

How to Win Friends and Influence People – For Christ!

Dale Carnegie offered a popular self-improvement course designed to build self-esteem and strengthen relationships. Its title..."*How to Win Friends and Influence People*. Many thousands have taken this course in an effort to increase their business skills, or simply to learn better how to relate to other humans.

The success of such a course points to some tremendous needs. We do not know how to relate.

The Bible is a book on developing and maintaining friendships – influencing people for Christ's sake. Turn with me to **I Thessalonians 2:1-19**.

Here we see a good demonstration of these biblical principles. Paul had great success in Thessalonica, partly attributable to the way he related to people. We long for success today in relating to people, don't we? We fail so often in this way. I agree with one author who said that there is little chance for people to get together as long as most of us want to be in the front of the bus, the back of the church, and the middle of the road.

Let us learn today how to relate to people for Christ's sake. Let us learn how to reach out so that the lost can be convinced of our sincerity. Let us make every part of our church a means to win others to Christ. Let us be especially committed to making our Sunday School classes our outreach centers where we reach out for Christ's sake as well as reach in to those already in class. Ralph Neighbor says this in his little book, *Witness, Take the Stand!*. "When a class lets a full year pass without reaching a single person for Jesus Christ, it has forfeited its excuse for existing."

The Scripture tells us that relating to others, reaching out to others must start with love. The key to Paul's approach is found in verse 8. "...you had become very dear to us." "Very dear" is the word *agape* – God's love. This chapter describes the vital nature of love. Four qualities of love are found here. These must be seen in our lives, if we are to reach others for Christ and to relate properly to anyone.

OUR LOVE MUST BE AUTHENTIC. Verses 3-5 speak to the authenticity of Paul's love, as well as verse 10.

Paul did not use guile or trickery to win converts. The word translated "guile" carries the idea of "baiting a hook." In other words, Paul did not trap people into being saved, the way a clever salesman traps people into buying his product. Spiritual witnessing and "Christian salesmanship" are different. Salvation does not lie at the end of a clever argument or a subtle presentation. It is the result of God's Word and the power of the Holy spirit (I Thessalonians 1:5).

Often we hear, "I don't care what your method is, just so long as your message is right." But some methods are unworthy of the Gospel. They are cheap, whereas the Gospel is a costly message that required the death of God's only Son.

Paul's enemies in Thessalonica accused him of being a cheap peddler of this new message. They said that his only motive was to make money. In describing himself as a faithful steward, Paul answered these critics and *Paul's readers knew that he told the truth.*

Paul's day was noted for roaming philosophers, sorcerers, and other peddlers who used tricks to impress their audiences. Paul approached them with honesty and an absence of deception, deceit, and manipulation. He was honest, direct, and decisive.

Paul's enemies were attacking him on many fronts, including the sin of sexual impurity, a sin so prevalent among the traveling religious teachers of the day. Paul disclaimed anything of this type as a motive for his activities.

He was sincere, and authentic in his motive for ministry and most of all, in his love. There were no undercover reasons for his activities. He loved, and the people sensed that.

Do those around you sense your love? I'm afraid that sometimes we concentrate more on being right than we concentrate on being loving.

Is your love authentic? In his book, *"Written in Blood"*, Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor. "Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister." Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room – Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned. As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube. With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence. "Doctor, when do I die?" Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he'd agreed to donate his blood. He'd thought giving up his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he'd made his great decision. This little boy's love was authentic. Is ours?

OUR LOVE MUST BE GENTLE. Look at verse 7. Paul and his helpers were gentle, not authoritarian. They put aside their rights of being respected and playing a dominating part and demonstrated the utmost tenderness, comparable to that of a mother nursing her own children.

The baby Christians sensed his tender loving care as he nurtured them. He was indeed like a loving mother who cared for her children.

It takes time and energy to care for children. Paul did not turn his converts over to baby-sitters or a divine daycare. He made sacrifices and cared for them himself. He did not tell them to "read a book" as a substitute for his own personal ministry (though good Christian literature can help young believers to grow). **Paul had patience with the new Christians.** Children do not grow up instantly. They all experience growing pains and encounter problems as they mature. Paul's love for them made him patient, because love suffers long, and is kind (I Corinthians 13:4).

Paul also nourished them. First Thessalonians 2:7 can read, "even as a nursing mother cherishes her own children." What is the lesson here? A nursing mother imparts her own life to the child. This is exactly what Paul wrote in I Thessalonians 2:8. You cannot be a nursing mother and turn your baby over to someone else. That baby must in your arms, next to your heart.

The mature Christian feeds on the Word of God and then shares its nourishment with the younger believers so they can grow (I Peter 2:1-3).

