

How to Walk in God's



**Learning How to Relate to Others so That You
Can Walk More Closely with Jesus.**

By Chris Simpson

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Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away, and the true light is already shining. He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him. But he who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.” (1 John 2:8 - 11)

Almost every religion claims to give “light” to anyone who will follow its teachings. What is meant by “light” is spiritual truth, and it is usually promised as a reward for some type of spiritual discipline or as the result of self-denial. In the passage above, the Apostle John makes a statement that totally separates the Christian religion from all others. He tells us that “true light” comes to the followers of Christ in the context of their relationships! In other words, the nature of your relationships can either cause the light of Christ to grow stronger in your life, or cause it to go out altogether. John equates how much light you truly have with how much you truly choose to love others. When you choose to love your brother, then you walk in the true light of Christ. But, if you choose not to love him, you invite darkness into your life.

You might read this passage and say, “Well, I must be in the light because I certainly don’t hate anyone!” But, let’s look very closely at what John means by hate. Hatred is used in this context as a contrast to love. The Greek word John uses for love is “agape,” and means to love as God does. God loves totally unconditionally. Therefore, to hate means to love in any way that is not unconditional. You could restate John’s words to say, “He who says he is in the light and has conditional love for his brother is in the darkness.”

So, what exactly does it mean to love conditionally? It simply means to chose to hold resentment, bitterness, or judgment against someone. If you are not willing to

let someone off the hook or extend mercy to them when they have disappointed or hurt you, you are loving conditionally. If you ever write another person off or allow yourself to have a wall up to them, you are loving conditionally.

Darkness Can Look Like Light!

"The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:22-23)

When Jesus speaks of a light that looks like darkness, He is referring to deception. Deception is when you believe something to be true that is not. The devil wants you believe that his lie is actually the truth. One of the most successful ways he is able to do this is to persuade us that we can love God and yet refuse to love one another. The startling truth is that you only love God as much as you love the person that you like the least. Jesus said, *"Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me"* (Matthew 25:40).

The degree to which you have a conditional relationship with any other person is the degree to which you are in the darkness, regardless of how much you say that you love God. The same is true when you fail to love your enemy, bless those that curse you, or pray for those who spitefully use and abuse you (see Matthew 5:43-44). This is why so few choose to walk the narrow road that Christ walked. One of the last things Jesus did was to forgive the very ones who crucified Him!

Do Not Forsake the Assembly of the Saints!

Jesus said, *“Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven”* (Matthew 18:19).

One thing that Satan greatly fears is genuine unity among believers! This is because he knows that if just two believers come together in genuine harmony and pray, God responds. For this reason, he constantly seeks to prevent such unity. However, it's usually not the enemy that keeps this incredible promise from coming to pass. Believers themselves often do it by their unwillingness to forgive and to work out issues that come up in relationships.

In fact, many avoid deep relationships of any kind, or at least those with people whose personalities are difficult for them. Having been wounded and hurt in the past, and having never resolved those earlier relationship issues, they avoid people who push their buttons. These people tend to isolate themselves and never come into the true light of God, which only occurs in the context of relationships. Paul addresses this matter very directly:

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25)

Simply put, Paul is saying, “Go to church!” Church, for many, is where you go to hear someone speak, visit with others for a few minutes, and then go home. The biblical concept of church, however, involves relationships, accountability, openness, correction, reproof, and encouragement. It is a place where we, as brothers and sisters in the Lord, are to exhort one another, care for one another, and

minister to each others' needs! This can't happen just on Wednesdays and Sundays. Earlier, Paul said to, "*Exhort one another daily*" (Hebrews 3:13). The Biblical pattern of church is to be involved every day with the body of Christ; to be part of a community.

By community, I mean a life of daily fellowship and interaction with like-minded believers. In other words, a family with deep bonds and ties to one another. Unfortunately, such an environment is quite rare in modern day America except in smaller or rural churches. However, it is only in just such an atmosphere that you can truly learn to love. I've lived in Christian community for over thirty-five years, and it has been, without a doubt, the single most important factor in my spiritual growth.

