

The Missing Fundamental Belief Love as a Key to Church Renewal

Keith Augustus Burton, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

In 1872, when James White listed the first set of SDA fundamental beliefs, he prefaced the propositions with the words: "This is not to secure uniformity." He shared the sentiment of other Adventists of his era who feared that the establishment of creeds was the first step to the kind of institutionalization that placed the authority of the church over the authority of scripture.¹ Unfortunately, White's very act established a creed setting precedent, the most recent of which is published under the imperious title, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*²--a title that is definitely meant to secure uniformity.

The quest to secure doctrinal uniformity has resulted in a confusion of priorities. We emphasize belief over behavior, text over transformation, rules over reform, conformity over conversion, doctrine over deliverance, and law over love. As a result, we have become a pretensive community. People use terms like "He's a *good* Adventist" to describe an "SOP" toting vegan. In some Adventist cultures, theater attendance is vehemently condemned by the same castigating Pharisees who subscribe to premium cable channels and hold membership with Blockbuster's. We have become a community that is defined by

¹Recall the warning of J. N. Loughborough recorded in Alayne Thorpe, ed., *Welcome to the Family* (Takoma Park: Home Study International, 1987), 109: "The first step of apostasy is to get up a creed, telling us what we shall believe. The second is to make that creed a test of fellowship. The third is to try members by that creed. The fourth is to denounce as heretics those who do not believe in that creed. And, fifth, to commence persecution against such."

²(Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1988).

our external decor rather than our internal fuel. We have become a community whose preoccupation with the legalistic demands from the left, right, and center, has caused us to forget that Christianity's *raison d'être* is to show and share the love of God.

This "great omission" is not limited to Adventism. Much of Christendom has fallen into the trap of emphasizing theory at the expense of praxis. Many denominations emphasize doctrinal agenda over love. Even the pre-eminent evangelical spokesperson, John R. W. Stott, in his celebrated apology, *Basic Christianity*,³ only reserves a couple of sentences to the importance of love in the Christian community.⁴

In this paper, I propose that love provides an essential key for church renewal. The majority of the paper is based on New Testament evidence for the centrality of love in the Christian church. The common Christian term for love, *agape*, was probably chosen for its emotional neutrality.⁵ Unlike *eros* or *phile*,

³(Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1971).

⁴See *ibid.*, 140, where Stott remarks, "Love for the Christians, however unlikely it may seem in prospect, is a new and real experience. In a Christian fellowship of all types, backgrounds and ages, there are few depths of friendship and mutual sharing to be discovered. The Christian's closest friends will probably be Christians...."

⁵See discussion in Ethelbert Stauffer, "*agapaō* ktl," *TDNT* 1:36-38. Also see my forthcoming guided approach to 1 Corinthians 13 in "Love Is..." *Sabbath School Leadership* 2,3 (1998). The neutrality of *agapē* is unlike '*ahabāh*', its Hebrew counterpart. '*ahabāh*' is emotionally charged, and is used not only for the love of God to Israel, or neighbor to neighbor, but is also used to describe sexual and philial love. See Gottfried Quell, "*agapaō* ktl," *TDNT* 1:21-35.

agape is a love that is based on principle.⁶ In our investigation of the principle upon which love is founded, we will first determine the object of love as we examine community boundaries. We will then look at the necessity of love as we establish community identity. Finally, we will explore love in action as we address community relationships.

LOVE AND COMMUNITY BOUNDARIES

The old adage declares, "Charity begins at home." This was definitely true for the New Testament Christian community. However, the influence of liberation and justice issues on contemporary scholarship, has led to the perception that Christian love is primarily directed to those outside of the community. While the emphasis on global justice does have a biblical foundation, the original *Sitz im Leben* of the Christian communities is often forgotten. The primary concern of the biblical writers was justice *within* the community. Hence the repeated New Testament commands to love the neighbor, the brother, and one another.

Love Your Neighbor

The original command to love neighbor was given to the Israelites in Leviticus 19:18. Love of neighbor comprised both

⁶See comment by Stauffer, "*agapaō*," 37: "The specific nature of *agapān* becomes apparent at this point. *Erōs* is a general love of the world seeking satisfaction whenever it can. *Agapān* is a love which makes distinctions, choosing and keeping to its object. *Erōs* is determined by a more or less indefinite impulsion towards its object. *Agapān* is a free and decisive act determined by its subject. *Erān* in its highest sense is used of the upward impulsion of man, of his love for the divine. *Agapān* relates for the most part to the love of God, to the love of the higher lifting up the lower, elevating the lower above others. *Agapān* must often be translated "to show love"; it is a giving active love on the other's behalf." If categorized by the Sophists, *agapē* would fall under the genus of *nomos* as opposed to *phusis*.

