

Hong Kong Bible Conference 2013

Radical Love in a Complex World

Ten Expository Messages on 1 Corinthians 13

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Session 1: Following the Way of Love

Text: 1 Corinthians 12:27-31; 14:1

It is a great joy for me to be in Hong Kong. I have not been here for about six years, but we have a very special place for Hong Kong in our hearts. In the last eighteen years, a ministry I have been closely involved with in Sri Lanka is drug rehab ministry. When we started that ministry, we came to Hong Kong to learn how to do it. Three of us spent quite some time here going to the centers and learning. So Hong Kong is a special city to me.

Christian Love is Truly Practical

Over the years when I am ministering, one of the most difficult things I have found regarding the first generation Christians has been to convince them Christian love is truly practical. What the Bible teaches is true and it works. So what I am sharing with you is the result of many long struggles to convince people that it is possible to live the Christian life. It is not only possible, it is the best way to live. So we are going to work thru Chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians.

We shall begin with just that earlier part before 1 Corinthians 13. What we have here is something like this: In the middle of a discussion on the gifts of the Spirit, Paul suddenly brings in this passage on love. Some people think it is a digression, that he has changed his topic. Some people even think it is not part of the original letter. But it is a very important part of the argument in his letter. The Corinthians have been giving gifts

unusually high place and, in the process, have been neglecting to care for each other in love. So in this practical section on how to use the gifts in the church, right in the middle he brings something that is most important: Christian character. He looks at Christian character through the lens of love.

Gifts are Given According to God's Will

Before verse 31 in chapter 12, he has been giving lists of different gifts, and then he says, not everyone is an apostle; not everyone is a prophet; not everyone is a teacher. There are different kinds of gifts, but there are some gifts in that particular time in the church life that are very important. So in verse 31 he says, “*earnestly desire the higher gifts,*” which are important for the life of church. So earnestly desire the gifts that are helpful to the church. Thus, gifts are important. We all have been given gifts. And we need to know how to use those gifts.

But in the second part of verse 31, Paul says, “I will show you a still more excellent way.” Now that is even more important than gifts. He says, “desire the gifts,” but it is God who finally gives the gifts. Earlier on, Paul explains that God gives gifts to different people according to His will. So we don’t know for sure what our gifts are going to be. We can desire some gifts and ask God, but we are not certain God will give that particular gift because God decides what is best for us. When I was a child, I wanted to have the gift of miracle. I wanted to jump down from the balcony and have an angel pick me up, then everybody, including the girls in the neighborhood, will be impressed. We can have those desires, but God will give

what is best for us.

Love is a Decision We Make to Follow

Now there's no uncertainty like that about love. It is not only something we desire, it is the way we follow. So Paul says, "*I will show you a more excellent way.*" There's no doubt that every Christian should follow this way. It is not an option. We cannot say God did not give us Christian love, because He promises us in the Bible that He can fill everyone with love. It is a decision we make to follow.

For example, the Bible tells us to love our enemies, to forgive those who hurt you. So somebody has hurt you and now you realize you need to forgive that person. You can say, "God didn't give me the ability to forgive." But if you obey Him, He will give you that ability. You cannot say this is not part of my personality. For us husbands, we do not like washing dishes, but love says, your wife is tired, now you go and wash dishes. You cannot say, "I don't like it." In love, you do things that you do not like. You cannot say, "I don't like to go visit," when a friend of yours is in hospital. Instead, you obey.

Cricket is the most popular sport in Sri Lanka. Sometimes, my son will say in the evening, "Father, come play cricket with me." When I am enjoying a book, the last thing I want to do at that time is to play cricket. I know as a father it is important for me to play with my son, so I cannot say "I don't like to play cricket." So I go. Let me say I never regret playing cricket, because once I made the decision to play, I enjoyed playing. Our commander has told us to love. When He says, "You have

to obey,” we cannot say, “Let me have a cup of tea and come back.” So, that is not just a desire, it is a way to follow.

God Will Give Us Strength to Love

1 Corinthians 14:1 says, “*Follow the way of love*” (NIV). The word used here means to pursue something. So we make a decision that we are going to follow, and we obey. God provides the strength to do it. In our own strength, we may be weak and may not be able to do it. But God will give us the strength to do what He wants us to do. 1 John 4:19 says, “*We love because he first loved us.*” The most beautiful thing about the Christian gospel is that God loves us, and He says, “Like I love you, now you love others.”

