

The Greatest Of These Is Love

The 2007

POWER



Lectures

Hosted by the Southaven church of Christ
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B. J. Clarke
Lectureship Director

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Dedication

I FIRST BECAME ACQUAINTED WITH the Southaven church of Christ by way of the POWER lectureship. In 1989, when the first POWER lectureship was conducted, I was preaching in Knoxville, Tennessee. I was certainly familiar with the directors of the lectureship: brothers Thomas B. Warren and Garland Elkins. I had read their writings for years, but did not know them personally. As a preacher I was very interested in the outstanding material produced in the first two lectureship volumes on *The Providence of God* (1989) and *The Minor Prophets* (1990). I purchased the books and came away with the impression that the Southaven church of Christ must be a doctrinally solid church to be aligned with strong men of the faith like brother Warren and brother Elkins, and to produce such strong and sound material.

Little did I know that within a matter of months, after the POWER lectureship in August of 1990, I would be “trying out” for the pulpit job at the Southaven church of Christ. Brother Elkins had decided to take a position with the Memphis School of Preaching and Barry Gilreath, Jr., the Associate Preacher at Southaven, was gracious enough to remember me and to recommend me to the elders as a candidate for the job. I was very happy in my work with the Ault Road church of Christ in Knoxville, Tennessee and so originally I was not interested in the work at Southaven. I called my Dad and encouraged him to look into the job. Selflessly, he encouraged me to check into the work. When I explained to him that I was very happy where I was, he reminded me that Abraham was very comfortable where he was when God told him to leave and go to another land. Of course, he was not comparing me to Abraham nor was he suggesting that God was telling me to go to Southaven. He was merely pointing out that our comfort and happiness is not the only consideration when it comes to serving God. It is about where we can accomplish the most and lasting good for the kingdom. He encouraged me to consider where I could influence the largest number of souls for good and to make my decision accordingly.

And so, in my late 20's, I sent my resume and was invited to speak to the congregation for the first time the last Sunday in October of 1990. We absolutely loved the church and could not

believe that we were actually being considered to work with such a church as Southaven. In December of 1990 the elders (Homer Eaton, Don Ward and James Williams) officially extended me the invitation to become the “pulpit preacher” at the Southaven church of Christ.

And so in mid-January of 1991, we drove the moving van across the length of Tennessee and drove to 6510 Sandhurst Drive in Horn Lake, MS to unload our belongings and begin a new chapter in our lives. Daniel was a few months shy of 3 years old and Holly was little more than a year old. Tish and I will never forget the “pounding” we received upon our arrival. Our pantry was stocked, the truck unloaded and our beds were set up in lightning fashion.

My first official Sunday was January 20, 1991. A lot has happened since that day. Since my arrival I have preached over 1000 sermons from the pulpit and taught approximately 2000 Bible classes. Also, the elders honored me after my arrival by asking me to edit the POWER Journal, which resumed in 1992. In 1994 they approached me about resuming the lectureship in August of 1995. I told them that I would do the best I could but that I did not have the drawing power of a name like Thomas B. Warren/Garland Elkins. They gave me a chance and it has been my privilege to plan/direct 13 out of the 15 annual POWER lectureships.

As much as I have enjoyed my work with the lectureship, that is only one aspect of my work here. To me, the most important thing that has happened over the past 16 1/2 years is that the Southaven church of Christ has become more than a distant congregation I had only heard of. The Southaven church of Christ has become my/our family! We have rejoiced together at weddings and births (including our own Michael who came to us in October of 1993). We have wept together at the bedsides of the ill, and the gravesides of the dearly departed. It has been my greatest thrill to baptize some of you and your children, or to watch someone else do so. I have always been honored to be introduced as a preacher for the Southaven church of Christ. Although I will still be a gospel preacher, and although I will enjoy the opportunity to train men to become gospel preachers, and whereas I will enjoy taking the gospel to the whole world by means of television, I will always treasure the time I spent as the preacher for the Southaven church of Christ. In the future I will treasure being introduced as a member of the Southaven church of Christ. Therefore, it is my honor, in this my last lectureship as the director and editor of the book, to dedicate the 15th annual lectureship book to the membership of the Southaven church of Christ!

Acknowledgments

My first lectureship book to edit was Major Lessons From the Major Prophets. Sain Publications did all of the formatting and typesetting, and all I had to do was edit the book. That alone was a formidable task, especially for someone like me who had never done it before.

Beginning with the 1996 lectureship I entered the world of desktop publishing. Paul Sain graciously “showed me the ropes” and I formatted and typeset my very first book (The Two Covenants), as well as editing it. I have learned so much since then, and as the years went by I was blessed to “show others the ropes” of desktop publishing. For years Robin Smith was my right hand man. I have often said that he has added years to my life by relieving me from the stress of doing all the formatting and editing. I will always be grateful to him.

As he grew older and moved on, my lovely wife Tish graciously stepped in to help bear the load. She had been helping for years and was more than qualified. I am so thankful for her skills, more thankful for her willingness to help, and most thankful for her amazing graciousness and forgiveness when I accidentally overwrote the chapters for this book which she had already painstakingly formatted. I wish I was kidding! In the wee hours of the morning, in a hotel in Cookeville, TN, it took me only a couple of mouse clicks and a few seconds to delete hours and hours of work, and this just a few days before we were supposed to have the book to the printer. I could not believe how graciously she handled this news and how consoling she was to me as I agonized over what I had done. After comforting me, she started all over again, and there is no way this book would be ready had she not been willing to give so much of her time and effort. I am also grateful to Sain Publications who jumped through hoops to get the book “to the church on time.”

Special thanks is also due to Shelley McGregory (for secretarial help and loaning us her laptop) and those who helped proofread: Geraldine Chaney, Annette Kellett, Janet Pounders, Stephanie Pounders, Bonnie Reid, Lynda Smith, Rannie Butler, Evelyn Hall, Grace Williams, Larry Nagle, and Norma Payne.

--B. J. Clarke

Foreword

A WELL-KNOWN SONG FROM many years ago affirmed that “what the world needs now is love, sweet love; that’s the only thing there’s just too little of.” In reality, there are many things in short supply that this world needs (e.g. knowledge of God’s Word, morality, honesty, etc.), but we do not disagree that what this world needs now is love. The apostle Paul said as much when by inspiration he declared, “But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13, ASV).

Certainly, something as great as love deserves to serve as the theme for an entire lectureship. I usually have the themes for the next two or three lectureship years in mind and two or three years ago I began entertaining the idea of devoting an entire lectureship to the subject of love. Shortly thereafter I was privileged to receive an invitation from brother Rod Halliburton to speak at the lectureship in Camden, Arkansas. They entitled their lectureship “The Greatest Of These Is Love.” Attending that weekend lectureship solidified my conviction that the subject deserved the utmost attention and that an entire book should be devoted to the subject. I tried to come up with a title for our lectureship that would be a bit different than the one in Camden, but I couldn’t come up with anything that said it better or more succinctly than the statement: “The Greatest Of These Is Love.” No wonder brother Halliburton chose that theme! It says it all!

The following pages explore the subject of love as it relates to the following main categories:

- (1) God’s Love For Man;
- (2) Man’s Love For God
- (3) Man’s Love For His Fellow Man
- (4) Man’s Love For His Family
- (5) Man’s Love For His Spiritual Family
- (6) Man’s Love For The Lost
- (7) Misguided Love
- (8) A Look At Love In The Life Of Paul
- (9) Lectures To Teach Ladies About How To Love Their Physical Family and Their Spiritual Family, the Church.

As you can see, there is something in this book for everyone. The bottom line is still the same: love God and love your neighbors!

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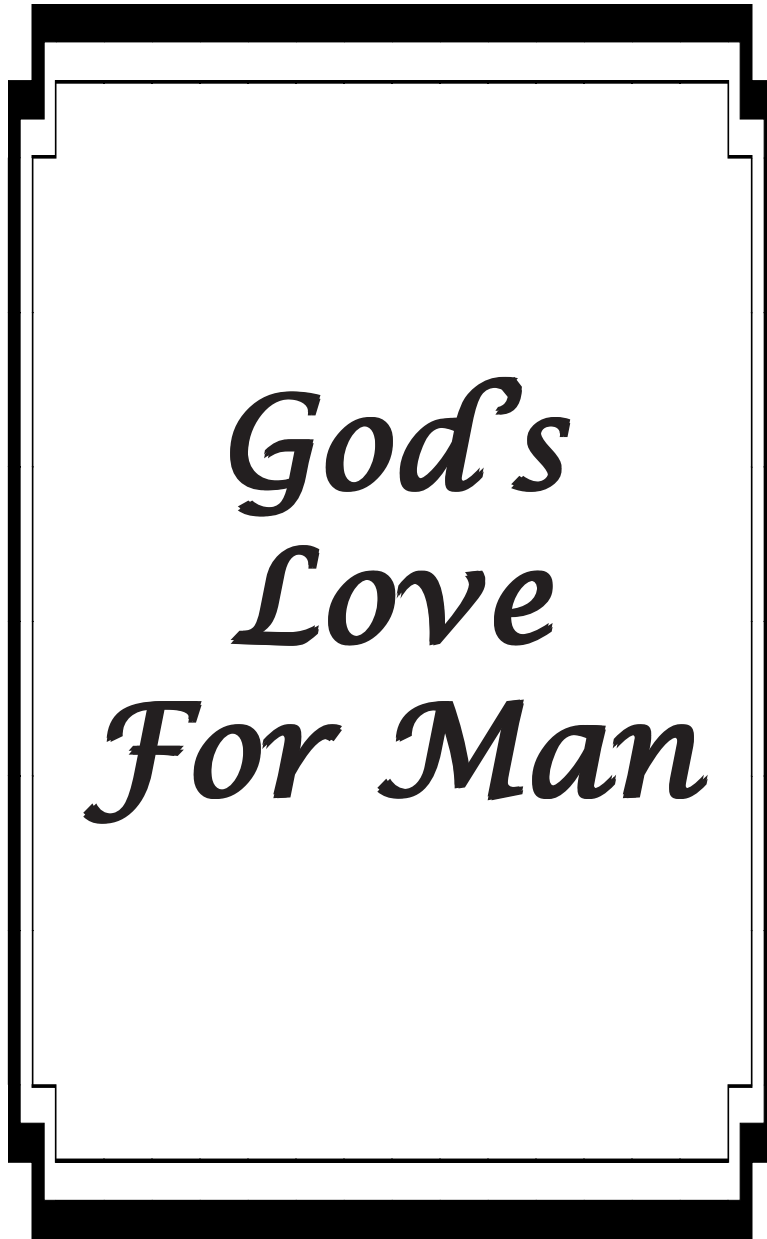
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*God's
Love
For Man*

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CHAPTER 1

God's Love For Man: From Creation To The Exodus

Eric Owens

Introduction

THANK YOU TO THE elders, and faithful congregation of Southaven, for the invitation to speak on this wonderful lectureship. Sermons on God's love will edify all who hear them. The book of Genesis is the foundation of the rest of the Bible. There are many wonderfully exciting things to learn from the book of beginnings. Among them is God's love for man.

Learning the lives of six men will help one to learn the book of Genesis. Adam (1-5), Noah (6-11), Abraham (12-25), Isaac (26-30), Jacob (31-36), and Joseph (37-50). There is some overlap but this breakdown is adequate. We will notice the love of God expressed in the lives of most of these men as well as some others.

We will also observe God's love in the life of Moses and the Exodus of Israel. The Bible is a seamless story, revealing the God of heaven to humanity. The story of the Bible is the salvation of man through Jesus Christ to the glory of God. One aspect of God's character is love. On nearly every page of the Bible, God expresses His love for man.

God Is Love

There are many ideas about what love is or does. Ideas come from Hollywood movies, philosophy, or personal feelings and thoughts. Some suggest that love does what is best. Since our knowledge is finite, we do not always know what is best. What might appear to be best at one time and in one area may not actually be best at another time or in another area. Therefore, we should look to God Whose character is perfect and Whose knowledge is infinite.

The Bible teaches that love is of God and God is love (1 John 4:7-8). God does not simply show or give love; He is love! Therefore, every act that God takes is a loving act. It is blasphemous to speak of God doing something that is unloving. God knows everything and God is infinitely pure; He alone knows what is "best" in every situation. God cannot commit an unloving act, for God is love. Like holiness, justice, and mercy, love has its origin in the character of God.

Concerning God's character and actions, Paul exhorts us to behold the goodness and the severity of God (Rom. 11:22). From Creation to the Exodus, one will read of God judging individuals, nations and the world. Yet, God loved those same individuals, nations, and the world. Since God is love and God judged, one should learn that judging is consistent with loving. The notion that love only seeks to please and pacify the recipient, without concern for right and wrong, is not from God but from men. Additionally, the thought that if one loved he would never judge or condemn any action, is not from God but men.

Concerning God's character and justice, Rex Turner Sr. wrote:

Justice is in reality a form of God's holiness. To affirm God's justice is to affirm that in all situations God will do right. . . . The point is that

God cannot contradict himself. He is morally capable of expressing or taking only those actions which are in keeping with his character. He is inwardly perfect; and therefore, his outward activity must necessarily be consistent with his perfection. He cannot clear the guilty. He will not clear the guilty.¹

To understand the love of God, one must understand the character of God. Abraham asked a very important question: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). The answer is a resounding yes. To know this is to understand the love of God. God does not explain His actions or declare His love alone. He acts; He does. Every act He takes declares His love, for He is love, and He only does what is right, and what is best.

God's Love In Creation

The Creation Demonstrates God's Love

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. 1:1). So begins the Bible and our knowledge of God and His love. God demonstrated His love for man by creating the world for man. "For thus saith the Lord that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it; **he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited**: (emphasis mine throughout unless otherwise indicated, EO) I am the Lord; and there is none else" (Isa. 45:18). God made the world with humanity in mind. He needed nothing, yet He created the world.

The Design Of The World Demonstrates God's Love

Concerning the intricate design of our universe, brethren Wayne Jackson and Bert Thompson observed:

Our Universe operates in accordance with exact scientific laws. The precision of the Universe (and the exactness of its laws) allows scientists

to launch rockets to the Moon, with the full knowledge that, upon their arrival, they can land within a few feet of their intended target. Such precision and exactness also allow astronomers to predict solar/lunar eclipses years in advance, or to determine when Halley's Comet can be seen once again from the Earth.²

God is a God of reason. The intricate design of our universe manifests love and concern for those who inhabit the earth. Humans walk, birds fly in the air, fish swim in the seas. These things are not the result of random, blind chance, but the result of a benevolent loving Father who made it all.

The Functional Nature Of The Universe Evidences God's Love

Science writer Lincoln Barnett once observed:

This functional harmony of nature Berkeley, Descartes, and Spinoza attributed to God. Modern physicists, who prefer to solve their problems without recourse to God (although this seems to be more difficult all the time), emphasize that nature mysteriously operates on mathematical principles. It is the mathematical orthodoxy of the Universe that enables theorists like Einstein to predict and discover natural laws, simply by the solution of equations.³

The sun heats our days, and gives light to the world. Lovingly, it is exactly the right distance from earth. The sun is not so close that we burn up, nor so far away that we freeze to death. Our world functions consistently according to laws God established for humanity. The order, exactness, and faithfulness of God's laws all evidence His great love. Try to imagine life if gravity only worked sometimes. You might be walking one moment, floating the next, and falling after that. How loving would that life be? Oh, yeah, watch out for that falling house!

The Size And Scope Of The Cosmos Reveal God's Love

To say our universe is impressive would be a great understatement. It is marvelous beyond description. We continue to unearth the splendor of God's galaxies. Again, brethren Jackson and Thompson help us appreciate the vastness and grandeur of God's marvelous creation:

We live in a tremendously large Universe. While its outer limits have not been measured, it is estimated to be as much as 20 billion light years in diameter (i.e., the distance it would take light to travel across the Universe at a speed of over 186,000 miles per second: see Lawton, 1981, 89 [1]: 105). There are an estimated one billion galaxies in the Universe (Lawton, 1981, 89 [1]: 98), and an estimated 25 sextillion stars. The Milky Way galaxy in which we live contains over 100 billion stars, and is so large that even traveling at the speed of light would require 100,000 years to cross its diameter. Light travels in one year approximately 5.87×10^{12} miles; in 100,000 years, that would be 5.87×10^{17} miles, or 587 quadrillion miles just to cross the diameter of a single galaxy. If we drew a map of the Milky Way galaxy, and represented the Earth and the Sun as two dots one inch apart (thus a scale of one inch equals 93 million miles – the distance between the Earth and the Sun), we would need a map at least four miles wide to locate the next nearest star, and a map 25,000 miles wide to reach the center of our galaxy. Without doubt, this is a rather impressive Universe.⁴

If you can measure love by how much one is willing to do for another, then how much does God love man?

The Creation Of Man Demonstrates God's Love

Man is the height of God's creative work and the most amazing part of creation. The ancient scholar Augustine said, "Men go abroad to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long

GOD'S LOVE: CREATION TO EXODUS

course of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars, and they pass by themselves without wondering.⁵ The amazing creation of humanity was not lost on David. He praised God for His creation: "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are thy works and that my soul knoweth right well" (Psa. 139:14).

Some evolutionists even concede the incredible complexity and wonder of humanity. One said:

When you come right down to it, the most incredible creation in the universe is you - your fantastic senses and strengths, your ingenious defense systems, and mental capabilities so great you can never use them to the fullest. Your body is a structural masterpiece more amazing than science fiction.⁶

The sun, moon, and stars in all their glory pale in comparison to the luminous glory of man. The angels have a greater appreciation of creation than do we. Observing that creation one said:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth (Psa. 8:1-9).

Our Lord gave us a clear view of God's perspective of the cosmos and the creation of man, when He said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange

for his soul” (Matt. 16:26). Estimates suggest that there are over 6 billion people on the earth. Our Lord says that any one of them is worth the entire orderly arrangement of the cosmos. Wow! How about that for love? God truly is mindful of man.

God’s Love For Adam And Eve

God Shared His Image With Humanity

The image men share with God is the immortal soul God gave humanity (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 2:7; John 4:24). God did not make robots; He made men free. Without freedom it is impossible to express love. Love is a choice of the will. If there is no freedom, there is no choice. God gave man choice in order that man could choose to love Him (Deut. 30:18-20). Of course, man could also choose to turn and rebel against God (Josh. 24:15-19). God knew that man would rebel, and still He loved man enough to give him the option and the ability to exercise his freedom.

God Communicated With Adam And Eve

Can you imagine the confusion and chaos of life if God had put us here and never communicated with us? God gave Adam and Eve the garden to dress and to keep (Gen. 2:15-17). He told them from whence they came, who they were, and Who He was. This kind of open, honest communication declares again the fact that God is love. He gave them parameters for their behavior. He gave specific instructions with clearly defined boundaries and punishment to follow if His Word was violated (Gen. 2:15-17). Any parent who emulates this formula will bless his children and they will bless him.

God Made Them Male And Female

God is a social being and so are His offspring. Man was alone, and God saw that it was not good (Gen. 2:18).

Therefore, God made man a help suitable for him. One need only observe the creation of woman to appreciate the love of God (Matt. 19:4; Matt. 19:5; 1 Cor. 11:8-9). For her alone is a man charged to leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife. The joy of two becoming one, and everything involved in it, can be traced back to the love of God. Where would we be without each other?

God Shared Fellowship With Adam And Eve

God demonstrated His love for Adam and Eve in the fellowship He enjoyed with them. They heard His voice walking in the garden in the cool of the day (Gen. 3:8). God's willingness to come to man, speak to man, and share Himself with man, is the zenith of human existence. In Christ, God would not simply commune with man; He would become a man (John 1:14; Heb. 2:14-15). Try to wrap your mind around the Creator, leaving heaven to come to earth to become a part of His creation. If you can understand this, you can understand the love of God. Christ, through His death, restored man back to God. Because of that, we can once again enjoy fellowship with God. What an awe-inspiring testimony to the love of God.

God's Love In The Fall

The third chapter of Genesis is one of the significant accounts in the entire Bible. We learn of Satan and sin; more importantly we see clearly the love of God at work. The Devil tempted Eve and she yielded to temptation (Gen. 3:1-6). Eve saw the fruit, desired it, and took it. Here, we learn the progression of sin and the avenues by which it comes to us all (Jas. 1:13-15; 1 John 2:15-17). These avenues and this progression continue today.

God Sought Reconciliation

It is easy to speak of God's love when all is well. Genesis 3 shows us God's love after His law is broken.

When Adam and Eve sinned, God approached them thereby showing His love. Please do not overlook this point or neglect its importance. Adam and Eve sinned, and God moved toward them to solve the problem. The reason for this is love. Their sin threatened their fellowship with God. God desired their fellowship, so He approached them to resolve it. This is why when He gets to them He asks questions. He wants them to be aware of the problem between them, so they can repent and He can solve it. This is the scene of love in the garden (Gen. 3:7-9). This is so important for us to understand about God, and about love as we emulate Him.

Another thing to understand about God's love is that it was not dependent upon their obedience. The Bible says God is love and since God is eternal, He has been love eternally. He was love before He made man. When He made the world for them He loved them. When He put them into the garden and gave them the fruit of all trees save one, He loved them. When He gave them commands for their own good, He loved them. He never stopped loving Adam and Eve.

One must never make the good behavior of man the means of procuring the love of God. If one will have a happy healthy relationship with God, he must understand this point about God. God is love; your actions have no bearing on the character of God (John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-8). We must never confuse the requirement of our faith with the love of God.

God Punished Adam And Eve

God did not punish them because He stopped loving them. Rather, God punished Adam and Eve because He loved them. When Adam and Eve sinned, they deserved to die instantly (Rom. 6:23). God did punish them; the ground was cursed for Adam's sake. Eve's pain in child bearing

was increased, and her desire was to her husband. The serpent would slither on his belly for evermore. Some misunderstand God's punishment as unloving, or evidence that He does not exist. Pain and suffering is often, but not always, due to sin. God's punishment and warnings about sin and its consequence demonstrate His love. Curtis Cates makes this point well when he asks:

Were a bridge to fall into the river and the authorities not put up warnings, flashing lights, barriers, signs, etc., to warn motorists, would such indifference to man's welfare be right, just, or loving? What if God had allowed man to be free from care, worry, sickness, unhappiness of any kind – and then all of a sudden removed him from the earth and cast him into Hell fire? What would the reaction be? Would it not be something like, 'What did I do to deserve this? Why was there no warning?' It would be criminal for the country or state not to warn of a bridge being out, would it not? None of us enjoys suffering and pain, and each notices the aches, sickness, wrinkles, gray hair, the cemeteries, et al. Let us thank God for loving us enough to warn us. He is saying, You are not going to live forever (Job 7:6; Jas. 4:13-14). This world is not your home (John 14:1-6). Prepare for a better place (Rev. 21:22).⁷

This is a very good point anyone would do well to consider. If a parent failed to inform their children of harmful things and their consequences, only to watch their children hurt themselves, would we call that love? If a parent failed to enforce rules to deter the child or correct the child from harmful action, would that be love? After they sinned, God said that if the man ate of the fruit of the tree of life, he would live forever. Imagine the sad state of Adam and Eve if they had to live forever on earth in sin. Putting them out of the garden was the most loving thing God could do for them. They would die physically, but through faith they could live with Him eternally.

God evidences His amazing love in Genesis 3:15. In the midst of the sin and the punishments, God speaks of deliverance and destruction. God would send the seed of woman to destroy the devil and deliver humanity (Heb. 2:14-15). That seed is Christ (Gal. 3:16). The Creator came to earth to die for His creation (John 1:1-3; John 1:14). It is the greatest love ever shown (John 15:13) and the greatest story ever told. This is story of the Bible! This is the love of God.

God's Love For Cain

Normally, we focus on Abel's faith and righteousness when we study chapter four of Genesis. The chapter also shows a great deal of the love God had for Cain. God always informs man of what will please Him, and He did so with Cain and Abel. We later learn that Abel offered his offering by faith (Heb. 11:4) and that faith comes by hearing God's Word (Rom. 10:17). Couple that with the words of John, that Cain was of that wicked one and slew his brother because his deeds were evil (1 John 3:11-12). Now, we have a good picture of the boys hearing God's Word with one obeying and one disobeying. Our focus must not be on Cain and Abel but on God. How would God behave toward one who committed murder?

When Cain rebelled, God approached him (Gen. 4:6). God showed concern about Cain's anger (Gen. 4:6). God informed Cain that there remained hope for his acceptance, if He did well (Gen. 4:7). God warned Cain about the danger of sin lying at his door and overtaking him (Gen. 4:7b). God allowed Cain to exercise his freedom of choice, even to the point of murdering his brother.

After he murdered his brother, God again approached Cain. He asked him questions the way He had Adam and Eve. "Where is thy brother" (Gen. 4:9)? "What hast thou done" (Gen. 4:10)? God punished Cain for his evil deeds,

and when Cain said the penalty was too severe, God placed a mark upon him to protect him (Gen. 4:13-15). What matchless love God showed to Cain! It is a picture of God's love for all who rebel and sin against Him.

God's Love For Noah

The world was so wicked that it repented God that He had made man on the earth (Gen. 6:6). God declared that He would destroy man from the earth (Gen. 6:7). He looked for a man He could use to save some. He found one! Noah found grace in the eyes of God (Gen. 6:8). In spite of every imagination of the thoughts of men's hearts being evil continually (Gen. 6:5), God still wanted man to be saved. He lovingly told Noah to build the ark. He gave Noah the dimensions He wanted (Gen. 6:14-17). He told the animals to go to Noah in the ark (Gen. 7:13-16).

From all of this we are to learn this lesson: God loves man and desires to save him. God's Spirit pled with man 120 years, and during this time Noah preached (Gen. 6:2; 2 Pet. 2:5). Sadly, no one accepted God's gracious offer, and the flood came and took them all away (Gen. 7:17-24; Matt. 24:37-39). God remembered Noah and brought him and his family safely through the flood (Gen. 8:1-18). God promised Noah and all men that He would never again destroy the earth with a flood.

God's Love In Abraham's Life

The promises God made to Abraham are the covenant that runs the length and breadth of the Bible. The seed of woman came through Abraham and his descendants. The three promises are a land (Canaan), a nation (Israel), and a seed (Christ) (Gen. 12:1-3; Gal. 3:16).

God Kept His Promises

God promised Abraham and Sarah a child. It took twenty-five years to fulfill the promise. We are to learn

that God is faithful. No matter how much time elapses, God is faithful to keep His promises. Joshua and Israel inherited the land (Josh. 21:43-45). Israel became a mighty nation, just as God promised (Exod. 12:37). Abraham and Sarah had a child (Gen. 21:1-2).

God Proved Abraham

Love is a choice, not simply from God but also from men. God proved Abraham's faith when He asked him to offer Isaac (Gen. 22:1-14). Abraham faithfully followed God, and the third day he came to the place God appointed. Abraham took the wood, the fire, and his son.

Observing these things, Isaac asked where the lamb was for the sacrifice. Abraham told Isaac that God would Himself provide a lamb. The statement is a snapshot of redemption. God allowed Abraham's son to get up from the altar. God provided Abraham a lamb, caught in the bushes, and it took the place of Isaac as the sacrifice.

Look beyond Abraham and Isaac and see the love of God. God is our heavenly Father. Man sinned in the garden and needed saving. We needed a sacrifice to remove our sins, because without the shedding of blood there is no remission (Heb. 9:22). God sent His Son as a sacrifice for all of humanity. Though God saved Abraham's son from death, He watched as evil men with wicked hands crucified His only begotten Son (Isa. 53:10-11; Acts 2:22-24).

Oh, how our minds should learn the love of God! How our hearts should rejoice over the love of God! How we should dedicate our lives to reciprocating the love of God. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God gives us glimpses of this great act in Genesis.

God's Love In The Life Of Joseph

God was with Joseph in his youth and throughout his life. Jacob loved Joseph more than he loved his other sons. Therefore, his brothers envied him and could not speak peaceably to him (Gen. 37:4). In dreams, God revealed Himself to Joseph. This caused even more hatred amongst his brothers (Gen. 37:5). Fueled by hatred, they sought to kill Joseph. Instead, they sold him into slavery in Egypt (Gen. 37:20-28).

As you read Genesis, you must understand that God is revealing and carrying out His plan for Christ to come and to die for the sins of the world. God used Joseph to save his family. His father is Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, to whom God made the promises. When Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, neither Joseph, his father, brethren, or the world knew there was a time of great prosperity coming followed by a time of great famine (Gen. 41:1-57).

This famine would kill all in the land, were it not for the grain in Egypt (Gen. 42:1-5). God, through Joseph, revealed the dreams of Pharaoh and told him of the years of plenty and leanness. Joseph saved the Egyptians, who in turn saved Israel. On the surface, this all seems to result from his brothers selling him into slavery. Actually, the selling of Joseph into Egypt was God sending Joseph ahead to save his family, and thus the seed line. He told his brothers, "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen. 45:5). Christ came through the nation of Israel, who Joseph saved by being in Egypt. God's purpose, foreknowledge, and faithfulness all demonstrate His amazing love (Gen. 50:15-24). After the death of their father, Joseph's brothers feared his wrath. Believing he hated them and would kill them, they sent a messenger of peace to Joseph. Note the interchange that follows:

And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold we be thy servants. And Joseph said unto them Fear not: for am I in the place of God? But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive (Gen. 50:18-20).

The book of Genesis closes with Abraham's descendants in Egypt. At this time, they are prospering and growing as a nation. In Genesis, God created the world, judged the world, and is now working out His eternal plan to redeem the world. His nation is now formed; it is now time to deliver them.

God's Love In The Exodus

God's Providence

God said that Abraham would become a great nation. Pharaoh tried to destroy the nation of Israel in its infancy by killing all the male children. As is always the case with God's plan, the right person or persons, are in the right place at the right time. Pharaoh's nefarious plan was thwarted by two women who feared God (Exod. 1:15-21). Instead of destruction, the nation grew mightier than her captors did. Like a game of chess, Pharaoh's next move was to cast every male that was born into the river. Though not yet formally introduced, Pharaoh was already fighting against God.

Into this testy situation, Moses was born. His faithful parents hid him as long as they could from the evil scheme of Pharaoh. Eventually, they put him into an ark and sent him down the river. It is incredible for us to watch as Pharaoh's daughter rears the deliverer of Israel in Pharaoh's house. Miriam watches her brother, Pharaoh's daughter draws him out of the river, and his own mother nurses him. God's amazing providence and His great love is on display for all who will observe it.

God's Prophet

After murdering an Egyptian, Moses fled from Egypt to save his life (Exod. 2:11-15). He was forty years old and spent another forty years in Midian. At this time God heard His children groan and called to mind His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 2:23-24). Then, God called Moses to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage (Exod. 3:6-10). God assured Moses that He would be with him (Exod. 3:11-12). He provided Moses miraculous power to confirm His message (Exod. 4:1-9). When Moses mentioned his inability to speak, God sent Aaron to be his mouthpiece (Exod. 4:10-16) God's love is seen in that He never asks men to do something they are incapable of doing. He always assures men that He will be with them, and then He is. He always provides men the things necessary to accomplish His tasks. He charges, He assures, He equips, He loves. Through Moses we also get a glimpse of the Prophet Who is to come (Deut. 18:18-20). Christ the ultimate expression of God's love is like unto Moses.

God's Plagues

We must never lose sight of the purpose for the actions of God. God is revealing Himself and working out His plan to redeem humanity. This is always behind God's actions in the Bible. The nation of Egypt was an idolatrous nation; they did not know the Lord (Exod. 5:1-2). God accomplishes several things by the plagues, all of which are acts of love. He judges the nation for their idolatry. No one is to have a god before God. The plagues demonstrated God's superiority over Egypt's gods. The Nile turns to blood, darkness covers the Sun, and Pharaoh's son dies. God's plagues demonstrate that He rules over nature and humanity (Exod. 12:12).

When the plagues are over, some of the Egyptians have learned of God and leave with Israel (Exod. 12:37-38).

Because of the plagues the Israelites were saved and not destroyed.

The plagues were not simply for the benefit of judging Egypt but also for revealing God to Israel.

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the Lord your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians (Exod. 6:7-8).

God's Passover

The institution of the Passover served to remind the children of Israel of their deliverance. The commands by God solicited their faith. God always desires faith when He delivers. They were to put the blood in the appointed places and remove the leaven from their homes. They were to be dressed and ready to leave. God assured them that when He saw the blood, He would pass over them (Exod. 12:1-13).

Of course, this also looked forward to the coming of the Christ. When sin ran rampant in Corinth, Paul informed them that "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:6-7). God told Israel to remind their children of His loving deliverance when they partook in this feast (Exod. 12:25-27). As we reflect on the Passover, of Israel, we are reminded of the Christ, the pure and perfect lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).

God's Protection

The scene at the Red Sea wonderfully illustrates the love of God. Pharaoh agreed to let Israel go, but he

prevaricated and pursued them. The showdown was set. Pharaoh and his army were rapidly approaching the fledgling nation, the sea was before them, and Israel was trapped. Israel cried to Moses, and Moses cried to God.

Again, God demanded faith from Israel. They were to go forward, trusting God to deliver, and deliver He did. The sea parted, and Israel went through the sea all night on dry ground. The Egyptians pursued but God gave light to Israel but darkness to Egypt so they did not come near Israel all night. As Moses said, God fought for Israel. This battle ends with these wonderful words. Thus, the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. Israel saw that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians. The people feared the Lord and believed the Lord and his servant Moses (Exod. 14:30-31).

God described His loving actions for Israel in a myriad of ways. He delivered them like an eagle rescuing her young in danger (Exod. 19:4) and like a father calling his son home from harm (Hos. 11:1). Moses summed up God's love and care for Israel when he said:

(For the LORD thy God is a merciful God) he will not forsake thee, neither destroy thee, nor forget the covenant of thy fathers which he swore unto them. For ask now of the days that are past, which were before thee, since the day that God created man upon the earth, and ask from the one side of heaven unto the other, whether there hath been any such thing as this great thing is, or hath been heard like it? Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? Or hath God attempted to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation, by temptations, by signs, and by wonders, and by war, and by a mighty hand, and by a stretched out arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? Unto thee

it was showed, that thou mightest know that the LORD he is God; there is none else beside him. Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee: and upon earth he showed thee his great fire; and thou heardest his words out of the midst of the fire. And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt; To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day (Deut. 4:31-38).

Points And Applications

From everlasting to everlasting, God is love. The examples and demonstrations of God's love are too numerous to count. We are to learn that love is rooted in God's character and God's character is unchanging. God's response to sin is the same today as it was in Biblical times. He did not permanently cast men away when they sinned; rather He sought men out and provided the means of reconciliation. The culmination of God's actions was Christ on the cross of Calvary. God so loved us that He sacrificed His son for us. There is no greater love.

Time fails to speak of His love for Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 16-17). Or the Amorites whose cup was not yet full (Gen. 15:16). There was also a great demonstration of love in God's desire to save Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 18-19). God's love spared Abimelech who took Sarah (Gen. 20). He blessed Laban because of Jacob (Gen. 30:27). He allowed Enoch to walk with Him (Gen. 5:22). He called Abraham friend and spoke face to face with Moses. He is good beyond description, and we praise Him and thank Him for His wonderful, matchless, boundless love.

To understand God is to understand love. By God's actions, we learn that love provides and instructs, love corrects and chastens, love listens and forgives, love shares,

and plans, love does what is right, love shows mercy and compassion, love is gracious, love sacrifices, love has no limit and it does not discriminate. Let us learn of God's love, reciprocate God's love, and then emulate God's love. Because love is of God and God is love.

Endnotes

1 Rex A. Turner, Sr., **Systematic Theology**, (Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1989), p. 50.

2 Bert Thompson and Wayne Jackson, **The Case for the Existence of God**, (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, 1996), p. 18.

3 Ibid, p. 18.

4 Ibid p. 19.

5 Ibid p. 22.

6 Bert Thompson and Wayne Jackson, "Guinness," p. 5 as quoted in **The Case for the Existence of God**, (1987), p. 23.

7 Curtis Cates, "For God So Loved The World," **Speaking As The Oracles of God Lectureship** (Pulaski, TN, Sain Publications, 1996), p. 17-18.

CHAPTER 2

God's Love For Man: The Lord Hath Loved His People

Dan Cates

IT IS AN HONOR to have been asked to be a part of the Fifteenth Annual Power Lectures. The writer appreciates the work done by the congregation here at Southaven through the years (and which continues under her elders Larry Everson and Con Lambert) and by B.J. Clarke during his time with this congregation. The writer has many friends who compose the congregation here. The writer is sure that the future holds great things for both Southaven and B.J. and is excited about future association with both.

With great anticipation the writer has been looking forward to the study of this theme, **The Greatest of These Is Love**, and is appreciative of his being allowed to address the subject "God's Love for Man: The Lord Hath Loved His People." This subject requires an overview of God's love as it was demonstrated in the days of the Old Testament when God's chosen people were the Israelites. In this study there are a number of considerations: the fact of God's love, showing the love shown by God toward the Israelites; the face of God's love, showing how God's love was manifested; the foundation of God's love, showing

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its extent; the focus of God's love, showing the particular recipients of it; the fairness of God's love, showing His love for proselytes; the fellowship of God's love, showing its conditional nature; the faithfulness of God's love, showing His providential care; the failings of man's love, showing how Israel allowed God's love to go unrequited; and, the future of God's love, showing the plan to ultimately redeem man.

As this study unfolds, it will be evident that the mental picture some have of the "God of the Old Testament" is a skewed one. Some picture God as being mean, vengeful, and unloving through the Old Testament, yet tender, loving, and meek through the New Testament. Let the reader rest assured that God has not changed in His view of and dealings with man. God has always loved those who loved Him and always will; likewise, He has always hated evil and all associated with it, and always will. Jesus Christ was described by Paul as "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever" (Heb. 13:8). As He and His Father are one (John 10:30), so the first person of the Godhead is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." Paul wrote, "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off" (Rom. 11:22). Christians today serve, as the Israelites did, a consistent God. Let all who would do His Will learn this lesson from the study at hand: If one will return to Him the love God offers, then he will continue to enjoy the benefits and blessings of God; conversely, if he will not return to God that love, he will suffer the fate of God's enemies (Jas. 4:4; c.f., Luke 19:27).

The Fact Of God's Love

In the pages of the Old Testament, inspired writers affirmed that God was, as He is (1 John 4:7-8), a God of

love. A discouraged, destroyed, and desperate Job asked the Lord, “What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?” (Job 7:17). Poor Job wanted to be left alone (Job 7:16; Job 7:19) and even to die (Job 7:15), but God’s interest was constantly upon Him and is upon man today—even when man may not desire or deserve such concern. God, no matter what His children did, always loved them—even when they did not love Him or want to be loved by Him. Ultimately they would forfeit the blessing of God’s love and others would take their place as God’s elect, but for them, through the Old Testament period, God’s heart was constantly upon them!

Jeremiah recorded, “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3). David told his soul to bless the Lord “Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;” (Psa. 103:4). Speaking to the Lord he explained why he sought, hungered for, and would bless the Lord, “Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee” (Psa. 63:3). God is not given the credit He deserves regarding the love He showed in that day; however it was known that “...the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life” (Psa. 42:8).

Could Psalm 23 have been written to a God who did not love? It could not have been. David, unquestionably responding to the love shown him by God, wrote:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I

walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod
and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a
table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth
over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the LORD for ever.

The Face Of God's Love

The manifestation of God's love was like a father's for his children (Psa. 103:13, "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him."); a shepherd's for his sheep (Psa. 100:3, "Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.").

Even in spite of the shortcomings of His people, God said, "Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips" (Psa. 89:33-34). As God "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9) because "the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation" (2 Pet. 3:15), so for the Israelites was "The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth," (Exod. 34:6) "forgiving iniquity and transgression, [but-DFC] by no means clearing the guilty," (Num. 4:18).

Consider the vibrant pictures of the manifestation of God's love, as presented in Ezekiel 16:1-14, in which God had pitied, quickened, sanctified, clothed, and prospered forlorn Jerusalem, and Isaiah 5:1-7 in which God fenced, cleaned, planted, and protected His vineyard only to have wild grapes be introduced.

Later, this study will return to these texts, but consider also Ezekiel 16:60-63 in which God's love is seen as having not ceased in spite of Jerusalem's unfaithfulness

and His tough-love punishment—what extent of love! In time, God, reflecting upon His efforts for His people, was moved to ask, “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isa. 5:4). The answer was and is “nothing,” for the love of God moved Him to do all in His power to curry the love of His people!

The Foundation Of God’s Love

The basis of God’s love is seen in His choosing those on whom He would shed His love. He chose those who were not esteemed by men. Of Israel’s being chosen, Moses penned:

For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people (Deut. 7:6-7).

This people whom God chose were to be different from those whom He did not choose (Deut. 14:2, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth.”). As His people they would live above and accordingly be blessed above all those whom He had not chosen (Deut. 26:18-19, “And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be his peculiar people, as he hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all his commandments; And to make thee high above all nations which he hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honour; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken.”).

Solomon wrote that “the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God:” (Eccl. 9:1); so the Lord’s chosen He desired to be righteous and prudent!

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Accordingly, as the foundation of God's love was a choice, so would be their response to it:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them (Deut. 30:19-20).

The Focus Of God's Love

The particular people whom God did choose were one family, one nation, one people! This was a people not only chosen, but severed from their neighbors (including the Hittites, Amorites, Samaritans, Sodomites, and others; these being pictured as family members in Ezek. 16:44-59) so they could be the Lord's possession (Lev. 20:26). So Moses could pray to God:

O Lord GOD, destroy not thy people and thine inheritance, which thou hast redeemed through thy greatness, which thou hast brought forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand. Remember thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin: Lest the land whence thou broughtest us out say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness. Yet they are thy people and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest out by thy mighty power and by thy stretched out arm (Deut. 9:26-29).

Similarly, Solomon prayed:

And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they

have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them: For they be thy people, and thine inheritance, which thou broughtest forth out of Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron: That thine eyes may be open unto the supplication of thy servant, and unto the supplication of thy people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they call for unto thee. For thou didst separate them from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD (1 King. 8:50-53).

Why did He choose them? Moses answered this in Deuteronomy 4:37, “And because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in his sight with his mighty power out of Egypt;” and Deuteronomy 7:8, “But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Beautiful is God’s reminder to His people:

But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt for thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life (Isa. 43:1-4).

There are those in the religious world today who would have God's salvation be universal; however, while His love and grace may be offered universally, there has always been and will always be only one group who received the blessings of God's love (1 Pet. 3:20; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 2:16; Col. 3:15).

The Fairness Of God's Love

God and His people knew what it was like to live in a strange land since the sons of Jacob sojourned in Israel for the period between Joseph and Moses (Exod. 22:21). Recognizing that a "mixed multitude," often called "strangers" in Scripture and commonly called "proselytes," had accompanied His children out of Egypt (Exod. 12:38), and others would over time be drawn to the people who were His possession, the Lord sought to have those who would yield to His commands (e.g., Exod. 12:48; Exod. 20:10) be treated as if they were Israelites though they were not such by birth (Lev. 19:34).

They were so treated because the love of God was vast enough that it could extend to them. Moses, concerning this love and the love which the native Israelites should likewise show to the strangers, wrote, "He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:18-19).

It is this ability to love all men (John 3:16) which culminated in the inclusion of strangers (1 Pet. 1:1) among the Lord's kingdom, the church, in the New Testament Christian dispensation: "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of

God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet. 2:9-10).

The Fellowship Of God’s Love

The love of God was great enough to extend to any, but it only ultimately extended to those who were obedient. Those who teach that salvation extends to all men correctly characterize the desire of God (1 Tim. 2:4), but not the reality (Matt. 7:13-14). God’s love is conditionally effectual! David said, “the LORD loveth the righteous” (Psa. 146:8); his son wrote, “They that are of a froward heart are abomination to the LORD: but such as are upright in their way are his delight” and “The way of the wicked is an abomination unto the LORD: but he loveth him that followeth after righteousness” (Prov. 11:20; Prov. 15:9). This is true today, and was true in the Old Testament period as well! Moses said plainly:

Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them. Wherefore it shall come to pass, if ye hearken to these judgments, and keep, and do them, that the LORD thy God shall keep unto thee the covenant and the mercy which he sware unto thy fathers: And he will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep, in the land which he sware unto thy fathers to give thee (Deut. 7:11-13).

God had chosen the people, but they would only be blessed by Him if they chose to be obedient to Him. Consider these statements of Moses:

The LORD shall establish thee an holy people unto himself, as he hath sworn unto thee, if thou

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shalt keep the commandments of the LORD thy God, and walk in his ways (Deut. 28:9).

Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exod. 19:4-6).

David said, "Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!" (Psa. 31:19). Micah identified what it meant to fear God: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8). The conditional nature of God's love toward Israel is succinctly described in Psalm 73:1: "Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart."

The Faithfulness Of God's Love

Mention has been made concerning the blessings associated with God's love. For the Jews, the greatest blessings in their minds were those of a temporal, physical, nature. Bearing that in mind, consider the providential care shown toward God's people as a result of His love for them. Of the Exodus from Egypt, God said, "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. 11:1). Of the entry of His people into the coveted Promised Land, God said:

Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey; I am the LORD your God, which have separated you from other people (Lev. 20:24).

Notice this beautiful picture of the providence of God:

He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him (Deut. 32:10-12).

Even on the rare occasion when the enemies of Israel sought to use God's power against His people, God provided for the Israelites. This is exemplified in Deuteronomy 23:4-5 as Moses wrote:

[The Ammonites and Moabites]...hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee. Nevertheless the LORD thy God would not hearken unto Balaam; but the LORD thy God turned the curse into a blessing unto thee, because the LORD thy God loved thee.

David, benefited by the benefaction of God, prayed to Him, "Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings," (Psa. 17:8), and spoke of Him "Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's" (Psa. 103:5).

The Failings Of Man's Love

If only the lesson could have ended with the previous point, all would have been well for the Israelites. Unfortunately, Israel history of loving God, if summarized, would read like the latter part of Judges 21:25 which says that "...every man did that which was right in his own eyes." When the Israelites of old did that which was right in their own eyes, they were forsaking their Lord and allowing God's love to go unrequited. Consequently, when

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Israel failed Him, God punished them in an effort to get them, by His shaming and confounding them, to return to Him (Ezek. 16:60-63). This is why the cyclical nature of the book of Judges (sin, punishment, repentance, blessing, apathy, sin, and so forth) is not peculiar to it, but is indicative of Israel not only in Old Testament, but also in Intertestamental, and even early New Testament history.

The problem of unrequited love toward God was one which reached even to one whose heart was after God's own (Acts 13:22; 2 Sam. 11:2-5; 2 Sam. 11:14-17) and one loved by God from birth (2 Sam. 12:24; Neh. 13:26); furthermore, even for these, when sin was committed, punishment followed (2 Sam. 12:9-12; 1 Kings. 11:10-11)! If these could face punishment, then even Israel, loved of God, would face punishment. God told the Israelites who were not in accord with Him, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

In Ezekiel 16, Israel is being condemned for her sins of unfaithfulness represented by her idolatrous acts of offering God's goods, including her own children, to false gods (Ezek. 16:15-34). Her punishment would involve her shame and Divine judgment (Ezek. 16:35-59). In Isaiah 5, God's picture of the vineyard is a picture of Israel which having sinned would be eaten up, broken down, trodden down, laid waste, and left alone without rain which was symbolic of God's providential blessings (Isa. 5:5-7).

Perhaps the most pitiful picture of the unrequited love of His people toward God is seen in God's commanding Hosea to take "a wife of whoredoms" (Hos. 1:2). Hosea bought her out of humiliation and degradation and promised to give her his faithfulness (Hos. 3:2-3). Even after she rejected him, he provided a safe-haven for her (Hos. 2:7). In spite of Hosea's love, his wife, Gomer, had gone back in to a lifestyle of whoredom, harlotry, adultery (Hos. 2:25). Her lack

of love for Hosea was a picture of God's people's lack of love for Him. Hosea wrote, "Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine" (Hos. 3:1). It is in this context that God said:

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt. As they called them, so they went from them: they sacrificed unto Baalim, and burned incense to graven images. I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms; but they knew not that I healed them. I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love: and I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws, and I laid meat unto them. He shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king, because they refused to return. And the sword shall abide on his cities, and shall consume his branches, and devour them, because of their own counsels. And my people are bent to backsliding from me: though they called them to the most High, none at all would exalt him (Hos. 11:1-7).

Hear the despairing voice of the forsaken lover:

I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt: open thy mouth wide, and I will fill it. But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways! (Psa. 81:10-13).

Notice one, final, sad picture of this unrequited love:

He cast out the heathen also before them, and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents. Yet they tempted and provoked the most high God, and kept not his testimonies: But turned back,

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and dealt unfaithfully like their fathers: they were turned aside like a deceitful bow. For they provoked him to anger with their high places, and moved him to jealousy with their graven images. When God heard this, he was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel: So that he forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which he placed among men; And delivered his strength into captivity, and his glory into the enemy's hand. He gave his people over also unto the sword; and was wroth with his inheritance (Psa. 78:55-62).

The Future Of God's Love

The greatest blessing associated with God's love was not appreciated by the vast majority of God's children, who longed only for physical blessings. Those with eyes of faith (Heb. 11:13-16; Heb. 11:26) realized that God blessed His people with the promise of salvation as Job accurately fore-spoke, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth:" (Job 19:25). God's love was shown in the Old Testament as the plan to redeem man was slowly being brought to fruition.

David said, speaking in terms of redemption:

And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God (2 Sam. 7:23-24).

Isaiah recorded God's words to Jacob and Israel regarding the removal of sin and the place of redemption: "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto me; for I have redeemed thee" (Isa. 44:22). Isaiah spoke, himself, of

deliverance from corruption thus: “Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back” (Isa. 38:17). Furthermore, Isaiah pictured great salvation when he wrote:

I will mention the lovingkindnesses of the LORD, and the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD hath bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel, which he hath bestowed on them according to his mercies, and according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses. For he said, Surely they are my people, children that will not lie: so he was their Saviour. In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old (Isa. 63:7-9).

Zephaniah recorded:

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing. I will gather them that are sorrowful for the solemn assembly, who are of thee, to whom the reproach of it was a burden. Behold, at that time I will undo all that afflict thee: and I will save her that halteth, and gather her that was driven out; and I will get them praise and fame in every land where they have been put to shame. At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD (Zeph. 3:16-20).

All of these pictures of spiritual blessings culminated in the coming of Jesus the Christ and were transferred

(Rom. 11:7) to spiritual Israel (Rom. 11:26; Gal. 6:16), the everlasting kingdom of prophecy (Psa. 145:13; Dan. 2:44-45; Dan. 4:3; Dan. 7:27; c.f. 2 Pet. 1:11); the church. For this reason, the physical nation of Israel is no longer God's chosen—their forfeiting of their blessings is exemplified in Paul's turning to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46; Acts 28:28; c.f., Isa. 55:3-7). In contrast, then, to the teaching of the premillennialist, stands this fact: There will be no Messianic return to the Israelites in general nor to Jerusalem in particular! They passed up the opportunity to seek the Lord while He could among them be found.

Conclusion

This study has shown the fact, face, foundation, focus, fairness, fellowship, and faithfulness of God's love. At the same time, attention has been paid to the failings of man's love. Finally, the future of God's love was also noted.

Nevertheless, there is no way that a brief study such as this could sufficiently survey God's love toward the Israelites. It is hoped that the elements of God's love noticed here are sufficient to reveal to the reader the aforementioned point: God is a consistent God; He is consistent in all His nature, including His love shown equally to physical Israel in Old Testament times as it has been in the Christian dispensation to spiritual Israel. As always, the disobedient are loved by God though not blessed by Him, "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:5).

CHAPTER 3

God's Love For Man: For God So Loved The World

Garland Elkins

Introduction

T^{HE GREATNESS OF LOVE} is truly amazing. Love is defined as “to regard with a strong feeling of affection: to have a devoted attachment to another,” and it is described by the great apostle Paul as the greatest abiding principle (1 Cor. 13:13). Jesus said, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). This was not a new commandment in the sense that love had not been commanded before, “...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself; I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18), but rather in the extent of the love that we manifest--“as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” Jesus laid down His life, which is the highest possible type of love (John 15:13; John 3:16).

We are identified as the disciples of Christ by our love for the brethren (John 13:35). Strife in the body of Christ is a terrible thing and love cannot exist where it abounds (Jas. 3:14-16). Surely the need was never greater for the love of God to be shed abroad in the hearts of His professed followers than now (Rom. 5:5). There is the great need that we recognize and assume our responsibilities to

effectively teach the love of God, both in word and in deed as Paul instructed the Corinthian congregation (1 Cor. 13:1-13).

The Superiority Of Love

Nothing can equal love, not even the spiritual gifts that were possessed in abundance by various ones in the church at Corinth (1 Cor. 12-14). Loving God, we will love His Word, His people, and seek to do His will, but if we love the world, we will disobey Him, neglect His church, and deceive ourselves (1 John 2:15-17).

The confusion in the church at Corinth manifested itself in the wearing of human names (1 Cor. 1:12), acts of fornication (1 Cor. 5:1), going to law with brethren (1 Cor. 6:1), corrupting the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:20), just to mention a few, none of which could have existed had love abounded. Placing their trust in spiritual gifts, they had missed the main thing, and while Paul did not minimize the importance of spiritual gifts, he proceeded to show unto them "a more excellent way" (1 Cor. 12:31). Using himself as an example, dispossessed of love, notwithstanding the ability to speak in the tongues of men or angels, the apostle sees only "sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." To speak many languages was then, and now highly regarded. To be able to speak all the languages of earth and heaven would make one a wonder in the eyes of men, but without love he would be only a noise in the world and without hope of salvation in heaven. Continuing to use himself as an example of one without love, Paul fancies himself possessed of the greatest of all the spiritual gifts: "prophecy," knowledge of things not possessed by anyone else; "all knowledge," all information in human affairs; "all faith," even to the removing of mountains, the ability to perform miracles; all this without love would not save him. He, therefore, shows that nothing can take

the place of love; all the disobedient in the day of judgment will be spiritually bankrupt. The Lord, before Paul, had taught the very same thing (Matt. 7:21-23).

In still another scene, the faithful apostle imagines himself upon the stage of life bestowing all that he had upon the poor, and giving his body to be burned. Surely the world would heap praise upon him for so doing, but Paul shows that one can do all of that and still stand empty-handed before the Lord. One may give for show, and sacrifice his life through stubbornness or fanaticism, and it profits him nothing. One may even preach the gospel, but do it in a crude and spiteful spirit, thereby bringing upon him suffering and persecution, and at the same time do the cause of Christ a disservice, all to no profit to himself in the day of judgment. We must preach the “truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

Characteristics Of Love (1 Cor. 13:4-8)

In view of the contention and strifes, the suspicions and jealousies, the pride and the boastings, it is not difficult to see why Paul did not merely define the love that they should have toward each other. Instead he shows how love is exemplified by listing things it does not do.

It suffers long, literally has a long mind. It is a state of mind that will bear long when provoked and does not become bitter when wrongs are done, enduring patiently under trying circumstances.

Love is kind, it seeks only good and never harm. Love never makes trouble for anyone. It seeks to save, never to destroy. Hate prompts to severity, anger, and a desire for revenge; love is the reverse of such things. To those we love we will be kind, gentle, and courteous.

Love does not envy the happiness and prosperity of others. Cain did not love Abel, for love excludes envy. Faithful gospel preachers do not envy other preachers of

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the gospel. Pure love is ever willing for others to be preferred before them (Rom. 13:10; Phil. 2:3-4).

Love does not vaunt itself, literally, does not set itself forward. Boasting and bragging is not motivated by love, for love never assumes the idea of superiority over others, and love produces just the opposite state of mind to a disposition to boast.

Love is not puffed up. It is never inflated with a sense of its own importance. Pride causes one to boast, strut, and appear to be what one is not; love is just the opposite and will not permit one to appear to be what he is not (Prov. 16:18).

Love does not behave itself unseemly, never acting out of place or character, and its behavior toward all people is above reproach. One who feels that he is too important to perform a humble service to the poor, the ignorant, or the lowly, is lacking in love. Jesus set an example for His disciples for all time when He performed the lowly service of washing their feet. This is not an act of worship but of individual service. Love is humble, and only in humility can we go to heaven.

Love does not seek its own, it is not selfish. It looks for the good and happiness of all. We cannot be Christian and be interested only in self; love seeks the good of all.

Love is not provoked, not easily excited to indignation. The character motivated by love will not be hasty, violent, or passionate, but calm, serious and patient.

Love takes no account of evil, believes no evil where no evil exists. Evil men expect and look for evil in every other person and place the worst construction on the acts of others. To the evil, all others are evil. Love desires to think good of all and will do so until true evidence requires otherwise.

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness. Love finds no satisfaction in beholding the downfall of others but rather sadness. It never rejoices in sin.

Love rejoices in the truth. God's Word is truth (John 17:17); and to love God is to love His Word, and find great delight in its success.

Love bears all things, refraining from broadcasting every evil report or exposing to public gaze the sins and shortcomings of the erring, but rather seeks to deliver from error. "Love covereth a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

Love believes all things, that is, it is ready to believe the best in all as long as it is possible to do so without betraying the truth of God. Love is not suspicious or distrustful.

Love hopes for the best. In all things, all situations, love continues to hope, and never despairs. A mother never gives up hoping her drunkard son will stop his drinking, because she loves him. Love endures all things. In every relationship of life it is durable and sacrificing, patiently waiting for good to prevail.

Love never fails; it is permanent. Spiritual gifts were temporary and ended when their purpose was fulfilled, but love will not only continue serving its purpose, in time, but also throughout eternity. Love for God and man is just as indispensable to gain heaven as it was thousands of years ago.

Love Is The Greatest (1 Cor. 13:13)

Spiritual gifts, so highly prized by the Corinthians, were to cease with the apostolic age, but faith, hope, and love were to abide, without which no one can be a child of God. The Word of God received into the heart produces faith, which is necessary to be pleasing unto God (Rom. 10:9-10; Heb. 11:6). Faith in the promises of God produces hope, an anchor of the soul (Heb. 6:19). Love prompts obedience to Divine truth; it is the tie that binds the universe in harmony, and unites God with His creatures.

God is love (1 John 4:8), and the test of our love is obedience to Him (John 14:23; 1 John 5:3).

Our hope of heaven depends upon our love for God. May our love grow stronger as time goes by, and may we also come to a fuller understanding that love for Christ also requires love for those for whom Christ died. Peter enjoined his readers to practice “unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22), and “love as brethren” (1 Pet. 3:8). Christ said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

God’s Love For Man

“For when we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom. 5:6). The entire fourth chapter of Romans is taken up with a discussion of the method by which men are justified by faith and the first five verses of chapter six tell something of the blessedness of those who are justified. Paul wrote: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). He also wrote, “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift” (2 Cor. 9:15).

“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die” (Rom. 5:7). The purpose of this verse seems to be to set in contrast the love of God with the love of men. In discussing the latter, Paul points out the possible height to which man’s love for man will go. The righteous man simply does that which he ought to do, that is, he gives to everyman his due, but only that. The good man on the other hand not only does that which he ought to do, according to the standard of righteousness, but he gives further, and might even die for the noble man who calls out his affection.

“But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). The love of God therefore goes further than anything that man would ever think of doing. Christ died, not for the righteous and good, but for sinners: “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10).

The term “commendeth” is in the present tense, and the implication is that God continues to establish His love in that the death of His Son remains as its most striking manifestation.

“Much more then being now justified, by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him. For if, while we were yet enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life” (Rom. 5:9-10).

God’s Love For The World

Many years ago, brother Gus Nichols preached in a gospel meeting where I served as the local preacher. The meeting duration was about a week or ten days. Brother Nichols stayed in our home and that was indeed a treat. We not only had evening services, but we also had day services, and brother Nichols preached great sermons. As I recall, some of his sermons were one hour and forty-five minutes in length. To me, that seemed very brief. One of those great sermons he called “The Great Love of God” and in that sermon he discussed John 3:16. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” I thought that day, and I still think, that it was the best sermon that I ever heard on John 3:16. Since that day, I have from time to time used that same approach when preaching on John 3:16 and God’s great love for the world.

God Is The Greatest Being

Since space is limited, I cannot go into as much detail as I would like. However, I point out that every prominent word in John 3:16 is a superlative. The first words introduce the greatest Being, God. God is introduced to us in the first verse of the Bible, "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth" (Gen. 1:1). The Bible declares that God is "...upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). He created all things, and made man and woman in His own image out of the dust of the ground (Gen. 1:26-27). The Bible teaches that He made us, and we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:14).

The theory of evolution denies the existence of God. The Bible correctly says, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psa. 14:1). Hebrews 3:4 states, "For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God" (Heb. 3:4). From nature there is abundant evidence that God exists. The Bible says "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard" (Psa. 19:1-3).

Paul affirmed, "For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse" (Rom. 1:20). However, even though there is enough in nature to convince any honest person of the existence of God it is necessary to have the written instructions in order that we may learn how to become a Christian and to go to heaven when we die (2 Pet. 1:3; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; Rom. 1:16; Eph. 5:17).

The Greatest Thing

God is the greatest Being, and the greatest thing in the world is love (John 3:16). Paul wrote that the greatest

thing is love, “But the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Love caused God to send His Son (John 3:16), and love caused Christ to voluntarily come and die for us (Heb. 2:9).

God Loved The Greatest Number

God is the greatest Being, love is the greatest thing, and God loves the greatest possible number: “For God so loved the world.” God loves everyone from Adam to the end of the world. However, only those who obey Him will be saved (Matt. 7:21-23; Heb. 5:8-9).

The Greatest Gift

“For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son” (John 3:16). He gave the most precious gift! Christ is indeed the greatest gift that God could give.

The Greatest Faith

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish...” To believe in Jesus is to believe in His Sonship and Divinity; it is to believe that He was born of the virgin Mary, that He wrought miracles to prove, that He was the Son of God, and that believing we might have life in His name (John 20:30-31); that He was crucified for our sins, and that He was raised again the third day (1 Cor. 15:1-4), and that He ascended back to heaven; and that He established His church wherein is salvation.

Peter speaks of “precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1). The faith that saves is the faith that obeys. John wrote, “This is the victory that overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4). Faith begins by believing what God says, and concludes by doing all He commands. Paul speaks of “the obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26). He wrote that faith must work by love to avail (Gal. 5:6), and Peter wrote, “receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls” (1 Pet. 1:9).

The Greatest Tragedy

The greatest possible tragedy that anyone can suffer is to be lost. Hell is a terrible place. The Bible says of that place, “where their worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:44); “And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night” (Rev. 14:11). Jesus says, “These shall go away into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41). Paul wrote that those who obey not the gospel, “shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Those who are not Christians are in danger of perishing for ever. To die lost, out of the Lord, would be the greatest tragedy that you could possibly suffer. To become a Christian one must: Hear the Word of the gospel and believe it (Acts 15:7-9), repent of all sins (Luke 13:3); confess that Christ is the Son of God (Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:37). One cannot be saved without baptism (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet. 3:21).

The Greatest Human Blessings

The last part of John 3:16 points out that salvation is in Christ (2 Tim. 2:10; Acts 4:12); and if one is in Christ and is faithful he receives the blessing of “everlasting life.” Jesus has promised His faithful disciples an hundredfold now in this life, and in the world to come eternal life (Mark 10:29-30). We now have eternal life in promise (1 John 2:25), and hope (Tit. 1:2), but after this life is over we shall actually receive eternal life (Mark 10:29-30).

CHAPTER 4

Christ's Love For Man: From Heaven To Gethsemane

David Jones

Introduction

LOVE IS THE FOUNDATION of all of God's commandments and communication with man. John wrote: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8). God is love in its perfect form. Every expression that God had to man was founded on love. When Jesus was asked by the tempting lawyer, He answered:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

Heaven's laws for the Israelites stood on the firm foundation of God's love as its footing. Every ordinance, law, and principle was founded on God's love.

Our responsibility in this lecture is to discuss the love which promoted the Christ to leave heaven, come to earth and which led Him to the garden. As we begin we

briefly will notice an overview of the whole scheme of redemption and then concentrate ourselves on our required assignment.

From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible drips from page to page with the sweet story of the redeeming blood of the Lamb. From the lambs slain to provide skins for Adam and Eve, to the cruel cross of Calvary where the innocent Son of God was slain for the sin of the world, we read of this sweet redemption. This sweet redemption was a product of the entire Godhead. Thus we see the concern of all three members as they each contributed to our redemption.

Redemption Promised By The Father

The Father, along with the help of the other members of the Godhead, created man in the image of God:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).

Being created in the image of God allowed man the freedom of choice. This freedom of choice was allowed and demanded by the love of God. Man, of course, chose to disobey God and brought sin and death (spiritual as well as physical) into the world. When the Father questioned the man about his sin, Adam blamed it on Eve, who in turn blamed it on the serpent. God spoke to Satan saying, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). In this prophecy, the Father promised to redeem man one day. This promise was echoed time and again by the prophets sent by the Father to the children of Israel (Joel 2:28-32; Isa. 2:2-3;

Isa. 53). Therefore, the Father promised redemption in Christ.

Redemption Provided By Christ

The pictures and prophecies are manifold throughout the Old Testament, pointing to the cross where Jesus gave His life for mankind (Exod. 12; Num. 21; Isa. 53). The voice of one crying in the wilderness said of Jesus: "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). The apostle Paul said of Jesus: "...For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7). Peter recorded: "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24).

We read in the letter to the Ephesians: "But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:13) . . . "And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby" (Eph. 2:16). Thus we see redemption provided in Christ, as He was the perfect sacrifice for the perfect man who sinned in the garden. All of mankind should take advantage of the redemption which was promised by the Father and provided in Christ.

Redemption Procured Through The Holy Spirit

What was promised by the Father and provided in Christ, needed to be preached to a lost world (Mark 16:15-16). Thus, it was necessary for the Holy Spirit to be sent to guide the apostles into all truth (John 16:13). This truth was preserved for us and thus the third person of the Godhead joined the others in making a contribution to our salvation or redemption.

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4) the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles as prophesied by Joel (Joel 2:28-32),

enabling them to speak in tongues, miraculously. It also brought to their remembrance all Jesus had taught them, and He guided them into all truth. He enabled the apostles to impart miraculous gifts to men as the gifts were needed to edify the body of Christ till all of revelation could be given. In this manner the Holy Spirit brought about or procured redemption to all of mankind in the form of revelation, both spoken (by inspiration in the first century) and written and preserved for our learning today.

The Motivation To Exit Heaven

Paul spoke of this motivation when he reminded the Corinthians of the attitude they should have in their giving: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9). Reminding them of the grace of Jesus should have been a motivation for them to dig deeper and give more with the same kind of heart that Jesus had already shown. Love was the motivation which allowed God to send His Son to die our places: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Having loved man so much, God had created man in His own image. After creating him, man sinned and God **still** loved him enough to send His only begotten Son to die for all mankind. Paul tells us that even at that time man was the enemy of God:

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet

sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life (Rom. 5:5-10).

