

Love Covers

The summer my nephew, Nathaniel, was nine, he decided to put on a puppet show to raise money for his favorite ministry. Nathaniel worked hard on the script, selected his puppet characters, cut and decorated the cardboard stage (complete with dragons and monsters), made flyers, rehearsed his lines and invited guests. No doubt about it, Nathaniel had put a lot of work into his fundraiser. At last the audience was assembled—on with the show. However, a few seconds after Nathaniel began animating his puppets and speaking their lines, his two-year-old buddy, Joe, became wildly excited and curious about the puppets. Joe squealed so loudly no one could hear a thing, then he escaped his parents' tight grasp, bolted for the stage, and caused the whole thing to collapse. Puppets went flying while tangled legs squirmed under the cardboard. As adults rushed to the rescue, I expected Nathaniel to emerge from the chaos with tears of disappointment. Instead, he propped up the cardboard theatre, wrapped loving arms around his friend, poked their heads through the stage opening and laughed as he said, "That's okay Little Joe. You can be in the show." In that moment, Nathaniel beautifully demonstrated 1 Peter 4:8, "*Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.*"

Alas, in the course of our Kingdom work, sometimes at our finest moments, major obstacles arise, our plans are blocked, our puppet shows are spoiled. Sometimes frustrations and troubles even come, however unintentional, through the actions of our closest friends and fellow Kingdom workers. Mark my words though; Nathaniel's attitude is one we would do well to adopt. Just such an attitude of love is needed if we intend to build up and not destroy God's Church! The apostle Peter originally wrote these words about love to believers who were being persecuted—a time of persecution during which Peter eventually lost his own life. Peter encouraged the embattled followers of Jesus to be careful in their suffering not to resort to human ways and desires, such as cruelty, hate, revenge, and anger. Instead, he urged, "Above all, love! (1 Peter 4:2,8)

Peter was preparing first century believers, as well as us today, to be ready for the evil one's diabolic tactics. Peter recognized that as the day of the Lord's second coming drew closer Satan would continually turn up the pressure on God's Church (1 Peter 5:8); and one of his most vicious, Church-crushing acts would be to destroy relationships between the Lord's Kingdom workers. For this reason, Peter urged, "Above all, love!"

When C.F.W. Walther preached from 1 Peter 4:8 over 150 years ago, he said, "Satan will summon all his hellish powers to plague and torment Christians because he knows his time is short... Therefore, precisely at that time, it will be urgently necessary for Christians to demonstrate a mutual brotherly love. As they are oppressed on all sides by the world, they cannot forsake one another. Instead, they must stand by one another in their troubles and be patient with one another in their mutual weakness."*

Without a deep commitment among believers to love one another, the Church could die. Jesus Himself raised this very possibility when he asked, "*When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?*" (Luke 18:8)

When a brother or sister offends us, interrupts our plans or inflicts pain, we would do well to learn to say "What hurt? I can't see it. It is covered over. With the Lord's strength I swept it under

the rug of love." I know that you know this is not an easy truth for us to live out. Perhaps even now you are struggling with anger, or revenge, or some other human desire because of frustration, hurt or interrupted Kingdom work. But the choice to love says: devil, you will not win. The choice to love says: Yes, Jesus, when you return, you will find faith on the earth!

Group Discussion:

(Please note: There are no right or wrong answers to the discussion questions. Let the Holy Spirit work through each member of your group. The best learning will happen when everyone shares his/her own insights, questions, concerns, and ideas.)

1. Share examples from your own experience of things that have “upset the puppet show” between individual Kingdom workers or between groups of people in the Church. What attitudes, behaviors, actions, words, or other things have you observed, or experienced, that disrupted plans, caused hurt, frustration, anger, or otherwise threatened to destroy relationships? (Please do not give specific names or locations of people or churches)
2. Read 1 Peter 4:7-11 aloud, then discuss the following:
 - a. Why do you think Peter placed so much emphasis on the need for believers to increase their love and strengthen their relationships with one another as the day of the Lord’s second coming drew closer?
 - b. In what ways would our churches look different if, above all, believers loved each other deeply? In what ways would our Kingdom work look different if, above all, we loved each other deeply?
 - c. What does “love covers over a multitude of sins” mean to you, your group, and/or your church?
 - d. Identify some specific ways God’s people can grow in their ability to live out the kind of love Peter wrote about?
3. Examining our relationships and evaluating our love for one another can be a convicting and painful experience. At times like this, it is good to remember that as believers in Christ, we enjoy the blessing of confession, repentance and forgiveness for our sins and any mistakes we make while serving in the Lord’s mission.

Read 1 John 4:7-12 together as a group, as a both a confession of our failure to love perfectly and as a reminder of God’s perfect love for us.

4. What opportunities do you currently have to show love, above all? (Share as much as you are able, without breaking confidentiality or violating someone’s privacy.)
5. Share one way you think your Kingdom work will be different as a result of this study. How would you like others to pray for you and/or your Kingdom work?

6. Close with a time of prayer based on the requests you identified and any other concerns brought to light by this study. One member of the group may pray for the whole group, or each member may pray for the person on his or her right and so on.

*C.F.W. Walther. Translated by Gerhard P. Grabenhofer. *God Grant It: Daily Devotions from C.F.W. Walther*. St. Louis: CPH, 2006, p. 448.