our Lord be reflected and glorified in their mutual motivations and actions.

One of the references to the Holy Spirit is the "*Spirit of Jesus Christ*" (Philippians 1:19). Being indwelt by the Spirit of Jesus brings home this critical transformational truth:

Jesus *in* you enables you to be more like Him.

This ongoing work of *willing yieldedness to His Spirit* on your part paves the way for each opportunity for character transformation to take place! If you *aren't* becoming more like Jesus in some way, then please seriously consider these two possibilities:



(1). He's not indwelling you. "*You are not controlled by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, IF the Spirit of God lives in you. IF anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ*" (Romans 8:9); or,

(2). You'd rather give in to your old sin nature than become more like Jesus. "*For IF you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but IF by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live*" (Romans 8:13).

So what does this mean? Jesus in each of His followers enables us to be *conformed into His likeness* (see Romans 8:29)! How can a marriage ever reflect our Lord if *both spouses* don't look to the Spirit of Jesus in each of them to change them? This is where a humble heart that cries out to Lord Jesus in trusting reliance finds peace as *He* sets into motion an opportunity for this change to come about. And don't be surprised if this opportunity is painful! That pain

may be the incentive that's needed to forsake your old nature's way and put on Christ in that part of your character.

A note of warning:

Don't try to "improve" your life in your own strength as so much Christian literature proposes. "Self-improvement" takes place through your sin nature-controlled soul. If you follow this deceptive path rather than call upon Jesus to change you 'Spirit-to-spirit', you'll only find yourself returning to the same besetting sins again and again. You'll be inoculating yourself against hope that He can truly change your yielded life.

Proverbs 26:11 speaks to the futility of trying in *your own strength* to change, and giving up in defeat when the hoped-for results don't transpire: "*As a dog returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his folly.*"

"I'm Tess and she's Monica."

When we came back from Jerusalem in 1994 a new show had just come on TV called *Touched By An Angel*. We'd returned with a thousand pages of research notes and a command from our Father to "Share this message" but we were clueless about how to do this. Sure, we're well aware of certain "theological problems" presented in the show's concept. But as we watched the segments of *Touched By An Angel*, the Spirit of Jesus gave us increased understanding as to both *the message* our Father had given us and *our role* in sharing it.

The main characters in the show were two angels, Tess and Monica. Mike identified with "Tess", the older experienced one, and Sue with "Monica", the younger one eager to learn. God sends the two angels to bring about change in the lives of people. We knew from the Spirit's

words we'd received in Israel that the Hebraic foundations were *not* to be merely informational. Rather, the restoration He was doing would be life-changing for those who would receive it.

We noticed that each episode was built on one of two themes:

1. A person was facing a *situation so awful* that they couldn't believe that anything good would ever come about for them. Their hopeless despair imprisoned them from any trust in God. In fact, most were often deeply bitter toward Him.

2. Someone was filled with angry bitterness toward a person who *had wronged them* in the past. Before the angels came into their life, they refused to even consider forgiving that person. Their only desire was for the perpetrator to suffer for the hurt that was caused.

As we began to share the Hebraic foundations, we recognized that many of the people God sent us to were plagued by one or both of these two themes. He was using us as messengers of the Hebraic truths He was restoring to *show them the way of freedom*. It all begins with their Covenant relationship with the Father and Jesus. (See the center of the Restoration Diagram; also, the Hebraic Article, *The Gospel of the Covenant is the Pilgrimage to Salvation*.)

Our Father didn't send us to get people out of their problems! He called us to help them **deepen their relationship with Him** as He freed them from their problem. Just as with the desperate Israelites standing on the shores of the Red Sea as the Egyptian army was about to attack, our Father uses difficult circumstances to cause us to turn to the Spirit of Jesus with all our hearts. In doing so we grow in the loving trust He cherishes. This is so life-giving, because

Jesus *still* asks all His followers, "***Do you LOVE (agape) Me?***" (John 21:17).