Paul warns us here not to forsake this type of fellowship. Why? Because to do so is to open yourself to attack from the enemy! "Lone ranger" Christians who don't believe they need others are vulnerable. The wolf always attacks the sheep that has wandered from the pack! In fact, after admonishing the Hebrew church to be faithful to meet together, Paul gives a strong warning to believers of the dangers of reprobation (see Hebrews 10:26-39). Why? Because the first step down the road to reprobation can be traced back to forsaking the assembling of the saints. Without strong Christians around you to help keep your relationship with the Lord fervent and on track, it is easy to slip into deception and lukewarmness.

Jesus Commands Us To Love

"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16)

Jesus commands us to love others if we are to walk with Him. And yet, over the years of my ministry, I have seen many Christians either avoid fellowship

altogether or become involved in relationships that do not reflect God's unconditional love. I want to examine exactly why this is and what needs to happen for Christians to have the kind of loving and healthy relationships that are available to us in the Lord.

To begin with, we must understand that a lot of the relational problems we experience are rooted in unresolved issues from the past. We all grew up with certain tensions and dynamics that affect our ability to relate to people in open and healthy ways. For instance, when I grew up there were certain things you never said or brought up because you knew you'd get an angry response. As a result, I learned to "walk on eggshells" to try and keep peace with those around me. This is true of so many homes! Healthy relationships are difficult when you grew up in an environment where people are not open and real, but instead they stuff and mask their true feelings.

Often, the way you responded to those past unhealthy environments growing up makes matters even worse. To this day, one of my brothers is still suffering the consequences of the way he handled the tension in our home. As a teenager, he would console himself by going to his friends' homes and dumping on them about things that went on in our family. After a while, he got involved with drugs and eventually wound up in prison. In prison he got caught up in a religious cult that he still embraces to this day. It was his response to the unhealthy relational dynamics of our family life that contributed to his emotional and spiritual damage.

However, on another level, there was something very healthy about my family life. My parents were both very gregarious, outspoken people, and my other two brothers and I took after them in this regard. Having an outgoing personality was one of the reasons that, in my late twenties, I was finally able to turn a corner in confronting and finding release from many of the old hurts from my childhood.

Even as a young adult, I was still intimidated by my father and found it hard to be honest with him about my true feelings. Finally, I looked him in the eye and told him exactly how I felt about our relationship and my growing up years. When I did, it changed everything between us! From that point on, our relationship improved. Ironically, it was when I stood up to him that he began to respect me and relate to me as a man and not as a child. Unfortunately, one of my brothers never turned that corner in his relationship with Dad. I noticed, just a few months before my dad died, that he still treated this brother like a child. What is sad is that my dad passed away before this brother was ever able to get over that hump in their relationship. Few things in life are as important as working through issues, forgiving and reconciling yourself with your parents.

Jesus knew that relationships could be difficult. That's why He gave some very clear instructions to the Church on how relational issues were to be handled. Following these instructions is essential to be sure that relationships within the Church remain healthy and that God's unconditional love is free to flow. Let's examine what He said:

Resolving Relationship Issues

Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” (Matt 18:15-17)

This is the only place where Jesus gives specific instructions on how to operate the local church. It's interesting that what He didn't talk about was Sunday School, bus outreaches, ministry fund raisers, etc... There is nothing wrong with any of

these things. What is wrong is that, while the Church focuses so much time and attention to these things, it gives almost no attention to the one thing that Jesus did say to do. His priority was to deal with the offenses that could potentially come between members of a local fellowship. He knew that not dealing with offenses was the major reason that most relationships deteriorate. So, in Matthew 18, Jesus gives us a clear prescription on how to deal with the issues that come between believers.

First, if you are in any way offended by another, you are to approach the offending party and seek to resolve the issue. You are not to tell your friend, your spouse, your prayer partner, or any other person about the offense until you have gone, or at least resolved to go, to the other party.

Second, Jesus tells us that if, after speaking with the offending party, the issue is still not resolved, you are to draw in one or two others to try to bring resolution. The inference here is that the persons drawn in should be individuals who will not contribute to the problem, but rather help solve it.

Third, if the issue is still not resolved, you must now bring it to the attention of the church leadership, who would then, if necessary, bring it before the church body. Notice that the Lord wants the circle of those aware of the offense to remain as small as possible. It is only after all other appeals have failed that the issue is to be brought before the church.