moral and ethical responsibilities to members of the community.⁷ The prophets continuously agitated the nation's conscience as they championed the cause of the widow, orphaned, and disenfranchised. Indeed, the Isaianic vision of utopia was one in which peace and prosperity was a reality for all in the community. The love of neighbor theme is also evident in Jewish literature, where the locus again is the religious community.⁸ It is no wonder, then, that the command to love neighbor is liberally featured in the New Testament.⁹ While often depicted as a single commandment, the New Testament portrays it as a command that embraces the numerous demands in the *Torah* that govern

⁷See Stauffer, "*agapaō*," 38-39: "The same exclusive motive asserts itself in the principle of love for the neighbor. It is a love which makes distinctions, which chooses, which prefers and overlooks. it is not a cosmopolitan love embracing millions. The Israelite begins his social action at home. He loves his people with the same preferential love as is shown it by God."

⁸For a survey of love commands in Jewish literature, see Pheme Perkins, *Love Commands in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1982), 10-26. But see also James Dunn, *Romans* (Waco: Word, 1988), 779, who observes that "... explicit references to Lev 19,18 are lacking in Jewish literature prior to Paul, and the allusions to it show that it was given no particular prominence."

⁹Cf. Mt 19,19; 22,39; Mk 12,31; Lk 10,27; Rom 13,9; Gal 5,14; Jas 2,8. Norman Young, "The Commandment to Love Your Neighbor as Yourself and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10,25-27)," *AUSS* 21 (1983), 265-72, warns that the term "as you love yourself" should not be viewed as a "third commandment." He suggests that the commandment is best translated, "You shall love your neighbor as though you were loving yourself." Note especially his comment on *ibid.*, 267: "Clearly, "as though loving yourself" assumes that no man hates his own flesh, that in treating the other as though treating himself he will act with compassion."

social relationships within the community.¹⁰ Loving the neighbor is a salvific issue, which Jesus parallels with love for God.¹¹

There has been a lot of discussion on the identity of the neighbor (*plēsion*). Probably influenced by the global mission of Christianity, many have concluded that the neighbor is not confined to the Christian community.¹² However, I read the

¹⁰Cf. Mt 22,39 (the "law and prophets" are partially dependent on this); Rom 13,9 ("the commandments... are summed up in this sentence"); Gal 5,14 ("for the whole law is fulfilled in one word"); Jas 2,10 ("whoever keeps the whole law, but falls short in one part, he has become a transgressor of all.") But see also Mt 19,19 where love of neighbor is appended to a list of stipulations from the decalogue (18-19). This should probably be understood as a summary. Notice comment by Donald W. Burdick, "James," in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor., *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 179: This commandment "... is called "royal" because it is the supreme law to which all other laws governing human relationships are subordinate."

¹¹Matthew's use of *homoia* (22,39), demonstrates that love for neighbor is just as important as love to God. Both the scribe in Mk 12,33, and the lawyer in Lk 10,27 recognize that honoring the double love command is essential to salvation.

¹²Eg. Dunn, *Romans*, 779f, who recognizes that the original context of *plēsion* in Leviticus 19,18 was the community member, but suggests that Paul uses it with more flexibility. However, he fails to make a connection between *plēsion* and *allelous* in Rom 13,8 (see *ibid.*, 776), although he does allow for the possibility: "Perhaps it would be best to say that Paul has fellow believers particularly in view but not in an exclusive way." See also Douglas J. Moo, *James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 94, who claims that James (2,6) "... argues that love for the neighbor, the heart of 'the royal law', forbids the church from discriminating against any who might enter its doors." Further, Pedrito U Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987), 65, who in establishing his audience hypothesis claims, "James probably is not writing to an

evidence differently. For instance, in Matthew's record of the antitheses, although the neighbor (*plēsion*) and enemy (*echthros*) are contrasted, the distinction between the two is not invalidated.¹³ The enemy is *still* the enemy. This antithesis serves mainly to emphasize the abrogation of the Rabbinic interpretation of the *lex talionis*. It is also obvious that both Paul and James have the community in mind when they speak of the neighbor.¹⁴ Neighbors are involved in a love relationship that is based on reciprocity. The enemy can never be a neighbor until s/he acts neighborly.

Indeed, this mandate of reciprocity seems to be the principle behind the Lukan parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10,25-37). Jesus does not intend to demolish community barriers with this parable, he simply aims to demonstrate their permeability. The parable demonstrates the hypocrisy of those who claim to be

exclusively Christian community." However, see also *ibid.*, 62, where the opposite is suggested, "This verse [Jas. 2,5] poses a problem especially in Christian communities where there are many wealthy members."

