

# The Governing of Love

## Choosing to love (part 3)

Summary: In business as in many areas of life, there are things we should not do, just as there are things we should do. We find the things we should not do quite a bit harder, but they can be more loving and worth the effort when we do not do them.

Scripture: Proverbs 25:23–28; 1 Corinthians 13<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

### The Customer is the Hero

Copyblogger.com is a B2B website for business owners and entrepreneurs. It's staff and consultants teach others how to build businesses that sell products and services online.

The Copyblogger training programs stand out in the marketplace because they encourage writing sales copy on your website that makes the visitor the hero of their own story.

This approach may seem counterintuitive because the inclination of business owners and entrepreneurs is to promote themselves as the hero who can swoop in and save potential customers from acne, obesity, a dusty or cluttered home, boring food, or many other fates worse than death. If they would just buy our product or service, we would be their hero.

The best practice, however, is to make others the hero of their own stories. It is better for you, as a businessperson, to fade into the background as your customer rises into the glory they were always destined for but were unable to achieve on their own. And your product or service was the key they always needed but didn't know existed.

They are the hero in their own story and you made it happen! How good is it that you came along at just the right time?

The customer is the hero of their story, not you or your business, as much as you would like to be the hero.

Refraining from promoting yourself turns out to be the key to success in sales.

### What & Why?

In business as in many areas of life, there are **things we should not do**, just as there are **things we should do**. We find the things we should not do quite a bit harder, but they can be more loving and worth the effort when we do not do them.

In the apostle Paul's *First Letter to the Corinthians*, the famous chapter describing and defining love tells us what love is, but it also describes for us what love is not. Let us today turn our attention then to what love is not and see whether refraining from some things is actually worth the effort.

## Explanation

It turns out there is quite a list of things that love prohibits:

### Love Does Not Envy

Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, *(1 Corinthians 13:4b)*

The first thing love prohibits is **envy**.

To be envious is to be or become painfully desirous of someone else's advantages. Those advantages may be material, they may be social, they may be skill-based, etc.

Just as there are many sources of advantage, there are an equal number of catalysts for envy. It is surprising just how many things there are of which we can become filled with envy by another person.

Envy, or jealousy, begins with an awareness of one's lack in the presence of another's plenty. They have advantages we want for ourselves.

The sad truth is we are not all equal nor equally endowed. This is not fair; it just is what it is.

The one who loves is not pained by another's prosperity, or another's pre-eminence, or another's superior worth. The one who loves is not hurt by seeing a sister more used by God or more honoured by men, nor are they made jealous by a brother enjoying the blessings which the one who loves, perhaps, might think were equally deserved by him.

There are many reasons to be envious, but the one who loves does not give in to envy.

### Love is Not Boastful

Where envy is an attitude of the heart, to be boastful is a deliberate action. It is to express self-importance; to give voice to one's advantages.

Love is **not boastful**.

Boastfulness flows out of pride rather than vanity. Where vanity is a momentary awareness of one's gifts or advantages, boasting arises from the prideful self-consciousness that does think highly of oneself and is swollen with the inflated conceits of its own wisdom, goodness, importance, prosperity, beauty.

The one who loves may be tempted by his or her pride to boast, yet does not give voice to boasting.

### Love is Not Arrogant

Love also is **not arrogant**.

The arrogant person takes her self-importance a step further. As with boasting, her desire is for display and for the good opinion of others, so rather than letting her advantages or virtues speak for themselves, her overbearing pride becomes evidenced by a manner of superiority in the presence of others.

A recent example of arrogance —at its worst, IMHO— is that of Nick Kyrgios, the Australian tennis player, who seems incapable of controlling his emotions, yet has no trouble telling the crowd how good he is...

The arrogant person expects special treatment by virtue of who she is and the advantages she already enjoys. Her attitudes of heart bloom into shameful treatment of others.

The one who loves may be aware of her advantages and be thankful for them, but does not give in to arrogance.

### **Love is Not Rude**

[Love] is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. (1 Corinthians 13:5)

When the apostle wrote love is **not rude**, he was highlighting how vanity and pride lead one to envy, boasting and arrogance, which are all instances of not behaving in keeping with accepted standards of what is right or proper in any given social group. For example, where one arrogantly thinks he is exhibiting his superior quality and advantages by boasting, a man can take his pride too far. This is noticed by his peers or superiors and results in scorn.

To be rude then means to fail to show respect, honour, or consideration for others. It is to act with poor manners. An example of this kind of behaviour among the Corinthians is described in 1 Corinthians 11:21 where some would eat or drink to excess without waiting for the others. That is simply rude behaviour for a community of faith that is encouraged to love one another.

Rather than bolstering his position, rudeness diminishes a man in the eyes of others.