Mankind was completely helpless to save himself. God's love motivated Him to send Jesus into the world. Jesus' love motivated Him to come and die so that man could be saved. Without the innocent blood of the Lamb, man would be forever lost in sin and separated from the love of God. But, the death of Christ allowed man to be reconciled unto God through the cross.

For this to be possible, Christ had to come to earth in the form of a man and be willing to die. Love was the motivating factor which moved Him to exit heaven and live among men. God's plan from all eternity involved this death. John wrote from the island of Patmos: "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8). When God laid the foundations for this world, He knew it would take the death of His Son to save man whom He was going to create in His own image. Again, we read from the pen of the Hebrews writer:

For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, [which are] the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for

him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation (Heb. 9:24-28).

The first reference to “world,” in Hebrews 9:26, would refer to the world which God created in which man dwells. If Christ’s **one** sacrifice was not sufficient and satisfying to God, then Jesus would have had to suffer many deaths. But, since His **one** death was fulfilling to God’s plan, then Christ only died once. The second “world” to which the writer refers has reference to the Jewish dispensation. Jesus appeared **once** as a man to walk and fulfill the Old Law. He will **not** return to this earth again, but when He appears the second time, it will be in the clouds, the world will be destroyed and all of mankind will be judged (2 Pet. 3:9-10; 2 Cor. 5:10). This plan was eternal as Paul writes to the Ephesians:

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all [men] see what [is] the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly [places] might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:8-11).

The plan to save man was motivated by God’s love to create man and then to allow His Son to die for all: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:9).

The Manner Of His Entrance

Jesus came to earth motivated by love and molded in the very same image in which He had made man. He

came to earth as a man in order to die for man's sins. The justice of God demanded that a perfect man die for the perfect man who sinned in the garden. Had Jesus come to earth as an angel, He would not have satisfied that justice. Paul wrote and explained this principle to the Romans:

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth [to be] a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, [I say], at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:23-26).

Jesus justified God's saving of man because He came to earth as a man and died as a man.

Jesus also came to earth in the manner of a man so He could be our faithful and understanding High Priest. Love motivated Jesus to become a man so He could be the mediator for us in heaven: "For [there is] one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time" (1 Tim. 2:5-6). Therefore, we have an advocate to the Father:

My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

John wrote to the church and said the church had an advocate in heaven. Anyone who is adopted into God's family through obedience to the gospel has One in heaven who is at the right hand of God. John also said that Jesus was the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. But, one must obey God in order to avail himself to the advocate in heaven.

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As our advocate in heaven, Jesus is able to take our petitions and prayers to the Father. He knows our troubles because He has been where we are. We read:

Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on [him the nature of] angels; but he took on [him] the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto [his] brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things [pertaining] to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted (Heb. 2:14-18).

From this passage the Bible student sees again that Jesus came to deliver man from the bondage of sin. But, he also sees that Jesus took the manner or make-up of a human being. That is, He was made like unto His brethren and came as flesh and blood.

The student also learns that Jesus did this so He would know our struggles we have in life and be able to comfort us when we call upon His Father in prayer. When we are tempted and tried, we need to remember we have an advocate in heaven at God's right hand Who knows our every need and problem. Having overcome them in the flesh, He wants to help us overcome our problems, as we are in the flesh. The writer went on to say:

Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast [our] profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points

tempted like as [we are, yet] without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:14-16).

Since He was tempted in every point as we are, then we should not blame God when we are tempted. Instead, we should come boldly (confidently) before the throne and ask for help. We have help at the right hand of God because the manner in which Jesus came to earth was a man.

His entrance into the world was not one of great fanfare or fanciful in any way. He was born of a woman like any human being. However, He was born of a virgin and His conception was not from a human man. The angel told Joseph:

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just [man], and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us (Matt. 1:18-23).

Jesus was conceived miraculously in Mary's womb as a result of God's working. However, He was born as any normal human being would have been. Paul told the Galatians: "But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law" (Gal. 4:4). He was 100% man as well as 100% God. Therefore,

referring to Him as the Son of God is correct. However, it is just as correct to refer to Him as the son of man. He can therefore be a mediator—a go between—for man, because He was man and God at the same time.

His manner of entrance also showed us a picture of the Father. John wrote of His incarnation: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). . . . “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared [him]” (John 1:18). Jesus declared unto sinful man the glory of man’s Creator. Jesus often spoke of the fact that He was here to reveal the Father unto man. When Philip asked to see the Father, Jesus responded to his request:

Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou [then], Shew us the Father? (John 14:8-9).

The Hebrews writer says about Jesus:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

Jesus is the image or stamp of God. He is the exact or express image of the Father. Their plans and purposes are one. His manner of entrance revealed the Father unto man.

His manner of entrance into this world was as a servant. He was born in a stable in Bethlehem, which shows a humble beginning. Paul wrote of His manner of entrance to the Philippians:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

His entrance into this world was one of no reputation. He did not come as a king in a palace. He was born in a lowly stable and lived in a city despised by many. Isaiah referred to Him 750 years before his birth:

For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, [there is] no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were [our] faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not (Isa. 53:2-3).

He was born as if He were a tender plant in dry ground. He had the mind and manner of a servant and He taught us to have this same mind and same manner.

The Mean's Of His Executing God's Will

Jesus was motivated to leave heaven because of His love. His manner of entrance was that of a human being so He could feel our troubles and share our sorrows. However, He also came to fulfill the Father's will and this involved doing good to all men. He did good often without the aid of miracles, but His work included miraculous

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powers to prove and confirm who He was. This power came when the Holy Spirit descended upon Him after John baptized Him. Matthew wrote:

And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:16-17).

His first miracle was in Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-11) and this was following His baptism. He did many miracles which helped mankind:

And his fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatick, and those that had the palsy; and he healed them (Matt. 4:24).

And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him (Mark 1:34).

And he came down with them, and stood in the plain, and the company of his disciples, and a great multitude of people out of all Judaea and Jerusalem, and from the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases; And they that were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed. And the whole multitude sought to touch him: for there went virtue out of him, and healed [them] all (Luke 6:17-19).

Many people were the recipients of the healing power of Jesus. He touched lepers and made them whole. He raised several from the dead. He cast out demons and made

many walk that could not walk. The benefits were abundant because of the touch of the Master. When Luke wrote the book of Acts, He said: "The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1:1). Jesus did, and **then** He taught. He proved He was Deity and Divine power, and then He taught the will of God. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost he convicted the Jews by reminding them of the good that Jesus did: "Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know" (Acts 2:22).

The good that Jesus did ultimately was to prove He was the Son of God. He did these deeds because He loved mankind, but He also did them to prove His Deity so they would obey and could be saved.

While He was on earth, there were some who knew He did the miracles by God's power. John records:

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him (John 3:1-2).

Nicodemus knew that Jesus was from God because of the miracles that He did. Therefore, he came and inquired further of Jesus' teaching. Jesus did, and then He taught. The blind man of John chapter nine was healed by the power of Jesus. When asked by the hard-hearted Pharisees as to how he was made to see he answered: "Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God, he could do nothing" (John 9:32-33). The now seeing man knew Jesus was from God because of the good that He did.

The Mind We Are To Exhibit Because Of His Love

Love motivated Jesus to come to earth, grow as a human, prove His Deity, and ultimately led Him to the garden in which He would be betrayed. His example is the example we are to follow: "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps" (1 Pet. 2:21). In order to do this, we must deny ourselves as Jesus did and then taught: "And he said to [them] all, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

Since Jesus had denied Himself the riches of heaven and had come to sinful earth below, He could now teach us to do likewise. We are to deny ourselves of our own wills and then to teach others. If we deny ourselves here on earth, we will have the riches of heaven that Jesus had, gave up, and then had restored unto Him upon His obedience to His Father.

Jesus told His disciples: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all [men] know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). We are to love each other **as** Christ loved us. John also wrote:

Hereby perceive we the love [of God], because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down [our] lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels [of compassion] from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18).

We lay down our lives by denying ourselves of things we may need if we have brethren who have needs also. We

must love our brethren in order to love God. John also penned:

We love him, because he first loved us. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also (1 John 4:19-21).

If we say we love God then we **must** by necessity love our brethren. Jesus demonstrated this love by leaving heaven and coming to the earth below and dying on a cruel cross to save humanity. We **cannot** hate our brethren, harbor evil thoughts and have ill will toward brethren and at the same time love God.

Conclusion

Thanks be to God that He loved us enough to allow His Son to come and die for us. Thanks be to Jesus Who loved us enough to come and be made in our likeness to die in our place and pay the price we could not pay. May we have the mind of Christ as we live upon this earth knowing that one day we shall stand and give account of how we have conducted our lives. Thanks be also to the Holy Spirit who inspired men to write God's Word so we can know we are saved and by what we will be judged: "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48).

CHAPTER 5

Greater Love Hath No Man Than This: From The Upper Room To Calvary

Wayne Jones

Appreciation

AS I WRITE THESE words, moving boxes surround me. My shelves are nearly bare, and my eyes are filled with tears. In nearly six years of work with the church at Southaven, my family and I came to know a love and unity that we had never known to that point in time. We owe a debt of gratitude too deep to pay for the way that you all took care of us and loved us. This lectureship would have marked the completion of our sixth year of work together. However, it now serves as a time of reunion and reflection. If I may speak freely, I love this church more than you will ever know. I commend to you the church of Christ which meets in Southaven, Mississippi. It is, without question, a distinguished honor to be a part of this lectureship program and to be able to come home again!

Introduction

Suppose you were to be given the assignment of measuring the love of Christ. Obviously the measuring devices of human standards would not be adequate. Since through the love of our Shepherd, our cups run over in

abundance (Psa. 23:5), we know that a measuring cup will not suffice to measure Christ's love. Since the mercy and love of God is higher than the heavens (Psa. 108:4), then a measuring stick or even a measuring tape would not do the proverbial trick. Since the love of God was invoked before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8), and since it will last into eternity (1 Cor. 13:13), not even a clock could measure the length and duration of Christ's love. We ought to pray as Paul prayed for the Ephesians:

That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph. 3:17-19).¹

Attempts have been made to measure the love of Christ based on the verse that heads our discussion. However, closer attention given to these words indicates that Christ is not revealing the totality of His love, but merely what would be one of its greatest illustrations. It is true that self-sacrifice is the highest expression and deepest revelation of love. Yet, in this text Christ is speaking friend to friend. Within the framework of this recorded conversation, Christ praises the apostles for their maturity and growth (John 15:15-16).

Herein Christ reveals that He chose them, but that they had grown beyond being merely students. In fact, He calls them His friends. No doubt this friendship was based on their willingness not only to be taught by Him, but their willingness to do what had been taught (John 15:14). It is against this backdrop that Christ reveals that self-sacrifice is the greatest expression of love from friend to friend.

Continued Bible study will show that Christ not only died for His friends, but also for those who did not know Him and those who were willfully wicked in their actions:

For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8).

Therefore, neither of these passages alone can fully explain the love of Christ. In fact, it is this writer's contention that we could read every verse of Divine inspiration a million times over, and our understanding of the love of Christ would still be incomplete at best.

Why? Because His love is not merely seen in His death. His love is a totality of His sacrifices, His teachings, His compassion, His goals, His life, His death and His resurrection. The love of Christ was seen from the origin of the earth to the manger at Bethlehem. Christ's love is viewed from the top of Mount Sinai and in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar. His love is recognized from the throne room of heaven and from Pilate's hall. His love can be studied from a storm tossed boat on Galilee and from a humble washcloth used to clean the dirty feet of those far inferior to Him. Although it may be dim, the light of His love is visible in the valley of the shadow of death and in a world which is littered with sin. Thanks be to God that we are allowed times such as this to focus on and saturate our minds with the love of Christ.

For the space allotted, we will direct our attention to the love of Christ as it is seen on the night leading up to His death and in the time He spent on the cross—from the upper room to Calvary. If we were to attempt a complete and exhaustive study of these events, we would

quickly reach a shortage of time and space. Therefore, it is our agenda to discuss the love of Christ during these events by looking at His hands, His feet, His eyes, His heart and His arms. Lord willing, this collection of thoughts will give us reason to glory in the cross (Gal. 6:14), reason to strive (2 Cor. 5:14) and reason to hope (Rom. 5:5).

From the upper room to Calvary, let us see Christ's love for man by noticing...

His Loving Hands Folded In Prayer

Prayer was very much a part of the events leading from the "last supper" to the last breath of Christ on the cross. Specifically, His prayers in the garden serve as a dramatic expression of His deep and abiding love for mankind.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record the repetitious prayer of the Savior for God to allow the seemingly unbearable cup of suffering to pass and that by some other means the plan of God for man's salvation be completed (Matt. 26:36-44; Mark 14:32-41; Luke 22:39-42). Some view these prayers of Christ as a weakness in the armor or a lack of love on His part. Dear reader, nothing could be further from the truth. Listen to Christ: "Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53). Do you believe Christ's statement? If you do, then you already know that Christ did not want to avoid the cross because He did not love man. If such were the case, there would have been no need to make this request of God for a change in plans. He could have simply called heaven's hosts to His aid, and the plan would have been aborted. No, it was His love for man that would not allow Christ to call on those angels or to back out of the committed plan. His prayer for the cup of suffering to pass shows us this

much. If man could still be saved and Christ not go to the cross, then Christ would have been in favor of such a plan. However, since the will and justice of God demanded a perfect, blood sacrifice on the altar of Calvary, Christ in His matchless love was willing to die. As His hands were folded in prayer, His will was submissive to the Father's. All of this was done because of the love that Christ had for us.

John's inspired record reveals much more about that garden prayer of Christ than the other three biographers of Christ. John spends an entire chapter (John 17), some 26 verses in detailing the prayer of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane. Consequently, we gain a deeper appreciation for the love of Christ as seen in His prayers when we read John's account. We quickly learn that the bulk of Christ's prayer in the garden was for others. The summation of this heartfelt, emotional prayer gives us great insight into the love that promoted it:

Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them (John 17:24-26).

Not merely the summation, but also the content of this prayer reveals the love that Christ had for those who did and would follow Him. Although Christ was ready to be reunited with the Father, in His love He showed great concern for their well-being once He was gone, both physically and spiritually (John 17:11; John 17:15). Furthermore, He wanted to make sure that those He was leaving behind would have sufficient reason to be happy

(John 17:13). Still, Christ wanted God to bless future generations of believers and His love compelled Him to pray to this end (John 17:20).

Putting an ear to the door of Gethsemane, one can hear the love of Christ in prayer. Taking a peek within the shadows of that night, one can see Christ and His love as His hands are folded in loving prayer to God for mankind.

His Loving Feet Standing Determined

The feet of Christ are mentioned more times in the Bible than some may realize. The following is by no means a comprehensive listing of these references, but rather a sampling of the many occasions wherein the Bible discusses Christ's feet:

Then great multitudes came to Him, having with them the lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others; **and they laid them down at Jesus' feet**, and He healed them (Matt. 15:30; emphasis mine throughout unless otherwise indicated, WC).

And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, Rejoice! **So they came and held Him by the feet** and worshiped Him (Matt. 28:9).

[A]nd stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and **she began to wash His feet with her tears**, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil (Luke 7:38).

Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, **anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair**. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil (John 12:3).

Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have (Luke 24:39).

We cannot begin to mentally travel the path that led from the upper room to the hill of Calvary without being immediately impressed with the **determination** in Jesus' feet. He had actually "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" many days before the events we are discussing together (Luke 9:51). Nothing along the way could dissuade Him—not being forsaken, being tempted, being falsely accused, being threatened, being beaten, being humiliated and even being killed. The determination of Jesus' feet is clearly seen as the writer of Hebrews looks back at those events: "...for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself..." (Heb. 12:2-3).

This determination was seen in the fact that Jesus was paraded all through the night before leaders and rulers and angry mobs. Never once did His purpose falter or did He lose sight of His mission. In fact, during the intense and unlawful trials that He endured, Christ, out of a heart of love, tried to teach those who would listen about His purpose. When the time was right He stood firm in defense of His earthly ministry (John 18:20-21). He explained about the nature of the kingdom (John 18:36) and His reign as King (John 18:37). Even before the blood thirsty mob, who were intent on crucifying Him, Christ stood firm on His claim to Deity (Luke 22:70). His loving feet were determined because without this firm stand He would have failed in His mission, and our hope of salvation would be lost forever.

His loving feet stood determined that we might have an example to follow when our road gets difficult to travel. There will be stands that we must make and explanations that we must give. These trials and troubles are often heaven's sifter that determines who is dedicated and who

is not. Never will we be allowed to excuse our own inability to stand by citing God's ignorance in "what it is like" to be tried. God in the flesh was troubled, distressed and intensely persecuted. However, on His loving feet He stood firm and determined that you and I might know of and be motivated by His love!

His Loving Eyes Seeing The Potential

The eyes of Jesus were often able to see potential in people who were useless to others. Remember it was Christ who composed His band of closest followers with fishermen, a tax collector and an impetuous man who spoke before he should have. It was Jesus Who saw the multitude of followers in Mark 6:34 as sheep without a shepherd. He did not see a group of lost souls with no hope, but rather a group of men and women in desperate need of a leader and of something to believe. Simply stated, He saw the potential where others would have seen an inconvenience or even an impossibility.

This ability to see the potential rather than merely seeing the problem was called upon by the apostles when they were looking for Judas' replacement. There, Luke records the prayer of the apostles: "And they prayed and said, 'You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen'" (Acts 1:24). Christ tried to pass this characteristic on to His disciples. On one occasion, Christ commanded, "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!" (John 4:35).

Many who followed Christ were able to begin seeing past the problems that people were facing and see the potential that lay within them. Is it not amazing that the Corinthian church was made up of men and women who

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were formerly idolaters, fornicators, homosexuals, drunkards and thieves (1 Cor. 6:9-11)? Thanks be to God that someone (namely Paul, according to Acts 18) with loving eyes saw the potential rather than simply seeing the sin.

From the upper room to Calvary, Christ was able to see with loving eyes such potential in those who were busy forsaking and ridiculing Him. Peter's denial is the most obvious of instances that comes to mind. After vowing to die for Christ and immediately being put in his place (Matt. 26:31-35), Peter proceeded to deny the Lord; and, on the third and final occurrence, he even cursed in doing so (Matt. 26:69-75).

Interestingly, Luke shares information regarding this event that Matthew does not record. Luke records that as soon as Peter had denied the Lord a third time, "the Lord turned and looked at Peter" (Luke 22:61). No doubt this look would have been one of rebuke and shame. Encompassed in this look would have been disappointment and sadness. However, this writer cannot help but believe that there was also love in that glance—as Christ knew He was also looking at a potential preacher of the gospel and elder in the Lord's church. He was looking at a man who would stand and boldly proclaim on Pentecost that those present were guilty of killing the Son of God.

Those same facts that Peter was denying this night, he would just a few weeks later defend and declare to be Truth! Do you suppose Christ still saw that potential in him even in what was Peter's lowest spiritual valley? I submit to you that Christ saw such potential because He looked at Peter through eyes of love!

Another target of Christ's loving eyes was one of the thieves with which He was hanged. Let us not forget that both thieves were involved in ridiculing the Christ as He hung between them on the hill of Golgotha (Matt. 27:44). Later it would appear that one of the thieves thought better

of the situation and was able to realize his mistake before he reached death's dark valley. Luke records the fact that he rebuked his fellow criminal (Luke 23:40-41) for continuing the humiliation of Christ. Then turning to Christ, the penitent thief said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."

It is at this point of the conversation that Christ, with loving eyes, saw the need for forgiveness and the potential for heaven in this fallen soul. Because of this man's repentance and Christ's ability to see the potential in him, Christ made this now famous statement: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Many others, no doubt, were given the same look of love from the eyes of Christ as He journeyed from the upper room to Calvary. These two examples will, hopefully, suffice to prove the depth and width of the love of Christ and His ability to see potential when others would merely see a sinner lost and destitute.

His Loving Heart Compelling Him To Speak

Isaiah's detailed prophecy concerning the suffering and death of Christ includes the fact that Christ "was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7). Peter, looking back at the cross by inspiration, authenticates this fact by noting that when Christ was reviled, He "did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten..." (1 Pet. 2:23). Matthew plainly reveals that "Jesus kept silent" (Matt. 26:63).

Yet, these statements were references to His defense. No, Jesus did not answer the charges laid at His feet. He did not attempt to argue with the false witnesses who

were there to destroy His credibility. In humility and respect for God's plan, Christ went to His death without proving His enemies wrong.

That does not mean, however, that Jesus did not speak a word during His crucifixion. In fact, the words that Jesus spoke around the cross are some of His most famous and powerful words He uttered while on this earth:

Without hesitation, nor fear of contradiction, we declare the words of our Savior, especially the seven utterances from His lips as he hung on the old rugged cross that are foremost in our minds. To hear Him cry out in agony is equivalent to a figurative dagger in the Christian's heart. To view (from the Scriptural account), once again His profound love for all humans is beyond what we can fully appreciate. To listen to His passionate words seeking forgiveness for their heinous deeds, even as His blood seeps from His wilting body, is more than our minds can grasp or evaluate.²

The Spirit documented seven of those sayings in the Divine record. We have already considered the statement of assurance to the repenting thief (Luke 23:43). In the space remaining we will give attention to two other of these seven statements, and it should be obvious that they were spoken from lips that were compelled by a heart filled with love.

While hanging in agony, the love that Jesus had for His mother compelled Him to speak these words: "Behold your mother" (John 19:27). These words were spoken to John regarding the welfare of Mary. Christ would not be able to take care of her any longer, and it would appear as if Joseph had already died. Where would she live? Who would provide for her? Was it not Jesus' earthly responsibility to care for her?

Even in a time of pain and anguish with the salvation of the world resting on His shoulders, His heart of love for

His mother compelled Him to speak. And His mission was accomplished; the Bible goes on to record that “from that hour that disciple took her to his own home” (John 19:27).

Again, while writhing in anguish and pain, Jesus, from a heart of love, displayed what is possibly the most selfless act ever to be committed in human flesh. Jesus prayed, “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). Truly there is no greater sign of love than to be unlawfully and unjustly killed and with one of your last breaths to offer forgiveness to the very ones who are killing you. What other man who has ever lived would have been humble, loving, and courageous enough to even go to the cross? Not to mention being loving, humble and courageous enough to utter these words while hanging there. It is no wonder that the centurion, after seeing all of these events, noted, “Truly this man was the Son of God” (Mark 15:39).

Jesus had been preaching this type of love to those who had been faithful enough to listen. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus concluded the beatitudes by pronouncing blessing or spiritual happiness on those who would be persecuted and reviled for His sake (Matt. 5:10-12). In that same sermon, Jesus taught about the importance of not seeking revenge: “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Matt. 5:38-39). Christ would further develop this concept later in this sermon:

You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you (Matt. 5:43-44).

Therefore, it should come as no surprise to Bible students that as Jesus hung between heaven and earth

that He would speak words of love for those who had beaten Him and spat upon His face. Despite the lacerations they caused and the blood they caused to flow from His body, He loved them all the same. Despite the pain and mockery their homemade crown and robe caused Him, His love was able to look beyond those despicable deeds. His love for all sinners (including you and me) is what compelled Him to offer forgiveness in the face of man's most sinful actions ever.

What compels a Physician to continually offer treatment to a patient who hates Him? What compels a Shepherd to put His life on the line to save a sheep who physically has nothing to offer? What compels a Savior to persist in a plan offering salvation to the masses, knowing that most will mock, ridicule and not care? You know the answer do you not? Love! It is a greater and deeper love than you and I can probably ever fathom. It is a love that would provoke Jesus to die for His friends and for His enemies. A love that could compel Him to say about the very ones responsible for His death, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).

His Loving Arms Embracing The Lost

With our mind's eyes we can go back to that upper room and at the conclusion of that song we can retrace the steps of our Savior. We can follow with the disciples to the gate of Gethsemane. We can watch from a distance as Judas leads the platoon of men to Christ. In horror, we can watch as seemingly every law is broken in the sham of a trial He was given. We may even weep as we notice Pilate's certainty of innocence but reluctance to release Him. Certainly, we would not be able to watch the merciless beating our Savior would endure at the hands of Roman soldiers. All the while, we can hear the chant "Crucify Him!"

Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” We could fight off the tears as Christ falls beneath the weight of His cross. Being a witness to the insults and mocking at the foot of the cross would be more than we could stand.

Then, as we looked up at His loving, outstretched arms we could truly know that “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Certainly, at the foot of the cross and watching His blood spatter at our feet, we can see that “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless otherwise noted.

2 Paul Sain, “What Jesus Said From The Cross (Part Two)” **The Sayings Of Jesus**, ed. B.J. Clarke (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications), p. 159.

CHAPTER 6

Who Shall Separate Us From The Love Of Christ?

Jerry Martin

Introduction

IN THIS SPACE WE will attempt to give an exposition of Roman 8:35-39 with special emphasis on how much Christ loves us. We want to address the question as to whether this passage means that nothing can cause us to fall from God's grace. Before addressing the specific question asked in the verses assigned for this lecture, it should prove helpful for us to review three previous questions asked earlier in the chapter.

The first question is found in Romans 8:31, "**If God be for us, who can be against us?**" In verse 31 we are reminded that God, who spared not His Son, is on our side. We also need not forget He knows who is on His side. "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity" (2 Tim 2:19). He knows how to deliver the righteous and punish the wicked. "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished" (2 Pet. 2:9). Because the Lord has promised to never leave us alone

we can have the confidence to face anything and everything men may do to us.

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

Questions two and three in Romans 8:33-34 are connected: **“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?”** and, **“Who is he that condemneth?”** The obedient believer has the approval of the Divine Godhead (Rom. 8:1-17). As the elect of God, Christians need to be reminded that Christ, Who died for us, now intercedes for us at God’s right hand. It is through such love that we can face whatever life hurls at us with the confidence that the One who represents us in the throne room of heaven will not allow false accusations to place us under condemnation. The Christian has the best “Lawyer” that Divine blood can purchase. Satan and evil men doing his bidding are powerless to bring charges against God’s elect.

Exposition of Romans 8:35-39

The text reads:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39).

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There are two schools of thought about this passage. One thought is that this is Christ's love for us that is under consideration. The other is that it is our love for Christ.¹ In either case, the things that are listed obviously would never keep Christ from loving us nor should they be the cause of us not loving Him. The "who" behind the distressful things mentioned is ultimately Satan. His greatest desire would be to create a loveless relationship between the Lord and those who have chosen to serve Him.

Romans 8:35 contains the fourth question, "**Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?**" These words of encouragement were given specifically to the Roman Christians and were intended to prepare them for the trials that would be brought upon them, in their immediate context, by evil and cruel rulers like Nero. The early Christians, like us, needed to be reminded that God sent His Son to die for them and that none of the cruelties man might inflict would cause Him to lose focus nor could they diminish His love for them. These inspired words are also recorded to provide encouragement for every Christian in every generation to stay focused on the love God has extended and to allow it to be the motivation for faithfulness to the principles He has prescribed for the Christian's spiritual protection (John 3:16-17). If God is for us we should never be fainthearted no matter "who" is against us. For, who are "they" compared to our Lord? The enemies of God's people are powerless to remove from the Christian even one spiritual blessing the Lord has promised them.

There are seven things that Paul mentions in this verse that Christians could face but should not allow them to cloud their view of the Lord's love for them nor callus their love for Him. **Tribulation** is an external pressure that can cause physical and emotional stress.² **Distress** is that external confinement that restricts freedom of

movement. **Persecution** is deliberate and intentional pursuit for the purpose of inflicting harm. **Famine** is obviously an economic situation in which there is a scarcity of substance. **Nakedness** describes an unclothed condition that exposes one to the harshness of the external elements. **Peril** is exposure to physical or emotional hazard. **Sword** is the blade of death that was ever a threat to those who professed and practiced Christianity (Acts 12:2).

Later in this Roman letter Paul reminds the Christians of Old Testament events and states, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom. 15:4). Among the things that are written for our learning is a wonderful story of confidence and courage even in face of promised physical torture and death. The story is of three Hebrew youths that were in Babylonian bondage, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Even in captivity and under threat of death in a fiery furnace their confidence in God’s love for them and their love for God sustained their faith and controlled their actions.

Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will

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deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up (Dan. 3:13-18).

The rest of the story demonstrates the care of the Lord and how the confidence of the faithful impacts even those inflicting the evil. As you read the outcome, retain it in your mind so you can allow it to help you learn the lesson that evil men and their evil deeds do not divert the Lord's plan nor should they dim the eyes of the faithful to the everlasting love of the Lord.

Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes,

governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them. Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God. Therefore I make a decree, That every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, in the province of Babylon (Dan. 3:19-30).

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to have their conviction of God's loving care marred by threats of or actual administration of external punishment. Their confidence in the omniscient, omnipresent and omnipotent God prepared them to face anyone who threatened them and any life circumstance those threats might impose. They did not let man's actions determine their view of God's love. They trusted that God would see that the ultimate outcome would be for their spiritual good.

The Hebrews writer charges the Christian to have the same confidence in the Lord and the same courage to face whatever is done to us.

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me (Heb. 13:5-6).

If there are those who wish us harm and who have the power to inflict such harm, those men and actions will

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not be a demonstration of a deficiency in the Lord's love for us. In fact, Heaven has already demonstrated just the opposite. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). There is obviously nothing we would ever need spiritually that He would withhold from us. So, there is nothing that anyone could ever do to us that should be confused as a lack of love on the Lord's part.

In writing to the Galatian Christians, Paul declared, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). As Paul reflected on being crucified with the Lord, he demonstrates that there is not a time when we are not in the presence of the Lord so we should prepare properly for such an intimate relationship. Our life should consist of complete devotion to and trust in the Lord. Since He demonstrated His love for us in dying for us we should be prepared to die for Him and not think that if such was required of us it would mean that the Lord did not love us. But, such would provide an opportunity for us to prove our love for Him.

Romans 8:36 states: "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." Here Paul illustrates the intensity of possible persecution by quoting Psalm 44:22. All Christians in all ages must be prepared to exhibit their love for Christ in death if necessary. "Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10). In the immediate context in which Paul is writing this letter to the Romans, Nero's cruelty to Christians had made death a probability rather than a possibility.³ The slaughter of Christians was

given no more thought than one would give in killing a sheep for a common meal.

In writing to the Christians in Corinth, Paul illustrated how suffering should be expected and viewed as an opportunity to draw closer to the Lord and to fellow Christians:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead: Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us (2 Cor. 1:3-10).

In 2 Corinthians 1:10 of the text above, Paul describes a threefold deliverance provided by the Lord. He says, (1) "Who delivered us..." this is deliverance from past sins; (2) "...and doth deliver" this present continuous deliverance; and (3) "in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us" this is assurance of future deliverance. With such deliverance promised the Christian, what could ever cause us to doubt His continuous love and care for us and over us?

Romans 8:37 states: "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." In all

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the above-mentioned attacks on Christians they would have the power and motivation to withstand through the love and strength provided by Christ. Empowered by Christ the Christian could not only withstand any and all persecution but they would (will) be the victors.⁴ The gospel of Christ is the power unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Salvation in Christ removes fear of death and provides an unconquerable strength to all who do all that which the Lord requests (Phil. 4:13). The ultimate victory belongs to the faithful Christian. Peter stated it thusly:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Pet. 1:3-4).

The heavenly message revealed to the Apostle John promises a “crown of life” to the Christians who are “faithful unto death” (Rev. 2:10).

Romans 8:38-39:

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In previous verses Paul has compiled the evidence of the Lord’s love and protective care for every Christian to examine. Here he expresses his personal confidence in the power, might, promises, and provisions of God. This confidence was the focus of Paul’s life and his teaching:

For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. Be

not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:7-12).

Paul maintained his confidence in the Lord even as he faced death. He emphasized that those faithful to the Lord could be confident in the faithfulness of the Lord:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

Conclusion

Friend, as comforting as the promise is that no one and nothing can separate us from the Lord's steadfast love and protection, the sober reality is that we have the power to reject His love and protection. Without question, the Divine desire is for "all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). But, we are informed that some will not "endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts

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shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:4). Such a decision is not a result of the Lord's lack of love and provisions but a personal, self-centered choice motivated by fleshly desires.

Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Jas. 1:12-17).

To illustrate that Paul is not teaching in Romans 8:35-39 that a Christian can never fall away from grace, read carefully what he said in Gal. 1:6-9:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

There is absolutely no person or power that can separate us from the love of the Lord. But, like the prodigal son in Luke 15, we can choose to leave the protection and

prosperity of our Father's house. Yet, like the prodigal son, we can also come to our 'self' and return to the Father's care.

Endnotes

1 Bob Winton, **Outlined Commentary on Romans** (Manchester, TN), p. 122.

2 Lynn Blair, "Sundry Encouragements to the Elect," **Studies in Romans** (Valid Publications, Inc. 1996), Denton Lectures, p. 175.

3 Ibid.

4 Guy Orbison and Denny Petrillo, "A Study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans," **Workshop in the Word** (Durango, CO, 2005), p. 32.

CHAPTER 7

For Whom The Lord Loveth He Correcteth

Jason Roberts

Introduction

T*RY TO IMAGINE SUDDENLY* living in a world where nobody made any more mistakes. At first glance, such a world seems quite appealing—especially to those who are prone to making many errors. Imagine the possibilities—a college student could never fail an exam; a manager could never fire an employee for reason of misconduct for such conduct would no longer exist; parents could never correct the unruly behavior of their children since all behaviors would now be considered on an equal plane.

Realistically, a world void of mistakes is not very attractive, not to mention it would produce quite a chaotic environment in which to live. Correction, though painful at times, is extremely beneficial as we navigate ourselves through the great ocean of life. Without correction, achievement is hampered, goals become diminished, and some great lessons of life are tragically missed.

Father Knows Best

As a Father, God knows what is best for His children. Therefore, whatever happens to us in the realm of His corrective discipline is always for our greater good, regardless of how painful the experience. Our heavenly Father cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7; Psa. 55:22)¹ and He also

corrects us (Prov. 3:12; Heb. 12:6; Rev. 3:19); neither of which are mutually exclusive entities.

The writer James reminds us that, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (Jas. 1:17). Since Divine discipline is almost always painful, few people consider it to be a gift from God. However, the wise Christian recognizes that God’s discipline is one gift he cannot do without.

Exegesis Of Three Key Passages

Proverbs 3:12 And Hebrews 12:6

Centuries ago the wise-man Solomon penned, “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth” (Prov. 3:12). The word “For” in this passage points the reader to the writer’s previous statement, “My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction” (Prov. 3:11). The writer of Hebrews quotes from these two passages, adding some additional information:

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no

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chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby (Heb. 12:5-7).

By coupling both the above passages, the following key points emerge:

First, love and discipline are not mutually exclusive entities. Again, Solomon wrote, “For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth...” (Prov. 3:12, emphasis mine throughout unless otherwise indicated, JR). The Hebrews writer noted, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). The writer uses an earthly father’s discipline as an example showing that love and discipline work together in the process of instilling a reverential spirit in the heart of his child (Heb. 12:9). Clearly, love and discipline are designed by God to compliment each other with a desired goal in mind.

Second, the purpose of God’s discipline can be forgotten. “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children” (Heb. 12:5). The word “forgotten” [used only here in the New Testament] means “to lie hidden...to make to forget entirely.”² Somehow the Hebrew Christians had forgotten an important element in the development of their Christian character—namely the purpose of God’s discipline. The reason for their forgetfulness was probably due in part to the fact that they had taken their eyes off Jesus (See Heb. 12:1-4).

The purpose of God’s discipline from Hebrews is: (a) **to prove our sonship** (Heb. 12:5-8). The reader may want to note how many times the words “son” and “sons” appear in the text; (b) **to promote a spirit of obedience** (Heb. 12:9); (c) **to help us become partakers of His holiness** (Heb. 12:10; cf. 1 Pet. 1:15-16); and, (d) **to assist us in living righteous lives** (Heb. 12:11).

Third, God's discipline elicits one of three different responses from His children. From Solomon and the Hebrews writers' pens, we observe that a child of God can: (a) **despise God's discipline** (Prov. 3:11; Heb. 12:5); (b) **become despondent of God's discipline** (Prov. 3:11; Heb. 12:5); or, (c) **endure God's discipline** (Heb. 12:7).

Revelation 3:19

Jesus declared to the lukewarm Laodiceans, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19). Part of God's discipline includes loving rebuke, with an intended desire to arouse one's apathy, leading him to repentance. When this occurs, there is great reason to rejoice (Luke 15:7; Luke 15:10). We now turn our attention to several Biblical examples where God's loving discipline was exercised.

Examples Of God's Discipline

The Bible is seasoned well with examples of God's people receiving His loving discipline. A careful examination of these cases makes for a profitable study.

The Nation Of Israel

The nation of Israel was God's chosen people—"the apple of his eye" (Deut. 32:10). His passionate love and care for His people is beautifully threaded throughout the Old Testament (See Deut. 7:6-9). Time and time again, God is pictured as their "deliverer" through the hands of others (Judg. 3:9; Judg. 3:15). God protects them from innumerable enemies throughout their history. Further, He graciously provided for their physical and spiritual needs: (1) **He gave them a leader** (Exod. 3); (2) **He gave them a law** (Exod. 20); and (3) **He gave them a land** (Josh. 10-22). The Old Testament writers do not hesitate

in chronicling Israel's celebrated victories (which were many). The crossing of the Red Sea, (Exod. 14-15), Jericho (Josh. 6), and Ai (Josh. 8) to name a few. When Israel obeyed, they were blessed. Sadly, Israel's obedient spirit was like a morning mist on a summer lake. The "apple of his eye" soon became the object of His wrath (Ezek. 20:13). Consequently, God's loving discipline became operative—not to merely punish—but to teach them of His ways with an ultimate desire of drawing the nation closer to Him.

Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness provided an excellent training ground for God's loving discipline to be received. Here is an interesting question: Have you ever wondered why God took them the long way on their journey to Canaan? Why not a straight line from Egypt to Canaan? Wouldn't that have been a lot easier? When one traces their journey on a map, there doesn't appear to be any rhyme or reason behind it (at least from a human perspective that is). And why forty years? Why not four years or forty days? Dear reader, listen carefully: Sometimes the shortest way in life is not always the best way. When God takes us the long way we can rest assured there is a Divine reason behind His doing so. In Israel's case, the reason is clearly given by Moses:

All the commandments which I command thee this day shall ye observe to do, that ye may live, and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore unto your fathers. And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy

raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years. **Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee** (Deut. 8:1-5).

King David

Israel's second monarch was not immune from the chastisement of the Lord. The Bible records two instances in the king's life when God's loving hand of discipline was administered. In 2 Samuel 11 we have the narrative of David's adulterous encounter with Bathsheba. What seemed to be just an innocent glance at a woman bathing on the veranda would prove to bring disastrous consequences to the king's life—consequences that would follow him all the way to his grave (2 Sam. 12:10-11). God's evaluation of the entire sordid scandal is captured in ten words: "...But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD" (2 Sam. 11:27b). We are not told how much time transpired between the close of chapter 11 and the opening words of chapter 12. What we do know is that God started to implement His corrective discipline upon David, and in this case, it would be done in an indirect way, namely through Nathan the prophet. The record says:

And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor. The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds: But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him. And David's

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anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man...(2 Sam. 12:1-7).

It is interesting that David recognized it was God, not Nathan, Who was instrumental in sending this corrective discipline his way. Twice he validates this truth in Psalms 32 and Psalms 51, which were more than likely written while he was reflecting upon this sin with Bathsheba. He wrote, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. **For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me...**" (Psa. 32:3-4). David clearly recognized that it was the corrective hand of God that was upon his heart while he was in a state of sin. Again, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me to hear joy and gladness; **that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice**" (Psa. 51:7-8).

The discipline of God is also evident in 2 Samuel 24 when David directs Joab to go and number the children of Israel. Joab tried to tell David this was totally unnecessary and not a good idea at all. However, David's word prevailed, so Joab and the captains of the army went out to count the people of Israel, a task which took them nine months and twenty days to accomplish (2 Sam. 24:8)! After Joab had given David the sum of the number of people, David's heart condemned him, and he told the Lord he had sinned greatly. The next day Gad, the prophet, came to David and stated that the Lord had said, "Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee" (2 Sam. 24:12). David's choices were: (1) **Seven years of famine**; (2) **Three months of fleeing his enemies**; or (3) **Three days of plague in the land**. David chose the three days

of plague. After his choice, God's discipline began to be rendered. David pleaded with God to let his sin be upon him and his fathers house (2 Sam. 24:17). He then made a sacrifice to God, and the plague was withdrawn from Israel (2 Sam. 24:24-25). In this case, God's loving discipline regulated David's behavior. Discipline causes us to impose the will of God on our lives (See 1 Cor. 9:27).

How God Disciplines Us Today

The discipline God sends to His people comes in various forms. We now turn our attention to the several avenues of correction God employs to bring us closer to Him.

First, God disciplines us through the proclamation of His Word. Paul wrote, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for **reproof**, for **correction**, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). A few verses later, he adds, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; **reprove, rebuke**, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2). One of the purposes of preaching is to place (and keep) the hearer in a correct moral posture. The reproofing and rebuking is specifically designed to fulfill this goal.

The primary purpose of Gospel preaching is not to make people feel good about themselves while they are in the assembly, but rather to create an element of Christian maturity in our lives. To achieve this goal, loving rebuke is necessary. Paul expressed it like this to the brethren in Colossae, "Whom [Jesus] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col. 1:28). Realizing this purpose of God's Word, one's attitude toward it should not be one of disdain but of delight (Psa. 119:16; Psa.

119:24; Psa. 119:35; Psa. 119:47; Psa. 119:70b.; Psa. 119:77; Psa. 119:174).

Second, God disciplines us by allowing us to experience suffering and trials. Yes, at times, experience is the best teacher. Unlike the atheist, Christians recognize the remedial value in pain and suffering: (1) **Suffering helps us clarify our priorities and focus on the right objectives.** The deeper the pain, the clearer the vision. The more we hurt, the better we determine what really matters. During the process, we replace knowledge with wisdom.

Each time our nation returns to another anniversary of September 11, 2001, we pause and reflect on all that happened. Each year we read the testimonies of real people who were devastated by that series of atrocities. It isn't uncommon for them to include words that mention some of the lessons learned, resulting in renewed commitments and priorities.

One surviving New York Policeman said, "As a result of those atrocities, I will never again take our liberty for granted." A middle-aged widow, whose husband was killed in the World Trade Center, expressed it this way, "I now hug my children tightly every day. I always tell them I love them every morning and every evening before we go to bed." One forty-eight-year-old stock broker who lost several coworkers on 9/11 admitted, "I've decided to hold my business and my career much more loosely; my family and friends have now become more important to me."

Suffering helps clear away the fog that success and prosperity create. I cannot recall ever hearing a once-successful, professional person, now lying in bed, dying with cancer, saying, "I wish I had spent more time at the office." Suffering helps clarify our priorities (Matt. 6:19-21; 1 Tim. 6:6-10; Prov. 23:4-5). You don't think about material things when you're hanging on to life by a thread.

Death has a way of opening up a clear window of wisdom for us. Solomon reminds us of this sobering truth:

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men; and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth (Eccl. 7:2-4).

If we modernized Solomon's words in verse two, they would read, "Visiting a funeral home is better than gorging oneself at a banquet" or "A thirty-minute stroll through a cemetery is better than an entire day at Six Flags." This seems puzzling, especially in our time of feasting, games and laughter. What kind of wisdom could a funeral home give to those who visit? Plenty! Solomon gives us two reasons why it's better to go to a funeral home than a party: One, he states, "for that is the end of all men" (Eccl. 7:2). Two, he adds, "...and the living will lay it to his heart" (Eccl. 7:2). One thing is certain, the atmosphere within a funeral home prevents one's mind from wandering. Everyone's attention seems to be riveted on that great punctuation mark in life—death itself! The living come face to face with their own mortality.

Solomon continues, "The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning" (Eccl. 7:4). Solomon says the wise man is going to be at that funeral home, to learn, to reflect, and to ponder the things that really matter in life. As a preacher, I have seldom had a wiser audience than in a funeral service. They really listen. Solomon says, "...the living will lay it to his heart" (Eccl. 7:2). It's amazing how much perspective is gained when we see life from the end back, when we get a glimpse of life from the back door.

I recently read a true story that comes from the sinking of the Titanic. A frightened woman found her place

in a lifeboat that was about to be lowered in the icy North Atlantic. She suddenly thought of something she needed, so she asked permission to return to her stateroom before they left. She was granted three minutes or they would have to leave without her. She ran across the deck that was already slanted at a dangerous level. She raced through the gambling room with all the money that had rolled to one side, ankle deep. She came to her stateroom and quickly brushed aside her diamond rings and expensive bracelets and necklaces as she reached to the shelf above her bed and grabbed three small oranges. She quickly found her way back to the lifeboat and got in.

Now that seems incredible, because thirty minutes earlier she would not have chosen a crate of oranges over even the smallest diamond, but death had boarded the Titanic. One blast of its awful breath had transformed all values. Instantaneously, priceless things had become worthless. Worthless things had become priceless. And in that moment she preferred three small oranges to a crate of diamonds.

Death gives you that kind of wisdom. Those who live their lives suffering from a terminal disease usually demonstrate a remarkable degree of wisdom in the way they spend their time.

Solomon continues, "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better: The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth [pleasure]" (Eccl. 7:3-4). We seldom think more shallow than when some clown casts a joke into our heads. After a quick laugh it's amazing how quickly the joke is forgotten. Seldom do we forget a stroll through a graveyard and what we learn there about the great men and women who have shaped lives. Malcolm Muggeridge summed up Solomon's wise words by stating:

Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness.³

Remember, the greater the suffering, the better we determine what really matters in life. Adversity has a way of quickly turning our focus on a vertical plane.

(2) Suffering helps us appreciate the value of things easily forgotten. Last year, one of our members broke her arm in a cycling accident. The nature of her occupation demands the usage of both of her arms, especially the one broken. She told me, “I never realized how much I needed my arm until I broke it.” True! Ironically, a week later, this writer’s left hand was stung by an angry wasp. That evening, my left index finger had swollen to the point that my entire left hand could no longer efficiently function to type a manuscript. Consequently, my right hand worked overtime to accommodate. The point is this: When was the last time any of us thanked God for either one of our hands while they were functioning properly? We generally do not think about the value of something until it is gone. Pain has a way of jolting us back to reality, by subtly reminding us of the value of things that we usually take for granted.

(3) Suffering reminds us that this earth was never intended by God to be our permanent dwelling place. In any discussion on human suffering, heaven is the last word, the most important word of all. Only heaven will finally solve the problem of pain and adversity. Paul wrote, “For I reckon that **the sufferings of this present time** are not worthy to be compared with

the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18; cf. 2 Cor. 4:16-5:8). Indeed, “This world is not my home...” Incidentally, if our earth was completely void of human suffering, we would have no desire to leave this present dwelling place. Even the notorious skeptic, Bertrand Russell, remarked, “The center of me is always an eternally and terrible pain—a curious wild pain—a searching for something beyond what the world contains.”⁴ Phillip Yancey’s comments are worth reflecting upon:

The Bible never belittles human disappointment (remember the proportion of Job—one chapter of restoration follows forty-one chapters of anguish), but it does add one key word: temporary. What we feel now, we will not always feel. Our disappointment is itself a sign, an aching, a hunger for something better. And faith is, in the end, a kind of homesickness—for a home we have never visited but have never once stopped longing for.⁵

Suffering draws our interests to a place where there will be no more pain (Rev. 21:4).

(4) Suffering can break a rebellious spirit, bringing the sinner closer to God. David wrote, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word” (Psa. 119:67). A few verses later he adds, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes” (Psa. 119:71). Affliction is good when it draws us closer to God. It’s amazing what can happen to the heart of an unfaithful child of God the night before his triple-by-pass procedure. When sinners are forced for days to stare at a hospital’s ceiling, it is not uncommon for their existing relationship with God to occupy their thoughts. When a child of God is lying horizontally in pain, their attention invariably becomes vertical.

The spirit of the rebellious son who left home (Luke 15), was finally broken when he reached the end of

himself—physically and spiritually speaking. Reality quickly took root in the young rebel’s heart. Consequently, his thoughts turned to the home he left and the precious relationship he once had with his father. For him, adversity was his best friend in disguise. His rebellious spirit died hard, but when it did, repentance emerged and a relationship was restored.

A few years ago I heard someone over the radio make the statement, “Pain plants the flag of reality in the fortress of a rebel heart.” C.S. Lewis described it like this: “God whispers to us in pleasures, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”⁶ The prodigal son and many of our readers would have to nod their heads in approval.

(5) Suffering has a way of uniting people on a single thread of human compassion and courtesy. Commenting on C.S. Lewis’ description of pain being God’s megaphone to get people’s attention, Yancey observes:

If you doubt the megaphone value of suffering, I recommend that you visit the intensive care ward of a hospital. There you’ll find all sorts of people pacing the lobby: a mixture of rich, poor, beautiful, plain, black, white, smart, dull, spiritual, atheistic, white collar, blue collar. But the intensive care ward is the one place in the world where none of those divisions make a speck of difference. In an intensive care ward, all visitors are united by a single, awful thread: concern over a dying relative or friend. Economic differences fade away. You’ll see no sparks of racial tension there. Sometimes strangers will console one another or cry together quietly and unashamedly. All are facing life at its most essential. Only the megaphone of suffering is strong enough to bring these people to their knees to ponder ultimate questions of life and death and meaning.⁷

Even feuding family members, who sit on opposite sides of the auditorium during a worship service, will find

themselves sitting together at the next funeral service for their mother or father or some other relative who died. Pain has a way of eliminating hatred and strife even from the hardest of hearts.

(6) Suffering enhances our ability to pray.⁸

Wayne Jackson said that “Praying is an instinctive human response to severe hardship.”⁹ While in the shadow of the cross, Jesus revealed the agony of His suffering when He prayed in Gethsemane. Note the following: “And being in an agony **he prayed more earnestly**; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). If hardship drove Jesus to His knees in fervent prayer, can we afford to do any less than the One Who is our great example in all things (1 Pet. 2:21; 1 John 2:6; Jas. 5:16)?

(7) Suffering nurtures the noblest qualities of which mankind is capable.¹⁰ It is very difficult for one to cultivate the quality of courage in the absence of fear. The traits of love and joy cannot be fully appreciated in the absence of apathy and sorrow. Patience cannot be properly practiced if there is no adversity behind it (Jas. 1:2-4).

(8) Suffering prepares the soul for eternity.¹¹

Peter wrote:

Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (1 Pet. 1:6-10).

It takes fire to refine gold. Suffering has a way of removing the ugly impurities of the soul, molding, shaping,

and preparing that soul for the incorruptible inheritance that awaits it (1 Pet. 1:4). Indeed, there is no crown of righteousness without the cross of adversity!

The Christian should thank God for loving him enough to allow him to walk through the fires of adversity, knowing, that ultimately in the end, he will emerge a better person (Job 23:10). God's loving discipline works!

Does God Directly Send Bad Circumstances Into Our Lives To Correct Us?

In addressing this question, it is my conviction that much of the mental turmoil about the pain and adversity we experience in life hinges on the important issue of **cause**. Technically, it is more accurate to say that God, in an indirect way, **allows** certain circumstances to occur in our lives (and in the lives of others) for the purpose of correcting our way of thinking. Perhaps the greatest example of this principle is seen in the life of Job. In Job 2:4-7, the writer offers a combination of the two causes of Job's suffering: Satan inflicts the pain (direct cause), but only after obtaining God's permission (indirect cause). Was God involved in the suffering that befell Job? Absolutely! Was His involvement done in a direct way? No. He was indirectly involved in the calamities that leveled Job physically and emotionally. Further, Job's three "prickly friends" brought about a significant amount of mental turmoil to Job, but no one could say that God directly sent them to be the "physicians of no value" (Job 13:4) and "miserable comforters" (Job 16:2) that they were. In fact, the writer states that Job's three friends personally made an appointment together to visit Job (Job 2:11).

Today, God does not directly cause certain tragic events to occur for the purpose of getting our attention. If He did, miracles would be occurring on a daily basis. The natural laws which God has established in our universe

can be violated; when this occurs, disastrous consequences quite often ensue. Trying to identify the cause of human suffering is not always easy, and at times, God refrains from directly answering our questions pertaining to this vital issue. Certainly one of the clearest examples of this appears in a brief, yet timely narrative, recorded for us in the opening verses of Luke 13. The text reads:

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish (Luke 13:1-5).

Here Jesus is asked about two “current events” that had evidently prompted much local discussion (as well as much confusion). It is important to note the two events under consideration—for they both parallel the kinds of suffering that bother most of us today. The first one was apparently an act of political oppression, in which Pilate (perhaps by the hands of some Roman soldiers) slaughtered some Galileans and mingled their blood with sacrifices; the other, a construction accident that killed eighteen people.

The events are strikingly parallel to the events that transpired on September 11, 2001. Then, as in case here, people wanted to know if this was a direct act of God; and, if the people who perished were deserving of this because they happened to be greater sinners than others? Jesus’ response is nothing less than brilliant. He does not fully answer the question most on their mind, the question of **cause**. Jesus never explains, “Here’s why those two

tragedies occurred,” but He makes one thing clear: they did not occur as a result of specific wrongdoing. Listen to Him again:

Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay...Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay... (Luke 13:2-5).

No grieving relative need stand around wondering what brought about the calamity; Jesus makes it plain that the victims had done nothing unusual to deserve their fates, but He doesn't stop there. He uses both tragedies to point to eternal truths relevant to everyone. Twice He urges them to repent or else they will perish (Luke 13:3; Luke 13:5). The implication is clear: we “bystanders” of catastrophe have as much to learn from the event as do the victims. A tragedy should alert us to make ourselves ready in case we are the next victim of a falling tower, or an act of political terrorism. Philip Yancey summed it up well in these insightful remarks, “Catastrophe thus joins together victim and bystander in a call to repentance, by abruptly reminding us of the brevity of life.”¹²

Another example surrounding the issue of the cause of human suffering is recorded in John 9 when the disciples questioned Jesus as to why a certain man had been born blind. They wanted to know if the man was born this way because he was a sinner or if his parents were (John 9:2). Jesus politely rebukes their faulty thinking by saying, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3). Note again, that the question that occupied their minds the most—the question of why this occurred—was not directly answered by Jesus.

The book of Job also well-illustrates this truth. Job was desperately searching for the “Why?” behind his suffering. His disappointment is only increased as one considers the fact that God is not answering any of his questions. Keep in mind that Job was a Patriarch, as such, he was accustomed to God verbally communicating to him (perhaps on a daily basis), but now, in the midst of his profound misery, at a time when he needs answers, the heavens are silent! He receives no response from God until the end of the book. When God finally speaks, not a single one of Job’s questions were directly answered by God. Dear reader, from the Biblical evidence, we must conclude that any hard-and-fast answers to the “Why?” questions are, quite simply, out of reach for the Christian! One writer’s comments are worth serious reflection:

Whenever you take on one of God’s prerogatives, we tread on dangerous ground. Even a well-meaning attempt to comfort a child, “God took your Dad home because He liked him so much,” crosses over into an area that the Bible seems to rule out of bounds. Though catastrophes—an airplane crash, a plague, a sniper’s random killings, the deliberate poisoning of medicines, a famine in Africa—cry out for some authoritative interpretation, the Book of Job offers an important reminder: God Himself did not attempt an explanation.¹³

On one occasion, Solomon introduced a timely concept in his personal journal known as the book of Ecclesiastes. Giving us some “Under-The-Sun Counsel,” he writes:

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet

riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; **but time and chance happeneth to them all**. For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them (Eccl. 9:10-12).

Solomon's words are as up to date as today's newspaper. The warning here is for those who are desperately pursuing the so-called successful life. Many are telling us that the way to make it in this world—the way to succeed—is to increase speed, get stronger, be competitive, think more cleverly, plan longer, and have a visionary strategy—hire people with the skills that are needed and life will be successful. The race is on! Get up earlier. Go to bed later. Make work a top priority. Don't get too sentimental about stuff like children, marriage, home, and the family. All that will have to wait. Raising kids can come later. And religion? Leave that for the over-the-hill group and preachers. Don't get too involved in it because, after all, the race to success is for the swift, the strong, and the clever.

It is so easy for us to get sucked in to this deceiving mentality. It all sounds so logical, so appealing, but there is another side to be considered. Listen to Solomon's wise-words again, "I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; **but time and chance happeneth to them all**" (Eccl. 9:11). In other words: Success is not what you think. That which appears to have the most speed, the greater power, and the strongest influence hangs on thin threads of time and chance! The truth of the matter is: The race is not always to the swift. The strong are not always the strongest. Those

most clever and competitive are not always the wealthiest. Look at Solomon's next statement: "For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them" (Eccl. 9:12). Man may think he's powerful, but in a matter of seconds he can be like a fish caught in a treacherous net or like birds trapped in a snare.

Everything may be moving in a certain direction. It's predictable, planned and success is on the horizon! And **suddenly** (key word) God has a way of bringing all of our plans to an abrupt halt (Prov. 27:1; Jas 4:13-15). Does He accomplish this by direct means? No. That's just the way life is—"time and chance happeneth to them all" (Eccl. 9:11). Do we not see evidence of Solomon's words every day in this world?

One can only wonder how many millions (perhaps billions) of dollars were being traded by those employed in the Twin Towers on that fateful morning of September 11, 2001? Tragically, in a matter of minutes, everything came to a screeching halt. At that moment, no one was thinking about how well the stock market was performing. Few, if any, were thinking about the Yankees Game scheduled later that evening, or their corporate business meetings that were to take place later in the day. Lunch plans, ball games and dinner parties were all abruptly canceled. Solomon had it right: "...time and chance happeneth to them all" (Eccl. 9:11).

Conclusion

No honest person can dispute the value of corrective discipline. Whatever is allowed by God, even if it is painful, is worth experiencing. God loves us too much to allow us to traverse through life in the absence of His discipline. Although Eliphaz was wrong about many things in the

book of Job, he was correct when he affirmed that there are positive benefits to suffering, and that God will be there to help us through our suffering. He said: "Behold, happy is the man whom God correcteth: therefore despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty: For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole" (Job 5:17-18).

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version unless otherwise indicated.

2 Spiros Zodhiates, **The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament** (Iowa Falls: World Publishers, 1992), p. 544.

3 Donald McCullough, **Waking From The American Dream**, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), p. 145.

4 Philip Yancey, **Disappointment With God**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), p. 286.

5 Ibid., p. 276.

6 C.S. Lewis, **The Problem of Pain**, (New York, NY: Macmillan Co., 1962), p. 93.

7 Philip Yancey, **Where Is God When It Hurts?**, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), p. 71.

8 Wayne Jackson, "**The Value Of Human Suffering.**" Article taken from author's website, www.christiancourier.com/articles/read/the_value_of_human_suffering_. Accessed Feb, 15, 1999.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Yancey, **Where Is God When It Hurts?**, p. 84.

13 Yancey, **Disappointment With God**, p. 215.

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**Man's
Love
For God**

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CHAPTER 8

The Greatest Command: Love God With All Your Heart

B. J. Clarke

Introduction

IF YOU HAD BEEN on earth when Jesus was, and could have asked Him any question in the world, what would you have asked Him? A certain Pharisee, who was also a lawyer and a scribe, had such an opportunity. Of all the questions he could have asked, he chose this one: “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” (Matt. 22:36). That the scribe asked Jesus this particular question is not really all that surprising. The religious leaders of the first century were constantly debating which commandments of the Law of Moses were the weightiest. “Some 1st-century rabbis were actively involved in trying to establish a hierarchy of biblical laws, while others insisted all commandments were of equal importance.”¹ Warren Wiersbe notes that neither was this question peculiar to the scribes of the first century:

This was not a new question, for the scribes had been debating it for centuries. They had documented 613 commandments in the Law, 248 positive and 365 negative. No person could ever hope to know and fully obey all of these

commandments. So, to make it easier, the experts divided the commandments into “heavy” (important) and “light” (unimportant). A person could major on the “heavy commandments” and not worry about the trivial ones.²

Before examining the scribe’s question more carefully, we should investigate the circumstances which led him to ask it. Matthew reveals that the Pharisees had heard of how Jesus had silenced the Sadducees. “The word ‘put . . . to silence’ in v. 34 literally means ‘muzzled.’ This shows how completely Christ silenced His enemies!”³ The Pharisees apparently thought that they could fare better than the Sadducees in a debate with Jesus so they gathered together in His presence (Matt. 22:34). Mark’s account indicates that this scribe came and “heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?” (Mark 12:28).

Much has been written regarding the motives of the scribe/lawyer who asked this question. Wiersbe suggests:

The scribe who had asked the original question seemed to be an honest and sincere man. Not all of the Pharisees were hypocrites. He publicly agreed with Jesus (Mark 12:32–33). This must have given his fellow Pharisees a fright. Jesus discerned that the man’s heart was sincere, and He commended him for his intelligence and honesty. Did the man ever get all the way into the kingdom, when he was so very near? We trust so.⁴

The opposite view is advanced by Harper’s Bible Commentary:

‘The Pharisees,’ not just a single scribe, initiate the question about the great commandment. They come together to do so, evidently with hostile intent (Matt. 22:34). And when their spokesman asks the question he is ‘putting him

[Jesus] to the test' (v. 35). In Mark, the scribe agrees with Jesus' answer and, in fact, elaborates on it himself, whereupon Jesus compliments him for his intelligent response and assures him that he is not far from the kingdom of God (Mark 12:32-34). Matthew drops all this. It is not a friendly encounter but a hostile confrontation that brings out the main issue between church and synagogue: the fulfillment of the Torah in terms of radical love.⁵

Matthew Henry affirms that the lawyer asked Jesus a question "not with any design to ensnare him."⁶ Another commentary argues that the scribe asked the question "manifestly in no bad spirit" and that while he may have been somewhat proud of his insight into the law "he was nevertheless an honest-hearted, fair disputant."⁷ Walter Elwell suggested a little different slant on the matter: "An evil design lies behind the question; but the man himself comes to view Jesus more sympathetically than those who sent him (cf. Mark 12:28)."⁸

It has oft been said that "the Bible sheds a lot of light on the commentaries written by men" and such is certainly the case here. Matthew writes that the lawyer asked his question "tempting him." Some have greatly emphasized that the Greek word for "tempting" is the same Greek word employed to describe the devil and his temptation of Jesus (Matt. 4:1-10). It is true that this Greek word is repeatedly used in the New Testament in a negative light. What complicates matters is that the word is also used in a positive sense. When Paul told the Corinthians to examine themselves whether they be in the faith, he used this same Greek word (2 Cor. 13:5). The same word is used to describe how Abraham was "tried" (Heb. 11:17).

While we have no difficulty accepting the idea that one of the Pharisees would have asked the question for the express purpose of ensnaring Jesus, we do not wish to

assign evil motives to a man without absolute proof. We do know that the scribe expressed great appreciation for, and agreement with, the answer given by Jesus. He did not, like the lawyer of Luke 10:25, seek to justify himself (Luke 10:29) and evade the force of Jesus' teaching. In fact, the scribe in Mark 12 indicated a better comprehension of the essence of the Law of Moses than the majority of other Pharisees we read of in the New Testament.

Finally, the reaction of Jesus toward this scribe offers a significant clue concerning the motives of his inquiry. After the lawyer responded to Jesus' response, Jesus observed that "he answered discreetly" (Mark 12:34). The word "discreetly" could also be translated "wisely" or "prudently." Furthermore, Jesus told the scribe that he was "not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). If this scribe was asking his question insincerely then he would not have been close to the kingdom of God; yet Jesus says that he was not far from the kingdom. Therefore, to this author, the case seems strong that the scribe asked his question with a sincere desire to know what Jesus the Master Teacher had to offer on the matter.

What Is The Greatest Commandment?

In responding to the lawyer's question there are several things which Jesus did not do. He did not ridicule the question as irrelevant or unimportant. He did not denigrate the importance of commandment keeping. He did not identify the fourth commandment, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exod. 20:8), as the greatest commandment. In fact, He did not choose any of the Ten Commandments as the greatest commandment. He did, however, identify one commandment from the Old Covenant as the greatest command, and quickly added a second one like unto it:

Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:37-40).

Concerning this answer from Jesus, Walter Elwell remarks:

Jesus responds (vv. 37–40) by quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 (v. 39), and in this order, Jesus teaches that one's supreme calling is to love God (v. 38); that one must first love God if he is to love his neighbor; and that one shows how well he loves God by the way he treats his neighbor. Israel's love is to be directed wholly and exclusively to Yahweh (Deut. 6:4), not shared with false gods (Deut. 4:15–31). That love finds expression in consistent obedience to Yahweh's commands, as now set forth by Jesus (cf. Luke 6:46; John 14:15). Israel loves Yahweh in response to his saving acts (Deut. 1–3), a gratitude now intensified by virtue of Jesus' work (1 John 4:19). Deuteronomy 6:5 does not describe separate compartments of the self, but emphasizes that a person must love God with his whole being, with every capacity at his command.⁹

The section of Scripture in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 is known as the Shema. It is called this because it begins with the Hebrew word *shema* meaning "hear:" "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (see Deut. 6:4-5; 11:13–21).

It was recited daily by every Jew, and written on the miniature roll which every scribe carried in his phylactery. This was a small case, made of parchment bound to the forehead or arm, in which was placed small pieces of parchment inscribed with scripture portions. Thus, the

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words were already considered of prime importance by the Jews. The words are found at the very beginning of this fundamental confession of faith and duty, thus testifying by their very position to their importance. The mention of the heart, soul, mind, and strength speaks of 'the devotion of the whole being to God' (Swete). The ancient Hebrews regarded the heart as the organ of the intellect, and the mind, that of the desires and affections.¹⁰

A look at the Old Testament indicates that the concept of loving God with all of one's heart and soul was emphasized long before Jesus echoed this sentiment in His response to the scribe. Consider the following Old Testament texts:

And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to **love the LORD your God**, and to serve him **with all your heart and with all your soul** (Deut. 11:13).

And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to **love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul**, that thou mayest live (Deut. 30:6).

Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know **whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul** (Deut. 13:3).

This day the LORD thy God hath commanded thee to do these statutes and judgments: thou shalt therefore keep and **do them with all thine heart, and with all thy soul** (Deut. 26:16).

And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, **with all thine heart, and with all thy soul**; (Deut. 30:2).

But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to **love the LORD your God**, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him **with all your heart and with all your soul** (Josh. 22:5).

That the LORD may continue his word which he spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, **to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul**, there shall not fail thee (said he) a man on the throne of Israel (1 Kings 2:4).

And the king stood by a pillar, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and **to keep his commandments** and his testimonies and his statutes **with all their heart and all their soul**, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people stood to the covenant (2 Kings 23:3).

