



Love One Another, 189 pages,
paper, \$15.00, 978-0-8308-
3449-5, May 2008

I am reminded almost daily of the enormous challenge Christians face to make the church what Jesus intended it to be. What I read in religious periodicals, hear from friends and colleagues, observe and experience in my contact with fellow believers yanks me back to reality when I become idealistic and naive. The church—both local and global—seems to work overtime making its witness in the world ineffective, if not altogether scandalous. . . . It makes me dizzy to think about how much trouble the church faces, how often the church is divided, how quickly it wanders off course. . . .

Jesus' new commandment requires special attention when believers don't get along. It's our diversity that makes love hard; it's also diversity that makes love necessary. That's why I prefer the strategy of learning to love one another when there is every reason not to. That is love's greatest test. As Paul wrote, love does not insist on its own way. It's not self-righteous, though it must still be grounded in the truth.

Some teachings, like the divinity of Christ, are so central that their compromise threatens the life of the church. The basic gospel is one of those nonnegotiable standards, as the church has affirmed now for almost two thousand years. Still, diversity is inevitable and in many cases healthy. The new commandment was given at least in part to keep the church united even in its diversity. The mutuality commands of the New Testament offer guidelines for how Christians can remain loyal to each other even when they dislike and disagree with each other. . . .

This book has presented a modest plan to help the church function as a family. It has not whitewashed difficult problems, advocated absolute tolerance or dismissed disagreements and divisions in the church as irrelevant. But neither has it answered every question, solved every dispute, revealed the right and wrong position on every issue. Instead, it has attempted to show what Christians can do despite these unanswered questions. It has pointed to the way of love. That does not make questions and disputes less troublesome, only less significant in light of Jesus' ultimate standard.

There is something more important than being right. That something is being loving. Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church, calls us to obey one supreme command: to love one another as Jesus has loved us. No disagreement is so important, no division so final, no clash so intense that we are relieved of the responsibility to live like Jesus. As he loved even his enemies who sent him to the cross, so must we love others. As Jesus said, "Love one another as I have loved you."

—From the epilogue