A memorable scene from the 1996 movie version of Jane Austen's novel, *Emma*, has Mr. Knightley (played by Jeremy Northam) confronting Emma (played by Gwyneth Paltrow) about her increasingly bad behaviour, after she took an unfair stab at Miss Bates (played by Sophie Thompson). "Badly done, Emma!" he said, repeatedly.

It is a heartbreaking scene, yet powerfully portrays how behaviour is identified and rejected as rude within a group seeking to bring out the best in each other —don't worry for, in the end, the boy gets the girl, as always ☺

The one who loves may find within him or herself temptation to envy, boasting or arrogance, but does not give in to rude behaviour.

### **Love is Not Self-seeking**

Envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness ... we could almost excuse such as minor aberrations, not reflecting our true natures when they arise. They are merely accidents, or mistakes maybe, but not who we are, really.

Then the apostle adds that love is **not self-seeking**. The key qualifier here is "seek" and therefore directs us to ask of ourselves: What is our pursuit? What is our purpose? Is it something that will gratify ourselves, our own rights or our own way, or is it something that will benefit others or glorify God?

When we are seeking benefit and advantages for ourselves, we become much more prone to envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness and all the other attitudes and actions the apostle described in these verses.

When we fall into self-seeking, we forget the aim of love never terminates on itself. Love is to be directed toward others. Pride will tempt us toward serving or promoting ourselves, but love is always directed toward serving the needs of others and promoting others for their advantage.

We do not have to convince ourselves to look after our own needs or advantages. We have to convince ourselves to look out for others.

The one who loves may be tempted to look after his or her own needs and advantages over that of others, but love does not give in to self-seeking.

### **Love is Not Irritable**

Where love is always directed toward others, their needs and advantages, one attitude or state that makes love impossible is being irritable.

Love is **not irritable**.

Being irritable is to be or become incited or stirred up in one's emotions, feelings, or reactions. To be stirred up can be positive when we are incited to act on behalf of others, but it is negative when it is stirred up against others. Being agitated in this way makes us angry and argumentative, without care or concern for others.

Some English translations add the word "easily" to irritated, yet this is not in the original. The apostle's intent was not to question how irritated we become with others, but that we allow ourselves to become irritated at all. Love makes no provision for failure.

To be irritable is a failure to love.

The one who loves notices his tendency to become stirred up by the attitudes and actions of others, yet he does not give in to irritability. *\*note to self*

### **Love Does Not Keep A Record of Wrongs**

Even further, love **does not keep a record of wrongs** encountered by and from others.

This quality draws to our attention the mind of love, the memory of love. The one who loves has a very poor memory for faults. She carries upon her shoulders a bag with holes, from which all the faults of others quickly fall out. She does not become resentful of hurts experienced at the hands of others, the evil or wrongs others commit, nor the weaknesses of others that she notices.

The one who loves may be tempted to hold onto the memory of evil, yet she does not give in to keeping records of wrongs.

### **Love Finds No Joy in Unrighteousness**

Love finds no joy in unrighteousness

(1 Corinthians 13:6a)

All that we have discovered so far about love has had to do with our own attitudes and actions, and the attitudes and actions of others directed toward oneself. Yet there is opportunity to love even from a distance.

Love finds **no joy in unrighteousness**.

This is to note love is not happy when others fail. Love does not take pleasure in criticising those who do wrong and does not have a sense of superiority when witnessing others faltering. Love instead grieves over the evils committed against others and by others.

There is a temptation to feel a little flattered when we find another doing wrong, especially if it is one who has been longer in the Christian life than ourselves, is more celebrated for their faith and gifts, or from whom we might expect better things. We can feel somehow vindicated by the failure of others, because their faults and sins are so much more grievous than our own, right?

The one who loves may be tempted to gloat from a distance at another's fault and failings and evil, yet she does not give in to finding joy in unrighteousness.

Love therefore does not give expression to envy, boasting, nor arrogance, being attitudes within ourselves, nor does it act with rudeness or in self-seeking, being actions by ourselves. Neither does love become irritable by that which we witness in others, nor keep a record of such. Finally, love does not find joy in the non-loving attitudes or actions of others whether directed toward us or against another.

There is much that love prohibits for **love is as much about what we do not do as what we do.**

## Application

It may have come as a surprise to you then there is as much that love does not do for this is perhaps the hardest aspect of being a person who loves.

So much of our modern culture encourages us to act on any feeling or whim, as if we are always pure in our intentions, and self-expression is always virtuous in itself. As a consequence, our 'muscles' for self-control are under-developed, as if they have never been used at all —just like the eyes of Neo/Thomas Anderson in *The Matrix*.

We are not islands unto ourselves. We are born into families, and therefore survive with the help of others; we succeed within communities, in which we learn and produce.

Our reading from *The Book of Proverbs* likely caused many here to wonder, "Why is that passage being read? What has it got to do with the price of tea in China?"