And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, **he did it with all his heart, and prospered** (2 Chron. 31:21).

The above passages are but a sampling of the fact that God has always expected His followers to love Him with all of their hearts and souls.

Why Is The Greatest Commandment The Greatest Commandment?

Having identified the greatest commandment, we are behooved to ask the following question: Why did Jesus point to Deuteronomy 6:5 as being the first and greatest commandment? Why does this commandment stand out above all others? It is because Jesus knew that if one dedicated himself to love God with all of his heart, soul, strength and mind, that obedience to all other Divine

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commandments would surely follow. Jesus stressed the connection between love and obedience when he said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The apostle of love later penned similar words when he wrote, “For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous...And this is love, that we walk after his commandments” (1 John 5:3; 2 John 6).

The Pharisees emphasized obedience without giving consideration to whether this obedience was motivated by a heart given over to God in love. They were more concerned with external actions than they were with the inner attitude of the heart. The reaction of the scribe to Jesus’ response demonstrates that he correctly perceived that Jesus was stressing more than mere performance of obedience.

Mark’s account of the incident records that the scribe said unto Jesus, “Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices” (Mark 12:32-33).

The latter portion of the scribe’s reply is reminiscent of Psalm 40:6-8, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” This passage appears puzzling at first because it seems to deny that God ever required his people to bring sacrifices and offerings to him. However, even a casual reading of the books of Exodus and Leviticus shows that God **did indeed desire** and require offerings and sacrifices. Does Psalm 40 contradict Exodus and Leviticus?

The solution to this apparent problem is to recognize the use of the hermeneutical device known as an ellipsis. An ellipsis is the omission of one or more words that are obviously understood but that must be supplied. Keeping this in mind, the passage could read, "Thou didst not desire sacrifice and offering **alone**." In other words, God never desired or required that His people merely go through the motions of bringing their offerings to Him. Two key words in the passage are the words "delight" and "heart." God wanted more than mere offerings and sacrifices. He wanted those who brought these offerings and sacrifices to do so with delight and love in their hearts.

Two passages from the prophets serve as perfect illustrations of God's demand for more than just the mere act of performance in obeying Him.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats...Bring no more vain oblations, incense is an abomination unto me...(Isa. 1:10ff).

Please note that the problem with God's people was not that they were failing to worship. They were offering their sacrifices with regularity. The problem was that they were failing to worship with the right kind of heart and life. These same individuals who were "piously" bringing their sacrifices to the priest for an offering to God were: (1) perverting justice by taking bribes (Isa. 5:23); (2) oppressing the poor, the widows and the fatherless (Isa. 10:1-2; Comp. Matt. 23:14); (3) erring through wine and strong drink (Isa. 5:11-12; Isa. 28:7-8); (4) transgressing laws, changing ordinances and breaking the everlasting

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covenant; (5) deeply revolting and sinning with their own hand by the production of idols and images (Isa. 31:6-7); (6) working iniquity with their hearts, practicing hypocrisy, uttering error against the Lord, and devising wicked plans against the poor (Isa. 32:5-7); (7) complacent and at ease about their sinful condition (Isa. 32:9-11); and (8) obstinate, with a neck of iron muscle and a brow of brass (Isa. 48:4). But, at least these folks were regular about going to “church!” However, going to worship is not enough! Being religious is not enough! Possessing a thorough familiarity with Scripture is not enough!

To this Micah adds:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? shall I come before him with burnt offering, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression., the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:6-8).

Our God desires that we worship Him with hearts full of love. Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees for drawing nigh unto Him with their mouth and honoring Him with their lips while their hearts were far from Him. We must recognize that God never has and never will accept external actions without internal devotion.

When we serve Christ only out of a sense of legalistic duty, we torment our consciences. But when we serve Him out of a “faith that worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6), we enjoy the service and our obedience becomes a blessing rather than a burden. Remember that phrase in 1 John 5:3 which says that when we love God His commandments are not burdensome? A song from a few years ago entitled, “He

Ain't Heavy; He's My Brother," comes near to expressing the thought. I've got to carry my fallen brother, but it doesn't seem like such a burden because of the relationship that we have. If I were given the choice of carrying around a 10 pound sack of potatoes or my 45 pound son through an amusement park for six hours, I would surely choose my son. Although he is heavier and demands more care and attention, he seems lighter because of my love and affection for him. Moreover, he can love me back !Likewise, when we serve the Lord out of love, His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

If the world perceives our Christianity to be a burden rather than a blessing, they will want to have nothing to do with it. On the other hand, if we display to the world the great love in our hearts for God and the joy that serving Him brings, this will serve as a beacon to lead men out of their darkness and despair into the marvelous kingdom of light.

Why Should I Love God So Much?

The simple answer is found in 1 John 4:19: "We love him because he first loved us." He manifested His love for us by sending His only begotten Son to atone for the sins of the world: "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10). The love of God is affirmed unforgettably in the golden text of the Bible: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Paul was very much aware of the love of God through Christ. Speaking of the relationship he enjoyed with Jesus, Paul wrote, "who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

In another of his epistles he acknowledged that the love of Christ “passeth knowledge” (Eph. 3:19). He reminded the Thessalonians of the Father “which hath loved us, and given us everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace” (2 Thess. 2:16). Paul concluded that “Nothing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:39). John also attested to the great love of God when he penned the following words: “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1).

The ultimate exhibition of God’s love is evidenced in His sacrifice upon the cross. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). Paul summarized it this way:

For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Rom. 5:6-8).

The picture of the innocent, blood-soaked Son of God is more than enough reason to love God with all my heart, soul, strength and mind!

**What Will Happen If I Love God
With All My Heart, Soul, Strength And Mind?**

What effect will loving God with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind have upon me and my Christian life? It is the key to every aspect of my life. Show me a man that loves God with all of his heart, soul, strength and mind, and I will show you a man that will gladly obey any and all commands given by the God he loves. Consider the significant impact this would make in our lives in a number of areas.

What Will Happen To My Church Attendance?

John R. W. Stott once confessed: “The thing I know will give me the deepest joy —namely, to be alone and unhurried in the presence of God, aware of His presence, my heart open to worship Him — is often the thing I least want to do.” Perhaps you have felt the very same way. What will motivate us to feel differently?

Once again, it has everything to do with love. When we love someone we long to be in their presence. When I was dating Tish, before she became my wife, I would get up very early on Saturday mornings to travel from Etowah, Tennessee to Marietta, Georgia to go and spend time with her. No one forced me to do this. No one had to give me a pep talk to get me fired up to want to go and be with her. I did it because I wanted to be with her. At the end of the day, suppose I had looked at her and said, “Now, let me know when the next time is that I am obligated to come and be with you again. Just tell me when I have to be here and I will be here. However, I don’t want to come anymore than I have to, so just tell me what the absolute requirements of our relationship are and I’ll be sure to accommodate you.” I can assure you that if I had been foolish enough to make such a speech I would not be married to her today. I’m sure that she would have responded with something like, “If you are only coming to see me because you feel obligated to do so, then just don’t bother.” Who could blame her?

This principle of love is precisely the same when it comes to attending worship services. If I love God with all of my heart, soul, strength and mind, then I will naturally desire to be in the presence of God in worship. No one will have to beg and plead with me to come to worship services. I will be there because I want to show the God I love how much I love Him.

The reasons for attending worship services fall into two categories — good and bad. A good reason to attend worship services is because the Lord has commanded me not to forsake such assemblings (Heb. 10:25). The best reason to worship God is because I love Him so much. A bad reason to attend services is because I am simply in the habit of doing so, or merely because I feel obligated to do so. Although attending services is a good habit, and a required one, it must be more than a habit—it must be a passion.

David said, “I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1). The opportunity to worship the God of the universe ought to be a natural and sufficient motivation to bring us to the worship services. When we love God we will not be asking questions like, “How many services do I have to attend to be pleasing in His sight?” Rather, we will be looking for maximum opportunities to praise and adore Him!

What Will Happen To My Bible Study?

We do not need to be informed that God expects us to spend time reading the Scriptures. We have heard the passages many times before which command us to give attendance to reading (1 Tim. 4:13) and to study to show ourselves approved unto God (2 Tim. 2:15). The question is this: if we know that God expects for us to read the Bible why don't we spend more time doing so?

Part of the answer is that we are too addicted to television and other forms of entertainment. We often excuse our lack of time with God's Word by arguing that we are just too busy to find time to delve into it. Yet, remarkably, many have no trouble finding time for a 600 column newspaper every day, or **Reader's Digest**, **Ladies Home Journal**, or some other publication. Why is it that the people who say they are too busy to study the Bible

daily are often the same people who can find time to watch television for several hours every day? The following parody of the 23rd Psalm is all too accurate to be funny. Read the words carefully:

The 23rd Channel

The TV is my Shepherd, I shall not want.
It makes me to lie down on the sofa.
It leads me away from the scriptures.
It destroys my soul.
It leads me in the paths of sex and violence for
the sponsor's sake.
Yea, though I walk in the shadow of my Christian
responsibilities,
There will be no interruptions; for the TV is with
me,
It's cable and it's remote control, they comfort
me.
It prepares a commercial before me in the
presence of my worldliness,
It anoints my head with humanism,
My coveting runneth over.
Surely laziness and ignorance shall follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house watching TV
"forever."

How many people can list every character on "The Young and The Restless" but cannot even name the 12 apostles? How many sports fans can recite the statistics for their favorite players on their favorite teams, but have no idea where to find the passages which would teach the gospel plan of salvation? Without a doubt, the neglect to inspect God's Word can be traced all the way back to someone's heart, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:21).

The real question is this: What will motivate me to read the Scriptures more? The answer is love. We do not have to be persuaded to do things that we love to do. When I receive communication from someone that I love I

naturally want to open it and read it. No one has to put me on a guilt trip in order to get me to read a letter from someone I love with all of my heart!

The story is often told of a young lady who finished reading a book with the remark that it was the dullest story she had ever read. She took the book, boxed it up, and stored it in the attic. As time marched on the young lady met a man and grew very fond of him. Ultimately, she accepted his proposal to marry. One evening at dinner, while making conversation, she said to her fiancé, “I happen to have a book in my library whose author’s name, and even initials, are exactly the same as yours. Isn’t that a coincidence?” To her amazement, he replied that it was not really a coincidence at all considering the fact that he had authored the book.

That evening, after he dropped her off at her house, she scurried up into the attic and rummaged through the box of books she had stored there. When she found the book written by her fiancé, she sat down and started to read it again. Suddenly, the book she formerly regarded as among the dullest ever written was now a real page-turner. She couldn’t put it down. What happened? What transformed the book from dry and dusty to enjoyable and exciting? It was her relationship with the author. This time, she knew and loved the author. In a similar way, the child of God is attracted to meditate upon the Bible because he knows and loves the Author. It is a message from the Father!

What Will Happen To My Prayer Life?

Our perfect example and role model, Jesus Christ, attributed great importance to the power of prayer in getting Him through the daily affairs of life upon earth. In fact, He assigned such importance to prayer that “in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went

out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed” (Mark 1:35). The Lord prayed all night before he selected his apostles (Luke 6:12). He prayed so fervently as He faced the shadow of the cross that He was in agony and “his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground” (Luke 22:44). He believed so much in the power of prayer to help keep us faithful that He taught His disciples to pray, “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil” (Matt. 6:13). Prayer is a powerful weapon in keeping the saved saved.

Jesus taught that men ought always to pray, and not to faint (Luke 18:1). The word “faint” in this passage comes from a Greek word which means “to be remiss in duty, to be slothful.” Hence, one of the purposes of prayer is to keep ourselves strong in the faith. If we are regular in prayer, we will not likely be slothful or remiss in our duty. Yet, one of our greatest privileges and blessings as a Christian is also one which we often neglect—prayer to God, offered through Jesus Christ as our mediator.

The question is this: if we know that Jesus was a man of prayer, and we know that prayer is commanded, and we know how beneficial prayer can be, why then do so many of us not pray as often as we should? Perhaps the better question is this: what will motivate us to pray more frequently and fervently to our Father? **Again, love is the key!** When we love someone we naturally want to spend time talking to them. When Tish and I were engaged, and two or three hours apart, she would write me letters and I would call her on the phone. I very vividly remember receiving a phone bill for \$196.00 one month. No one had twisted my arm to call Tish on the phone. No one had put me on a guilt trip. I called because I wanted to talk to the one I loved. Likewise, when we love God with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind, we will desire to talk to Him by means of prayer. When we love God with all of our

hearts we will “continue in prayer” (Col. 4:2) and “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

What Will Happen To My Evangelistic Zeal?

We have all heard that “Go ye” means “Go me.” We are not unaware of the command to evangelize the world. The crux of the great commission has to do with our speaking up for God and proclaiming the saving gospel (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16). The question is this: how well are we doing in carrying out this command? Why are we not more diligent in fulfilling the great commission? Most importantly, what, if anything, will motivate us to do what the Lord commanded us to do?

Show me a man who loves the Lord with every fiber of his being and I will show you a man who will want to tell others about the one he loves. When a girl gets engaged to be married she does not keep it to herself. She freely and gleefully spreads the good news. Grandparents are not bashful about announcing the good news about their grandchildren. They do not have to be coaxed into so doing. It comes naturally. Sports fans proudly display their team banners and will gladly talk with anyone willing to listen about their team’s accomplishments. As wonderful as our fiancé might be, as thrilling as it is to become grandparents, and as joyous as it might be to celebrate our team’s victory, these all pale in comparison to the greatness and majesty of our beloved Savior Jesus Christ. Our love for Him should compel us naturally to tell others about Him!

What Will Happen To Our Giving?

All Christians are commanded to give a portion of their income to God, as they have been prospered (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7). Every Christian ought to ask, “How much love for God does my giving reflect?” Here again, our love

for God is the catalyst to sacrificial giving. If I really love someone I do not begrudge giving them a gift. Picture a husband walking in on the day of his anniversary and tossing a gift in his wife's lap with the following words: "I knew it was our anniversary and I knew that you would be expecting a gift, so I bought you a little something. I knew I would never hear the end of it if I didn't fulfill my obligation to buy you a gift, so here you go. Don't say I've never bought you anything." Now picture a frying pan flying across the room in the direction of his head! No wife in the world wants a gift that is presented to her out of sheer obligation. She wants the gift to come from a heart of love!

The same is true with our God. He does not want us to give grudgingly, or out of necessity—God loves a cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). The more we love Him the more we will want to give to Him! The more we reflect upon how much He loves us the more we will want to love Him, live for Him and give to Him!

Conclusion

The greatest commandment is coincident with the greatest goal of our lives: to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13). If we love Jesus we will keep His commandments (John 14:15). If we truly love God we will be doers of the Word and not hearers only (Jas. 1:22). John summarizes well the message: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous (1 John 5:3). Let us love Him more and more because He first loved us!

Endnotes

1 Lawrence Richards, **The Bible Reader's Companion** (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1991), p. 624.

2 Warren Wiersbe, **The Bible Exposition Commentary** (Mt. 22:34). (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, c1989).

3 Warren Wiersbe, **Wiersbe's Expository Outlines On The New Testament** (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, c1992), p.81.

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5 J. L. Mays, **Harper's Bible Commentary** (Mt. 22:15). (San Francisco: Harper & Row, c1988).

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7 R. Jamieson, A. R., Fausset, & D. Brown, **A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments**, (Mk 12:28). (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc).

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CHAPTER 9

“O How I Love Thy Law!”

Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

Introduction

IT HAS BEEN BOTH a pleasure and privilege to speak on all the fourteen previous POWER Lectures (beginning with the one on Providence in 1989) and pen a chapter for each of the printed volumes. I have made it a point to read all the previous volumes which have been brimmed full to overflowing with rich Biblical material and powerful applications.

Likewise, it is a deep delight and high honor to speak on this current one and pen a chapter for the book. Genuine gratitude is expressed to Larry, Con, B. J., Wayne, and all the precious people composing the Southaven congregation for this treasured invitation. B. J. is a master in crafting lectureships that are Biblical in basis and relevant in the redemptive riches of God’s Word. How regal and rich is our current study relative to the greatness of love as penned in 1 Corinthians 13:13—with love even eclipsing faith and hope—its holy handmaidens in this majestic verse.

Our Text And Its Close Colleagues In Psalm 119

“O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97).

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Love for God's law permeates this entire chapter—the longest one in the Bible. Here is a saintly sampling:

And I will delight myself in thy commandments, which I have loved. My hands also will I lift up unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate in thy statutes...I hate vain thoughts: but thy law do I love...Thou puttest away all the wicked of the earth like dross: therefore I love thy testimonies...Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold...Look thou upon me, and be merciful unto me, as thou usest to do unto those that love thy name...Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it...Consider how I love thy precepts: quicken me, O Lord, according to thy lovingkindness...I hate and abhor lying: but thy law do I love...My soul hath kept thy testimonies; and I love them exceedingly (Psa. 119:47; Psa. 119:48; Psa. 119:113; Psa. 119:119; Psa. 119:127; Psa. 119:132; Psa. 119:140; Psa. 119:159; Psa. 119:163; Psa. 119:167).

In these kindred passages God's message of truth is called Word, Commandments, Law, Statutes, Testimonies, and Precepts. One passage speaks of God's name and another of His lovingkindness. His name and His Word cannot be severed. Yet, as much as He loves His name, He has "magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa. 138:2). Under Mosaic mandates He would not allow them to take His name in vain (Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11). Obviously, He would not tolerate their perverting or tampering with His Word. Under Christianity His name still is revered. How much more the Words of the glorious gospel. Men who pervert and tamper with His Word should tremble at the literary crime they are committing. They cannot do such with impunity (escaping all accompanying punishment).

These precious passages link love for God's Word with delight and pleasure. They link this love with dedicated meditation. He was a student and an eager one at that.

He was no Scriptural ignoramus or illiterate toward Heaven's message which had been bequeathed so beautifully to him. They link His Word with Law and Commandment keeping. What a rebuke to those today who degrade Law and Commandments. Men have been under God's Law since Eden. Surely there was Edenic Law. There was patriarchal Law. There was Mosaic Law. There is Christ's Law for us today. Isaiah knew Christianity would be law (Isa. 2:1ff). Jeremiah knew there would be law in the new covenant yet to come (Jer. 31:31ff). Micah knew there would be law for the coming kingdom (Mic. 4:1ff). So did Paul in 1 Cor. 9:21; Rom. 8:2; Gal. 6:10. As did James in James 1:15 and James 2:12. What an open rebuke to those today who tell us there are no laws, commandments, charges, or directives under Christ and Christianity!

Calvinism bats out quickly in Psalm 119 for this cruel, cold, and calloused system has **all** activity in God's corner and **none** in man's corner. This chapter is filled with duty doing and commandment keeping. The foregoing verses connect God's law with the high value of love placed upon it. These verses in general and Psalm 119 in particular connect love for God's law with active aversion for lying. All falsehood falls into this category. Twice in this chapter we read, "I hate every false way" (Psa. 119:104; Psa. 119:128). Toleration for error does not equate with love for the Lord's law. Error and truth cannot be on a par with God's saint who loves the law of the Lord or His Word exceedingly. The greater God's law looms in our hearts and lives the greater will be our disdain of damnable falsehood. Wicked people portrayed in Psalm 119 do not come out with any degree of approbation at all.

In Ephesians 4:15 Paul inculcated the speaking of truth in love. It needs to be **spoken** in love, **received** in love and **practiced** in love by speaker and auditor alike. Please retain in mind how much error is refuted in the six

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chapters of Ephesians in general and in Ephesians 4 in particular.

However, there is another vital part of Psalm 119:97 which reads, “it is my meditation all the day.” This is reminiscent of the preface Psalm wherein we read, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa. 1:1-2). Studious by nature the Psalmist allowed no day to pass but what he meditated on the law of the Lord. This was one of the wonderful ways he exhibited his loyal love for the Lord’s law. The bright and beautiful Bereans come readily to mind along this line (Acts 17:11). Daily they perused the Scriptures. What delightful dividends it produced!

The Eloquent Exclamation In Psalm 119:97

The careful student will note the exclamation point at the end of “thy law!” The ASV and the NKJV also have the same precious punctuation point. Significant? Indeed so!

Seemingly, it amazed even the Psalmist at the intensity of his love for the Lord’s law. His love for the Lord’s law possessed breadth, length, depth and height (Cf. Eph. 3:18). To add some descriptive adjectives it had beautiful breadth, lovely length, delightful depth and holy height. John 3:16, Golden Text of the Bible, has these dimensions of love: “For God **so** loved the world”—beautiful breadth; “that he gave his only begotten Son”—lovely length; “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish”—delightful depth; “but have everlasting life”—holy height.

Why was his love for God’s Word so intense? He knew he lived on planet earth which had been crafted by a “thus saith the Lord” (Gen. 1; Psa. 33:9). Psalm 119 recognized God as Creator (Psa. 119:90). He knew God’s Word upheld all created things. Hebrews 1:3 makes crystal clear that

the Second Person, the Eternal Word and God the Son in redemption, is Upholder. He knew that Word had guided and governed the patient patriarchs of old. He knew that Word had performed the miraculous from creation to his era. He knew that Word had guided and governed Moses, the prophets, and all Israel century after century. He knew that Word would cleanse the searching souls of earnest youth (Psa. 119:9). He knew that Law was “the way of truth” (Psa. 119:30). He knew that Law quickened him (Psa. 119:50). He knew that Law, when kept, aided him greatly in the valley of suffering and affliction (Psa. 119:67; Psa. 119:71). He knew that Law was “settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89). He knew that Law, when believed and obeyed, made him wiser than his enemies and gave him greater understanding than his teachers and the ancients all in aggregate possessed (Psa.119:98-100).

Understanding that Law (Precepts) enabled him to hate every false way (Psa. 119:104). That Law (Word) proved to be a lamp to his feet and lighted his path (Psa. 119:105). Love for that Law motivated him to hate vain thoughts (Psa. 119:113). That Law upheld him (Psa. 119:116-117). That love caused him to “esteem all thy precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate **every** false way” (Psa. 119:128). That Word, when entering his life, yielded to him light and understanding (Psa. 119:130). His love for God’s Law caused him to realize how very pure God’s Word really is (Psa. 119:140). That love moved him to be a diligent student of truth (Psa. 119:147-148). That Word, when reverently received, delivered him (Psa. 119:153). That love of God’s law prompted him to view Heaven’s message as “true from the beginning” (Psa. 119:160). Because of the intensity of that love his heart stood “in awe of thy word” (Psa. 119:161). For many years this has been my very favorite verse in this grand and good chapter. Because of the love he had for God’s law he hated and abhorred lying (Psa. 119:163). Bound

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together was his keeping the testimonies of truth and his exceedingly great love for them (Psa. 119:167). Love for that law prompted him to view all Heaven's commandments as possessing righteousness (Psa. 119:172). He delighted in God's law and longed for the salvation accruing from the same (Psa. 119:174). Here is why so few are saved. They feel no delight for the law of the Lord and have **no** longing for the Lord's precious plan of pardon. They do not feel toward pardon as did those asking how to be saved in Acts 2:37, Acts 9:6, Acts 16:30, and Acts 22:10. Even if they were to ask about how to be saved they would feel promptly as did the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16ff. They would prefer their riches to soul redemption. Love and real living were linked in Psalm 119:175. Love would not allow him to "forget thy commandments" (Psa. 119:176). Interestingly, the final word of Psalm 119 is "commandments."

It is little wonder why he exclaimed, "O how love I thy law!"

Why We Should Love That Law

For the same reasons the Psalmist did. However, we have additional reasons of a cogent nature for loving it. Partial revelation was his; we have totality of revelation—the perfect law of liberty as James expressed it so beautifully in James 1:25 of his practical epistle.

We love God's Word because of its rich connection with the scheme of human redemption. From that Word we learn that Jesus would be the seed of woman and of Abraham (Gen. 3:15; Gen. 12:3). We learn that He would be the saving Shiloh to Whom the people would gather (Gen. 49:10). We learn that He would be the Prophet raised up by God from among Israelite brethren (Deut. 18:15-19).

We learn that He would be the Lord's Anointed (Psa. 2; Cf. Acts 4:26-27; Acts 10:38). Christ means the Anointed.

We learn that He would be crucified for us and raised again (Psa. 22; Psa. 16). We learn He would be a priest after the order of Melchisedec (Psa. 110:4). Such is a major emphasis in the book of Hebrews. We learn He would be the suffering Servant (Isa. 53). We learn of His establishment of the kingdom or the church (Isa. 2; Mic. 4; Zech. 6; Matt. 16; Matt. 18; Matt. 19; Acts 2).

From the Word of the Lord we learn that we are sinners and have come short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). We learn what we are to believe about Christ in the four records of the one gospel—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We learn from the book of Acts and Ephesians 2:8 that by grace through faith we can be saved. We learn about Christian work, worship, watching and waiting in the epistles from Romans through Jude. We learn about overcoming Satan and sin in the book of Revelation. We learn of the second coming, the resurrection of all the dead, the judgment and eternal destinies in such chapters and verses as Matthew 24-25; John 5:22-29; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 21-22.

Without exception these are regal reasons for our loving deeply the law of the Lord—the gospel of Christ. Our love for the glorious gospel of God should be boundless and ever expanding.

How Such Love Will Influence Thoughts, Words, And Actions

These three words sum up what we are mentally, vocally and habitually. In a very real sense, we are not what we think we are; we are what we think! Words and deeds, whether good or evil, flow from hearts. A good man out of a good heart brings forth good words and right deeds. An evil man out of an evil heart brings forth sinful words and evil deeds. Jesus so stated in Matthew 12:34-35. People will sometimes say, "I spoke before I thought." This is not

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really correct. The mouth speaks only what the heart dictates. It would be more correct to say, “I spoke before I thought correctly and had all facts clearly in mind.”

Intense love for God’s Word will aid us greatly in the mental department. Solomon, centuries ago, told us, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life...For as he thinketh in his heart so is he” (Prov. 4:23; Prov. 23:7). In the latter passage the wisest of the ages was delineating the heart of an evil man. He was evil because his heart was not right in the sight of God.

Peter told erring Simon of Samaria that his heart was not right in the sight of God (Acts 8:21). He had offered money to Peter and John to possess the same apostolic powers of transmitting miraculous gifts by imposition of hands as they possessed.

Deep love for God’s law means we will not have hearts filled with murder, sinful anger, wrath, malice and lust for one of the opposite sex (Matt. 5:21-30). Love for God’s law will not turn us into harsh, unkind, insensitive and destructive people such as Paul warned against in Galatians 5:15 wherein we read, “But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.”

Such unchristian decorum comes from hearts filled with harm, hatred and injurious thoughts, words and actions toward others. The Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6:31 forbids such. So do the principles of Romans 12—sometimes called the Golden Chapter of the Bible. Philippians 4:8 talks of what is true, honest, just, pure, lovely, good report, virtuous and praiseworthy. The Pauline inculcation is that we “think on these things” and well we should.

Intense love for God’s law will greatly influence and enhance our speech patterns. After Jesus spoke of the good heart and the evil heart in Matt. 12:34-35, He stated:

That every idle word that man shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matt. 12:37-38).

The idle word here is the injurious word, the filled-with-harm word. In the Gentleman's Psalm, as Psalm 15 has been styled so beautifully, Jehovah's approved saint speaks "truth in his heart" and "backbiteth not with his tongue" (Psa. 15:2-3). No corrupt speech is to leave our lips but instead words that edify and which "may minister grace unto the hearers" (Eph. 4:28). Speech is to be "with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col. 4:6). James 3 can be a great helper in guarding our speech and encouraging us to speak good and right things.

Intense love for God's law will flavor immensely and profoundly our actions. Such will produce the good works Jesus delineated so delightfully in Matthew 5:16 and that Paul commanded in Ephesians 2:10. To Titus, Paul spoke of good works in a trio of passages (Tit. 3:1; Tit. 3:8; Tit. 3:14). Paul commended the Thessalonians for their work of faith, labor of love and patience of hope (1 Thess. 1:3). Incidentally, this is the third verse Paul wrote in the beginning of his fruitful literary career. How noteworthy that he got to the heart of gospel basics as a beginning penman of Sacred Scripture.

Intense love for God's Word and diligent practice of the same will be in the forefront of the service we render God. Old Testament prophets were servants. They loved God and His Word. David is remembered as having served his own generation prior to his falling asleep (Acts 13:36). Jesus came not to be ministered unto but to minister or serve (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). Jesus trained His disciples and apostles to be servants. This is where true greatness

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lay (Mark 10:42-44). This was the planned intent of His washing the disciples' feet in John 13:1ff. James and John, sons of pride in Mark 10:35-37, learned well this lesson and became great servants of God and their fellowmen. Look at the various salutations of New Testament writers and observe how many laid humble claim to being servants. Paul captured what all of them sought to be and do when he wrote, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord: and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

What has enshrined the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 into the very fabric of our thinking and vocabulary? He was a servant to the fallen victim on the Jericho Road, the bloody way, as it has been called. The passive priest and the lukewarm Levite did not get up to bat in the service department. They were selfish. It requires a great deal of selflessness to be a real servant. I have a short series of lessons I entitle, "The Christian's Treasure Chest." One of the ten riches we can and must place into this robber proof chest is the "silver of service." The other nine are "the gold of gratitude, the diamond of dedication, the pearl of purity, the precious coin of consistency, the opal of opportunity, the gem of goodness, the jasper of justice, the ruby of righteousness and the jewel of Jesus." Love of God's law leads to a life of service vertically and horizontally—upward and outward. Such will pay a rich dividend inwardly. In a good sense it makes us proud inwardly. Service is a saintly synonym of Christianity.

How Such Affects Faithful Worship Attendance

I am now in my 58th year as a gospel preacher and in my 63rd year as a Christian. In all these years I have seen far too much laxity as touching church attendance

faithfulness. I have often quoted Hebrews 10:25 to my audiences, which forbids worship absenteeism only to see many ignore this passage as though it were a total non-entity. I really believe it is the most disobeyed verse in all the New Testament. Many of our members treat it with the same contempt as the denominational world does Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, and 1 Peter 3:21. For shame!

Jerusalem saints in Acts 2 were steadfast in worship faithfulness as we learn in Acts 2:42. Gladly, they gave glory to God, honor to Jesus, respect to the Holy Spirit, and fellowship to other saints worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness (Psa. 29:2). Three decades later they had made drastic changes and not for the better I might add. They were forsaking the assembly where worship of a corporate nature occurred and where needed exhortations were the order of each service. For shame! Hebrews 10:25 is not optional; it is a commandment. In essence it says, "Thou shalt not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as the manner of some is."

In every service we have, the Word of God is either preached from the pulpit or taught in Bible classes. Intense love for that Word would mean faithful attendance of the same. Disinterest in such is a sure sign of far too little love for the Word of God. Can the derelict member really say truthfully, "I miss Bible classes Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights and many of the preaching services on Lord's days because of my intense love for the Word of God?"

Many years ago, about 30, I preached in a gospel meeting for a congregation in another state. Sunday morning we had about 300 present. I urged all members to support faithfully the remaining services. Before dismissal one of the elders arose and spoke for the entire eldership urging all the members to support the six remaining services—Sunday night through Friday night. At the time I wondered how submissive the sheep there

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would be to their shepherds. I had my answer soon. We had about 50% back for Sunday night and even less percentage Monday through Friday. Hebrews 10:25 and Hebrews 13:17 were both ignored by many of the members there. I did my best but many of the members did not do their best by any stretch of the imagination.

A lady, now deceased, once complained, "The elders of this congregation are trying to **church** us to death." Four hours a week, three on Sunday and one on Wednesday night, were just too much for her. She knows better now and could have before her decease.

An elder in a Texas congregation was once asked, "Do I have to attend **every** service?" His reply was brimmed full of prudence, "I did not know there was any service any member ever **wanted** to miss!"

Brother C. E. McGaughey, who did much in the way of local work and held numerous meetings, had this happen in one of his gospel evangelistic efforts. I heard him tell it. About the time he arose to speak one of the nights a large group walked out of the assembly. It disturbed him as it would any preacher who takes seriously his work for the Lord. The next day he inquired of one of the members who left only to be told, "Why preacher, last night was our league bowling time. We could not let down our regular league members. We just dropped by a few moments to show our respect for the meeting!" Bowling over the Bible had been the clear victor that night! They did not feel as the Psalmist did toward God's Word.

I have had many similar experiences in the hundreds of gospel meetings in which I have preached. While in a meeting where I had been a number of times before, I learned that a man who was a member was not attending faithfully. I had baptized him and a number of his family in earlier meeting work there. I went to see him. He said, "I really do not feel like I can leave my wife and afflicted daughter long

enough to attend the meeting.” He was a farmer and raised prize winning livestock. While I was there he was grooming some of his animals to be taken to a fair in another state requiring a number of days away from his wife and afflicted daughter. Psalm 119:97 was lost on him.

While in a meeting I was given the names of a mother and her children who were not faithful. I called on them and urged them to come that night. Quickly, she stated, “Oh we cannot come tonight. Our children play softball.” Softball had won over the Saviour. Psalm 119:97 also was lost on her and her children.

Loving God’s Word Will Bless Us And Our Homes

Spouses cannot be what they ought to be unless they love God’s love with precious priority. Neither can parents, nor their children. Moses knew that and gave excellent family counsel to Israelite households in Deuteronomy 6:1-9. So did Paul and Peter in Ephesians 5:22-6:4 and 1 Peter 3:1-6.

What has Jesus Christ meant to our homes in the past, at the present, and what will we allow Him to mean to it in the future? There is not much we can do about the past except repent of its sins. However, there is much we can do about the present, the right now, and far more about the future if such we have. Christ In The Home and loving God’s Word supremely have much affinity for each other. We dare not sever them except at our own peril.

Conclusion

How many of us can march to the side of this precious Psalmist in 119:97 and say truly, “These are my sentiments—loving God’s Word supremely and meditating on it daily?” Here is duet priority!

CHAPTER 10

Lovest Thou Me More Than These?

Freddie Clayton

Introduction

I *COUNT IT AN* honor to be invited to participate in such a wonderful lectureship and this, the 15th annual is a boost to the cause we plead. What a challenge lies before us as we pursue a greater understanding, appreciation, and necessary implementation of what we learn about the sterling theme, “The Greatest Of These Is Love!” Could there be a timelier subject for consideration? Is there a topic more misunderstood and abused than the Biblical concept of love? I have yet to hear it if there is.

As it thus relates to man’s responsibility to His Creator, to fail to know and apply what the Word of God reveals concerning this subject is devastating! It means to miss out on the blessings and privileges both here and in eternity reserved for those who “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37). An eternity of regret awaits those who fail to demonstrate love for God and neighbor.

Background

The background, from which the verses of particular interest to us grow, goes back at least to the beginning of the 21st chapter of John. The episode commences, “After

these things.” This phrase is of specific concern in that this expression was a common one of John (John 2:12; John 5:1; John 5:14; John 6:1, etc.). This, along with the rest of such clear evidence demands the conclusion that the author of chapter 21 is the same as of the first 20 chapters. Attacks by so-called liberal scholars denying John’s authorship of chapter 21 should not be taken seriously.

Numerous “authorities” hold that the last chapter of John is an appendix or epilogue. Some even contend that it was not written by the same man that authored the first twenty chapters. However, men, faithful to their scholarship, see clear evidence, in both language and content, to identical scholarship. No copies of the Fourth Gospel have ever been found from which chapter 21 is omitted, and no trace of such copies has even been discovered. This means that from the date of its publication onward it has always contained 21 chapters.¹

Having written to prove the resurrection (John 20:30-31) the Holy Spirit then bore John along in providing additional inspired material showing the humanity of the risen Christ in various ways and specific applications we would be the worse without. It is my hope that the motivation here will be made our own.

John 21:1-14

“After these things,” refers to the appearances of the Lord after His resurrection as recorded in chapter 20. In this chapter we are shown and told how He “manifested” Himself to the disciples appearing before them some ten times with this being the seventh. Interestingly, each recorded instance of the Lord’s appearance was to His disciples only. “The world had its chance during the personal ministry; henceforth, his personal contacts would be with his own and no others.”²

Harmonizing Promise And Fulfillment

Prior to His crucifixion, Jesus had told His disciples that after He was risen He would go before them into Galilee (Matt. 26:32; Mark 14:28). I can imagine sentimental feelings associated with this locality. Remember that Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee when He called Peter, Andrew, James, and John from the fishing for fish business to the fishing for men business (Matt. 4:18-21). Remember as well when Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome found the empty tomb on resurrection Sunday, we read:

And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment; and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you (Mark 16:5-7).

Does the angel mention the promise Jesus made to His disciples prior to His crucifixion that He was going to go before them into Galilee after the resurrection (Matt. 26:32; Mark 14:28)? Is the meeting in chapter 21 the one under consideration? The sea of Tiberias is named for the city on its shore but it is most often referred to as the Sea of Galilee, so we are in the general vicinity. John's use of "Sea of Tiberias" indicates the writings were intended for the Roman world. Tiberias was the Roman name for the Sea of Galilee. Because of the connection of the words of conversation between the Lord and Peter, and with Peter's affirmation of his superiority in faithfulness to the other apostles (Matt. 26:33; Mark 14:29), it would seem so. However, all of the apostles were present when Jesus made the promise, and only seven here are present (John 21:2).

Also consider Matthew 28:16: "Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where

Jesus had appointed them.” If the Galilee visit is this one, the rest of the apostles must have arrived at some point. The fulfillment was over a period of time rather than a few minutes. The significance of the occasion is not in being able to line everything up to suit our inquisitive minds but the tremendous lessons taught as “on this wise showed he himself” (John 21:1b).

The Fish Were Not Biting

Seven of the apostles were together at this time (John 21:2). Peter declared that he was going fishing, and the others followed his lead (John 21:3). We see that Peter still maintained influence over the other disciples. There are multiple plausible explanations as to why Peter suggests this. Peter returned to the fishing business having lost his faith. Or perhaps he has returned for economic reasons, needing money and has to provide for his own (1 Tim. 5:8). Of course, the reason most fishermen would give is what better way to pass the time before the Lord’s promise to them is fulfilled at Jerusalem a few days later (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8)?

As is often the case, their all night fishing had produced little more than drowned worms and sleepy heads. As morning was breaking, Jesus appeared on the shore (John 21:4). “The verb ‘stood’ in association with the preposition ‘on’ indicates motion and thus tells us that the appearance was sudden and supernatural.”³ The apostles did not know who Jesus was. As to why, we do not know. When questioned by the Lord as to the success of their night of fishing, they responded they had caught nothing (John 21:5). They quickly responded to the Lord’s instructions to cast their nets on the right side of the ship and were not able to draw in the nets for the number of fish. Did they just follow anyone’s advice on how and where to fish? Did they recognize His voice? Did their quick response

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to the suggestion show desperation and willingness for anyone's help? Or were some of them remembering another similar instance (Luke 5:4-7)? While such speculation might be conversation starters, it was John who said to Peter, "It is the Lord," (John 21:7).

Needing little by way of spark to be impulsive, Peter threw his overcoat on and hit the water, leaving behind boat and fish and set out for Jesus on shore. The rest of the disciples had to take up the slack caused by Peter's actions but were successful in dragging the overflowing net, which did not break, to shore.

Jesus had breakfast ready for them as soon as they came to land (John 21:9), but the Lord pointed out that the catch needed attention first (John 21:10). Peter joined in bringing the catch of 153 large fish to land. In contrast to another occasion of the Lord's assistance in another fishing expedition (Luke 5:6), the nets here did not break (John 21:11), evidently also a part of this miraculous event.

Breakfast With Jesus

There being no realistic possibility of spurning the invitation of Jesus to eat, this must have been one of the most difficult meals in which any of these men would ever participate. While we might think that we would have acted the very opposite of them, it must have been their amazement, their wonder, being filled with awe in the presence once again of the resurrected Lord that kept them silent. It prevented them from asking questions that they were no doubt curious to know, but were better left unasked— as asking might expose their weakness and/or folly (John 21:12).

With the Lord as host and serving these seven, He once again demonstrates one of the qualities so difficult for those who would be His disciples. That characteristic

is humility, "...but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:" (Matt. 20:26b-27).

A Changing Man Is Questioned

As if to emphasize the purpose of this whole event, John notes, "This is now the third time that Jesus shewed himself to his disciples, after that he was risen from the dead" (John 21:14). Following the meal, Jesus broke the silence by questioning Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). It appears as though this series of questions was for the purpose of removing any hint of false self-confidence from the heart of Peter. It would also help remove from the rest of the apostles the criticism they may have felt toward Peter by allowing them to witness his new found humility.

There are a number of questions that arise from this conversation between Jesus and Peter. Is there significance in Jesus calling Peter by his original Hebrew name, Simon, and identifying him as the son of John? Is Jesus taking him back to his pre-Petros days and calling upon him to establish himself as rock-like once again? Some questions we can only raise while some answers become clearer through study.

When Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him "more than these," what comparison did Jesus have in mind? Is it a "what" or a "who?" The language allows at least three possibilities. Does Jesus refer to "these" fish, boats, and nets? Is it the fishing profession from which he was called that Jesus asks about? Certainly this could be alluring when compared to all the problems that have been the direct result of following this Jesus fellow. Remember how easy it used to be when the only problem was the fish not biting? Is this not an attraction too strong for some to

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resist? In order to provide for my family, so they can have everything everybody else has, I must return to the road of the rat race. I do not want to be “worse than an infidel” (1 Tim. 5:8). Even the reality of sickening comparisons like “The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Pet. 2:22) is not sufficient to keep misplaced affection at bay. Faithfulness in spite of the difficulties is necessary to receive the crown of righteousness (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Love for the Lord will ensure that (John 14:15).

Jesus could have been asking Peter if he loved Him more than he loved these men: business partners, family members, and friends. The love that people have for friends and family has often been so strong that such love, limited only to this lifetime, has been secured while casting aside benefits for eternity. Lot’s wife looked with affection upon what and who she was leaving in Sodom and promptly turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). It was Jesus that warned of the extent to which one must go in order to be His disciple:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth:
I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am
come to set a man at variance against his father,
and the daughter against her mother, and the
daughter in law against her mother in law. And
a man’s foes shall be they of his own household.
He that loveth father or mother more than me
is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or
daughter more than me is not worthy of me
(Matt. 10:34-37).

No doubt the love of many has grown cold for the Lord while contemplation of earthly existence even with its brevity is viewed as the more desirable. If only we had the evangelistic fervor of the rich man described in Luke 16 who did not want his brothers to follow his sorry example (Luke 16:27-28). Our motivation must be just as was Moses’:

...when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward (Heb. 11:24-26).

Third, Jesus may have been asking Peter if he loved Him more than the other apostles loved Him. This would certainly get right to the heart of Peter's previously exposed lack of self-knowledge. It was Peter who alleged superior affection for Jesus before His death. The Lord had warned, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night" (Matt. 26:31). As recorded in Matthew 26:33 we read, "Peter answered and said unto him, Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended." Was Peter still willing to boldly affirm his greater bravery, faithfulness, and dedication? Peter's denial made necessary his restoration. How many today are likewise motivated? Does the Lord grade on the curve? Some evidently think so as they did in the first century. It remains just as Paul by inspiration addressed it:

For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise (2 Cor. 10:12).

There may be other possibilities as to Jesus' question on comparisons; however, if Peter loved the Lord as he should, then that would be enough.

Before heading to other matters here present, notice that Peter did not answer by comparing himself in any way. When Peter responded, he did so minus the Lord's "more than these" (John 21:15). If Jesus had reference to the fishing business, the other apostles, or the love of the other apostles for Him, Peter was being taught a difficult

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lesson. He needed to be more cautious and have less bravado regarding his strength in the hour of trial. Had Peter thought more highly of himself than he should (Rom. 12:3)? Certainly, but that has been and is yet in the process of being corrected in Peter. Have multitudes of brethren missed these lessons taught by Jesus and learned by Peter? Are they any less important today? Most of the problems presently plaguing the brotherhood would never have made it to first base if genuine humility and self-examination were more readily cultivated.

There are other questions of significance that are not observable except in the original language. While there are multiple ideas all designated by the one English word "love," this is not the case in the Greek language of the New Testament. As to these differences in the questions of Jesus to Peter and Peter's replies, more questions than answers result. The differences are found in the words *agapao* and *phileo*, both translated as "love" in standard English translations. The translators evidently thought that there was no substantial difference in the meaning of these two words. While this idea simplifies the main point and avoids other facts, themselves thought provoking, for some reason two different words for love were used in this question and answer session of the Lord and Peter. Peter had denied the Lord three times, and now the Lord gives him a chance, in some measure, to get working again. The soon to be called out people of the Lord will depend greatly upon the restored Peter. Peter's sin of triple denial had to be dealt with, and the Lord provided the opportunity by means of a triple confession. Notice the unfolding of the inspired account by John:

Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to

him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep (John 21:15-17).

The Lord asked Peter if he loved Him with the highest form of love in the Greek, *agape*. In Peter's answer he humbly acknowledges that he has affection for the Lord by using the Greek word *phileo* in response to His question. In his answer, Peter leaves out any comparisons of himself to other things or people. The Lord then tells Peter to feed His lambs. This probably has reference to the obligation that Peter will fulfill in tending the Lord's flock, specifically as an elder of a local congregation in the future (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1).

The second question and answer are the same as the first with the exception of "more than these?" being eliminated. Peter again acknowledges that the Lord knows that he has a strong affection for Him but refuses to claim something of which he is not sure. Jesus then told Peter "Feed my sheep." While there are similar ideas stated in this second question, there are different words used to denote a more specific meaning. Here older sheep are referred to by Christ with tending or shepherding associated with the command. Thus Peter has been told to take care of the young and old, the mature and immature.

Jesus changes the Greek form of love in His third question to Peter which He had been using. He now uses the same term for love, *phileo*, that Peter has been using in his responses to Christ. Christ is asking Peter if he really only loves the Lord in this lesser sense of the word

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and not with the supreme love of will and commitment that *agape* implies? This grieved Peter.

Was he sorry that Jesus' question amounted to doubting his affirmations? Was he sorrowing for his own failures and in his boasting of superior courage? Does he realize he is letting down the Lord Who did and does so much for him? His denial of the Lord ringing in the memory of his ears cuts him to the heart but was necessary so that all would work out, and, just as Jesus had also predicted, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren" (Luke 22:31-32). Here I include the outstandingly perceptive remarks of the late Guy Woods on John 21:17:

This time, the Lord used the same word for love that Peter did, saying, in effect, 'Do you really have the warm, close, personal and abiding affection for me that you claim? Have you forgotten that you stood afar off when I was being reviled and even denied that you knew me?' Peter was cut to the heart, and grief overwhelmed him, as he recalled that awful night and he now acknowledges that the Lord does indeed know all things and thus knows that he deeply loves his Saviour. The Lord's foreknowledge which Peter denied when he controverted his prediction, 'Verily I say unto thee, that thou today, even this night, before the cock crow twice, shalt deny me thrice' (Mark 14:30), he now conceded and he appeals to this same foreknowledge to establish his claim of deep devotion. Three times Peter denied the Lord; three times the Lord required him to reaffirm his love; the process, though extremely painful, was a healing one, and it brought the embattled disciple back to a commitment that was to remain with him the remnant of his days and to prompt him to become one of the most courageous and faithful disciples the Lord ever had.⁴

Conclusion

With Jesus repeating His charge to Peter to feed His sheep, a tremendous task for dedicated brethren, the text for this study concludes. On the heels of this all-important return to the fold, Jesus tells Peter the method of death that he would eventually experience:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me (John 21:18-19).

Christ prophetically was telling Peter that the courage once boasted of would actually exist in the bosom of the reclaimed Simon Peter because he would die a martyr's death for the cause of Christ. Peter was blessed with a longer life than many persons who would die for a cause. Those years would be filled with strength and faithfulness. Having revealed to Peter that he would live to an old age and then die violently, Jesus simply said to him, "Follow me." It was this same man who earlier had forsaken the Lord for fear of death. Now, knowing that martyrdom awaits, Peter resumes his work in the Lord's vineyard.

I am confident that our affinity with Peter is due more often to the mistakes that he made rather than the fact that he always got back up when falling in a big way. We dare not fail to be like him in that regard as well. Talking minus walking has brought the label of hypocrite many a time (Matt. 23) and rightfully so. We, like Peter, overestimate ourselves sometimes. Regular spiritual inventories (2 Cor. 13:5) are necessary to faithfulness.

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Suppose the Lord were to ask you, “Lovest thou me, more than these?” What would most likely try to invade the first place that is rightfully the Lord’s (Matt. 6:33)? We can easily figure that out just as Jesus explained it, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). May we follow the example of Peter in putting to practice such common sense passages as this one, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Love to live.

Endnotes

1 William S. Cline, **John** (Austin: Firm Foundation Publishing House, Inc., 1989), p. 385.

2 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary On The Gospel According To John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1984), p. 435.

3 Woods, p. 436.

4 Woods, p. 443.

CHAPTER 11

Thou Hast Left Thy First Love

Bryan Braswell

Exposition of the Principle

Revelation 2:1-7¹

THE CHURCH AT *EPHESUS* was a great and opulent (affluent) city of Ionia.² Ephesus was culturally well rounded with the wealthy, learned, unlearned, poor and illiterate. The general condition of life was that of a wealthy, cultured, and corrupt city.³ Hence, the city of Ephesus characteristically would represent any modern city in American culture today. Their struggles, then, would be no different than ours of our own culture today. The principle of Revelation 2:1-7 is very much alive and active to this day.

In his inspired letter addressed to the seven different churches of Christ of Asia Minor, the apostle John writes to Ephesus first. His message to Ephesus is one of first priorities. The Lord said to all of the churches addressed in the book of Revelation: "I know thy works..." demonstrating His omniscient eminence over all of His churches (cf. Rev. 2:2; Rev. 2:9; Rev. 2:13; Rev. 2:19; Rev. 3:1; Rev. 3:8; Rev. 3:15). John scribes this message to the messengers or angels of these churches. And, just who these angels were addressed, at each congregation, is not absolutely known. This book, overall, was written in symbols, signified in figures, according to Revelation 1:1,

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and must be read with this in mind. One man rightly said: “The Bible is a book of lively principles, which enable us to be alive spiritually, live faithfully, and be edified with everything necessary for life and godliness, equipped thoroughly for every good work.”⁴ When rightly divided, or handled aright, the Word of God will make us workmen unashamed and approved of by God Himself (cf. 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 3:16-17 et al.). It is not, therefore, a dead book of dead information, but an alive one with principles that are all sufficient for everything pertaining to life and godliness (cf. Heb. 4:12; 2 Pet. 1:3-4 et al.).

The angels addressed are considered to be the messengers or those who would have received the message first at these churches. Perhaps, they were the preachers or elders, or one or more, who would have presented the inspired message. We know that epistles were written and addressed to various folks, congregations, and were expected to be read and passed along the way (cf. Col. 4:16). This letter was no less expected to be read and understood in all of the congregations then, as it is now. As Revelation 1:1-3 states:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto Him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John: Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. Blessed is he that readeth and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Ray Summers, in his commentary, mentions that the probable view is that these angels likely represented the “elder, the leading pastor, of the church.”⁵ He continues: “New Testament records, as well as others, indicate that the churches sometimes had several pastors charged with

differing responsibilities in the life of the body. ‘The angel of the church,’ then, is the leading pastor.”⁶ This is quite the presupposition on his part. How one can rightly conclude that pastors and elders are the same in respect to their work in the New Testament, serving as a plurality of men, as he rightly does; but then wrongly suggest that this “angel” is the leading pastor, as if there is sanctioned authority in Scripture to have one man as the head, or lead elder or pastor, is unfounded—and therefore represents the typical Roman Catholic, protestant denominational view that the eldership/pastors, who serving local churches such as at Ephesus, had one man in charge—this is a preposterous view.

If one reads the Bible correctly, one would understand that Paul summoned the elders (plural) from Miletus, encouraged and warned them about various matters; one being “...of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). The principle here regarding the angel, then, is simple. They were the persons who could and would relay the epistle to the church as a whole. There is no implication that this was a head elder or pastor, unless one is persuaded by a sectarian movement, and such a judgment would be contrary to apostolic authority (cf. 1 Pet. 5:1ff.).

To the church at Ephesus, commendation was in order. Their labor and patience is mentioned (Rev. 2:2-3). Labor is demonstrated by their patience, or steadfastness, enduring, not forbearing, but being impatient with evil. This evil is associated with false apostles, or those who have been tested and found out to be liars. Dishonesty is a most difficult matter to handle, especially regarding those who are deceived and are deceiving. A deceived person who deceives others may not know he is in error. However, when tested or tried, truth always trumps error like light exposes darkness. When the light is presented, darkness

is alleviated. This principle of light and darkness is used throughout the Bible. The false apostles in this text were found out to be liars as they had been tested by those at Ephesus. An apostle, generically, is one that has been sent. The word apostle is defined as a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders. Specifically, there were twelve chosen apostles and a thirteenth added later by the Lord himself, the apostle Paul, formally known as Saul of Tarsus (cf. Matt. 10:2; Acts 9:27; Rom. 1:1). The New Testament warns of this kind of wickedness as a result of false apostles, deceitful workers. The apostle Paul wrote:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

When the works of false apostles are examined, in view of the works of the true apostles, evil will be apparent. The church at Ephesus had taken their examination and passed this test. The Lord commended them here and said: "And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted" (Rev. 2:3). That they had not fainted is worthy of commendation.

Some practical application is expedient at this point. Many today are claiming "apostolic worthies" are found within their own churches. The Mormon Church, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches are the biggest proponents of this office today, all claiming to have apostles serving them. There is not much difference in this persuasion and the papal perversion of the Roman Catholic Church. However when their works are compared, these so called modern day apostles are clearly found out to be liars too, and their works are nothing more than

perversions of the powerful gospel of Jesus Christ (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). Such today that claim apostolic status are subverted and parallel to those of the first century who were found out to be liars then. The apostolic ministry was fulfilled when the last apostles of the Lord died, having been led into all truth (John 16:13; 1 Cor. 12:29; 1 Cor. 13:8-10; Eph. 4:11-12 et al.). Ephesus had not grown weary in well-doing in the matter of trying these spirits or testing these false, deceitful workers (cf. Gal. 6:9; 1 John 4:2). We can be encouraged by the fortitude and faith demonstrated by the Ephesians at this point. The apostolic command to “try the spirits” is still binding today. We must never grow weary in well-doing.

Another point of commendation is due to the fact that they bore stiff with those who held to the “deeds of the Nicolaitans.” The Lord stated: “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate” (Rev. 2:6). The deeds of these are not clear, but Foy E. Wallace, in his commentary, states:

The claim that this designation of a sect or a party derived its name from Nicolas, of Acts 6:5, rests on assertion. There is no historical or factual evidence of it. It is more consistent with the code language of Revelation to regard the term Nicolaitans as a symbolic expression, along with the use of the word Balaam. The two words actually are similar in meaning, one meant a “victor of the people” and the other a “devourer of the people.” These meanings of the two words significantly unite the two symbols as signs of the religious seductions of the Libertine party in the Ephesian church.⁷

That they hated, or loathed this problem was commended by the Lord. He, Himself, hated these deeds. Wallace further stated: “they were commended for hating something; some graces had decayed, as in verses 5 and 6, but the hatred of evil had remained, and was extolled.”⁸

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The word hate is taken from the Greek *miseo* and is defined to hate, pursue with hatred, detest, or to be hated, detested. God hates certain things, and sin is the matter we are discussing generally. In Proverbs 6:16-19 the Lord hates six things, yea seven are an abomination to Him: (1) A proud look; (2) a lying tongue; (3) hands that shed innocent blood; (4) an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations; (5) feet that be swift in running to mischief; (6) a false witness that speaketh lies; (7) and he that soweth discord among brethren. Yes, it is the case that we are to detest, loathe, and with disgust and contempt for certain things “hate.”

We often hear, “love the sinner, and hate the sin,” and rightfully so. We are to love all people, generally speaking—that is, we are to love their souls—but an imbalance of this love negates the proper hatred for those who teach error and pervert God’s good and perfect blessings of life. If you notice, in Proverbs 6:16-19, God “hates” the person and the problem. He hates the “he” that sows the discord among brethren. This is why Paul said to mark them that cause the divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned (cf. Rom. 16:17). Hence, the statement, “love the sinner and hate the sin, is not all that Biblical without qualifying what you mean. God’s love never negates justice, and this implies wrath, but mercy too (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6-10). The Bible teaches very clearly that we can be angry without sinning (Eph. 4:26). These were worthy matters to commend at Ephesus.

As it is, there was much to be commended about Ephesus and parroted in today’s battle for truth, but there too was a concern that troubled the omniscient Christ. He said this:

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee,
because thou hast left thy first love. Remember

therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

Since the problem, here, is related to factors worthy of commendation, it follows that the departure from their first love must have had something to do with the Christians first priorities. My suggestion is this: Evangelism and complying with the first commission, the great commission of our Lord, according to Matthew 28:18-20 is often set aside when fighting false brethren, exposing and expelling them, and extolling the right from the wrong. This is often an all consuming matter, but we must never forget our firm foundation. This in no way suggests our neglect to fight the good fight of faith, but we must never lose sight of the Cross. This is why we fight in the first place. Redemption is our cause, and when we lose sight of this, we lose sight of everything.

Wallace suggested this regarding their departure:

This divine injunction goaded the memory in reference to the things of the past; it commanded the will with respect to the present determination; and it exhorted obedience in the restitution of the first works—not in quantity, but in quality. It meant to do the first works in the spirit of first love.⁹

Burton Coffman suggested that the first love is the Lord Himself, and their departure is an indication of heart, not in word or deed, contending for the doctrine, but in every matter, their center of affection was in defending themselves, not the Lord.¹⁰ Another source offered this statement:

Their intolerance of imposture and their hatred of heresy had bred an inquisitorial spirit which

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left no room for love. They had set out to be defenders of the faith ... only to discover that in the battle they had lost the one quality that really matters.¹¹

Their departure, their fall, was so severe that the Lord said repentance was the only avenue of correction. Restoration or repentance is always the key to making things right. When our course becomes diverted from the strait or narrow pathway, we must repent. If we lose sight of our foundation, forgetting the love God had for us in the beginning, the love we had for Him, the love we had for our neighbors, we too must repent. Repentance is the only course of action that will set matters right, and the Lord is the Commander in charge here (cf. Luke 13:3; Luke 13:5; Rev. 2:5). We must repent or perish. The Lord gave hope when He said:

He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7).

Here is the Bible's best course in Psychology 101. Hope is always found in doing God's will. Every man struggling with life's difficulties, stressed and struggling with anxiety, is suffering without hope. But, the Bible always promises hope in doing right. And so it is, if we are doing right and repenting when wrong has been done, then we have hope. The real question is not in the fact of what the Bible teaches, but in the faith of the hearer. Hence, the Lord's plea: "He that hath an ear, let him hear..." The choice is ours. Will we hear, believe, and obey, which is faith expressed in trust; or, will we continue in belief without expression and remain in sin? There is no promise of hope in this latter course of no action, and this is why psychology is a dominant and real secular problem today. Faith coupled with obedience answers man's problems.

Relative to the tree of life and eating freely from it in the midst of the paradise of God, every Bible believer, who has read, pondered, and imagined the perfect paradise of the Garden of Eden is consoled. Genesis 1-2 demonstrates God's perfection and provision in creation. Genesis 3 demonstrates man's weakness and need for God's continual perfection and provision. Revelation 2:7 demonstrates that only through Christ, now, can we have such perfection planted and provided in our lives again. Through the perfect law of liberty, we have perfect hope and pardon (cf. Jas. 1:25). We must eat of the bread of life and live (John 6:35).

The garden or paradise of God, in the beginning, kindles the favorable fact that God loves man; but will man reciprocate with his faith and obedience? That's an entirely different matter, but to the penitent, faithful follower of Christ, paradise is our promise and plea to others when preaching Christ and Him crucified.

What Was Right At Ephesus?

Ephesus had many things for which to be commended, things many congregations have not applied and or practiced as of late. They were steadfast in warring against wickedness, idleness, and worthlessness. They had labored, which is emphasis on the past, not current or future status. Wallace commented on 2:3 of the Revelation:

'Hast borne, hast patience, hast labored . . . hast not fainted'—2:3. Here is the sphere of tolerance, what to bear and what not to bear. Infirmities and weaknesses can be shared with tolerance, but never to the point of condoning false doctrine, or of upholding false teachers. Of that class Paul said, in Gal. 2:5: "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."¹²

Also what is emphasized in this text is that they had so labored and borne patiently with these matters “for My name’s sake” (Rev. 2:3). For Christ we labor or our labor is in vain. We do not labor for selfish gain. We do not so labor for others, per se. We do, however, labor for God’s glorification. We grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior for one reason: “To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet. 3:18). When our eyes leave the cross, compromise sets its course. When compromise’s course has been set, it leads to sin, and sin when it is finished brings forth death (cf. Jas. 1:15). Too many folks have forsaken the cross of Christ for academic enterprises when in fact some have forgotten it is love that edifies, and knowledge without love puffs one full of pride (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1; 1 Cor. 13:1-4). Apparently, Ephesus had not grown weary in these matters. They had been busy trying false teachers. They exposed and expelled them from their midst. They hated the same things God hated. They were, and are, to be commended for this. We are, and will be, commended when we do likewise; but...

What Was Wrong At Ephesus?

What was it that was not right and therefore wrong at Ephesus? What was wrong was their departure from first priorities: their love for God, their desire for salvation, their conviction and zeal for good works, their passion for Christ—the lack of these things was the problem. When we speak of good works, good comes to mind in regard to two passages: Galatians 6:10 and James 1:27. The principle is “doing good unto all men as we therefore have the opportunity.” It is hard to see the opportunity to tend to the truly needy when we are consumed with fighting error all of the time. We suggest that the Lord was challenging Ephesus to stay the course with their battle for truth, but not to forget the “whole counsel” of which Paul preached

while at Ephesus (cf. Acts 20:27). The whole or sum of God's counsel included, as the Lord had said: "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). It is my conviction that Ephesus had lost this balance. It is my conviction that Ephesus forgot redemption's sweet purpose. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their afflictions, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). Paul had preached this message to them. He said: "I have shewed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:35).

Keeping oneself unspotted from the world is a hard job, but no excuse is offered in neglecting truly needy folks—orphans and widows. A true orphan is left without guidance, without goals, without hope if we do not tend to these, "as we therefore have the opportunity." A widow "indeed" is one that is worthy of our love and support. Paul gave inspired guidance for us to always consider such in 1 Timothy 5:3-16. The Lord left the world with this Divine injunction: "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and in this, they apparently were lacking (Acts 20:35).

What Does It Mean To Leave Our First Love?

Leaving our first love simply but profoundly has to do with leaving our first priorities: (1) Denying self (Luke 9:23); (2) denying family (Luke 14:26); (3) denying possessions (Luke 14:27; Luke 14:33); (4) and ultimately seeking first the kingdom of God in all matters, which is God's righteousness (Matt. 6:33-34)—these matters place Christ in His preeminence (Col. 1:18).¹³ Author Ogden continues:

If this is the original love with which we are to serve Him, then any insufficiency in any part is equal to leaving our first love. The Ephesians were not ignorant of these responsibilities. Paul

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had showed them all things (Acts 20:35), “keeping back nothing” (Acts 20:20), and declaring unto them “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). They were therefore without excuse knowing very well what God expected. The Lord had expected them to grow, abound, and move on to perfection, but they had not so developed. They had lost some of their fervor [sic], motivation and dedication. It was a serious matter.¹⁴

If the locally autonomous church of Christ at Ephesus could lose their first love, then we in our locally autonomous churches can do the same thing. This can happen when we place more emphasis upon worldly, political affairs, and not local affairs. And, this in my judgment only stems the problems. Why, you might ask? Big problems start off as small problems, and when the small problems are weeded out first, taken care of at the root, the branches will not run wild.

As it is said, and is true, when the home decays, society decays. When the home is intact, then society will follow. The church has a first priority, and home, wherever that may be: 1) Roanoke, TX; 2) Southaven, MS; 3) Washington D.C.; these locations must do their first works. This is local work at its greatest when accomplished.

There is no greater establishment than the local church! Elders, deacons, and preachers should never forget this. Extracurricular, subordinate institutions or subcommittees, colleges, universities, presses, and networks do not overrule or outrun the local church.

When the churches of Christ are truly doing their jobs then and only then will we not be guilty of leaving our first love—first priorities. There is plenty of work at home. Perhaps, we need to regroup. Paul said this: “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6), and this starts with self.

What Must We Do Today To Avoid Committing The Same Error?

We have an obligation to fight the good fight of faith. Paul again said, “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses” (1 Tim. 6:12). Spiritual warfare will always be ongoing while Satan roars (cf. 1 Pet. 5:8-9; Eph. 6:10-18). The battle for right versus wrong will go on with light triumphing over darkness, while there is light (Psa. 119:105; 1 John 1:5-10; Rev. 20:1ff.). Satan will lose because God has won. In Christ there is only victory (Rom. 8:31-39). Outside of Christ is error and eternal loss.

What must we do today to keep from committing the same error of the Ephesians? We must set our own houses in order first before we die (cf. 2 Kings 20:1; Isa. 38:1). Perhaps the greatest work we can do is in saving our own households from the judgment of God’s wrath like Noah. To preachers, I suggest we stay home more and tend to our own business before engaging in other’s first. Stick with the Book and “preach the Word” (2 Tim. 4:2). That is the best we can do, in season and out of season! To elders, you must shepherd, in the truest sense of the word, feeding and overseeing the affairs of the local flock of God which is among you, not another (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). Churches of Christ need to tend to their own knitting, as the proverbial saying goes. No, local autonomy is not a shield for error, but until our own houses are in order we will never be able to have an impact in society as we should.

An imperialistic mindset is contrary to Bible authority. Elders cannot be guilty of lording matters over their own flocks, much less those of others. We have been fighting liberalism and radicalism for a long time, and this fight will continue. We will always have a fight as long as we are faithful (2 Tim. 3:12). But, perhaps the

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principle here is our greatest concern: Though Christ has won, are we losing the battle because we are leaving our first love? We must tend to first priorities, our own affairs!

No congregation, eldership, preacher/s, papers, journals, or other organizations has the right to tell another congregation, eldership, preacher/s and so on when and where to expedite God's will. They do have every right to preach the truth, but time is of the essence in such matters relative to expediency. Preachers cannot tell a different congregation's eldership or the eldership for which he preaches when and where truth must be expedited. A preacher has every right and responsibility to preach the truth, encourage, rebuke, and reprove, but to expedite is usually another's responsibility. The illustration is parallel to one man's home compared to another's. How would a husband of another wife fare by telling another husband how, when, and where to expedite his affairs with his own wife? Another husband of another wife can tell her husband what the truth of the Bible is regarding said matters, but that's as far as it had better go or someone's likely going to get into trouble or hurt (cf. Eph. 5:21-33).