¹³Mt 5,43-47. In Jewish tradition, the love of neighbor theme was often buttressed with the command to hate enemy. See, for example, E. F. Sutcliffe, "Hatred at Qumran," *Revue de Qumran* 2 (1959-60): 345-55.

¹⁴Notice how in Rom 13,8 and Gal 5,13-14 the term "neighbor" is used interchangeably with "one another." And the context of James 2,8 demands that the community is in view here (see *adelphos* in 2,14-17). See comments by Stauffer, "*agapaō*," 51: "Neighbourly love, once a readiness to help compatriots in the covenant people of Israel, is now service rendered to fellow citizens in the new people of God." Also, *ibid.*: "[In James, love] means taking seriously the basic affirmation that all who love God are my brothers and are not to be put in the background even though they come shabbily dressed (2,14), since God has thought them good enough to be called His *basileia*."

neighbors. As Perkins recognizes, this is not an anti-clerical parable,¹⁵ but rather an indictment on every member in the community who does not practice love towards the brother.¹⁶ It should really be called “The Parable of the Hypocritical Neighbors.”

The Lucy Byard incident provides a modern parallel to this parable.¹⁷ This was the straw that broke the camel's back in Seventh-day Adventist race relations. Byard, a Black woman whose genes were predominantly white, was taken to the SDA Sanitarium and Hospital in Takoma Park and refused admission when it was discovered that she had negroid ancestry. The true neighbor was the Freedmen's Hospital in Virginia. Unfortunately, Byard died before the Freedmen's staff could fully execute its role as Good Samaritan.

Love Your Brother

Another form of the love command pertains to the love of brother (*adelphos*). The generic term “brother” is a more affectionate term than neighbor, and refers to one who is in close

¹⁵Perkins, *Love Commands*, 62.

¹⁶When we consider Luke 10,36, we recognize that Young, “Love Your neighbor,” 271-72, is wrong in viewing the injured man as the “neighbor” in this parable. The question, “which of the three appears to you to be the neighbor?” is definitely intended to place the focus on the potential rescuers, and not the victim.

¹⁷For details about the Lucy Byard incident see Louis B. Reynolds, *We Have Tomorrow: The Story of Seventh-day Adventists with an African Heritage* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1984), 293f; also Keith A. Burton, “Seventh-day Adventist Church,” article in *Encyclopedia of African American Religions*, edited by Larry G. Murphy, et al. (New York: Garland, 1993), 684.

relationship with another.¹⁸ The term itself is used primarily for blood relationships, and conjures the image of family. If I am your brother, we must have a common parent. On the basis of this familial relationship, the Christian is commanded to love his/her relative.¹⁹

The use of this affectionate term to describe community relationships is by no means unique to New Testament Christianity. “Brother” was already employed to describe a community member in the OT and Qumran,²⁰ and was also used in Greek fraternities.²¹ As Raymond Brown recognizes, “The Christian use of ‘brother’ for coreligionists is common in the NT (over 200 times), being found in every work except Titus and Jude.”²² A sincere brotherly love (*philadelphia*) is an essential

¹⁸See Hans Freiherr von Soden, “*adelphos*,” *TDNT* 1:144-46; and J. Beutler, “*adelphos*,” *EDNT* 1:28-30.

¹⁹Cf. Heb 13,1 (“Let brotherly love continue”); 1 Pet 2,17 (“Love the brotherhood (*adelphoteta*)”); 1 Jn 4,21 (“He who loves God should also love his brother”).

²⁰Cf. Jer 22:18; 1QS 6,10, 22; CD 7,1-2.

²¹For further discussion see Brown, *John*, 269-70.

²²Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 270. Brown, *ibid.*, 270, further comments: “... in Johannine thought the spiritual term “brothers” must be confined to “those who believe in his [Jesus] name....” I find it strange that some will question the close relationship associated with the term. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 28, for instance, contends that in the first epistle of John, ““Brother” means... not especially the Christian comrade in the faith, but one's fellowman, the ‘neighbor.’” See also, *ibid.*, 53-54.

component of the Christian's character,²³ and it is impossible for a Christian to love God and not brother (1 Jn 4,21). Only by loving the brother can the Christian remain within the boundaries of Godly fellowship.²⁴

Love One Another

Another formulation of the Christian love command is found in the imperative: "Love one another."²⁵ Found primarily in the Johannine literature, this command is definitely directed to the community.²⁶ There is no room for speculation here. No-one outside the community can be squeezed into the equation. This is not to say that the outsider is not worthy of Christian love, but the Christian must first love the one to whom s/he is united in the Spirit. Indeed, according to 1 John 3,11, this command is

²³Cf. 1 Thess 4,9 (Here it is used synonymously with love for "one another." Note comments by F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word, 1982), 89: "*Philadelphia* is more restricted than *agape* [1 Thess 3,12], which is to be extended to all (3,12)."); Heb 13,1 (See Harold Attridge, *Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 385: "... Hebrews does not recommend a general love of humankind, but a love of the 'brothers and sisters.'"); 1 Pet 1,22; 3,8.

