

January 27, 2008

“Trouble: An Opportunity for Joy”

Part 4: “Conviction The Route to Love”

Phil 2:3-5 NLT

Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.

Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had.

An honest look at life will produce confusion about what we see in our world and in ourselves. It will cause disappointment when others fail to respond the way we need them to in sensitive moments; that would mean so much if they would only come through the way we need them to. And it will provoke conviction over the ways we violate God's command to love and how we fail others.

My prediction for 2008 is that you will experience confusion, disappointment, and conviction. But I want you to resolve – be firm in your mind - that your purpose for 2008 is to not allow confusion, disappointment, and conviction have a negative result, but a positive one.

James 1:2 (NLT) “Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy.”

Confusion, disappointment, conviction, is this the path to joy? Yes, because they develop faith, hope, and love

John 16:33 AMP

I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have [perfect] peace and confidence. In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration; but be of good cheer [take courage; be confident, certain, undaunted]! For I have overcome the world. [I have deprived it of power to harm you and have conquered it for you.]

Rom 8:28 NLT

And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

God causes confusion to work for our good and for His purpose of building our faith. Our faith is often weak, but the kind of faith that develops to support us through times of overwhelming confusion is strong and resilient (when we allow confusion to do it's work). Confusion must not cause us to doubt our faith but to cling to it, thus confusion is the route to a stronger faith.

God causes disappointment to work for our good and for His purpose of building our hope. In this life we will experience disappointment. The most overwhelming

disappointment is experienced when others fail us, especially those who are suppose to love us. Disappointment can cause us to avoid people for fear we will only get hurt again. We lose hope in people and so we develop a self-protective style of relating to others. But, disappointment can drive us to hope - a hope that can keep us steady even when people let us down. This hope can motivate us to pursue rather than avoid relationships. Pastor Nick talked about this hope last week. It is hope in Christ, He meets all our needs, He will never leave us, and one day we will be with Him forever. Through Christ and His sacrifice for us we have hope of eternal life in heaven. A hope that keeps us going when we feel most alone that is what will take over when we allow disappointment to do it's work. Disappointment reminds us that nothing in this world will ever be perfect, but our hope is in The Perfect One, and in the perfect life to come. Disappointment is the route to developing that hope. (Disappointment can be the route to steady hope.)

God causes conviction to work for our good and for His purpose of building our love (Conviction can be the route to deeper, steadfast love)

3. Today we will talk about Conviction: the route to love for...

Not only do others fail us, we fail others, I know you don't think that is possible, but believe me you have. When we are aware of our failure to love we become broken hearted. There are people we love, we don't want / mean to hurt them, but we do. Conviction over our own lack of love can run deep. We don't always behave as we ought, just like those who disappoint us. We must become sensitive to even the subtle violation of love in our lives; because the love that grows out of a deep repentance over our self-protective sin is insightful, fruitful, and powerful. Therefore, conviction (of our failure) can be the route to deeper love.

We must not limit our awareness of sin to just the more obvious things like, immorality and undisciplined living. If we do we will be rigid, shallow, self-righteous Christians who are not learning to love as Christ loved and commanded us to love. Conviction over lack of love must and can run deep. We must become sensitive to the subtle violations of love involved in our relating to others. When we do we will be overwhelmed with our personal sinfulness. We admit we are powerless to love better just on our own will power. We realize to think we can love better just by trying harder is arrogant. Our own will power only lasts so long, and not very long at that. All we can do is confess our need to God and accept His forgiveness. Then, some how He gives us power to love better.

Before we act, we must ask why? Why are we doing what we are doing? Are we motivated by selfless love or are we trying to impress others with our actions.

Throughout his life David learned that God always tested him to find out what was in his heart, and what his motive was in his actions. David instructed his son to "...acknowledge the God of your father, and serve Him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts" (1 Chron. 28:9a - NIV).

Paul tells us, “Don't be selfish; don't live to make a good impression on others.” Then he tells us what to do instead, “Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself. Don't think only about your own affairs, but be interested in others, too, and what they are doing.”

Every moment consists of a moral choice to put our self first or others first. Many of us never wrestle with morality at that level. We talk about putting others before ourselves, but avoid the self-awareness that would convict us of our failure to do it. But when we are faced with the ugliness of our selfishness it can drive us to a profound repentance that opens up a whole new dimension of love. Confusion is the route to building faith; disappointment drives us to hope; conviction leads to love.

Don't let the confusing things of life rob you of faith or your confidence in the truths and promises of God's Word. Don't let disappointment rob you of hope in Christ or prevent you from enjoying relationships with others. And don't let conviction over your sin and impure motives stop you from loving others and doing kind things for people. If you wait for perfect motives before you do anything, you'll do nothing. Are the motives of your actions always going to be pure? No, but do kind things anyway. Bring a meal to a sick friend or neighbor, greet a stranger at church, help an elderly person, do something thoughtful for your spouse. When conviction hits you with the realization that your motives were not pure and perfect even as you did nice things for others; or when you are convicted that you did not do a loving thing you could have done, let it drive you to a repentance that makes you aware of how desperately you need God's grace to be all you should be. Then you will be able to do these things with more love. But don't wait. Do them now.

There are three kinds of love: The “If” kind of love. This is love given “if” we meet certain requirements. If you are a good parent, if you give gifts, if become successful, if you are important, if you meet my expectations, if you love me then I will love you.

Then there is the “Because” kind of love. This is love given “because” of something you do, or because of who you are, because of what you have, because you are good to me, because you are popular, or wealthy, or famous, because you give me security, because you have a nice car, because you love me, I will love you.

And there is the “In Spite Of” kind of love. It is different than the “if” kind of love because there are no strings attached and expects nothing in return. It is different than the “because” kind of love in that it is not brought about by some attractive quality. This is when a person is loved “in spite of,” not because of, what he / she is. It doesn't matter if a person is good or bad, attractive or ugly, rich or poor; it doesn't matter if a person deserves it or not; it is not earned; a person is simply loved as they are, in spite of faults, bad habits, ignorance or anything else.

Now guess what kind of love God has for you? Right! Jesus offers us the “in spite of” kind of love.

Now guess what kind of love God commands us to give? Right again!

The biblical word for "love" is agapao, it is a totally unselfish love, and the only source of this "in spite of" kind of love is Jesus Christ. It is a love of which human beings are capable only with the help of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit helps us love Him and others as we ought. You must have Jesus in your life to get this kind of love and you must go to Jesus every day and get this love anew from Him.

Cling to faith by reminding yourself of what is true, enjoy the good things of life God has given you now as you put your hope in what will be, and look for ways to express love to people. But face life honestly and remain open to confusion, disappointment, and conviction. Read your Bible, pray, worship, develop relationships with people of faith. When the pain of life overwhelms you, you will need to know the truth of God, you will need the Spirit of God, and you will need the support of the family of God. All three are needed to grow in faith, hope, and love.