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# God's Call to Love Others

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Free media and discipleship resources for pastors, leaders, and growing disciples.

# God's Call to Love Others

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Imagine two doctors. The first was trained in a medical school where no one talked, wrote, or read—training only involved the close observation of working doctors. The second's training was the opposite. It consisted solely of listening to lectures and reading text books. Which **doctor** would you rather see—the one who knows how procedures are done but not why, or the other who knows why but not how? Probably neither!

The Church faithfully answers God's call to love others when we both explain and demonstrate that love.

We explain God's love when we faithfully teach the content of our faith; when we guard "the original testimony without ceasing to apply it meaningfully to the context of local and prevailing conditions." [1] Explanation is a way of loving both followers of Jesus and those who are not yet followers. The good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection, and what that means for us has to be put into words for people to believe. It also has to be put into words for a believer's faith to deepen.

Explanation is love in that it dignifies our neighbor as a person capable of understanding and making decisions. It is also love when it is motivated by the Church's concern for people. And finally, explanation connects people to their faith community. As a believer better understands the doctrines, practices, and motivating values of their particular church they are able to more meaningfully participate in the life and worship of that congregation.

We the Church demonstrate God's love and our own to others when we take their needs seriously—whether physical, emotional, spiritual, intellectual, or contextual.

While at times, Christians have disagreed over whether explanation or demonstration of love is the more important mission of the Church, it is clear that Jesus saw them as different strands of the same command. Jesus taught that loving God and loving others were together the most important commandments (Mark 12:28-31), and His example is one of blending teaching with meeting the physical

needs of those around Him (healing, feeding the 5,000, raising the dead). Jesus was not just a teacher nor just a healer. His authority to teach was proven through His healing and His healing was given deeper significance through His teaching.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, we see the Apostle Paul collecting money from churches everywhere to aid the church in Jerusalem. (2 Corinthians 9) We see the first church distributing money to those in need. (Acts 2:45) And the Apostle James goes as far as saying that caring for orphans and widows is an essential part of pleasing God with our lives. (James 1:27)

Christians have seen acts of charity as the Church's responsibility for generations, but what about the church actively working to change human experience on a structural/cultural level? Does pursuing justice for the oppressed, victimized, and marginalized fall within our responsibility of the Church? Or is that too political, too far from the proclamation of the gospel? [Read "[God's Call to Pursue Justice](#)"]

Like a doctor confidently practicing medicine because she both understands why a particular procedure needs to be done and has actually physically practiced doing it, the Church clearly practices God-reflecting love of others when we both explain and demonstrate that love. Then believers and not-yet-believers alike, are invited into a deeper understanding and experience of the saving, healing, restoring work of the gospel.

#### **Footnotes:**

1. Thomas C. Oden, *Life in the Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1992), 353.