²⁴Cf. 1 Jn 2,9-11; 3,14.

²⁵Cf. Jn 13,34 ("I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another..."); Jn 15,12 ("This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you."); Jn 15,17 ("This I command you, 'Love one another!'" 1 Jn 3,11 ("We should love one another."); 1 Jn 4,7 ("Let us love one another."); Rom 13,8 ("Owe no one anything, except to love one another.")

²⁶For e.g. see comment on John 13,34f by Ernst Haenchen, *John 2* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 117-18: "In this passage, John does not have in view the worldwide church, but the small band of disciples for whom the Gospel is written."

foundational to the Christian catechism. Neither is this *agape* to characterize the staid neutrality of its pre-Christian usage, for Peter stresses that Christians ought to "love one another earnestly from the heart" (1 Pet 1,22).²⁷

LOVE AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

The attempt to obscure community boundaries by expanding the definition of "neighbor", is due to the fact that we are in denial about the reality of our dysfunctional family. As it now stands, the Christian community cannot be characterized by love, and the rechanneling of focus is the best we can do to avoid our confrontation of the issue. But, can a love starved community really spread love? It seems to me, that in order for Christianity to spread love, it must first demonstrate love within its boundaries. Charity does begin at home. While the Bible heralds the universality of God's love (e.g. John 3,16), it also maintains that God has chosen a people to serve as His agents of love. However, in order to be effective, the chosen community must perfect the art of loving.

²⁷The notion of loving "one another", also permeates the Pauline corpus. For Paul, the Roman congregations are obligated to love one another. (Rom 13,8) Paul is quick to distinguish between community love and universal love with his wish, "may the Lord make you increase in love to one another *and* to all men, as we do to you." (1 Thess 3,12. Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 72, minimizes this distinction with his comment: "Certainly it conveys the writers' concern for the unity of all the believers in Thessalonica, but *eis pantas* does not mean merely "all the brethren" (5,26, 27) but all mankind. The love of God poured into the believers' hearts by the Holy Spirit could not be reserved for members of their own fellowship; it must overflow to others without restriction.") And again in 1 Thessalonians 4,9, he uses the term to love one another synonymously with love of the brothers (*philadelphia*). In 2 Thess 1,3, there is no doubt that Paul has community love in mind.

The Genuine Community

As a church, we often pride ourselves about being the "remnant." Many Adventists quickly point to Revelation 12,17 where the remnant is identified as those who "keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus." However, what we don't emphasize is the fact that a remnant must have the characteristics of the genuine item. While Jesus did state that our love for him and God will be manifested by adherence to commandments,²⁸ he also makes it clear that our community identity depends on our love for each other: "By this will all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."²⁹

According to John, only the one who "loves the brother" can genuinely claim to be "in the light"--a part of the remnant.³⁰ A genuine love for brother is actually a manifestation of God's love.³¹ The Christian's love for the members of the community is a natural consequence of God's love for the Christian--a love that was demonstrated in His sending Jesus (1 Jn 4,9-10). None of us deserves to be loved by God, but since we are recipients of his grace, we extend our love to others whom we may otherwise deem undeserving. Similar to God's love, the love between Christians is unconditional. In fact, 1 John 4,12

²⁸Cf. Jn 14,15; 1 Jn 5,2-3.

²⁹Jn 13,35. The use of the preposition *en* (translated "for") is intentional, and should probably be viewed as a locative. They have love "for" one another because they have love "in" one another. See also Col 2,1-5 where Paul uses the metaphor of Christian hearts being "knit together (*sumbibasthentes*) in love."

³⁰See 1 Jn 2,7-11. Brown, *Epistles*, 274, comments: "Those within the brotherhood not only *are* in the light but also remain or *abide* in the light by sustaining the brotherhood in love."

³¹See 1 Jn 4,7-20, and my guided study in "Perfect Principles," *Sabbath School Leadership* 1,5 (1997), 28.

indicates that the practice of loving one another allows us to partake in the divine nature, at which point we become prisms through whom people see God.³² This privilege allows us to share in the mission of Jesus who also manifested the inconceivable God to humanity (Jn 1,18). Any person claiming to be a part of the beloved community while hating his brother "walks in the darkness," and is a prevaricator (1 Jn 4,20).