The hope is that issues and offenses will be cleared up long before such a drastic move is necessary. Love covers a multitude of sins, but there is a point where you must deal with spiritual cancer, otherwise it will spread. Following this appeal process clearly laid out in Matthew 18 is the absolute key to healthy relationships. Unfortunately, this process is so rarely preached that people are generally at a loss for what to do when the inevitable conflicts in their relationships

occur. Because of this ignorance, the Church is littered with troubled, unhealthy relationships caused by unresolved issues between people.

Healthy Relationships

Jesus said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20). When two or more are gathered in Jesus’ name, they are gathered in the spirit of righteousness and truth. However, if two or more are gathered in another name, it might very well attract another spirit. For example, if there is unforgiveness, bitterness, or judgment between two people, it gives the enemy place to intrude himself as the third party in the relationship instead of the Lord. These relationships then become characterized by lies, masks, and game-playing instead of honesty and love of the truth.

Satan is seeking opportunities to destroy our relationships. The thief comes to steal, kill, and destroy (see John 10:10), but he can only do so when we open the door and let him in. The story of Cain and Abel gives us a clear example of how this happens. Cain felt rejected because God accepted Abel’s offering, but not his, and he became jealous. God warned Cain that he was in danger of opening a door to the enemy if he did not handle his feelings toward his brother correctly. The Lord said, *“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door and its desire is for you, but you should rule over it”* (Genesis 4:7). We all know how the story ended. Cain opened the door to the devil and ended up murdering his brother. But what you may not be aware of is that when you harden your heart to your brother, you do the same thing! 1 John 3:15 says, *“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer.”*

One of the surest ways to open the door to Satan in our relationships is not to follow the Lord’s order in dealing with offenses. The most frequent way people do this is by sharing their feelings with someone other than the offender when they’re

hurt. This opens the door to the devil in several ways. First, you wrong your brother by not giving him a chance to work out the issue with you. Second, you tempt another person to have what I call a “third party judgment.” A “third party judgment” means that the person you told about the offense is now tempted to judge the offender, even though they are not involved and have never heard the other side of the story. Third, it is out of order because the person you told has no real authority to do anything to help.

The resulting dynamic can wreak havoc in the Church. The person, or persons, who becomes aware of the offense often will respond by putting a wall up to the offender. The offender feels the wall of course, but has no idea why it’s there and may very well respond in kind. Now you have a situation where people begin wearing masks around each other and where there are all sorts of undercurrents of judgment and gossip going on. Jesus hates this! He cried out to His Father on the night before He died to make His Church one in the Spirit (See John 17:11).

Really loving people is hard work. At times, it means standing up for what’s right, speaking your mind, and dealing with the issues and dynamics that bother you. If you don’t do the hard work of love, things are going to get doubly hard all around you. What happens if you don’t weed a garden regularly? The weeds take over, choking the good plants. In the same way, if you don’t work to keep your relationships rooted in truth and righteousness, the “weeds of division” will take over.

Fundamentally there are two major reasons why people do not follow the Lord’s order in resolving issues. These two issues are idolatry and intimidation. Let’s examine them both to see if one of them may lie at the root of some of your relationship problems.

Idolatry – The Root Relationship Problem

A relationship becomes idolatrous when you begin looking to another person to meet your needs rather than to the Lord. I have met many people involved in this type of unhealthy dynamic over the years. When you don't allow Jesus to be Lord in some area of your life, you will almost certainly begin to look to a person instead. This could be a friend, a spouse, or anyone who makes you feel secure or brings comfort in areas where you feel rejection or pain. Once a relationship becomes an idol, all kinds of damaging things can happen. For one thing, you'll no longer be fully honest with that individual. Pressing issues and problems will go unmentioned for fear of offending them. Because of this, you may find yourself agreeing with and doing things that you may find quite uncomfortable.

The reason people wind up in idolatrous relationships is usually because of unresolved hurt, rejection, or abandonment from their childhood years. Because the relationship offers a measure of comfort and solace from such feelings, they certainly don't want to jeopardize it by speaking truth where it needs to be heard. Why "ruffle someone's feathers" when they meet your emotional needs? So, you end up ignoring areas of sin and deception in certain people's lives to hopefully keep them from rejecting or abandoning you.