Romans 5:5 says, “*God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*” The word “poured” has the idea of “flooded.” There’s a flood of love that comes through the Holy Spirit who comes into our lives. In 2 Corinthians 5:14, Paul says, “*For the love of Christ controls us.*” The word “control” means to apply pressure. So when God’s love comes into our lives, it applies pressure on us and says, “Love! Love!” And when we obey, the love is activated. God’s love is an inexhaustible resource. There is no shortage of love. But we have to activate it through obedience.

Obedience Opens the Floodgate of God’s Love

Obedience is the key that opens the floodgate of God’s love so that it can come into our lives. This is what we might call a “decisive love.” It does not automatically happen. Sometimes

we are asked to love people who are difficult to love. We love our enemies—those who have hurt us. Now that does not automatically happen. We make it happen. We decide to love.

In English, we have this statement, “you fell in love.” Not much effort is involved there. Actually in youth ministry, one of our biggest problems is that people have fallen in love with the wrong person—“It just happens!”—but it takes effort to get out of love. Christian love is not like that. You do not fall into love, you decide to love. And when we decide, God helps us to do it.

Corrie Ten Boom: No Love is Impossible if We Obey

This is well described in the story from a wonderful Christian servant of God called Corrie ten Boom. Corrie lived in Holland. During the Second World War, when the Jews were being exterminated, her father hid people in their home. Then the government found this out. Her mother was dead, her father, brother, sister and herself were all put into prison. Her father died in prison and her brother was released, but the two sisters were sent to a concentration camp and there they suffered a lot of terrible experiences. The elder sister got sick there and she died too. But Corrie was released. The two had decided that if they got out, they would go and share the message of love.

When Corrie was preaching shortly after the war, once she came to a place very close to the concentration camp. After the preaching, a man came close to her, when he raised his face, she realized he was one of the wicked guards in the

concentration camp. He came and put out his hands and said, "You spoke fine, sister. When you talked about Vught, it sounds like you were an inmate there. You know, I was a guard there." He didn't remember her, but she remembered him very well, because he was a very wicked man. And then he said, "But I have now become a Christian. I did terrible things, but I know God has forgiven me. But I'd like to hear from your lips as well. Sister, will you forgive me?"

This was the most difficult thing she was ever asked to do. She remembered one day this guard made her sick sister remove all her clothes and laughed, then she remembered how her sister died a slow and painful death. And she thought to herself, "Can I forgive this man?" But she also remembered those who have not forgiven become crippled, and never get out of their pain. But she thought to herself, "I don't feel like doing this. I don't want to do this." Then she realized obedience does not depend on the temperature of the heart—how one feels.

So she prayed, "Lord, I can extend my hand, but you supply the feeling." So woodenly and slowly she put out her hand. She said it was like an electric current that started from her shoulder and went through her hand. She touched the man's hand and said, "I forgive you, my brother, with all my heart." A former prisoner and a former wicked guard were clutching each other there, experiencing the love of Christ. She said, "I have never experienced God's love with such intensity as on that day."

Can you see what happened? Love told her, 'Do it!' and she had to obey. But when she obeyed, love gave her the strength.

So our job is to obey, and God will give us strength to do it. And because God's love is inexhaustible, no love is impossible for us if we obey.

'Agape' Love is Not a Feeling But a Decision

I want to say a few words about a word used often in the Bible that means love. The word most commonly used in the New Testament is the word "*agape*". Now this word "*agape*" shows up only about 20 times in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, but in the New Testament the noun and verb forms appear about 216 times. Paul uses the word about 99 times. It seems the church did not use a common word because they felt that the common word did not fully capture what Christian love is about. So they took an uncommon word and gave it a special meaning--the Christian meaning for love.

When the Bible was translated into Latin, the translator, whose name was Jerome, did not use the common word for love. The common word for love in Latin was *amore*, instead he used the word *caritas*. *Caritas* has the idea of action, of acting in love. So even the old King James Version uses the word "charity," which comes from *caritas*. They wanted to show that Christian love is different: It is not this nice, sweet feeling, but something we do by deciding.

