

REDEEMER

R E P O R T

MAY 2008

THE BIG NON-NEGOTIABLE

BY SCOTT SAULS

In a day when Christians are sometimes perceived as narrow-minded, mean-spirited and judgmental, it is wise to frequently visit 1 Corinthians 13, commonly referred to as “the love chapter.” Jesus himself said that the first and greatest command is to love God, and the second (which flows from the first) is to love people as we love ourselves. These commands together are a summary of the entire law of God (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus also said that the way people will be able to identify his followers in the world is by the way that they love (John 13:34-35). These things being true, it is vital to understand the priority of loving well—to know what love is, and what it is not.

Some think love is underrated. According to The Beatles, “All you need is love...love is *all* you need.” Some, on the other hand, think love is overrated. Tina Turner, for example, sings, “What’s love got to do (got to do) with it? What’s love but a second-hand emotion... (and) a sweet, old-fashioned notion?” Scripture sides with the Beatles on this one. To the God who created us, *love is huge*. The Christians in first century Corinth had many things going for them...lots of talent,

lots of resources, lots of gifts, lots of brilliance and savvy. But they had a big problem with *lovelessness*, which, according to Scripture, made all the other things they had going for them essentially worthless.

Mistaking competence for ‘success’

When you meet someone, what is usually the first question you ask each other? You know... “So, what do you *do*?” In today’s culture, a high value is placed on vocation. “What you do” says something about your skills, abilities, and influence. To many, “what you do” determines your *value* to society. In the Bible, however, very little emphasis is placed upon what one *does*—especially when it comes to determining his or her intrinsic value. Rather, the focus is always upon the kind of person somebody *is*. You can be successful academically, vocationally, as a leader, and even at religion, but without love you have nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2-3).

Mistaking morality for ‘success’

The Bible speaks of two kinds of morality. As Nietzsche was fond of noticing, for many people moral behavior is really just a power-play, something people do so they can feel superior to others. The first version of morality is the *liberal* version—the kind that

places great emphasis upon taking care of the poor, the oppressed, those in need, and those who have a hard time staying ahead in life. The second is the *conservative* version—the kind of that is willing even to die for “truth”—for firm, deeply-held convictions about what is right and what is wrong. Yet without love, even the most moral liberals gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3, “If I give all I possess to the poor but have not love, I gain nothing”) and conservatives gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:2-3, “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...if I surrender my body to the flames but have not love, I gain nothing”).

Exactly what is love?

First, it’s important to understand what love is *not*. Love is *not* a to-do-list. Those who read the Bible’s list of love’s attributes (1 Corinthians 13:4-7) very often want to turn the list into several “to-do’s”—to turn the character qualities of love into a moral self-improvement program. We think, “I need to *work* on being more patient...more kind...more centered on God’s truth...I need to become less critical and more

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THE OFFENSE OF BEING OFFENSIVE

BY KATHY KELLER

Tim and I have had an unusual opportunity recently to travel a bit outside of New York City and so get a better sampling of the thinking going around in the Christian world. Some of it is very encouraging: more thinking about how to help the marginalized, more effort to integrate faith and work, more hope for people who would have formerly been written off as hopeless.

But we have encountered one disheartening strain of thinking on enough occasions that a certain degree of alarm seems warranted. That is, unless you are actively offending a person with the doctrines of Christianity, you aren't preaching, teaching, or witnessing to them faithfully. In other words, offending skeptics and unbelievers with your proclamation of the good news are signs of integrity, while gentleness, humility and kindness are all indications of compromise.

1 Peter 2:12 gives us the perfect balance. When we live and speak the truth, some people will be offended and even will persecute us, and yet many others will be attracted and will glorify God because of us. If you habitually offend people or seldom offend people, you are not speaking with integrity. But the life of Jesus himself gives us some general idea

of who will be offended and who will not be.