These kind of compromising choices in relationships can bring dire spiritual consequences. The longer you ignore the convicting voice of the Lord to "stand up for truth" in a relationship, the harder your heart will become. Other voices will then crowd in that will seek to rationalize, justify, and excuse your lack of confrontation. Ultimately, you'll wind up spiritually blind and susceptible to all kinds of sin.

The Sword of Truth

“Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven. Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matthew 10:32-39)

When someone puts the value of a relationship over the importance of standing up for the truth, then that relationship deteriorates accordingly. Jesus specifically brings up the division that may occur when someone stands up for Him in their own household. It is very often the members of a household who are most tempted to compromise the truth because of fear of another in the household’s anger and control. The problem is, however, that such an attitude of dishonesty and compromise between family members often becomes a breeding ground for all sorts of demonic activity.

Over and over in the Gospels, Jesus gives us the key to life: you tend to lose what you cling to, but gain what you’re willing to lose. This principle applies to everything: money, relationships, ministry, your future. You will find that whatever you cling to out of insecurity, wanting it to meet some need inside you, will eventually dry up and leave you dissatisfied. But, when you are completely willing to lose what you once looked to for security, then you will gain it forever.

Jesus said that He came not to bring peace, but a sword. In other words, there can be no true peace until the “sword of truth” becomes central in relationships! The degree to which you are not willing to speak the truth is the degree that a relationship is dysfunctional and possibly demonized. When parents do not place truth in the center of their relationship, the children are inevitably affected. A disregard for truth creates an environment of spiritual unreality which often produces fear and intimidation in a child’s personality. In fact, it’s often not until mom and dad see the unhealthy dynamics of their own relationship mirrored in their children that they begin to seek help and deliverance.

Jesus commanded us to confess Him and to stand up for His truth before others. Are you willing to go to someone and stand up for what's right? When you do, Jesus will confess you to His Father, who will then release the anointing of the Holy Spirit in your life. But, when you refuse to make a stand for the truth, then Jesus will deny you before the Father – meaning the Holy Spirit will not be released into a situation or relationship. The result is a “spiritual vacuum” that’s often quickly filled with other spirits that aren’t so holy.

Intimidation Keeps Us From Confronting

Often, when people are confronted about issues in their lives, they become angry and unpleasant. They may, in fact, turn on you and point out your own areas of weakness! In order to avoid this type of unpleasant reaction, you may be tempted to avoid confronting them altogether. However, the degree to which you accommodate a person’s sin and allow them to intimidate you is the degree to which your relationship will become sick and dysfunctional.

Usually, people get angry when they are confronted because of their unwillingness to deal with certain issues in their lives that are painful to them. To protect these painful areas, the person builds a shield of anger to keep others away.

Also, they may begin to move in control in an effort to keep others from these areas. This is why you get a feeling around certain people that you better let sleeping dogs lie, or else! When you sense this in a relationship, you may actually be discerning a spirit that needs to be confronted before you confront the person.

Fighting in the Spirit

“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 6:12)

If you discern a spirit operating in a person that makes it difficult to be open and honest with them, enter into spiritual warfare for a season before confronting them. Intercede for the person, binding the demonic spirit, without letting them know what you are doing. If it is someone you live with, wait until they are gone; then, take a bottle of oil and anoint the house, commanding the demons to go. Aggressively speak to the spirits you sense, telling them, “No! I've had it with you. Get off my husband! Get off my kids! Get out of my house!”

Then, when the individual comes home, spend some time loving on them. This is what true love does; it fights for relationships and the things that keep people in bondage. Much of your frustration with a person often occurs because of the unclean spirits in their life. When you do battle against the spirits, and not the person themselves, you'll inevitably see significant change.

