

"THE ABCs OF AUTHENTIC AFFECTION"

(Romans 16:1-16)

(Chuck Swindoll)

Paul and his companions in Rome didn't share a lukewarm love. The hardships and victories of ministry had bound their hearts together in a deep, abiding affection that neither time nor distance could diminish. He hoped this same kind of affection would bind the believers in Rome into an indivisible, tight-knit community. As a matter of fact, he would want the same for us today.

As I review the list of twenty-seven persons greeted or commended and then reflect on Paul's personal connection with each individual, I find that he had diligently applied the lessons he taught in 12:1-15:13. To help make these lessons easier to remember—and therefore apply—I have reduced them to four simple commands. Think of them as the ABCs of love within the body of Christ.

A—*Accept one another.* Accept variety. Not only did God create people with diverse appearances, He gave us a broad range of opinions, values, interests, gifts, and abilities. Some think, eat, breathe, and dream missions. Many pursue opportunities to teach. Others cannot imagine devoting themselves to anyone other than special-needs children. Still others are wonderful conduits of music. We need them all.

Moreover, we are a community of Christians at varying stages of growth and growing at different rates. We have brand-new Christians who still cuss (and some older Christians who cuss and try to hide it). We have people who've been in the church all their lives and many who are still discovering what life in the body is all about. We're a diverse family, not a collection of clones. Rejoice in variety, and accept—"receive unto yourself"—those who are not like you.

B—*Become a servant.* Communities work best when we serve one another. Find something that needs doing or someone who needs help and don't hold back! If you aren't sure where to begin, find someone who's been around awhile and ask, "What can I do to help around here?" If you want to see a pastor faint, walk up and ask him. Most people want to find only the best fit for their gifts or the precise place to exercise their gifts without regard for the most pressing needs. Servants aren't picky.

C—*Cultivate esteem for others.* I use the word "esteem" in the archaic sense, meaning "to show value or worth." The best way to appreciate the worth of another is to treat him or her as you would a VIP.

Think of someone you greatly admire. For me, that might be Abraham Lincoln. If this great president were to enter my home, I would behave in a certain manner to express my immense respect for him. Because our



attitudes tend to follow our actions, I can cultivate esteem for someone I don't even know by giving him or her the same VIP treatment I would offer Lincoln.

Cultivating esteem for some people will be easier than for others. Let me encourage you to concentrate on giving VIP treatment to those you might ordinarily avoid.

D—*Demonstrate your love.* Love without deeds is no better than cold indifference. It feels the same. Therefore, find ways to demonstrate love through acts of kindness. And if you're really up for a challenge, try expressing your love in a more tangible way. Men find this difficult, but we have to get over it.

Once, I was teaching a midweek service at a church when the back door blew open and two rough-looking guys walked in. One wore a sleeveless shirt, revealing a network of tattoos running down one arm. The other wore a leather Harley jacket and held a Nazi helmet under his arm. They walked heavily to the back seats and sat down with a loud thump. The guy with the sleeveless shirt never took off his sunglasses, and they both sat like statues with their arms folded.

After the service, the crowd mingled and talked. The pair of heavies made a beeline for me. The guy with the helmet said, "Your name Swindle?"

"Sure, that's me." I gulped.

"You the guy on the radio?"

"Yes, I'm probably the one you've heard."

At that point, he dropped his helmet and gave me a bone-crushing hug, lifting me straight off the ground. My feet dangled helplessly as I struggled to breathe. "Chuck, don't ever quit. You told me about Jesus, and I want to thank you. I also want you to know I love you, man!"

After he put me down, his buddy walked up and gave me another painful hug. And I loved every minute with those two crusty guys.

Their authentic demonstrations of unguarded love are exactly what we should be expressing each time we meet one another.

Take a few moments to review the ABCs of authentic affection. Then close your eyes and imagine the people in your church faithfully carrying out these four commands—accepting one another without judgment, serving one another without pride, treating one another like VIPs, and freely expressing heartfelt fondness for one another. You'd have to shut off the lights and lock the doors to make them go home! Who wouldn't want to be a part of something that contagious?

If this is the kind of church you want to call home, take the lead; be the first. Become an example of authentic affection, and praise those who join you. Ignore the frowning critics, and genuinely smile down every sourpuss. Then see what effect it has on attendance.