So important is the authenticity of the Christian community that Jesus devotes a section of his final prayer to the theme of love (Jn 17,20-26). He specifically requests that the disciples be united as a result of their being filled with love from God (Jn 17,26). Love leads to unity, and Christian love not only reveals the identity of God's people, but is a witness to the *kosmos* of the transforming power of God's love (Jn 17:20). Paul viewed love as the *sine qua non* among all virtues (Col 3,12-14), since it "... binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col 3,14). Consequently, love is foundational to genuine Christian doctrine.

Indeed, as Paul presents advice to Timothy, he urges him to address those who are confusing the congregation with theological minutia (1 Tim 1,3-5), and to elevate the true purpose (*telos*) of Christian doctrine: "love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith" (1 Tim 1,4). Christianity was not to pattern itself after the esoteric discussions of incipient gnosticism or the profound absurdities of the type of

³²In commenting on verse 12 Bultmann, *Johannine Epistles*, 68, writes, "There is no direct relationship to God, only an indirect one, which consists of men loving each other..." Brown, *Epistles*, 521: "God abides in us and the love that comes from Him reaches perfection in our love for others." See also Glenn W. Barker, "1 John," in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor., *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 344, "As God was once present in his Son, so now he is present through the community of faith."

mystical Judaism evidenced in Jubilees or Enoch.³³ Genuine Christianity is not to be identified merely by unique doctrines, but by an atmosphere of love.

The Model Community

The genuine community will also be a model community. In our organization, we often measure a model community in terms of success in membership increase, building projects, or the ability to achieve financial goals. The *Sabbath School Leadership* staff has recently resurrected an important dimension of church success with a new investigative series that is designed to determine the level of love within a church community. The community is selected at random and observed by an undercover reporter. Those churches that demonstrate love are featured in a monthly column.

The commendation feature in *Sabbath School Leadership* is reminiscent of the practice of those New Testament authors who commended specific churches for their love.³⁴ Indeed, if love is the factor that defines a genuine community, it should only be expected that those communities that excel in love be elevated as models. The type of love that draws commendation leaves an impression on visitors to the community, who are

³³See Martin Dibelius and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 28: "... [telos estī] ("the goal is") seems to refer to the "purpose of the preaching" as opposed to the "racking of one's brain" (zēfēseis), which is the "outcome" of the activities of the false teachers."

³⁴Cf. Eph 1,15 (although textual evidence is weak); Col 1,3-8; 2 Thess 1,3; Philem 4-7; Heb 6,10; 3 Jn 6; Rev 2,19 (oddly, the church community at Thyatira is the only one of the seven commended for its love).

anxious to tell others about their experience.³⁵ So important is a loving community for the reputation of Christianity that Paul prays for communities to increase in love, and commends them when he receives news of their progress.³⁶ In demonstrating love to others in the community, Christians demonstrate love to God.³⁷

The Intentional Community

A model community is also an intentional community. One must not assume that community identity is automatic for the Christian. The Christian lives life in a paradox--driven by the opposing powers of *sarx* (flesh) and *pneuma* (spirit). The reality of this dichotomy probably influenced the choice of the rational term *agape* to depict Christian love. The community member may not always *feel* like loving the other. Many justifiable natural passions may result in feelings of hate or indifference towards the neighbor. Love, for many, is indeed laborious.³⁸ However, in

³⁵Cf. 3 Jn 6 (where visiting Christian strangers have testified about Gaius' love before the church. See comments by Glenn W. Barker, "3 John," in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor., *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 372f); Philem 4-7 (The church in Philemon's house is praised for its love. Paul himself has been a recipient of Philemon's love (7)); Col 1,3-8 (Colossians are commended for the love they have for all the saints (4). Epaphras has given Paul and Timothy a good report on the level of love in the community (8)).

³⁶Cf. 1 Thess 3,12 & 2 Thess 1,3. For comment, see Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 144.

³⁷Heb 6,10. See discussion by Leon Morris, "Hebrews," in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor., *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 57f.

³⁸See 1 Thess 1,3, where the church is praised for its "labor (*kopos*) of love."

spite of prejudicial or vengeful feelings, the Christian community will make all efforts to practice love.³⁹

A unique characteristic of love is demonstrated in 1 Corinthians 12,31. Here Paul recognizes that every member of the church may not have the ability to missionize, prophecy, teach, perform miracles, heal, speak with tongues, or interpret (1 Cor 12,27-30). However, the Spirit has gifted all with the ability to love. Hence it is a more "excellent" way. In fact, as 1 Cor 13 explains, love is foundational to Christianity.⁴⁰ So essential is love to the identity of the Christian, that on a number of occasions, Paul exhorts Christians to "pursue love" (*dioke[te] agapen*).⁴¹ Of course, love cannot be practiced in isolation. Every community member needs to be involved (Heb 10,24).⁴²

³⁹Cf. 1 Cor 16,14 ("Let everything you do be in love"); Eph 4,25-5,2 (The "therefore" (*oun*) in 5:1 indicates that the command in 1-2 summarizes the ethical guidelines that have been stipulated in 4,25-32. Christians are encouraged to conduct themselves (*perpateite*) with love); 1 Pet 1,22 (Note the comment by Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 86: "Whoever has thus had his soul purified by being baptized is truly able to love his brothers, and will do so from the heart with perseverance.)