Our Great Aim in Life is to Love

Now in 1 Corinthians 14:1 it says, "*Pursue love.*" One of the older English translation translates this as, "*Make love your aim*" (RSV). There is a revolutionary thought here: Love is not just a means

to an end, but it is an end in itself. We don't love for the sake of just achieving some end, such as helping somebody pass an exam, where giving help to that person is the means, and the end is to pass the exam. But in Christianity when we have love, we have achieved the end. 1 Timothy 1:5 puts it like this, *"The aim of our charge is love."* Romans 13:8 says, *"Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law."* Jesus says in John 15:12-13, *"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."* So a person who has love has been successful in life! Because our great aim in life is to love.

Sometimes it is wonderful if you love someone and have good results. It is wonderful if you can train a young athlete and help that person get a gold medal in her performance. Measurable goals are very important in life. We must look for the best way to do things in the shortest time using the least amount of resources. That is very good. Measurable goals are important for productivity in this world. But there is more to life. There is a deeper, more basic aspect in life. That is, we are called to be loving people. The real measurable goal is that I have loved this person.

For example, someone is called to look after a dying, poor person. You will not have some wonderful outcome as a result of helping that person. It seems meaningless to wash him and change his soiled clothes. But we do that to help this person die with dignity. It seems like a waste of time, but not for Christians. Sometimes people adopt a child but the child goes astray and becomes very rebellious. Some people might say, "Shame! Such a waste of time when they have shown so much affection for that child." No, it's not a waste of time! Because they gave that child a chance to do well in life. They loved as Christians love, and therefore they have

been successful. Some people are called to help psychologically sick people. It is a very frustrating job because very often you do not see results, but Christians are committed to such people because for us love is our aim.

Robertson McQuilkin: Because He Loved, He was Successful

There is a well-known Christian university in the United States called Columbia International University. A former president of that university was a good speaker and writer. His name is Robertson McQuilkin. His wife began to show signs of Alzheimer's disease. She was beginning to lose her memory and with time she became very dependent on the husband. Suddenly this husband shocked everyone by announcing he is resigning from his position. He was at the prime of his career as he was emerging as a world-famous Christian leader. He said, "I have to resign in order to look after my wife. She has looked after me for forty years, and now it is my privilege to look after her."

In 1990, he resigned from his job. By 1993, she stopped recognizing him. It was ten years later in 2003 that she died. But all those years he looked after her. For many years he got no response from her. But when he announced his resignation he said, "I don't have to do this. I get to do this. This is not my obligation out of a sense of duty. It is my privilege to look after my wife." Because he loved, he was successful. His love was an achievement.

So my dear friends, sometimes we are called to love people who are difficult to love. But God will give us strength so that in

the midst of the hardship we can go on. But we need to have God's love in our hearts. Without the love of God, this will be meaningless.

C. T. Studd: Christianity is Like Smallpox

In England, there was a cricketer called C. T. Studd. He was a student at Cambridge University and he was playing for the national cricket team. He, along with six others from Cambridge University, decided they would give up prospects of great success in England and go to China as missionaries. C. T. Studd came from a very rich family and his family was shocked. He went from town to town sharing his vision for China.

Once he stayed at a town where an aunt lived. This aunt was a uncommitted Christian. She was very embarrassed by the enthusiasm of her nephew. One day, C. T. Studd said something that made her very angry. He said, "Christianity is like smallpox. If you have it, you give it." She got very angry about it: Imagine comparing Christianity to smallpox! So she was relieved when he finally left, but his testimony kept bothering her. She knew he had something she didn't have. So she pursued what she got from him and finally gave her life to Christ. After her conversion, she sent a telegram to him: "Bad case of smallpox. Praise God!" Christ had come into her heart and now he was applying pressure. She had to share the love of Christ.

When God Comes In, He Comes In With Love

My dear friends, as you look at Christian life, is it a duty? A difficult road with no beauty in it? Oh yes, it is a difficult road. There is a cross that we must bear, but it is a beautiful road because the love of Christ comes in and brings brightness to our lives. And that is what drives us. The love of Christ *"has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."* Is that your experience today? Or do you need to come to a point where you open yourself so that God's love can pour into your heart? Maybe you have committed your life to Christ, but there is an area of disobedience--something that does not please God, maybe the refusal to forgive, or the anger nurtured anger against someone who has hurt you, and that attitude has taken away the freshness of God's love in your life. Come back to God! He can change your life. In the midst of the hardship, he can bring a freshness of love to you.