Relative to sound doctrine, one text comes to mind when thinking of not losing site of our first love: Titus 2-3. Herein, Paul emphasizes that what is sound doctrine must be constantly affirmed (Tit. 3:8). These matters must be read, preached, and expedited in our lives. Sound doctrine is healthy doctrine, and as the wise man penned to his son:

Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD,
and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy
navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the
LORD with thy substance, and with the
firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns
be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst
out with new wine. My son, despise not the
chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his
correction: For whom the LORD loveth he

correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth. (Prov. 3:7-12).

Now, none of this denies our responsibility to mark them that cause division, discipline those who are leavening a congregation with sin, withdrawing ourselves from every brother that walks disorderly, and not fellowshiping or bidding Godspeed to error or its teacher (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:1ff; 2 Thess. 3:6; 2 John 9-11).

These matters must be contended over always (Jude 3-4). But, contending for the faith is not only a matter of defending against the enemies of the cross, of which there are many (Phil. 1:17; Phil. 3:18). Contending or agonizing over the faith may be as much of an issue in bringing self's imaginations, thoughts, and such that would be contrary to Christ, into captivity—bringing self into utter obedience to Christ (2 Cor. 10:4-5). That is a job in and of itself, and there is plenty of work to do at home in this regard.

If one holds Christ in His preeminent position, and minds every word or deed by the authority of Christ—His Word—then perhaps we will not be guilty of leaving our first love today (Col. 1:18; Col. 3:16-17). If we do find ourselves burdened down, having left our first love, we should find a solace in the fact that He—our blessed Savior—is alive and positioned in His place of authority, and when we restore ourselves to Him, having repented of our departure, we can be renewed daily by this fact. It is repent or perish according to Jesus. It is not excuses and worldly sorrow that will do, but repentance that rekindles sweet fellowship with Christ and our brethren (2 Cor. 7:10). To this end, we purpose and labor!

Endnotes

1 All Scripture references, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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2 Ray Summers, **Worthy Is the Lamb** (Nashville, TN Broadman Press, 1951), p. 108.

3 Ibid.

4 This quote is taken from a personal mentor and friend during a personal Bible study at his home.

5 Summers, p. 108

6 Ibid.

7 Foy E Wallace, **The Book of Revelation** Fort Smith, AR. Foy E. Wallace, JR. Publications, 1997), p. 88.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 **James Burton Coffman Commentaries** reproduced by permission of Abilene Christian University Press, Abilene, Texas, USA. All other rights reserved. <http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?book=re&chapter=002>

11 G. B. Caird, **The Revelation of St. John the Divine** (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 31.

12 Wallace p. 87.

13 Author M. Ogden, **The Avenging of the Apostles and Prophets** (Somerset, Kentucky 42501 Ogden Publications, 1996) p.123

14 Ibid.



*Man's
Love
For His
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CHAPTER 12

Love Thy Neighbor As Thyself

Ronnie Hayes

Introduction

IT IS A PRIVILEGE to be part of the 15th Annual POWER Lectureship. The POWER Lectureship has stood and continues to stand for truth. It has been a beacon in a sea of darkness, a refreshing breeze for balance and edification in a time when radicals lurk behind the bushes seeking a time to pounce. To brother B.J. Clarke and the elders at Southaven, I thank you for the opportunity to participate in this lectureship.

The subject of love is one that needs to be discussed. Love is the disciple's "badge of discipleship." "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35). Guy N. Woods writes in his commentary on John, "The love of the law embraced one's neighbor, the love Jesus commands is that which includes all men—good and bad—our enemies as well as our friends."¹ Is our badge tarnished or does it shine brightly with actions of our love?

Without love our actions are meaningless.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as

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sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Some have forgotten that we are to speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15). Instead, their motives for speaking of others are revenge, pounding someone into their position, or hurtful words to destroy. It seems that some think the only way to rise is through standing on the graves of those whom they have buried. Love is to be our motive for teaching, preaching, defending, and living the Christian life. Without love, who are we?

Love thy neighbor as thyself is the subject of this discussion. Our discussion will come from Luke 10:25-37. While Christ is traveling toward Jerusalem, He is confronted by a lawyer who asked, "...Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25). Jesus asked him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" Christ commended the lawyer's answer which was, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27).

It was my privilege to hear the late brother Winfred Clark speak on this subject in 1986. I spoke to his son, brother Jimmy Clark, and asked his permission to use this outline. In my opinion this was one of the finest lessons I've ever heard on this subject. For us to understand how to love our neighbor properly we must: (1) Recognize the **Period** in which it was written; (2) See the **Problem** that was involved; (3) See how the **Parable** applies to us; and (4) Make the **Practical Application** to our lives.

The Period

The period in which this is written finds Christ journeying to Jerusalem. We read, "And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). This journey is made in the "Shadow Of The Cross." Christ's resolve is noted in this verse, "...he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). H. Leo Boles writes concerning this resolve:

The language of Jesus makes it clear that he was fully conscious of the time of his death; it was rapidly drawing near to the close of his ministry. The time when 'he should be received up' means the time of the ascension of Jesus after his resurrection. Luke as well as John 17:5 reveals a yearning on the part of Jesus to return to the Father; this was in the mind of Christ at the transfiguration. He now 'stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.' This is emphatic; Jesus himself with fixedness of purpose set his face against the difficulties and dangers that would befall him.²

Would we still go? Having the knowledge of Christ and aware of the difficulties and even death that was imminent, what would we do? This is where many Christians have their faith tested. Christ warned of persecutions. He said, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:10). "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matt. 10:22).

These persecutions were not a reason for neglecting working or maintaining faithfulness. Paul urged the church at Corinth to remain steadfast when he stated, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). We would all do well to learn from

Christ that when adversities face us it is time to set our faces steadfastly.

The time frame or period in which something is said, adds significance. We all understand this. To give you an illustration, anyone who knows me, knows I'm not a cat person. But what if, as someone is about to die they say, "Will you watch after my cat?" These words ordinarily would have no meaning to me, but under the circumstance what could I do other than to take their cat and provide for it? We have all played the child's game, "Mother May I." In that game one might hear "Take one giant step." Those words have no real significance, but when Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon and said, "One small step for man and one giant leap for mankind," those words brought hope and vision to generations.

Now just think of it for a second; every Word that Christ utters on this trip to Jerusalem to be crucified is magnified! They have more meaning. They carry more weight. Surely, we can see that we should look at these Words with the significance that is intended.

Even with all of the distractions that were surrounding the Lord, this didn't take away from the seriousness of the question. Everybody has a bad day from time to time. There are those days when you hope no one speaks to you, or maybe you hope they don't even look your way. You know those days when you are just mad at the world. Then someone asks you something silly! How do you respond? Well, Christ was not just having a bad day, but a bad period. He is headed to Jerusalem to be killed. He knew this and was willing to make the sacrifice. Then, this lawyer comes wanting to make a name for himself. He wants to be known as the one who asked the question that the Son of God could not answer. What would we have done if we had known that this lawyer was here to "tempt" us? Remember, Christ is not having a good day.

Would we have said, “Get lost,” or maybe, “I don’t have time for your foolishness?”

What did Jesus do? He saw the seriousness of the question. He took time to answer the question. This lawyer didn’t bargain for the answer that Christ gave him. It is not for us to determine whether or not someone really wants the truth. It is ours to plant the seed. Paul states, “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor. 3:6). That is why Christ told His disciples, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). We are to preach, just as Peter did in the first recorded gospel message, and let the individual decide what they are going to do. “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). The message is serious, and it must be proclaimed regardless of what individuals do with it!

The Problem

The problem was not the lack of truth. When this lawyer wanted to know what to do to inherit eternal life, Christ pointed him to the law (Luke 10:26). We know where truth is today. “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). We know that it is the power of God unto salvation. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom. 1:16). It is our light in a world of darkness. “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa. 119:105).

The problems that the church faces today don’t stem from the lack of truth, but the lack of respect for the truth.

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The plan of salvation is simple, but will man obey it? No! The items of worship are plain, but will man do them? No! Christian living in a sea of immorality is as clear, but does man listen? No! It appears that man wants to ask the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" If the answer is what we want to hear we will do it; if not, then we attempt to justify our actions.

There are at least two problems which still plague man. It is said of the lawyer, "But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour" (Luke 10:29). The lawyer did as many do today. He tried to justify what he was doing.

Man has always been good at trying to place the blame on someone else. In the Garden of Eden, man tried to justify himself by blaming God, "...The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat" (Gen. 3:12). The woman said it was the serpent's fault (cf. Gen. 3:13). Aaron was quick to put the blame for the golden calf on the people (cf. Exod. 32:22).

While preaching on modest apparel, I pointed out the immodesty of mini skirts. At the end of the lesson I had a young lady say to me, "When I wear mini skirts, I always wear tennis shoes!" What does that mean? Are mini skirts longer when worn with tennis shoes? Do tennis shoes somehow make them modest? Somehow in her mind the wearing of tennis shoes justified the wearing of immodest clothing. She was wrong and is still wrong. We cannot explain away God's law nor can we substitute an equally as good law. Redefining God's law to incorporate our sin is impossible. It is time for us to quit trying to justify our sins and to get back to obeying God!

Not only did the lawyer fail by trying to justify what he was doing, his next problem was he asked the wrong question. He asked, "...who is my neighbor..." and he should have asked, "to whom should I be a neighbor?" This

lawyer is still trying to put the responsibility somewhere other than at his doorstep. President Kennedy stated, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country." Both statements sound similar but they are totally different. One is receiving and the other is giving. The lawyer was interested in receiving.

Unfortunately, there many like this in the church. When are the elders going to come see me? Why hasn't the preacher come to check on me? When will the ladies bring me dinner? Certainly we should be concerned about those who are sick and need our care. James said, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Jas. 1:27). But serving God faithfully isn't about me. Serving God doesn't involve selfishness, but selflessness. Christ said, "...It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

Maybe it is time for us to look at ourselves and ask when was the last time I did something to help someone? In the picture of the great judgment scene that is painted in Matthew 25, Christ says, "For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me" (Matt. 25:35-36). The righteous person is going to want to know when? When did we do these things? Christ's answer to when we did this for Him is as follows, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). Christianity is about serving, not being served!

The Parable

When we come to the parable we see an array of characters. The victim was a traveler who had the right to be where he was. The thieves took advantage of the

situation. Brother Boles said, "This road to Jericho was through a narrow, deep ravine with holes, caves, and hiding places for robbers."³ This road was the perfect place for an ambush. The thieves were there to do whatever was necessary for them to prey upon unsuspecting travelers. In this case they "...stripped him of his rament, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead" (Luke 10:30).

After the departure of the thieves other travelers came by. First, there was "...a certain priest..." who seeing the victim, "...passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:31). Then came "...a Levite..." who seeing the victim, "...passed by on the other side" (Luke 10:32). Then lastly, there came "...a certain Samaritan..." who seeing the victim, "...had compassion on him" (Luke 10:33).

The response of these three travelers is typical. You will have those who don't want to get involved and others who will do their best to help. Which are we? Much has been written to vilify the priest and Levite as to why they didn't help. The truth is, who knows why they didn't help? If they had viewed this one as a neighbor, they would have gone out of their way to help. When someone we love is injured, we don't say, "If I had the time I would carry you to the hospital." No, we do it! What did this Samaritan do? He did everything for this stranger that he would have done for himself. He used every means available to take care of his needs. He saw him; he used his eyes. He had compassion; he used his heart. He went to him; he used his feet. He bound up his wounds; he used his hands. He poured in oil and wine; he used his own medicine. He set him on his own beast, and he brought him to an inn; he used his own transportation. He took care of him; he used his own time. He took out two pence; he used his own money. He told the innkeeper, "whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee" (Luke 10:35);

he used his good name. What would you do for yourself that this Samaritan didn't do for this stranger (neighbor)? Whether we get involved or not will determine if we are a neighbor or just someone passing by. Whether we get involved or not will show those around us who we truly represent. Christ said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16). Many can talk the talk, but can we really walk the walk?

The Lord reminded this lawyer of what it means to love thy neighbor as thyself (Luke 10:27). In trying to shirk his responsibility the lawyer tried to justify himself and then asked, "Who is my neighbor." This parable is set to answer that question. Christ says, "Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:36-37). It is hard for this lawyer not to see his responsibility to others. It should be hard for us to miss the point as well. Neighbors are not determined by color or where one lives or even religion. Our neighbors are those who need our help. We can show Christ to them. The question is, "Will we?"

The Practical Application

The world is looking for something in religion. Otherwise, there wouldn't be a denomination on every corner. Some flock to see "miracle healers." Others seek a new revelation and some want to know about the future. But these are not the things the world needs.

I believe in every miracle spoken of in the New Testament. When I read and study of the miracles that Christ and His disciples performed, my faith is strengthened. John proclaimed this would be so:

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And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name (John 20:30-31).

But, on the other hand I don't believe in a single one of these modern day miracles. Yet, there are many who do. Large crowds will flock to these charlatans to try and receive something from them. Why? Because the world is looking for answers. Solomon sought for the answers of life by looking in all of the wrong places and he concluded, "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 2:17).

Many are doing the same thing today. Our thirst for God is not going to be quenched in emotionalism, but an honest obedience to God's commands. We don't need more miracles. The miracles of the Bible prove the Word of God to be just exactly what it claims to be. What we must determine is what are we going to do with His Word?

God has given us His revealed Word, and there is no need for any further instructions. Jude wrote:

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints (Jude 3).

The faith has been delivered once and for all. Woods writes in his commentary on Peter, John and Jude:

This faith has once for all (hapax) not simply formerly as the King James Version implies, but for all time been delivered. The meaning is that the truth is delivered for all time; it is a permanent deposit, it will never be superseded, amended or modified. As it not stands it is a

perfect, adequate, complete and inviolable deposit of truth, providing the means with which to confute the gainsayer, and resist the advocate of false doctrine.⁴

Seeing that the faith has been once and for all delivered, why would someone seek more? Could it be that there are those who are trying to circumvent God's way with their own? This is not new. Man has always sought other ways. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12). But, what man finds out, or figures out, is that he can't do it on his own. "O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Why is it so hard for man to seek God where He is? Will we ever learn to use the guidance He has given us? The Psalmist reminds us, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psa. 119:105).

Rather than seeking other ways, we would be wise to learn from Christ and simply be obedient, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

I believe that Jesus Christ is coming again and when He does the earth will be no more. It seems that this is the only thing that matters to some in religion. They want the specific date and time. They spend all of their time coming up with elaborate computations so they can pinpoint a time, when there is really no need. Christ said, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matt. 24:36). Why waste your time on something that only God knows, especially when He is not telling? It is just another attempt of man to satisfy the curiosity of man. These feeble attempts will do nothing to answer the questions of life.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

What the world needs to see is love. Christ states, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). This is why the subject of love is such a timely matter. This is a genuine love. Paul wrote, “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Rom. 12:9-10). The world is tired of hypocrisy. They are tired of being betrayed by those who claim to be Christians.

The heart of this parable points to the fact of what we are, not who we are. Do we talk about love but find it hard to show it? Our love is also to be fervent. Peter tells us, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22). Woods writes:

‘Fervently,’ from *ektenos*, intensely, describes an emotion that is vivid and forceful, earnest and pointed. *Ektenos* originally had a musical significance, referring to the drawing out, or stretching, of a string. It thus signified to draw out; to stretch. Children of God are not to love one another indifferently, or loosely, as an unstrung instrument, but with the full tension of heartstrings drawn out fully. Such love does indeed for a symphony, the harmony of which rises to heaven, and falls pleasingly on the ears of our heavenly Father.⁵

When Christ told the lawyer to “love thy neighbor as thyself” wasn’t this the point He was trying to get across? We could be tempted to not love fervently, especially if our heart is not in the matter. But if you love someone or something as your own self, there is not going to be

indifference there! This is the kind of love that the world doesn't understand, but they are looking for it.

What the world needs to see from us is the proper example. Matthew records Christ's command to glorify the Father by how we live our life:

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

In a world of darkness we are to shine. In a world of immorality we must be moral.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things (Phil. 4:8).

When the rest of the world has gone mad over divorce, Christians will shine as a beacon in the night; "One man for one woman, for life." In a time when fashions are patterned after the world, Christians will remain modest (cf. 1 Tim. 2:9). Yes, Christians will reflect the light of the Savior. Our manner of life should be an example to a world that has lost its direction. Paul described the world and explained how Christians should be different:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another,

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you
(Eph. 4:31-32).

We have to be in the world, but we don't have to be and shouldn't be of the world.

What the world needs to see are disciples who will continue in His Word. Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). What someone thinks of the Bible will determine what he or she does. When one views the Bible as God's inspired, inerrant and infallible Word, then they are going to be obedient to it. Paul said, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

If Christians don't see the importance of the Bible why would they point others to it? Christ said, "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Could it be that we have become ashamed of the Word of God? "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Could it also be that this is why we are having as many problems in the Church?

When a lack of respect for God's Word is shown then anything will be done. Without the Word of God, there is no standard of authority. The world is in disarray because the denominations show a lack of respect for the Word. This is why many are searching today for someone who will "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:2).

What the world needs to see is pure religion. James defined pure religion, “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (Jas. 1:27). Bottom line: this is what the world is seeking. In a time when Christians should be promoting pure religion many are seeking to give the church away. Others are simply trying to turn it into a denomination. God wants us hold the line.

Pure religion is to visit and maintain purity. To visit is “...to see, to inspect, with a view of assisting.”⁶ Visiting is more than just going by and saying “I hope you get to feeling better.” When we go by and see the yard needs cutting, mow it. When we see the dishes need to be washed, wash them. When we see children who need attention, give it unto them. This is not hard. We are to take care of their needs. It is not a matter of saying I hope you get what you need. James put it this way:

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone (Jas. 2:14-17).

Just saying and not doing is worthless! James also reminds us that pure religion is keeping yourself unspotted from the world. We are to separate ourselves from the corruption of the world. Paul warned:

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves

unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:12-18).

We must be careful of the lure of the world. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). The world is clamoring for pure religion. Will they find it in us?

May God grant us the courage and strength to give the world what it truly needs. Not some shallow substitute for religion, but pure religion.

Endnotes

1 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on the Gospel of John** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1981), p. 297.

2 H. Leo. Boles, **A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1974), p. 210.

3 Ibid, p. 224.

4 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter, John and Jude** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1976), p. 385.

5 Ibid, p. 50

6 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on the Epistle of James** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1976), p. 99

CHAPTER 13

Love Your Enemies

Bobby Liddell

Introduction

ON THE MOUNT (MATT. 5:1-2), Jesus preached the magnificent sermon, in which He proclaimed the characteristics of those who would be citizens of His kingdom. In it, He gave the beatitudes, as He taught His disciples (Matt. 5-7).

Robert R. Taylor, Jr. wrote of the Savior's teaching in that setting:

What fell from his lips that notable day contained in germ form the great spiritual and moral light that the remnant of Holy Writ details so delightfully. He sweeps, as it were, the knowledge and wisdom of past, present and future and eloquently embeds such into a marvelous discourse, the equal of which the world has never seen in parallel competition.¹

Roy Deaver penned:

In teaching to His disciples the great Sermon on the Mount the Lord was announcing that a **new order** was at hand. Several times in the course of the sermon he stressed "**Ye have heard that it was said...but I say unto you.**" This new order would include (1) a new man, and (2) a new righteousness.²

Eldred Stevens wrote:

This part of the Bible can be regarded as the very constitution of the Christian religion – because it is the most impressive summary of what it means to live a Christian life...Our attitude toward the gospel can probably be determined by the way that we face the teaching of Jesus found in the Sermon on the Mount.³

“Ye Have Heard”

In the text under consideration, (Matt. 5:43-48), Jesus addressed the Jews’ misunderstanding and misapplication of God’s instruction, which derived from what they had “heard” (Matt. 5:20; Matt. 5:43). An important lesson for us is that we must take care as to **what** we hear (Mark 4:24), and to **how** we hear (Luke 8:18). Likewise, we must consider the **source** of that spoken (cf. Matt. 26:65ff; 2 Pet. 3:16; John 12:4-6; 1 Kings 21, et al.). What they had “heard”; that is, “hate thine enemy,” was not from God.

McGarvey thought the Law of Moses inevitably taught hatred of one’s enemies.

“Love your neighbor as yourself” was an express precept of the law of Moses (Lev. xix. 18), while the sentiment “Hate thine enemy” is not found in the law as a precept. But the Jews were forbidden by law to make peace with the Canaanites (Ex. xxxiv. 11-16; Deut. xxiii. 6), and the bloody wars which by God’s own command they frequently waged against their enemies inevitably taught them to hate them. This was the feeling of their most pious men, and it found utterance even in their devotional hymns; *e.g.* Ps. cxxxix. 21, 22. It is a true representation of the law, therefore, in its practical working, that it taught hatred of one’s enemies. This is one of the evils of the Jewish dispensation, which, like the privilege of divorce at will, was to endure but for a time.⁴

On the other hand, Miller writes:

The final paragraph of chapter 5 pertains to the mixture of Mosaic legislation and tradition regarding treatment of enemies. The phrase “*love thy neighbor*” is found in Leviticus 19:18 but the formula “*hate thine enemy*” is not found in Scripture and was clearly a distortion of God’s Old Law to accommodate human inclination. In fact, kind treatment of enemies is *commanded* in the Old Testament (Exod. 23:4-5). It is true that God wanted the Jewish nation to execute righteous vengeance upon wicked, pagan societies at various points in history (cf. Rom. 13:1-7). But these civil decrees were not intended to endorse, sanction, or promote *hatred* of people out of personal bias.

On at least two separate occasions, Jesus Himself made clear that the original Mosaic injunctions to “*love thy neighbor*” meant that the child of God seek the welfare of everybody—including his enemy. On one occasion, He identified Leviticus 19:18 as the “*second*” greatest commandment of the Old Law (Matt. 22:39). On another occasion, He elaborates upon this command by relating the incident of the “*Good Samaritan*” and showing that our “*neighbor*” is *anyone*, regardless of race, who is in need of our assistance (Luke 10:25-27). Jesus deliberately selects a Samaritan – mortal enemy of the Jew – as the “*hero*” of this narrative in order to emphasize that loving one’s neighbor encompasses even enemies. Stephen epitomized the essence of Matthew 5:44.⁵

The Jews’ misconception, which they held in spite of God’s revealed will to the contrary (which will they should have known), validated, to them, their ungodly attitudes and actions toward those outside their sphere of acceptance. One author writes:

The strict *lex talionis*, or law of like for like, is established in such Old Testament passages as Exod. 21:24-25; Lev. 24:20 and Deut. 19:21. Jesus

admonishes a non-retaliatory disposition of personal relationships within a wise and reasonable framework. (Matt. 5:39-42). There would be legitimate ends beyond which this should not and could not go. Jewish interpretation of such Old Testament passages as Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 23:6 led them to advocate love for neighbors and hatred for enemies. Jesus demands love for, blessings in behalf of, doing good toward and prayers for enemies. This makes us like our heavenly Father (Matt. 5:43-45).⁶

Since the Jews considered all Gentiles, and even some of their own nation, as enemies (cf. 1 Thess. 2:14-16; Acts 10:34-11:18; John 4:9), they felt no responsibility to show love to anyone other than their fellow Jews, or, more specifically and exclusively, other than their friends. Such “love” was partial, imperfect, and in contrast to God’s love.

“Love Thy Neighbor”

The word neighbor (Matt. 5:43) indicates one who is near (in various ways), such as one of the same location (city or country), or of the same situation (such as social standing), or, more broadly, in reference to a fellow man in general; thus, one with whom there is some common bond (in our present understanding, more near than remote).

A “certain lawyer” answered Jesus’ question, “What is written in the law? how readest thou?” (Luke 10:25-26), with this answer: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself” (Luke 10:27).

Jesus replied: “Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:28). “But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?” (Luke 10:29; cf. Jas. 2:8; Gal. 5:14; Rom. 13:10; Matt. 22:39). Jesus used the occasion to teach him about love (Luke 10:27), compassion (Luke 10:33), and mercy (Luke 10:37), as he

told him of the “Good Samaritan,” and made the point that everyone is our neighbor.

Loving one close to us should be easy, and, in most cases, is. We generally, and naturally, gravitate toward those most like us—socially, financially, educationally, and ethnically. Hating an enemy also seems natural to the carnal, worldly man. The Word from God, concerning love, included those near (cf. Lev. 19:18: “love thy neighbor as thyself”), but also those with whom the Jews perceived little, or no, connection, and to whom they felt they could legitimately deny any obligation (even Edomites and Egyptians [Deut. 23:7]). Jesus affirmed the common practice of the Jews was according to what they had heard about loving their neighbors and hating their enemies. So far, the Jews would have been in complete agreement with what the Christ said.

“But I Say Unto You”

The Word who became flesh (John 1:1-14) did not come down from Heaven to declare as acceptable man’s misconceptions, but to do the will of the Father (John 6:38; John 9:4), and to show man the way of light and life—abundant life (John 10:10). He taught men a better way, a higher plane, as He called them from sin to salvation, from sorrow to joy, and from darkness to light. Those who would be the “salt of the earth,” and the “light of the world,” must do and teach the commandments, and must be more and do more; that is, must “exceed” in righteousness the scribes and Pharisees (Matt. 5:13-16; Matt. 5:19; Matt. 5:21).

“But I say unto you,” emphasized the significance of what Jesus said, contrasted with what men said. Important to our study, and to living the Christian life, with blessings now and eternally, is this fact: we must choose whether we will listen to the “King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15; Luke 6:46), to the Devil (cf.

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Gen. 3:4-5; John 8:44), or to mere, mortal men (Mark 6:3; Matt. 15:9). On the “mount of transfiguration,” the “voice out of the cloud” declared: “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him” (Matt. 17:5). God has “spoken unto us by his Son” (Heb. 1:1-4). Some would rather hear what men say, whether in words of condemnation of the Savior (Mark 15:13-14), or in praise of themselves (John 12:42-43), than to hear the words of Jesus. Whether we choose to listen to them, or not, the words of Christ will be that by which we are judged (John 12:48; 2 Cor. 5:10; Acts 17:30-31).

“Love Your Enemies”

Jesus said, “Love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44). “Notice that Jesus intensified self-giving love more. He not only stressed giving love away but giving it to the person you would least think of loving.”⁷ Love (*agapao*), in this passage, is love in a sense that is different from brotherly love, or physical love.

‘Love’ (in the sense of *agapao*) means basically: the will to do good to, or toward.... We must ‘will to do good toward’ all men, even toward our enemies. *Agapao* love considers all that is right and good and just and honorable.⁸

The love Jesus commands is not something we are to lock away, hoard, and keep only to ourselves, and a select few. The love we are to have for our enemies is not a reaction, in kind, to their attitudes toward us (in the sense of reciprocation [cf. 1 John 4:19]), but is a determined, obedient action, in keeping with the Lord’s command, in order to be like the Father, and in spite of the hatred of our enemies for us. “Love your enemies. This has been considered perhaps Christ’s most unique teaching—and most difficult commandment.”⁹ We do not fall into this kind of love, but we must push forward with it. “Love does

not seek a limit. It seeks outlets. Loving enemies examines our responsibilities and does not anticipate an enemy's reactions."¹⁰

“Love **your** enemies.” “Your” makes it personal. Jesus did not command men to love the enemies of their enemies, which would be far easier, but for each to love his own enemies. Who is an enemy? An enemy is one who is an antagonist or foe, whether one who actively hates us, or who is detestable in a passive sense. How are we to feel and act toward our enemies?

We are all too familiar with the natural impulses involved. When someone hits you – you strike back, and harder! For even a slight injury, the injured must have his revenge. There is a tendency to wrath, anger, retribution, retaliation.¹¹

Such is not the way of Jesus! What a great example He set in loving His enemies.

“Bless Them That Curse You”

Jesus said, we are to love our enemies—which is difficult enough. In addition, Jesus said, “Bless them”; that is, rather than denouncing with derogative speech, praise them (from *eulogeo*). The worldly response would be to be hateful, harsh, and vindictive, but we are called to a higher level of life (1 Pet. 3:9), and to a different spirit.

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto

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wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14-21).

An amazing statement, made about our Lord, occurs in 1 Peter 2:19-24:

For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Especially noteworthy is this: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again.” When Christ was reproached and vilified, He did not reply with railing. Was He a coward because He did not stoop to the level of angry, abusive accusers? No. He exercised self-control, and answered not, when an answer would have done no good. Rather, He allowed His adversaries to show what, and who, they really were, as they contradicted and refuted themselves (Mark 15:55-57). Was He sinfully silent because He did not respond in kind to the wickedness of their deceitful trickery? No.

“Neither was guile found in His mouth.” As our example (1 Pet. 2:21), Christ, who could have answered from omniscience, sometimes did not answer His accusers

at all (Isa. 53:7; Matt. 27:12; Matt. 27:14; John 19:9; Mark 15:5). Instead, He prayed for, desired the salvation of, did good to, suffered at the hands of, and died for His enemies.

Paul wrote, by inspiration, that we are not to have fellowship with a brother who is a “railer” (1 Cor. 5:11). Some demand an arbitrary standard of conduct and fellowship for others, yet will embrace a brother who is a railer, and even exalt him. Nonetheless, in their attempt to destroy others, such railers unwittingly make possible, for their intended victims, a blessing.

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you (Matt. 5:11-12).

Whom should we bless? Only those who bless us? Only those who are agreeable, or at least, who are not disagreeable? The Lord said we are to bless those who would pronounce a curse upon us, those who would invoke our demise, or destruction, those who would “curse” us! This is the acid test of self-denial, self-emptying submission to the will of the Lord (Rom. 6:16-18).

Yet, there is more: “Do good to them that hate you.”

“Do Good To Them That Hate You”

Doing good means: to cause to come about that which is morally good. Doing good requires **doing something**. Doing nothing is not doing good. David described the base devices of sinful enemies who sought information so they could spread an evil report. Sadly, these enemies used to be his “own familiar friend(s).”

Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish? And if he come to see

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me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it. All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me (Psa. 41:5-9).

Again, the question is: “To whom are we to do good?” To our friends only? No, to those who are like the ones described in Psalm 41, full of hatred toward us, and who actively display their loathing of us; to those who do all they can, without regard to the principles of courtesy, integrity, ethics, and honesty, to destroy us. Instead of our seeking to retaliate, to bring injury, or to cause to stumble, we are to do good (Prov. 25:21-22). What a challenge! What a test of faith! What an opportunity!

We cannot force others to love us, or not to hate us, but we can love them. Moreover, we can determine not to allow their enmity to rob us of our happiness, or salvation. Wheeler wrote: “We often think of loving an enemy as a puzzle to be solved, but this is a way of life to be emulated.”¹²

“Pray For Them”

“And,” there is still more. We are to make prayers to God on their behalf—not spiteful, angry, hateful prayers, or calling down fire from heaven upon them (Luke 9:54), but earnest supplications for the very ones who hate and despise us. We ought to pray to God about them, which may not be as difficult, but also pray for them (which is much more difficult)—pointedly and pleadingly. We are to pray for those who maliciously allege, falsely accuse, hatefully slander, and knowingly bear false witness in an attempt to bring harm to us, to ruin our reputations, to

encourage others to shun us, or who encourage others to join with them in their dishonest, unethical denunciations and persecutions of us. “You” is in the objective case, meaning that “you” are the object of their hatred and despise. With such a weighty charge upon us, we could surely use a good example of one who did as Jesus here commands.

Of Stephen, who was “full of faith and power,” and, “who did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8), doctor Luke wrote that wicked men:

...were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake...(and) suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. Then said the high priest, Are these things so? (Acts 6:10-7:1).

Following Stephen’s scriptural, stirring, and straight-forward sermon:

They were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul (Acts 7:54-48).

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While we might expect such hate-filled actions by the martyr's attackers, the most remarkable response recorded for our instruction and example comes from the one heinously attacked:

And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:59-60).

"Lay not this sin to their charge" is hardly the response we would think forthcoming from one being stoned to death by vile men, ungodly liars, and their false witnesses, but it was Stephen's response. This is the very kind of response Jesus demonstrated, and which He taught we should have.

"That...Persecute You"

"And," if the foregoing were not enough, our enemies, whom we are to love, to whom we are to do good, and for whom we are to pray, are those who **persecute us**.

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

Persecute comes from a word which indicates pursuit. Often, enemies are relentless in their attacks, becoming

obsessed in their pursuit (cf. 1 Sam. 23:25). Why would one persecute another? Hateful attacks may be the result of misguided conscience, such as in the case of Paul (Acts 8:1-3; Acts 23:1; but note also Gal. 1:23; 2 Cor. 11:23-33). Persecution, oftentimes, is a vain attempt to vindicate oneself, to prove a point or a position, to divert attention from one's own guilt, to reclaim a position, or standing, which he has lost, to punish a perceived detractor, to boost one's own wounded ego, or is just a sad example of one's uncontrolled anger and ungodly malice.

Many attacks are nothing more than calculated displays designed to parade the "strong stand" one is taking (supposedly) "for the Truth." The goal they seek to accomplish is of such importance to them, that they can with assumed impunity, **do wrong** to achieve it. Sadly, some men, perceiving an opportunity to make a name, or to secure an invitation, jump on the bandwagon, and ignorantly serve the evil purposes of others. Such attacks may deceive the uninformed, arouse unfounded fears, and lead astray the gullible, but discerning brethren know that one does not prove his point just because of his persistence. In other words, the one who shouts longest and loudest does not, by such conduct, convince the wise.

Even so, we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Wheeler noted: "When one doesn't love, he finds an excuse; when he loves, he finds a way."¹³

"Children Of Your Father"

Why should we love our enemies and do good to them? "That," so that; thus, by one's conduct accomplishing the intended objective, "ye may be the children of your Father" (Matt. 5:45). If we would be (become) the children (sons) of God, we must conduct ourselves as His children. Of whom should we desire to be children? Of the Father who is "in" (that is, He is located there) "heaven." God's

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dwelling place is above, not on the earth; therefore, He is **the** Heavenly Father (as different from earthly fathers).

Jesus, on another recorded occasion, confronted the disbelieving Jews with their problematic paternity. They claimed to be “Abraham’s seed” (John 8:33), and said, “Abraham is our father” (John 8:39). The Messiah replied:

If ye were Abraham’s children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father (John 8:39-41).

“Then said they to him, We be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God” (John 8:41). “Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me...Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:42-44).

To the prophet Jeremiah, God commanded that he bring the Rechabites into one of the chambers of the house of the Lord, and set wine before them. Jeremiah did so, and said to them, “Drink ye wine” (Jer. 35:1-5). “But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us, saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever” (Jer. 35:6). “Thus have we obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he hath charged us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, nor our daughters” (Jer. 35:8). God used this occasion to show the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem that they should obey their Father, God (Jer. 35:12-19).

Attitudes and actions demonstrate whose children we are, and if we are obedient to our father, or not. As children of God, we must conduct ourselves properly, in accordance with the commands of our Father, even toward our enemies. Why?

Because the Father, as the Creator, causes the rising of the sun, supplying the life-sustaining light upon, or over, the evil, those who are wicked and whose influences are harmful, **and** also upon the good, those who do well and whose influences are beneficial. Likewise, the Father, whose children we ought to be, sends rain, another essential element of life, upon the just, those who, in holiness, exercise righteousness, **and** upon the unjust, the unholy and unrighteous, whose opposition to good is without ethical or moral boundaries (Matt. 5:45).

God's love is impartial. So must our love be. He "so loved" the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16)! His Son so loved us that He died for us—while we were yet sinners! (Rom. 5:8-9; cf. Acts 2:22-23). Upon the cross, as His life was passing from Him, Jesus said, of His enemies: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). This is the kind of love we are to have—toward our enemies.

"More Than...The Publicans"

If our reason for loving others is only because they love us, then what reward do we have? When Jesus asks, "Do not even the publicans the same?" His question reflects the intensity of the negative thought. The publicans were tax collectors who were despised by the Jews because of their perception of the publicans as greedy, self-serving, treacherous traitors who abused the powers given them (or bought by them) from the Roman government to exact tax money from the Jews. By "the same," Jesus shows that even the hated publicans, who lacked compassion, or even concern, for the plight of the Jewish subjects of Rome, would love those who loved them.

Additionally, Jesus brings up another question: "And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" "If" they greeted

warmly; such as, with an embrace, only those who were brethren (literally, those who came from the same womb, but used figuratively of those with whom they had a close relationship), those alone, and no other, in what way did they exceed, in quantity or quality, what others did? Even the detested tax collectors would do the same (Matt. 5:47).

“Be Ye Therefore Perfect”

God’s children are to rise above the level of hate given by enemies, as well as the level of love extended by publicans. Thus, Jesus concluded by declaring that, as a consequence of correct attitudes and actions, as described above, we would be “perfect,” fully-grown, mature, or complete, even as the Heavenly Father lacks nothing (Matt. 5:48). Unlike those who love their friends, or those who reciprocate love to them, followers of Christ and children of God are to have perfect love—not for friends only, but even for enemies.

Is the opportunity to achieve maturity—perfection—a blessing? Or, should we curse God that enemies persecute us (cf. Acts 16:22-25). While none would desire enemies, having them can help us to learn to trust God more, and to draw closer to Him (Heb. 12:1-15; Rom. 8:35-39). A great Psalm of comfort, in such times, is Psalm 56:

Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee. In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. Shall they escape by iniquity? in thine anger cast down the people, O God. Thou tellest my wanderings:

put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book? When I cry unto thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. In God will I praise his word: in the LORD will I praise his word. In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee. For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

Oppressive enemies, fighting against us, wresting our words, thinking evil against us, hide, and lie in wait for our souls. What shall we do? “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me.” God will deliver us.

Conclusion

Stevens asks, “What are the reasons for obeying the command?”¹⁴ Negatively, he states, “We obey; not to turn them into friends,” nor, “...to rehabilitate them – help them psychologically.”¹⁵ He further states:

Positively, we obey to display to them the love of God. The object is to make them see themselves against the background of God’s love which they can see in you....This is a condition for being a child of God! The implication is that one is not a child of God unless he loves his enemies! ...Second, He says...this display of God’s love is so that you may be different and do more than others....The Christian is really different—something ‘special!’...Third, display the love of God that you may be perfect like your Father (Matt. 5:48). Perfect not in the absolute sense but there must be in us the ‘family likeness!’¹⁶

In the end, when enemies have falsely condemned us, wrongly convicted us, and have done all they can to carry out our execution, this truth still stands: “The Lord knoweth them that are his” (2 Tim. 2:19).

In the section entitled, “Why Should We Try To Live The Sermon On The Mount?” Stevens included these thoughts:

Because the more we try to practice it, the more we are blessed....Because it is the best means of evangelism....The world is looking for true Christians. If we were all truly practicing the Sermon...we would have to build a building three times this size next year!...If we lived the Sermon—men would shout, ‘I have found it! Here it is!’¹⁷

The benefits of loving our enemies are many. There is benefit to us, for we become more like the Father. There is benefit to our fellow man as we show the world, and our enemies, the true, impartial, *agape* love of God. There is benefit to the church, the beautiful bride of Christ, to which He is married (Eph. 5:23ff), the body of Christ, for which Christ died (Acts 20:28), and of which we, as Christians, are members (Col. 1:18; 1 Cor. 12:20).

Endnotes

1 Robert R. Taylor, Jr, “Background Of The Sermon On The Mount,” IN: **Sermon On The Mount**, eds. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (St. Louis, MO: Sain Pub., 1982), p. 3.

2 Roy Deaver, “The Law Of Love,” IN: **Sermon On The Mount**, eds. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (St. Louis, MO: Sain Publications, 1982), p. 147.

3 Eldred Stevens, **The Sermon On The Mount** (Dallas, TX: Eldred Stevens Pub., 1982), pp. 1-2.

4 J. W. McGarvey, **A Commentary on Matthew and Mark** (Delight, AR: Gospel Light Pub. Co., 1875), p. 59.

5 Dave Miller, “The Beatitudes; Salt and Light; Fulfillment of the Law; Sin in the Heart; Marriage; Oaths; Second Mile; Love,” IN: **The Book of Matthew**, eds. Garland Elkins and Thomas B. Warren (Pulaski, TN: Sain Pub. , 1988), p. 213.

6 Taylor, p. 7.

7 Bill Wheeler, “Loving Your Enemies,” IN: **Love One Another**, ed. Neale Pryor (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. House, 1981), p. 87.

- 8 Deaver, p. 149.
- 9 Stevens, p. 132.
- 10 Wheeler, p. 87.
- 11 Stevens, p. 119.
- 12 Wheeler, p. 87.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Stevens, p. 134.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., pp. 134-135.
- 17 Ibid., pp. 5-6.

CHAPTER 14

A Friend Loves At All Times

Curtis Cates

Introduction

F*RIENDSHIP IS ONE OF* the most beautiful and important concepts in the Bible, a term of deep endearment and love. To be friends' means that we trust one another, accept one another, bear the burden of one another, and cherish the companionship of one another. How critically vital it is to select our friends carefully, for such a relationship carries such influence as to cause us to develop either positively or negatively (1 Cor. 15:33)!

Everyone needs the blessings of friendship. Though one has the whole world, but no friends, he would not be termed genuinely happy. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up" (Eccl. 4:9-10). Countless millions are traveling the road of life in loneliness and despair; they have no one to help bear their burdens, cushion their pain, and share their joys (Gal. 6:2).

Two of the greatest needs of mankind are acceptance and a sense of belonging. These needs are not met by having enemies. "As with a sword in my bones, mine adversaries reproach me," wrote the Psalmist (Psa. 42:10). Paul had enemies (Gal. 4:16), as did Christ (Matt. 27:18). "A friend loveth at all times; And a brother is born for

adversity” (Prov. 17:17). “Man, that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1); a friend is born for that type adversity. The world abandons us in times of grief and sorrow; a friend steadies us with encouragement, support, and undying, unconditional love.

The theme of this study is to investigate the nature of true friendship under the following divisions: Friendship—Spurious or Genuine? The Friends of Job—Pretended or Authentic? Special attention will be given to an exegesis of Job 2:11-13 and to other statements as recorded in Job from which many lessons can be learned by the Christian.

Friendship—Spurious or Genuine?

In the first place, it is important that we study the beautiful word “friendship” and learn what constitutes friendship as God defines it. On one hand, is there such a thing as feigned, counterfeit friendship, and what is its foundation?

One, the Bible speaks of friendship based upon partiality. “To have respect of persons is not good; Neither that a man should transgress for a piece of bread” (Prov. 28:21). “Howbeit if ye fulfil the royal law, according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect of persons, ye commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors” (Jas. 2:8-9). Our Lord refused to practice partiality (Mark 12:14), and in God is no respect of persons (Acts 10:34-35). The Judaizers criticized Peter for not being a respecter of persons (Acts 11:1-3), and James stated, “My brethren, hold not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons” (Jas. 2:1; cf. Jas. 2:2-7).

Two, the Bible speaks of friendship based upon hypocrisy and betrayal. “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, Hath lifted up

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his heel against me” (Psa. 41:9). This despicable crime was fulfilled in Judas’ betrayal of Christ (John 13:18). Amasa was appointed by David to be captain of his army in the place of Joab (2 Sam. 19:13); Amasa was Joab’s cousin (2 Sam. 17:25). In an act of treachery, “Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab’s hand: so he smote him therewith in the body, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again [one time was sufficient to kill him—CAC]; and he died” (2 Sam. 20:9-10). Many are the people whose characters and/or lives have been destroyed in the house of a friend (Jas. 4:11), stabbed in the back (Mic. 7:5).

Three, the Bible speaks of friendship based upon money and/or prestige. “But the rich hath many friends” (Prov. 14:20); “Wealth addeth many friends, But the poor is separated from his friend” (Prov. 19:4). The multitudes followed the Lord, as long as He fed them:

Many will entreat the favor of the liberal man;
And every man is a friend to him that giveth
gifts. All the brethren of the poor do hate him:
How much more do his friends go far from him!
He pursueth them with words, but they are gone
(Prov. 19:6-7).

Many will be faithful as long as we can serve, be used by, benefit them; but, when this ceases, the friendship is in the past and is no longer even a memory to them. The friends of the prodigal son left when the money ran out; “no man gave unto him” (Luke 15:13-17). True friends do not say “What can my friend do to make me happy,” but rather, “What can I do to make my friend happy?” No genuine friendship can be built on selfishness, control, self-centeredness, and “using” others (Phil. 2:4).

Four, the Bible speaks of friendship based upon the world and its fleshly ways. “Ye adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?”

Whosoever therefore would be a friend of the world maketh himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4). We can acquire habits of the worldly. “Make no friendship with a man that is given to anger; And with a wrathful man thou shalt not go: Lest thou learn his ways, And get a snare to thy soul” (Prov. 22:24-25). In addition, a person given to anger will smite his own friend if he fails to submit to his domination.

On the other hand, is there such a thing as genuine friendship; and what is its foundation?

First, the Bible describes genuine friendship as based upon the abiding trust and trustworthiness of two persons, of their feeling safe and secure with each other. “He that maketh many friends hath it to his own destruction; But there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). He will not take advantage of you. “Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a shilling?” (Matt. 20:13).

Second, the Bible describes genuine friendship as based upon unfeigned love. “A friend loveth at all times” (Prov. 17:17). This “love” is not dependent upon your wealth, your influence, your circle of friends, or his or her being able to “use” you. A friend who truly loves does not seek to be competitive, or jealous, or resentful when good things happen to us: “Rejoice with them that rejoice; weep with them that weep” (Rom. 12:15). Naomi’s neighbors (friends) praised God when Ruth bore a son to Boaz, “for thy daughter-in-law, who loveth thee, who is better to thee than seven sons, hath borne him....And the women her neighbors gave it a name, Obed” (Ruth 4:13-17). Note the love of Ruth for Naomi:

Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee, for whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God, where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be

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buried: Jehovah do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me (Ruth 1:16-17).

Question: Did these two beautiful women have to reassure and to re-prove their deep love and undying commitment to each other as friends every day? Elizabeth's neighbors and kinsfolk rejoiced when John was born (Luke 1:57-58). Words of love and friendship must be demonstrated in action (Acts 9:36-42). If we would be friends, we must live the words of Paul:

Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

A classic, powerful example of friendship is that of Jonathan and David: "the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1). The son of King Saul, Jonathan gave precious gifts to David [having made a covenant together (1 Sam. 18:3-4)], warned David that his father was seeking to take his life (1 Sam. 19:2), pleaded with Saul to spare David's life (1 Sam. 19:3-7), vowed that whatever David needed he would provide (1 Sam. 20:4), and had to dodge Saul's spear when his father tried to take his life (1 Sam. 20:30-34). Why such commitment and sacrifice for David? "And Jonathan caused David to swear again, for the love that he had to him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul"; he did not like being separated from his beloved friend: "Tomorrow is the new moon: and thou wilt be missed, because thy seat will be empty" (1 Sam. 20:17-18). Again, Jonathan warned David to flee for his life:

...and they kissed one another, and wept one with another, until David exceeded. And Jonathan

said to David, Go in peace, forasmuch as we have sworn both of us in the name of Jehovah, saying, Jehovah shall be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed, forever (1 Sam. 20:41-42).

Later, when Saul out of jealousy was viciously pursuing David's life, Jonathan found David "and strengthened his hand in God. And he said unto him, Fear not; for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. And they two made a covenant before Jehovah" (1 Sam. 23:15-18). Now, that is true love and friendship. Jonathan was the son of the king, but he realized that David was the Lord's anointed. Jonathan had neither jealousy, envy, resentment, nor personal ambition, which would destroy this friendship.

Third, the Bible describes genuine friendship as based upon helping one another spiritually. Our Lord said on one occasion, "Go to thy house unto thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and how he had mercy on thee" (Mark 5:19). Christ knew that one devoted to Him can often have a profound influence for truth upon his or her friend. "Iron sharpeneth iron; So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend" (Prov. 27:17); "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (Prov. 27:6); "Oil and perfume rejoice the heart; So doth the sweetness of a man's friend that cometh of hearty counsel. Thine own friend and thy father's friend, forsake not" (Prov. 27:9-10).

Loving, tender, wise counsel in meekness from a faithful, trustworthy friend can save our souls; how very different that is from the proud, arrogant, boastful, vindictive, vicious, destructive words spread by a pseudo-friend! Henry Ford wrote, "My best friend is the one who brings out the best in me." A little child commented thus

when his little friend died, “It was easier to be good when she was around.”

Fourth, the Bible describes genuine friendship as based upon two persons who “sticketh closer than a brother” (Prov. 18:24). We love God “because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19); God’s love does not waver (Rom. 8:37-39), “for himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Such a friend has stability and dependability, not double-mindedness (Jas. 1:8). Such a friend was Onesiphorus, “who oft refreshed [Paul], and was not ashamed of my chain; but, when he was in Rome, he sought me diligently, and found me (the Lord grant unto him to find mercy of the Lord in that day); and in how many things he ministered at Ephesus, thou knowest very well” (2 Tim. 1:16-18). No doubt Onesiphorus was hazarding his own life in order to be a true, loyal friend to Paul; he had principle, courage, and reliability!

Fifth, the Bible describes genuine friendship as based upon intimacy and the ability to confide in one’s friend. How wonderful it is to feel very free to call upon a great friend in time of need and discuss private things with confidence that they will go no further! “He that goeth about as a tale-bearer revealeth secrets; But he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth a matter” (Prov. 11:13). A talebearer is an abomination to the Lord, and his punishment is severe. “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among they people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor: I am Jehovah” (Lev. 19:16).

Job declared, “If I have walked with falsehood, and my foot hath hastened to deceit,” he would have deserved the destruction which came to him (Job. 31:5-8). Paul commanded that the Thessalonians withdraw fellowship from the disorderly, the busybodies who were destroying the tranquility of the church with their mouths (2 Thess. 3:6-15);

how different a spirit from the “Lord of peace” (2 Thess. 3:16)! God hates “A false witness that uttereth lies, And he that soweth discord among brethren,” “And hands that shed innocent blood,” and “a lying tongue” (Prov. 6:16-19). This would include those who murder the reputations of good people. “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and railing be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other, even as God also in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:31-32).

To be a genuine friend, one must imitate the example of the worthy woman: “She openeth her mouth with wisdom; And the law of kindness is on her tongue” (Prov. 31:26). It is sad, though, that we sometimes expect others to forbear with our weaknesses while at the same time not being kind and gentle toward theirs (Matt. 7:3). And, where does the Golden Rule come in (Matt. 7:12)? Would we like to have our confidences and trust betrayed and vicious lies broadcast about us? There are certain ones in whom the Lord felt He could confide: “No longer do I call you servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I heard from my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

Sixth, the Bible describes genuine friendship as based upon being a comfort to one’s friend. For everyone, days of sorrow, difficulty, alarm, and betrayal come. “Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). Sorrow is universal; thus, everyone needs a friend(s). As the prodigal son learned the hard way, when he reached desperation and starvation, no one helped him; others just kicked him further down into the ditch. Beasts bite and devour one another. How blessed in such time one is to have a friend who is trustworthy, who will not flee in time of trouble and ridicule

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and laugh at one and stab him in the back. Enter the person who has the compassion and pity of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). In times of trouble, the identity of one's genuine friends is revealed; many people are friends only until one really needs a friend. An author unknown to this writer penned:

Try to name the five wealthiest people in the world. Name the last five winners of the Miss America competition. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.

Now name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.

The people you'll never forget are not the ones with the most credentials, the most money or the most rewards. The people who make a difference in your life are the ones who care. And they will live forever.

The apostle Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). And, comfort others, Paul did! Beaten and wounded, Paul and Silas saw "the brethren, they comforted them, and departed" (Acts 16:40). "As you know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children" (1 Thess. 2:11, KJV). "Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:18). "And be at peace among yourselves. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded [fainthearted, ASV], support the

weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men" (1 Thess. 5:13-15, KJV). Indeed, trouble brings out the worst in pseudo-friends and the best in genuine friends. The historical events in Job are a powerful illustration of the former in the three "friends" of Job, as well as the latter in Job himself. The way of the Lord is comfort, not conflict.

The Friends Of Job— Pretended Or Authentic?

In the second place, what can we learn from Job about friendship? The patriarch Job has been described by some as [except for Christ our Savior] the greatest sufferer and believer who ever lived. This perfect and upright man was falsely accused by Satan [of course God knew the truth about Job's character and obedience of faith]; he had been viciously deprived of his wealth; his children had been ruthlessly killed, he had been stricken with excruciating, persistent pain within a hair's breadth of his life; and his wife had been used by Satan to urge him to "renounce God, and die." For months (Job 7:3), he had undergone this indescribable grief and sorrow, yet "In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2:10).

Abandoned by his own brothers and sisters, deeply grieved over the foolishness of his wife, ridiculed by the scum of the earth, and seemingly abandoned by God [at least, God in the past had talked with him regularly, his being a patriarch], he sits in a garbage dump grieving with agony beyond description. His once healthy, handsome countenance has been so disfigured; and the deep sorrow, unrelenting pain, and reality of abandonment have so plowed furrows in his brow; and the ashes, maggots, erupting boils, sunken eyes, and constant temperature

have made his body so grotesque that he has become unrecognizable.

Job's Excited Expectations Of Comfort From His Friends

“Now when Job’s three friends heard of all this evil [the word “evil” is used in the Bible for such things as natural disasters, punishment for sin, suffering, et al.; the only intrinsic evil is sin itself, violation of God’s law—CAC] that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place: Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite; and they made an appointment together to come to bemoan him and to comfort him. And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his robe, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great” (Job 2:11-13).

Can you not hear Job exclaiming in his own spirit as they approach, “Here come help, solace, comfort, companionship, relief, understanding, sympathy, support! Oh look, my dear friends are weeping loudly, bemoaning my condition! Oh, they are coming into the garbage dump, and they are throwing ashes upon their heads! Look, my friends are feeling my grief and destruction, and they are mourning for seven days. What great solace for my soul they are!” Word had gotten to Job’s friends, and they had made an appointment to meet to mourn over Job’s destruction (Job 2:11) and to console him. **However**, such mourning and comfort were short-lived! It seems that they meant well when they went, but Job’s reaction did not fit into their erroneous, evil philosophy [which was Satan’s philosophy]. Indeed, like Job’s wife, Eliphaz, Bildad, and

Zophar would be motivated by Satan and speak for him—not for God. “Jehovah said to Eliphaz the Temanite [likely the oldest of the three—CAC], My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends; for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath” (Job 42:7). How many are the “friends” that have the wrong motivation and philosophy, very regretfully and sadly!

Poor brother Job poured out his deepest emotions to his friends, deploring the fact that he had ever been born, and later (since he had been born) expressing the strong longing that he could die and get out of his misery. Jeremiah, persecuted [in despair and despondency], mocked, and treated a laughing-stock for preaching God’s message, poured out the same emotion (Jer. 20:14-18).

When we obey God, it is inevitable that such periods of despondence will come; that is when we need “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother.” Anyone who denies that such despair will come is unrealistic and has not experienced life. Neither Christ nor His apostle Paul was on the mountain top all the time. In fact, when the Lord was in the Garden of Gethsemane, Paul records that Christ “offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death,” but He endured the cross for us (Heb. 5:7-9; Heb. 12:1-2); the apostles were not there for Him, for they were asleep! Would Job’s friends be there for him?

Yes, Job surely thought they would comfort him. Like the caravans going through the desert [they have run out of water] who went out of their regular highway hoping to find an oasis to save their lives, Job had hoped to find an oasis of comfort and sympathy in his friends. However, “They were put to shame because they had hoped; They came thither, and were confounded,” for the oasis had dried up, and they died (Job 6:18-20).

Now, knowing what we have learned about genuine friendship versus pretended friendship [conflict], upon

what basis would Job charge that they were sorry comforters?

First, his so-called friends falsely accused him of bringing this destruction upon himself by his grievous sin: “Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? Or where were the upright cut off?” (Job 4:7); only those who sin reap trouble (Job 4:8); God destroys them (Job 4:9). Of course, if one sows to sin, he reaps destruction (Gal. 6:7-8). However, that is a far cry from affirming that all who suffer are grievous sinners! The philosophy of the friends is: all suffering is punishment for sin; Job is suffering; therefore, Job is a sinner.

But, was Abel killed because he sinned (Gen. 4:1-8), or rather because he was righteous? Really, the battle in Job was not between Job and Satan but between God and Satan—and Job was the innocent sufferer in the middle. [Satan’s real attack was upon the scheme of redemption—the innocent Lamb of God, suffering for the guilty. Had Satan’s false charges been sustained, we would be of all men most miserable! Job is a type of Christ].

The still small voice [either seen by Eliphaz or fabricated] stated a lie—that God does not trust His servants, not even the righteous angels; one gets into grave danger when he starts supposing that some “spirit” told him a blatant contradiction to the Holy Scripture (Job 4:12-21).

Calling upon Job to repent, viciously representing God as causing this evil in order to correct Job; the truth is, Job is suffering **because of** his innocency (Job 5:18). Then, he implicitly affirms that every person who serves God will be blessed financially (Job 5:19-27). Is this not what Satan charged against Job at the first—that the motivation for Job’s obedience to God was his increased financial substance (Job 1:1-11)? Should we use that motivation to try to get people to obey God today? I think I remember that some of God’s greatest servants died in

poverty; the only perfect One died in poverty and even had to borrow a tomb in which to be buried! God's people are motivated out of unquenchable love for God and the desire for the superior spiritual blessings in Christ. Bildad made the same false charge in Job 8:6-7, using the same argumentation as Eliphaz. He even appealed to antiquity; well, antiquity was also wrong (Job 8:8-10).

Zophar in his viciousness not only implied that God destroyed Job because of his wickedness [actually Satan destroyed him because of his righteousness], but he charged "Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (Job 11:6). Some friends!

Second, his so-called friends charged that Job's children were killed because of their wickedness. Notice the despicable cruelty of Bildad: "If [for since] thy children have sinned against him, And he hath delivered them into the hand of their transgression" (Job 8:4). The truth is, Job's children were sons of God, and Job offered continual sacrifices for them all (Job 1:4-5). This was not only a ruthless, baseless charge against them, but he was also implying that Job's sacrifices [which pre-figured the sacrifice of God's only begotten sinless Lamb] did no good! Can one trust such a "friend"?

Third, the friends falsely accused Job of having forgotten and turned away from God. "So are the paths of all that forget God; And the hope of the godless man shall perish" (8:13). When such friends have no evidence, they manufacture it in their own minds. These groundless charges were that Job trusted in riches (Job 8:15), that he had a crafty, deceitful tongue (Job 15:5-7), that he got angry and lost his temper (Job 15:11-12), that he was "abominable and corrupt, A man that drinketh iniquity like water" (Job 15:16), that he rebelled against God through pride (Job 15:25), that he was a hypocrite (Job 15:31), that he was by God "rooted out of his own

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tent, wherein he trusted" (Job 18:14), that his wickedness caused the death of his own children (Job 18:15-18) and brought his destruction (Job 20:29), that his wickedness was "great" (Job 22:5), that he had "taken pledges of thy brother for nought, And stripped the naked of their clothing" (Job 22:6), that he had "not given water to the weary to drink" and had "withholden bread from the hungry," "sent widows away empty," and broken the arms of the orphan (Job 22:7-9). Thus, they charged, God had to destroy him (Job 22:10-11). In this connection, they perverted Job's language and position (Job 22:12-14). True friends would not do this, would they? When all of these false charges were being made, who came to Job's defense?

The huge, loving heart of God was deeply troubled and broken when His dear suffering servant was being so viciously maligned and mistreated, but His hands were tied. His great confidence in Job was certainly properly placed; He knew that Job would vindicate God's honor by disproving that God was unworthy of worship [as charged by Satan (Job 1:9-11)] and by disproving that man is such that only by being paid financially and otherwise rewarded would man worship and serve God [also as charged by Satan]. God knew that Job would "come forth as gold," because He knew Job (Job 23:10)! Only by allowing Job to be exposed to such bitter abuse, vicious lies, and dastardly assaults could God's honor be vindicated and the test won; else, Satan would cry foul.

The ultimate attack upon God and upon His character was the greatest miscarriage of justice ever perpetrated in the history of the world when Christ, the Son of God, was rejected by His people, betrayed by His own friend, falsely charged by the wicked Sanhedrin made up of God's own people, and mercilessly beaten, humiliated, and crucified at the hands of the heathen.

Fourth, indeed, Job was shamefully mistreated and attacked by his own friends. “They have gaped upon me with their mouth; They have smitten me upon the cheek reproachfully; they gather themselves together against me” (Job 16:10). Again, he painfully declares, “they whom I loved are turned against me” (Job 19:19). He pleaded for their mercy: “Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O ye my friends” (Job 19:21), but they showed no mercy! [God must have been grievously pained through all of this; His huge heart of immeasurable mercy and pity must have been cut deeply at such a sight]. How can we contemplate it without weeping? Read about the crucifixion of our Savior:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why are thou so far from helping me, and from
the words of my groaning?...They gape upon me
with their mouth, As a ravening and a roaring
lion. I am poured out like water, And all my bones
are out of joint: My heart is like wax; It is melted
within me. My strength is dried up like a
potsherd; And my tongue cleaveth to my jaws;
And thou hast brought me into the dust of death.
For dogs have compassed me: A company of evil-
doers have inclosed me; They pierced my hands
and my feet. I may count all my bones. They look
and stare upon me; They part my garments
among them, And upon my vesture do they cast
lots (Psa. 22:1; Psa. 22:13-18).

But, God had to allow it to happen for our salvation.

Job was innocent; how one is reminded of Christ when Job exclaimed that he was being destroyed “Although there is no violence in my family, And my prayer is pure” (Job 16:17)! In fact, throughout the “conflict” between Job and his friends, Job is in constant prayer to God; **but**, his friends, his false accusers, his antagonists **never** prayed to God! All they could do was lie and mock (Job 17:2), thus Job’s urgent prayer not to cover his innocent blood [shed because of his righteousness] until his next of kin, his Redeemer, could see it and vindicate his innocence (Job 16:17-22):

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He [Job thought it was God, actually Satan—CAC] hath put my brethren [brothers and sisters, and even his wife—CAC] far from me, And mine acquaintance are wholly estranged from me. My kinsfolk have failed, And my familiar friends have forsaken me. They that dwell in my house, and my maids, count me for a stranger: I am an alien in their sight....My breath is strange to my wife, And my supplication to the children of mine own mother. Even young children despise me; If I arise, they speak against me. All my familiar friends abhor me, And they whom I loved are turned against me (Job 19:13-19).

Our hearts should be deeply touched that such a righteous person could be so grossly mistreated by his own kin and friends. No one can be quite so cruel as a “friend” in whom we trusted, as was experienced by our Master: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa. 41:9). What had Christ done to Judas [to deserve Judas’ cowardly, treacherous perfidy] except to make Judas one of His own trusted twelve apostles? Nothing can cut us so deeply as the betrayal of a friend, and/or one for whom we have sacrificed much. My beloved late Bible professor, Eris B. Benson, (**The Bible Teaches**, VIII, 81) quoted Clarence Edward Macartney thus:

One one occasion Talleyrand, being told that a certain public officer was saying evil things against him, exclaimed, ‘That surprises me; I have never done him a favor.’

When the ministry of Robert Walpole fell, and a hostile vote was being taken in the House of Commons, Walpole, watching those who voted against him, said to the one who sat near him, ‘Young man, I will tell you the history of all these men as they come in: That fellow I saved from

the gallows. And that one, from starvation. This other one's son I promoted.'

The writer is caused to ponder what all Job had done for Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar before his deep sorrow, pain, abandonment, and destruction, which precipitated such a mean, unwarranted, vindictive, ruthless, sorry attack. Had the money or influence run out?

That was exactly what happened in the case of Judas: He held the money bag of the apostles and Christ, and thought that he himself would be the treasurer of the promised kingdom of Christ [supposing that it would be a physical kingdom rather than a spiritual kingdom]; no doubt he was greatly encouraged when Christ made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:29-45). But when Christ started talking of a cross rather than a crown (Matt. 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19; John 12:20-50), that was more than this lecherous, ambitious, penurious thief could take; therefore:

he went away, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might deliver him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he consented, and sought opportunity to deliver him unto them in the absence of the multitude (Luke 22:4-6).

At the time that Christ was sorrowing unto death, He surely could have used a loyal friend, but with Judas it was not to be! Whether such a thing happened in the case of the friends of Job, the Word seems not to reveal. It is certainly true, though, that Job suddenly went from a billionaire to a pauper; from the most highly respected judge at the gate to one ridiculed and scorned; and from a great benefactor and savior of the poor, the widows, the orphans, the mistreated, the falsely accused, and the naked (Job 29:7-25; Job 31:16-23, Job 31:31-32) to

one spat upon, afflicted, mocked—even by the very ones and the children of the ones whom he had helped so much (Job 30). Is there no one to help Job when he so desperately cries out and pleads out of pain and despair for a friend?

Fifth, the friends were devoid of compassion.

Job pleaded, “To him that is ready to faint kindness should be shown from his friend.” Why? “Else might he forsake” the Almighty (Job 6:14, margin). He had great hopes for comfort from them, but they were no comfort! “Ye see a terror, and are afraid” (Job 6:21); Job reminded them that he had not asked them to come or sought some present, or bribe, to influence anyone (Job 6:22-23). He did plead for a fair hearing from them, for valid argumentation, for mercy (Job 6:24-26); but, from those who were so unconcerned and so lacked the milk of human kindness that they “would cast lots upon the fatherless, And make merchandise of [their] friend,” and would not look Job in the eye (Job 6:27-28), **What could Job expect?** He pleaded with his friends not to persecute him any more, but to no avail (Job 19:22); had he not been persecuted enough? But, as brother Garland Elkins often has observed to the writer, “Satan has no pity.”

Conclusion

Thanks be to God that at the times when it seems all others have abandoned us—even our “friends,” He remaineth true! The only one in this heartbreaking story Who steadfastly maintained His relationship with Job was God; no, Job did not curse God, and God’s honor was vindicated. There was a time when Job “darkeneth counsel by words without wisdom” (Job 38:2) and yet he humbled himself and repented “in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6). Suffice it to say, Job was not required by God to disown his claim never to have committed the grievous sin that brought

this terrifying tragedy upon him, as Satan speaking through Job's friends had so vehemently charged.].

Thanks be to God that God provided a way for the "friends" to repent and to have their sins forgiven, through the blood sacrifice which pointed to the innocent blood shed on Calvary. Though not merited by Job who offered the sacrifice and prayed for the friends, the forgiveness in promise **was** merited by our Mediator, whom Job prefigured; "Jehovah accepted Job" (Job 42:7-9)—"him will I accept." Thanks be to God that, if I have betrayed my friend, I can receive the same mercy from God as Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar; I can repent and rectify matters, that God "deal not with [me] after [my] folly" (Job 42:8).