⁴⁰See comment by Stauffer, "*agapaō*," 51: "[Love] builds the work of the future. *Agapē* stands under the sign of the *telos*. This is the greatest truth of 1 C. 13. For this reason love is the heavenly gift surpassing all others, the *kath' hyperbolēn hodos*, which not only stands at the heart of the trinity of faith, love and hope but is greater than the other two."

⁴¹Cf. 1 Cor 14,1a; 1 Tim 6,11; 2 Tim 2,22.

⁴²Morris, "Hebrews," 105, notes: "It is interesting that this kind of love is thus a product of community activity, for it is a virtue that requires others for its exercise. One may practice faith or hope alone, but not love."

The Redeemed Community

The intentional community is also a redeemed community. The ethics of the eschatological Kingdom of God are to be proleptically modelled by those who have been "cast from death into life" (John 5,24). Only the redeemed can truly love, for they see others through the eyes of eternity.⁴³ In their very actions they aim to replicate the character of the One who provided them access to His Spirit. Indeed, as Peter notices, love is essential for those who wish to partake in the Divine nature.⁴⁴ At the *parousia*, the loving community will have nothing to fear.⁴⁵

⁴³See Stauffer, "*agapaō*," 51: "With love the power of the future age already breaks into the present form of the world. As for Jesus, so for Paul *agapē* is the only vital force that has a future in this aeon of death."

⁴⁴See 2 Pet 1,3-11. Notice how love is rhetorically placed at the end of a list of virtues needed for those who wish to partake in the divine nature (5-7). Notice comment by Edwin A. Blum, "2 Peter," in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor., *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 270: "Godly people who participate in the divine nature must abound in love."

⁴⁵Cf. Phil 1,9-10 (Paul wants the Philippians love to abound "more and more" so that they may be "... pure and blameless for the day of Christ"); 1 Thess 3,12-13 (Here again, Paul wishes for the congregation's love to grow, so that the Lord may "establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all his saints." As with Phil 1,9-10, we have an eschatological motif here. The raptured community is identified by love. Perfect love eliminates fear. Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 72, remarks on 1 Thess 3,13: "If the readers receive this ethical stability within, they need have no fear of the outcome on the day when the Lord "will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart." (1 Cor 4,5).")

LOVE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

The eschatological nature of the beloved community compels it to model the ideals of the kingdom in the area of community relationships. The citizens therein will determine to march to the beat of a different drum. The ethics of society have no place in the community of the redeemed. The redeemed community is itself a manifestation of the kingdom of God. Empowered by the Spirit, each person in the community will embrace the other, and treat him/her as s/he would a blood relative.

The Obligated Community

Love in the community is a matter of obligation. Jesus, the community founder, intended for the community members to fashion their attitudes after his. Hence, he commands his disciples to follow his example by loving one another, even as he loved them (John 15,12). In a patron-client society where much emphasis was placed on honor and shame, the patron is honored if his clients are obedient to his desires.

According to Paul in Philippians 2,1-4, the type of love expected in the beloved community is one that looks at the other as better than oneself (3). Consequently, each person in the community becomes a slave to the other as s/he follows the example of Jesus.⁴⁶ This does not mean that the Christian is to adapt a weak and vulnerable posture, but s/he is to engage in mutual service. The type of service demanded is one that leads to harmony in the community. A symbiotal relationship is formed in which the pain of a community member affects the entire community, and depends on the community for healing.

The Understanding Community

The obligated community is also understanding. Each member understands that the community is comprised of unique

⁴⁶Cf. Gal 5,13b; Phil 2,5ff.

individuals who may not always see eye to eye. Love enables the community member to exercise tolerance towards the sibling who has a different theological stance than s/he.⁴⁷ Love also empowers the individual to refrain from certain permissible activities that may be damaging to the spirituality of a weaker sibling.⁴⁸ True love is able to fully empathize with a person.

No community member is exempt from this requirement. Even the leaders are expected to model a spirit of understanding. Paul reminds the teachers in Ephesus that they are to speak the truth "in love" (Eph 4,15). There is to be no authoritarian belittling or unrealistic expectations. Students are to be respected. Paul himself models this tolerance in his letter to Philemon when he writes, "... I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for loves sake I prefer to appeal to you..." (Philem 8-10).