We've grieved over the years as we've watched so many who were once freed neglect their Covenant union with our Lord and choose instead to fall away from Him. Like the Israelites in the Book of Judges, they returned to their old sinful ways. Many became imprisoned in the same hopeless, bitter pit from which they'd once been emancipated. In essence, they *gave up on Jesus* and embraced their sin nature again (see Hebrews 6:4-6).

Keep this in mind: If either spouse is making attempts to change themselves in their own strength, they're relying on their *soul* (their mind, will and emotions) rather than on the Spirit of Jesus. Over time, they'll give up and serve their sin nature all over again. You can recognize this by the way they continue to *find fault in their spouse* (see Matthew 7:4,5).

The love spoken of below is "agape" love. This type of love *looks to the need of others* and *has power* to be implemented. Only the Spirit of Jesus in you can empower you to have this love for one another (see Galatians 5:22).

- *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.*
- *It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, IT KEEPS NO RECORD OF WRONGS.*
- *Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.*
- *It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres* (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

Out of love for Jesus and for each other, you must press on into all the transformation our Lord wants to accomplish in you! *Don't look back* at what you've done wrong to each other in the

past. *Don't ever keep a record* of those past hurts. When these painful memories arise, you must *"take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10:5). With HIS perspective and power to forgive, you can love your spouse like Jesus would!

If agape love is the heart motivation of both of you, you'll refrain from making a **project** out of improving your marriage. Some of you who have been successful in corporate America speak as if improving your marriage is some type of **business plan**. Just know that if you work at your marriage like a project or business plan, you'll keep returning to the same evil vomit. And what's worse, you'll develop a spirit of **cold love** toward each other.

Cold love develops when you *guard your emotions* so you won't be hurt again. It's a cave of emotional protection into which you can withdraw and hide. Once you're isolated in the cave, there's no way you can develop the interactive Christ-like love you need in your marriage.

We followers of Jesus can't allow cold love to freeze our hearts! How could we ever stand before Him having failed to share His affection with our spouse the way He wanted to *through us*? Our spouses need to not only hear us speak of the priority and work of Jesus in our lives, but experience the affection — the emotional side of His love for them — through us. (For more on the affectionate side of love, see **Teaching E-mail 36. Are You Dancing Around Each Other?**)

You'll never love each other as Jesus would unless HIS LOVE empowers you.

Get on your knees as often and as long as you need to and look inside yourself to the Spirit of Jesus for the love only He can give through you.

Anything less only defames Him, and leaves you hurting each other.

Topic 3. Does Cold Love Have A Strong Hold On You?

Many today under the control of **cold love** perceive themselves to be far more loving than others recognize them to be. Sadly, within much of Christendom, people who are beset by cold love can mask it over by doing "good works", believing that their charitable actions are a suitable substitute for heart devotion.

In our workbook *Demolishing Strongholds*, cold love is one of the symptoms under the stronghold of **Stupor & Prayerlessness**. Any or all of the symptoms which manifest this stronghold are (but not limited to):

- Distanced From God
- "Cold" Love
- Hardened Heart
- Distracted
- Spiritual Blindness
- Laziness
- Deceived Self-appraisal
- Unresponsive to others

If you habitually guard yourself from emotional hurt in any form, you've either given in to the stronghold of *Stupor & Prayerlessness*, or have allowed the symptom of cold love itself to control your response to and interaction with others.

How can you recognize if cold love dominates your relationships? You refrain from providing the affectionate support others need from you. You may indeed do many kind acts for others. But your actions only mask over your desire to *protect yourself from emotional hurt*. Through what you do you're able to conceal from others the fear that you'll be wounded.

Another very different indicator of cold love is a *false self-appraisal*. You may think you're walking in Jesus' steps. But

while you openly welcome expressions of care and love *toward you*, you rarely initiate affectionate support *toward others*. Like a 'bull-in-a-china-shop' we wrote about in Lifebyte 48, you're totally unaware of how your reticence hurts others. You're so afraid that you'll be rejected if you reach out that you wait for others to make the first move toward you—even if they've repeatedly affirmed to you how dear you are to them!