I want to close with a challenge to you to commit yourself afresh to God. If you have never known what it is to have a personal relationship with God, come to him today. Ask him to forgive you of the sin that separates him from you. He has done everything to forgive you. The Bible says, *"He is faithful and just and will forgive"* (1 John 1:9). *"Come in!"* (cf. Rev. 3:20) When He comes in, He comes in with love. The difference is so great that the Bible even describes it as being born again. Or if you know what it is to be born again but now there is a block to the love, surrender that block to him. Let his Spirit come and fill you with his love.

Closing Prayer

Father, we want to thank you for your love. We want to thank you that love can give us a freedom amid all the challenges in life. We know that life is difficult. There are dangers and price to pay for following you, but we thank you, nothing that we give up or suffer compares to your love in our hearts. Today we come to you as thirsty people, thirsty for your love. Please come in with the grace for us to surrender our sins to you. Forgive us, O Lord, that we have chosen to do things that displease you. We surrender those things, O God, and we ask you to come and fill us afresh, so we too can say, like Paul, that we are controlled by the love of Christ. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen!

Session 7:

Arrogance - A Sign of Weakness

Text: 1 Corinthians 13:4

In this session, we are going to look at two characteristics, which will bring us to the end of verse 4. "*Love does not boast; it is not arrogant.*" These two features of love are closely related.

What Boasting Means

The Greek for "boast" almost carries the idea of being a windbag, someone who brags about himself. But boasting is not the same as sharing our victory. Since Christianity is a religion of community, when something good happens to us, naturally we want to share it with other members of our community. As mentioned before, joy is not complete until it is shared. When something good happens to us, our joy causes us to want it shared.

In 1 Corinthians 12:26, we are told, "*If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it*" (NIV). Romans 12:15 says, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice.*" Therefore, sharing our victories and blessings is wonderful. But we must know when to share, with whom we share, and how to share. With some, you will share everything; with others, you will share part of it; and with still others, it is better not to share about your victories because of the situation.

Then what is boasting? Boasting comes out of the desire to show we are better. If you say, "God did this to me!" and

you do so in a way that makes others feel inferior, then it is boasting. Many testimonies are like that. In fact, this became such a problem in our church we have to stop our testimony time because it sounded very odd after a while. This must have happened in Corinth, especially with people having some of the more spectacular gifts. That is why we have those warnings in chapters 12 and 14.

How We Boast

How do we boast? We boast when we talk about our background in a way that looks down on others. We would talk about the house we live in, the education we received, the position we have. To talk about these is good, but if it makes others feel inferior, then it is better not to do so.

For example, when a person is struggling, he might come to talk about his struggles. In turn, you might talk about how you conquered a similar situation. Sometimes, this type of conversation is helpful to the person. At other times, it is unhelpful and insensitive: The person needs a listening ear, but instead we kept talking about what God did for us.

An employee who has a famous Christian boss went to the doctor because he was not feeling well. The doctor said he needs to rest. But the first response from his boss was, "I have an inner strength that enables me to go on!" Some people simply do not listen to other people's problems, because they are so keen on talking about how God solved their problems. But remember: We give our testimony in order to give people hope, not to make them feel small.

How Not to Boast

We deal with boasting by experiencing God's love. When we experience God's love, we are so amazed, thrilled, and grateful. God did all these things for us even though we do not deserve it. Then, we cannot boast because we realize we do not deserve it. Instead, we *testify* to the grace of our great God. Testifying and boasting are different.

The famous composer Franz Joseph Haydn was a Christian. Once he was asked, "Why is your music so light and happy?" His answer was something like this, "I hope you will excuse me for having happy music, because God has given me a happy heart." When God fills us with his love, there is joy in our hearts. Thus, we are full of gratitude to God, and we just want to lift him up.

When Haydn grew old, he was taken to a performance of Creation, one of his greatest musical works. This piece follows the creation account in Genesis. The following section is perhaps one of the most beautiful in western music. It depicts the verse that says, "And God said, 'Let there be light.....'" Then the chorus sings, ".....and there was light!" At that moment, the whole audience rose up and began to cheer, looking at Haydn. Haydn, who was on a stretcher, said, "Not from me. Not from me. It all comes from above." That is the heart of a Christian thrilled with the grace of God, wanting to magnify that grace.