Thanks be to God that, if my friend has betrayed me and if my friend repents, I can [and must] forgive that betrayal and be blessed of the Lord. In Job's case, "Jehovah turned the captivity of Job, **when** he prayed for his friends" (Job 42:10). Christ states that principle explicitly thus: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15). After all of that persecution, how truly admirable is the mercy of Job toward his friends when **they** pleaded for mercy (cf. Matt. 5:7; Matt. 18:21-35; Jas. 2:13; et al.)!

Thanks be to God for His majestic book of Job and His tremendous revelation of Himself, "how that the Lord is full of pity, and merciful," full of mercy (Jas. 5:11)!

He hath not dealt with us after our sins, Nor rewarded us after our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is his lovingkindness toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, So far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, So Jehovah pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust" (Psa. 103:10-14).

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*Man's
Love
For His
Family*

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CHAPTER 15

Husbands, Love Your Wives

Keith Mosher, Sr.

Introduction

A *MARRIAGE AS GOD* would have it requires more than a ceremony ending with a kiss and a certified license. God requires that the couple engage in “non-stop nurturing, mutual attention, constant cooperation, joint effort, abundant affection, two-way communication, and a heaping helping of hard work.”¹ God designed marriage especially for companionship for “It is not good that the man be alone” (Gen. 2:18).² Traveling in the same direction requires being in the same vehicle and moving toward a loving relationship demands working together. There should **never** be any timeouts in a marriage; there should be mutual love and sharing without the neurosis of selfishness which ends in ugly disregard for the needs and rights of the other. (Psychologists have labeled the phenomenon of “I have to be me and he or she should meet **my** needs” as **arrogant individualism**.)

This essay deals with just one partner in the marriage relationship—the husband; and the effort here is to focus on Ephesians 5:25: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.” Brecheen wrote:

Selfishness is the greatest single enemy of a happy marriage. Selfishness is the root of all other sins: When **I** am the center of my world, I am out of place and my world is out of balance. The tremors that follow will not stop until they have destroyed something—my marriage, my job, my sanity.³

Husbands who **truly** love their wives will avoid selfishness as if it were the plague. Encouraging husbands to love their wives as God instructs requires: (1) Recognizing the need, (2) Realizing what the wife wants, (3) Reaching the goal of love (*agape*), (4) Raising one's intimacy level, and (5) Remaining faithful.

Recognizing The Need

Families are in crisis.⁴ Last year in Shelby County, Tennessee, where Memphis is located, 1600 cases of child abuse were reported along with 1000 instances of child-sexual abuse. (Some of those charged were members of churches of Christ.) In the United States one of every two new marriages ends in divorce and for the first time in the history of this nation more couples are living in sin together than are married.⁵

This family crisis is **not** unprecedented, but it is a significantly different problem. Biologically, children reach puberty five years earlier than one-hundred years ago; but, they are remaining as adolescents into their twenties.⁶ These latter are **learned** changes from environmental stimuli and mean that males want sex earlier but are not able to make adult decisions until around age twenty-five, for adulthood does not begin until one is responsible for self. Husbands must be able to **leave** their parents and **cleave** to their wives (Gen. 2:24). But, if males are remaining as youngsters into their mid-twenties there is no capacity for loving a wife **as** God requires, for such a love is submissive (Eph. 5:21), sacrificial (Eph. 5:25),

sanctifying (Eph. 5:26), and **sensitive** to the wife's needs (Eph. 5:28-29).

Without a truly loving husband in the home, families today rarely have mealtime together; rarely have daily Bible devotions; rarely play together; **and** rarely stay together. Intimacy is being lost, for both parents usually work and "day care" becomes the parent. (Television is a culprit here also.) Christian husbands have hard decisions to make in today's world. If one gets a job promotion will one have time for his family?; will the family have to move where no faithful congregation of God's people exists?; will there be any time for loving one's wife?

In 1890 only six percent of fourteen to seventeen year olds were in school and the rest were working. (Only three percent were in college then.) Today, ninety-three percent are in high school and sixty percent go on to college. (This latter statistic means that a husband must earn \$126,000.00 extra if he intends to put a child through four-years of college and further stress is placed on his efforts to give his wife the time necessary for real love.) Nye wrote:

How did we get off the track of things so that we now raise generation after generation of inadequately functioning individuals? What is the explanation when an apparently highly indulged and freely raised child turns out to be a highly manipulative, and generally maladjusted adult?⁷

The Biblical answer to Nye's questions (above) is that the husband (and maybe the wife, but she is not discussed here) is not practicing love, but rather is acting selfishly. His judgment is clouded as to what is right for life (Prov. 14:12). His wants are never satisfied (c.f. Eccl. 1:2-3). His way is not following God's (Jer. 10:23) and his way does not allow his wife to blossom as she should (Eph. 5:28-29; cf. Jas. 3:16). There is a need for real men to become really loving husbands.

Realizing What The Wife Wants

Men (and women) generally enter marriage with “storybook” expectations and limited training. Men, especially, are often unaware that they must **win** the affection, respect, love, and cooperation of the wife. From counseling hundreds of couples, this writer has observed that if one can get the husband to do his part **first**, it is much easier for the wife to carry out her responsibilities in the marriage; and she will usually do so with greater enthusiasm and commitment.

One of the major causes for a husband’s not knowing **how** to meet his wife’s needs is a lack of understanding about the general differences between men and women. The two sexes are **totally** opposites emotionally, mentally, and physically. These differences are so extreme that, without a concerted effort to understand them, it is nearly impossible to have a blessed marriage. In fact, God instructed Peter to write:

Likewise ye husbands, dwell with them (the wives, K.M.) according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered (1 Pet. 3:7).

Note that God insisted that the husband learn how to deal with a woman who is different in emotional need and physiology.

Emotionally, woman tends to be more emotional than man. Women build relationships; men build strong interests in activities. (Why are so many wives **not** interested in that football game, for example?) Men **tend** to be less interested in building relationships. (Who usually buys the books on marriage?) On the other hand, a woman’s natural inclination to develop emotional attachments can help the husband obey two, very important commandments; loving God and others.

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Matt. 22:36-40).

Because the woman, properly loved and appreciated by her husband, can help him in his relationship to God and man, God has designated her as a “helper suitable” (Gen. 2:18).

Husbands, think about it! Your wife has the God-given drive and ability to help you build meaningful relationships. A woman naturally becomes an intimate part of the people she knows and the things surrounding those acquaintances and she can lead a loving spouse to deeper relationships. (This latter emotion is the reason any criticisms of her house, children, or friends is so destructive to her. These latter are extensions of herself, but only incidentals to a male.) And so, husbands are forever asking, “What does she want from me anyway?”

A woman is frustrated, and often angered, by the constant maintenance required in a house. Resentment builds further when her husband refuses to help. Too many wives have a complaint something like:

Why can't I get him out here to help me? Why is his schedule so full that he can't even help me at home? I need rest and recreation too. When is it my turn to sit in front of the T.V.?⁸

Perhaps a working woman brings her work-related frustrations home, or some unrealistic expectation of “change” in him is **not** happening. Whatever the reasons, emotional frustration is a friction in many marriages.

Another reason wives become angry is from **fear** of losing financial security; she begins thinking, “What if” thoughts until the resentment explodes. Therefore, the

loving husband will learn to understand what frustrates her and recognize and ease her fears by: (1) helping to share her load, and (2) responding to her pain and fear by being the leader in matters financial.

Many wives relate that one of their most important needs is not to feel scrutinized and found wanting by their husbands.⁹ Such criticism is really verbal abuse, but often it is given as “constructive criticism;” a “why did you” kind of statement.¹⁰ The problem here is sourced in one of those major differences between men and women. He, as a loving husband, may often state how he compliments her on everything she **does**. What she wants is to be praised for what she **is**. If he silences her every time she states an opinion, she soon gets the idea that he does not think very much of her or her thoughts. Incompatibility here results from the husband’s arrogances in thinking that women are somehow inferior to men. Husbands who routinely downgrade their wives’ worries and fears are hurting the marriage. More importantly, such husbands are belittling the crowning glory of God’s creation. The following was written by a husband who did not value his wife until it was too late:

O God, where is my right side?
The one that I fell in love with when I was young.

O God, where is my right side?
The one I married, the one you said was bone of
my bone, flesh of my flesh.
(And I took for granted.)

O God, where is my right side?
The one who has the beautiful smile and laugh.
(I never told her every day.)

O God, where is my right side?
The one who wanted me to hold her hand and put
my arm around her.
(Not just as a prelude to sex.)

O God, where is my right side?
The one who loved you and prayed over our family.
(I didn't lift her up in prayer or jump for joy when I
felt her loving touch.)

O God, where is my right side?
The one who wanted to be a wife and mother.
(Not the breadwinner and part-time father who
handled the bills alone.)

O God, where is my right side?
The one who finally got tired and left.
(Because I couldn't or wouldn't be the man she
wanted me to be.)

O God, where is my right side?
I look for her in the now-empty recesses of my life.
(Not wanting to admit that I just didn't value her
the way You wanted me to.)

O God, where is my right side?
I know in my heart I found her once,
in the wife of my youth.
And I know I can't win her back without You.

So I pray for a second chance.
I hope that a spark of the love might blaze once more
Ten times greater than before
so that our lives together will be
A powerful witness for You. Amen.¹¹

A wife wants, from a husband who loves her, not only to be affirmed in what she does; but who she is. Her emotions must be heard **and** valued for being "different." Her dreams and desires are for him to **include** her in his world and for him to lead by serving God and her (Eph. 5:26).

Wives often ask their husbands if they still love them. The underlying questions are: "How do I look?" "How come we never spend time alone?" "Why are you gone so much?" "How about talking?" Somewhere along the way, he forgot what love really is. God's definition includes action and not being self-centered:

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Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Husbands—hunting, fishing, and buddies are fine—to an extent. But, when he heads out as she fixes dinner a message of non-love is sent. She feels unloved. He is just going fishing! His recreation can be a “turn-off” to her. And, even his work can become a competitor since he values his life by his career, and she may see his job as taking too much of his time since she does not **feel** he cares; even though he truly does or he would not work so hard! This dichotomy needs careful balancing by utilizing **special** dates and times together. Phillips asks:

Does the title “husband” or “father” seem as important a part of your identity as your title or job description at work? What would happen if you allowed your wife and family to become the fuel that lights your fire? What message are you communicating when you come home so late night after night? Why don’t you want to come home? Has your home, your family, your marriage, your wife become so less attractive to you? Does your wife feel discouraged, lonely, and abandoned, because she’s lost the best part of you to your work?¹²

Husbands, your wife **feels** loved by what you **do** and **say** to her. Try doing something **she** wants instead of what you want. Phillips insists that husbands should “Use ink on (their) schedule for her, and use pencil for everything else.”¹³

Next to God, the husband's number one priority is his wife (Gen. 2:24).

In terms of communication many anecdotes have been told about husbands. One is that when a husband says, "Of course I love you," he means that he is watching a ballgame! Of all the things a wife needs from a loving spouse, talking with and to her seems to lead the list. A divinely mated couple are a union between two **spirits** not merely two **creatures**. Robertson wrote that "the intention of that bond is to perfect the nature of both, by supplementing their deficiencies with the force of contrast; giving to each sex those excellencies...of the other."¹⁴

In the area of verbal usage, men and women differ. Smalley notes that she uses about 25,000 words daily while he uses about 10,000.¹⁵ Smalley comments that this difference of word usage is even seen in youngsters: "from the time they (his children, K.M.) first showed signs of life, they displayed the common differences between the sexes. It all began with how much more **noise** came from the boys and how many more **words** came from our daughter at the same age."¹⁶

When a husband fails to listen and/or talk, and communication breaks down, physical, psychological, and social stresses appear. She may feel stress and may have frequent headaches or stomach upsets. She may feel "put-down," cynical, and may attempt to "get even" by nagging. Too, she may become verbally aggressive or go to the other extreme of withdrawing.

Husbands ask, "What should I say?" If he can remember needs, feelings, and love (especially the latter); if he can remember how he won her in the first place; if he will share his work, feelings, fears, and dreams; he will communicate. As Phillips put it, the husband can

become a “MVP in the NFL.”¹⁷ That is, he will listen and learn about her **needs, feelings, and love.**

Reaching The Goal Of Love (*Agape*)

Years ago a wife told this author that she did not love her husband anymore. When it was suggested that she should learn to love him, she replied: “You can’t learn to love someone.” However, God said that a Christian could learn to love (1 Cor. 13:4-8; quoted above). A husband too, who practices the characteristics of *agape* as listed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 will “fall in love” with his wife. Contrary to the world’s idea that one should be “lovable” in order to attract another, God says that one should be “loving.” After all, does the Christian not love God who “first loved us” (1 John 4:19)?

Agape is long-suffering (1 Cor. 13:4a). The verb here is *makrothumei* and means “patience in respect of persons.”¹⁸ This divine love causes a husband to “love the unlovable” in his wife because such a love looks beyond the act to the person; that is (as seen above) it looks at what she **is**. *Agape* is kind (1 Cor. 13:4b). It is easy to kick a person when she is down, but it is kinder (*chreestotes*, not harsh in nature) to lift her in a sweet, gentle way. After all Christ’s yoke is *chreestos* or easy (Matt. 11:30). (Note the communication skills exemplified in practicing *agape*.)

Agape never envies (1 Cor. 13:4c). The word translated “envieth” is *zeeloi* which means “to seethe or to boil.” When the husband is self-centered this emotion reveals itself as jealousy.¹⁹ Note that *agape’s* non-involvement in jealousy and not boasting (1 Cor. 13:4d). A husband may not be the least bit jealous simply because he is smugly self-satisfied, but when one is completely self-centered he never considers the other.

Agape never behaves itself “unseemly” (1 Cor. 13:5a). The term, **unseemly**, is *ascheermenoi* meaning “ugly, shameful, and base.” The Greek *scheema* means **plan** (English, scheme); that is, the shape it takes before others. How does the husband act outwardly? A husband’s love ought to have a purifying quality. He should never ask of her to do that which degrades and coarsens, nor should he criticize cooking, weight, housework, etcetera until she withers.

Agape does not seek “her own” that is, it is **unselfish**. And, being unselfish, “is not easily provoked” (1 Cor. 13:5b). Zodhiates wrote:

Paul is not speaking of mere human types of affection such as romantic love (*eros*) here, but of *agape*, the love of God within the Christian. Romantic love is very easily provoked indeed. It is the victim of constant jealousy. It is really the love of one’s self, the love of being loved. But Christian love basically has nothing to do with the wish to be loved again and therefore nothing to do with jealousy. It seeks no return for its own sake, only for Christ’s sake. If there is no response to the Christian’s efforts for the benefit of others, he feels regret but no personal enmity.²⁰

Imagine a husband who actually serves his mate. He is practicing God’s love.

Agape is a love that “thinketh no evil” (1 Cor. 13:5c). The husband who loves his wife never cherishes memories of past grievances nor is he ready to believe the worst in his wife. There are at least seven ways a husband can hurt his mate and they are listed here even though there is a redundancy with items mentioned above, but these are too important not to mention repetitively.

1. By frequently criticizing her. What are some criticisms you hear?
2. By not paying attention to her words and ideas.
3. By not assuming enough of the household responsibilities.

4. By trying to “explain her hurts” rather than trying to understand her feelings and empathizing with them.

5. By acting as if he is superior and she is inferior.

6. By showing preference to others over her.

7. By not going out of his way to add romance to the marriage.

Agape never rejoices in iniquity (1 Cor. 13:6a). A husband’s love should be optimistic. Nothing is quite so dark that some cheering light could be shed on it. *Agape* asks questions, but then faces its responsibilities in light of the answers. The husband is **never** glad when things go wrong for his spouse, but he feels the deep need to help her in whatever the problem is, for *agape* rejoices in the truth. The censorious mind is a perilous one and disqualifies a man as a truly loving husband. Such a person thinks he is so much better than any other and does not seek to help.

Agape “beareth all things, believeth all things; hopeth all things; endureth all things” (1 Cor. 13:7). A husband’s love encompasses every perspective of the life of his wife. (It is possible that the Greek term *panta*, translated **all** has the sense of an adverb here and refers to the **manner** in which love acts.) A husband must provide a love shelter for every situation and not be selective in when he will love. His obligation is for better or worse. There is no marriage situation which divine love in a husband’s heart cannot face with full hope. Zodhiates related that:

A husband volunteered to accompany his wife on a shopping expedition to purchase dress goods for herself and the children. “This is pretty material,” said the husband, indicating a gay print. The wife fingered it briefly and said, “Too flimsy. It won’t wear well.” “Then how about this?” persisted the man, pointing to another bolt of cloth. “Strong enough,” said the wife, “but will it wash?” The husband in his inexperience was allowing himself to be influenced by eye appeal. The wife was looking for more lasting qualities.²¹

Note the differences in the husband and wife in the preceding quote. Only one thing, *agape*, can cross such a chasm of misunderstanding. *Agape* never fades, but it is a quality once learned and then, if placed in practice, makes better husbands and more cheerful wives.

Raising One's Intimacy Level

Generally, when first married, husbands and wives desire to “build a strong bridge to intimacy.”²² Smalley insists that such a “bridge” must have five “pillars.”²³

The first stanchion under the bridge of intimacy is a “warm blanket of love.”²⁴ This security, or commitment to a lifetime with one's spouse, means that whatever problems are faced the couple will work **together** to solve them. Love, as seen from 1 Corinthians 13 above, is a **decision**—not a “feeling.” Husbands might want to ask their wives just how secure they feel in the marriage. Then ask them what it would take to move closer to complete security.

The second pillar under girding intimacy is communication (noted above). And, “it is not until we understand **why** males and females think and speak so differently that we will begin to maximize communication.”²⁵ Men process all incoming information far differently from the way a woman does. Specifically, males before birth are subjected to brain-washing! That is, a bath of testosterone and other sex-related hormones wash over a baby boy's brain.²⁶ Thus, boys are forever left-brain oriented, but girls are more two-sided in their thinking. The left side of the brain is the analytical one. In the female, the right side or emotional one leads; but not in the male. He will analyze intimacy; she will feel it—or not.

Pillar number three is that the husband (or wife) creates romantic moods. Unexpected gifts, dates, notes, and poems all lead to intimacy. As Elizabeth Browning

wrote, so should the husband say, “how do I love thee? Let me count the ways.”²⁷ The greatest human lover of all time, Solomon, used words to woo his love. “Behold thou art fair my love; behold thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes” (S. of Sol. 1:15). Again Solomon wrote, “Behold thou art fair my love; behold thou art fair; thou hast doves’ eyes within thy locks (vail, K.M.): thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead” (S. of Sol. 4:1).

At **number four is the pillar** of a meaningful touch. A couple entered the author’s office and were yelling at each other. They were instructed to sit facing each other with their knees touching and with the holding of each other’s hands. They were told not to speak until the author returned which was not until an hour had passed. What is the point? Outside of the bedroom many wives must “look to children, relatives, or supportive friends to make up for a lack of meaningful touch from the husband.”²⁸ More than eighty percent of a woman’s desire to be touched is non-sexual. No wonder Peter insisted that husbands should “dwell with their wives according to knowledge” (1 Pet. 3:7).

The **fifth pillar** is building self-esteem in the partner. Women have great memories; even of past abuses. Unless these are taken care of, her self-worth suffers. Women seem to have a tougher battle with self-esteem and intimacy than men. When a woman “falls in love” and gives herself to a man, “she makes herself vulnerable.”²⁹ The woman believes in her “one true love,” but if the relationship fails, she feels rejected and unworthy. Self-worth (about her looks, weight) affects a woman’s response to intimacy far more than the man’s. The suggestion here is that husbands need to be **extremely** sensitive and gentle here. Her physiology does change after childbirth and age; but **she** does not change. Malachi wrote:

Yet ye say, Wherefore? Because the LORD hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth, against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. For the LORD, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the LORD of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that ye deal not treacherously (Mal. 2:14-16).

Remaining Faithful

In terms of the marriage vows, husbands are to love their wives until death. Interviews done with thousands of married couples indicate that those married who stay faithful over the years enjoy more intimacy, less conflict, and greater stability.³⁰ God's advice is correct: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24).

It is a fact that married folks live longer than singles. (One wag said that it just seemed longer!) And wives must be made aware that when health issues come, she will be **more** depressed than he and may withdraw into herself since she is losing some of that "warm blanket" of security. He, on the other hand, when illness arrives, is buffered by her nearness.

Faithful husbands, who have nurtured their wives, will experience a oneness known **only** to the loving. As an anonymous poet said:

The raw materials of love are yours-
Fond hearts, and lusty blood, and minds in tune:
And so, dear innocents, you think yourselves
Lovers full-blown.

Am I, because I own
Chisel, mallet and stone,
A sculptor? And must he
Who hears a skylark and can hold a pen
A poet be?

If neither's so, why then
You're not yet lovers. But in time to come
(If senses grow not dulled nor spirit dumb)
By constant exercise of skill and wit,
By patient toil and judgment exquisite
Of body, mind and heart,
You may, my innocents, fashion
This tenderness, this liking, and this passion
Into a work of Art.

Conclusion

The challenge for husbands to “love their wives” (Eph. 5:25a) carries with the command a sacrificial attitude. For husbands are to love their wives with the same intensity that Christ had when he allowed Himself to be sacrificed for His bride—the church (Eph. 5:25b). This hard work, however, bears much fruit.

The husband will recognize the need, realize what she really wants, reach the goal of *agape*, raise the level of intimacy, and remain faithful. The latter are not possible at all for a non-Christian husband to achieve for only a Christ-like character would make the effort.

Endnotes

1 Susan Downs, **If I Really Wanted to have a Great Marriage, I would...** (Tulsa, OK: River Oak Publishing, 1984), p. 3.

2 **The Holy Bible: King James Version** (World Publishers). All Scripture references are to this version unless otherwise specified.

3 Carl Brecheen and Paul Faulkner, **What Every Family Needs** (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing Co, 1979), p. 5.

4 The statistics are from the **Courier Journal**, Memphis' only daily paper.

- 5 www.bible.org/docs/NT/books.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Robert Nye, **Three Views of Man** (Monterey, CA: Brooks and Cole, 1975), pp. 134-135.
- 8 Holly Faith Phillips, **What Does She Want From Me Anyway?** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997), p. 38.
- 9 Ibid., p. 57.
- 10 Ibid., p. 58.
- 11 Ibid., Anonymous, pp. 67-68.
- 12 Ibid., pp. 101-102.
- 13 Ibid., p. 102.
- 14 F. W. Robertson, "Marriage," in **Counselor's Manual**, ed. Gary Collins (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984), p. 21.
- 15 Gary Smalley and John Trent, **The Language of Love** (Pomona, CA: Focus on the Family Publishing, 1988), p. 107.
- 16 Ibid. p. 33.
- 17 Phillips, **What Does She Want From Me Anyway?**
- 18 Since I teach Greek, I did not endnote all of the Greek definitions. The reader is referred to Bauer if necessary.
- 19 In the New Testament *zeeloi* can be good (zeal) or bad (jealous). The term, *phthonos*, **envy**, is always evil and is often connected to murder.
- 20 Spiros Zodhiates, **To Love Is To Live** (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 108.
- 21 Ibid., p. 321.
- 22 Smalley and Trent, **The Language of Love**, p. 107. This observation came from hundreds of interviews.
- 23 Ibid., p. 108.
- 24 Ibid.
- 25 Ibid., p. 30.
- 26 Ibid., p. 35.
- 27 From Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "**Songs of the Portugese.**"
- 28 Smalley and Trent, **The Language of Love**, p. 123.
- 29 Phillips, **What Does She Want From Me Anyway?**, p. 125.
- 30 www.gospelcom.net/105.

CHAPTER 16

Wives, Love Your Husbands

Caleb Campbell

Introduction

IT IS A PRIVILEGE to be able to be a part of this lectureship devoted to that which was the greatest commandment of the Old Testament and which is the supreme trait of the New. This lesson will focus specifically upon Titus 2:4 and the topic, **Wives, Love Your Husbands**. Attention will be given to the **Instruction, Implications, and Implementation** of the text.

The Instruction Of Titus 2:4

The book of Titus is an epistle of Paul the apostle to Titus, his “own son after the common faith” (Tit. 1:4). The letter was written both to encourage the evangelist and to strengthen the church in Crete. The latter purpose was to be accomplished, in part, by Titus courageously reminding the various elements of the congregation that God had placed special responsibilities upon each of them (Tit. 1:5-2:10). It is in that context that we find Paul’s inspired instruction for wives:

The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false

accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things; That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the Word of God be not blasphemed (Tit. 2:3-5).¹

There is a contrast in the text between “aged women” in verse 3 and “young women” in verse 4. “Aged women” is *presbutis*, the feminine form of *presbutes*, meaning “elderly...a senior.”² “Young women” is *neos*, meaning “new in respect of time.”³ The passage is somewhat similar to 1 Timothy 5:1-2, as distinctions are made between age groups within the church and responsibilities for each are provided. In this case, it is the older generation of sisters that is to teach the younger. “Teach” is *sophronizo* and means “to school them and encourage them in matters of good sense, wise discretion, and sober conduct.”⁴ One commentator gave this explanation of the duty: “Christian matrons are to assist the younger women in the discipline of family love, not of course as interfering busybodies, but as humble advisers on problems of married life.”⁵

“Love their husbands” is but one word in the Greek, *philandros*. As its root *philos* suggests, it is that love which is commonly referred to as one of affection, fondness, and companionship. Though it is not mentioned specifically, this love of togetherness was clearly a fundamental part of God’s original plan for marriage:

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone: I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found an

help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:18-25).

Though this love is often considered more personal or emotional in nature than *agape*, that does not mean it should be viewed as the flippant, in-love-one-minute out-of-love-the-next feeling that the world portrays as being “in love” with another. It is not silly or unbridled emotion. Rather, it is the same type of love that the Father has for His Son (John 5:20), Christ had for His close acquaintances (John 11:36), and that Christians are to add to their lives (2 Pet. 1:7). It is a deeply felt and highly responsible love; and, according to this text, is absolutely essential that wives possess toward their husbands.

Some Implications Of Titus 2:4

A Woman's Family Is Important

The world today is one which minimizes the importance of the home in a woman's life. Hollywood, the media, and society in general have painted a picture of a successful woman that, generally, has nothing to do with her family. To impress others, she needs to be the one with the greatest education, the highest income, and the most attention. It is technically possible for her to be married with children and still be successful, but it will always be **in spite of** those things rather than **in or because of** those things.

Titus 2:4 is a reminder to Christian ladies that though society may see it that way, God does not! Of the eight areas in which older sisters are to train the younger, at least four pertain directly to a woman's family life. Why? Because the home "is the sphere in which she reigns as queen."⁶ Aside from her allegiance to Christ, the home of a Christian lady should come first. Indeed, though she may be considered by some as a success in other areas of life, if she is negligent with her family, she has failed in her God-given purpose and priority! Consider these passages:

Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life... She riseth while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens... She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet... She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her (Prov. 31:10-28).

Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work...I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully (1 Tim. 5:9-14).

Proper Love For A Husband Is Something That Must Be Learned

Why would the aged women be told to train the young women in loving their husbands? For the same reason Christians were told by Peter to add to their faith, virtue,

knowledge, temperance, patience, and godliness both brotherly kindness (*philadelphia*) and love (*agape*)—**love is something that must be learned**. Contrary to popular thinking, it is not something one helplessly falls in and out of. Nor is it a switch that instinctively flips on once a marriage begins. A wife does not wake up the day after her honeymoon and suddenly possess the traits of a caring spouse any more than a new convert is miraculously infused with the necessary love for God, brethren, and lost souls. In both cases, there is an education and growing process that must occur for maturity to be reached (2 Pet. 1:5-12; 2 Pet. 3:18). That is the reason—shocking as it may seem to younger adults—that couples into their fourth, fifth, and sixth decades together can often truly say, “We love each other more now than we ever did while we were dating or when we were newlyweds!”

Lea Fowler wrote, “God, who knows all, knows that love is a decision, a learned art. We **learn** to love our husbands, our children, and our homes—maybe. We love ourselves by instinct, by nature.”⁷ Her words remind one of a song by Whitney Houston:

I believe that children are our future
Teach them well and let them lead the way
Show them all the beauty they possess inside
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier
Let the children's laughter remind us how we used
to be.

Everybody's searching for a hero
People need someone to look up to
I never found anyone who fulfilled my need
A lonely place to be and so I learned to depend on
me

I decided long ago never to walk in anyone's shadow
If I fail, if I succeed at least I'll live as I believe
No matter what they take from me,
they can't take away my dignity

Because the greatest love of all is happening to me
I found the greatest love of all inside of me
The greatest love of all is easy to achieve
**Learning to love yourself, it is the
greatest love of all.**⁸

How many marriages could be strengthened if husbands and wives actually learned to love **each other** instead of just following the lyrics above and focusing upon **themselves**! If the Bible indicates that individuals do well to fulfill the royal law, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,” in everyday life (Jas. 2:8), then how well would spouses do to obey that precept in marriage?

“But,” a wife says, “He is so rough around the edges. He can be so difficult.” There is no doubt that most, if not all, husbands can do far better than they currently do. But remember, dear wives, you **willingly** left father and mother to become one with him (Matt. 19:4-6). Remember also that you once had the choice of any number of gentlemen with whom to share your life, and you chose **him** to be your “beloved” (S. of Sol. 2:8). Surely, imperfect as any husband may be, he deserves a wife who will learn to love him! Most of the time, the more a husband feels appreciated by his wife, the more likely he is to go out of his way to reciprocate that love by being the greatest possible man and spouse that he could ever be.

God Has A Specific Plan For How Wives Can Learn To Love Their Husbands

Hugh Hefner, well-known founder and head of *Playboy*, once stated: “I learned about love from the movies.”⁹ Like Hefner, many ladies are learning to “love” from Hollywood. As they watch the beautiful actors and actresses glide across the screen, as they listen to powerful musical backgrounds, and as they are emotionally moved by expertly crafted storylines, women gradually fall for the nonsensical views of the entertainment industry—views,

incidentally, that have infiltrated the infected society as a whole. “Why would a woman ever subject herself to traditional marriage and be tied down in the home?” “Make sure that you are getting out of marriage what you want. If not, then move on and find it somewhere else.” “Don’t let that chauvinist try to be the head of your relationship. You do as much or as little as you feel like doing in your marriage.” It is no wonder that marital strife is rampant, divorce is out of control, and so many families are in shambles. Many young women are seeking marital advice in all the wrong places!

Titus 2:4 indicates it is the will of God that young women find training in older Christian women. One commentary states:

They are regarded as under the instruction and guidance of the aged women. In Ephesus, Timothy was exhorted to teach the younger women, but it is probably that the state of the Cretan community required that the instructions of Titus should be supplemented by the more practical and continuous guidance of the elderly women. The young women were to be schooled in their duties in a wise manner.¹⁰

Apparently, Crete was so wicked and tempting a place for young ladies that they needed personal attention and practical instruction from faithful sisters with far more experience than their own. It is amazing that nearly 2000 years later such is still the case. It is true that a young woman could pick up a Bible and receive all of the information she would ever need to be a faithful and loving wife (2 Tim. 3:16-17). She would, no doubt, receive tremendous benefit from reading many of the passages that deal directly with the responsibilities of wives. She would also be blessed as she studied the examples of women who enjoyed success in their marriages throughout history—women such as Sarah, Ruth, Hannah, and Mary.

That said, how encouraging would it also be for young women to see firsthand what it means to **live** these passages? How strengthening would it be to sit at the feet of women who had for years been faithful wives in the very same culture in which the younger ladies lived? Whether it is through the printed page, weekly congregational classes, or special programs such as lectureships and retreats, younger women need the guidance that the faithful, older generation can provide.

We spend hundreds of dollars yearly to have preachers hold special meetings for the church. It is hoped that they, too, will touch our souls and renew our minds and activate our service for the Lord. They do well! But why can't we be just as concerned to have our women taught by women? Women have more time, in time, to work for the Lord. A church with dedicated women will send out waves of good throughout the whole body of Christ. Husbands will be more loved, submitted to, and appreciated. Children will be more loved and more loveable, more obedient, more like Timothy when they are grown. Homes will be happier, lovelier, more hospitable, cleaner, more peaceful, and more anxious to be returned to. Women will mature faster, and the fruits of the Spirit will be more noticeable in their lives. God will be more glorified in His daughters.¹¹

It should be noted that there are two important factors that must be present if this Divine plan is to succeed. First, there must be experienced Christian ladies who are willing to teach. Rather than viewing their years as a burden and their experience as an excuse for retirement, older sisters in Christ need to realize the tremendous influence that they can be to ladies just starting out on their lives' journeys. Think of all the instances in the Word of God when novices benefited mightily from observing their more experienced peers. Before Joshua was a leader, he was privileged to be the

servant of Moses (Exod. 24:13). Before Samuel judged Israel, he grew up under the tutelage of Eli (1 Sam. 2:11). Prior to his own prophetic endeavors, Elisha ministered alongside Elijah (1 Kings 19:16-21). As a growing boy and young evangelist, Timothy had as examples both family members (2 Tim. 1:5) and the apostle Paul (Acts 16:1-5). These individuals all developed into effective and powerful servants of God. They had potential that was met because of the genuine care of those around them. How many young wives are there in the church that have that same potential and, like flowers before bloom, simply need a little sunshine, warmth, and rain to strengthen them?

The second key to God's plan is for younger ladies to have enough humility to accept and heed the instruction of the previous generation. Changes in society notwithstanding, there is still a place for respecting those further into life's journey than oneself (Lev. 19:32; 1 Tim. 5:1-3). Many young women who clamor for total independence and a desire to learn things for themselves would do well to remember the message of 1 Corinthians 10:1-12. Namely, the ones who refuse to learn from those that have gone before them are headed towards inevitable disaster both now and eternally. An older sister can only train if a younger sister is willing to learn!

In closing this point, listen again to Fowler:

I've heard young Christian women say, 'I don't want the older women teaching me.' And I've heard older women say, 'I don't want to teach the younger women. I've done my time.' However, I haven't heard God say, 'How would you ladies like for it to be done?'¹²

The Implementation Of Titus 2:4

It is clear at this point that love is something that must be appreciated, taught, and understood. The wife, who appreciates the need for loving her husband, has

Biblical and practical guidance for loving her husband, and thus comes to understand what it means to love her husband, is traveling on a path that will likely lead to a successful marriage. Ultimately, however, love is something that must be demonstrated and practiced; it is never fulfilled until it proves itself in action. Paul emphasized that which love **does** in a familiar passage:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth no; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

Consider now just a sampling of the many ways in which wives can demonstrate love for their husbands.

A Loving Wife Will Help Her Husband Go To Heaven

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the Word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quite spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands; Even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement (1 Pet. 3:1-6).

Though the passage above is dealing specifically with Christian ladies who were married to non-Christian

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husbands, it emphasizes a powerful principle for all wives: The single greatest thing you can do for your husband is help him go to heaven! As his mate for life, wives have an influence over their husbands that no other human beings will **ever** have. In fact, how that power is used will most certainly have a direct impact upon where he spends his eternity.

Some women, knowing that, have lived as wonderful examples alongside their husbands: Noah's wife was by his side in the ark of salvation (Gen. 7:7); Elisabeth lived just as righteously as her priestly husband, Zechariah (Luke 1:5-6); and Priscilla was active in the Lord's service with her husband, Aquila (Acts 18:24-28). On the other hand, Eve led her mate Adam into sin (Gen. 3:6-12), Lot's wife disobeyed God in an hour of family trial (Gen. 19:26), and the wife of Job told her husband to "curse God, and die" (Job 2:9).

A wife who loves her husband will lead him closer to God, not further from Him! She will support her husband's efforts to bring the family to congregational services, lead the family in private devotion, and establish moral rules appropriate for a house built upon Jesus Christ. When he fails in those areas as the head of the home, she will still lead her children in them while continually encouraging him and his spiritual life. She will seek his eternal welfare in all that she does because she loves him!

A Loving Wife Will Respect Her Husband

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it;

That He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the Word, That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. For this cause shall a man leave His father and mother, and shall be joined unto His wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband (Eph. 5:22-33).

Can the church claim to love Christ when she seeks her own will rather than His? When congregations show no reverence for His teachings as it pertains to salvation, worship, divorce, and other matters, is that a sign of their love for Him? Do Christians who live life their way rather than His have a right to speak of their love for Him? **Of course not!** According to Paul, the wife who fails to properly respect her husband is no different. If she loves him, she will reverence him even as the church does Christ.

A wife who loves her husband will never belittle him in public. She will not in anyway undermine his authority before their children. She will acknowledge that, yes, there will be disagreements, but “the final say is his on differing opinions...He is the ‘house-binder.’ He is the one whose labor supports the family. He is the lifeline for food, clothing, sustenance, love, and direction.”¹³ The challenge of leading a family in paths of righteousness in this generation can be demanding and consuming at times. That challenge, though, can become infinitely easier for a husband when his wife is committed to supporting him in his sincere efforts to lead the marriage and home.

A Loving Wife Will Do Her Best For Her Husband

And while he yet spake with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep: for she kept them. And it came to pass, when Jacob saw Rachel the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near, and rolled the stone from the well's mouth, and watered the flock of Laban and his mother's brother. And Jacob kissed Rachel, and lifted up his voice, and wept. And Jacob told Rachel that he was her father's brother, and that he was Rebekah's son: and she ran and told her father. And it came to pass, when Laban heard the tidings of Jacob his sister's son, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all these things. And Laban said to him, Surely thou art my bone and my flesh. And he abode with him the space of a month. And Laban said unto Jacob, Because thou art my brother, shouldest thou therefore serve me for nought? Tell me, what shall thy wages be? And Laban had two daughters: the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. Leah was tender eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favoured. And Jacob loved Rachel; and said, I will serve thee seven years for Rachel thy younger daughter. And Laban said, It is better that I give her to thee, than that I should give her to another man: abide with me. And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her (Gen. 29:9-20).

The passage above has been selected because it is a reminder of what love is like in the period of courtship. From the moment Jacob met Rachel, he was taken with her. He had no shame in openly showing his adoration for her. And he clearly was prepared to do anything to be with her. Someone says, "Husbands need that lesson today! They go out of their way to be generous, sensitive, and caring in the dating days, but once marriage begins that is the end of that!"

Such is often the case, and husbands should be ashamed for it (Eph. 5:25; 1 Pet. 3:7). But wives, is there not a lesson pertinent to this current discussion here as well? Qualities such as kindness, politeness, and courtesy should not end at the altar. Efforts to present oneself in a clean and attractive manner should not stop after the honeymoon. Spontaneous and meaningful ways of showing endearment should not gradually go by the wayside. If he deserved your best then, he surely deserves your best now!

A wife who loves her husband will seek to brighten his day with a cheerful disposition, not darken it with moodiness or grumpiness. A loving wife will strive to make their house a haven in which he longs to be, not a place from which he wants to escape. She will be an ear when he needs to speak, a comfort when he is down, a strength when he is weak. She will be the reason, quite often, that the marriage is as loving as it should be:

Men need to be loved and loved and loved. They many not even know they need it, but they do. [Wives] need to be touchers with our husbands and with our children. Touch often. *Someone has to start the touching*, and most times it is the wives. Babies can die without it and so can marriages.¹⁴

A Loving Wife Will Provide Sexual Fulfillment For Her Husband

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband. Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband: and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife. Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come

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together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency (1 Cor. 7:1-5).

An honest and open analysis of the differences between the genders will reveal that the need for sexual gratification is generally a stronger urge for men. This is borne out by general observation and experience, by true science and medicine, and is even intimated in Scripture. Where warnings against sexual immorality are addressed to a specific gender, they are generally (though not always) to the male class (Prov. 5-7; Matt. 5:28; Matt. 19:10-12).¹⁵

It should be understood by all women entering into marriage that this will be one of the primary elements of the relationship sought by the husband. The Scriptures teach that pleasure in the bed of marriage is not only something that is permissible (Heb. 13:4), but that it is something **owed** one's husband or wife (the clear implication of "due benevolence" and "defraud" in the text). When a wife wrongfully defrauds her husband of the sexual relationship, she is taking away a blessing he **wants** and an opportunity he **needs**. Further, she is increasing the likelihood of him destroying his family and losing his soul by seeking that fulfillment elsewhere. Would a wife who truly loved her husband do any of those things? Of course not. Consider the words of brother Robert Taylor:

The wife is commanded by Paul to render "due benevolence" toward her husband. Health permitting she should be sensitive to his needs and eager to respond lovingly. She cannot afford to ignore his needs. That would invite a serious rupture in their marital harmony. Sex was a part of his anticipated reward when he made her his at the marriage altar. She has no right to renege on this part of their marriage. That would encourage him to seek satisfaction with another and would be sin on his part. She would become an accessory to the sin because of her persistent refusals to meet his needs in this area.¹⁶

Conclusion

“The aged women likewise...that they may teach the young women...to love their husbands” (Tit. 2:3-4). May the Lord bless His people with older sisters who care enough to train and younger sisters who are wise enough to learn. May His Word ever move wives to grow in their love for their husbands, and husbands in their devotion to their wives.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture references and quotations are from the King James Version.

2 W. E. Vine, **Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words** (McLean: MacDonald), p. 45.

3 Ibid, p. 792.

4 Carl Spain, **The Letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus** (Abilene: ACU, 1970), p. 178.

5 Donald Guthrie, **The Pastoral Epistles** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 205.

6 Robert Taylor, **Christ in the Home** (Abilene: Quality, 1983), p. 111.

7 Lea Fowler, **Precious Are God's Plans** (Abilene: Quality, 1986), p. 1.

8 www.rickmd.com/greatest.htm, accessed on 4/1/07.

9 As quoted by Rhonda Handlon, **The Media on the Media**, www.family.org, accessed on 4/1/07.

10 T. Croskery, “Titus,” IN: **The Pulpit Commentary: Volume 21**, ed. Joseph Exell and H.D.M. Spence (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p.31.

11 Fowler, p. 7.

12 Ibid, p. 6.

13 Ibid, pp. 21-22.

14 Ibid, p. 23.

15 Jacob Campbell, **Adultery**, a sermon preached in Pensacola, FL, on 2/19/07.

16 Taylor, p. 107.

CHAPTER 17

If We Really Love Our Children...

Michael McDaniel

Introduction

EVERY OTHER YEAR FOR quite some time, I have been asked to be a participant on the POWER lectures. I have a great fondness for this congregation, for your elders, and for this lectureship. It always gives me great joy to be here with you. The Clarkes are dear friends of the McDaniels. Our love and prayers are with brother Clarke and his good family as well as with the family of brother Jones as they each make a transition in their work for the Lord.

When I was given a choice of topics, I selected this one not because I am an expert on parenting, but because as a parent, these are matters of which I need to be reminded on a daily basis. Perhaps many of us have feelings of inadequacy when it comes to being a parent. But the love that we should have for our children demands of us that we be the best parents we can possibly be.

As the Heavenly Father loves His children, so must we strive to love ours as godly parents. In Titus 2:4, Paul instructed the older women to “teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children.” The Greek word used here for love is not *agape* as we might think, but rather a word derived from *phileo*. This

Greek word communicates a fondness for one's children and in this context indicates maternal love. It means to care for them, to manage and monitor them, and to train them for time and eternity. We might think this type of love is instinctive, but the Bible says that people who leave the Lord lose natural affection (Rom. 1:31). There are many instances of this in our society relative to child abuse. It amounts to heartlessness for those who should be near and dear to them.

The breakdown of the home occurs when one or more of the family members have failed to demonstrate love for the others. As parents, we have an obligation to show our children that we love them. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). Let us notice (1) The Responsibilities Of Parental Love, (2) The Restraints Of Parental Love, and (3) The Rejection Of Parental Love.¹

The Responsibilities Of Parental Love

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Accept The Role Of Parent

Ephesians 6:4 states, "And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Observe that these remarks are addressed to fathers. This is the case because the father is vested with the authority for bringing the children up right, and he will ultimately be held responsible by God for the training of his children. This ties in with the fact that he is the head of the family as Paul had discussed in Ephesians 5:23, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." This text very specifically stresses the father's responsibility in the education of the children. Yet, we have entered into a place in America where the

father is often absent. There are several reasons why the father is absent. (1) Teenage girls often become pregnant, and the boy doesn't marry the girl. (2) Sometimes the teenage boy cannot support the family, and so he just leaves. (3) There is divorce, as about half of all new marriages end in divorce. (4) The father is often away from home on business for extended periods of time, and his responsibility is passed on to the mother. (5) Sometimes the father dies. (6) Then, sometimes, fathers are absent even when they are present because they do not involve themselves in the lives of their children.

Of course, while fathers are addressed specifically in our text, we realize that mothers also have an important place in the training of the child. Each is responsible to God, to their spouse, and to their children. Each spouse should share the responsibilities of parenthood. Proverbs 6:20 says, "My son, keep **thy father's commandment**, and forsake not **the law of thy mother**." Accepting the roles of parenthood and sharing their responsibilities can strengthen the bond of husband and wife as well as strengthen all family ties.

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Chasten Them

The word *nurture* in Ephesians 6:4 is from a Greek word which means the training of a child with all that would go along with it. The nurturing of a child, therefore, would involve instruction, discipline, correction and chastening.² It is interesting that the ASV of 1901 renders the phrase in our text, "Nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord." In fact, the word for nurture is translated as chastening in Hebrews 12:5, Hebrews 12:7, and Hebrews 12:8.

One of the principle factors in the unraveling of the fabric of American society is the general lack of respect

for duly constituted authority. The increasing rate of crime is directly related to disrespect for civil law and order. Public school teachers and administrators are sometimes terrorized by unruly students. Occasionally, we see lack of respect for authority in the church manifested in rebellion against godly elders and the denial of their God-given authority, in an intolerance for plain Bible teaching and preaching, and in ignoring the need for Bible authority in matters of faith and practice. These matters all relate to a common root—disrespect for authority. If children do not learn proper respect for authority in the home, it will be difficult for them to ever learn it! Proverbs 19:18 states, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.”

The word “love” should never be used to excuse a lack of discipline or correction. One commentator wrote, “I once heard a ‘modern mother’ say, ‘I love my child too much to spank her.’” In reality, she had a selfish love for herself and did not really love the child.³ In fact, chastening is an evidence of love. Proverbs 13:24 says, “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” The Hebrews writer wrote, “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6). The proper type of chastening produces respect (Heb. 12:9). The first opportunity children have to learn respect for authority is in their home and toward their parents. Parents actually represent God to their children in their very early years until parents can transfer that respect and devotion to God through teaching and guidance. If there is no parental respect in the child, it is most likely that there will be no respect for God when the child has become an adult. Brother James Boyd related the following:

One day I was in my truck with one of my grandsons. James had a little run-in with some

playmate, and evidently retaliated somewhat, which is unlike his character. But I told him that he was to return good for evil. He looked up at me and said with skepticism, 'Who made that rule?' I told him that was God's rule. Then he said, 'Well, that makes a difference!' He was showing signs of having learned to respect authority.⁴

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Give Them Admonition

The word *admonition* in Ephesians 6:4 literally means "a putting in mind."⁵ This word emphasizes training by word, while the word for nurture emphasizes training by act. While both involve words, the emphasis appears to be different. Parents have the great responsibility of instructing their children in the Lord's precepts. About faithful Abraham, God affirmed, "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen 18:19). The Hebrews were commanded, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deut. 6:6-7). Teaching one's children requires much time. "Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (Isa. 28:9-10).

Parents must realize that teachable, impressionable moments happen throughout the day. God inspired Moses to record, "And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in

time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Exod. 13:14). In Joshua 4:6, the memorial stones in the Jordan River were to be: “a sign among you, that when your children ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean ye by these stones? Then ye shall answer them, That the waters of Jordan were cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord; when it passed over Jordan, the waters of Jordan were cut off: and these stones shall be for a memorial unto the children of Israel for ever.” How important it is to teach the lessons of God when the time and opportunity comes!

Parents have the responsibility of putting their children in mind of God, His love, and His desire for the salvation of mankind. We should put them in mind to love the Godhead, to love the study of God’s Word, to love and obey the truth, to know the deceitfulness of sin, to know the power of the blood of Christ to save them, to know the essentiality and uniqueness of the church of Christ, to know the sinfulness of denominationalism, and to keep themselves pure.

Paul said to Timothy:

But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 3:14-15).

Notice the process that is identified here: (1) Knowledge, (2) Learning, (3) Assurance, and (4) Wisdom. Timothy first received knowledge. His family had taught him Scriptural facts. The second stage was learning. He learned those facts. Knowledge and learning then led to personal conviction of those things. He was fully assured that what

he had learned was the truth. That finally resulted in wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to apply Biblical principles to your everyday life.⁶ As parents, we should ask the question, "What are we putting into their minds?"

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Give Them Time

How we need to redeem the time as parents! Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." There is no substitute for investing our time and attention in our kids. The parent that is too busy to spend time with his children is too busy! When a parent is too busy to play, to talk, to help with problems, he is telling his children, "I love my work and my leisure time more than I love you." Yet, this response seems characteristic of more and more parents today.

Parents sometimes take their children for granted. It might seem to parents, when their children are small, that they will always be at home. This might cause some parents to take for granted the precious time they have with their children. It is said of Boswell, the famous biographer of Samuel Johnson, that he often referred to a special day in his childhood when his father took him fishing. The day was fixed in his adult mind, and he often reflected upon many of the things his father had taught him in the course of their fishing experience together. After having heard of that particular trip so often, it occurred to someone much later to check the journal that Boswell's father kept and determine what had been said about the fishing trip from the parental perspective. Turning to that date, the reader found only one sentence entered: "Gone fishing today with my son; a day wasted."⁷ It is a foolish mistake for parents to get so preoccupied that they waste the time they have to be with their children. Jochebed

was a mother who taught while she had the time. When Moses was come to years, he chose God because of the teaching he received from his mother. Parents, don't take your children for granted.

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Give Them Encouragement

In First Thessalonians 2:11, Paul said, "As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children." Three verbs are used by Paul to outline the function of the type of father to which Paul compared himself in a spiritual way. These verbs are "exhorted, comforted, and charged." Exhorted means to call to one's side, to encourage. This is what a father does with his children, for children are easily discouraged.

Next is the word comforted. This word carries the same idea of encouragement with the emphasis on activity, of not only making them feel better but urging them to do better. A father must not pamper a child; rather, he must encourage the child to go right back and try over again.

The third verb is the word charge. In verse twelve, we see the nature of Paul's charge as their father in the gospel. He charged them "that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory." Parents should charge their children to lead respectable, moral, and upright lives before God. We need more parents who are fathers and mothers of encouragement!

In Which House Do You Live

'I got two A's,' the small boy cried.
His voice was filled with glee.
His father bluntly asked,
'Why didn't you get three?'

'Mom, I've got the dishes done,'
The girl called from the door.
Her mother very calmly said,
'Did you sweep that kitchen floor?'

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'I've mowed the grass,' the boy said.
'And put the mower away.'
The father, looking at the rug,
'Didn't you clean off the clay?'

The children in the house next door
Seem happy and content.
The same thing happened over there,
But this is how it went.

'I got two A's,' the small boy cried.
His voice was filled with glee.
His father proudly said, 'That's great!
I'm glad you belong to me.'

'Mom, I've got the dishes done,'
The girl called from the door.
Her mother softly smiled and said,
'Each day I love you more.'

'I've mowed the grass,' the boy said.
'And put the mower away.'
His father answered with much joy,
'Son, you have made my day.'

Children deserve a little praise
For tasks they're asked to do;
If they're to lead a happy life
So much depends on you!

***If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Give Them
Patience***

Hebrews 10:36 says, "For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise." Patience is an integral part of a happy home. Just ask a parent of small children how valuable patience is. When you have to remind the kids three or four times to come to the supper table, to pick up their toys, and to make their beds, you will begin to appreciate the value of patience in rearing children. Parents often experience things broken, fallen, dropped, stepped on, and swallowed. It takes patience. And of our heavenly Father, 2 Peter 3:9 says He is

“longsuffering to us-ward.” We should be longsuffering like Him. 1 Corinthians 13:4 teaches that love “suffereth long.” May we be as longsuffering with our loving family as our loving God is with us.

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Manifest An Unfeigned Faith

Paul saw it in a home with which he was familiar. He spoke of three generations who possessed an unfeigned faith. “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Tim. 1:5). The Greek word for *unfeigned* means unhypocritical or unpretended. There was nothing phony about their faith. It was sincere and real. Eunice was greatly blessed because she had witnessed this unfeigned faith in the heart and life of her godly mother. Together, they instilled it into the heart of young Timothy (2 Tim. 3:14).

Everyone needs role models. Timothy had good role models in his mother and grandmother. Parents, and grandparents, gospel preachers, Bible teachers, elders, deacons, and faithful Christians were role models for many of us. Our godly parents and grandparents may be gone from earthly scenes, but the ideals they taught no doubt linger in our heart and life. We need moms who will be models to the boys and girls they have brought into the world. We need dads who will be a pattern to their children and later to precious grandchildren. We need older brothers and sisters who will be role models to their younger siblings. The Christian family is in a position to fill this vacuum. We need to translate God’s truth at home.

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Pray For Them

In Judges 13:8, “Then Manoah entreated the Lord, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst

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send come again unto us, and teach us what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.” Later in verse 12 he also said, “How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?” Notice the “us” and the “we” of the prayer. Also, notice the source to which they went. Truly, they desired to bring up Samson in the way “he should go” (Prov. 22:6). They were anxious to bring him up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). Greatly blessed is a child who grows up in a home of praying parents!

We need to pray for strength and wisdom as parents, and we need to pray that our children develop into strong servants of God. As parents, do you pray for the man or woman your daughter or son will one day marry? If not, why? It's never too early to start. If your children are yet small, do you pray for the day they will be of accountable age and mature enough to become Christians? How sad it is that many boys and girls away from home do not have any memories of mothers or fathers praying for them while at home.⁸

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Learn To Say “I Am Sorry”

As parents, we often make mistakes. It is difficult to admit our mistakes to our children. When we fail to admit our own mistakes, we often lead our children to practice (1) **denial**—“It wasn't my fault”; (2) **blame**—“She did it first”; or (3) **rationalization**—“He made me do it.” Our pride often gets in the way. But when we humbly confess our wrongs to a child and ask their forgiveness, our example of humility can have a profound impact on them. It can affirm to them that you are a person of integrity; it can enhance their respect for you, and strengthen your ability to be compassionate and forgiving towards them.

One of the most touching articles this writer has ever read is entitled, “My Son.” It was written by Gus Nichols and published in the **Gospel Advocate** on October 13, 1955. Brother Nichols confessed that one day he had been

in a very ill temperament and overly critical of his son. After the boy went to bed, he reflected upon the fact that he had been an unreasonable and overbearing father that day. What follows are the last paragraphs of his article.

Son, it was not that I did not love you, but because I expected too much of youth. I was foolishly trying to put a man's head upon a boy's shoulders. True, you are not perfect, but you are as fine and good mannered as the best of children around us, and that in spite of the fact that your little heart has starved for love and appreciation. You did not deserve my treatment of you, my son. Even when you feared what the outcome might be, you rushed to kiss me goodnight.

Son, I have come to kneel at your bedside, choking with emotion, and in deep repentance! I know you could not understand these things if I were to say them to you in your waking hours. But I have come to make free and full confession, and I have prayed to God to strengthen me in my high resolve and purpose of heart. Tomorrow, I will be a real daddy. I will chum with you, suffer with you, laugh and play with you, and help you to be happy. In the future, all correction and discipline shall be exercised in wisdom and sweetened by love. I will bite my tongue when impatient criticism seeks utterance. I will keep saying over and over in my mind, 'He is nothing but a mere child, and needs tender care.' Yes, I shall be cheerful and good natured, and keep my home happy. I will be the father I should be and let you, my little son, be my sweet little child. In the past I have asked entirely too much of you. God bless and keep you, my sweet little son, and make me more like you! I now kiss your little fingers and forehead. Good night! Good night, little son!⁹

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Spend And Be Spent For Them

In 2 Corinthians 12:14-15, Paul wrote:

Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I

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seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

In a context describing his refusal to take financial support from the church at Corinth so as not to be a burden to them, Paul uses a parenting illustration. He said, “for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children.” Paul was like a parent to the Corinthians, and they were like his children. He wanted to help them and support them in any way that he could because of that special relationship. He had begotten them through the gospel (1 Cor. 4:15).

Like a Father, Paul desired to demonstrate his love for his children. He said in verse 15, “I will very gladly spend and be spent for you.” He would gladly spend on their behalf, a price involving not only money, but energy, time, and strength. He would also be glad to spend himself on their behalf.

This is a manifestation of true sacrificial love. Love led to his devotion for them. Love caused Paul to seek the Corinthians rather than things, making him glad in exerting any expenditure for them. Paul did not hesitate to lay up for the Corinthians, just as the parent gives little thought to whether or not he should give himself for his child. As parents, we need to possess this kind of attitude—that we will spend and be spent for them.

The Restraints Of Parental Love

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Not Practice Parental Partiality Towards Them

Such was the case in the home of Isaac and Rebekah. Isaac favored Esau, and Rebekah favored Jacob (Gen. 25:28). This proved to be a source of trouble in their home.

For some reason, Jacob failed to learn this lesson from his parents and repeated the same mistake.

Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colors. And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him (Gen. 37:3-4).

Parental partiality is not fair to the one preferred because they may be led to feel they deserve preferred treatment from everyone. Partiality is not fair to the ones left out. Resentment may build up toward the favored sibling and toward the parent or parents guilty of showing partiality. This may grow to hatred and even violence could result as seen in the life of Joseph.¹⁰

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Not Practice Parental Permissiveness

Eli was a permissive parent with his own children. “Now the sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:12). They committed grievous sins concerning the sacrifices, caused men to abhor the “offering of the Lord” (1 Sam. 2:17), and committed immorality with women. “Now Eli was very old, and heard all that his sons did unto all Israel; and how they lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation” (1 Sam. 2:22). Eli gave them a mild rebuke (1 Sam. 2:23-25). However, God’s attitude toward Eli’s inexcusable permissiveness is seen in 1 Samuel 3:13, “For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and **he restrained them not.**”

“Three forms of authority over these sons met and merged in Eli; (1) He was their father, (2) He was their

priest, and (3) He was their judge. Domestic, religious, and civil authority converged in his hands, yet he used none of these powers to curb his wicked sons."¹¹

Many children never hear a “no” to their selfish demands. If your philosophy is sort of a “sit back and let it happen” style, listen to these words of Solomon in Proverbs 29:15, “The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child **left to himself** bringeth his mother to shame.”

Left in his room? No. Left alone on the playground at school? No. Left to fend for himself at college? No. The idea is: left untouched, left undisciplined, left without an authority figure to respect, left without affirmation and direction. Neglected! If we adopt a hands-off policy and “leave” our children to find their own way through the maze from childhood to adulthood, God’s word says they will bring us shame!¹²

Brother Robert Taylor wrote, “Permissive parents produce permissive children and permissiveness will wreck human society.”¹³

If We Really Love Our Children, We Will Not Practice Parental Provoking

Ephesians 6:4 states, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Ralph Earle says that a good translation of this would be “not to goad our children to resentment.”¹⁴ A companion passage is Colossians 3:21 which says, “Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.” In giving this command, the apostle Paul is dealing with two of man’s strongest emotions: wrath and discouragement, and causing these to occur.

A teenager once said, “My father would use a cannon to kill a mosquito! I either get away with murder, or get blamed for everything!” Many children have literally

counted the days until they could leave home because of fathers who were overbearing, extremely unrealistic, and who never compromised. We fathers can be extremely unrealistic. It does us good to remember that a .350 batting average is considered tops in the big leagues. That means the professional baseball player swings and misses well over half the times he's at the plate. Yet, .350 means that he's still considered the batting champ. In fact, if he keeps that up long enough, he's Hall of Fame bound. It sure is easy to set our expectations for our children out of reach, expecting them to bat a thousand.¹⁵

Discipline must be fair and consistent. Brother Guy N. Woods wrote:

Unreasonable restraint, unkind and intemperate rebukes, and anger on the part of parents leads to wrath on the part of children. Parents violate the apostle's instruction here, (1) when the requirement is impossible, absurd, or unnecessarily severe; (2) when the parent is angry and punishment is administered as an expression of such.¹⁶

Parents provoke their children and discourage them by saying one thing and doing another, by always blaming and never praising, by being inconsistent and unfair in discipline, by showing favoritism in the home, by making promises and not keeping them, by making light of problems which are important to the children, and by talking down to them, implying that they are second class persons. You have probably heard parents talk about their children in their presence as if they were not there, or were pieces of furniture. Simply having courtesy and practicing the golden rule would prevent parents from provoking their children to wrath by telling an embarrassing fact about them. "Even what we may think are expressions of love, such as protecting our children,

providing for their wishes, may be overindulgence, favoritism, and permissiveness—which embitters a child’s heart.”¹⁷

The Rejection of Parental Love

Brother James Boyd wrote:

It is not uncommon anymore to hear about a son who has become involved with drugs, a daughter who gets pregnant out of wedlock, young people who have quit the church, run away from home, or ruined their marriage. It seems all the efforts parents have made to rear their children have been wasted, and the children have turned against them and their training . . . Many people are severely hurting because of such things and are carrying great burdens in their hearts. They are very disappointed in their children. While they may take pride in them in some matters, such is not true in the most important matter, their loyalty to God. They tried, but are now hurting deeply with much joy being drained from their life. If this is your lot, you are not alone. That brings no comfort, but it is a fact. God also knows this hurt.¹⁸

A Misunderstood Passage

Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Many a parent has read this verse and reproached himself or herself bitterly due to the fact that his or her children have departed from the Lord’s way. For example, listen to this touching letter that brother Bobby Key once received:

The Bible says, ‘Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it’ (Prov. 22:6). We have done our best to train all of our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. All are faithful Christians with the exception of one son. Since he married, he has left the church. Have we

failed as parents? What did we do wrong? Does the verse teach that he will eventually repent?¹⁹

A General Principle, Rather Than An Unqualified Promise

It is true that Proverbs 22:6 places emphasis on parental responsibility. But, it is not the case that it excludes the personal responsibility which is the child's. The entire matter does not rest with the parent. We need to understand that fulfilling your parental responsibility does not deprive the child of his personal responsibility or power of choice. If one could not behave contrary to his rearing it would be impossible to convert a person who was reared in sin and then bring him to righteousness.

You cannot keep your children faithful. Even God does not keep His children faithful without the cooperation of the children. If God cannot do it, how do we expect to do it? When a parent has been at fault, he or she needs to repent and seek God's forgiveness. If the child has gone wrong, he or she needs to repent and come back to the right way. We cannot obey the gospel for them, nor, once they have obeyed, can we be faithful for them. They must keep themselves faithful. We may help them or hinder them. Some are faithful in spite of their parents, and some are unfaithful in spite of godly parents. The bottom line is that each child is answerable to God for himself or herself.

Many see this verse as a promise: "As long as you train your children right, you don't need to worry if at some point they sow their wild oats. Eventually, like the prodigal, they will come to their senses, repent, and come back to God." But as popular as that interpretation might be, it does not square up with Scripture. That verse doesn't say anything about a child repenting after he has departed. It does not square up with our experience either. Experience teaches us that wild oats can make for a painful harvest. Not all prodigals come home. All of us are

acquainted with cases where two children of the same family who received exactly the same teaching went in opposite directions morally and religiously on reaching maturity. Some children will receive the training which will affect their future life, and some will not. The mere fact that a child does not keep in the right way is not to be taken as conclusive evidence that the parents failed in their effort.

This passage contains a general principle. A child who has been trained according to the truth and who lives in harmony with that until he gets old, will not then abandon that which has become second nature to him. However, that is not an iron-clad rule. This rule has exceptions, otherwise, it would teach the impossibility of apostasy. The Scriptures do not teach that doctrine. If it were taught here that a child having been properly taught, could not fail to be faithful in adulthood, that would be in conflict with many passages which teach that anyone can fall from God's grace and be lost (1 Chron. 28:9; Rom. 11:22; Gal. 5:4).²⁰

The very writer of Proverbs 22:6, Solomon himself, is one such exception to this general rule. "For it came to pass, **when Solomon was old**, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:4). The sons of godly Samuel proved a disappointment to him (1 Sam. 8:1-5). Samson made many mistakes in spite of his godly parents.

God Himself was said to be Israel's parent, and yet the nation departed. Listen to Isaiah 1:2, "Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the Lord hath spoken, I have **nourished and brought up children**, and they have **rebelled** against me." Was it the case that the Lord did not fulfill His parental responsibility? Did He fail to train them properly? We know better.

Faithful parents need not feel guilt-ridden when they have done all they could to rear their child rightly, but in spite of such, they go astray. Though their hearts will break over a wayward child, parents must realize the child is responsible for his or her own choices and eternal destiny. Even though a child may receive the best training, the child is still a free moral agent.

Proverbs Can Have Exceptions

This verse (Prov. 22:6) is not an unequivocal promise. It is a proverb. It is a wise and good rule, but there are exceptions. Robert Burton (1577-1640) wrote, “No rule is so general which admits not some exception.”²¹ That we are dealing with a general principle can be illustrated by comparing this proverb with some others. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.” But what if you give a soft answer, and he still hits you. Was it the case that your answer was just not soft enough?²² Proverbs 16:7 says, “When a man’s ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.” But wait a minute. Didn’t God say of Jesus, “Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11)? Yet, His enemies crucified Him! That is a general rule, but there exceptions.²³

Some years ago at Drew Theological Seminary, as Dr. Samuel F. Upham lay dying, friends and relatives were gathered about the bed. The question arose as to whether he was still living or not. Someone advised, “Feel his feet. No one ever died with warm feet.” Dr. Upham opened an eye and said, “John Huss did.” [John Huss was burned at the stake]. Those were Upham’s last words— words which pointed out an exception to a general rule.²⁴ There are exceptions to Proverbs 22:6.

Pointers For Parents With Wayward Children

We realize that only repentance and the return of the child to the fold of God solves the problem. But what

should the parent do in the meantime? Consider the following suggestions:

(1) **Don't burn all bridges.** Try to maintain some contact so that you can be an influence for good.

(2) **If you are at fault as a parent, ask God to forgive you.** If you have been guilty of making matters worse since the child went astray, ask both the Lord and the child to forgive you. It is never wrong to admit our own errors.

(3) **Don't give up on your child.** In time, something may cause the child to repent. You may not live to see it. But, that good influence on them must be maintained.

(4) **Protect yourself.** Your child may play on your emotions and even promise many things in order to get what they want. Don't be a doormat. You might have to consider withdrawing financial help if you are giving it. You, as a child of God, cannot afford to finance the works of the Devil. You do not have the obligation to provide them a place to sin whether it be for drinking, adultery, or any other sin. Let them know that sinful behavior will not be permitted in your house.

(5) **Continue in prayer.** You should never cease to pray for a wayward child. Don't you know the father of the prodigal son was looking down the road, longing for the day when his son would return home? Pray.