Does Cold Love Have A Strong Hold On You?

Do you find that your love flows from an affectionate heart that's eager and willing to be poured out as a blessing? Is your life expression of love growing more daring and more evident to those who know you well? Or, do you find that you're emotionally protective of your heart, and judgmental toward others who don't meet your preconceived parameters of right behavior?

This is a very important matter, for your Christianity is only as real as your love is. Your inability to develop Christ-like love is evidence that cold love may have a strong hold on your mind, will and emotions — your soul. Jesus warns that the *influence of evil* around us and our own *tolerance of sin* in our lives will diminish our capacity to respond from the Spirit's fire of love: "*Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many, and because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold*" (Matthew 24:11, 12).

Law-lessness is defiance of God's ways, basically any motive or action that is contrary to His Word. Many Christians like to think that their lives are acceptable to the Father, but their self-gratifying and wicked goals and motives betray them. The world has such a *strong hold* on their

hearts that they don't even realize how far they've compromised their relationship with a holy and righteous God.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does—comes not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:15,16).

Many of those who are tempted to stray from God's path are doing so because they're finding a camaraderie and sense of acceptance that's sorely lacking among fellow Christians. They're critically examined by others in the faith



and found to be lacking in some area. Therefore, self-appointed spiritual watchdogs

assault their emotions and drive them into "caves" in which they hide the pain and fear of further rejection.

Little wonder that those who are being hurt try to protect their emotions and eventually give way to *cold love* — going through the motions of "Christian" activity out of duty or obligation but experiencing none of the loving communion of the Spirit of Jesus in them or from others.

NO emotionally guarded person can develop the love of Jesus *for others* because they're unable to accept the love of Jesus *for themselves*. What a grievous antithesis of Kingdom living! Whatever loving motivation of Jesus that could be manifested through you is stifled as you cut yourself off from being His conduit of *agape* love.

Please consider this in your spirit: If you're cutting yourself off from the possibility that you might be hurt by others in your family or faith family, you may be giving way to a *root of bitterness* that's nestled behind the pain. The Scriptures warn us that even a little root of bitterness in your life can sprout because we resist God's grace to forgive. And even more insidious, that root *can infiltrate the lives of others* as well:

[Look] carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled (Hebrews 12:15).

Bitterness is really unfulfilled revenge. By hiding out in your emotional cave, you're not only exacting vengeance on the one(s) who hurt you, but also on everyone else who deserves your Christ-like affectionate support but isn't receiving it from you. Your choice to *withhold love* contaminates others as they're not experiencing God's love for them through you. They're being hurt by your fear of vulnerability and your refusal to believe that the Spirit in you can both *work through you* and *heal you*.

It's very possible that someone's bruising or cruelty may have wounded you deeply. It's almost inevitable that in a world of increasing harshness and cruelty you'll at some time be hurt. You may indeed choose not to respond with the love and forgiveness that the Spirit of Christ in you empowers you to extend. But giving way to *begrudging bitterness* induced by that offense will rob your heart of its capacity to love. Gradually you'll join the majority of Christians today whose love is "growing cold."

Let's look at your marriage, or that of someone you care about. Marital love has

been designed by our Father to be a *passion* for covenant union with each other. (Picture the Song of Solomon in regard to your spouse!) It is a commitment to your mate that has no limitations. Love *without* this intense commitment is really NO love at all for your partner. Going through relational motions in no way reflects our God — and certainly doesn't describe the love our heavenly Bridegroom has for His Bride!

HE is the Source of the love you need for each other. Being yielded to the work HE wants to do in you to extend this love is a choice on your part. HE has forgiven you as a sign of His love for you. Are you willing to respond in His Spirit to *fully forgive your spouse*? Many Christians attend services, read the Bible, tithe, sing and act like other Christians they know. But *inside* they have grown distant and aloof from both God and other people. In passive self-protection they've withdrawn from allowing the love of Jesus to be fruitful *in and through them*.

