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His secretary reads it out to King Josiah. In verse 11 we read:

“When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his robes.”
2 Kings 22:11

Why? Because he understands that he and his people haven’t been following the word of the Lord, and he hears of the destruction that is surely coming on his people. So, he sends the high priest to inquire of the Lord, who goes to Huldah the prophet for guidance.

Huldah, the prophet, she tells the high priest what no priest or king wants to hear:

‘This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.’
2 Kings 22:16-17

Huldah, the prophet, she’s not afraid to pass on the message of the Lord, even when it’s not what anyone wants to hear.

Josiah, the king, doesn’t shy away from what he’s heard in the Law. He is willing to hear God’s words *against* him and his people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and anti-Nazi dissident who helped found the Confessing Church – a group of believers who saw how the Christian faith was being co-opted in their country for the Nazi party, and their racist agenda. At the time there was a ‘pro-Nazi’ faction called the ‘German Christians.’ This was a group that was aligning the Christian faith with Nazi ideology.

In his 1932 speech, Bonhoeffer challenged the church:
*“Has it not become terribly clear, again and again, in all that we have discussed with one another here, that we are no longer obedient to the Bible?”*¹

As Kaitlyn Schiess put it, “...more than giving a pious scolding, Bonhoeffer described the perennial problem for the church’s relationship to political power.”²

Bonhoeffer goes on:

*“We prefer our own thoughts to those of the Bible. We no longer read the Bible seriously. We read it no longer against ourselves but only for ourselves.”*¹

NOTES

By "...no longer reading against ourselves..."¹ he means against *our self-interest*. Against those areas of our life where we're out of accord with God.

Love for God begins with listening to God. That means, like King Josiah, hearing what God is saying to us even – maybe especially – when that word is *against* us - when it challenges us; calls us to change our minds. We need people like the prophet Huldah.

As Kaitlyn Schiess puts it:

"We need prophetic Christians today – not people who enjoy feeling brash or bold or who joyfully enter into conflict, but people who care carefully and courageously read God's Word and God's world...We need people who can think well about ethics and politics and who have been spiritually formed in such a way that they can read the Word against their own interests."²

If integrity begins with loving God, with caring most about what He thinks, then living fully 'integrated' always means love for neighbour.

III. Love for God is Always Expressed in Love for Neighbour

One of the big issues Paul has to deal among these immature believers in Corinth is that they are bringing many of the values of the broader Greco-Roman culture into the church, into their new life in Christ. Like the Roman culture, that shows up primarily in a hunger for power.

In the middle of his discussion about spiritual gifts – these God given abilities that are for the service of others – Paul shows the orientation of God's gifts (see 1 Corinthians 13:1-3).

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing."

Greco-Roman culture celebrated power. Paul is saying, 'all this power, and boasting, without love, without it in a loving orientation, it's worthless - pointless.'

Paul is then contrasting the love of power, of dominance and of control, with love itself. He goes on to tell us, helpfully, what love is all about:

NOTES

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a

We can insert the name 'Jesus' everywhere it says love, and that is just true of Jesus' character. Like...

Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind. He does not envy, does not boast, is not proud. Jesus does not dishonor others, He is not self-seeking, He is not easily angered, He keeps no record of wrongs. Jesus does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. He always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Jesus never fails.

This is how Jesus has acted toward you and. What unites us together is our need. Our need for someone to be patient and kind when we weren't. Our need to be forgiven – to not have our wrongs held against us. Our need for someone who would always protect, who would never fail us. Our need for love. Our need for Jesus.

If, in Jesus, we are given a new heart, are brought into the Kingdom way of life, this is now the *modus operandi*, the way of being. We follow the one who is love.

A. Love Is Patient, Love is Kind

"Just as our love for God begins with listening to God's Word, the beginning of love for others is learning to listen to them."⁴

Listening is our first act of love, and it feels like love, because it's costly. That takes tons of patience. It costs you in time and energy, especially when you don't agree with them. Patience is saying, 'I will give you some my most valuable resource – my time.' This is a deep kindness to others.

The objection might be: 'If I take the time listen to them, they'll think I'm affirming what they say! If I give them airtime, it will seem like I'm legitimizing their view.'

No. We can say, 'Thanks for sharing with me what you think. I'm happy to share some of my thoughts, or to offer some further questions if you're interested?' That's patient and kind - that's love.