(6) **Continue to love your child in the sense of always seeking their highest good.** Be ready to receive them back if they repent and return.

(7) **Keep God first.** If you don't, you will be as lost as your child is. God is the source of our strength, our hope, the anchor of our souls. We dare not let anyone, even those as close as our children, come between us and God. Our loyalty is to God before our loyalty to our children.²⁵

None of us are perfect parents. There are no perfect children either. When parents have loved their children

in such a way as to spend and be spent for them, and yet their children reject that love and rebel against God, such may not be the result of something they have or have not done as parents. While it does nothing to ease their grief, they should not be “burdened by implications of blame lashed like an albatross to their shoulders. Such may be self-imposed or inflicted by others. Let us not be unfair in our judgments without knowing all the circumstances in certain situations.”²⁶

Hopefully, something has been said that has been constructive to those who are parenting now and to those whose have suffered with children who have gone wrong. Let us learn to love our children as God loves us.

Endnotes

1 Some of the material in this manuscript is compiled from various sermons I have preached over the years. As a result, regrettably, I am uncertain as to the original source for portions of it. When I have been able to successfully find the source, that source has been given proper credit.

2 Ralph Earle, **Word Meanings In The New Testament** (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1977), p. 326.

3 Warren W. Wiersbe, **The Bible Exposition Commentary**, Vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), p. 265.

4 James W. Boyd, **O, Give Me A Home** (Pulaski, TN: Sain Pub., 2001), p. 106.

5 Earle, p. 326.

6 Charles R. Swindoll, **You And Your Child** (New York, NY: Bantam, 1984), p. 77.

7 Gordon MacDonald, **The Effective Father** (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1977), p. 103.

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9 Gus Nichols, “*My Son*,” **Weekly Newsletter**, Steve Higginbotham, ed. (Glasgow, KY: South Green Street Church of Christ, Sept. 18, 2000) p. 2.

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12 Charles R. Swindoll, **Growing Wise In Family Life** (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1988) p. 95.

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- 13 Taylor, p. 146.
- 14 Earle, p. 326.
- 15 Charles R. Swindoll, **The Finishing Touch** (Dallas, TX: Word, 1994), p. 283.
- 16 Guy N. Woods, **Adult Gospel Quarterly** (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, July 6, 1975), p. 43.
- 17 Charles R. Swindoll, **Becoming A People Of Grace - An Exposition of Ephesians** (Plano, TX: Insight for Living, 2001), p. 178.
- 18 Boyd, p. 307.
- 19 Bobby Key, "Training Children," **Four State Gospel News** (Neosho, MO: Don Deffenbaugh, Oct. 1995), p. 2.
- 20 Guy N. Woods, **Questions and Answers**, Vol. 1 (Henderson, TN: FHC, 1976), p. 193.
- 21 John Gipson, "The Exception," **Keynoter** (Little Rock, AR: Sixth and Izard Church of Christ, May 23, 2002), p. 2.
- 22 Cecil May, "Proverbs 22:6 is a Proverb," **Messenger** (Lakeland, FL: South Florida Avenue Church of Christ, June 28, 1995) p. 2.
- 23 Wayne Jackson, **Notes From The Margin Of My Bible**, Vol. 1 (Stockton, CA: Courier Pub., 1993), p. 95.
- 24 Gipson, p. 2.
- 25 Boyd, pp. 309-312.

CHAPTER 18

If We Really Love Our Parents...

Charles Box

Introduction

T^{HERE IS A GREAT} deal of mutual responsibility in a family. Parents are responsible to provide for the welfare of their children. They are to care for their physical and their spiritual needs. Parents must provide unconditional love for their children. Children must respond with loving respect for their parents. By inspiration of God Paul wrote, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." (1 Tim. 5:8).

Through the influence and example of parents, children are taught values and attitudes that have an effect on their entire earthly life and also on their eternity. Children must then respond to their parents in loving respect and obedience. Solomon wrote, "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." (Prov. 1:8). Children must understand how much their parents have loved and sacrificed for their sake.

The honor and respect that children have for their parents will cause them to understand their responsibility to care for their parents in their old age. "If your parents take care of you up to the time you cut your teeth, you take care of them when they lose theirs." This should be

an act of love just as the care given from parent to child was an act of love. Love, gratitude and respect are the defining attitudes that determine a child's reactions to their aging parents. A child grows under the loving care of his parents. Then when he is older and mature he will take care of his parents.

Children's Responsibility To Their Parents

The New Testament provides some simple, sober and serious statements concerning the responsibility of children toward their parents. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth" (Eph. 6:1-3).

Key words to remember are "Obey" and "Honor." Obviously children ought to obey their parents in right things. They must never obey wrong things! The teaching of obedience and honor for parents is not just for small children. There is no time limit on these commandments. You are not free from these simple commands though you may be married, have your own family and even be older yourself. Many children in the early years of adulthood make the tragic mistake of neglecting their parents.

The scribes and Pharisees were very guilty in that they tried to find ways to get around God's commandments to honor their parents.

But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have

ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:3-9).

These Jews preferred the inventions of men to the positive precepts of God. By the traditions of the elders, the Word of God was perverted, the worship was corrupted and many parents were dishonored. This dishonor for God and parents sounds very much like our day!

The goal of the parent should be to help the child grow into a decent person that is prepared to be a responsible citizen and a servant in God's kingdom. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Prov. 22:6). The training of the child, the honor and obedience to parents and the life lessons learned have an effect on generations yet unborn. In Psalm 78, Asaph wrote this profound truth:

Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and

IF WE REALLY LOVE OUR PARENTS...

whose spirit was not steadfast with God (Psa. 78:1-8).

As we speak of love and responsibility of children toward parents we are thinking of the attitude and respect that must be displayed toward parents. In the thundering tones of Mount Sinai, God said, "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." (Exod. 20:12). In the New Testament we read, "Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise." (Eph. 6:2). Honor is "Something done or given as a token of respect." This is the love children must have for their parents.

Those children that properly honor and respect their parents will be established in New Testament worship. They will practice kindness toward their parents and they will persevere in both faith and family. The child that learns to honor parents will likewise know how to respect others and to be a parent himself or herself! Parents have the responsibility to conduct their lives in such a way that they make it easy for their children to "arise up, and call them blessed" (Prov. 31:28).

As a child Jesus became the example of what it means to honor parents. After the events of being left in the Temple at the age of twelve the Bible says, "He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:51-52).

The key statement that reflects honor and respect is "He was subject unto them." Honoring and obeying your parents is a lifetime project and it will bless you for a lifetime and for eternity. Children must strictly obey the commands of their parents. They must serve and honor their parents with diligence; be upright of heart; hate falsehood; and be diligent in study; that will make it

possible for them to honor and respect the Heavenly Father.

Parents must demonstrate to their children what it means to honor the Lord and faithfully obey His Word. Children must then honor God and their parents by responding in similar faithful obedience. In Leviticus 19:32 we read, “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD.” This truth should certainly find application with children to their parents.

If We Really Love Our Parents We Will...

Youth is both an exciting and challenging time in life. This is a time of many changes and opportunities. At any age, life at its best is life lived for God. The book of Proverbs is rich in God’s teaching on how young people can love and honor their parents.

If we really love our parents we will be willing to respect their teachings and instructions. “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Prov. 1:8). Children who do not listen to their parents bring misery to themselves and to their parents.

If we really love our parents we will resist the company of sinners. “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not” (Prov. 1:10). It is still true—“evil companions corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33).

If we really love our parents we will receive wisdom and understanding. “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding” (Prov. 2:1-2). Through receiving God’s Word and treasuring His commandments you receive both wisdom and understanding.

If we really love our parents we will recognize the value of God's commandments and keep them.

"My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings. Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart"(Prov. 4:20-21). Obedience to God is a lesson young people should learn early in life. God blesses the obedient and punishes the disobedient.

If we really love our parents we will refrain from wickedness. Solomon said, "A wise son maketh a glad father: but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother. Treasures of wickedness profit nothing; but righteousness delivereth from death" (Prov. 10:1-2). Wickedness will be a grief to your parents. Wickedness profits nothing!

If we really love our parents we will refuse wine and strong drink. "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1). Alcohol and other drugs are working havoc among our young. Let all refuse that which destroys internally, externally and eternally.

If we really love our parents we will realize the value of a good name. "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Prov. 22:1). Your honesty and integrity will give you a "good name." Do nothing to destroy that name; work hard, pay your debts, be fair, be real!

If we really love our parents we will rule our own spirit. "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Prov. 25:28). If we do not control our spirit, temper, actions, and thoughts it will lead to our ruin.

If we really love our parents we will remember God while we are young.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no

pleasure in them; While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain (Eccl. 12:1-2).

Youth is the time our service to God should begin. Young people should believe, repent and be baptized into Christ. (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:15-16.) Young people should use their energies for God and not for Satan. Remember, the old must die and the young do die, so get ready!

If We Really Love Our Parents We Will Not...

If children really love their parents they will not be full of pride. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18).

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not fear men. "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe" (Prov. 29:25). This is that thing that we call peer pressure.

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not close their eyes to truth. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Prov. 12:15).

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not forsake the assemblies of the church. Attendance at the assemblies is a matter of conscience because God commanded it. The Hebrews writer shows that Christians should never be guilty of willfully forsaking the assembly (Heb. 10:24-31). Conscience would not allow this!

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching (Heb. 10:24-25).

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not involve themselves in the works of darkness. Christians are to:

[H]ave no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light (Eph. 5:11-13).

Children must not practice, condone or defend works of darkness. They must actively oppose those evil things. This is done through reproof of those things, avoiding involvement in them, refusing to consider their practice and taking no pleasure in the doing of them. Children must cause God's light to shine because the light makes manifest (known) works of darkness.

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not accept the theory of evolution. Not knowing the Scriptures has led many young people to the acceptance of evolution. "For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God" (Heb. 3:4). Houses are the result of planning and design. Houses do not happen by accident. God is the Designer, Planner, and Creator of the universe.

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not reject the Bible as God's Word. The words of the Bible are God's words given by the Holy Spirit. "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual" (1 Cor. 2:13). Peter said inspired men spoke God's word as the Holy Spirit moved them (2 Pet. 1:20-21). The Bible is God's eternal Word.

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not miss the theme of the Bible. Man has a sin problem.

Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear (Isa. 59:1-2).

God formed a plan to save man through the sacrifice of Jesus as Savior. The theme of the Bible is salvation through Jesus. There is salvation in no other (Acts 4:12).

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not be confused about the church. Jesus promised to build His church, and did build His one church. "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). The saved are added to Christ's church (Acts 2:47). The gospel of Christ produces the one body or church of Christ (Eph. 4:4). If children know the Scriptures they will be content to be united in God's one family, the church.

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not be led into denominationalism. Jesus desired and prayed for unity:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

The Bible pictures denominationalism as something bad:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you;

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but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul (1 Cor. 1:10-13)?

Young people will not deny the one God, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one hope, and one church!

If children love their parents and wish to honor them they will not reject baptism as essential to salvation. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). Denominations teach, "He that believeth is saved and is then baptized to join the church." The Bible teaches that baptism is the final step in becoming a Christian. "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal. 3:27).

If We Really Love Our Parents We Will Love Them When They Are Old

Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34-35).

This surely would have some application to children loving their aging parents. The scribes and Pharisees used their traditions to justify mistreatment of their aging parents (Matt. 15:3-9). Sadly, there are many of this same thinking still living today. Aging parents are mistreated when their children place them in a less than adequate care facility. For good or bad, most of us have parents. God expects us to care for them in the time of old age!

Our society is an aging society. Many in their 60's still have living parents. Many difficult decisions have to

be made. There are things like nursing homes, and living wills that must be dealt with by family members. Family has always been important for the passing on of faith and love. There is no greater proof of this than to observe how one treats his aging parents.

Under the Law of Moses a disobedient son was stoned.

If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, which will not obey the voice of his father, or the voice of his mother; and that, when they have chastened him, will not hearken unto them: Then shall his father and his mother lay hold on him, and bring him out unto the elders of his city, and unto the gate of his place; And they shall say unto the elders of his city, This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton, and a drunkard. And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear (Deut. 21:18-21).

What should happen to a child that disrespects or neglects their parents in old age? Personal holiness and respect for parents go hand in hand. "Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God" (Lev. 19:3).

The honor that we give our parents must go beyond words. It must be more than lip service. We must back up our words of honor with holy actions. Observe what God did when He honored someone that served Him faithfully. "He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (Psa. 91:15). Honor has the idea of taking care of someone and showing affection for them. Care for your family is a measure of the depth of your faith. "But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God" (1 Tim. 5:4).

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God's Divine order is that our fathers and mothers are to be honored, even if they are old. Giving loving care to your aging parents provides you an opportunity to show outsiders that Christianity really does work! Obviously many adjustments are necessary in our relationship with parents as we grow older. America is characterized by prejudice against the old. It cannot be so among God's people. A person's worth is not determined by their age!

Zechariah's lovely picture of the restored Jerusalem had elderly people sitting in streets watching children:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof (Zech. 8:4-5).

They were enjoying meaningful life, even in old age.

Hear God As He Speaks About Parents

"Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). This in no way indicates dishonor to father and mother.

"And that Jacob obeyed his father and his mother, and was gone to Padanaram" (Gen. 28:7). How wonderful when children honor and obey their father and mother!

"And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him" (Gen. 44:20). You may have now, or one day you might have, a father that is an old man. When that day comes honor your parents by seeing that that are loved and properly cared for!

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee" (Exod. 20:12). No commandment could be plainer.

“And he that smiteth his father, or his mother, shall be surely put to death” (Exod. 21:15). What of the one that dishonors parents in our day?

“And he that curseth his father, or his mother, shall surely be put to death” (Exod. 21:17). Some speak evil both to and of their parents. That is a terrible thing to answer for on the Day of Judgment.

Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee (Josh. 2:18).

This woman had the opportunity to save her parents physically. You may have the opportunity to bring spiritual salvation to your parents.

And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore (Ruth 2:11).

It might be necessary to leave parents to find the Lord. However, even then you will not forget to honor and respect them.

Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee (2 Sam. 19:37).

You will likely bury your parents one day. Live in such a way that you have no regrets when that time comes.

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“And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin” (1 Kings 22:52). Many godly parents have gone to an early grave because of the godless life of one of their children.

“And he wrought evil in the sight of the LORD; but not like his father, and like his mother: for he put away the image of Baal that his father had made” (2 Kings 3:2). Some have evil parents but they must still honor and care for them.

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the LORD will take me up” (Psa. 27:10). The Lord is even better to us than our earthly parents.

Solomon wrote, “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Prov. 1:8). “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother” (Prov. 6:20). “He that wasteth his father, and chaseth away his mother, is a son that causeth shame, and bringeth reproach” (Prov. 19:26).

Jesus said, “For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Matt. 10:35). You are to honor a parent that even opposes your Christianity.

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). We are to hate our parents only in the sense of loving them less than we love the Lord.

“Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother” (Luke 18:20). We do know the commandments from God concerning our parents. The question is, “Will we do it?” Therefore to him

that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (Jas. 4:17).

“Honour thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise” (Eph. 6:2).

Before It's Too Late

Before it's too late send your parents a letter to thank them for the sacrifices they made for you.

Before it's too late show your respect by spending time with them.

Before its too late honor your parents by expressing in words your love and appreciation for them.

Before it's too late be kind to your parents and see that all their needs are met!

Some Final Thoughts As Parents And Children Prepare For Eternity

Parents are taught:

And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:5-7).

Children are taught:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth (Eph. 6:1-3).

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Those parents and children that appreciate the sacrifice of Jesus must **believe in Him** (John 8:24), **repent of sins** (Acts 2:38), **confess Christ as Lord** (Rom. 10:9-10), and **be baptized into Christ for salvation**. (Rom. 6:3-4).

Do you, as a parent or a child, really want to be saved? Do you really want to go to heaven? Do you want to be an honor to God? If so, "Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16). Salvation is within your grasp. Do you really want to have eternal life? Do you really want the life that is in Christ Jesus? Tragic as it is may be many still remain in that state of sin and death that was brought into the world by Adam. Please obey God and have life through Christ before it is too late. Gather your family around you and say, "Let's go to heaven together." Then do what is necessary to do it!

*Man's
Love
For His
Spiritual
Family*

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CHAPTER 19

If We Really Love The Local Church...

Barry Grider

Introduction

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST is the most glorious institution on earth. It is the only place wherein we can glorify God (Eph. 3:21) and in this Divine institution we are saved (Acts 2:47). Jesus loved the church so much that “he gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). Therefore, if we love what Jesus loves, we will love the church.

Jesus is the head of the church universal. The church was forever in the mind of God (Eph. 3:10). The prophets wrote concerning it (Isa.2:2-4; Dan.2:44). During his preaching ministry, John the Baptist spoke that the church or kingdom was at hand (Matt. 3:2). Jesus stated that He would build the church:

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven (Matt. 16:17-19).

When Jesus died on the cross, He purchased the church. On the first Pentecost following our Lord's resurrection, the church was established. At that time, Peter convicted his audience that they were guilty of the crucifixion of Christ, but that God had raised Jesus from the dead and He was now seated at God's own right hand (Acts 2:32-33). Daniel had prophesied of Jesus's ascension when he stated:

I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed (Dan. 2:44).

What does Jesus do at God's right hand?

And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fullness of him that filleth all in all (Eph. 1:19-23).

While it is correct that Jesus died for and is the head of only one church, that church is composed of many congregations. These congregations are not the various denominational bodies in existence today, for God's people are to be of one mind and are to speak the same thing. Paul wrote:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Furthermore, Paul concluded that as brethren, we should “walk by the same rule” (Phil. 3:16). Peter admonished, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God.” While so many denominational bodies claim an allegiance to Christ, in reality they do not belong to Him because they teach contrary to His will. Jesus stated:

This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men (Matt. 15:8-9).

There are still many today who are sincerely religious, yet, do not respect the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). So, every congregation of the church of Christ, if it is indeed faithful to the founder and head, will be organized in a manner that is in harmony with the New Testament.

In the first century the church grew despite the intense persecution (Acts 8:4). There was a zeal for evangelism that is often lacking among God’s people today. Where the gospel was spread, there a congregation of the Lord’s people was established. Paul concluded the book of Romans by stating, “Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16:16). If we are to be pleasing to God in the 21st century, we must love the church universal, and be a faithful member of a local congregation wherein we can worship and serve God.

It is thrilling to read the Book of Acts and learn how the church grew in the first century. Luke records:

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And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily (Acts 16:4-5).

It ought to be the prayer of every faithful child of God that more and more congregations of the Lord's people be established. It is through the local congregation that God's great plan is carried forth. While discussing the local congregation several points come to mind.

First, one should understand the **authority** in the local congregation. Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18). Therefore, the headquarters for the church of Christ is in heaven. All authority is with Christ and He authorizes through His Word (2 Thess. 2:15). It is very important that Christians watch their language. We do not have "church of Christ" doctrine, but, rather, appeal to Bible doctrine when describing the church. Through the Word, Christ has authorized elders to oversee the local congregation (Acts 14:23; cf. Acts 20:28). Always a plurality of men, their qualifications are set forth in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They make decisions in all areas of expediency and judgment.

Second, one should understand the **autonomy** of the local congregation. Each one is self-governing. The idea of sending delegates to a national convention to make church law is completely foreign to the Scriptures. Each eldership oversees its own respective congregation and no more (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:7). While cooperation and respect ought to be shown to other congregations, it is fully realized that each congregation engages in its own respective works on behalf of the Master. This is how God intended for the church to accomplish His purpose.

Third, one should understand the **aim** of the local congregation. Remember the church is composed of the

saved. Members are saved that they may save others. Jesus stated the mission when He said, "A sower went out to sow his seed" (Luke 8:5). This is done as each congregation engages in evangelism, edification, and benevolent work.

Yet, many members of the church are uncommitted to the local congregation. Some seem to prefer to live on the periphery of Christianity observing others and letting others do their work. These members identify with the congregation and their name is placed on a membership roll, yet, they are never involved. Is this pleasing to God? Absolutely not! Such an attitude reflects a lack of love and appreciation for the Lord and His people.

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First, we will be faithful in attendance. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "Not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Heb. 10:25). When Christians assemble to worship, it is the responsibility of each member to be present. If we deliberately fail to assemble, not only do we fail to present a good example to others, we cannot fulfill the command to exhort and encourage each other.

Furthermore, Christ has promised to be with His people when they assemble (Heb. 2:12), so we miss Christ, as well. Thomas failed, for whatever reason, to be present when the Lord showed Himself to the rest of the disciples (John 20:24). As a result, he did not believe that Jesus had risen from the dead. Our faith will falter when we fail to assemble with the saints. Why attend Sunday night and Wednesday night services? The elders of a congregation have the responsibility of feeding the souls whom they oversee (Acts 20:28). This is done through the teaching of God's Word. We have the responsibility to be obedient to these shepherds (Heb. 13:17). Still, even without this command there should be in the heart

of every Christian a desire to be present with the saints to worship God and fellowship with one another. If every Christian attended the services like you, dear reader, would the doors be open?

Second, we will be sound in doctrine. Soundness indicates that which is healthy. As one who loves the local congregation do not be “carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14), but uphold and defend the truth. Do not push that which is strange or erroneous. Furthermore, it is not good for a congregation to be overwhelmed with those who push their own opinions or have secret agendas. Paul continued, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Tim. 2:23). Local congregations have been torn asunder because of false doctrine or of opinions being exalted above Scripture.

Third, we will pray. While teaching the disciples to pray, Jesus stated to pray as follows, “...thy kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10). Of course, the kingdom has now come (Col. 1:13), yet, we should still pray for the church. Dear Christian friend, when you pray, remember to pray for the leadership of the local congregation. Include the work of the deacons in your prayers. Remember your evangelist. Pray for the work of the congregation. Do not forget those in the congregation who are sick, homebound, or are grieving. Remembering to pray each day for your congregation will help you to be mindful of your own responsibilities and will increase your love for the church.

Fourth, we will be committed to every good work. Paul wrote, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Remember, God works through the local congregation. Visitation teams, evangelistic outreach, and teaching programs are a marvelous way for members to utilize their talents (cf. Matt. 25:14-30).

Fifth, we will maintain a good attitude. Paul admonishes:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:1-3).

God's people desire peace and unity. Yet some constantly gender strife in the local congregation. This may be the result of a craving for power. Diotrophes, for example, loved to have the preeminence (3 John 9). A great example, however, of a peacemaker and unifier is Barnabas, the son of consolation. When Saul (Paul) was converted and desired to "join himself to the disciples" in Jerusalem, the brethren were fearful of the former persecutor of the church.

But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:27).

What a great reconciler. Paul later said, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain" (2 Tim. 1:16). Dear Christian friend, do you refresh the brethren in your congregation? Are your brethren happy to see you and encouraged by your presence?

Sixth, we will not bring reproach upon the church. Paul wrote, "Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ" (Phil. 1:27). Our manner of life ought to be compelling evidence to others that Christianity is real. You are the only Bible some will ever read. When we are reckless in our manner of living we will do untold damage to the cause of Christ. The local church cannot reach out to others when its ranks are filled with the ungodly.

Seventh, we will give of our means. Paul instructed the church at Corinth:

Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

Those who love the local congregation will give liberally and cheerfully (2 Cor. 9:6-7). “Will a man rob God?” (Mal. 3:8). Many members today are refusing to give of their material wealth to the cause of Christ, even resenting sermons preached on the subject. The only way the work of the church can go forward is to open our wallets and give financially to the Lord. Remember, you cannot outgive God (Luke 6:38; Phil. 4:19).

Eighth, we will evangelize the lost. This is really the primary work of the church and every local congregation. We are not just a group of good people who get together for a good time. We have been commissioned by our Lord to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Mark 16:15). Jesus did not send angels to perform this task. Rather, He has called on the redeemed to tell others the good news of salvation. If we love the local church we build up the church by seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10). Baptizing souls into Christ is really the only way it can grow. Take a Bible tract to a friend, invite a neighbor to a gospel meeting, and establish home Bible studies. When you do, you demonstrate your love for the local church.

Ninth, we will develop our leadership skills. As mentioned earlier, each congregation of the church of Christ is overseen by Biblically qualified elders (these qualifications are set forth in 1 Tim. 3:1-7). However, leadership skills must be desired and developed. How often have you heard that the first qualification for an

elder is that he must desire the office? While this is true, please remember that a brother who loves the local congregation **should** desire it. The church is in a crisis today regarding her leadership. Many of the problems brought about by radicalism and liberalism could have been curtailed had there been strong leadership in congregations. Young men in the church should give serious thought to training themselves to be tomorrow's leaders, especially in the local church.

Tenth, we will be unashamed of the church of Christ. Remember Paul's words, "Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you" (Rom. 16:16). Many congregations today have removed the scriptural name **church of Christ** from their buildings. Their leadership evidently believes there is a stigma attached to that name. Yet, Peter said, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Let us never bring shame to the name of Christ and never be ashamed to wear His name.

Conclusion

Since Jesus died for the church and the saved are members of it, let us always build up the church and never tear it down. It would be worse to bring harm to the spiritual body of Jesus than to pierce the side of His physical body as did the soldier on Golgotha's hill. May I encourage every reader to investigate the church of Christ. One will find that a true church of Christ can be identified by New Testament teaching. Obey the gospel and become a member of the Lord's church. Likewise, work with a good and sound local congregation under the oversight of faithful elders. By following that which has been discussed in this lesson, you will demonstrate to the Lord and to others that you really do love the local church.

CHAPTER 20

Love One Another

Mike Vestal

Introduction

COULD IT BE THAT there are murderers in the church? Could “cold-blooded killers” exist in the body of Christ? Whether we are aware of the fact or not, 1 John 3:15 admits the possibility: “Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.” When love is lacking and unholy hatred abounds, it is murder! Without love, any hope of truly meaningful and lasting relationships deteriorates (cf. Matt. 22:36-40; Rom. 14:7-8). Scripture abounds with teaching to the effect that God’s people will be known for their love. Christians are to put on love (Col. 3:14). We are to follow after and to abound in it (1 Cor. 14:1; Phil. 1:9). Those who truly belong to God will continue in and be ever increasing in love (Heb. 13:1; 1 Thess. 3:12). Such love will be fervent and consistent (1 Pet. 4:8; Phil. 2:2). Christians should provoke one another to love (Heb. 10:24), and we should always love sincerely (2 Cor. 8:8; 1 Tim. 1:5).

For all the talk we hear about love these days, and for all the Word of God teaches about it, the sad fact is that the world as a whole and not a few of us as Christians have too often been guilty of lacking or missing love. Yes,

even Christians can be guilty of misunderstanding, misdirecting, and misapplying love! In a world full of wickedness and distorted views of love, how the body of Christ needs to show what love for God and for one another truly mean! People desperately need to see what Christianity is all about. If the love of Christ is not seen in those who belong to Him, it will not be seen at all.

John 13:34-35 is a passage rich with insight about how loving one another must be considered a vital aspect of genuine discipleship. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one for another." This passage reveals four matters about love that must ever be kept in mind if we are to glorify our God and reach out to the lost.

Loving One Another Is A Doctrinal Matter

The fact that love is **commanded** makes it a serious doctrinal matter. It is not optional but obligatory. There is no genuine discipleship without following the Master. Although the following distinctions should not be pressed, they do highlight something crucial about the nature of following Jesus. It can be said that continuing in God's Word is an **inward** view of discipleship (John 8:31-32). Bearing fruit to God's glory, both in godly character and in service (Gal. 5:22-23; Gal. 5:6; Gal. 5:13), might be regarded as an **upward** view of discipleship (John 15:7-8). And our Lord in John 13:34-35 makes it clear that loving one another is an **outward** view of discipleship. Surely the inward, upward, and outward aspects of discipleship are intended by God Himself to be interwoven. What God has joined together, let not man separate! We are not following our Lord as we ought when we fail to show Him love in an inward, upward, and outward way.

Such love is a “command” (John 15:17) or “commandment” (John 15:12; 1 John 3:23). It is part of the message Christians have heard from the beginning (1 John 3:11; 2 John 5). We have been “taught of God” to love one another (1 Thess. 4:9). “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). God’s love is a compelling reason to love one another. “Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is begotten of God, and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7).

Doctrinal correctness, without obedience to this command, amounts to just going through the motions (Eph. 4:15; 1 Tim. 1:5). Sadly, it is possible for one to be as straight as a gun barrel, but just as empty. Further, **talent and ability**, apart from compliance with this command, amount to nothing (cf. 1 Cor. 13:1-3). As essential as these things are to being Christians, it is a proper love for God and for others that causes us to love and respect His authoritative will and to utilize our talents to His glory (cf. Psa. 119:97; 1 Cor. 4:6; 1 Thess. 4:1-2; Phil. 1:21).

Not only is love commanded, but it is described as a “new” commandment. The Old Testament, in passages such as Leviticus 19:18 and Deuteronomy 6:5, spoke of the necessity of loving God with our whole being. Leviticus 19:18 further details that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. Jesus spoke of love for God and loving neighbor as we love ourselves as the great commandment (Matt. 22:36-40). How is the Lord’s command in John 13:34-35 “new”?

It is worthwhile to note that there are two Greek words for “new.” One has reference to **new in time** while the other has reference to **new in quality (fresh)**. Christ’s command is new in the sense of quality or freshness. This love for one another is based upon a new standard, “as I have loved you.” Oh, the beauty and challenge of such a love! Our love for one another is not silly, gullible or soft on sin any more than the Lord’s love for us is.

John 13:34-35 is a simple enough statement for a toddler to memorize, yet so profound that even the most mature of Christians will at times be humbled at how poorly comprehended and applied it has been to their lives. We are to love one another “as” or “because” Jesus loved us. The Lord gave us a command, but He also gave the **extent** and **reason** behind it!

Shining The Spotlight On John 15:9-13

It might be especially enlightening to consider John 15:9-13 as it emphasizes the command to love. Let’s notice four principles given in these verses concerning the nature of the closeness between Jesus and His followers and the command to love one another. In the first place, **note that as Jesus was the object of the Father’s love, so Christians are the object of Christ’s**. “As the Father loved Me, so I have loved you: continue ye in My love” (John 15:9). What an utterly amazing statement! Such should prompt us to marvel and reflect at the thought that we can be so privileged to enjoy something of the intimacy with Jesus that He enjoys with the Father.

In the second place, **consider that just as Jesus remained in the Father’s love by means of obedience, so Christians remain in Christ’s love by means of keeping the Lord’s commandments**. John 15:10 states, “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I kept My Father’s commandments, and abide in His love.” The Lord never “downplayed” the Father’s commandments during His time on earth, and we should not “downplay” His. We must not rest on our laurels, oblivious to the responsibilities which the enjoyment of Christ’s love brings (cf. John 14:15). Submission to the will of God and desire to please the Father characterized Jesus (cf. John 4:34; John 8:29), and these characteristics must belong to Christians too. Notice that one’s obedience in John 15:10 is not merely presented as the **evidence** of

love (as in John 14:15), but as the **means** for remaining in Christ's love (cf. Jude 21). This does not mean that we earn or merit His love; rather, it means that we properly respond to Christ's love in humble "obedience of faith" (Rom. 1:5; Rom. 16:25-26).

Third, **consider that just as Christ's supreme joy is in His relationship to the Father, so the Christian's supreme joy is in the relationship of loving obedience to Christ.** "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11). God's commandments always are for His glory and for our ultimate good! The obedience of Jesus to the Father was the obedience of deepest delight, joy and satisfaction. There is nothing Biblical and holy about being a cynical sourpuss! The joy Jesus promises to His disciples is the profound joy of humble, loving obedience (cf. 1 Pet. 1:8; 1 John 1:4; Psa. 16:11; Psa. 43:4; Psa. 63:3). A joyless Christian ought to be a contradiction in terms!

Fourth, **understand that just as Jesus in His expression of love is the ultimate "Friend," so we are to be true friends in the expression of our love to others.** Hear the words of John 15:12-13: "This is My commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Think of the love shown by Jesus in dying for sinners – for those who were God's enemies (Rom. 5:7-10). We are to love others, deserving or undeserving, lovely or unlovely, with the love of Christ. The command to love means among other things that love is not simply the victim of our emotions, but the servant of our will. Christ's love is a love of intelligence, purpose and heart that desires the welfare of the one loved. Our love to others as Christians must reflect these qualities as well.

Is it not remarkable that in Jesus' last extended discourse before the Cross (John 14-16) He spent so much

time exhorting His disciples to love one another and to obey His commands? Their purity in doctrine and in life, as well as the growth and the health of the Kingdom, would hinge on a proper application of both! Surely there is a lesson for the people of God today in this.

Loving One Another Is A Functional Matter

Love is functional in that it is **active**. This involves action and attitude. Love must not only have an **object**, but it must have an **objective** as well. It must not only have **degree** but it must have **direction** too. By its very nature, love is expressive and functional. “My little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth” (1 John 3:18). 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 deals both with what love will and will not do. “Dysfunction” is a buzzword of the day. We have dysfunctional individuals. We have dysfunctional families. And yes, we tragically have too many dysfunctional churches! (cf. Rev. 2:1-7; Rev. 3:1-6; Rev. 3:14-22).

True love functions in an active, orderly and timely way, and this has always been so. John 13:34-35 indicates that love is to function toward one another, cause others to know that Christians are His disciples, and to cause the Lord’s people to be motivated by God’s love for us. The apostle Peter wrote, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22). The word “fervently” in this verse means “stretched out.” It is a love that requires effort and energy.

A group of players playing the same sport do not necessarily constitute a team (in the best sense of the word). And the same point is applicable in the spiritual realm. If God’s people do not work and function together in love, unity and teamwork are definitely hindered, regardless of the great talents and abilities some might

possess. Christians are members of the same family and partakers of a heavenly calling (Heb. 3:1; 1 Tim. 3:15). Love is a matter of the heart. When the heart is right, things just look better. And the people of God should have the same type of heart. Our hearts should be pure (Matt. 5:8), meek (Matt. 11:28-30), contrite (Acts 2:37), tender (Eph. 4:32), good and honest (Luke 8:15), and assured (1 John 3:19).

Understanding the individual nature of Christianity does not mean that our functioning together as one is unnecessary or undesirable (Phil. 1:27; 1 Pet. 3:8; 1 Cor. 12:13-27). “Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

Shining The Spotlight On 1 Peter 4:8; Galatians 5:13; 1 Thessalonians 4:9

It is profitable to examine what these three passages say in particular regarding the functional nature of love. 1 Peter 4:8 says, “above all things being fervent in your love among yourselves; for love covereth a multitude of sins.” The word “fervent” in this verse speaks of constant, intense action. Love does not dishonor God by refusing to properly deal with transgressions when they occur (cf. Ps. 32:1; Luke 17:3-4; 1 Cor. 13:6; Jas. 5:19-20). However, real love refuses to gossip or to slander. It promotes Biblical peace and harmony (cf. 1 Thess. 5:14-15). The love spoken of in 1 Peter 4:8 also takes into consideration those who are weak (Rom. 14:1; Rom. 15:1-2). Where love is lacking, every word is viewed with suspicion, every action is prone to being misunderstood, and conflicts abound. There are those insults, slaps, and slights of others that all of us as Christians can and should simply “cover” for Christ’s sake. Wise indeed are those spiritually-minded enough to exercise godly judgment in how love functions both in hating sin and loving sinners. May we know both when to rebuke and when to overlook!

Galatians 5:13 says, “For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.” In this passage, Paul deals with two implications of the freedom we have in Christ. He first indicates that Christian freedom is **not** the freedom to indulge the flesh. We were slaves to sin but have been made free by Christ (John 8:31-36). Liberty in Christ is not to be used as a pretext for self-centeredness.

Paul goes on to state a second truth: Christian freedom is **not** freedom to exploit our neighbors but rather to serve them out of love. To exploit others not only is harmful to them but also inherently harmful to self (Gal. 5:15). Galatians 5:13 puts matters into excellent perspective regarding how love functions towards others. Christian freedom treats others as persons to be served and loved, not as things to be used and abused as a means of ministering to our own sinful desires.

God’s Word says in 1 Thessalonians 4:9, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” The immediate context of this verse is 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, a context that deals with the fact that a loving, godly lifestyle will not only benefit other Christians, but will also bring to the watching eyes of the lost a wonderful picture of the life they could have in Christ. Brotherly love must function because we are the “family of faith”—we are blood kin! (Eph. 2:19; Acts 20:28). When brotherly love properly functions, there will be an impact upon others.

Loving One Another Is A Relational Matter

This is so because love is **reciprocal**—we are to love one another. Three times John 13:34-35 mentions that we are to “love one another.” Our Lord gives the world the right to examine if we truly belong to Him on the basis of our love for one another. The fellowship of love should not

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be a one-way street. “If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:1-2). We have so much in common as Christians due to our Lord. Yet often our relationship with one another as Christians leaves much to be desired. An old poem well illustrates this thought when it says:

To dwell above with saints we love,
Oh, that will be grace and glory.
But to dwell below with saints I know,
Well, that’s another story!

God gave us people to love and things to use, but Satan wants us to start loving things and using people! We must not love money (1 Tim. 6:10), or this will rob us of our love for God and one another (Matt. 6:24). We must not love the world (1 John 2:15-17). We must not love self and pleasure more than the Lord and each other (2 Tim. 3:2-4). We must not love the praise of men more than the glory of God (John 12:42-43). Nor should we love preeminence (3 John 9). The relationship which members of the body of Christ share transcends racial differences (Acts 17:26; Gal. 3:28), economic differences (Jas. 2:1-13) and differences in individual opinions and tastes (Rom. 14:19; Rom. 15:1-2). It transcends the “respect of persons” that often characterizes those in the world (Acts 10:34-36).

The various “one another” passages of the New Testament are probably the clearest teaching regarding the relational aspect of Christianity. We are to love one another (John 13:34-35; 1 Pet. 1:22). We are to be hospitable to one another (1 Pet. 4:9; Rom. 12:13). Christians should pray for one another, and as necessary, confess faults one to another (Jas. 5:16; Acts 8:18-24). The people of God must be considerate of one another (Heb. 10:24). We are

instructed to serve one another (Gal. 5:13). The followers of the Lord will encourage one another (Heb. 3:13) and comfort one another (1 Thess. 4:18).

These are things that not just anyone can do and do well. They come as a result of having a relationship. Faithful Christians will know and love God (Jer. 9:23-24; John 17:3; Phil. 3:10). They will know and love God's Word (Jer. 15:16; Matt. 4:4; 2 Tim. 2:15). Faithful Christians know and love God's people (Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:17). It is freely admitted that often it is easier to love God and His Word than it is to love one another. But it is also to be admitted that we **cannot** truly love our God without also loving our brethren (1 John 4:19-21).

Shining the Spotlight on Philippians 2:1-5

Few passages in the New Testament deal with the relational nature of loving one another like Philippians 2:1-5. It is tempting (although in so doing one is missing a crucial point) to view Philippians 2:1-4 as nothing more than an "introduction" or preliminary to the great Christological passage of Philippians 2:5-11. However, contextual considerations indicate that verses 5-11 were actually given to reinforce what Paul was teaching in Philippians 2:1-4 about relating to one another with a submissive mindset in a spirit of unity and humility.

1. The Grounds For Relating to One Another in Love. Philippians 2:1 says, "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies." The word "therefore" serves as a link to what has already been said, especially in Philippians 1:27-30. Notice also the repetition of "if" in the KJV. Paul appeals to them on the basis of Christianity's greatness—**since** these things are **indeed** so. The first three items ("consolation in Christ," "comfort of love," "fellowship of the Spirit") sound much

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like 2 Corinthians 13:14 and Romans 5:1-5. The fourth item mentioned (“if any bowels and mercies”) resembles Colossians 3:12. Since Christianity is all of this and more, what motivation there is for relating to each other with submission and love.

2. The Exhortation to Relate to One Another in Love. “Fulfill ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil. 2:2). Paul’s joy would be fulfilled “if” the Philippians were properly motivated to relate to each other in Christian love. Perhaps Paul was concerned about difficulties that threatened the unity and love of these brethren (cf. Phil. 1:15-17; Phil. 3:1-3; Phil. 4:2-3). The Apostle’s very life seems bound up in the well-being of these brethren! Paul’s joy would be fulfilled by their being likeminded, by their having the same love and by their being of one accord and one mind. What was important to Paul ought to be important to all of us as well.

3. The Explanation For What Relating to One Another in Love Means.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory;
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others
better than themselves. Look not every man on
his own things, but every man also on the things
of others (Phil. 2:3-4).

Verses 3-4 show that genuine humility is key in relating to others in love and unity (cf. 1 Cor. 10:24; 1 Cor. 13:5). “Nothing” is to be done through “strife” or “vainglory.” How much better off our lives, our families and our congregations would be if we better applied these verses! A contrast occurs (notice the word “but”) in both Philippians 2:2 and Philippians 2:3. It would be difficult to find a better description of humility than what is given here. Humility is (1) the “**lowliness of mind**” that causes us to (2) “**esteem others better than themselves**” and to (3) **not merely look out for our own interests** (we

would say, “take care of #1”), but to be (4) **genuinely concerned with the interests of others**.

4. The Supreme Example For Relating to Others in Love. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). Paul indicates in Philippians 2:5-11 that Jesus is the supreme example of the very mindset encouraged in Philippians 2:1-4. The beautiful passage in Philippians 2:5-11 exalts Jesus in a remarkable way while at the same time making the primary point of exhorting the Philippians to relate to one another in love and humility.

Loving One Another Is A Motivational Matter

What drives or motivates us? If it is not love, something is terribly wrong. This is so because love is to be **reflective**. It is the distinguishing trait by which we are to be known. “Let all things be done with love” (1 Cor. 16:14). Love is to be without hypocrisy (Rom. 12:9). Love shows our **oneness** with the Lord, that we truly are His disciples. Further, such love is powerful in its **influence**. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). The love we **share** in Christ must be **shown** to others. When members of the body of Christ are spiritually lacking, there likely is a love problem behind it.

Our motive in loving is to love “as” or “because’ Christ loved us. Indeed, the “love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor. 5:14). The Lord loves us with a **selfless** love (Eph. 5:25). When Jesus left glory to come to earth to die for our sins, it was not a matter of what was best for Him, but for us (Mark 10:45; Phil. 2:9-11). His love for the church was **sacrificial** in nature. He “gave Himself up” (Eph. 5:25). And we are encouraged to do the same (Luke 9:23; 2 Cor. 12:15). Christ’s love is a **sanctifying** love (Eph. 5:26-27).

Sanctifying love sets apart, encourages, enriches and fulfills. Is this how the love of Christ impacts us in treating one another? The Lord's love for His own is a supreme love (Eph. 5:28-31). Do we reflect this love before others? (Mark 12:30; Jas. 2:8).

Shining The Spotlight On 1 John 4:7-12

For the third time in this epistle, with each occasion becoming more and more searching, John takes up the subject of mutual love as the supreme test of whether one truly is in the Lord (cf. 1 John 2:7-11; 1 John 3:11-18). Three times in this paragraph is the call to “love one another” (vv. 7, 11, 12). First, it is used as an **exhortation**—“Beloved, let us love one another” (1 John 4:7). Then it is used as a **statement of fact**—“we ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11). Finally, it is used as a **matter of evidence**—“If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us” (1 John 3:12). The passage also gives three areas of motivation for loving one another.

1. God Himself Is Love. “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). Not only is God the Source of true love; He is love in His very essence or nature. The God Who is love is light and fire as well (1 John 1:5; Heb. 12:29), so **all** of God's attributes ought to be properly considered in order to avoid serious pitfalls concerning the nature of Deity. 1 John 4:7 states the matter positively—those who are born of God and know Him love one another. 1 John 4:8 states it negatively—those who do not love do not know God.

2. God Has Loved Us In Christ (1 John 4:9-11). We should be motivated to love one another because such is God's eternal nature (1 John 4:7-8), but also because of His incomparable gift—Jesus (1 John 4:9-10). “Herein is

love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). This is the epitome of concrete, sacrificial love in that Jesus came to save undeserving sinners. John simply will not allow the practical application of this principle to go unnoticed: “Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

3. God Continues to Love Through Us. “No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us” (1 John 4:12). In a sense, it is accurate to say that the same God Who once revealed Himself in His Son chooses now to reveal Himself in and through us if we love one another. Our love for one another is to be evidence that God indeed IS real! God’s love **for** us is perfected only when it is reproduced **within** us. And what powerful motivating forces these are!

Conclusion

John 13:34-35 does not teach that we are to love people of the world less, so much as it does that we are to love one another as Christians more (cf. Matt. 5:43-48; Gal. 6:10). God loves all, but He has a special love for His children. And Christians should have a special love for one another. We should do all the good we can, by all the means we can, in all the ways we can, in all the places we can, to all the people we can, at all the times we can, as long as we ever can.

Love **is** a matter of **doctrine, function, relationship, and motivation**. When love for one another is properly understood and applied, our **oneness** with the Lord will be obvious, and our **influence** on the world will be great. Say Christian friend, does this sound like you and me?

CHAPTER 21

Love The Brotherhood

Mike Hixson

Introduction

I AM HONORED TO participate in the annual POWER Lectures. This lectureship has been a blessing to the brotherhood for many years. The elders at Southaven church of Christ are to be commended for their willingness to oversee this great work. B. J. Clarke, the lectureship director and editor of the book, has always done a superb job fulfilling his responsibilities in this endeavor. It is my prayer that this work will continue to be a blessing to the brotherhood for many years to come.

My assigned subject is taken from 1 Peter 2:17, where the apostle Peter exhorted saints of all ages to “Love the brotherhood.” It is painfully obvious this lesson is needed today because the church of Christ is being rent asunder by extremism, to the right and to the left.

Command

The idea of love is not foreign to the spirit of the Old or New covenants. God commanded ancient Israel with these words in the law, “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Lev. 19:18b). The idea is that they were to love the brotherhood of mankind. During the earthly ministry

of Jesus, He stressed over and over again the importance of loving one another. Jesus taught that we must love fellow disciples (John 13:34-35), the brotherhood of man (Matt. 22:39; Luke 10:25-37), and our enemies (Matt. 5:44).

Thus, it comes as no surprise to read the words of Peter, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17). The late and well respected Guy N. Woods has written:

The ‘brotherhood’ is the church of the Lord in its aggregate sense; the affection we are admonished to feel for it is the love which obtains between those of the same family with common parentage, common interests, and common aims.¹

As people of “like precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1), our love for one another signifies to the world at large that we are followers of Jesus and seek to live in harmony with His teaching and follow in His steps (John 13:34-35; 1 Pet. 2:21).

We should love the brotherhood because it is the precious body of Christ. The Bible indicates the body is the church (Eph. 1:22-23), and there is just one body (Eph. 4:4). Now, think for a moment about the cost of the church or body. The apostle Peter said:

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was forordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. (1 Pet. 1:18-21).

The church is composed of people that have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. It cost the Son of God His life for us to be associated with His Divine body (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:7; Rev. 1:5).

To further amplify the tremendous cost of the body, the inspired penman Peter graphically depicts the suffering of Jesus on our behalf. He wrote:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls (1 Pet. 2:21-24).

These passages should stir our souls and cause us to reflect on the steep price of redemption in the body.

Considerations

It should be noted that the basis for our redemption is the love of God. The Bible affirms “God is love” (1 John 4:8). His matchless love was manifested in the sending of His only begotten Son into the world to die on our behalf. The apostle John wrote:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10).

Another Scripture that brings to mind the depth of God’s love for us is found in Ephesians 2:4-9, where Paul said:

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ,

(by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, And made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.

How grateful we should be for the amazing love of God!

A discussion of the love of God would not be complete without emphasizing the love of Christ, who was the executioner of our salvation. In John 15:13, Jesus said: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." Jesus humbly and submissively laid down His life for us on Calvary's tree. No wonder Paul could speak of "the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). We could plumb the human language and still not adequately sum up the love our Lord had for us as members of the human family.

In light of the love of God, we become Godlike when we love one another. John wrote:

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; And every one that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love...Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another (1 John 4:7-8, 1 John 4:11).

Caution

Great care should be exercised in examining what the Bible says regarding the love we are to have for the brotherhood. As we have already noted, the brotherhood that we are exhorted to love is the church of our Lord. This would be inclusive of brethren on a local and universal level.

While we preach, "Love the brotherhood" (1 Pet. 2:17), our practice sometimes does not measure up to the Divine ideal. Forces to the left are currently undermining the

harmony and cohesiveness that once characterized churches of Christ in bygone years. Those who love the Lord and the brotherhood would never promulgate a doctrine or practice contrary to the New Testament. However, advocates of change, in an effort to restructure the church and accomplish their liberal agenda, bear responsibility in dividing congregations and rupturing long-standing relationships among brethren.

Sadly, their nefarious deeds have caused numerous splits on a local level and all indications are the church has divided in an aggregate sense, though no formal acknowledgement has been announced similar to what occurred in 1906. Issues such as instrumental music, praise teams, choirs, solos, the woman's role in worship and church organization, fellowship with denominations, etc., have contributed to much of the division that exists in the brotherhood today.

It is lamentable that some of our brethren have become so carnally minded and blinded by worldly ambitions, that they have violated the passionate plea of our Lord as He stood in the shadow of the cross and prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one (John 17:20-22).

While the peace and harmony of our mighty brotherhood has been hurt by those to the left, forces to the right have also pierced the body of Christ with their dogmatic extremist views. They have methodically and mercilessly tried to run roughshod over those who do not walk to their cadence. In their so-called defense of the truth, they contentiously "contend for the faith" (Jude 3).

Character assassination and the maligning of reputations are inconsistent with the teaching of the New Testament, yet this seems to be the manner in which some to the extreme right operate. It is appalling that the extreme right will isolate a proverbial “whipping boy” in the brotherhood and build their platform around his “positions.”

Dan Winkler has crystallized the position of those who are in the extreme right camp in these profound words:

These are brethren who bind where God has not bound (Matt. 16:18-19; Matt. 18:18) and, accordingly, are harder on their brethren than God is. They are quick to mark anyone who refuses to ‘goosestep’ to their personal preference, their parochial tradition, or the unfounded ranting of some ‘yellow rag’ they have read. For example, this is the mindset that deems congregations ‘liberal’ because of the facilities they have built, the technology they engage, or the vehicles of philanthropy they employ. Still further, this is the mindset that has rendered gospel preachers and church leaders suspect because of their association with a lectureship, their use of a Bible translation, or their matriculation at a particular university. People of this extreme are among the first to cry for ‘sound’ (*hugies* meaning ‘healthy’) doctrine (2 Tim. 4:1-3; Tit. 1:9; Tit. 2:1), but, with their emphasis, they are among the least to contribute to such.²

A word of warning is also in order to those of us who are striving to remain anchored to the center of Biblical teaching and preaching. While we may not go to the extreme left or right, our attitudes and actions may circumvent the teaching of Peter when he said, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17). For example, if we harbor grudges, refuse to forgive one another, engage in gossip, and sow discord among brethren, then we violate the tenor of Peter’s admonition and undermine the love that is to

abound among brethren. We would do well to remember that sinful activities disrupt the peace and harmony of the church on a local and universal level.

In 1 John 5:19, the apostle John said “the world lieth in wickedness.” The world is that sphere dominated by the devil and manipulated by his wicked devices (cf. Jas. 1:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:8). In the world it is not uncommon to see people treat one another in a vicious and savage manner. They see nothing wrong with being hateful and vindictive in their behavior. Backstabbing and the vilification of character are simply tools to get ahead or climb the corporate ladder.

Lest we think this behavior cannot find its way into the church, we are sadly mistaken. If the church of our Lord mirrors the ugly attitudes of the world, why would people want to become one of us? The truth of the matter is they will have no desire to be a part of an institution that does not demonstrate genuine love, affection, compassion, kindness, and respect for one another. This is true on a local and universal level.

May we as God’s people rise above worldly behavior and honor the sacred words of Scripture, “Love the brotherhood” (1 Pet. 2:17)!

Endnotes

1 Guy N. Woods, **A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude** (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1991), p. 74.

2 Dan Winkler, “Balance in the Brotherhood,” IN: **The Spiritual Sword**, 37:2, Alan E. Highers, ed., (Memphis, TN, (2006), p. 33.



*Man's Love
For The
Lost*

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CHAPTER 22

If We Really Love The Lost...

Gary McDade

Introduction

T*HE HUMANIST MANIFESTOS* I, II, and III (also known as “Humanism and Its Aspirations”) constitute infamous documents from the philosophical world. They were written in 1933, 1973, and 2003 respectively. They were signed by the world’s most recognized atheists. The signers included influential leaders from several realms including those of education and politics who have helped form current American culture. One signer was British Philosopher, Anthony G.N. Flew, whom brother Thomas B. Warren (1920-2000) resoundingly defeated in debate in 1976 on the subject “Does God Exist?” The Manifestos accurately reflect, if not assist, in defining humanism.

The significance of these documents to the subject at hand, “If We Really Love The Lost,” should be explained. These documents allege that man, i.e., mankind, is capable and equipped to solve his own problems and to determine his own destiny. For example, the eighth principle articulated in the 1933 document says, “Religious Humanism considers the complete realization of human personality to be the end of man’s life and seeks its development and fulfillment in the here and now.”¹ Further, the ninth principle is:

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In the place of the old attitudes involved in worship and prayer the humanist finds his religious emotions expressed in a heightened sense of personal life and in a cooperative effort to promote social well-being.²

A final example is the thirteenth principle, the idea which has wreaked havoc in churches of Christ in the twentieth century and now into the twenty-first century: “Certainly religious institutions, their ritualistic forms, ecclesiastical methods, and communal activities must be reconstituted as rapidly as experience allows, in order to function effectively in the modern world.”³ (Do you not think some in churches of Christ have read this document?). The document concludes with the summation:

Though we consider the religious forms and ideas of our fathers no longer adequate, the quest for the good life is still the central task for mankind. Man is at last becoming aware that he alone is responsible for the realization of the world of his dreams, that he has within himself the power for its achievement.⁴

It is the next statement that is the most chilling: **“Man alone is the designer of the destiny he chooses!”**

Seventy years have not changed the theme of the Manifesto. In 2003, they wrote:

Thus engaged in the flow of life, we aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

Again, the significance of these documents to the subject at hand, “If We Really Love The Lost,” is this: if people believe that they determine their own destiny, it is an almost overwhelming challenge to convince them that they are lost!

A second challenge is in convincing our society that they cannot “pull themselves up by their own bootstraps.”

Perhaps the Judean prophet Jeremiah said it most succinctly, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23).

In the first century as the apostle Paul faced a society, which ours has paralleled in godlessness and immorality, the Holy Spirit directed him to write with this purpose to the Romans: (1) In chapter one of the book of Romans he **convicts the Gentiles**, who were atheistic and immoral, as sinners before Almighty God; (2) In chapter two he **directs his attention to hypocritical Jews** who were breaking the Law of Moses and causing the name of God to be blasphemed among the Gentiles with the result that they also were sinners before God (cf. Rom. 2:23-24); and, (3) then in chapter three **he affirms that both Jew and Gentile were sinners**, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). The solution to the problem faced by mankind, then and now, of ungodly and immoral living before an all-righteous God, Who will one day “bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13; 2 Cor. 5:10), is presented in the theme of the book of Romans, which is **the need for, yea, the demand for, the obedience of faith among all nations for all time.**

Key verses on the theme strategically placed in the beginning, near the middle, and at the end of the book, support this contention. Romans 1:5 states, “By whom we have received grace and apostleship, **for obedience to the faith** among all nations, for his name.”

Romans 10:16 declares, “But **they have not all obeyed the gospel.** For Isaiah saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” Romans 16:25-27 concludes:

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the

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commandment of the everlasting God, **made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:** To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen” (emphasis added throughout unless otherwise indicated, GM).

Consequently, we today must meet our first challenge in convincing men that they are lost, and we must meet our second challenge in convincing men that they can and must obey the gospel of Christ in order to be saved.

Barriers we face include:

1. Atheistic Humanism, as suggested earlier.
 2. An American society saturated in immorality.
 3. 1.3 billion Muslims currently striving for world domination at the point of the sword.
 4. Popular rejection of the Bible as the Word of God.
 5. Radical religious division within “Christendom” shrouded in ecumenicalism.
 6. Charlatan “health and wealth” preachers such as Benny Hinn, Joel Osteen, Paul and Jan Crouch, Creflo and Tammy Dollar, Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes, and Paula White.
 7. Political high ground controlled by Humanists.
 8. An educational system dominated by Humanists and historical revisionists (i.e., those who rewrite history to conform to current personal and political objectives).
 9. Societal ignorance and indifference to domination by political, educational, and religious errorists.
 10. Closely associated with the previous entry: refusal to hold accountable leaders, e.g., presidents, senators, governors, mayors, professors, teachers, and preachers who advance factual errors on foundational principles and eternal truths.
 11. The philosophical dominance of the powerful public news media.
 12. Churches of Christ straying from their Biblical organization, worship, and mission.
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13. Churches of Christ luxuriously equipped and staffed with only token spending on evangelism.

14. Christian education that lays claim to being “Christ-centered” without educating its students on the church of Christ.

15. Churches of Christ whose elderships have an evangelistic vision which does not extend beyond its four walls or generally beyond its boardroom walls.

16. Churches of Christ that have little energy expended in the classroom and from the pulpit toward equipping the saints for service for Christ in the raging battle for the hearts and minds of dying men and women.

17. Changing the church from a spiritual community to a social community through Biblical illiteracy.

“**Exclusivity**” is one of the most hated words in the world today. Trumped by pluralism, relativism, and agnosticism, the concept of exclusivity philosophically and theologically is severely disparaged. **Pluralism** is the doctrine that one philosophical or theological system may stand as validly as any other despite any real or apparent contradiction. For years the slogan has stood that says, “One church is as good as another.” And, most people did not, and still do not, even realize that behind their conviction was not some hidden Biblical principle but the philosophy known as pluralism.

“**Relativism**” is the doctrine that truth is relative to the situation to which it is applied and not inherent or absolute in principle. The codification of this concept includes the work of Joseph Fletcher whose book in 1962, **Situation Ethics**, served to articulate the views of the various Humanist Manifestos that the subject of ethics (what is right and what is wrong) is relative and situational. Ten years later the Supreme Court of the United States supported such a view in its decision on Roe v. Wade (1973), legalizing the out-and-out murder of pre-born human beings (called “fetuses”) until today a

nation of 300,000,000 people mourn not and scarcely ever even consider the slaughter of 42,000,000 of its potential citizenry.

In contradistinction, in 2001 the murder of 3,000 in the World Trade Center has to date yielded the sacrifice of 3,000 more in Iraq and Afghanistan in retaliation and eradication of the terrorist culprits who dared invade the sacred precincts of American shores. Do we not have **relativism**, at least in part, to thank for these contradictory developments? American deaths down the street of Abortion are 7,000 times greater than American deaths down the streets of Baghdad. American involvement in the turmoil in the Middle East may diminish or possibly even eventually terminate, but it will take winning the battle for the minds and hearts of men and women for Christ to ever stem the tide of the loss of life abortion represents.

“Agnosticism” is one of those philosophical words gospel preachers never thought they would need to know. It means that you cannot know the truth. As illustrated over and over again, agnosticism falls of its own weight because, even if true, how can you know agnosticism is true? Agnosticism is the ridiculous position that the **only** premise in the universe that alone bears absolute certainty is the one that says, “You cannot know any premise with absolute certainty”!

“Exclusivity” seems to be the chief criticism levied against the church of Christ today. It manifests itself in the often antagonistic question, “Do members of the church of Christ believe they are the only ones going to heaven?” Rick Atchley, preacher for the largest congregation among churches of Christ in the world—the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas, [approximately 6,400] in his effort to advance the use of instruments of music in the worship [actually not just the instrument but an entire entertainment-based form of worship as they have employed the Praise Team arrangement along with dramatic skits and attending accoutrements for years at RHCC] says

churches of Christ merely are a part of the kingdom of Christ but the denominations are also Christians.

The hope of our calling to salvation by means of the gospel of Christ is as unique as the body or church into which that call leads, for the Bible plainly teaches, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:4). That is exclusivity. Jesus Himself said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). Christ’s statement excludes hope of credibility of any other concept of salvation than through Him—“no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

Jesus Christ came into the world to “seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The motivation of God in sending Him into this world is renowned, as one of the best known and most widely appreciated passages of Scripture, John 3:16, shows:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

In consideration of our topic, “If we really love the lost,” and we ourselves wish to be Christ-like, just about what love for the lost caused Jesus Christ to do. Paul reminds us what Christ did for mankind in the following passage:

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-9).

First, what He had in mind, we are urged to have in mind. We are not to be merely observers of the greatest act of sacrifice in the history of the world. When an apostle like

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Paul spoke or wrote, he gave the commandments of the Lord (1 Cor. 14:37). The English phrase “let this mind” in this text comes from the Greek word *φρονητε* (*phroneite*) from *φρονω* (*phroneo*) meaning “think, have in mind; care for, be concerned about; think highly of”⁵ and is present active indicative, second person imperative. The imperative mood is used in commands. So, the phrase “let this mind be in you,” demands our attention and energy. Georg Bertram wrote the entry in the **Theological Dictionary of New Testament** on this Greek word in which he observes:

The fundamental demand of Pauline exhortation is a uniform direction, a common mind, and unity of thought and will. In Phil. 2:2 the apostle issues an urgent admonition that we are to seek the same goal with a like mind, establishing the given unity and maintaining a Christian disposition in all things, cf. R. 12:16. According to Phil. 2:5 the confession of Christ is itself the standard for the mind for believers whose fellowship is constituted by Christ.⁶

If we are ever to serve our Lord, that service must begin by submitting our thinking to His will. Our Lord “really loved the lost,” and He set His mind on rescuing them.

Second, the argument of these verses is that Jesus found no sacrifice too great; therefore, neither should we. This is easier to articulate than it is to implement. The dedication and determination the first century Christians had as reflected in these verses points to why Luke wrote:

They drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, **These that have turned the world upside down** are come hither also; Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus (Acts 17:6-7).

We do not “turn the world upside down” by conveniently blending into the religious landscape around us. Nor do

we advance Christianity by sitting silently by and waiting for others to do the preaching and teaching and disputing and debating. An unconverted membership will eke out occasional prayers, seldom read or study the Bible, sporadically appear at worship, display a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately attitude in regard to the church, archive a storehouse of meaningless complaints to draw out when spiritually challenged by the leadership, and display a void of understanding about submission to Christ in general and sacrificial submission to Christ in particular.

Positively, many Christians are mounting up decades of faithful service to Christ and validate the mandate to be Christ-like. Jesus set the highest standard because of the depth of humility He displayed. It expands beyond the boundary of comprehension for most of us to think of the sacrifice Jesus made in “disrobing Himself of Deity” and robing Himself in humanity. Have you ever thought about the fact that He could never go back to the form He gave up until He “became flesh”? There was “no turning back” for Christ; neither should there be for Christians. Since Christ loved the lost that much, surely Christians can grow in our love for the lost by remaining focused on reaching them with the soul-saving gospel of Christ.

Conclusion

Two examples hopefully will round out this study. First, the apostle Paul. It would set the zeal for lost souls aflame in the hearts and lives of members of the church should each Christian think deeply on the statement Paul made about his love for the Jewish people. In Romans 9:1-5, he wrote:

I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my

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kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

When have you ever seen that depth of devotion to evangelism? Imagine someone actually saying today, "For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Mississippians and Tennesseans." The thought clearly is that if it were possible for Israel to be saved through Paul's being accursed that he would place himself in that position. Paul's attitude of willingness to suffer even eternal loss himself so that others could be saved may well account for his tireless labors in the church. He wrote defending his apostleship to the Corinthians:

Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

Do you think we would be less spiritually minded, maintain our current level of spirituality, or become more spiritually minded should we strive to follow the example of Paul in his love for the lost?

A second example we would like to share is that of someone many members of the churches of Christ have at least heard of, and respect, even if they did not see or meet him personally. Guy N. Woods loved the Getwell church of Christ in Memphis. His parents were members at Getwell. He himself reserved the last Sunday of every year to come back to Getwell and preach in all the services that day. When brother Woods passed away, he left a sizeable portion of his estate to the church at Getwell to be used to assist the church in continuing its work there as long as possible.

In a lesson preserved on cassette tape, on one of those prized occasions when he preached at Getwell, brother Woods told of holding fifty meetings the preceding year and that he was considering cutting back to around twenty-five or maybe more. That is an impressive number of meetings for a man of any age, but what makes it even more so concerning brother Woods is that when he made that statement he was eighty years of age! Without exaggeration, you could say of a man like that “**he really loved the lost.**”

These examples are given to motivate us to greater heights of service for the Lord in reaching the lost. Many tools are available that give us an influence greater than our numbers in churches of Christ. The use of internet evangelism and edification is growing. The Gospel Broadcasting Network is too. At the time of this writing about half a million people have access to GBN 24/7 in the United States.

One of the programs that might be considered a recent serendipitous “spin off” from GBN is “The Everlasting Gospel” with B.J. Clarke and me as speakers. Thirty million people have access to it on DirecTV, in addition to those who watch on GBN. Brethren grading the Bible correspondence courses it generates are already concerned about how to get to those from all across the

country who are learning the gospel when they request baptism into Christ. This is a much welcome and new problem for many of us.

We have much for which to be thankful in the way of powerful tools of communication. It is of interest that efforts to use mass communication are making not only those outside of Christ more aware of those teaching the truth and advancing the cause of pure New Testament Christianity, but are also bringing faithful brethren together cooperating in combined efforts like the Gospel Broadcasting Network. At a crucial time in antiquity, Samuel penned the record of what Saul's son said:

And Jonathan said to the young man that bare his armour, Come, and let us go over unto the garrison of these uncircumcised: it may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few (1 Sam. 14:6).

This principle still exists today "for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." It simply is the case that "if we really love the lost," we will do everything we can to teach them the truth of God.

Endnotes

1 www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto1.html).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Barclay M. Newman, **A Concise Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament** (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 195.

6 Gerhard Friedrich **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, IX (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974) p. 333.



**Love That Is
Misguided**

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CHAPTER 23

The Love Of Money Is The Root Of All Evil

Mark Lindley

Introduction

HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED of having millions of dollars? Think about it. A fortune so great would provide you with the financial freedom to live a life of extravagance. Having millions of dollars, you could drive the most luxurious cars and trucks, build your dream home, go on expensive vacations, buy clothes at the nicest stores, dine at the best restaurants, and you could spend the balance of your days debt free.

Apparently, many people of America dream of such affluence. A recent Gallup poll on gambling in America found that 57% of American adults reported buying a lottery ticket in the last 12 months.¹ This poll indicates that many Americans see nothing wrong with gambling, though Bible students understand that gambling is inconsistent with many clear Biblical principles. Also, this poll suggests that we Americans tend to love money.

In a society where more than half of adults have bought lottery tickets in the last year, one can safely assume that many people long for and fantasize about being wealthy.