Jesus was described as gentle and meek, and when confronted with the woman taken in adultery, or the serially monogamous Samaritan woman, he was gentle in his firmness. Likewise with Matthew and Zaccheus, tax collectors and Roman collaborators (and probably thieves.) He went out of his way to woo them with kindness into the kingdom. Matthew says about Jesus that "a bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out" (Mt 12:20) to describe how gentle and tender he was. Jesus himself said that he was "meek and lowly of heart" (Mt 11:29.) If a Christian has a reputation for being brusque, sarcastic, and frequently offensive, it's hard to see how he or she fits this Christ-like pattern.

But when John sent to ask whether he was really the Messiah or not, he ended his message "...and blessed is he who takes no offense in me." This was because, true enough, there were people whom Jesus DID offend. But as a general rule they were the religious leaders, the moral pillars, the self-righteous Pharisees who praised God "that they were not as sinful as other men" rather than repenting in humility before a

holy God. Jesus' harsh words are reserved mainly for the religious, not for the unbelievers and sinners. As a result, the sinners and prostitutes heard Jesus gladly (Mt 21:31-32,) because he proclaimed a gospel of grace, and those sure of their right standing with God plotted to kill him, because he exposed their hypo-crisy. Even then, Jesus died forgiving his murderers, "For they know not what they do" rather than denouncing them.

I wonder, then, at those who believe that the "Good News" ought to be proclaimed with as much finger-wagging as possible. It isn't that believers should be unable or afraid to talk about the sinfulness of sin or the hellishness of hell, but always in the context of the Cross, where Jesus took the punishment on himself and opened the way to God for the lost. I think it is fair to say that some Christians enjoy telling people that they are lost and hell-bound. It really is an offense against the grace of God, as well as a misrepresentation of the character of Christ, to be offensive when announcing the good news. It almost makes one wonder if they've heard the good news themselves, or whether they are poor elder brothers, unwilling to rejoice that sinners are being saved.

CONGREGATIONAL MEETING – MAY 4 AT 12:15PM

The Congregation of Redeemer Presbyterian Church of New York City will meet for the following purposes: 1) Election of Officers 2) Financial Report 3) Update of the Vision Campaign. Please note that the Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America does not permit proxy voting. No other business will be conducted. *Childcare will be provided.

REDEEMER REPORT

Kathy Keller
Heather Klein

The Redeemer Report is a publication of the Redeemer Presbyterian Church.
OFFICE • 1359 BROADWAY (BETWEEN W. 36/37TH STREETS) • FOURTH FLOOR • NY, NY 10018-7102
(212) 808-4460 (PHONE) (212) 808-4465 (FAX) www.redeemer.com

HUNTER COLLEGE AUDITORIUM East 69TH (Between Park & Lexington) services at 10:30AM • 6:00PM	ETHICAL CULTURE West 64TH and CPW service at 9:15AM	FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH Corner of West 79TH and Broadway service at 5:00PM & 7:15PM
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PAMELA BROWN-PETERSIDE JOINS REDEEMER STAFF

Pamela Brown-Peterside is the newest addition to our Fellowship Group staff. Getting to know this extraordinary woman will be a privilege for all those who work with her or who experience her ministry.

Born and raised in Nigeria, of a Nigerian father and an Irish mother, Pamela came to the U.S. as a student in 1982. Though she became a Christian as a teenager, she drifted away from the faith while at Oberlin College where she received a B.A. in sociology/anthropology. Pursuing a public health career, she got a master's degree in public health at the University of Michigan, was an AIDS researcher in London, and then came to New York to work on a Ph.D. in Sociomedical Sciences at Columbia. During this program, an academic crisis led Pamela back to Jesus and a year after completing this degree, she began attending Redeemer,

in 1998. Not knowing anyone, Pamela soon joined a home fellowship group, then became a host, a leader, and eventually a coordinator (now called leader-



coaches). She also served as co-leader of the Racial Unity Ministry for three years.

Three years ago Pamela left her position in NYC to work with HIV prevention, and traveled to Uganda to work alongside of doctors with World Harvest Mission. She managed a program that prevents the trans-

mission of HIV from mothers to children. Pamela worked with hundreds of traditional birth attendants (midwives) to establish practices of drug administration and delivery that significantly reduced HIV transmission. You can read more about her work in Uganda at her blog site: http://lamppostmedia.net/column_bundibyline/index.html.