NOTES

Later, Paul will say that love ‘always hopes.’

Patience is applying this virtue of hope to people.

In Philippians 3 Paul narrates his own life story as now being totally consumed by ‘knowing Christ,’ by being found ‘in Him.’ That his intention is just to let his life be poured out for the good of others.

Then he says:

“All of us, then, who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you. Only let us live up to what we have already attained.”

Philippians 3:15-16

What’s he doing here? He’s exercising patient hope in relation to people. Paul is working and praying for the maturity of this community; but there’s got to be space for that growth. Do I believe that God, “...who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion” as Paul says in Philippians 1:6?

Patience and kindness doesn’t mean we don’t hold people accountable. This doesn’t mean there’s never any pushback against bad ideas.

A few books earlier Paul says: “Do not be idolaters...” (1 Corinthians 10:7a).

In Galatians 6, Paul says:

“Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.”

Galatians 6:1

Jesus tells us, in Matthew 18, that if a person is persistent in sin, that there is a process of challenge, and inviting change.

Where do you need to grow in patience or in kindness, particularly when it comes to public engagement? What relationships can you practice this more this week?

B. Love does not envy, does not boast, is not proud.

“Love has a million disguises. But winning is simply not one.”³

C.S. Lewis⁵ says pride is fundamentally competitive. It’s not about having something but having *more of it* than someone else. You’re not proud of being smart, or beautiful. You’re proud of *being smarter or more beautiful* than others. Pride is about winning. Boasting is about beating.

NOTES

Applying the logic of love in our relationships means, 'I'm not trying to *beat* anyone.'

The objection. Yes, of course, we want to do what is just and true and good in the world. That means standing against injustice. It means being an advocate of what's true and right. Of course, 'Love has a million disguises, but winning is simply not one.' Because love is not proud.

C. Love does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

If we're honest, we've all crossed these lines at some point. To put others down – in subtle or not so subtle ways. To self-seeking. To quick anger. To growing resentments. Almost like we're searching for ways that others may be wrong so we can say: 'See, gotcha!'

Love keeps no record of wrongs. Love forgives. Love ends the cycle of retribution.

At some point, someone just has to not hit back. That's what we see in Jesus. What He's doing on the cross is saying, 'I'll take the hit for you. In your place. I'll pay, so you don't have to.' Then, as we see in Jesus' teaching, and here again in what Paul says, to follow Jesus in His way of forgiveness is to 'not hit back' to end the cycle of retribution.

That's the opposite of cancel culture. That if you say the wrong thing, if you do the wrong thing, there is no space for repentance, no fresh start – just condemnation – you're just over – done. But love says 'No' to cancel culture.

The way of Jesus, the way of love says, grace is possible. Mercy is real. Step into God's mercy and become a person of deep mercy to others. This is forgiveness.

D. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

At least one feature of 'evil' is that it's deceptive. It's bending the truth to get its way. Love rejoices with the truth. To be a person of integrity means that I'm committed to what's truthful.

Rejoicing with the truth means deep commitment to what God reveals about what's good.

Loving my neighbour doesn't mean affirming what wouldn't ultimately be for their good.



Open Up

Think of someone you know who exudes a life of 'integrity.' How do they set a good example for you – how would you want to emulate their way of life?

(Extra question if you think you'll have time: What has been helpful so far in this series? What questions do you still have?)

Dig In

1. **Read Mark 12:13-15.** Notice how the Pharisees and Herodians point out Jesus' integrity. They are not wrong in their assessment. What factors do they name to back up their claim? In which of these ways would you like to grow – to be more like Jesus?
2. **Read Mark 12:28-31.** Jesus is 'integrating' love for God and love for neighbour as two sides of the same coin. Why do you think this is important for our public engagement, for thinking about the political realm and Christian faith? How might this be important to remember as you consider what it means to be a follower of Jesus in the public realm?
3. **Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-8.** In what is often called the 'love chapter,' what stands out to you the most initially?
4. We read that love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. What makes this difficult to practice in the public space for you? In what you've read in this text or what was pointed out in the message helps you to discern your role? In what areas might you need to seek further wisdom?

Prayer:

Take time to thank God that He has given us a clear sense of what love really looks like. Thank Him that in Jesus, God 'shows us' these traits for us to emulate. Ask God for wisdom and courage in the areas that you need more integrity. Pray for the needs of your group.