James Denney was a great theologian and pastor from Scotland over a hundred years ago. At his church, in the room from which he come out to preach, he had a plaque on the wall that says, "No man can bear witness to Christ and himself at the same time. No man can give the impression that he himself is clever and that

Christ is mighty to save." As preachers, we have a choice: Are we going to show how clever we are, or how wonderful Jesus is?

How to Share

Of course, that does not mean we have to be down on ourselves, because when Jesus does something through us, we share the glory with Christ because we are one with him. When something wonderful happens, we are thrilled with it. But since we are one with Christ, and we know it is Jesus who gave it to us, we share in such a way that Christ gets all the glory.

a. Repent After We Boast

However, it is difficult for us to know whether our sharing has become boastful, so we need to be sensitive towards other people. Furthermore, when we realize we have boasted, we have to repent.

Henry Morrison is the founder of Asbury Seminary, where I used to study. Many years ago, he preached at a camp meeting (similar to a Bible conference) along with a very young preacher. One day, the young preacher preached in the morning whereas Morrison preached in the evening. The young preacher delivered an amazing sermon. God worked mightily among the people. Many came forward to repent and receive God's grace. In the evening, when Morrison, a famous speaker in America, preached, the audience really admired his eloquence. He displayed all his skills as a good orator. But the young preacher got a little worried. He thought to himself, "I think he's trying to outdo me."

In those days, people stayed in tents. When the young preacher went to sleep, he noticed someone went into his tent. It was the

older preacher, Henry Morrison. He knelt down before the young man's feet and began to weep. The young preacher knew there was a conversation between Morrison and God, so he just kept quiet. After Morrison finished the conversation, he left.

We all mess up sometimes. We all make mistakes. When we do, how wonderful it is for us to go to God and say, "I have made an mistake. Please forgive me." Our loving Lord is always willing to accept us when we confess our sins.

b. Show How Great Jesus Is

Christians do not try to show how great they are, they try to show how great Jesus is. I have a friend who is the head of the Bible Society in Egypt. In 1974, my friend went as a youth delegate to a famous conference in Lausanne, Switzerland known then as the International Congress on World Evangelization. During this conference, the participants broke into small groups, meeting one hour daily for fellowship.

My friend noticed one participant in the small group. He had many children, six of them grew up before he became a Christian during the East African revival. His other children were more blessed for they grew up with a Christian father. He shared that later he became a pastor who was often rebuked by a godly woman as a way to help him to become a godly pastor. God had humbled him because he was a very proud person.

My friend concluded he must be the pastor of a small congregation in rural Kenya. When the conference was over, they shared their cards. Only then did my friend realize this man was Archbishop of Kenya, the head of a denomination with three

million members. He was the bishop of bishops.

When I went to some conferences, it was a pain because people merely talked about what they were doing. It was so boring. But when you are filled with the love of Jesus, you would love to bring glory to God, not you.

The Story of William Carey

"Love is not arrogant." The word literally means puffed up, that is, to be full of one's own importance. Paul addressed this several times in 1 Corinthians. Christians should realize they are nothing.

William Carey was the father of modern missions. He went to India and was personally responsible for translating the Bible into thirteen different languages. Later, his team translated about thirty-five languages. He also translated some great literature of India into English. His achievements were unbelievable. I can go on and on.

However, before Carey came to India, he was a shoe repairer in England. One day at a party, an English gentleman wanted to put down Carey. So he said, "I suppose, Mr. Carey, you were a shoemaker." "No, your lordship," Carey humbly answered, "Not a shoemaker, only a cobbler." A cobbler does not make shoes, but only mend them.

What Arrogance Looks Like

How does arrogance express itself? It expresses itself as we look down on others. In Sri Lanka, I often hear people say, "My daughter will not marry someone from that family. They are below us."

Not just rich people say this. I work with the poor all my life, and I find even the poor have such thoughts sometimes.

Jesus altered people's verdict of greatness through his life. He was not born into a privileged family. They could not use their influence to get a decent place for baby Jesus to be born. When he grew up, there must be stories in the community wondering whether he was an illegitimate child. When they presented him in the temple as a little baby, they used doves rather than the usual lamb. Doves were used by those who could not afford a lamb. A few months later, he went to Egypt as a refugee.

After that, Jesus came back to a little town in Galilee called Nazareth. Upon knowing that Jesus came from there, a man exclaimed, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" He was from the wrong town. He did not receive a good education, possibly because his father died when he was young. When he was teaching, people asked, "How could he talk like this without proper education?"