Every time you refuse to forgive another person who has hurt or offended you, your heart not only hardens toward them, it hardens toward God.

If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And He has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother" (1 John 4:20-21).

You may be grieved by what someone has done, but you do not have a biblical option to stop loving them. Should you confront them and express how their action or attitude has hurt you? Absolutely! But the love of Jesus for others, no matter what they've done, is your only heart option. Otherwise, you become

a *prisoner of unforgiveness*, unavailable to be Jesus in the flesh to them by His grace.

Each of us needs special people in our lives who are committed to us as individuals; people who know we are not perfect but love us anyway. The manifestation of God's Kingdom will not come without people being committed to help each other reach the fullness of Jesus in their lives to bring Him glory. Remember, the Kingdom of God is founded upon *relationships* — imperfect relationships of Spirit-indwelted brothers and sisters mutually extending the love of Jesus to each other.

Focus on the Greatest Commandment

LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'LOVE your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these.

(Mark 12:30,31)

When you love our Lord as He commands and empowers you to through His Spirit, your *love for others* will look like your *love for Him*. The second commandment is like the first — it's the same devoted, sacrificial *agape* love. The more you unconditionally love Jesus, the more you will unconditionally love others.

The outgrowth of the Spirit of Christ in His followers is that *His* love for others becomes *our* love for them. Those who possess the Kingdom of God in its reality are people who refuse to guard their emotions. They resist the temptation to give way to cold love. Rather, they *help each other* become what our Lord has called them to be: the loving representatives of Jesus Christ to all they encounter.

Jesus calls each of us to carry out His mission: "*As Thou did send Me into the world, I also have sent them...*" (John 17:18). If we aren't bearing the same divine forgiveness and love that impelled Him, we will be deceived. Indeed, if we are not motivated by a love that can be *extended to others*, we will actually become a menace to the cause of Jesus. This love comes only by the grace He has given His own.

Repentance removes the "logs" within our own vision so we can acquire God's view of people through the work of His Spirit in us. It is the true beginning of seeing clearly — of seeing light in *His* light (Psalm 36:9). This is the opposite of the judgmental, carnal sin nature in us which always projects the image of itself onto others. The way we help others for His glory is by "seeing clearly." Calling out for His love and forgiveness make His perspective possible in us.

The Apostle Paul longed for his Philippian family with "the affection of Jesus". Thus he urges us to abundantly extend love to one another: "*I pray that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment*" (Philippians 1:9).

True discernment is rooted deeply in a love that is sincere and fruitful in righteousness, eager to bring praise to God (Philippians 1:10,11). But there is also a *false* discernment that is based on suspicion and fear caused by past hurts. You can recognize false discernment by the *self-protective barrier* around it that keeps a person from redemptively reaching out in affectionate love.

Many of you reading this have for one reason or another allowed cold love to take control of you. You've lived with emotional guardedness for so long that you can't recognize it. Please, let go of

your cold love and cry out to Jesus for the cleansing and healing work He can do as you trust Him! Holding onto a "love" that's only a duty for you to fulfill will keep you from lovingly representing Jesus to others. And, tragically, your resistance to His love for and through you will defame Him to those who have yet to know Him in Spirit and in truth.

Topic 4. You Cannot Serve Both God And Money

Yet another root of *cold love* may be hindering your ability to love your spouse as our Lord Jesus would have you. A love that is lawless *serves self* as its god. If self-gratification is your god, then it is also your master, as Jesus warned: "**No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money**" (Matthew 6:24).

Pursuit of wealth and its trappings is epidemic among so many westernized Christians. Have you ever paused long enough when a TV evangelist is speaking to realize that *finances* — whether yours or those of their ministry — are a neon focal point? And even a passing glance at the "church growth movement" witnesses to its ever-greater need for stadium-sized edifices to harbor the thronging masses.

What prestige and worldly acclaim emanate from a system that parallels the corporate realm! Yet in the end, what message is sent forth? The love of money and what it represents rather than the love of God.

