

CHAPTER 15

THE LAW OF LOVE (e²)

"...You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' "This is the first and great commandment," And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

LOVE TRUMPS ALL OTHER LAWS

One day a lawyer desiring to test Jesus asked him the following question: "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?" Jesus didn't hesitate, He immediately replied, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment," and the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' "On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Perhaps you have never noticed that the Law of Love is the master law of the universe. Failing to walk in love and harmony with God and your neighbor will hinder your ability to be successful in life. It will hinder your ability to successfully walk in any of the other spiritual laws. "Upon the law of love hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Don Ostrom, a friend of mine and owner of a company that owns and operates nursing homes, shares the following incident from his business life in his book entitled *Millionaire in the Pew*: (1)

Many years ago, I learned the graphic lesson that harboring unforgiveness stops the flow of God's blessings. I lost thousands of dollars, not knowing that my bitterness was the cause.

I had a close friend whom I had helped to become successful in winning others to Christ. We had worked together for years, going overseas to help reach people with the gospel. In the course of events, he was accused of wrongdoing, things I knew he would not do. I defended him. As time progressed, certain men treated him with dishonor, and I built up a bad attitude toward them. I criticized them and talked about them to others. My attitude became so bad that I didn't want to see them at meetings. I avoided them. It was really none of my business, but I took offense for my brother. I wanted to defend him, to protect him, but inadvertently I became secretly bitter toward his accusers. I harbored unforgiveness in my heart toward them. Criticism invaded every area of my life. Soon, I was criticizing my wife, my pastor, my employees, and my friends.

One day, unexpectedly, I heard the Lord say to me, "Ask forgiveness of those men for your attitude." "No way!" I responded "They should be coming to me asking forgiveness." I was stubborn and refused to obey the Lord. The very next day, a friend from another country sat beside me and said that he had noticed that I had changed from my usual happy self. He said that something "not so good" was coming out of my life. He caught me totally by surprise when he said to me, "Don, I think you should go to those brothers and ask forgiveness for your attitude." It was like a knife going through me. Here was a friend telling me the same thing the Lord had spoken. It was too much! I knew the Lord was being patient and gracious to get me to repent. I knew I had to obey if I wanted God's blessings on my life.

I called the leader of the group and asked to meet with him. We did meet, and I asked him to forgive me. I told him I would fly to the board meeting and ask all of these men for forgiveness. He accepted my apology and said he would relay it to the others. I felt good as I left the room. Now I could face these men without fear or disgust. As I walked to my room, I heard the Lord say, "Now your beds will fill at the nursing home in Bremerton." I was shocked! What did those twenty empty beds have to do with my asking forgiveness? I couldn't believe there was any connection. We had been struggling financially for several months. I had been rebuking the devil, and calling those beds full, but nothing was happening.

Two days later, I called Sam, our administrator in Bremerton, and asked him how things were going. He said, "Don, we've started taking residents again." I asked, "When did that start?" He said, "Two days ago." Within two months our facility was full. We had lost about \$60,000.00 that year. It was a very expensive problem. I learned the lesson, however, that unforgiveness

and bitterness can block the blessing and protection of the Lord in our lives. We must maintain godly character and be quick to forgive. We must not harbor resentment. We must let it go. The sooner we do the better..." (1)

BITTERNESS CAN AFFECT YOUR HEALTH AS WELL AS YOUR BUSINESS

My wife Barbara and I first learned the importance of guarding our hearts against bitterness and resentment when we were speaking in Ireland in 1984. An incident that occurred in Dundalk, a small town located just south of the border between Southern and Northern Ireland, dramatized the importance of forgiving others if we want to keep our bodies free of sickness and disease. Father Hampsch, a Catholic Priest from America, was traveling with our team. He had just finished speaking on the importance of forgiving others if we want God to forgive and heal us, when an Irish lady in her late forties approached my wife and me for prayer. It appeared that every joint of her body was swollen from rheumatoid arthritis; it was obvious that she was in severe pain. I asked her if she understood what Fr. Hampsch had just taught concerning the importance of forgiving others if we want God to forgive and heal us; she related that she understood. I asked her if she was holding bitterness toward anyone, she replied, "Yes, many people." We led her in a simple prayer in which she asked her Heavenly Father to forgive her for the bitterness and resentment she had harbored toward these people, and she named the people quietly before the Lord. I reminded her that Fr. Hampsch had taught that it was important that she contact each of these people and ask them to also forgive her. She agreed she would do so. When she finished her prayer, we prayed for her healing, but there was no apparent change. Her joints were still filled with pain.