Setting our initial sense of being offended aside, the author there described many unloving actions and their consequences:

- a backbiting tongue results in angry looks
- a nagging wife causes a husband to long to live uncomfortably outside the house
- yielding to the wicked, rather than correcting him, destroys one's life
- eating too much and self-seeking are to be avoided
- a lack of control over one's temper is unsafe

All of these actions are unloving; they are actions we should not engage in, things we should not do. And they are evident in our community —not regularly, of course, but often enough to be noticeable.

These are quite naturally in evidence because we are a community, after all, filled with people who, upon entering through those doors, carry all sorts of baggage with them. We all have hurts and hangups and habits, which predispose us to react negatively once we are triggered by others. We bite back at each other; we nag and micromanage one another; we yield to each other when we should correct or we correct others when we should yield; we eat more than our fair share; and, we lose our tempers with each other far more often than we should.

These bad attitudes and actions are evident even here amongst us, even though we have committed ourselves to be a healthy and safe community of faith, have we not?

All of these unloving behaviours have consequences. They cause discomfort and they destroy relationships. They cause some among us to withhold their gifts and skills and resources, and cause some among us to reject the gifts and skills and resources of others.

All of these negative effects could be avoided if we would but refrain from envy, boasting, and arrogance; refrain from rudeness, becoming irritated, or self-seeking. These negative and destructive effects could be avoided if we would refrain from keeping record of wrongs and finding joy in the faults or failures of others.

Love prohibits these things. Jesus commands us to not think in these ways nor to behave in these ways.

As hard as it may be, at times, we have been commanded to love one another, not because we feel like it, but because it is the right and loving thing to do. And that includes not doing some things, for the sake of love.

As a corrective, the author of *Proverbs* begins to describe the antidote to those consequences: Good news satisfies the thirsty.

By “good news” the author did not mean the good news about Jesus —although that may be, in fact, what another, thirsty person needs, ultimately. By “good news” is here meant a gift, a kindness, an encouragement, etc, that directs another person away from their fault and failure into a victory.

If you find yourself tempted to respond to the faults and failures of others in these unloving ways, and cannot hold yourself back from giving in to envy, boasting, arrogance, rudeness, irritation, self-seeking, keeping a record of wrongs or finding joy in evil, then consider the catalyst of your discomfort as another person needing good news. Imagine them thirsty.

Turn your attention away from your own discomfort. Instead of harbouring an unloving thought or acting in an unloving way, how might you provide good news to that person? If they are doing something to you or around you that elicits in you an unloving thought or from you an unloving behaviour, then they are more than likely thirsty and in need of good news in some way.

How might you commend them? correct them? redirect them? comfort them? Steer your mind away from how bad you think they are and direct your imagination to how good they could be, if only someone shared with them some good news.

When you turn your attention away from yourself, from your advantages, endowments, prosperity, your worth or beauty, you will not be so easily tempted to unloving thought and behaviours, attitudes and actions toward others, and will free yourself to love others as Christ loved us.

## Conclusion

Our Vision includes becoming a healthy and safe community known for members with integrity. To that end, our Mission is to encourage and equip others to love God, love one another, and love our neighbours. We had better know what it means to love then, and that includes learning what love prohibits and why.

That love is not sexual love, romantic love, friendship or sentiment. It is a love whose source is God; it is *agápē* love.

God's love for us keeps him from envy, boasting, arrogance and rudeness. God's love is not prone to being irritated, self-seeking, keeping a record of wrongs nor does he find joy in our unrighteousness. For that we can be thankful.

As his beloved children, God pours out his love upon us and into us, expecting us to do the same for others. Let us therefore remember there is much that love prohibits for **love is as much about what we do not do as what we do.**

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Which brings us to the practice of Passing The Peace. As God's love has been poured into our hearts and lives, we are blessed with a peace that passes all understanding. It is therefore a privilege to share the gift of that peace with others.

Passing The Peace is a simple act: a handshake, a fist bump, an elbow tap, a hug, a kiss, a nod of the head. All of these acknowledge another person. Add to this the verbal exchange of peace —The peace of Christ be with you| And also with you— and this practice signifies our love for each other.

But what happens when the person immediately in your proximity has wronged you? is a fool? has faults and failures hard to ignore? is beneath your station in life? does not have the right gadget or gizmo? does not enjoy the same pastimes? is an altogether unbearable person to you? What then is the loving thing to do?

It goes without saying the loving thing to do is to refrain from allowing your resentments to arise or give voice to your discomfort and to instead extend peace as a first gesture toward reconciliation.

I won't now tell you to seek out those you resent because that would be too obvious to everyone. Let us though keep in mind we have been called to a ministry of reconciliation and ministry begins with those in our community of faith. Let us take some time now to share the peace of Christ with each other...

## Endnotes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, all scripture quotations are taken from *The Christian Standard Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017).