While love of neighbor is mandated for the community, each member must voluntarily choose to respond to the command. Conferences and committees cannot legislate solutions to racism and other justice issues in the church. Change takes place in the hearts of determined individuals who are willing to suppress their

⁴⁷See discussion in Robert Jewett, *Christian Tolerance. Paul's Message to the Modern Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982); and the interactive monograph by his student, Lareta Haltemann-Finger, *Paul and the Roman House Churches* (Scottsdale: Herald, 1993).

⁴⁸Cf. Rom 14,1-15,13 (especially verse 15: "because of what you eat, you are no longer acting in love." As Dunn, *Romans*, 820, recognizes, this verse is foundational to the understanding of the entire discussion: "This is the only place in 14,1-15,6 at which Paul uses the key motive which links together all his paranesis in these chapters...."); 1 Cor 8,1-13; 10,23-30; Gal 5,13-15 (esp. 13b: "... through love be enslaved to one another.").

emotions and do the right thing.⁴⁹

The Reconciling Community

The understanding community is also aware of its role in the reconciliation process. Since it embodies the love of God, it must share the mind and attitude of God. It is not quick to condemn those who violate the rules of the community. While unrepentant perpetrators are expelled from the family,⁵⁰ the community is sensitive to the fact that each community member is still engaged in a struggle against his sinful self. Therefore, the sinner is not automatically "delivered to Satan," but is provided with assistance to achieve restoration. By offering assistance to the sinner, the community members are being honest about their own paradoxical existence as they struggle with the reality of life in the flesh (Rom 7,13-25). Every community member is in the same position in that "all have sinned and come short of God's glory."⁵¹ Indeed, it is the recognition of our common struggle that allows the reconciling community to exercise a "love [that] covers a multitude of sins."⁵²

⁴⁹See my discussion of race relations in "The Walls Came Tumbling Down," *We've Come This Far by Faith* (Huntsville, AL: A Voice in the Wilderness Publications, 1996), 84-96.

⁵⁰Cf. Mt 18,15-20; 1 Cor 5,1-5.

⁵¹Rom 3,23. See Stauffer, "agapaō," 55: "Agapān in the Greek sense is respect and sympathy between equals. Christian *agapē* derives from a consciousness of equal unworthiness before God and His mercy."

⁵²1 Pet 4,8. See context in 7-11, and comment by Edwin A. Blum, "1 Peter," in Frank E. Gaebelin, editor., *The Expositors Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 246: "This quotation from Proverbs 10:12 does not mean that our love covers or atones for our sins. In the proverb the meaning is that love does not "stir up" sins or broadcast them. So the major idea is that love

As long as the person remains a part of the community, the community is expected to be proactive in the reconciliation process.⁵³ Forgiveness should be the fragrance that flows throughout the community.⁵⁴ Rather than ostracize the sinner, the community is responsible for "bearing one another's burdens."⁵⁵ In bearing the burden of the one who has fallen, the Christian "fulfills the law of Christ" to love neighbor as self.⁵⁶

The Sharing Community

In addition to the extended arm of reconciliation, the loving community is characterized by open hands that are ready to share. While Christian benevolence can extend beyond the boundaries of the community, the primary beneficiaries of the community resources should be the members therein.⁵⁷ The extent of the community transcends local boundaries and incorporates every social group that identifies itself with

suffers in silence and bears all things (1 Cor 13,5-7). Christians forgive faults in others because they know the forgiving grace of God in their own lives."

⁵³See incident in 2 Cor 2,5-11 where Paul encourages the congregation to stop "shunning" (my term) a brother who had done wrong.

⁵⁴Here I use the imagery of Mark Twain who said, "Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it."

⁵⁵See Gal 6,2. As Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 299, recognizes, the Greek word for "bear" (*bastazo*) means "... more than "tolerate" and includes effective assistance and relief."

⁵⁶See discussion in *ibid.*, 300f.

⁵⁷Note Paul's admonition in Galatians 6,10 to do good **especially** (*malista*) to those in the household of faith.

Christianity. Hence, Paul can say that in sharing their resources with other believers, the Macedonian Christians have demonstrated that their "love is genuine" (2 Cor 8,8).

Of course, genuine love will not overlook the needs of the immediate community. John is quick to admonish his audience: "If anyone has the financial means (*ton bion tou kosmou*) and sees his brother with a need, but has no compassion for him (*kleisēi ta splagchna autou*), how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in action and truth."⁵⁸ John envisions a Christian community that is modelled after the ideals of the early Judean church. A community in which love is demonstrated on the highest level of commitment.