When Jesus launched his ministry, he had no place to lay his head. Sometimes I wonder if we would allow our daughters to marry such a person. Yet he was the greatest human who ever lived. Many people, whether rich or poor, kings or peasants, educated or uneducated, pay homage to him and call him their Lord. Jesus showed that greatness does not depend on earthly factors.

The Key is Grace

The key is to understand grace. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15, *"For the love of Christ controls us..... and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their*

sake died and was raised." In the following verse few verses, he says, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view" (v. 16a, NIV). Whether one is rich or poor does not matter any more. Paul says, "Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer" (v. 16b, NIV).

Then how do we look at people? 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" In other words, we ask when we look at people, "Do they know Jesus?" If they know Jesus, they are my brothers and sisters. We are one. If they do not know Jesus, we ask, "How can I tell them about the good news so they know what I know?"

We all came to Christ the same way as hopeless sinners. The greatest sin is the sin of independence from God. We may be from a wonderful Christian family, or from the family of a persecutor. But we are all guilty of the most terrible sin: We all rebelled against God. Both the drunkard and the person who had never touched a glass of beer came to Jesus as sinners. The salvation he gives is more valuable than anything in the world. Jesus says it is like a pearl of great price, which is worth selling everything we have on earth in exchange for it. When we receive salvation, we receive the greatest gift one could ever have.

There are two brothers, one who did very well in life, and the other not so well. One has around \$15,000 in his bank account, and the other has only \$1,000. The fellow with \$15,000 looks down on his brother. He does not even want others to know they are related. Then, a very rich uncle who has no children gave all his wealth to them. Now each of them has \$50 million. The one who used to have \$15,000 cannot say, "I am richer than you,"

because what he had was nothing in comparison to the great gift he received. This is why Christians cannot be proud: The greatest wealth we have is a gift. It is not something we earned.

Pride Has Consequences

Pride also has serious consequences. Proverbs 16:18 tells us, *“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”* Therefore we must be careful. We are who we are only because of what God did for us. In 1 Peter 1:5, we *“are kept by the power of God through faith”* (NKJV). What keeps us is God’s power, and we get the power through faith. When we become proud, we depend on ourselves. We feel we do not need God’s power, and so we do not act in faith. We are asking for a fall. 1 Corinthians 10:12, *“Let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.”* If we are arrogant and think we are big shots, we are opening the door for a big fall!

Some drug addicts who recovered and had left drugs to walk with the Lord, became critical of other Christians, saying they are not genuine Christians. I get worried when I hear that. But invariably, such people end up going back to drugs. They have become proud and insecure. As a result, they lose their spiritual power.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:1, *“Judge not, that you be not judged.”* If we judge people, we will be judged. It does not mean we do not point out what a person has done wrong. If we truly love a person, we will point out his wrong when we see it. Rather, to judge is to look down on people.

“These are not people of integrity; We are sincere Christians.”
If you talk like that, you are in a dangerous situation. Jesus says

you will be judged, and that can mean one of two things: First, we might have committed the same sin that we accuse others of doing. Sadly, we often see this in the Christian church. Second, God will judge us for doing what he alone has authority to do, which is to judge people.

Therefore, let us be careful. When we find pride coming, let us run to God like what the great preacher Henry Morrison did. Plead with God to make our hearts pure again.

Grace Gives Us Strength to Serve

Furthermore, grace gives us strength to be servants. I believe this is the most important lesson the church has to learn in the twenty-first century. We are accused of arrogance today because we say Christ is the only way to salvation. That goes against the whole trend of pluralism sweeping the world today. I am convinced one of the best answers to this is for us to be servants. We have a strong gospel to proclaim, but we do so as servants.

People find these two ideas hard to mix. During Jesus' time, he came as a servant so they said he cannot be lord. Today, when people hear us proclaim Jesus as Lord, they say we are arrogant. We must show them servanthood and Lordship can go together. Meekness and majesty came together in Jesus. On one hand, we proclaim with confidence that Jesus is Lord. On the other, we live like servants. Again, grace is paramount. Grace gives us strength. When we realize God has lifted us up, we have the strength to come down. If you do not feel God has lifted you up, you do not want to come down. You want to feel like big shots.