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However, before we begin worshiping at the altar of the almighty dollar, we would do well to consider Paul's instruction to Timothy regarding money:

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

It is clear from these words that Paul did not believe "hitting the jackpot" would be a dream come true. Rather, Paul warns about the grave dangers of loving money. Why is the love of money so dangerous? Paul answers: "For the love of money is the root of all evil..." These words serve as the text and theme for this chapter. The theme will be developed by an explanation of the text and its surrounding context, considering reasons people love money, observing the pitfalls of loving money, and by examining how to avoid falling in love with money.

An Explanation Of The Text

The book of First Timothy was written by Paul to Timothy, a young evangelist (cf. 1 Tim. 4:12), who had been left at Ephesus that he might "charge some that they teach no other doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3). Apparently, some who were teaching error and causing strife believed that "gain was godliness" (1 Tim. 6:3-5). That is, these were religious racketeers who viewed religion as a means to get rich. They professed religious faith, but only that they might prosper financially.

It seems as though some in our day hold to this same philosophy. The doctrine they preach is often termed "The Gospel of Health and Wealth." The idea is that if one becomes a Christian, he not only will be saved from sin,

but he will also enjoy health and great financial success. In spite of the popularity of this doctrine, it is, nevertheless, a perverted gospel (cf. Gal. 1:6-9). The pure Gospel of Christ centers on salvation from sin, not “health and wealth.”

Paul warned Timothy about these false teachers, and he informed him that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6). Practicing godliness and contentment, Timothy would not be led astray by the notion that “gain was godliness” (1 Tim. 6:5). It is in this context that Paul instructs Timothy, and consequently us today, that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10).

Observe that it is not **money** that is the root of all evil; rather, it is the **love** of money that is the root of all evil. Some great Bible characters were both rich and faithful to the Lord. Abraham, faithful “Friend of God” (Jas. 2:23), was “very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold” (Gen. 13:2). Job, a man who was “perfect and upright,” was so affluent that he was considered the “greatest of all the men of the east” (Job 1:1-3). Evidence suggests that the obedient seller of purple, Lydia, likely was a wealthy woman (Acts 16:13-15).

Based upon these examples, it is clear that merely having a lot of money will not cause one to be lost. Money is neutral and can be used for good or evil. It is like a loaded gun. In the hands of a man being attacked by a grizzly bear, a loaded gun would be helpful, but a loaded gun in the hands of a violent criminal may be used to commit murder. A loaded gun should be handled with extreme caution. Money also should be handled very carefully. Although money is neutral, it can be used for evil purposes.

Further, notice that Paul referred to the love of money as the root of “all evil” (KJV). The American Standard translation reads: “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). It seems the translation, “all kinds of evil” is better than the rendering, “all evil.” Some evil deeds are not directly traceable to the love of money. Sexual lust

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for a person other than one's spouse, using profane language, being disobedient to parents—these sins are not necessarily connected to a love of money. It appears, therefore, that Paul meant to convey that the love of money is “a” root of “all kinds of evil”; that is, loving money leads to various types of sin.

Observe now that the love of money is called the “root” of all evil because it lies beneath the surface and nourishes many sins. The branches of a giant oak reaching into the sky could not live apart from the roots of that tree. The intricate root system that reaches down into the earth supports the tree and provides nourishment to sustain the life of the tree. So it is with the love of money. It is the root that produces and nourishes many kinds of sin.

The love of money is powerful. Paul warns that some in the first century had erred from the faith because they loved money. They were led astray by their covetous ways. In the process, they had “pierced themselves through” with many sorrows. The picture is of those whose souls have been wounded and pierced through and through with grief and sorrow because they chose to pursue money instead of godliness. Lovers of money in our day will suffer the same sad consequences.

Reasons People Love Money

One obvious reason people love money is that it can purchase a lot of things, and some feel that having a lot of things will lead to fulfillment in life. However, the Son of God said, “Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15). In effect, Jesus is saying that life is more than houses, lands, boats, four-wheelers, fancy cars, and the latest fashions in clothing. Man has been created that he might “fear God and keep His commandments” (Eccl. 12:13). Life, therefore, does not consist in the abundance of the things we possess.

Though money can buy many things, there are things it cannot buy. Someone has well said:

Money will buy a bed but not sleep; books but not brains; food but not appetite; finery but not beauty; a house but not a home; medicine but not health; luxuries but not culture; amusements but not happiness; religion but not salvation; a passport to everywhere but heaven.²

Additionally, people love money because they feel it will bring happiness. In spite of the almost proverbial statement, “Money won’t make you happy,” this is a hard lesson for us to learn. God tells us in His Word that money will not satisfy: “He that loveth silver **shall not be satisfied with silver**; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity” (emphasis mine throughout unless otherwise indicated, ML, Eccl.5:10).

According to forbes.com, the richest man in America is fifty-year old William Henry Gates III, co-founder of Microsoft. It is estimated that Gates has a fortune of \$53 billion. “If I had that much money, I’d be the happiest person alive,” one might say. To the contrary, Solomon says that we would “not be satisfied.” Those who win the lottery quickly discover that having immense wealth does not bring happiness; rather, it has the potential to bring many problems. “Winning the lottery isn’t always what it’s cracked up to be,” says Evelyn Adams, two-time winner of the New Jersey lottery. Though she won \$5.4 million, today all the money is gone and Adams lives in a trailer. While there is certainly nothing dishonorable about living in a mobile home, we would not expect this to be the dwelling of a two-time lottery winner. Adams admits that she lost a lot of money at the slot machines in Atlantic City.³ Willie Hurt of Lansing, Michigan, won \$3.1 million playing the lottery. Two years later he was broke and charged with murder. His lawyer says Hurt spent his fortune on a

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divorce and crack cocaine.⁴ A Southeastern family won \$4.2 million in the early 90s. They spent their fortune on a house, cars, and their relatives' debts. Eleven years later, the couple is divorcing, the house is sold and they have to split what is left of the lottery proceeds. The wife bought a very small house, and the husband moved in with the kids. They even cashed in the life insurance they had bought. Their financial advisor said that winning the lottery "was not the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."⁵

The weight of gold that came to Solomon annually was 666 talents (1 Kings 10:14). Using a very conservative standard for a Jewish talent, the value of the gold Solomon received each year was more than \$17,000,000. Some believe the value was much greater. Yes, Solomon was living the "American dream," but he was a miserable man. In spite of his great riches, he wrote, "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 2:17). Do not be deceived—money does not guarantee happiness.

Further, some love money because having a lot of money and living in luxury make them feel important and successful; it boosts their ego. This approach to life, however, is a sure path to disappointment. "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall; but the righteous shall flourish as a branch" (Prov. 11:28). One's self-esteem should be based upon the fact that one is created in God's image; God loves him; Jesus died for him; and that makes each one special (Gen. 1:27; John 3:16; Heb. 2:9). Money can only offer a false increase in self-esteem.

Then, there are those who love money because they imagine it brings security. This is an artificial security, however, nothing more than an illusion. Jesus, in the Parable of the Sower, warns about the "deceitfulness of riches" (Matt. 13:22). Riches deceive us in that they make

us feel self-sufficient, secure, and that we have “need of nothing” (Rev. 3:17). Imagine a wealthy man who is in the last stages of a battle with a vicious malignancy. As his life ebbs away, do you think his mind is on the stock market? Buying a new yacht? All his designer suits? No, the mundane things of this world no longer hold his attention. Now, that man would give all his wealth for an extension on life.

The rich, but, foolish farmer, of Luke 12 would tell us there is no security in money and material things. Having torn down his old barns and built greater ones, he said:

Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? (Luke 12:19-20).

Though he had elaborate plans to enjoy his fruits and goods for “many years,” he died that very night. His life was cut off, and he was labeled by God, a “fool,” because he was not rich toward God (Luke 12:21). The treasures we may lay up on earth will never provide us with true, lasting security. It is no wonder that Paul wrote, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, **nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy**” (1 Tim.6:17).

The Pitfalls Of Loving Money

As noted in the previous section, people hold many misconceptions about money. But what is the truth about loving money? The truth is there are many pitfalls for lovers of money. Paul wrote, “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and

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perdition” (1 Tim. 6:9). Observe that Paul says those who will be rich “fall into temptation and a snare.” The idea is that a greedy, covetous attitude will tempt one to do wicked things to get money. A snare is a trap. An animal that steps into a trap is unaware of danger until it is too late. So it is with the love of money. Temptations are so strong and lives become so entangled with worldliness and sin that people cannot easily escape the trap.

Paul affirms that those who pursue this course fall into “many foolish and hurtful lusts.” These lusts “drown men in destruction and perdition.” The term **drown** translates a word that is used in Luke 5 to describe boats that were beginning to sink because they were filled with fish (Luke 5:7). Paul is saying that those who trust in money will sink into destruction and perdition as a wrecked ship will sink into the depths of the sea. In the end, there will be no happiness, peace, or joy...only the misery of perdition, the misery of damnation.

To show the truthfulness of 1 Timothy 6:9, there could not be a stronger example than that of Judas. On the occasion of Matthew 10, Judas was sent by Christ to preach the Gospel, heal the sick, cleanse lepers, raise the dead, and to cast out devils (Matt. 10:4-8). If only he had continued serving the Lord faithfully, Scripture would not tell of his tragic end: “Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out” (Acts 1:18). If Judas could return from the dead, he surely would warn that loving money brings tragic consequences.

Loving money can hurt one’s health, one’s home, one’s children, one’s spirituality, and ultimately cause one to leave the faith. Did Paul not speak of some who had “erred from the faith” because they loved money (1 Tim. 6:10)? How many of the Lord’s church are now wayward because they began to worship money rather than God? It is not

likely that any of those brethren ever intended to leave the faith. They wandered away one step at a time. No one ever intends to get lost. One simply fails to pay attention to where he is going, makes a wrong turn, and ends up far from where he wants to be. A child of God can fail to guard his life against the love of money, make a couple of poor choices about his job and money, and finally depart from the faith.

Some Specific Pitfalls Of Loving Money

Paul warned Timothy about the dangers of loving money because this covetous attitude will lead to various pitfalls. For example, the love of money **leads to injustice**. “And thou shalt take no gift: for the gift blindeth the wise, and perverteth the words of the righteous” (Exod. 23:8). “Thou shalt not wrest judgment; thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift: for a gift doth blind the eyes of the wise, and pervert the words of the righteous” (Deut. 16:19). A “gift” in these passages is a bribe. Those who judged God’s people were not to take bribes because doing so would lead to injustice. One who took a bribe would be tempted to judge in favor of the one from whom the bribe was received. Governor Felix, of Acts 24, “hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him” (Acts 24:26). In other words, Felix wanted a bribe. If he had received one, he would have set Paul free. It is still possible for the love of money to pervert justice in our day.

The love of money **will cause one to steal**. After crossing the Jordan, the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan. The first city they took was the city of Jericho (Josh. 6). Joshua had warned God’s people that when they went into the city of Jericho they were not to take of the silver, gold, or vessels of brass and iron (Josh. 6:18-19). These were to be put into the treasury of the Lord.

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Nevertheless, Achan disobeyed this clear command. When it was discovered that someone had taken of the spoils of Jericho, Achan was brought before Joshua. He made this confession:

Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done: When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them; and, behold, they are hid in the earth in the midst of my tent, and the silver under it (Josh. 7:20-21).

Observe that Achan “coveted” these things. Achan stole the garment, silver, and gold because he loved money. In the end, Achan, his sons and daughters, and all his cattle and possessions were stoned and burnt with fire (Josh. 7:24-26). Criminals today steal cars, money, jewelry, guns and other things for the same reason Achan stole.

The love of money **will lead one to lie**. After Jesus had been raised from the dead, the chief priests and elders did not want to admit that Christ had been raised from the dead. So they devised a plan. Matthew records that:

[W]hen they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day (Matt. 28:12-15).

Those who engage in dishonest business today tell lies for the same reason the soldiers of Matthew 28 lied. If people ceased to love money, many lies would never be told.

The love of money **causes men to preach false doctrine**. Notice Paul's warning about the false teachers

of his day: “For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake” (Tit. 1:10-11). Paul was referring to the Judaizing teachers who taught the error that Christians had to keep certain parts of the Law of Moses, namely, circumcision. But why were they teaching error? Paul gives one reason—“filthy lucre.” They knew what to preach so as to be popular with people that they might get money.

What of the charismatic, voice-quivering, “Holy Ghost-filled” (?) televangelists of our day who claim to have miraculous power to perform miracles? Some have made a fortune off their poor deluded followers. A few of these preachers who claim miracles, perhaps, are sincere, but it is an indisputable fact that many deceive their followers in order to get rich. Indeed, the love of money is the root of all evil.

The love of money **will cause one to reject eternal life**. The rich young ruler asked an outstanding question: “What shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17). After Jesus had told the young man to keep the commandments, the young ruler said that he had kept them from his youth. Then Jesus looked into this ruler’s heart, and seeing it flooded with a love for money, said, “One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me” (Mark 10:21). At that saying, the young man “went away grieved: for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:22). This young man seemed so close to eternal life. He was in the presence of the One Who could provide such life. Yet, in the end, the materialistic and sorrowful young fellow held on to his possessions and walked away from Jesus. Multitudes

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of other money-adoring men and women have done the same.

The love of money **will cause one to betray the Son of God**. Read these sad words written about Judas:

Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted **to give him money** (Luke 22:3-5).

Having received his “reward of iniquity,” Judas betrayed the spotless Lamb of God with a kiss (Matt. 26:47-50). While we are stunned by the unmitigated callousness of such an act, let us not forget that it is still possible to betray God’s Son today for riches and material things. Jesus is betrayed today when the church, the work of the church, and the worship of the church are betrayed for money. Putting Acts 9:4 with Acts 8:3, we can see that Saul, in persecuting the church, persecuted Jesus. Thus, what one does to the church, one does to Jesus. If we put material things before the church of the Lord, we are betraying Jesus.

Yes, the love of money is indeed the root of all these sins and others. People will sell illegal drugs, sell their bodies through prostitution, gamble away all they own, rob, burglarize homes, and even take innocent lives, all for the love of money. If people did not worship money, much of the crime reported by the media would cease. All of the preceding examples demonstrate that for the one who will be rich, the pitfalls are many.

How To Avoid Falling In Love With Money

Because falling in love with money brings awful consequences, God has given us instruction that will help

us to avoid falling in love with it. Just prior to writing the statement that the love of money is the root of all evil, Paul penned these challenging words: “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim. 6:6-8). To help us avoid falling in love with money, Paul admonishes us to develop the grace of contentment. Contentment will dispel a love for money.

According to Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, contentment is a “condition of life in which no aid or support is needed” (page 84). It is a calm and satisfied feeling; freedom from murmuring and complaining. The Lord expects us to work at developing contentment. His Word frequently encourages us to be content: “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and **be content with such things as ye have**: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). When soldiers asked Jesus what they should do, He responded, “Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and **be content with your wages**” (Luke 3:14). In his epistle to the Philippians, Paul wrote:

Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me (Phil. 4:11-13).

From the foregoing verses, it is easily seen that the Lord expects us to be content with the “things” we have. Also, it is clear that Paul “had learned” to be content, even in prison (Phil. 1:7; Phil. 1:13-16). The word translated “learned” means “to learn by use and practice.”⁶ If Paul could be content while in prison, surely we can learn, by

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practice, to be content. We have blessings in abundance. If we tried to count them, as the song says, it would surprise us what the Lord has done. Yet, we often struggle to be content.

The story is told of a man who had decided he wanted a larger and more expensive house in order to keep up with his peers. He listed his house with a real estate agent, and he began looking for a house to buy. One day, as he read the classifieds in the local newspaper, a house caught his attention. As he read the description, he knew it was the house for him. He raced to the phone and called up his agent. He told the agent he had found the house he wanted to buy, and he described the house to the agent and gave the address. Upon hearing the description of the house, the agent said, "But sir, the house you described to me is your house we have put up for sale." The owner simply had a case of discontentment.

The Israelites of old were often discontent. Observe the following:

And they journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red sea, to compass the land of Edom: and the soul of the people was much discouraged because of the way. And the people spake against God, and against Moses, Wherefore have ye brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread, neither is there any water; and our soul loatheth this light bread. And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died (Num. 21:4-6).

Notice that their complaint was not that they had no bread; rather, they complained that they despised the bread God had provided—"light bread." It is this attitude of discontentment that leads one to be a lover of money and material things. When we are discontent, we cannot see how richly blessed we are because we long for larger and

better blessings, just as the people of Israel longed for a different “kind” of bread.

Reasons For Being Content

Not only does Paul encourage us to be content (1 Tim. 6:6-8), that we might not fall in love with money (1 Tim. 6:9-10), but he also gives reasons for contentment. **First, we should be content because God will provide His people with the physical necessities of life, and all else is extra.** Paul writes: “having food and raiment” we should be content. These bare necessities are all we really need, and God has promised to provide them (Psa. 37:25; Matt. 6:33).

Second, Paul affirms that “we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.” In view of this evident fact, it would be foolish to be a lover of money, and it would be foolish to live in discontentment. All the money and things we now have will be left behind when we die.

There are two times money is equally irrelevant to us: when we are born, and when we die. Tell a little baby, “You are heir to an estate worth millions.” The baby is not concerned with these things; rather, a diaper change, a full bottle, and a nap are the only things on the little one’s mind. No, the baby has no interest in money and neither does the man on his deathbed. That man knows earthly possessions will not buy him more time to live upon this earth, and he knows that he cannot take his things into the next life. Therefore, since we cannot take our things with us, it would be folly to live for the material. Solomon wrote:

There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. As he came forth

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of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand (Eccl. 5:13-15).

Additionally, we not only avoid falling in love with money by developing contentment, but we also avoid this problem by realizing that the things which bring true happiness do not have price tags on them. Maximum happiness comes to those who live the simple, godly life. Having good friends, a loving spouse, well-raised children, a home built on love, a right relationship with God, and a clear conscience, these are the things which cause us to feel happy, and money cannot buy these things.

A certain fisherman knew how to enjoy life. A rich businessman was disturbed to find this fisherman sitting lazily beside his boat. "Why aren't you out there fishing?" he asked. "Because I've caught enough fish for today," said the fisherman. "Why don't you catch more fish than you need?" the rich man asked. "What would I do with them?" "You could earn more money," came the impatient reply, "and buy a better boat so you could go deeper and catch more fish. You could purchase nylon nets, catch even more fish, and make more money. Soon you'd have a fleet of boats and be rich like me." The fisherman asked, "Then what would I do?" "You could sit down and enjoy life," said the businessman. "What do you think I'm doing now?" the fisherman replied as he gazed out to sea. One does not need a million dollars to be happy; he only needs a simple, godly life.

Further, we not only can avoid falling in love with money by developing contentment and by realizing that life's greatest joys are not bought with money, but we also can avoid becoming obsessed with money by considering the problems money can cause. A rich man will have his own unique temptations that the poor may never

experience. Wealthy celebrities, famous musical artists, and professional athletes who are paid millions of dollars have the money to buy any sensual pleasure the world has to offer. Drugs, booze, wild parties, and illicit sex all could be had in abundance. Scripture says that those “who will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts.” Living a hedonistic lifestyle, however, will eventually drown one in destruction and perdition.

Questions For Personal Consideration

One who reads the information contained in this chapter could possibly reason that this lesson applies only to those who are rich, to those with a lot of money. However, in the context from which the theme of this lecture comes, Paul wrote about those “that will be rich” (1 Tim. 6:9). The image is of a man who falls into temptations, snares, sorrows, destruction and perdition, not necessarily because he is rich, but because he desires to be rich. A poor man with no wealth may worship money more than a man with money to burn. This lesson, then, has application to all. Contemplating the following questions might help us to keep a proper perspective on money:

First, do we predictably choose the job that pays the most, or do we choose the job that will be best for the church, the spiritual well-being of our families, and our own spirituality?

Second, do we thank God daily for the abundant blessings we enjoy, or do we frequently complain that we do not have enough? Paul wrote, “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess. 5:18).

Third, do we ever imagine that more money would mean more security in life? The psalmist wrote, “...if riches increase, set not your heart upon them” (Psa. 62:10).

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Proverbs 23:4-5 warns, “Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not? for riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven.”

Fourth, do we base our self-worth on money, our jobs, or on our material possessions?

Fifth, have we learned the lesson that money cannot make us happy?

We may not think about it often, but essentially all who live in America are rich. Yes, we are rich compared to most people of the world. We live in the wealthiest culture in the history of the world. We have been blessed immeasurably by God, and we should show our gratitude by being faithful stewards of our blessings.

Living in this great land of prosperity, there is the danger of becoming enamored with the material. Nevertheless, we should keep in mind that the greatest treasures are not to be found in America, but in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible says, “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7); and Colossians 2:3 says, “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Staying focused on these unspeakable treasures and riches in Christ will keep us from falling prey to the love of money.

Endnotes

1 www.naspl.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=content&PageID41&PageCategory=38

2 **Reader's Digest**, December, 1983.

3 From Internet-<http://articles.moneycentral.msn.com/SavingandDebt/SaveMoney/8lotteryWinnersWhoLost...>

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Joseph Henry Thayer, **Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament** (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1973, page 389.

CHAPTER 24

For Men Shall Be Lovers Of Their Own Selves

Chris Butler

Introduction

LOVE IS THE FOUNDATION of all that is good and right. We read from John, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:7-8). His love may be seen in a number of ways. **First**, it is seen in the creation of this world and man in His image (Gen. 1-2). **Second**, it is seen in His providing man with what he needs to live (Gen. 1:26-27; Gen. 1:29). **Third**, it is seen in the promise of a Redeemer to pay the price for sin (Gen. 3:15). From that time forward God worked out His eternal plan for the redemption of our transgressions. God chose Abraham and promised that through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-2; Gal. 3). This blessing came only when the price was paid by the Son of God through His death on the cross (Matt. 20:28; 1 Tim. 2:5-6).

God’s love then, has been manifested to all humanity through Jesus Christ (John 3:16; Tit. 2:11; 1 John 4:9). His love however, demands our love. John wrote, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). We express our love for God through our obedience to His commands.

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John wrote, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). So it is love that motivates one to be obedient to God. Paul said, that “faith worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6).

God’s desire is that our whole heart be given to Him. The “first and great commandment” is to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matt. 22:37-38). A close second to that is one’s love for his neighbor. God even requires that we love our enemies (Matt. 5:44). Our love is to be like the love of Christ. John wrote, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; **as I have loved you**, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34, emphasis mine throughout unless otherwise indicated, CB).

The fact of the matter is that if we love God as He deserves, then our love for our neighbors will be what it should be. Love is expressed outwardly. For example, I show my love for God by keeping His commandments, and I demonstrate my love for my neighbors through various acts of kindness. Both of these examples are expressed outwardly. Not only that, but the Bible warns man not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think (Rom. 12:3). This is the very opposite of the love found in our assigned text.

Note the words of Paul:

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

There is a great difference between the love God requires and the love described in this verse. The men who are described as “lovers of their own selves” are further described in seventeen other ungodly characteristics which

all find their root in the love of self. To better understand the text before us we will review the second letter to Timothy.

Message Of Second Timothy

The second epistle to Timothy was written by a valiant soldier of the cross facing his last days. Paul wrote to encourage the young preacher, who like himself would face “perilous times.” Paul reminded Timothy of his faithful mother and grandmother, who no doubt had tremendous influence upon him in his youth (2 Tim. 1:5). He sought to “stir up” Timothy by reminding him of what God had given, namely the spirit of “power, love, and a sound mind” (2 Tim. 1:6). He urged Timothy to “hold fast...sound words” and to “keep” what had been committed unto him (2 Tim. 1:12-13). He encouraged Timothy to be “strong,” to “endure hardness,” and to “study to show himself approved” (2 Tim. 2:1; 2 Tim. 2:3; 2 Tim. 2:15).

Then, finally, the heart of the letter is found in the fourth chapter. Paul said to Timothy “preach the word.” Can you imagine the weight of those words from a tired and weary preacher nearing the end of his work (2 Tim. 4:6-8)? Paul wanted Timothy to continue preaching despite the “perilous times,” despite the fact that many would “turn their ears away from the truth” (2 Tim. 4:3-4). The message of the book is keep on preaching; don’t ever give up. Don’t quit preaching even though you may suffer persecution at the hands of evil men (2 Tim. 3:12).

These qualities would only serve Timothy as a preacher of the gospel as “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse.” They would enable him to “make full proof of his ministry.”

Misguided Love

The first of the eighteen sins listed in 2 Timothy is the **love of self**. This particular sin is the root of nearly all sin. Brother Lipscomb said:

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It denotes one who assigns to himself a larger share of wealth, honors, and bodily pleasures than to others. This trait is mentioned first because, as the root of the essence of all sin, it is the source of the other evil characteristics mentioned.¹

Brother Coffman said:

Self-love is pride, selfishness and a total unawareness of God; and the other sins enumerated actually derive from this basic root of all wickedness.²

The words of our text describe a man whose only interest is self. He is not concerned about the welfare of his neighbors. He is not concerned about serving God faithfully, though on the outside he has a 'form of godliness.'

Brother Taylor, concerning the love of self, said, "This will crowd out any love for God and for others. Their **own** interest is their **only** concern."³ These words adequately describe this ungodly characteristic. I am reminded of God's people just prior to the Assyrian invasion. The books of Amos and Hosea are a Divine commentary on the text under consideration. Amos said:

Thus saith the Lord; For three transgressions of Israel, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they sold the righteous for silver, and the poor for a pair of shoes (Amos 2:6).

They had become so rich by their oppression of the poor that they had summer and winter houses (Amos 3:15). Listen to the way that Amos describes them:

Hear this word, ye kine of Bashan, that are in the mountain of Samaria, which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink (Amos 4:1).

Hosea proclaims the people have the same sin problem Amos recorded. They were selfish, greedy, covetous

and unconcerned for God or their neighbors. Thus Hosea wrote:

Hear the word of the Lord, ye children of Israel: for the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood (Hos. 4:1-2).

Hosea gave the reason for such terrible conditions in that day—there was no knowledge of God in the land. Thus, they were destroyed for lack of knowledge (Hos. 4:6). This lack of knowledge was not because there was no Word from God. It was not because the prophets refused to preach the Word. It was because Israel rejected the Word of God.

When Amos prophesied to the nation they said, “go, flee thee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there: but prophesy not again any more at Bethel” (Amos 7:12-13). By rejecting the words of Amos it was the same as if they were rejecting God’s Word. When a people or a nation rejects God, then there is nothing left but for every man to do that which is right in his own eyes (Judg. 17:6).

Their rejection of the prophets had taken them far away from God. Their “own counsels” would bring great destruction upon them. They had rejected God as the source of their blessings, and turned to their own ideas for direction. Jeremiah said, “O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23). Their rejection of God had caused them to forget. Hosea wrote, “According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted; **therefore have they forgotten me**” (Hos. 13:6). They allowed their love of riches, which were from God, to turn their hearts away from the Giver of

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these blessings. They trusted in those riches and as a result forsook God.

Moses told them in the beginning, “Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deut. 6:12). This was so important that Moses said it again in Deuteronomy 8:1-20. This is an entire chapter designed to encourage Israel to feed themselves with the Word of God, lest they forget and suffer punishment. In regards to the destruction that God would bring upon them, Hosea wrote, “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help” (Hos. 13:9). Take a good look at the conditions that existed just prior to captivity and compare that with the country in which we live. It should get our attention!

The love of self causes a host of problems. When a man is concerned only with himself, he will be **covetous**. The word here means lover of money. Paul wrote that “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Tim. 6:10). Note the connection between the words covet and love for money. Micah spoke of those who lie in bed at night and devise plans by which they could take advantage of the poor. He said, “they covet fields and take them by violence” (Mic. 2:1-2). Is there a problem in this country with violent crimes? When money becomes a person’s god he will do anything and everything to get it. How many of our nation’s elderly citizens have been scammed by some covetous idolater? How many of the poor have been taken by those who have the power to do it?

Paul said covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). We live in the midst of a country whose god is money. Paul described them as **boasters** (2 Tim. 3:2-5). Thayer defines this person as an empty pretender, a boaster.⁴ Brother Lipscomb said, “these arrogate to themselves honors which do not fairly belong to them.”⁵

The lover of self is described as **proud**. The word haughty is used in the ASV. Thayer defines it in this manner:

Showing one's self above others, overtopping, conspicuous above others, pre-eminent, with an overweening estimate of one's means or merits, despising others or even treating them with contempt, haughty.⁶

Solomon wrote, "The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts" (Psa. 10:4). Pride brings destruction and a fall (Prov. 16:18).

The lovers of self are also described as **blasphemers**. The word here means "speaking evil, slanderous, reproachful, railing, abusive."⁷ God can be blasphemed as well as our fellow man.

They are further described as being **disobedient to parents**. Have you ever seen any children who fit this bill? Brother Taylor said:

This sin runs rampantly in our land both in the church and out of the church. If the character of the times can be delineated by the manner of youth toward parental respect and honor, and it can to a large degree, what shall we say of the new low to which our generation has sunk? Rebels by the masses now refer to parents as 'the old man' and 'the old lady.' Flouting parental authority is the name of the rebellious game of emerging evil that millions of young people now play and it is a deadly or fatal game from the beginning to end. God has not yet changed what He said in Ephesians 6:1-3. Parents need to **wake up** and **make up** for all this deadly deficiency of the perilous past to keep the perilous future from becoming even worse. Children need to **wake up** and **look up** to Dad and Mother with filial affection and let the parents be worthy of such parental respect.⁸

The lover of self is **unthankful**. What ever happened to "Thank you"? How many times do you hear that from children today? How many times do you hear that from adults today? An unthankful heart is dangerous.

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Remember this is the result of selfishness. When a person or a nation is not thankful to God for the rich blessings He bestows upon us, the only alternative is apostasy. One of the first things Paul states about the Gentiles is that they were not thankful (Rom. 1:21). Barnes said:

Ingratitude has always been regarded as one of the worst of crimes. It is said here that it would characterize that wicked age of which the apostle speaks, and its prevalence would, as it always does, indicate a decline of religion. Religion makes us grateful to every benefactor—to God, and to man.⁹

The lover of self is **unholy**. God is holy (Josh. 24:19; Lev. 20:7; 1 Pet. 1:16). Holiness comes by study and application of God's Word. The selfish are not concerned with being like God. They are only concerned with their own desires. Brother Lipscomb said of these that they are, "not consecrated to God through their want of purity; defiled with sin, irreligious."¹⁰

They are said to be **without natural affection**. Note again the words of Brother Taylor:

'Without natural affection' is another mark of perilous or grievous times. It means a lack of affection that nature demands such as that between parents and children. Many of the crimes committed today are domestic in nature. Parents abuse and even kill their children. That infamous evil of abortion allows the murder of the innocent and precious unborn at mass rate in our insensitive era. When life is not respected at its beginning or and its end there will be no respect for it in between.¹¹

They are called **trucebreakers**. This word is translated implacable in Romans 1:31. It means according to Thayer: "without a treaty or covenant; of things not mutually agreed upon e.g. abstinences from hostilities; that cannot be persuaded to enter into a covenant, implacable."¹²

Adam Clarke said, “the word means those who are bound by no promise, held by no engagement, obliged by no oath; persons who readily promise any thing, because they never intend to perform.”¹³

A lover of self is a **false accuser** or slanderer. Thayer defines this word as, “Prone to slander, slanderous, accusing falsely; a calumniator, false accuser, slanderer; metaphorically applied to a man who, by opposing the cause of God, may be said to act the part of the devil or to side with him.”¹⁴ This is the word from which we get the word devil.

They are **incontinent**, without control of self. Brother Lipscomb said they are “persons of unbridled appetites and passions who do not control their evil propensities.”¹⁵ The word is translated in the ASV as “without self control.”

They are **fierce** or savage. Barnes stated, “Religion produces gentleness; the want of it makes men rough, harsh, cruel.”¹⁶

They are **despisers of those that are good**. Have you ever been ridiculed for trying to live as a Christian? That tells you about the character of the one who ridicules the godly. Coffman said, “The natural animosity of darkness against the light, of wickedness against righteousness, of error against truth, etc., is the mark of these. The wolves always hate the sheep.”¹⁷

They are **traitors**. There is no loyalty with this brand of person. They will betray any and all if it will profit them. The names Judas Iscariot and Benedict Arnold are synonymous with this word.

They are **heady**. In the ASV the word is headstrong. They are determined in their course of action. They will have their own way.

They are **high-minded** or puffed up. This is self conceit. This person thinks very highly of himself.

Lovers of self are described as **lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God**. They are the opposite of Moses,

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who forsook Egypt and its pleasures to live faithfully before God. Brother Lipscomb said, “The sorrowful catalogue which has just passed before our minds began with “lovers of self,” that unhappy vice which excludes all love for others, and closes with the lovers of pleasure, which shuts out all love of God.”¹⁸

Brother Taylor summed up this point well when he said, “Pleasures occupy top priority in their fun-filled lives. God is outlawed. ‘If it feels good, do it’ is the noxious norm ardently accepted by millions today. Hence liquor, dope, and illicit sex are in; sobriety, temperance, and moral purity are out—**way out**.”¹⁹ Truly this describes the condition of the world in these “last days.”

Mistreatment of Neighbors

The man who is described as a lover of self is far, far from what God wants him to be (Rom. 8:29; Rom. 12:1-2). Remember that Paul said, “perilous times shall come” (2 Tim. 3:1). The times would be perilous because of the conduct of men. A society which neglects and rejects God has nothing but perilous times to come. Even a casual glance at the world today tells us that the words of Paul are dead on. The conditions present today are no different than those described earlier. The nation of Israel rejected and rebelled against God. The only other path was to be the way of sin. As a result many suffered at their wicked hands. When a man is self-centered those around him suffer. Selfishness manifests itself in a number of ways.

One of the primary ways selfishness exhibits itself is seen in the way the lover of self treats his neighbors. God has always desired that his people treat their neighbors in a way that is good and right. Moses wrote:

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart:
thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and
not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge,

nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD (Lev. 19:17-18).

The same holds true under the New Covenant (Matt. 22:39).

Cain is an example of this selfish character. We read in Genesis 4:9, "And the Lord said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" He was not concerned for his brother. He took his life.

Isaiah spoke of priests that were selfish. "Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter" (Isa. 56:11). Micah who was a contemporary of Isaiah speaks of the priests as well: "The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us" (Mic. 3:11).

The priests of that day had a "form of godliness" just like those about whom Paul wrote, but they are nothing more than hireling preachers who have no desire to please God. Why do they preach? For what they might gain. How many so called "preachers" today fit into this category of hirelings? They are exactly what Paul said would come in the fourth chapter of 2 Timothy. They have no concern for the authority of God; they have forsaken it. They have no concern for truth; they do not preach it. They have no concern for lost souls; they preach what the wicked want to hear.

Another example to consider is Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 21). Ahab was king of Samaria and he desired to have the vineyard of Naboth. He went to Naboth and tried to strike up a deal and Naboth refused. When Jezebel saw her husband pouting she asked him what was wrong.

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Upon hearing the matter she basically said, “Don’t worry, I will devise a plan by which you can have the vineyard.” For a Divine commentary of her attitude study Micah 2:1, where we read, “Woe to them that devise iniquity, and work evil upon their beds! when the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.” Greed and covetousness caused a man to die. That is the result of selfishness.

In Luke 10:31-37 we read:

And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.

Here are two attitudes, one of selfishness, one of selflessness. The first two men are examples of the ungodly characteristic we have been discussing. The second example is a pattern for men to follow who desire to live godly. The Samaritan in this verse was compassionate. Compassion and love go hand in hand. This man loved in deed and in truth. John wrote:

But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels

of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:17-18).

There is a connection between love and compassion. Our Lord was compassionate and that compassion was a result of His love. If we love as we should, then we too will be a compassionate people. The growth of the early church was astounding, in part due to their compassion.

Another example is found in Matthew 25:41:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matt. 25:41-46).

Imagine the pride and arrogance of men who think they have no responsibility towards their neighbors. These were condemned to a devil's hell because they lacked compassion. I think the church would do good to spend much time in studying the life of our Lord in order that we might learn compassion.

I suppose we could pick nearly any sin in the Bible and trace it to the love of self. There are many others which could be examined, but I hope these few help get the point across.

Mastering Love

A very common Biblical principle is that a seed produces after its kind. Let's take that principle and apply it to the study at hand. We have established that God is love. God has given us His Word which teaches, instructs, and molds us into what God desires that we be (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Tit. 2:11-12). What then does His Word teach us about love? There is a love that is sinful. It is selfish to the core. This love is condemned as we have seen in this study.

The Bible teaches, however, that there is a love for self that is good. Matthew wrote, "And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39). How then do we harmonize the condemnation of self-love and the statement here about loving our neighbors as we love ourselves? The reality of the matter is that there are two kinds of love discussed in these passages.

The first we have already discussed. It is selfish, arrogant, proud and haughty. It shows no concern for God or mankind. The love we have for ourselves is to be based on God's love. Adam Clarke stated, "If I am to love my neighbor as myself and this 'love worketh no ill to its neighbor,' then self-love, in the sense in which our Lord uses it, is something excellent."²⁰ Christ taught that we are to live by what is called the Golden Rule. We read, "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

Clarke commented:

We owe to our neighbor what we have a right to expect from him—'Do unto all men as ye would they should do unto you,' is a positive command of our blessed Savior. By this rule, therefore, we should speak, think, and write, concerning every soul of man:—put the best construction upon all the words and actions of our neighbor that they can possibly bear. By this rule we are taught to

bear with, love, and forgive him; to rejoice in his felicity, mourn in his adversity, desire and delight in his prosperity, and promote it to the utmost of our power: instruct his ignorance, help him in his weakness, and risk even our life for his sake, and for the public good. In a word, we must do every thing in our power, through all the possible varieties of circumstances, for our neighbors, which we would wish them to do for us, were our situations reversed.²¹

Brother Wayne Jackson, in an article on self esteem, stated two Biblical facts that help build a person's self esteem. First, we are made in the image of God. Moses wrote:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Brother Jackson went on to say:

This circumstance, of course, has no reference to our physical constitution, for God is a spirit Being (John 4:24), not a physical one (Luke 24:39; cf. Matthew 16:17). That 'image' then consists of 'spiritual qualities, in man's mental and moral attributes as a self-conscious, rational, personal agent, capable of self-determination and obedience to moral law.'²²

Included here is the fact that each individual has a soul. Moses said, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). The soul, one day, will return to God who gave it (Eccl. 12:7). It will return to God in one of two ways; it will return

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to Him stained with sin, or it will return to Him washed in the blood of His Son.

Second, brother Jackson said:

A second fact that breathtakingly crowns human beings with a wonderful feeling of value is the fact that **God bestowed His Son** as a gracious, free gift, so that every accountable person has the potential for redemption. All that is necessary to achieve such is to surrender to the Lord's will (Heb. 5:8-9).²³

John wrote, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John 3:16). The love of God gave to mankind what we did not deserve. Our sin deserves punishment in eternal separation from God. Paul described the conditions of the world in Romans 3:9-10 and Romans 3:23. He summed up the point by saying, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Our sin deserves punishment, but notice the contrast in this verse: "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

The Bible is full of passages about the love of God for man (1 John 3:1; 1 John 3:16; 1 John 4:10; Phil. 2:5-11; Rom. 5:8-9; Tit. 2:11-14). One passage in particular shows the value of the soul. Matthew wrote, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). One soul is worth more than this world. Because of God's concern for the souls of men He sacrificed His Son (John 3:16).

These two points should be more than enough for man to know that he is loved. This also teaches man about self-love. One cannot read the Bible without knowing that he is of value. The Bible teaches that God loved us, and the result of is that we should value ourselves. The Word of God builds self-esteem, self-respect, self-worth, and self-love. All of these are good and will profit us in Christian

living. God's Word does not, however, produce the self-willed, proud, arrogant, and haughty self-love we discussed earlier.

In order to master love, I must spend much time in the Scriptures. One must follow the example set by our Lord.

Conclusion

God's love has provided for us "all things pertaining unto life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3). The Scriptures are the avenue through which God has revealed all things that man needs to live acceptably. May we ever follow the pattern of our Lord's life in His love for all humanity. When and where this Divine pattern is followed, the ungodly selfish desires defined in this study will be avoided. May we each live to this end.

Endnotes

- 1 David Lipscomb, **A Commentary On The New Testament Epistles**, Vol. V: I, II Thessalonians, I, II Timothy, Titus, and Philemon (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1983), p. 226.
- 2 Burton Coffman, **Commentary On 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus & Philemon** (Abilene: ACU Press, 1986), p. 262.
- 3 Robert R. Taylor, Jr., **Studies In First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon** (Ripley, TN: Taylor Publications, 1995), p. 110.
- 4 Joseph Henry Thayer, **Thayer's Greek Lexicon**, Electronic Database (Copyright 2000 by BibleSoft).
- 5 Lipscomb, p. 227.
- 6 Thayer, Electronic Database.
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- 9 Albert Barnes, **Barnes' Notes**, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft.
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- 14 Thayer, Electronic Database.
- 15 Lipscomb, p. 228.
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- 23 Ibid.

CHAPTER 25

**Diotrephes, Who
Loveth To Have The
Preeminence**

Cliff Goodwin

*Never is a man so small,
As when he is big in his own eyes.*

Introduction

T^{HE TRUTH OF THESE} words is easily verified in Scripture. The Corinthians were rebuked for aligning themselves in a sectarian manner under the names of various men (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10-13, King James Version). In doing so they became puffed up one against another (1 Cor. 4:6), as if to say, "My clique (sect) is better than yours." Ironically, as the Corinthians were puffed up in their own minds, in actuality their attitude had made them spiritually small. The apostle Paul wrote the following:

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal (1 Cor. 3:1-4)?

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Pride and the division often resulting from it are sure signs of carnality. In fact, children of God are warned of this perilous attitude throughout Scripture. Solomon penned, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,” (Prov. 16:18). Paul wrote to the Romans, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think **of himself** more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith,” (Rom. 12:3). Simply put, pride, arrogance and a “better-than-you” attitude bespeak spiritual immaturity.

Unfortunately, Scripture records the example of one who typified all too well the above mindset. His name is Diotrephes, and it is thought by some that he was perhaps an elder in an Asiatic congregation of the late first century.¹ Of course, this is definitely uncertain. What is known of Diotrephes, however, is that he was a self-seeking, domineering “church-boss” who greatly harmed the local congregation. Following is the brief, but shameful, Biblical account of Diotrephes:

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God (3 John 9-11).

Diotrephes: His Desire

The Holy Spirit was very candid in describing what Diotrephes wanted. He is styled as one “who loveth to have the preeminence among them (the church, CG).” The English words “loveth to have the preeminence” translate

but one word in the original Greek text—the word *philoproteuon*. This word simply means “fond of being first,” with Strong adding the further description, “ambitious of distinction.”² Diotrephes’ desire was to be given first place; he wanted to be placed on a pedestal and have everything in the church to go his way! In other words, he wanted to “call the shots.” One can easily see how such pride and egotism were very detrimental not only to Diotrephes himself, but also to the congregation of which he was a member.

A similar desire is seen in James and John’s mother, and perhaps even in those two apostles themselves. Matthew’s account follows:

Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom. But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father. And when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren (Matt. 20:20-24).

Their mother was not requesting that James and John be given **preeminence** in the absolute sense, for they were merely to be seated on the left and on the right of Christ’s throne (Matt. 20:21). Nonetheless, she desired that they be given places of **prominence**. Further, it appears from the **response** to the Lord’s question (Matt. 20:22) and from

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the **reaction** of the other ten apostles (Matt. 20:24), that James and John likely desired this themselves. Such positions of **prominence** would have given James and John **preeminence** in the circle of the apostles—and the other ten knew it.

It is important to note how carnal ambition in a few sparked problems in the group as a whole. The peace and harmony that Jesus no doubt wanted among His apostles was imperiled by the mother's request. So it is even in the church today. Sometimes the worst in one will bring out the worst in others, and explosive results follow. The church as a whole will suffer when individual members act like Diotrepes or the mother of James and John. Thankfully, however, Jesus knew the antidote to such carnal ambition. Like all sin, the cure must begin in the heart—in the attitude and will of a person. Jesus immediately called the apostles together and furnished this spiritual insight and instruction:

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Matt. 20:25-28).

It must be understood that true spiritual greatness in men is not measured in terms of preeminence, but rather in terms of service. Indeed, “the way up is down!” Jesus urged His apostles to seek opportunities wherein they could serve one another, instead of seeking occasions wherein they could dominate each other. Jesus Himself provided the greatest example of this attitude in performing His redemptive work (Matt. 20:28). Sadly

however, even decades later, Diotrephes did not understand this at all. He obviously did not realize that Christ held and deserved all preeminence (Col. 1:18), nor did he learn from Christ's selfless example while upon earth. Because of such spiritual deficiencies, Diotrephes desired to hold first place. He was willing to trample over the other brethren—and even over Christ Himself—in order to be first and have his way. What carnal ambition, what devilish desire!

Diotrephes: His Defiance

It seems that defiance of authority must naturally follow such insistent, carnal ambition. One determined to have his way will seldom stop at anything to have it. Diotrephes even bucked against apostolic authority by rejecting those sent from the apostle John (3 John 9). As the New Testament itself bears out, it was not uncommon for apostles to write letters, or epistles, to congregations as well as individual members (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14; 1 Tim. 3:14). John had written such a letter to the congregation of which Gaius and Diotrephes were members (3 John 9), but the defiant Diotrephes would not receive the epistle nor the “missionaries” who delivered it. Seeing his letter to the church as a whole had been refused, the apostle John then wrote a personal missive to Gaius—the beautiful letter commonly known today as Third John. Unlike Diotrephes, Gaius was one who welcomed John's messengers (likely “missionaries” of a sort) and extended to them Christian hospitality (3 John 5-8). Gaius understood and respected apostolic authority; Diotrephes did not!

The apostles of Christ were guided into all spiritual truth by the Spirit of truth Himself, the Third Member of the Godhead (John 16:13). In carrying out the work of Christ's apostles, both their preaching and writing were inspired of God (cf. Acts 2:1-4; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). In fact,

they were inspired witnesses and ambassadors of the risen Christ (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:18-20); when an inspired apostle spoke or wrote, it was as if Christ Himself was speaking to the hearers or writing to the recipients. Jesus had said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me,” (John 13:20). Paul powerfully brought out this point when he reminded the Corinthians, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord,” (1 Cor. 14:37). This is why Diotrephes’ defiance was so serious: in rejecting the apostolic authority of John, he was rejecting the authority of Christ Himself! Tragically, however, such behavior is not uncommon in those who insist on having the preeminence.

Diotrephes: His Denunciation

When one has a pet agenda he cherishes, he will often go to great lengths (or stoop to new lows) in order to push that said agenda. Diotrephes obviously recognized John’s apostolic authority as a threat to his ambitious maneuverings; therefore, he did not shrink from denouncing John and his messengers openly. John wrote that Diotrephes was “prating against us with malicious words.” “Prating” means “to accuse idly and falsely.”³ The original term is formed from a Greek root meaning primarily “to bubble up or boil over,” which Vincent notes as being indicative of speech that is both **fluent** and **empty**.⁴

In modern terms, Diotrephes’ charges might be described as “a lot of hot air.” However, the text reveals that he prated with malicious, or wicked, words—suggesting that his accusations constituted serious slander. Without a doubt, his denunciation of John would have been designed not only

to diminish the apostle in the eyes of the congregation, but also to elevate himself at the same time. Diotrephes' charges were foolish, empty words, regarding which John promised, "Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth" (3 John 10).

Selfish ambition will drive people to do and say unthinkable things. The tense of the Greek text indicates that Diotrephes "kept on doing" his malevolent and pernicious deeds. His must have been an incessant work of slandering John and undermining his apostolic authority. Those engrossed in such devilish activity seldom pause to think about some of the things they are saying. They press on tirelessly in their insidious work, thoughtlessly sowing seeds of destruction in the words they speak. Jesus warned of idle words, assuring man that, in the Day of Judgment, he will give account for each one (Matt. 12:36).

Diotrephes: His Dereliction Of Duty

When one's priorities become skewed in a particular area, the tendency is for the proper focus to be lost in other areas as well. Once again, Diotrephes stands as an example of this negative quality. His obsession with having the preeminence resulted in his neglecting the duty and privilege of Christian hospitality. Whereas Gaius could be counted on by the apostle John to receive the messengers, or missionaries, whom he sent, Diotrephes obviously could not. With the following words, Gaius had been earlier commended in the selfsame epistle:

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow helpers to the truth (3 John 5-8).

On the other hand, John contrasted Diotrephes with Gaius by supplying the words, “and not content therewith (i.e. **with slandering John**, CG), neither doth he himself receive the brethren.” His rejection of these “missionaries” as faithful and credible teachers of the gospel would have obviously precluded his lodging them or supporting them in their journey. In this way Diotrephes refused to be a “fellow helper to the truth” and was thus derelict in his duty as a member of Christ’s church.

Though still binding and essential today, the grace of Christian hospitality was especially needful in the first-century world. Traveling over distances of any length was often a perilous undertaking in ancient times. Obviously, modern modes of transportation were not existent, and travelers on foot or on beast were vulnerable to the attacks of raiders and robbers. For Christians who journeyed with the message of the gospel, the refuge of a Christian home was a welcomed consolation after braving the **highways** or the **high seas** of the first-century world.

Christian travelers of the period in which Peter wrote were often under considerable difficulty in finding proper accommodations. The inns—hotels—of the time were places of gross sin and corruption; and the homes of heathen friends, if open to them, would often subject them to ridicule for their espousal of Christianity, or what was worse, temptation to resume their former manner of life. Hence, only the private homes of Christians provided suitable association for those whose travels took them away from their homes. To guard the hospitality-minded against imposition by unworthy people, the letters of commendation mentioned by Paul (2 Cor. 3:1) came into use.⁵

It may be that an example of such a commendation is found right here in Third John. Immediately following his condemnation of Diotrephes, the apostle John

introduces a “Demetrius” into the text (3 John 12). There seem to be essentially two schools of thought regarding Demetrius. Some believe that he was a member in the same congregation as were Gaius and Diotrephes. In this way, John might have been encouraging Gaius to gravitate toward Demetrius, following his good example and shunning the bad example of Diotrephes (3 John 11).

Those who have lived through congregational problems know how precious a tried and true friend can be during those upheavals. If this school of thought is correct, then Demetrius certainly would have been “a shoulder” on which Gaius could have leaned, as the congregation endured the trials caused by Diotrephes.

There is a second school of thought, however. Some propose that Demetrius was another “missionary” sent from the apostle John, and that verse twelve was penned in order to assure Gaius that Demetrius was worthy of his fellowship (cf. 2 John 9-11). Demetrius would obviously be rejected by Diotrephes and thus would need the support and hospitality of faithful Gaius. In fact, it is altogether plausible that Demetrius was the messenger who delivered this epistle himself!

Diotrephes: His Deterrence

As tragic as it is for one to insist on sinful behavior himself, the awfulness of the situation only worsens when one insists on causing others to sin as well. It was clear that Diotrephes was not going to receive messengers from John, but he stubbornly went further, “[forbidding] them that would.” He did what he could do to deter other members of the congregation from exhibiting respect for apostolic authority and from extending hospitality to fellow-Christians. Whether or not he was successful in this evil work seems unclear from the original text.⁶ The word “forbiddeth” is translated from a Greek term meaning “to

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hinder, to prevent, to forbid.”⁷ If Diotrephes had been successful in deterring others from their Christian duty, it seems very clear from this brief epistle that he had not been able to deter Gaius.

Causing others to sin is in itself a grievous transgression. The apostle Paul wrote, “...that no man put a stumbling block or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way,” (Rom. 14:13b). In doing so, one helps cause his brother to perish—what a terrible thought! Paul elsewhere penned these inspired words:

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to the weak. For if a man see thee who hast knowledge sitting at meat in an idol’s temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be emboldened to eat things sacrificed to idols? For through thy knowledge he that is weak perisheth, the brother for whose sake Christ died. And thus, sinning against the brethren, and wounding their conscience when it is weak, ye sin against Christ (1 Cor. 8:9-12, ASV).

The child of God should in no wise encourage sin. To deter one from performing a God-given obligation is just as sinful as seducing one to commit a wicked act. Diotrephes was doing all he could to be a stumbling block to his brethren, imperiling not only himself, but other members of the church as well.

Though the devil’s servants will do what they can to deter God’s child from faithful obedience, one must never give in, or comply, with the adversary’s demands. Perhaps Diotrephes was very forceful in his “bullying” the congregation, but this in no way relieved the members from their Christian duties. Peter and the other apostles exclaimed, “We ought to obey God rather than men,” (Acts 5:29). These wise words apply even when the enemy’s pressures are the strongest. The Gospel must be preached and obeyed “without fear or favor.” The Scriptures clearly

condemn the fearing of men, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28). They further reveal that man cannot pursue the favor of man; instead, he must seek the favor of God. “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God,” (John 12:42-43).

Diotrephes: His Domination

Some have speculated that Diotrephes was an elder or preacher. Whether or not he served in either of these capacities, he definitely usurped authority that God never intended for him or any other human being. Regarding those members who respected apostolic authority and practiced Christian hospitality, John wrote that Diotrephes “casteth them out of the church.” The apostle here employed the same word used by Matthew in recording Christ’s clearing of the temple, “And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,” (Matt. 21:12). It is the same word used also in John’s Gospel account, describing what the Pharisees did to the former blind man (John 9:34).

Diotrephes obviously made it clear that those who refused to bow to his domination were not welcomed in the congregation. His attitude could be described as “My way or the highway,” as well as “Rule or ruin.”⁸ It is hard to imagine a person who could be so conceited and brazen as to assume dictatorial rule over Christ’s church—that is, unless one has met such a person! Sadly, the spirit of Diotrephes is still around in the church today. It can be found in elders, preachers, and yes, even in members.

An elder who refuses to understand that rule lies in the **eldership**—not in himself as an individual—may have fallen prey to such a spirit. There is a reason why the New Testament speaks of the plurality of elders in the local congregation (cf. Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5). No one man is to be the “presiding bishop” over the eldership as a whole. Any such power structure, or hierarchy, is completely without Biblical substantiation. It is always hurtful to hear of a congregation that suffers from one elder who insists on having the preeminence and “calling the shots.” It is equally disappointing to know that the other elder(s) involved allow such to exist and persist.

Preachers are not without the need of caution in this matter. There are some preachers who apparently feel that they are not answerable to anyone—neither the elders nor Christ Himself! How can such an attitude be different from that of Diotrephes? Gospel preachers have the authority to preach and teach God’s word (cf. Tit. 2:15), but they are to work **under the oversight** of the elders like any other member (cf. 1 Thess. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:17-20; Heb. 13:17). Some preachers have lost sight of this fundamental truth. One needs to realize that it would be easy for a gospel preacher to fall into such a trap. After all, many are continually commended for their good work, always hearing how good they are. Obviously, encouragement is needed by all who preach the gospel (cf. Gal. 4:13-15; 2 Tim. 1:4-8), but a preacher must be careful not to let redundant praise “go to his head” (cf. Rom. 12:3).

Finally, the spirit of Diotrephes can infect members of the church who are neither elders nor preachers. A congregation is susceptible to this especially when the pulpit is weak and the eldership is spineless or nonexistent. Often one’s “weight is thrown around” in terms of “dollars and donations.” An egotistical member may threaten to withhold his contribution if he is not petted or coddled.

Others look at their family's history in the congregation as a sort of entitlement. The Lord's people must realize that there is no seniority in the church! There is but one King, and His name is Jesus; He holds all the preeminence (Col. 1:18). For any member to insist on his own will or to promote himself to "first place" is insubordination of the rankest order. There was no room for Diotrephes' spirit in the first-century church, and there is no room for it in the Lord's church still today.

Diotrephes: His Destruction And Destructiveness

It is clear that Diotrephes did not love the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind (Matt. 22:37), for if he had, he would have allowed Christ to sit on the throne of his heart, instead of insisting on that position for himself. In his pride and arrogance, his insubordination and self-will, he was thus found disobedient to the first and greatest commandment. Inspiration does not reveal whether John ever made his hopeful trip to Diotrephes' home congregation (3 John 10; 3 John 14), or whether Diotrephes ever repented of his carnal ambition. One thing is certain, however. If Diotrephes died in his sins, then he is lost in torments even today (cf. John 8:21; Luke 16:23). Is self-aggrandizement that important? Is having one's way that imperative? No matter how much power or preeminence one thinks he enjoys, the words of Christ still echo ever true. "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:26).

The sadness of Diotrephes' story is only half-told. What other souls might be in torments with him this very day, because of his wicked influence and coercion? This, too, is a lamentable consideration when dealing with "church bosses" like Diotrephes. They often drag down other souls with them, whether by mustering them on their

devilish side, or by so discouraging them that they fall away. Untold harm has been done in the Lord's church by those like Diotrephes. At times it seems that their destructiveness knows no bounds—congregations are ripped apart, and disillusioned souls wander back into the world. May God help us all to avoid ever finding ourselves in the shoes of Diotrephes!

Endnotes

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7 Joseph H. Thayer, **The Online Bible Thayer's Greek Lexicon**. Electronic Database, BibleSoft.

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CHAPTER 26

With Their Mouth They Show Much Love

Jeff Archey

Introduction

I *KNOW OF NO* one who would not acknowledge that "...the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor. 13:13) is a beautiful text! This is a timely study for churches of Christ in the past, present, and the future. It is our prayer that this volume of study concerning love will be profitable until our Lord returns (1 Thess. 4:14-18; 2 Thess. 1:7-9).

"Love" is a word much maligned and misused as we note in daily reading and through various expressions. When Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," (John 14:15) we understand that love is expressed by action; not merely by statement. In order for proper love to be developed, it is necessary within the realm of our study to see how misguided love lacks guidance and how misguided love is deceptive to the one possessing it. We will do so by considering a text of long ago, Ezekiel 33:30-33:

Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my

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people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: **for with their mouth they shew much love**, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them.¹

As we examine our verses, let us see the character of the chapter; its background, the context of the statement itself, and the challenge and its application in our day. Also, let us look to the Christ and how He addressed this matter in His day. Let us further notice the commitment needed, as described by James during New Testament times, in order to supplement and instruct us as to how we can defeat the misguided love of showing love only with our mouths.

The Chapter—Ezekiel 33

This chapter is a “chapter of charge.” It contains a charge or challenge from God brought forth especially through this “son of man,” Ezekiel.

As the chapter begins, we read the charge to a watchman to warn the people and the command to the people to listen, respect, and obey the warnings given by this prophet of God (Ezek. 33:1-9). Verse seven clearly shows Ezekiel as the watchman God has brought forth. We read similar language in Ezekiel 3:17-21 as God, through Ezekiel, continually warns His captive children. One understands the necessity for a watchman to give warnings and call attention when needed—much like preachers today. Gospel preachers would do well to note this example of the watchman (cf. Rom. 15:4). DeHoff observes, “Those preachers who have ceased to preach the truth and become men-pleasers should consider carefully

that they not only destroy the wicked by failing to warn but bring destruction upon themselves.”²

A great question is presented in verse ten, “how should we then live?” If one hardens in sin, where is life to lead? It is as if God asks through Ezekiel, “What kind of life do you really have, Israel?” Immediately, another question follows as a plea from God to Israel, “for why will ye die, O house of Israel” (Ezek. 33:11)? It is as if God was saying, “I have made everything possible for you to change and now the ball is in your court.” Brandt’s thoughts on this are worthy of note:

The exiles’ despondent cry was to be met with Ezekiel’s echoing an immutable truth regarding God and a resultant plea (Ezek. 33:11) which heaven had pronounced earlier to this same people: For I have not pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye (Ezek. 18:32).³

Of course, we are reminded of Peter’s words in 2 Peter 3:9, “The Lord...is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” What a continual, beautiful plea from God to this day—with everything God has granted unto us, why would we die spiritually?

Why would we choose to die spiritually, when God does not want us to? God is for us (Psa. 56:9). God sent His Son to die for us (John 3:16). God is extremely patient with us (2 Pet. 3:9). God is love and expressed that love to us (1 John 4:8-10). He has done everything possible for us to make the right choice to follow Him.

Why would we choose to die spiritually by walking unfaithfully? Peter’s depiction of one’s dying unfaithful to the Lord (2 Pet. 2:20-22) should be enough to cause us to pause in order to look at our own lives to prevent this same occurrence. We need to ensure that we are renewing

our inward man daily (2 Cor. 4:16-18), pleading with others to return and walk with Christ once again (Gal. 6:1-2).

Why would we choose to die spiritually by not telling the world about Christ? One study of churches of Christ showed that only two to three percent of a congregation are involved in teaching the lost. How sad! We need to be more evangelistic in our congregations—it is a command! Evangelistic congregations are exciting congregations! They remember the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) and put it into action. We must study continually in order to be approved unto God and to be ready to grant an answer to anyone who asks “of the reason of the hope within” (2 Tim. 2:15; 1 Pet. 3:15).

Could it be that our concern to fight against liberalistic error has kept us from evangelism the way God intended? We must stand against error, but not at the expense of evangelism. We see the problem with the Grecian widows in Acts 6 and how it was resolved. The solution was not at anyone’s expense. Both taking a stand against error, and conducting a study with the lost, can be done.

In Revelation 2:1-7, the church at Ephesus was commended for their stand against evil by testing those claiming to be apostles; yet, they left their “first love” and were rebuked. They were told to remember and repent. We must always be on guard like the watchman, but let us not forget that the watchman’s stand contributed to safety by allowing everyone to go onward doing what needed to be done. Reaching the lost with the gospel is necessary! Why should they die, **when they do not have to?**

We must make our Bible classes evangelistic. Bible school teachers who use their classes for instruction as well as outreach should be commended! Teachers who send a note to a little child, and then follow up with a personal visit to that same home are great examples of a simple evangelistic tool in action. Oh, what an opportunity for evangelism!

We must immediately contact those who visit us; we must welcome folks as guests; get to know them as friends and our goal should be to eventually add them to our church family (Acts 2:47). Follow up with every guest whether by card, visit, or phone call.

We should also ask at this juncture why would we choose to die spiritually when our children need us? Those “arrows in the hand of a mighty man” need guidance (Psa. 127:3-4). “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6) is a commonly quoted text. Children need **training** (“*chanoch*” in the Hebrew); meaning to place a bit in the horses’ mouth, to guide, to break and to lead in the right way.

Life is too short, and eternity is too long, for us to die spiritually; especially after our Heavenly Father has “given us all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3).

God brings forth specific warnings in Ezekiel 33:12 and elaborates two simple eternal truths in Ezekiel 33:13-16: **those who turn from God, you will die**, and, **those who turn to God, you will live**. The summary in Ezekiel 33:17-20 finds rebellious Israel complaining that God’s way is not equal, but oh, it is! God’s ways are just, His ways are set, and His Word is firm. We know what God expects of us, and we know what good things He has done. In turn, man makes various decisions and choices. Man cannot blame God for his choices and he cannot blame others for his choices. His decisions are his own. Of course, man must face the consequences of his decisions.

In Ezekiel 33:21-29, we find one coming to Ezekiel expressing how Jerusalem was smitten during Babylonian captivity (Ezek. 33:21). Ezekiel “...was no more dumb” (Ezek. 33:22) and he responded as the Lord wanted him to respond.

It is stunning to see the sheer arrogance of the people of Ezekiel’s day using the inheritance of the land, the

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teaching of Scripture, and mentioning Abraham—yet, they were not living for God (Ezek. 33:24-26). God obviously knew their thinking and their hearts. Their arrogance and their desire for the land, while not living for God, would be their downfall (Ezek. 33:27-29). It did not matter whether they were found in the wastelands, the fields, or the caves—God promised their destruction for their disobedience. Their abominations and disobedience to God would take them away from the blessings He had given them to enjoy.

This brief synopsis and discussion of the first thirty-two verses allows us to see the background and foundation for how they showed their “love” to God and their fellowman in regards to our text under consideration.

The Context—Ezekiel 33:30-33

Also, thou son of man, the children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the LORD. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not. And when this cometh to pass, (lo, it will come,) then shall they know that a prophet hath been among them (Ezek. 33:30-33).

Come And Hear

In Ezekiel 33:30, we see the plea to hear and **observe** the words of the preacher, but the people do not show the desire to hear and **obey** them. It is clear the covetousness and worldly desire that first swept the people away into

captivity continued while they were in captivity. It was as if the people felt Ezekiel's words provided them a "comfort zone" or "just enough" spirituality to say "they had been to church," if you will. DeHoff notes, "The people loved and admired Ezekiel. They were 'against' him in the sense that they did not obey what he preached."⁴

Cease To Do

In Ezekiel 33:31-32, we see a crowd that reflects a great attitude. Oh, the evangelism—asking people to come, what outreach! The attention span of this crowd—man, one cannot beat it! Oh, what preacher today would not want a congregation such as this? Upon first reading these verses, this crowd appears to be a "great congregation." But, let us remember what is expressed on the outside may not reflect what is truly found on the inside. They expressed love with their mouths, but their hearts were somewhere else; a challenge always for God's people through the centuries, even today. Oh, their preacher Ezekiel was one they loved to hear, but that was the extent of it. Their challenge was the covetousness and greed that was among them. The very thing that caused them to be taken into captivity; turning away from God and choosing idols and the world, remained their focus and kept them in captivity. The following observation of Henry from Matthew 7:24-27 is an exceptional example and parallel of the people in Ezekiel's day and that of the foolish man:

They will not be persuaded by all the prophet can say, either by authority or argument, to cross themselves in any instance, to part with any one beloved sin, or apply themselves to any one duty that is against the grain to flesh and blood. Note, there are many who take pleasure in hearing the word, but make no conscience of doing it; and so they build upon the sand, and deceive themselves.⁵

Come To Pass

In Ezekiel 33:33, the people were told of the way to know a true prophet. The law had also stated, “When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:22). It is evident the people should have been able to hear and obey. Also, it is without doubt that the length of captivity probably would have been shorter had they turned to God sooner, rather than reveling in their “just enough religion” attitude.

The Challenge

In examining Ezekiel 33 and the context of Ezekiel 33:30-33, we bring forth this question: Are church members today sometimes disposed to listen to God’s Word in the same fashion as those in Ezekiel? As we have examined **then**, let us examine **now**.

Come And Hear...Today

Each Lord’s Day and Wednesday evening, we “come and hear” and obviously, such is admirable. But, let us not forget that worship to God is not something “done unto us,” but, rather something that we do and offer to God. According to the Scriptures, there are three types of people who assemble for worship.

First, there are those who come looking for something. This example was brought forth in the time of Christ as He entered the synagogue (Mark 3:1-2; Mark 3:6) and the people watched solely for the purpose to “accuse him.” Your writer has met individuals in many foyers, presenting various requests for monetary aid, immediately following the worship hour. Often, they ranged from benevolent needs, to complaints about the congregation—and they didn’t even attend there! I wished

not to judge intentions or motives. However, I wondered about the swiftness of discussion afterward and what the true “need” in the situation really involved.