This wickedness of worldly compromise is why over 20 million people have left institutionalized Christendom. The mega-churches, the crown of a system in which financial resources represent evi-



dence of success, have seen a 15% drop in attendance in recent years. The Spirit of Jesus in the people who have departed has convicted them penetratingly.

They can't *love* Him and still sit complacently within religious institutions which are marked by a common quest for a larger share of the world's pie.

The biblical principle of *separating* your goals and desires from those that are "unclean" in God's sight is a new wine-skin into which your old worldly desires and goals just can't fit! (See Matthew 9:16,17; 2 Corinthians 6:17,18.)

Examine your inner person closely with these questions as a framework:

- Is the pursuit of money and/or prestige your current motivation? Was it ever?
- You may have once pursued money but now have the trappings (home, luxury vehicle, wall-sized TV, vacation cruises, "toys") that your earnings have achieved. But is your delight in your belongings fostering cold love in you? Do you find you'd rather spend any free time enjoying your belongings instead of attending to your relationships and purposes in God's Kingdom?
- Have you ever really considered the *negative consequences* of your *pursuit* of money, the *security* you feel you derive from it, and your *delight* in what your resources have provided you?

A sobering reality: A key reason given for the dissolution of marriages is the grim battle over money. Who earns what and who spends it on what is fertile ground for a harvest of discord and

anger. Unwillingness to set aside wants or to reevaluate the nature of true needs often tears apart couples raised in a generation in which plastic easily overcomes self-control. The resultant tension over how to manage money can turn the most passionate marriage into a battleground dominated by cold love. How does this happen?

Both Testaments make clear that God will not entertain any form of competition with the loving devotion that's due Him. The "love of money" referred to in the following verse is a word that means *keeping what you have and pursuing more of it*. You're driven by what money represents as a value in your life, and blind to the decline in your relationship with God that inevitably occurs when "things" take precedence.

For the LOVE of money is a root of ALL EVILS. Some people, hankering after money, have WANDERED FROM THE FAITH and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:10).

Why can't you serve God and money at the same time? Because mankind has been created to cling with zealous devotion to only *one master at a time*. If the things of this earth and your means of attaining them are your master, then you're going to despise God and all that He represents. He shares His place with no one and no thing. If you choose to adhere to the world system's goals and desires, your relationship with Jesus will shrivel. Is the pain of that self-piercing worth it to you?

On the other hand, if you served God according to His Word's parameters, the Spirit of Jesus would have been at work in you to develop His *agape* love. And, your spouse would be the delighted recipient of that love. Does this describe

your marriage? When you served money and the pursuit of all that you wanted to please your flesh, you developed a heart of *cold love*. Please know this. If you refuse to repent and change your ways, your marriage will falter and crumble. Is this what you want?

Let's recap here. You may have **wandered** from the life of love-grounded, obedient trust that our Father called you to by His Spirit. There is such sober intensity in God's words through a faithful Hebrew servant's pen: "**Let your character [or life] be free from the LOVE of money, being CONTENT with what you have**" (Hebrews 13:5). Straying from our gracious Lord's path will only lead to the piercing **grief** Paul warns about — the grief of *cold love in your heart* as you go through relational motions but have no passion or sincerity in them.

You may find yourself quite pleased with the current state of your prosperity, relishing the comfort your money has purchased. (Actually, it doesn't take wealth for you to be consumed by things of the earth; just a greater drive for those things in your life compared to your hunger for Christ.) But the security of the accumulation you believe your hands have produced is a snare (Luke 8:14). *Self-sufficiency* and *worldly security* nurture a lethargic complacency about the commands of God, especially those that involve the call to love one another.

If you find yourself spending time daydreaming about how you can acquire that next promotion so you can *add to your abundance*, you've created your own version of God — a deity that benignly encourages you to "be all you can be" and "get while the getting's good". And you know in your heart that that's a false gospel that in no way relates to our Lord

— the Lord Who contrasts the true riches of His Kingdom with what HE calls "unrighteous mammon" (Luke 16:11). Ask yourself if your good intentions and Christian phraseology are in fact a smokescreen for your fear of what walking in Jesus' steps will cost you.