Beside making sacrifices, having patience, and giving nourishment, **a caring parent also protects her child.** It was this fact that enabled King Solomon to discover which woman was the real mother of the living child (I Kings 3:16-28). Paul was willing to give not only the Gospel but his own life as well. His love for the Thessalonians was so great he would die for them if necessary.

"Love is patient and kind" (I Corinthians 13:4). Part of the fruit of the Spirit is gentleness (Galatians 5:23), which involves patience, empathy, and merciful compassion. This quality is essential to win friends and influence people for Christ.

OUR LOVE MUST BE A RISKY LOVE. It must be self-giving, total. In verse 8, Paul stated that they had not only shared the gospel of God, but their lives as well. These missionaries knew a constant "yearning for" these people, so much that they found it a continual delight to share their whole being with them.

Is our love like that? For many, especially for men, it is not. We are led to believe that men shouldn't love to the point that we open up our lives, especially with other men. The words of David W. Smith delve deeper. "Within each man there is a dark castle with a fierce dragon to guard the gate. The castle contains a lonely self, a self most men have suppressed, a self they are afraid to show. Instead, they present an armored knight – no one is invited inside the castle. The dragon symbolizes the fears and fantasies of masculinity, the leftover stuff of childhood.

"When men take the risk and let down the barriers (or drawbridge...) people respond to one another as whole persons and try to communicate with openness and intimacy. Openness brings with it opportunity for a growing relationship, for a wider

range of deeply felt experiences. This is the stuff from which friendships are formulated and sustained."

The Bible says that our love must be self-giving, even risky.

OUR LOVE MUST BE EXPRESSED IN ACTIVE MINISTRY. In vs.11-12, Paul shifts his image to that of a father who "exhorted, encouraged, and charged" his children to be all they could be. Love is not gullible, nor does it ignore situations and evil which threaten "a life worthy of God." The father Paul has in mind cares for each one of his children and is personally involved to help each one toward maturity. Love is never effective at long distance.

As he defended his own work against false accusations, Paul pointed out three of his duties as the spiritual father to the Thessalonians.

His work (v.9). The father works to support his family. Even though the Christians in Philippi sent financial help, Paul still made tents and paid his own way. No one could accuse him of using his ministry for his own profit.

His walk (v.10). Fathers must live so that they are good examples to their children. He could call the Thessalonian believers as witnesses that his life had been exemplary in every way. None of the members of the assembly could accuse Paul of being a poor example. Furthermore, God had witnessed Paul's life and Paul was not afraid to call God as a witness that he had lived a dedicated life, while caring for the church family.

His life was holy. In the Greek, this means to "carefully fulfill the duties God gives to a person."

His life was also righteous. This refers to integrity, uprightness of character, and behavior.

Paul's life was also unblamable. Literally, this word means "not able to find fault in." His enemies might accuse him but no one could level any charge against Paul and prove it.

His words (vv.11-12). A father must not only support the family by working, and teach the family by being a good example. He must also take time to speak to the family members. Paul knew the importance of teaching these new believers the truths that would help them grow in the Lord.

Paul dealt with each of the believers personally. Our Lord was never too busy to speak to individuals, even though He preached to great multitudes. To be sure, this is difficult and demanding work. But it is rewarding work that glorifies God.

Paul encouraged the new believers. This is what a father does with his children, for children are easily discouraged. New Christians need someone to encourage them in the Lord. The word exhorting means "to call to one's side, to encourage." It does not mean that Paul scolded them. Rather, it means he encouraged them to go on with the Lord.

Paul also comforted them. This word carries the same idea of "encouragement," with the emphasis on activity. Paul not only made them feel better, but he made them want to do better. A father must not pamper a child. Rather, he must encourage the child to go right back and try over again.

Finally, **Paul charged them.** This word means that Paul "testified to them" out of his own experience with the Lord. It carries the idea of giving personal witness. Sometimes we go through difficulties so that we may share with new Christians what the Lord has done.

We who are parents know that our children (especially teenagers) do not like to hear us say, "Now, back when I was a kid..." But this is an important part of training a family. It is a wonderful thing when a "spiritual father" can encourage and help his "children" out of his own experience with the Lord.

What was the purpose for this fatherly ministry to the believers? His aim was that his children might "walk worthy of God" (I Thessalonians 2:12). Just as a father wants to be proud of his children, so the Lord wants to get glory through the lives of His children. Paul ministered to them in such a personal way because he was teaching them how to walk.

Our love must also be personal and firm. It is to be a love which includes encouragement, comfort, and urging.

Sometimes love means we will confront...it always means we will act.

We cannot expect to win friends and influence people for Christ without love...a love that is authentic, gentle, "risky," and expressed in active ministry.

How is your love life?