Pamela is humbled to be joining the Fellowship Group team and passionate about coming alongside Redeemer attenders to help them grow more deeply in their love of God and toward one another. She hopes to encourage people in their groups to embrace diversity, be outward facing as Jesus was, and live as Jesus did—unhurried and unworried—a radical choice, especially in this city! During her down time, Pamela enjoys regular walks in Fort Tryon Park, journaling, and playing tennis.

THE BIG NON-NEGOTIABLE...

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supportive of people...etc.” This approach, though it may sound good at first glance, can actually be lethal. Nobody learns to love by trying harder to love. We simply cannot manufacture character in ourselves, no matter how hard we try. Love is not a to-do-list.

The definition of love

Love is, like the fruit of the Spirit, a *condition of the heart* that grows and develops in us over time *as we encounter Love*. Think, for example, of families whose children seem so wonderful and kind. They are the kind of kids *you* want to have one day, or the kind of kids you wish you had now. You think to yourself, “If only I could be so lucky to

have kids like that.” But here’s a shocker to consider...those kids weren’t just born like that! No, we become loving only as we encounter love. In the vast majority of cases (not every single one!) where you see sweet, well-adjusted, other-centered children, at closer glance you discover that such children are merely imitating and living out the kind of sweetness and other-centeredness that they have experienced directly from their own parents over the course of their lives. You become what you encounter.

So where do I go to ‘encounter’ Love?

The Bible gives the answer when it tells us that God *is* love. It does not say that God is *loving*, but

that God is *love*. What this means is that you will never become loving if you seek to be loving without going through God, and more specifically through repeated personal encounters with His Son Jesus, who is the embodiment of Love in all its fullness. The Bible says that God *is* love, and that Jesus is the exact representation of God’s being. So, if you want to encounter love, you must encounter Jesus. And you will only become patient, kind, protective, trusting, hopeful, etc. once you see *in Jesus* the ultimate expressions of patience, kindness, protection, trust, hope, etc. Biblically, love is a living, active *power* that comes to you and picks you up and *changes you*.



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PROFESSIONALS IN ACTION

Professionals In Action (PIA) is a new initiative by Hope For New York (HFNY) that recruits teams of professionals to volunteer on short term projects for HFNY affiliates. It is an excellent opportunity to maximize the impact volunteers can bring to these organizations by utilizing their specialized skill sets, and a chance for them to meet other professionals in the industry.

Project duration ranges from 1 to 3 months for 2 to 3 hours per week. Types of projects include: **Strategic Planning, Marketing, Client Workshop, Accounting, Video Production, Graphic Design, Website Development, Technology Consultation, Database Development** and many more.

For information on how to get involved, please visit www.hfny.org or join the mailing list by contacting pia@hfny.org

CENTER FOR FAITH & WORK EVENTS IN MAY 2008

DATE & TIME	EVENT & LOCATION
Thursday, May 1 at 7:00PM	Law Dinner, Redeemer Offices
Sunday, May 4 at 12:00PM	Finance Chat, Hunter College
Thursday, May 8 at 7:00PM	Grad Students Fellowship, Redeemer Offices
Friday, May 9 at 7:00PM	InterArts Fellowship, Redeemer Offices
Thursday, May 15 at 8:00AM	Legal Fellowship Breakfast, Redeemer Offices
Sunday, May 18 at 12:00PM	Healthcare Lunch, after East Side AM Service
Monday, May 19 at 7:00PM	Entrepreneurs Fellowship
Monday, May 19 at 7:00PM	Financial Services Ministry, Redeemer Offices
Tuesday, May 20 at 7:00PM	The A.D. Agency: Creativity and Christianity, Cooley Studio
Thursday, May 22 at 7:00PM	Healthcare Fellowship, Upper East Side, contact aseon@hotmail.com
Friday, May 23 at 7:30PM	Higher Education, contact dmugglin@duke.poly.edu

Please go to www.faithandwork.org for information on all CFW events.