Is Lord Jesus against money itself? Not at all. But He recognizes the powerful sin nature within each person who is tempted to pursue that which can easily become an idol and a trap. Let's take a closer look at His words:

- ***"How hard it is for those who have riches to ENTER the kingdom of God!"*** (Mark 10:23). The man to whom this was spoken yearned to inherit eternal life but just couldn't release the tentacles that his possessions had around him. Are you any stronger of spirit than this man was in dividing your loyalty between God and earthly security? Are you going through spiritual motions but really haven't even set foot in His Kingdom's love and purposes?

- ***"But WOE to you who are rich, for you have your comfort"*** (Luke 6:24; see also James 4:17-5:5). The James passage in particular is written for *believers*, since they're the only ones who will be reading (or hearing) it. Interestingly, there was no punctuation in the original epistle. The anguished warning of the misplaced focus on wealth is preceded by an encompassing declaration. If you blithely make plans for earthly enjoyment without seeking first our Lord's will, you've made your will superior to His.

When you know what the good is that you're to do but fail to do it, you've sinned. And His Spirit as well as His Word make clear that pouring out your resources to bless yourself violates the heart of God. Heaping up wealth for self-

indulgence reveals who your "god" is: you.

- ***"Do not store up FOR YOURSELVES treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up FOR YOURSELVES treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For WHERE your treasure is, there YOUR HEART will be also"*** (Matthew 6:19-21). Ask yourself what your HEART really cherishes most. Anyone who follows their Master as His adoring, obedient sheep has no doubt: to LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD with ALL your heart and soul leaves no room for depending on earthly security to sustain you. God graciously intends the resources of both those with much and those with little to be entrusted into His care for His dissemination.

Love and obedience to His Spirit go together. You might want to pause here and check out Deuteronomy 30 for the intertwining of *loving* God and *obeying His voice*. Since all Scripture is given to us as an example, surely we who have been blessed with His Spirit have no excuse when we disregard His voice!

Nearly a century ago Oswald Chambers addressed the *obedience factor* of our relationship to a Lord Who is bent on readying all that we are and have to suit His loving purposes. Note that this relationship allows not one iota of space for self-indulgent worldly pursuit!

"In the Christian life we are not being used for our own designs at all, but for the fulfillment of the prayer of Jesus Christ. He has prayed that we might be "one with Him as He is one with the Father"; consequently, God is concerned about that one thing, and He never says, "By your leave." Whether we

like it or not, God will burn us in His fire until we are as pure as He is. . . When a man is right with God, God puts His honor in that man's keeping."

Again, money itself is not inherently evil any more than food or recreation are evil. It's the *emphasis* that it has in our priorities that makes it evil for us! Our Lord speaks so forthrightly against the pursuit of wealth because of the dire outcome for those who neglect Him in favor of the chase:

1. *Love* of money compels you to wander from the faith. Your heart turns away from God and you no longer hear His voice. You forsake His command to put Him first, and instead lust after the idol of wealth. As your love for Him grows cold, you leave Him behind. The result? As He warned the spiritually adulterous Israelites, you perish. (See Deuteronomy 30:17,18.)

2. As you become increasingly consumed with satisfying the lust of your eyes and the pride of life that money fulfills, your life is filled with all kinds of grief. The wanton excess of the prodigal son in the parable is a sure depiction of what self-indulgence leads to. Is LOVE of money and the sense of gratification and/or security you derive from it really worth it?

Yet our God has not left us to wonder what His perspective—the one we're empowered by His Spirit to follow — is. Our Lord Jesus esteems a love for God that's backed up by *devoted action*:

• ***"As He looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 'I tell you the truth,' He said, 'this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All***

these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on'" (Luke 21:1-4).