Principles of spiritual warfare work in the workplace as well. When people tell me about an oppressive atmosphere in their office, I tell them to do the same thing as above. Anoint whatever is appropriate with oil and bind the demons that you sense. Remember that you are a child of the living God. You have authority in heaven and earth. When you are willing to exercise your authority against the

unclean spirits that are seeking to control your environment, you will be able to see the difference. *

Confronting in Love

“In humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:25-26)

Venting your anger about a person’s behavior against the powers of darkness behind the behavior allows you to be loving and gracious to the person. It is the unconditional love of God that disarms the attitudes in another that might want to intimidate and control you. Once you’re free from a person’s spiritual manipulation toward you, a window opens for you to confront the person in meekness.

When you don’t vent your personal frustrations in a relationship in prayer, and instead stuff your true feelings, you can become an emotional “accident waiting to happen.” In the same way that a soda bottle explodes after it’s been shaken, your stuffed feelings are inevitably going to come out, one way or another. They may manifest physically in the form of infirmities and maladies that you otherwise would not have been susceptible to getting, or you may find yourself angry, kicking the dog when you get home and generally being hateful. If you attempt to confront your brother without first dealing with your stuffed emotions, you will tend to blast them! Separating your emotions from the offense is so important before you go to your brother. Otherwise, don’t be surprised if they get defensive and are unwilling to hear what you have to say.

One of my church members is a big guy who tends to be very real. Recently, he came to me about an issue that had made him really angry. But, in spite of his

anger, he stayed under control as he told me about the offense. This is what is meant by “being angry and sinning not” (See Ephesians 4:6). Because he did not come to me emotionally, we were able to talk, and he could share with me how I had offended him. His approach made it easy for me to hear him and to humble myself for being insensitive. I remember thinking how refreshing that encounter was as opposed to other encounters I have had when people approached me “being angry and sinning!”

You May Need Deliverance

Because many grew up with rejection and abandonment, confronting others out of genuine care is often difficult. Instead, we often react out of hurt and anger because people hit buttons in us left there by old, undealt with issues. Honestly, the only way you can really love others is to receive some deliverance yourself. You must deal with your issues before you can help others with theirs! This is why Jesus said, “*Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye*” (Matthew 7:4).

I minister regularly at a conference center in Arkansas that has a particular anointing for deliverance. I love going because of the loving spirit I always feel in that place. One of the reasons for this is, I think, that virtually everyone attending, whether they are there to receive ministry or to give it, recognizes their need for deliverance. Because the people are dealing with their issues of rejection and abandonment, there’s an extraordinary freedom to love others.

Unfortunately, so many churches today are full of religious spirits. Everyone is really nice on the outside, but you can sense that it’s phony. I have ministered to many people who have claimed to be “blessed,” and yet were wrestling with dark temptations and even suicide! People in most churches today need a place to be gut-level honest and share the deep issues in their lives.

I remember one lady in particular, a member of a very large church in town, who would occasionally visit our fellowship. Whenever she came around, she would always tell you that she was “blessed,” and yet I just felt that something was not right with her. When I was finally able to minister to her, the truth came out. She was suicidal because her father had sexually abused her, and when she was older, she had had an abortion. These issues were unresolved because she was told that once she was saved she was fine, and that these things should not bother her anymore. As much as I wish otherwise, this is simply not true. Despite being saved, she still needed someone to roll up their sleeves and spend time with her to minister grace and deliverance. She needed brothers and sisters to love her and hold her hand while she worked through the pain of all the abuse of her past.

The Key to Deliverance

Many people who do understand their need for deliverance do not understand that the reason for getting free is so that they can then lay down their lives and love others. This is the greatest key to deliverance. You can get ministry for years, and if you don't learn how to love, it's for naught. Love is hard. Love is tough. Love involves standing up for what's right, speaking your mind, speaking the truth and getting it out of your gut.

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12)

In order to keep the commandment that Jesus gave on the night before He died, we must make a commitment to make sure that He remains in the center of each of our relationships. This means working out offenses with others until you are sure that peace and unity have been restored. It means confronting those around you with issues of sin and standing up for the truth, even when it's difficult.

Remember that Jesus made it very clear that if you are not willing to do the things necessary to walk in love, then you are not walking in the light and so are not in fellowship with Him. But, if you are seeking to learn to love by being quick to forgive and extend mercy, and by opening your life up to others, you are assured of fellowship with Jesus Himself!

* (For more on how to pray for difficult people see my booklet, entitled “*What You Can do to see Others Change.*”)

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