Frankly, I left the meeting that afternoon thinking the lady hadn't received a thing from the Lord. That night my wife and I traveled to Northern Ireland where we would speak in a number of meetings in and around the city of Belfast during the following week.

On the following Friday, Barbara and I returned to Dundalk to speak in a Christian businessmen's meeting, which was to be held in the same restaurant in which we had prayed for the woman with arthritis the previous week. When we walked into the restaurant there was the woman, and she was smiling from ear to ear. In fact she had brought ten or twelve other people with her. She ran to Barbara and me, threw her arms around us, and exclaimed, "I visited the doctor yesterday, and all the arthritis is gone." Since that experience in Ireland, I have observed Christian people all over the world who have allowed bitterness and resentment to become established in their heart, and it has hindered their prayers and allowed the enemy of their souls to inflict their bodies with disease and pain.

OBEDIENCE CAUSES THE BLESSINGS TO COME UPON US

Having witnessed the negative effects that bitterness and resentment can have on a person's health and business success, I would like for you to clearly understand the following important principle taught in the Creator's Handbook:

Moses proclaimed this important principle to the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy: "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today,... "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:" (Deuteronomy 28:1 & 2). Then in the next thirteen verses he describes blessings of prosperity, health, and abundant life that would come upon the Israelites if they carefully observed all the commandments of the law. These blessings describe what is referred to in the New Testament as the "Blessings of Abraham" (Galatians 3:14).

Everyone wants prosperity, health, and abundant life; but in order to receive them, it is necessary that we obey the law of the Lord.

DISOBEDIENCE ALLOWS THE CURSES TO COME UPON US

After Moses proclaimed the blessings of Abraham, he declared the curse of the law: "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you" (Deuteronomy 28:15). The curses named in the next fifty-three verses included poverty, sickness and death. They include eleven specific diseases, and "Also every sickness and every plague, which is not

written in this Book of the Law..." (Deuteronomy 28:61). These verses describe what is referred to in the New Testament as the "curse of the law" (Galatians 3:13).

A NEW COMMANDMENT I GIVE UNTO YOU

The Old Testament believer, the Israelite had over six hundred laws to obey, but you and I as New Testament believers have only one law to obey, the "Law of Love." Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (John 13:34). The Apostle Paul declares says, "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Galatians 5:14; Romans 13:8-10).

UNFOGIVENESS CAN HAMPER YOUR BUSINESS LIFE

While I understood that negative emotions such as resentment or bitterness would affect a person's health, it never occurred to that it could affect one's success in the business world, not at least until very late in my business career. The construction industry tends to be a rather rough and tumble industry. Looking back, I can recall a number of occasions when I have allowed anger or resentment to develop toward an individual who was acting in a very adversarial manner toward me or my company. Knowing what I now know, I am sure that my negative attitude toward these individuals not only affected my judgment in dealing with them, but hardened them against us. Perhaps even worse, it prevented my faith from producing victory in the situation.

One incident in particular stands out in my mind. A man had done something to me that was not right and in fact not even lawful, and I became offended. I decided to teach this individual a lesson and I started a major contention with him. One evening I was reading my Bible when I came across the following admonition: "For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use that liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all of the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:13-15). I immediately saw that I had gotten out from under the law and had opened myself up to sickness and disease. I dropped to my knees and asked the Lord to forgive me. The next morning at 7:30, I called this man (he lived about a thousand miles from me) and asked him to forgive me. He was so shocked he didn't know what to say. I don't believe he ever said that he forgave me, but I got the bitterness out of my heart, and it was very liberating.

When problems arise in our personal or business lives, they may not always be caused by the devil; they might be caused by bitterness and resentment on our part. We can become the problem through unforgiveness and fleshly actions or reactions. When we teach about faith we often use Mark 11:23 & 24 to describe and demonstrate the "God kind of faith." But we nearly always overlook the next verse: "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses"(Mark 11:25 & 26). You simply cannot get an answer to your prayer if you are harboring unforgiveness in your heart toward another. It is often the little things that keep our faith from working and our prayers from being answered. Often it's bitterness against another that keeps our voices from being heard in heaven.

WALKING IN LOVE TOWARD OTHERS IS DIFFICULT

Walking in love toward others, particularly those who are not being kind to you, is an area of the faith walk which I have personally found to be the most difficult. However, it is a important part of the faith message, and we must learn to walk in the love of God if we want to experience the blessings of God in our lives and our businesses. It certainly is not easy to walk in love toward someone, especially when they are not being kind toward you, but I know from personal experience that it is the right thing to do if we want God's blessings in our lives.

