

When the Best of the Best Isn't

Paul writing to Timothy: “As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than **God's plan, which operates by faith.** Now **the goal of our instruction is love** that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. They want to be teachers of the law, although they don't understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on.”
(1 Timothy 1:3-7)

Paul writing to Philemon: “I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of **your love and of the faith** which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is **in you** for the sake of Christ. For I have had great joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you” (From Philemon 1:4-9 NASB)

It isn't hard to find scriptures that speak of love and faith. Above are two that connect faith with love. I think one of the things most detrimental to the church is not connecting these two, especially in the way we live.

Jesus' *spotless bride* is to be both full of love and full of faith. In Paul's letter to Timothy he stated plainly that God's **plan** works through faith and that the **goal** of teaching is love; he stated also that when people turn aside from these, they end up with “fruitless discussion.” How many people have we run across on our Christian journey that could speak for hours and insist on things they don't even understand—Paul calls such “fruitless.” They waste time and produce nothing beneficial to anyone. James was against such when he said “faith without works is dead.” At the last supper Jesus said, **“I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”** (John 13:34-35 CSB) Even Paige when speaking about tongues and gifts of the spirit brought up the “*more excellent way*” of love from 1 Corinthians chapter thirteen.

In writing to Philemon, the slave owner to whom Paul was representing Onesimus—the slave returning to Philemon; Paul was expecting Philemon to **do what was right** because he knew him to be a man full of love and faith—toward the Lord **and** toward all of the Lord's people. Paul said he had joy and comfort in the way the Lord's people, their hearts, had been refreshed through this man. Has our faith



and love brought joy to our Lord, joy and comfort to His people? Can we, because of our love toward the Lord and His people, be confidently expected by others to do the right thing?

We don't have to look very far to see the failure of the church at large in its love and in so many fruits of the Spirit. We see how the church misrepresents the One they claim is their Lord in something so basic as love. The church is the best of the best, but many times it isn't. It isn't what it should be in love or in oneness. Why?

Facts without transformation is one reason. This is the fruitless discussion of those that don't understand what they are saying. The transformation hasn't taken place in their "house"—but they insist! These are our modern day Pharisees, and dogmatic Christians who will not allow themselves to question doctrine—they already know because someone told them—they won't allow debate or get into the scriptures for themselves to hear what God has said, which He will confirm to them through their relationship with Himself. The word of God is not fruitless in itself and in context, but false teachers twist it and take it out of context, hindering its effectiveness. Proverbs 24:3-4, I believe, was talking about the state of a "house" that is available to us, since we are the temple of the Holy Spirit: **"A house is built by wisdom, and it is established by understanding; by knowledge the rooms are filled with every precious and beautiful treasure."** (CSB) The wisdom, knowledge and understanding are ours through the Holy Spirit who fills us, our rooms, with revelation of all we have in Christ—priceless and beautiful!

Missing unity is another reason that the best of the best isn't always what it should be. We have a sense of oneness, more at NUMA than I have experienced anywhere else, but in our present environment I don't know if we can have the oneness that the Lord desires. Anything less than a loving oneness is dysfunctional Christianity. **What must the Lord put the church through** to bring us to the place where we let our guards down to each other, to be open and honest that the love of Christ in us for each other can be applied and received? Then we will know we are accepted by our brothers and sisters. For this to happen we must feel safe within a loving, non-judgmental, compassionate people who can be trusted; and **we must be that person** letting Christ minister through us.

Independence also discourages the best of the best. It just goes against the grain of an American. To Americans independence is almost an idol! We are brought up to stand on our own two feet, to be strong, to take up for ourselves, to chase after the American dream. To our own downfall we think we are independent, and self-sufficient. We don't need anyone's help—until we do! **What must the Lord put an individual through** before we realize we need Him? His sufficiency and dependability are ours through faith. We need Him and each other.

There are other reasons like laziness, and selfishness with our time and resources, neither of which actually belong to those who say they are Christ's.

Can we have this kind of oneness and love this side of heaven when in every group there always seems to be "that one" who is out of God's order? When times get hard enough, perhaps. Meanwhile, we do our best not to be "that one" disruptive to what God is doing—His goal. Paul planted; Apollos watered; God gives the increase. I am thankful for Numa Church, a loving family that makes God's goals its goals. Lord, we depend on You for your increase in Your church and in Your people. Please work in us and through us. Amen.