Jesus praised the poverty-stricken widow who gave all she had out of her *love for God*. She could offer this sacrificial giving only if she *trusted* that the God of Israel would keep His promise to His beloved child and provide for her. Her example of loving trust bears witness that it's not what you have but what you *do with it!*

• ***"If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me"*** (Matthew 19:21).

To store up treasure in heaven you must love God above all else. That's foundational for "being perfect" in His sight! The encompassing theme of the whole of Scripture is that *love* must be your heart motivation. Only your love *for* God and the love He infuses *into* you can impel you to divest yourself of the treasures you have on earth and sacrificially care for the poor He makes known to you.

You may be missing the point by thinking, "They can't be talking about me. *I'm* not rich." (Actually, compared to 95% of the world's inhabitants, you are!) Again, you don't have to be wealthy to pursue money. God judges as evil a heart motive that places *anything* above devotion to Him. (See Matthew 10:37. If *family devotion* supersedes love for Jesus and is deemed unworthy, how much more will love of earthly *things*?)

Every so often we're asked about tithing. First, the tithe that supports the system of organized religion and man-made edifices was done away with when Jesus became a ***"Priest in the order of Melchizedek"*** (Hebrews 7:17). The new

Covenant in Jesus brought with it a new *priesthood of His followers* which ended the need for a temple and the Levitical priesthood (clergy). But the supply for the poor and needy was never done away with.

Father God had established as a command that *reflected His love* a tithe to help widows, the fatherless and the strangers in their midst who had no means of provision (Deuteronomy 26:12,13). His encompassing love was intended to be lived out "on the ground" by His people. Those blessed with more were to willingly allow the less fortunate to freely glean fields and vines. That's why Paul was so delighted when the Macedonian followers of Jesus gave so abundantly out of their meager means to provide for their needy brothers and sisters in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:1-4).

Consider this: Those who love their money more than they do people who are made in God's image have not the love of God in them. What we *do* at the impulse of His Spirit far outweighs what we *say* but don't *put into action*.

All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

Then the King will say to those on His right hand, "Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me" (Matthew 25:32-36).

When you know you're being nudged within, are you cheerfully willing to do whatever is necessary to help those in need, especially those who can never pay you back? Your obedience is a sign of the Spirit of Jesus in you, the Spirit Who is your guarantee that you'll be welcomed at the Final Judgment (Romans 8:9). Examine yourself now while there is yet time. An eternal kingdom is promised to those who have walked in His steps as sheep "blessed of His Father".

One last point: Ask yourself if you're among those who are suffering from cold love because you *rob God* of the money He entrusted to you to serve as His conduit:

"Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me. But you ask, 'How do we rob You?' In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing that there will not be room enough for" (Malachi 3:8-10).

The chief blessing of our Lord is not money and wealth, but the *blessing from above* out of His storehouse of love. By His grace He yearns to replace your cold, passive love with His passionate, active love. Godly sacrificial love is the treasure above all treasures, the currency of heaven.

The kind of love our Lord sheds abroad through His set-apart vessels, His Church, counters the inroads that cold love may have made in your own heart. Cry out in agreement as we do that our lives may discern *true* and *everlasting* riches, and extinguish from our hearts any desire for the riches of the world:

*[We] pray that He would grant you,
according to the RICHES OF HIS
GLORY to be strengthened with
power THROUGH HIS SPIRIT
in the INNER MAN;
so that CHRIST MAY DWELL in
your hearts through faith;
and that you, being ROOTED AND
GROUNDED IN LOVE
may be able to comprehend with all
the saints what is the breadth and
length and height and depth, and to
know the LOVE OF CHRIST WHICH
SURPASSES KNOWLEDGE
that you may be FILLED UP to all
the fullness of God.¶
Now to Him who is able to do
EXCEEDINGLY ABUNDANT
BEYOND all that we ask or think,
according to the POWER THAT
WORKS WITHIN US,
to Him be the glory IN THE
CHURCH and in Christ Jesus to all
generations forever and ever. Amen.
(Ephesians 3:16-21).*