LOVE NEVER FAILS

Several years ago my office manager, a woman who had worked with me for a number of years, had a rather sharp disagreement with one of my vice presidents. During the verbal exchange he apparently cursed at her and said some rather unkind things. She became very upset and angry and filed a sexual harassment complaint against our company with the Federal Government. She was in poor

health at the time, and was experiencing marital problems, which no doubt contributed to her anguish. In America, a sexual harassment lawsuit can be very expensive for a company to defend against, and it could have cost our company a great deal of money. Several weeks after she filed the complaint she resigned from her position and prepared to leave the company. I decided that even though she was suing our company that we would organize a company luncheon in her honor and present her with a nice going away gift (something we normally did when a long-term employee would leave the firm). She was apparently so embarrassed by the fact that we were blessing her, even though she was in essence cursing us, that she feigned sickness and asked to be excused from attending the luncheon. Following the luncheon we sent the gifts to her home and a week later she withdrew the sexual harassment charge. The Manufacturer's Handbook says, "Love never fails" (I Corinthians 13:8).

FAITH WORKS THROUGH LOVE!

"And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (I Corinthians 13:13). As we have said many times in previous chapters, "faith is important," but the Creator's Handbook clearly says that love is greater than faith. Furthermore, the handbook states that faith works through love (Galatians 5:6). If faith works through love then it is essential to your success that you develop and walk in the "God kind of love."

The English word **love** used in the above scriptures is the translation of the Greek word **agape** (ag-ah'-pay). But the English word **love** doesn't accurately reflect the full meaning of **agape**. Agape describes the "God kind of love," wherein God makes a deliberate choice to exercise love toward us. The agape love, to which we are to aspire, requires no special relationship, and even responds in love toward those who wrong us. It is quite unlike human love, which loves only those with whom we have a relationship and those who love us. The thirteenth chapter of Corinthians encourages us to overlook the faults of others and refuse to react to the unkind things that others may do or say to us. Thinking and talking about the wrongs and hurts that other people have inflicted upon us causes anger, bitterness, strife and resentment to become established in our hearts, and those negative emotions in turn cause us to react negatively toward others. Even worse, it allows the demon forces of hell to attack our minds and our bodies, and hinder the development and exercise of our faith.

LOVE IS NOT LOVE UNTIL IT IS SPOKEN

Faith must be in your heart, and in your mouth, to be effective (Romans 10:8). It is the same with love; it must be in your heart and in your mouth to produce results. You can have a heart full of love for your wife or sweetheart, but you must confess your love to her and act upon your love for it to produce results. Your love is not love until it is confessed and acted upon. Walking in love toward others is not easy. It requires you to change; it requires a new way of life.

"And then take on an entirely new way of life--a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you"(Ephesians 4:22-24 MSG).

ONE FINAL ADMONITION

One day the apostle Peter asked Jesus "How often shall I allow a person to sin against me, and I forgive him? Up till seven times?" Jesus answered, "Not seven times, but up to seventy times seven." Then Jesus related the following story which has a surprisingly harsh ending about a man who would not forgive. In the story, Jesus compared the kingdom of heaven to a king who decided to collect all the debts that were owed to him (Matthew 18:23-35). One of the king's debtors owed him a great deal of money, the equivalent of \$10,000,000 in today's currency. But the man could not repay the king, and the king ordered that everything the man owned, including the man, his wife, and his children be sold, and the money gained from the sale be applied toward the man's debt. The man fell at the king's feet, begged him earnestly to have patience with him, and promised that he would repay all he owed to the king. The king was moved with compassion for the man and forgave him all his debt. Now, later the man whom the king had forgiven this extremely large debt, began to settle accounts with his own debtors. One of them, a poor man, owed him the equivalent of \$20.00 in today's currency, but could not repay it. The debtor begged the man, "Give me time, and I will pay you all of it." But the man whom the king had forgiven the \$10,000,000 debt was unwilling to forgive

his debtor the \$20.00 debt, and had him thrown into prison until he should pay his debt. The king, upon hearing about the incident, was very upset and had the man whom he had forgiven brought before him. The king said to the man, "I forgave you all that debt, because you asked me. Shouldn't you have had had compassion and done the same to your fellow servant?" The king was very angry and delivered him over to the tormentors until he should pay all that was due to the king.

Jesus said, "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (Matthew 18:35). In this illustration, Jesus makes it very clear: if we do not forgive our fellow man, our Heavenly Father will not forgive us! He will remove his protective shield and allow the tormentors (the demon spirits of hell) to exact their deadly toll on our mind and body.

(1) *Millionaire in the Pew* copyright 2004, by Don Ostrom, Published by Insight Publishing Group, Tulsa, OK 74137 (Pg 132-133)