The Servanthood of Jesus

There are three passages describing the servanthood of Jesus. All three passages start by talking about how exalted Christ's identity was.

a. Mark 10:45

"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The Son of Man is a title for the exalted heavenly king. So Jesus was aware of his identity as the Son of Man. But where did he come from? The next passage gives us the answer.

b. John 13:3-4

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tie it around his waist." Jesus came from God. But Jesus in a great act of humility began to wash the feet of the disciples.

c. Philippians 2:5-11

The same idea lies in this passage. *"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God"* (vv. 5-6, KJV). Jesus was equal with God, and from that exalted position, he humbled himself to become a servant.

Servanthood Comes from Our Identity in Christ

Sometimes, humble people become very angry people. Why? Because their servanthood did not come from grace. When we have the grace of God, we realize we are children of God. The eternal God loves us. He walks with us, talks with us. Now that I have this exalted identity, I will do anything to help people. Nothing is below my dignity because grace gives us the strength to be humble.

Those who always talk about their status and want people to respect them for their status are unhappy people. But when you are happy in Jesus, you do not care whether people treat you as a big shot or a small fly.

In the United States, there is a well-known Christian senator called Mark Hatfield. One day, a famous preacher went to preach at the church where he was a member. After the meeting, the preacher saw Mark Hatfield carrying the chairs and stacking them up. He was like a servant because he has the strength of his identity in Christ. When you have that identity, you always like to lift others up.

The Example of Paul

How many times do we see Paul say good things about other people? Today, we see famous people get unknown people to write books and then put their own name on it. That is the way of the world. But what did Paul do? In his epistles, he identified the authors as "Paul and Silas", "Paul and Timothy", etc. He co-authored with those who were lesser known.

Paul's epistle to the Romans is a letter of theology, but its last chapter is very interesting. Thirty-five names were mentioned. He was just lifting up people. Great people are in the habit of lifting up others. Of course, Paul learned this from Barnabas. When Paul first came to the church in Jerusalem, the church was suspicious about this former persecutor. What did the senior Christian do? Barnabas took Paul right to the apostles, and told them the story of Paul's conversion. Paul did not have to give his testimony, Barnabas did.

Our kingdom is an upside-down kingdom. In the world, junior people acts as public relations officers for senior people. In the kingdom of God, it is the other way round. They are lifting others up. That is a sign of true greatness.

Great People Lift Up Others

Billy Graham is the most prominent preacher in the twentieth century. When I was thirty-four years old, I was at a conference for evangelists. That was the first time I spoke at a big conference with about six thousand evangelists. I was asked to speak about raising up young evangelists. I spoke about how we can take young evangelists along with us when we preach so they can learn from us, and we can check with them on the way.

Billy Graham was not in the audience, but he had been watching from the television inside. Afterwards, he walked up to the platform, shook my hand, and said, "I'm not used to preaching in Asia. I'd like to come and listen to your preaching so I could learn from you." The most famous preacher in the world said he wanted to learn from me, an unknown young preacher. He was trying to

lift me up. Great people lift up others.

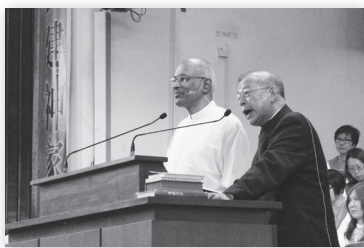
Shall we commit ourselves to lift up others? Do not worry, God will lift you up. We just have to concentrate on lifting others up. According to the Bible, those who care for God's business, God will care for their business.

In conclusion, let us thank God for the joy of grace. Because of his grace, we can be happy. We do not have to be proud. We can lift others up. Let us thank God for loving us, for making us his children, and for all the wonderful things he has done in our lives. Then with the strength of grace, we ask God to reveal our weaknesses, to make us humble, and to give us courage to confess our failures.

Closing Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for the grace that has come to our lives. Thank you for lifting us up and making us your children, princes and princesses of God's kingdom, joint heirs with Christ for the riches of heaven. Thank you for the Holy Spirit who lives with us everyday, for the strength to overcome difficulties, and for being a friend who sticks with us all the time. Thank you for your grace. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The ten messages in this book were given at the Hong Kong Bible Conference 2013. They were transcribed and edited by the Editorial Team of Hong Kong Bible Conference, and are only intended for purposes of review by conference attendees. This material has not been reviewed by the speaker.



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