The communal activities of the early Judean Christians are recorded in Acts 2,44-47 and 4,32-37. Luke reports that the believers were "of one heart and soul" (4,32), and this led them to pool and redistribute their collective resources.⁵⁹ There was a socialist society that shunned capitalist exploitation. They practiced the ethics of the egalitarian kingdom as the rich contributed their wealth so that the poor could experience an

⁵⁸1 Jn 3,17-18. See comments in Brown, *Epistles*, 452-53: "For the author of I John, God's love is an active force; it must express itself in deeds and not only be talked about."; and I Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 196: "Their love is to be demonstrated "in truth," which is a call not just for actions to prove the reality of their inward feelings but also for a love which is in accord with the divine revelation of reality in the love shown by Jesus." Also, see my guided study: "Exposing Our Love to His Light," *Sabbath School Leadership* 1,5 (1997), 26.

⁵⁹A modern example of this type of commitment is found in the Reba Place Fellowship, an urban Mennonite community in Evanston, Illinois.

elevated status.⁶⁰ This total level of commitment is more radical than *zakat*, the fourth pillar of Islam, in which a 2.5% tithe is redistributed among the community at the end of Ramadan. While generosity abounds in the beloved community, this is not to be a community of scroungers.⁶¹ The community is not to be vulnerable and irresponsible to exploitation. Love demands that every member has a responsibility to contribute to the community, whether in the form of liquid assets or sweat equity.⁶²

⁶⁰Notice, however, that not all in the community shared this commitment. Ananias and Sapphira were punished for their counterfeit love (Acts 5,1-11). Racism was also a problem in Acts 6,1-6, as nepotism and ethnically motivated biases resulted in the formation of an affirmative action policy.

⁶¹See 1 Tim 5,3-16 where Paul warns that community assistance should be for those community members who are really in need. See comments on verses 4, 8, and 16 by Dibelius-Conzelmann, *Pastoral Epistles*, 74-76.

⁶²See 2 Thess 3,6-13, particularly the command in verse 10b: "If anyone does not desire to work, do not let him eat." Robert Jewett, "Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the Early Church: The Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thesalonians 3,10," *Biblical Research* 38 (1993), 24-43, recognizes that this command is given in a community context. While Bruce, *Thessalonians*, 206f, does not argue for a communal setting, he does mention a similar passage from the *Didache* (12,2-5): "If he who comes is a traveler, help him as much as you can, but he shall not stay with you more than two days, or, if necessary, three. If he wishes to settle down with you and has a craft, let him work for his bread. But if he has no craft, make such provision for him as your intelligence approves, so that no one shall live with you in idleness as Christians. If he refuses so to do, he is making merchandise of Christ; beware of such people."

CONCLUSION

None can deny that as a church we are far from the ideal. If the church is to experience renewal, we must return to the basics. By calling for a return to the basics, I am not suggesting that we listen to those agenda driven voices that confuse basic Christianity with denominational events of 1844 or 1888. Basic Christianity has its roots in the biblical documents that we deem authoritative, and is expressed in a community that is characterized by love.

A community that loves is aware of the responsibilities that lie within its boundaries. The humanitarian efforts of ADRA and other relief agencies are commendable, but why evangelize if the community itself has not experienced the unity of the kingdom? Are we false representatives of Christ? I submit that we will witness exponential success if we began to practice what we preach. Love for each other will evoke a centrifugal force that violently attracts others to the beloved community. In this world of alienation and extreme social stratification, people will be pleased to be a part of a model that characterizes genuine unity and spiritual stability.

A community that loves will strive to maintain its identity. While it would not hide its identity as a Sabbath church, it would endeavor to be distinguished as the loving church. It doesn't matter how many "Ss" we have, if we do not have the "L" we cannot claim to be the remnant. Love within the community must be intentional. It must transcend the false image of unity portrayed in glossy magazine ads and TV commercials. The church must take a stand against the racism, sexism, and classism within our midst. It must also be proactive in commending those communities that excel in love.

Finally, a loving community will model the ethics of the eschatological kingdom in its relationships. The members of the community will recognize that they are obligated to love the other. This love will express itself in tolerance and forgiveness as we realize that "God ain't through with us yet." We are not yet perfect. In this loving community, efforts at reconciliation are not

confined to annual inter-ethnic pot lucks, after which the twain never meet. This community is also a place where members pool their resources to create economic opportunities for the benefit of all.

It seems to me that we offer the cart without the horse when we present the Word without the Spirit. If the gospel is presented in the spirit of love, text will lead to transformation, rules will lead to reform, conformity will lead to conversion, doctrine will lead to deliverance, and law will lead to love. With this in mind, it may not be a bad idea to replace the 27 fundamentals with the proposition: "We believe in loving each other as Christ loved us." Then, unlike James White, we would not need a disclaimer, but could preface the doctrine with the statement: "This *is* to secure uniformity."

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