Secondly, there are those who engage in vain or empty worship teaching and emphasizing man’s way rather than God’s way (Matt. 15:9) while offering up personal desires. We see those “looking for a church to meet my needs” and in turn making unauthorized decisions when the authority, God’s Word, has clearly stated what to do. This reminds us of Cain, in Gen. 4:3-5, who did not offer to God what God wanted, but what Cain desired (see Heb. 11:4; also Nadab and Abihu of Lev. 10:1-2).

Thirdly, there are those who desire to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24) and are eager to serve God. Such have the desire as “a deer panting for water” (Psa. 42:1) to be “true worshipers” (John 4:23). This should be our aim, not “come and hear” but rather “come and join with us in true worship.”

As “come and hear,” seemed to be the “accepted norm,” in Ezekiel’s day, may we be reminded of our purpose and aim as we come to worship God. The late Winfred Clark penned, “How many times do we come into the assembly, and our minds are upon a dozen other things that have nothing to do with worship? It must mean that we are not giving due consideration to what we are doing.”⁶

Jesus responded to Satan. We see in Matthew 4:10, “Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.” This is more than a “come and hear” type of worship and it should refresh us in our purpose towards worship.

“Thou shalt” sets the aim of worship for you and me. We see from John 4:20-24 that the **object** of our worship is God. In worship, God is the audience. It is God we are to please with what we offer to Him. We need to not only come and hear but apply the response of the angel in

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Revelation 22:8-9, “Worship God.” This is for any and all as the Psalmist penned, “Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children: Let them praise the name of the Lord; for his name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and the heavens” (Psa. 148:12-13). What a joy it is to say, as David exclaimed in the long ago, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD” (Psa. 122:1).

“Thou shalt” starts with you and me. “Thou shalt” in Matthew 4:10 is the same as “they that worship him” in John 4:24. John 4:24 emphasizes two aspects needed for acceptable worship: **“in spirit”** and **“in truth.”**

“In spirit” is for the human heart to reach up! To reach up with the human heart is the right approach! God knows our hearts (Acts 1:24) and can discern its thoughts and intents (Heb. 4:12). We see what happens when ones heart is far way from his worship (Matt. 15:8). We must put our **hearts** into our worship unto God, our **hearts** in prayer, our **hearts** in singing, our **hearts** in preaching and studying, our **hearts** in giving, and our **hearts** in the Lord’s Supper. In other words, move our hearts closer to God—not just by hearing but by doing!

“In truth” is the guideline which we follow in offering worship unto God. Even in the worship of an idol or false god, there are always guidelines and requirements for “acceptable” worship. Granted, such worship is vain and wrong, but the deceived one will do all he can to be “pleasing” to “his god.” Colossians 3:17 reminds us of the authority we should follow in worship and in life, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” I must put forth my effort and my heart unto my God! There is no other way.

Of course, we are not minimizing, nor ignoring the necessity of attention itself. “He that hath an ear to hear; let him hear” is stated by our Lord eight times, and the seven churches of Asia were reminded the same each

time—“He that hath an ear, let Him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 2:7; Rev. 2:11; Rev. 2:17; Rev. 2:29; Rev. 3:6; Rev. 3:13; Rev. 3:22). We are to hear **and** understand (Matt. 15:10). We also remember the exhortation of Paul to Timothy, “Give attention to reading” (1 Tim. 4:13). We listen, but let us not ignore the strength of reading as we see the words and hear them in our minds—applying them to our hearts. Spurlin observes:

Recently a poll revealed 65% of Americans agree the Bible answers all or most of the basic questions of life. Only half of those who accept this fundamental truth read it at least weekly. 28% say they rarely or never read the Bible. Only 16% of Americans read their Bible daily, 21% weekly, 12% monthly, fewer than 10% a month, and 41% rarely or never read it. It is sad most people do not feel it necessary to read the Word of God to know Him and to learn what one must do to meet the conditions of salvation. The greatest of all books, the best-selling book of all-time, and the book that adorns most every coffee table is the least read book of all.⁷

There are a few changes we can make to improve our listening. **First**, focus attentively on the One to Whom we are listening. **Second**, look eye to eye in discussion. **Third**, repeat what is said without paraphrase. These attitudes go a long way in being a good listener.

Our attitude of “come and hear” must not be a means to an end as it was in Ezekiel’s time. When we find this attitude prevalent, we note that, by and large, the majority of people who say “come and hear” are eager for others to share in the blessings they enjoy—salvation and the beauty of the church we read of in the New Testament. May their tribe increase and press onward!

Cease To Do...Today

One might show much love with his mouth, but that alone will not “cut it,” if you will. Jesus made this clear,

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“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21).

From the time we are a child in Bible School, we understand the difference between hearing **and** doing through the song “The Wise Man” taken from Matthew 7:24-27. It is the wise man who hears and does. When one hears **and** does, one will be justified before God (Rom. 2:13). Jesus grants a warning to us in describing the Pharisees of His day: “They say and do not” (Matt. 23:3). We may come “en masse” to hear, but imagine if the truth were **heard** and **applied** more often!

One major reason why the “doing” was not carried through in Ezekiel 33 was their emphasis and desire for greed. In Ezekiel’s and Jeremiah’s day we see “every one is given to covetousness” (Jer. 6:13).

The New Testament has much to say about covetousness. Covetousness is also called idolatry in Ephesians 5:5 as we read “nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” Idolatry, or putting other things before God, is evident in today’s society. When one desires the things of the world, which place dedication and service to God secondary, he chooses carefree over communion, personal priorities over prayer, gaining over giving, and so-called freedom over faithfulness. Let us be reminded that “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:20).

When the Word of God is put aside, and the possessions of this world fulfill our lusts and satisfactions, we will move further from God just as they did in Ezekiel’s day. Let us make certain our treasure is laid up beyond the blue (Col. 3:1-2; Matt. 6:19-21).

Come To Pass...Today

“Come to pass” is a constant plea like those of Ezekiel’s day. Like Ezekiel, we must continue onward

praying and hoping that our preaching and persuading will make a change sooner than later in people's lives. We must renew ourselves and proclaim the gospel so they will know a "...[preacher] hath been among them."

The Christ

Our study of Ezekiel 33 brings to mind the teaching of Christ in Matthew 15:1-9. Similarly, they each describe religious people who "with their mouth they show much love:"

Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, **This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.** But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Indeed those in Christ's day were showing much love with their mouths, but their hearts were showing something else. What had they done? The Pharisees wished to bind others with traditions of men. The four steps of binding a man made tradition, rather than a God ordained tradition, (see 2 Thess. 2:15; 2 Thess. 3:6) are evident in this text. **First**, it started as an **innovation** (something new). **Second**, it became **accepted** (Matt. 15:4). **Third**, it was **approved** by their elders (Matt. 15:3; Matt. 15:5).

Fourth, it was **exalted** above God's commands (Matt. 15:9). Notice a trend? It looks very similar to today in apostate congregations, does it not?

Their hearts were aimed toward man's traditions, but their lips were aimed toward God. Such cannot be, for the lips say what the heart emphasizes (Mark 7:20-23). The heart of man must be right and acceptable to God, for God knows the heart of man (Acts 1:24). The heart must be touched with the gospel in order to know what one must do to be saved (Acts 2:37), and we must obey from the heart (Rom. 6:17). To Simon, a Christian, the very thoughts of his heart had to be repented of in order to be forgiven (Acts 8:22). The heart must have focus and unity (Acts 2:46; Acts 4:32). The heart must have Christ dwelling in it by faith (Eph. 3:17).

A "clean" mouth and a "dirty" heart are hypocritical. They are not as one, for they are far apart. May we, like the Psalmist, make the plea with our lips, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Psa. 51:10). And, let us be reminded that God's Word is of none effect to those that wish to follow their own ways. Would to God they would do as the long ago: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

The Commitment

We have examined the attitudes of Ezekiel's day and compared them to our attitudes. Also, we have examined the teachings of Christ in order to understand more completely what is acceptable for our attitudes. Let us now ask "what more can we do to help us avoid the attitude of using our mouths only to show love"?

The book of James has been referred to by many as a practical book with plain and simple teachings that, when

applied, will make a change in our lives and, prayerfully, a difference in others. Coffman said:

...the viewpoint advocated here is that every portion of [the epistle] fits beautifully and appropriately into the one theme of 'Perfection' which ties every word of it into a cohesive whole. This theme was stated at the outset [Jas. 1:4], thus: "That ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing."⁸

Our text under consideration is James 1:19-27:

Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

To make us perfect or complete, let us commit and apply this text to our lives. Let us make love an action word, and truly show our love by word and deed. Love is more than just speaking it with our mouths.

Let us be better listeners—much like we discussed earlier. In order to support that beautiful "gift of attention,"

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James reminds us to be “swift to hear.” Maynard makes a simple “down home” observation: “Why do you think God gave us two ears and one tongue? To hear more than we speak.”⁹

Let us be slow to speak—get all the facts first. “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Prov. 18:13). Failing to get all the facts before speaking leads to the judging that Christ condemned (Matt. 7:1-5). James later teaches how we should bridle our tongues (Jas. 1:26; Jas. 3).

Let us be slow to anger—a “quick tempered” person needs to work on this attribute and not brush it off as “well, that’s just the way I am.” You know, there’s an invitation song that might help this person out; it is called **Just As I Am**. The emphasis of the song is simple, when we go to God “just as we are” He in turn makes us “just the way He wants us to be” if we follow His pattern of obedience for our life. The apostle Paul stated:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

Let us lay aside naughtiness—also known as evil, wickedness or malice. Vines calls it “primarily, ‘badness’ in quality, denotes ‘wickedness, depravity, malignity.’”¹⁰ These things deprive us and malign others. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor. 7:1).

Let us be a doer and not a hearer only. Unlike those in Ezekiel’s time, may we apply the things we hear in our lives. Use them and apply them! Make the changes looking into the “mirror” of God’s Word. When one does

the will of God, one tends to those in need, as we note the fatherless and the widows in James 1:27, but he will also keep himself unspotted from the world.

Hearing carefully, speaking slowly, and putting into action what we say will help us to avoid the attitude of showing love only by our mouths. It will also be an example to others. May this study be concluded with the thought that through Ezekiel, the prophet, our Savior Jesus Christ, and the inspired pen of James, “the Word of God remains among us.”

Endnotes

- 1 All scriptures are from the King James Version.
- 2 George DeHoff, **DeHoff's Commentary, Volume IV** (Murfreesboro: DeHoff Publications, 1982), p. 321.
- 3 Mike Brandt, “Ezekiel's Call Renewed; Israel To Be Restored (Ezekiel 33:1-35:15),” IN: **Ezekiel And Lamentations; Lessons For God's People Past, Present, And Future**, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Pulaski: Sain Publications, 1997), pp. 276-277.
- 4 DeHoff, p. 323.
- 5 Matthew Henry, **Commentary on the Whole Bible, Volume IV (Isaiah to Malachi)**, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc4.xxvi.xxxiv.html>
- 6 J. Winfred Clark, **Expositions of the Expositor, Volume 1**, Ed. Michael R. McDaniel (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2001), p. 550.
- 7 Bob Spurlin, **Bob Spurlin E-Mail Newsletter**, December 2004.
- 8 James Burton Coffman, **Commentary on James, 1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2 & 3 John & Jude** (Austin: Firm Foundation Publications, 1979), p. 17.
- 9 Bill Maynard, **Jewels From James**, (unknown), p. 41.
- 10 W.E. Vine, **Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words** (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1985), p. 213.

CHAPTER 27

Should You Love Them That Hate The Lord?

Ted J. Clarke

Introduction

“*THE GREATEST OF THESE* Is Love” (1 Cor. 13:13). What a great theme for this **POWER Lectureship**! If there be critics of this lectureship from the right or the left, one thing they cannot claim is that this lectureship has been single minded or issue oriented in the topics it has covered through the years. The elders and preachers of this congregation have done an outstanding job in seeing that a diversity of rich themes has graced the brotherhood with great Bible study material. Much of the responsibility and work in planning these annual lectures has fallen on B. J. Clarke, my son, and I am very proud of all he has done to make these lectures the excellent events they have come to be. Likewise, I am confident that the Southaven elders, Larry Everson and Con Lambert, will choose a replacement for B. J. that will continue in the same path of truth and stability. I am also so thankful for the support provided to me from the Southaven church for my work at the **Bible Institute of Missouri** at Springfield, Missouri.

The primary text for our lesson comes from Jehu the prophet during the time of king Jehoshaphat of Judah:

Then Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned safely to his house in Jerusalem. And Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to King Jehoshaphat, **'Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?** Therefore the wrath of the LORD is upon you. Nevertheless good things are found in you, in that you have removed the wooden images from the land, and have prepared your heart to seek God' (2 Chron. 19:1-3; emphasis mine throughout unless otherwise indicated, TJC).¹

The background for the Scripture above is reflected in the quote that follows:

**The Prophets And Jehoshaphat
2 Chronicles 17:1–19:11**

Jehoshaphat began his sole reign in 869 B.C. Like his father Asa, he followed Yahweh.² Unlike his father, his commitment did not wane in his later years. Four chapters in Chronicles shed light on why Ahab had cultivated an alliance with Jehoshaphat.

A. The Strength of Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 17:1–19).

The strength of Jehoshaphat was manifested in two ways. First, the king of Judah was militarily strong. He stationed troops in fortified cities throughout Judah. He had garrisons in the towns of Ephraim which his father Asa had captured (2 Chron. 17:1–2). He had a huge army of experienced men numbering in the hundreds of thousands (2 Chron. 17:12–18).

Second, Jehoshaphat was enormously wealthy. Because he followed the Lord he had *“great wealth and honor”* (2 Chron. 17:3–6). The fear of Yahweh fell on the surrounding kingdoms so that they, for the most part, did not make war with Judah. The Philistines rendered tribute in silver to him, the Arabs in thousands of rams and goats (2 Chron. 17:10–11).

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The source of Jehoshaphat's strength was Yahweh. The Lord was with this king because he followed the example of David. He did not seek after the Baals as did his counterparts in the northern kingdom. So Yahweh "*established the kingdom in his control.*" Jehoshaphat took great pride in the ways of Yahweh. He continued the efforts of his father to remove the high places and the Asherim from Judah. He even dispatched government officials and Levites throughout the land to instruct his people in the book of the law (2 Chron. 17:3–9).

B. The Prophet Jehu (2 Chron. 19:1–11).

The prophets had two main criticisms of Jehoshaphat. First, he did not remove the high places outside Jerusalem. These were shrines where Yahweh was worshiped illegally. Second, he made peace with Ahab of Israel. To seal this alliance, Jehoshaphat arranged a marriage between his son Jehoram, and Athaliah the daughter of Jezebel (2 Chron. 18:1). Probably the mutual fear of the rising power of Damascus forced the rival kingdoms to seek reconciliation (1 Kings 22:41–44).

When Jehoshaphat returned to Jerusalem after his narrow escape at Ramoth-gilead, Jehu the prophet went to see him. Jehu was the son of Hanani the seer who had condemned Asa for his alliance with Ben-hadad (cf. 2 Chron. 16:7). He rebuked the king for entering an alliance with those "*who hate Yahweh.*" Jehu warned that compromise with the enemies of the Lord could bring the wrath of God against the king. Because of his reform efforts and his personal efforts to seek God, however, Yahweh would be lenient with Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 19:1–3).

Jehoshaphat responded to this criticism with yet other reform efforts. He appointed judges in the land in each city. An appellate system brought difficult cases to one of two supreme courts in Jerusalem. One court, presided over by the high priest, considered religious questions. A

government official was supreme judge over the civil court (2 Chron. 19:5–11).³

When the prophet Jehu asked Jehoshaphat, “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?” he was discussing an issue that has always troubled the faithful people of God in various degrees. Likely, long before the Flood, we do not know how long before, God’s people became a minority in the world’s population. By the time of the Flood there were eight souls against the world population, which was likely in the millions. Except for some brief periods of time, Biblical history portrays the people of God in a minority. How did God’s people treat those who had no belief in God, whether they were originally unbelievers or former believers who had become apostate? To what extent could God’s children “help” those who did not serve God? What type or degree of “love” could be demonstrated toward the general population of the world who do not love the Lord?

Jehoshaphat’s blessing of his son’s marriage to the daughter of the wicked and idolatrous Ahab and Jezebel may have been intended to strengthen his kingdom of Judah, and his alliance with Ahab to fight the common foe of Syria may have seemed appropriate, but in fact these were looked upon by the prophet as expressions of aid and love to those who hated God and had rejected Him as their God. In making these moves Jehoshaphat was following the example of his father Asa (cf. 2 Chron. 16:1-6). Interestingly, it was the prophet Jehu’s father, Hanani, that rebuked Asa for his unholy alliance with the pagan Syria (2 Chron. 16:7-14).

For a time Jehoshaphat heeded Jehu’s rebuke and instituted many reforms to exalt and honor God (2 Chron. 19:4-11). God also gave Judah victories over Ammon, Moab and Edom (2 Chron. 20:1-30), but toward the end of his reign Jehoshaphat once again failed to trust God and allied

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himself with the wicked king Ahaziah of Israel in seeking to expand trade to Tarshish, possibly in southern Spain (2 Chron. 20:31-37). This time Eliezer prophesied, "Because you have allied yourself with Ahaziah, the Lord has destroyed your works." The ships that Jehoshaphat had planned to use in promoting this trade were all destroyed.

Although Jehoshaphat was a reasonably good king most of the time (cf. 2 Chron. 17:1-10), his actions of showing help and love for those who hated God brought God's disapproval and wrath upon him (2 Chron. 19:1-2; 2 Chron. 20:35-37). There is a lesson for us in Jehu's censure of Jehoshaphat (Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:6, 1 Cor. 10:11).

Still A Minority

Jehoshaphat's alliances with the wicked likely were prompted by his position as king over a relatively small population amidst enemy nations who often sought Judah's destruction. Israel, as a nation before the divided kingdom, were told to enter Canaan and utterly destroy seven nations in the land who would, if left to survive, draw Israel into idolatry (Deut. 7:1-5). They failed to perform this task as they should have and suffered for their failure (Judg. 1-3; et al.). Besides the remnants of these seven nations, a united Israel had to deal with the Midianites, Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and a number of other nations that they were not told to destroy, but they were told not to imitate (Deut. 18:9-14).

When the divided kingdom came, the northern kingdom, led by Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and those who followed in his steps, went into a great apostasy (1 Kings 13; et al.). Eventually, the northern kingdom of Israel was carried away captive and spread across many nations (2 Kings 17). In spite of being greatly diminished in number, God expected the southern kingdom of Judah to remain faithful, but she did not do so. Second Kings 25 tells the

story of Judah's captivity. After the captivity only a small remnant of the formerly great nation of the Jews returned to Jerusalem to renew worship and service to God under the Law of Moses (cf. Ezra/Nehemiah).

When Jesus of Nazareth came as Christ, the promised Old Testament Messiah, very few of the Jews accepted Him fully (John 1:11; John 12:42-43). What began as a predominantly Jewish church of Christ (Acts 1-7) soon became a Gentile Christian majority (Acts 8-28). The New Testament church has always been a minority in the world population and remains so today. We fight the same battles with the nations around us as did the Jews in the Old Testament and the early Christians. The difference is that there is no physical element in our fighting (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-20). By far most of the world is filled with unbelievers regarding God and Christ (1 John 5:19). True Christians look around and see themselves as a miniscule minority even among all who profess some type of "Christianity" (Matt. 7:21-23; 1 Tim. 4:1-2; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Jude 3).

Accordingly, the temptation is great to want to "fit in" to a greater number and to be **"like all the nations"** (cf. 1 Sam. 8:1-8, 1 Sam. 8:19-20). Like Jehoshaphat, we want to trust in our own thinking and in others, rather than trusting in God. We are wrong! "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:5-6). We seem to think that joining with others will make a greater and more satisfying faith—without ever thinking of what we are sacrificing or compromising in the process.

Surely we want the Lord's church to grow into a mightier and more numerous influential force in the world. Such will glorify God (Eph. 3:21). However, we want to be certain that we are working for God's glory and not our

own. Jehoshaphat's alliances with those who hated God were the result of his own desires, not God's.

Determining How To Love Others

As God's children in the New Testament church of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are given a threefold mission. We are to evangelize the world (Matt. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16); edify the church (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 14:3-5; Eph. 4:12); and work benevolence toward the needy (Acts 4:32-35; Rom. 12:13; Gal. 6:10). In accomplishing these works we are to be guided by the standard of authority known as the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 1 Cor. 14:37; 1 John 4:6; Jude 3). What the Scriptures authorize we must apply to carrying out these areas of work. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17). In whatever way we "help" or "love" those who "hate the Lord," such must be authorized by Scripture.

We know that there is a Christ given command that we show love for our enemies. Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, **love** your enemies, **bless** those who curse you, **do good** to those who hate you, and **pray for** those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:43-44). The Greek word for "love" in this passage is a form of *agape*. This is a love that is known by the sacrificial acts performed toward its object. This love always seeks the good of the one loved. It is a commanded love that does not mean that we are to have an affectionate delight to be in the company of the one(s) being loved. God does not command that we love to be in the company of those who are our stated enemies, who curse us, and who spitefully use us and persecute us. However, we are to engage in acts of *agape* love toward them; to invoke a blessing upon them; and to pray for the best for them. The difference between invoking a blessing upon them and

praying for them is that the "blessing" is spoken to those who curse us, while our prayer for them is spoken to God.

Notice that we are to exhibit this love toward those who do not love us in imitation of God our Father, for He shows His love toward all men, even those who do not love Him—the evil and unjust. "...[T]hat you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matt. 5:45). God is the perfect example of how to demonstrate a perfect love for all men. But God's love for man does not demonstrate itself in giving help to those who hate Him by assisting their efforts to turn people from belief in Him or in the promotion of false religions. God's perfect love for men's souls was seen in giving His Son upon the cross so that those who believe in Christ and obey Him may have eternal life (John 3:16; John 3:36, ASV; Heb. 5:9).

For God to participate in or to promote sinful activities would be to divide Himself against Himself and destroy not only His own kingdom, but also his very Being (cf. Matt. 12:25-30; Hab. 1:12; 1 Pet. 1:15-16). Accordingly, God would not and could not ask His children to participate in or to promote activities that His Word describes as sinful, even if such would be done with the intention of showing love for one's fellowman. Such actions do not fall under the Biblical definition of the love we are to show to others. God does not tempt anyone to sin (Jas. 1:13), so it is impossible for Him to approve of participation in sin.

The problem comes when men give a definition to showing love for others that God does not give. This is a problem far beyond the scope of this lesson to explore fully, but we can give some general and specific examples and then ask that you apply the principles to other situations that confront you. **First**, some do not accept the Scriptures as the absolute and final revealed Word of God that is to

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be the only standard of authority in the way we live our lives (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Col. 3:17). Therefore, contrary to God's will, these people will add to or take away from God's instructions on how we are to love one another (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:5-6; Rev. 22:18-19). These "lovers of men" do not believe that God could possibly be so "narrow minded" that He would condemn their approach to loving others. For such people God's Word is incomplete. Likewise, they look upon God's revealed will as being "suggestions" for one to consider rather than absolute law to be obeyed. No wonder they stray into religious error.

Second, some of these people claim a respect for God's Word, but they subject its truths to the test of their feelings and emotions. It is much like the denominationalist who says something like, "I know what the Bible says on this matter, but I also know what I feel in my heart." Others have been known to say, "I wouldn't trade what I feel in my heart for a whole stack of Bibles." The emotions of the heart take first place over God's expressed will. Often this has been a stumbling block for unbelievers becoming children of God and a pitfall for God's people in all generations. Feelings often produce thoughts that are not established in fact. Jacob's feelings for his son Joseph, who he thought was dead, were so strong that he felt he would go to his grave mourning (Gen. 37:33-35), but he later saw Joseph alive in Egypt (Gen. 46:28-30). King Saul "**felt compelled**" to offer a burnt offering though he was not authorized to do so and lost his kingdom for doing so (1 Sam. 13:11-14). Saul of Tarsus said, "Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9). The feelings and thoughts of these people were the exact opposite of the truth, although at the time they engaged in these acts they all felt justified. Feelings are a part of our created being but it is certainly proved that for feelings to be correct and

trusted they must be a result of believing what is true. Martin Luther is credited with the following poem on this topic:

For feelings come and feelings go
And feelings are deceiving;
My warrant is the Word of God,
Naught else is worth believing.

Though all my heart should feel condemned
For lack of some sweet token
There is One greater than my heart
Whose Word cannot be broken!

I'll trust in God's unchanging Word
Till soul and body sever
For though all things shall pass away,
His Word shall stand forever!

We should never say, "I feel good about doing this and therefore I know I am right." Instead, we should say, "I know this is what God's Word teaches and therefore I feel good about doing it."

Forming Ungodly Alliances

Many things feel good in the sense that doing them is pleasing to our fleshly appetites—and here I am not talking about catering to our lustful sexual desires or intoxicating the mind with alcohol and other drugs.

One of the most disturbing trends in the Lord's church today, as well as in past generations, is the desire on the part of many church members to be "**like all the nations**" (1 Sam. 8:4-5, 1 Sam. 8:19-20). Israel could not stand being different from the other nations in Palestine who had earthly kings over them. God was their King (1 Sam. 8:7), but Israel wanted a visible king to comfort themselves and impress the nations around them. Some twenty years ago a few so called preachers among us decided it would be a good thing for the Lord's church to be "like the denominations around us." As they went to

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and from among many of the larger brotherhood congregations, they found many audiences who agreed with them. These “preachers” criticized and ridiculed the church for thinking we had the corner on the truth, for saying that we were the only ones who were going to be saved, for quoting so many Scriptures in our sermons, for rejecting instrumental music in worship, for teaching that immersion in the name of Jesus is essential to salvation, and a host of other items. Of course, several charges made against the church by these “liberators” were false, but they had to build straw men they could easily tear down. Many members of these larger churches believed some or all of these things before these renegade preachers began their attack, but they rejoiced that someone else had taken up the task of promoting these changes. Change spread through the church like wildfire and the “change agents” became more and more popular.

The end result is that a large number of congregations of the Lord’s church now count themselves as merely another part of the denominational landscape of “Christianity.” Some have taken unscriptural names for their newly liberated churches; some have abandoned the idea that baptism is essential to salvation; others have conceded that instrumental music in worship is no sin and have begun using it, while others do not use it yet but see nothing wrong in doing so. Some of these churches have denominational preachers exchange pulpits with their preachers and engage in a wide variety of religious activities together.

Now these changes are more frequently being seen even among the smaller congregations. In such localities the former charges made against churches of Christ as being narrow minded and arrogant Bible thumpers are giving way to expressions of how nice it is to have such a unity of diversity. “I’m O.K., You’re O. K., We’re all O.K.” Such is the standard denominational mantra.

Let me be totally honest and say to you that there have been times in my forty years of preaching that I have forced myself to reevaluate what the church teaches on several of these issues. I have thought about how “nice” it would be to be able to have more in common with other religious people and to work with them in a number of ways not possible under the teaching of the church I have embraced for so many years. **However, when I searched the Scriptures for the authority to make those compromises, I repeatedly confirmed and fortified my understanding of the “faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”** (Jude 3). There has not been one fundamental teaching of the Lord’s church about which I have had to change my mind from the time I first began to hear the gospel in Okinawa in 1961 down to the present year of 2007. I plan to continue my studies till my dying day and remain open to consider all matters, but God’s Word has been completely revealed and confirmed for 2000 years and you will have to prove to me any needed change from the Scriptures.

If you are not a diligent and continuing student of God’s Word, it will be relatively easy for someone to convince you that you are not showing the proper love for your fellowman if you deny that denominational teaching is as valid as what is taught in the Lord’s church, like the congregation here at Southaven, MS.

How can we guard against helping and showing improper love for those who hate God? **First**, remember that Christians can show love in limited ways for those who hate God and do not serve Him (Matt. 5:44-45), although it would be wrong to make alliances with such people when doing so would be to participate in or to promote unbelief and ungodliness (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:8-11). One must use sound judgment and Biblical truth in making these distinctions. Jehoshaphat did not consider these restrictions in making his alliances.

Second, even though this section might be considered a sub-point of the previous paragraph, there are religious people who do not openly profess hatred toward God and actually believe that they are faithfully serving Him, although they are mistaken. In one sense these people might be more easily loved, since they would not initially exhibit hatred toward the Christian faith we express. However, if we oppose and expose their religious error they may become as hostile an enemy as the atheist. Our expressions of love toward these people cannot be such that it brings us into engaging in unscriptural worship or the promotion of false doctrines (Matt. 7:21-23; Gal. 2:4-5).

Third, although there were no religious denominations in the first century such as we have in the hundreds in the twenty-first century; there was immorality, false teaching and partyism propagated by some in the church. Love was to be shown toward these brethren in error along the same lines as the first and second points above. Fellowship was not to be extended to the immoral in the church (1 Cor. 5:1-13), but even those who could not be fellowshiped were not to be counted as enemies (2 Thess. 3:6-15). False teachers, those who abandon the teaching of Christ, are destructive to the church and cause the truth to be blasphemed (2 Pet. 2:1-3). Those who bring doctrines other than that of Christ are not to be greeted or received into one's house (2 John 9-11).

The prophets in the Old Testament noted that there were those among the Jews whose actions allowed the influence of evildoers to prosper and these actions were properly rebuked.

Also I have seen a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem: They commit adultery and walk in lies; They also strengthen the hands of evildoers, **So that no one turns back from his wickedness** (Jer. 23:14).

Because with lies you have made the heart of the righteous sad, whom I have not made sad; and **you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does not turn from his wicked way to save his life** (Ezek. 13:22).

The seeds of denominationalism also were being sown by the creation of division and partyism in the early church (1 Cor. 1:10-15). Giving aid and comfort to those who foster such divisions can be a promotion of those parties. Expressions of love that do not share in the evil deeds of these people may be allowed, but we cannot give them our blessings without promoting their false teaching that will cause them and others to be lost (2 John 9).

Truly all three categories above are those who do not love God or serve Him as His will requires. Those who defiantly hate God and have contempt for His ways will freely admit their animosity. Denominationalists who deny the absolute authority of God's Word likely will not make any admission of hatred toward God, although a rejection of His Word is in truth a rejection of His Being (Luke 9:26; John 12:48-50). This latter point also applies to erring brethren. However, the fact that some will not admit that their actions ultimately constitute a hatred for God or Christ does not excuse them, for even the atheist does not believe he has done anything wrong and he denies that he refuses to consider properly the evidence against his position.

In summary, our love for our enemies, which would include all those who in some way hate God, must be guided by all that the Scriptures have to say on any matter. The major guideline is that we do not engage in or promote any sinful activity in our demonstration of that love. Remember that the *agape* love our Lord requires us to demonstrate toward our enemies is a love that is known by the action that it prompts, but it also is a love that

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constantly seeks for the highest good that can be done for another. It is this latter point that we seek to explain now to bring balance to this discussion.

Loving God First

When Jesus was asked which of the commandments of the Law of Moses was the first or greatest, He did not respond by naming one of the Ten Commandments given in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5. His response was:

‘The first of all the commandments is: ‘Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these’ (Mark 12:29-31).

Christ quoted these commands from Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Leviticus 19:18. These two commandments sum up man’s total duty on earth in any age, whether Patriarchal, Mosaic, or Christian. Love for God must be **first** in every area of life—heart, soul, mind and strength. To properly love and serve God all consideration must first be given to following God’s will, even over self and family (Matt. 10:37-39; Luke 14:26, Luke 14:33).

Note that the **second** command is to “love your neighbor as yourself.” Because we are to love God first, it must be that however we are to show our love for our fellowman, it must be in harmony with putting God first in all things. Therefore, we cannot claim to be showing love for our neighbor when what we are doing runs contrary to showing love for God first. This means, as we expressed previously, that we cannot allow our personal ideas or our emotions to set aside God’s will by claiming we are showing love for mankind. Whatever good we may think we are doing in such cases of showing “love” for

others is negated by the fact we are not showing undivided love for God. If it would be right for me to act in this way, it would be right for anyone to follow my example and out goes the first and greatest commandment of loving God first!

We must love our fellowmen whether unbelievers (Matt. 5:44-45) or brethren (1 John 4:20-21). If we do not do so, we are not loving God Who gave these commands, and we must not love men more than we love God.

Showing True Love To All

Many mistakenly believe that true love never confronts another with a view to correcting erroneous viewpoints or improper behavior. Such belief is certainly not the Biblical definition of love. What we are to think about religion and what we are to do as believers in and as lovers of God is set forth authoritatively in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:3; Col. 3:17; Jude 3). We are to let the Bible define the elements of love we are to show to others.

The Hebrews writer points out that God chastens (disciplines) us as an act of His love toward us and that He does so for our profit (Heb. 12:5-11). God's revealed Word can be used as a tool for teaching and instructing us and others, but it is also to be used for the purpose of reproof (rebuking) and correcting those who believe and practice what is contrary to the Word (2 Tim. 3:16). Preaching the Word of God includes correcting and rebuking with urging and appeals to respond appropriately (2 Tim. 4:2). All Christians have a responsibility to teach the Word of God. "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3). These words are to all who are "in

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Jesus Christ” (Jude 1). The words “contend earnestly” are also used in references to wrestling matches where the combatants are in a vigorous intensive struggle to defeat the foe. Of course we do not fight physically to defend the truth of God’s Word. It is a spiritual battle with the opponents of religious error (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-17). Our weapon is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. **Love for God will prompt every Christian to fight against the proponents of ungodliness and false teaching whoever they may be.**

The apostle Peter’s love for lost Jews moved him to charge them with murdering Christ. His love also led him to command them to obey the gospel (Acts 2). The apostle Paul did the same in Acts 13 and 17 to both Jews and Gentiles. Many other examples could be noted from the same book. The point is that these men of God did not consider it a lack of love for their fellowmen to teach them the truth about God **and** to correct their religious errors. The gospel contains not only facts to be believed about Christ’s death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4), but also commands to be obeyed (Rom. 10:16; 2 Thess. 1:8-10). If people do not believe and obey the gospel they will be eternally condemned. Therefore, it is a mark of true love to teach these people the truth of the gospel.

Jesus sent the apostles, first century Christians and all subsequent generations of Christians on the global mission to teach the gospel to all people of the world, even if some do not like the message and do not obey it (John 3:16; Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16). This gospel is the greatest measure of God’s love for mankind and it is the greatest measure of love we can show to God and our human race—to teach them of God’s love and how to be saved eternally. True love will not only teach them the positive truth but will also teach them about their religious errors and encourage their repentance from error to obey

the truth. To do so is not a lack of love but a demonstration of true love.

The apostle Paul told the Ephesian church that they ought to always be “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15). Paul was contrasting what the Ephesian Christians were to do compared with the manner of false teaching by some men who used trickery and cunning deception to lead others astray from the truth. “Speaking the truth in love” does not just mean to do it kindly. It means that one will speak only the truth because one has love for those to whom he is speaking. One also speaks the truth in love because this *agape* love means that one will speak those truths that will bring the most possible good to those who hear it. If someone is in error that person needs to be corrected by hearing the truth and it is the highest form of love to teach them that truth. Of course, initially we need to present that truth in the way most likely to gain the acceptance of the hearers, for our purpose is to produce obedient hearers. Paul addressed Timothy on these matters:

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:24-26).

For Paul, a gentle, knowledgeable, patient and humble presentation of the truth is the very best way to get people to come to their senses so that they will embrace that truth. Even if some extremely serious matters need to be discussed and people need to be held accountable for their sins, this is the way to approach such situations. Love looks to get people to repent, not to “get them told!”

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The same apostle who wrote the passage just cited above also wrote the following: "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching" (2 Tim. 4:2; 1 Tim. 5:20; Tit. 1:13; Tit. 2:15). The word "rebuke" means to censure sharply. There comes a time in trying to deal with sinners who are reluctant to repent when one increases the intensity of the discussion. See the discussion by Jesus of the handling of offences between brethren (Matt. 18:15-17) or the manner in which He condemned the Pharisees after many confrontations with them in His ministry (Matt. 23). Notice also Paul's dealing with unbelieving Jews in Acts 13:13-52). Confronting and rebuking in the proper setting are elements of a true love for our fellowman and for God.

How Far Can We Go?

Imprecation In The Old Testament

Remember the question of Jehu the prophet to king Jehosaphat? "**Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD?**" The psalmist David would have answered the prophet Jehu's question in the following manner. "Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies" (Psa. 139:21-22). Then David immediately requests, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psa. 139:23-24).

Many people read such a passage and say something like, "Well, that is the Old Testament, but in the New Testament Christians are forbidden to feel like that or say things like that." Others contend that such sentiments were not approved by God under any circumstances and thus not inspired by His Holy Spirit. However, there are

positive evidences that David was inspired when he spoke these imprecations. Notice the following psalms:

Add iniquity to their iniquity, And let them not come into Your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living. **And not be written with the righteous** (Psa. 69:27f).

Let his children be fatherless, And his wife a widow. Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg; Let them seek their bread also from their desolate places...Let there be none to extend mercy to him, **Nor let there be any to favor his fatherless children** (Psa. 109:9-12).

These are called imprecatory psalms because they contain imprecations that “call down a curse”⁴ and contain “expressions calling for divine judgment to fall upon the Psalmist’s enemy.”⁵ Leupold calls them “those psalms in which the writer prays that God may afflict the evildoer and punish him according to his just deserts.”⁶ Imprecation is not a literary feature confined to the Psalms. The actions of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:1-15 and Elisha in 2 Kings 2:23-25 come under the definition of imprecation. The prophet Jeremiah also equals anything found in the Psalms with his imprecations in Jeremiah 18:18-23.

Were David’s statements in the psalms cited above inspired of God? The truth is, the psalmists did not call for anything in their imprecations that God had not already done any number of times (cf. Gen. 6-9; Gen. 19; Deut. 7:1-5; 1 Sam. 15; et al.). Also, these Psalms were used by Israel as her songs of lament and praise. If these Psalms had been sinful, we would have adequate record of it. The fact that David spoke by the Holy Spirit in the Psalms was stated in 2 Samuel 23:1-2 and by Peter in Acts 1:16. In that same section of the text (Acts 1:20), Peter quoted two of the “worst” of David’s imprecatory psalms, Psalms 69 and 109. See also Acts 4:24f. Any view which

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denies the inspiration of these Psalms or claims that they reflect personal sinful attitudes is refuted by the passages in Samuel and Acts.

One major emphasis seen in these psalms is to preserve God's reputation as the One Who establishes the righteous and punishes the wicked (Psa. 7:6-11).⁷ Consider how these various elements from the Psalms justify the imprecations of the psalmists and the resulting judgment of God. **First**, deliverance of the righteous will bring praise to God (Psa. 7:17; Psa. 35:18; Psa. 35:28). **Second**, the wicked will see that there is a reward in being righteous and recognize that God is the true judge in the earth (Psa. 58:11). **Third**, it will show to all men everywhere God is sovereign and that this is the God of Jacob (Psa. 59:13). **Fourth**, the wicked will see that as wicked men they cannot enjoy the same blessings as the righteous and that death is the absolute judgment of God against them (Psa. 69:28).⁸ **Fifth**, the psalmist hoped that imprecatory judgments would cause the wicked to seek the Lord and acknowledge Him as Most High (Psa. 83:16-18).⁹

Frequently the imprecatory Psalms are condemned by some who fail to reflect properly upon the style of the eastern Oriental languages. In our present Western world we do not speak with such poetic flare or intensity. We therefore apply different meanings and motives to the Hebrew poets, imposing upon them what we would mean if we had said what they said. Nothing can be more unfair than to impose Western culture and twenty-first century standards upon oriental Hebrew times around 1000 B.C. The Psalms are poetry and thus are intended as pictures, vividly portraying the thoughts of the poets. Park clarifies this point very well:

Now why should we not remember that as the **affectionate** words of the Old Testament are more intense than an American philosopher

would adopt, so the **denunciatory** words are more unqualified than he would select? Why should we forget that the sensitive Orientals would feel chilled by the calculating, reserved style in which we indicate our abhorrence of vice? If the lion were the painter, how should we be portrayed? On the other hand, we are not prepared by temperament or by education for the rank luxuriance of their style in reprimanding vice. Yet they and we mean to express essentially the same idea. We are roused by their unmodified figures to reconsider and to feel anew the force of our idea. The western philosophers clothe an exact thought in the precise words: 'Good men will rejoice when they see virtue triumphant, even if its prosperity be attended with the just and needed sufferings of the vicious.' The Hebrew poet is inflamed with this thought, and he sings: 'The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked...' [Psa. 58:10].¹⁰

As an example that these differences in language and rhetoric still exist, when the late Saddam Hussein, former president of Iraq, commented on the possibility of going to war with America (Gulf War, 1990-1991), he stated, "The American soldiers will drown in their own blood." Hussein was obviously predicting the terrible punishment he thought Iraq would inflict on U.S. forces. President George H. W. Bush of the United States, promising victory for America and its coalition forces simply said, "Our actions will be swift and decisive." Hussein shows the impassioned oratory of the oriental mind of Middle Eastern culture, while Bush exhibited the calmer logical speech of the Western world. These are real issues that need to be considered before making charges of immorality against the Biblical writers.

Some view the imprecatory Psalms as immoral because "their inspiration is overlooked."¹¹ If the Lord **reveals** to men that others have been abandoned by God,

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those who speak these imprecatory sanctions against them have the Divine approval for doing so. A reasonable question would be, “Can men pray in that way today?”

In our present relations it would be inappropriate for us to invent a method of threatening, which men who ‘spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,’ employed in relations unlike our own. If we are not inspired to know that our enemies have been judicially given up of God, and if we are not inspired to offer a prayer in opposition to the forsaken ones, then we are in circumstances so dissimilar to those of David that, if we should originate words like his, the meaning of them would be different from his. The simple fact that he speaks as a supernatural representative of the All-wise Judge, interprets his phrases as phrases which cannot be interpreted as devised by an uninspired man.¹²

Another question could be, “Instead of asking God to condemn these people, why not pray for the wicked to change and be converted instead of destroyed?” A look at the examples of God’s patience and longsuffering (Gen. 6:2ff; Gen. 15:26; Deut. 7:1-6; 2 Pet. 3:9-10), makes it obvious that He does not “give up” on people while there is any reasonable chance for their reclamation (cf. Eph. 4:17-19; Rom. 1:21-32). For this reason God may have revealed to David that “indignation was more appropriate than compassion, **at that time.**”¹³ On the other hand, there were times when the psalmist did speak of “converting” the sinner and God causing the wicked to “return” to Him (Psa. 51:13; Psa. 78:34; Psa. 90:3). God would not move men (inspire them) to cite imprecations for eternal condemnation against those who were not beyond turning to Him.

It may be that the imprecations of the Psalms seem to be too intense and harsh because we do not hate sin as badly as we need to do. If we are soft on sin, we shall

certainly be soft on the punishment for it. Kelley makes some appropriate remarks.

In the third place, we can examine some of the implications of these psalms for our own lives....They should warn us against an easygoing attitude toward sin, and especially toward every form of oppression. Perhaps we would not find these prayers so strange if we took right and wrong more seriously. The self-centered person who faces God and yet deliberately turns away, choosing evil rather than good, can only come into judgment.¹⁴

The imprecatory Psalms also illustrate that we are to submit retribution to the proper authorities.

[P]rivate individuals, as such, ought not to satisfy their retributive sentiment by inflicting evil on transgressors; but ought to invoke the administrator of law to do what the general good requires, in satisfying this sentiment. The retributive affection is not holy, neither is it sinful; but is normal, and must be rightly controlled. Its office is to call on the giver of a revered statute to afflict the violator of it with some kind of penal evil.¹⁵

Where there is no penalty for violating the law, the law will not be respected. When those who break the law are not punished with diligence, more people seem to think that they can get by with law-breaking (Eccl. 8:11).

It is wrong for "private individuals [to] usurp the office which belongs to the domestic, social, [and] public guardian."¹⁶ There is always a need for caution. Park admits that this sentiment of retributive justice can be "easily perverted" and that men are sometimes "inclined to take from the Divine Ruler his prerogative of administering moral penalties."¹⁷ Individual actions are governed by Leviticus 19:18; Deuteronomy 32:35; Proverbs 25:21-22 and by God appointed authority in the New

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Testament (Rom. 13:1-7; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). **God is to determine the agency of punishment, whether “natural” disaster, through the state, or special assignment.**

Now the Imprecatory Psalms lay an emphasis on the truth, that private individuals are not to usurp the place of a magistrate, and take the law into their own hands. These are not wild, disorganizing, Jacobinical songs; not incendiary appeals to a rabble; but they are governmental Psalms; staid, regular, reverential invocations upon the monarch to wield his own scepter.¹⁸

When David prays to God to “raise me up, that I may repay them” (Psa. 41:10), he is doing nothing more than volunteering to be God’s agent in administering deserved punishment. As king over Israel David was authorized by God to act on His behalf in certain administrations of justice on both the Jewish and Gentile nations.

These imprecatory psalms also point out that there are occasions when we must do something, even if it is painful and unpleasant, to prevent an even more painful occurrence from happening. “O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed, Happy shall he be who repays you as you have served us! Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock” (Psa. 137:8-9). These acts were not to be accomplished by the Jews, but by the Medes, as foretold in Isaiah 13:1 and Isaiah 13:15-10.

While contemplating this massacre of the infants, the Psalmist does not **express** any joy of his own in such a cruelty, He announces the mere fact, that the **Medes and the Persians** will be jubilant when they make an utter end of their annoying and corrupting foe. The **Medes and the Persians** will congratulate each other, as all victorious warriors make themselves happy, when they have so far succeeded in their conflict that nothing more can be feared from

their opposer. The **Medes and Persians** will be congratulated by their countrymen at home, as all conquering heroes are, when they have eradicated a fruitful mischief, so that not one germ of it can take life and grow up to afflict the world any more.¹⁹

The Jews could rejoice at the demise of Babylon and God's assurance that it would never again rule the world with its cruelties, even though the Medes themselves were pitiless in their destruction of that nation. Also, one must remember that God charged Israel with the total destruction of several of the vile and wicked Canaanite nations (Deut. 7:1-6).

There is nothing in the concept of inspiration, when it is understood in the total Biblical context, that argues against the inspiration of the imprecatory psalms. The identification of the authors with the purposes of God, as complex as those purposes may be, absolves the psalmists from immoral sentiments in calling for justice upon evil doers. In the context of their times, these psalms can well be considered both inspired and morally sound.

Imprecation In The New Testament

At times we fail to recognize "the sentiments of justice" expressed by Christ and the New Testament apostles and prophets as being as severe as the imprecatory judgments of the Psalms. In Matthew 23 Jesus pronounced scathing denunciations to the face of the scribes and Pharisees, saying in Matt. 23:33, "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" Peter announced the death of Ananias' wife in Acts 5:9 and condemned Simon and his money to "perish" together (Acts 8:20). The apostle Paul struck Elymas blind for "a time" for his opposition to the gospel and for seeking to turn away the proconsul Sergius Paulus from the truth (Acts 13:4-12). Additionally, Paul foretold that God would

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“smite” the high priest that ordered him to be struck illegally (Acts 23:3); he expressed wishes that the circumcision faction would “mutilate themselves” (Gal. 5:12) and that Alexander the coppersmith would be paid back by God “according to his works” (2 Tim. 4:14). Furthermore, Paul pronounced “*anathema*” or the state of being “accursed” on two classes of people: (1) those who do not “love the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 16:22) and, (2) those who “preach any other gospel than that [Paul] preached” (Gal. 1:8-9). To be *anathema* or accursed is to be “condemned (eternally)...used for something or someone doomed to eternal destruction.”²⁰ Also emphatic is the plea of martyred saints for God to “avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth” (Rev. 6:10). One author has traced the judgment events of the book of Revelation directly as a fulfillment to the prayers of the saints to avenge them.²¹ Tying together the prayers from the altar with the events which emanate from the altar, Thomas joins Revelation 6:9-10 with Rev. 8:3-5; Rev. 9:13; Rev. 10:6; Rev. 14:18; Rev. 16:7, and Rev. 19:2. Whether or not this linkage can be justified, it is obvious that God heard the prayers of these saints for justice, even if they had to wait “a little while longer” (Rev. 6:10). These verses point out that a spirit which pleads for justice, as expressed by the psalmists, is not contrary to the spirit of Christ and Christianity.

There are some who would object to the propriety of Christians using imprecations of any kind. Frequently, Luke 9:51-56 is quoted in support of this objection:

Now it came to pass, when the time had come for Him to be received up, that He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, and sent messengers before His face. And as they went, they entered a village of the Samaritans, to prepare for Him. But they did not receive Him, because His face was set for the journey to Jerusalem. And when His disciples James and

John saw this, they said, 'Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?' But He turned and rebuked them, and said, 'You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' And they went to another village.

In this passage, James and John wanted to call down fire from heaven upon some Samaritans who would not receive Jesus, that is, to feed and care for His company as He passed through their village. The reason for the Samaritans' rejection of Jesus is stated—because He was going to Jerusalem. The hatred between Jews and Samaritans was two-sided in this case.

The KJV and NKJV have James and John asking for permission to bring down fire from heaven "as Elijah did," an obvious reference to 2 Kings 1:1-15. The Nestle's and United Bible Societies' editions of the Greek text omit this phrase, but the Textus Receptus and Majority Text retain it. If we allow this part of the verse to be genuine, we must be careful how we apply Christ's remark to James and John, that, "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of."

If we believe that Christ is contrasting Elijah's spirit with the supposed spirit of New Testament teaching, then we have Elijah, as a man inspired of God, doing something that Jesus is implying is wrong or sinful. Or, another might say that the spirit of the Old Testament is inferior to that of the New. We have previously shown that vengeance was prohibited in the OT as well as the NT (Deut. 32:35; Psa. 94:1). What Elijah did he did because he was "a man of God" (2 Kings 1:10-12). God approved of it and honored his request for fire to come down out of heaven and consume the soldiers sent by Ahaziah. One thing that Jesus cannot be saying to His disciples is, "You have the wrong spirit, just like Elijah had the wrong spirit."

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If Elijah had the proper spirit in his circumstances, why did the disciples have the wrong spirit? It must be obvious that Jesus did not consider the prejudice of the Samaritans against the Jews as sufficient grounds for destroying this village. It may also be that James and John wanted to bring the fire from heaven for the wrong reason. Just previous to this event (Luke 9:46-48) the disciples had argued about who would be greatest among themselves. In Mark 10:35-45, James and John were vying for a top position in the kingdom. It is quite possible that they wanted to call down fire to show their authority, or even to impress the Lord with their loyalty for Him. We know from Acts 5:9; Acts 13:8-12 that imprecations were honored by God in the gospel period and that such was not always improper. Remember also Paul in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and Galatians 1:6-9.

The words of Christ in Luke 9:56 are also omitted by the Nestle's and United Bible Societies' texts. "For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them." Again, allowing this verse to be genuine, Jesus was to soon die on the cross for the sins of these Samaritans as well as the Jews (Acts 1:8; Luke 24:46-49). Many of the Samaritans would later hear Philip preach Christ to them (Acts 8:5; Acts 8:12). Later, John himself would go to Samaria to impart spiritual gifts unto them (Acts 8:14ff). Indeed, Jesus came to save these men that John and James wanted to destroy. Evidently, these were not the hardened intractable men against whom the psalmists and others spoke their imprecations. These were men whose hearts may well have been softened by the great gospel of Christ, whose prejudice against the Jews would melt away with the warmth of God's love for them in Christ. Indeed, James and John did not know of what spirit they were. They did not understand the proper grounds in calling for imprecations such as they suggested. If this pericope

negates all imprecation in the NT then the previously listed cases of NT characters who called on God to bring judgment upon the ungodly would be contrary to Christ's teaching. This simply cannot be the case. Christ's statements to James and John do not constitute a valid objection to the NT use of imprecation.

Conclusion

In consideration of our own day, and our present Western culture regarding one's feelings and general language, it would seem improper for us to move ourselves back three millennia and plant ourselves in a culture foreign to us, trying to speak with inflamed Oriental passion. Yet, when we find ourselves closer to events like those of the psalmists, we also find the temptation to speak more like they spoke. If it is truly righteous anger that moves us, we might be moved to utter milder forms of imprecations. Although we are not inspired, when we can truly identify situations with those who were, we can say what they said. One must admit, however, that our ability to truly identify with inspired men is limited, simply because we are not inspired. Since we understand more clearly the concept of death and eternal judgment, the burden is heavy upon us to pray and work for saving souls. Nothing that we do in any way ought to minimize the Great Commission.

Still, there are those who despise the gospel message. Did not Christ liken those to dogs and swine (Matt. 7:6)? There are some who openly oppose the gospel, such as Elymas, and seek to turn others away from the faith (Acts 13:8). There are many in the Lord's church who work to toss Christians "to and fro...with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive" (Eph. 4:14).

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If these people are set in their ways after repeated efforts to turn them to the truth, would it be wrong to pray **for God** to remove such obstacles to preaching and hearing the truth and these threats to the faith of others? Is doing so a lack of love for lost souls? Not necessarily. In addressing the point of God's acts of judgment upon the wicked, versus just letting men do whatever they want, without any checks and balances against their evil activity, J. H. Titcomb wrote the following:

Am I to understand you, however, as saying that a God of love and mercy had absolutely no moral right thus to destroy His own creation on account of its prolonged and inveterate self-corruption, after He had warned it, and had been patient with it through centuries of protracted long-suffering? Are there not stages of moral evil, even in the present day which show themselves absolutely irreclaimable by any remedies known to man; crimes so deep and inveterate that neither mercy nor remedial treatment will stop them? Now you will observe from the narrative [Gen. 6-9] that this was just the case here. Long-suffering had reached its utmost limit; corruption and rebellion had left only one righteous family. Hence, if permitted longer, the very last remnant of goodness would have perished out of the earth. What! Do you mean to tell me that it would have been consistent with perfect love to allow the last spark of moral goodness to become extinguished? **Are all the resources of love and mercy to be spent upon the wicked and none to be exhibited for the protection of the righteous?** Are there not some periods and cases, even within our own experience, when severe judgments on hardened criminals become conservative of benevolence and kindness toward the innocent? Would any just government allow assassins to go through a country committing murder and rapine upon the population, and corrupting the vitals of society, without feeling a need to interfere on behalf of the virtuous? The cases

are exactly analogous. Only, in this instance, the government was God's, and the corruption, instead of being partial, was all but universal. Look at the case fairly in this light gentlemen, and your impeachment of the Divine goodness hopelessly falls to the ground.²²

There is no absence of love for souls in asking God to deal with wicked people who continually seek to thwart the progress of truth and the work of the church in seeking the lost of this world and in preserving the faith of God's children. It can be argued that it is the highest demonstration of love for those who may be led to the truth or preserved in the faith if elements of the wicked are removed. Is not this the passion that inflamed David to write, **"Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? And do I not loathe those who rise up against You? I hate them with perfect hatred; I count them my enemies"** (Psa. 139:21-22).

Certainly God has not given the church today the powers of inspiration to discern the hearts of men nor to know the future. The miraculous powers that Peter and Paul exercised in their physical judgments upon Ananias, Sapphira and Elymas ended with the removal of those gifts by God (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Eph. 4:11-14). But is it a lack of love for souls to pray to God to minimize the evil warring against the truth and the church by removing inveterate unrepentant people who will never be turned to righteousness—and who may turn many away from it?

Could not one pray for wisdom to know how to deal with such a person, but, if all efforts fail, ask God to deal with that person in the best way according to His Divine wisdom? When one is faced with teachers of false gospels who cannot be moved to the truth, would it be wrong to ask God to honor the "anathema" which the apostle Paul placed on such people (Gal. 1:8-9)? Perhaps these questions cannot be easily answered, or, perhaps we find the answers

difficult because we do not know how to balance our pleas to God for His mercy and His justice.

It will require serious thought and great wisdom for us to utilize any words of imprecation against the enemies of God, Christ and the church. Yet, it must be obvious that such is not contrary to the balanced Spirit of God and Christ. It may be that a spirit of love for right things requires it. Remember that the Biblical definitions of love and hate for all mankind are not defined by the emotions of men, but by the Word of God.

Endnotes

1 All Scriptures are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise indicated.

2 Yahweh is now generally considered to be the proper spelling of the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH instead of the word Jehovah that was used in the KJV in Ex. 6:3; Psa. 83:18; Isa. 12:2; 26:4. The ASV uses the name Jehovah nearly 6800 times. Other translations usually signify this covenant name by spelling LORD or GOD in capital letters instead of the lower case Lord and God.

3 James E. Smith, **The Books of History** (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1995), pp. 535-536.

4 Norman L. Geisler, **A Popular Survey of the Old Testament** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 202.

5 J.W. Beardslee, "The Imprecatory Element in the Psalms," **Presbyterian and Reformed Review** 8 (1897), p. 491.

6 H.C. Leupold, **Exposition of the Psalms** (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 18.

7 J. Carl Laney, "A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms," IN: **Bibliotheca Sacra** 138, 549 January-March 1981), p. 41.

8 Ibid.

9 Page H. Kelley, "Prayers of Troubled Saints," IN: **Review and Expositor** 81, 3 (Summer 1984), p. 381.

10 Edwards A. Park, "The Imprecatory Psalms Viewed in the Light of the Southern Rebellion," IN: **Bibliotheca Sacra** 19 (January 1862), p. 171.

11 Ibid., 177.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Kelley, "Prayers of Troubled Saints," p. 380.

15 Park, "The Imprecatory Psalms Viewed in the Light of the Southern Rebellion," p. 184.

16 Ibid., 186.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid., 187f.

19 Ibid., 198f.

20 William D. Mounce, **Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words** (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), p. 152.

21 Robert L. Thomas, "The Imprecatory Prayers of the Apocalypse: **Bibliotheca Sacra** **126, 502** (1969): pp. 126-129.

22 J. H. Titcomb, "The Moral Teaching of the Old Testament Vindicated," IN: **Popular Objections to Revealed Truth** (New York: Randolph, 1873), pp. 152-153.

CHAPTER 28

Demas Hath Forsaken Me, Having Loved This Present World

Don Walker

Opening Comments

I*T IS WITH GREAT* joy that I express my appreciation for the invitation to participate in this annual feast. Words cannot express the deep respect and admiration I have for brother B. J. Clarke. His love for the Lord and great respect for His Word is beyond question. I count it a great privilege to call this brother a friend. In the words of the Apostle Paul when he wrote of Epaphroditus, I consider B. J. “my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier” (Phil. 2:25). May our God richly bless him and his family in their labors for Him!

Introduction

The pages of Scripture are littered with those whose attention was distracted and their loyalties shaken. For some it was a brief excursion from the spiritual paths of righteousness, while others were detoured completely.

Eve “saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). The result was she fulfilled the desires to partake of that which is of this world. The Apostle John wrote, “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh,

and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). In her partaking, she fulfilled the “lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.” In short, she gave in to the call of the world. Even though she along with her husband Adam were the first, they by no means were the last.

Esau was earthy and carnal. He succumbed to the call of the world. Jeremiah warned, “Flee ye, turn back, dwell deep, O inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau upon him, the time that I will visit him” (Jer. 49:8). Esau’s profanity will forever be proclaimed by the pen of the Hebrews writer. He wrote:

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright (Heb. 12:14-16).

Esau gave in to the call of the world.

In Numbers 22 we read of the man named Balaam. Even though we do hear some powerful words from his mouth, we cannot overlook the statements made by both Peter and Jude. Peter wrote concerning false teachers, “Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness” (2 Pet. 2:15). In considering the same topic, Jude also spoke of this ungodly, worldly man. He wrote, “Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core” (Jude 11). The lure of the things of this world was simply too much for Balaam. Balaam gave into the call of the world.

There are so many other examples that we could give on an individual basis. However we do not want to leave

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the idea that the problem of worldliness was one that was allocated to a few individuals or even many individuals. Scripture teaches us that this problem is one that affected not just individuals here and there, but rather cities, regions, civilizations or even all mankind, with the exception of a very few. Let us illustrate our point.

In the eighteenth chapter of Genesis we read again of an area, cities if you please, that were discussed earlier in Scripture. Remember Lot had cast his tents toward Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 13). In Genesis 18 we read of Jehovah's determination to destroy these cities. We read, "And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous" (Gen. 18:20). These are the words that precede Abram's intercession on behalf of this area. The discussion began with sparing the cities for 50 righteous souls and ended with the Lord's agreement to spare the cities for ten righteous souls. Notice the end result. "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground" (Gen. 19:24-25). Those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, had given themselves over to the vile practices of worldliness, and they paid the price.

In the first chapter of Romans the apostle introduces the theme and thesis of the book. He writes:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith (Rom. 1:16-17).

From that point he chronicles the horrific worldliness that captured the Gentiles. Writing from Corinth, the Apostle

Paul could view from his window the very degradation of which he wrote here in Romans. It was worldliness gone to seed. Paul wrote:

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them (Rom. 1:28-32).

The largest cross section of society, the Gentiles, was described as those who had given themselves over completely to the call of the world.

In the sixth chapter of Genesis, we learn of Noah and his family. In Noah's family we find the eight souls that were delivered by water (1 Pet. 3:20). However, of the rest of the inhabitants of earth, Moses wrote, "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth" (Gen. 6:11-12). In consideration of man in that day it says, "every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The whole world, with the exception of Noah and his family, had given themselves over to do wickedness—to follow the course of the world.

The Apostle John wrote, "the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). As we consider the world we live in today, we must also conclude that worldliness runs rampant, and righteousness is a commodity whose value goes unrecognized by the largest majority.

“Ye Are Not Of The World”

In John 15:19, Jesus makes a statement that delineates the very meaning of the Greek word “*ekklesia*” which is most often translated “church.” He said, “ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world.” In Colossians 2:20, Paul indicates that we are “dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world.” Though Paul does not use the term world in Romans 6, we certainly see the thought that we are dead to the world that we might be alive unto our God.

These two passages are not the only two that draw attention to the very dark line of demarcation that exists between those that are of God and those that are of the world. For the child of God, the call of the world must be a constant concern, for it takes great diligence and vigilance to overcome. There are two contexts of Scripture that address this great danger and the concern that Heaven has for each of us to remain focused with our gaze on our Lord.

In the Book of Revelation the message has been summed up very well by our late brother Johnny Ramsey. He used to say of the book, “If you will **overcome** Satan, self and sin, then you can **come over** and be with the Lord.” The book’s message was one that proclaimed the constant need for vigilance.

The other section that we have in mind is in the Book of Hebrews. In the second chapter the writer exhorts, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip...How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:1-3). In fact the whole message of this book shouts for vigilance and perseverance.

Really, there are two passages that just ring with the determination a child of God must possess to be able to overcome the dainties of Satan and the baubles and

trinkets of the world. In Galatians 5, before Paul enumerated the works of the flesh, contrasting such with the fruit of the Spirit, he makes a most glorious statement. He wrote, "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that **ye cannot do the things that ye would**" (Gal. 5:17). This passage is not speaking of ability, but rather of determination.

1 John 3:9 is another passage that speaks not of possibility, but rather the fact that a Christian who desires to remain faithful to the Lord must not be distracted by the things of the world. John wrote, "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and **he cannot sin**, because he is born of God." Rather, he cannot continue in sin. Both of these passages, though slightly different in thrust, emphasize the fact that a child of God must not be overtaken by the matters of the world.

Yet, as urgent as Scripture is concerning this fact, the Bible still teaches plainly and often that the child of God **can** become so tangled with the world that he will fall from grace. Not only does Scripture teach us that we can fall (1 Cor. 10:12; Gal. 5:4), but it shows the putrid condition of those who do leave the unsearchable riches of Christ for the quagmire the world offers. Peter wrote:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

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That this was, and is a problem for the Lord's church, is abundantly clear. When we consider the congregations of the Lord's church as revealed in Scripture, we see evidence of the world's influence penetrating the church. In five of the seven letters addressed to the seven congregations of Asia, the Lord addresses various stages of apostasy and worldliness (Rev. 2 & 3). Thyatira had that "woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev. 2:20). The Laodicean church was worldly to the core. They said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" while Jehovah's assessment was quite different. He said, [Thou] "knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17).

Of all of the congregations which we read of in the New Testament, most would consider the church in Philippi to be one of the stronger churches. To say that she held a special spot in the heart of the apostle would be an understatement. However, as strong as she was, Paul was still led by the Holy Spirit to give warning concerning this problem. He wrote:

Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, **who mind earthly things**) (Phil. 3:17-19).

Worldliness is a grave danger that challenges the church of all ages. We too need to be reminded of this great enemy. Yet, when we consider the congregations that have been affected by this menacing monster, we understand that it finally boils down to an individual matter. Our God has provided in His Word a character study that will forever stand alerting us to the great danger it provides.

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The words ring throughout the annals of time. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica” (2 Tim. 4:10). We do not have much inspired information concerning this man. There are only three passages that definitely mention Demas by name. When we consider them in chronological order, we learn much about him. Let’s take a moment to notice these passages of which the aforementioned is the third in the time line.

1. “Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellowlabourers” (Phile. 24).

2. “Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you” (Col. 4:14).

3. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia” (2 Tim. 4:10).

Let’s take a moment to study the sequence of statements made concerning Demas. In Philemon 24, he is mentioned with three other brothers in Christ and the four of them are called by the apostle “fellowlabourers.” In Philippians 2:25, Epaphroditus is called, among other things, “a companion in labour.” These brethren that have been described in this fashion should certainly, at this point at least, be considered faithful brethren. Commendation from an inspired apostle which proclaims each, including Demas, to be “fellowlabourers” with Paul himself can be taken no other way. So here is a man that started out faithful and loyal to Christ, a lover of God.

In the second passage it is interesting that his name is mentioned with no accolade or denouncement. Could this be a statement which looks into the progression of apostasy? Could it be that Paul sees something in Demas that indicates that he is not growing the way he should or that Demas is showing signs of distraction in his work for

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the Lord? It very well could be. Then finally, the horrific statement made, in the last passage, stands in stark contrast with the first mention of him. He “has loved this present world.”

This progression of apostasy is seen in different passages. When the Psalmist spoke of the righteous man he proclaimed him to be one that does not follow this path. He wrote, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Psa. 1:1). First there was walking, then standing, and finally sitting. The trek is obvious in this passage and the negative progression is clear.

Jesus provided an even more graphic portrait of this spiritual calamity. In the parable of the sower Jesus spoke of four different types of soils. The soils we learn represent the hearts of men. Notice the proclamation made concerning those brethren like Demas. In the parable, Jesus tells us that some of the seed “fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it” (Luke 8:7). In explanation Jesus said, “And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). In either of these passages, and any similar passage, the call of the world was just too enticing for some men. This is exactly what happened with Demas.

The Strength Of Paul's Statement

Paul's choice of words is interesting and somewhat shocking. The weight of his words is crushing. It was not that “Demas has left me” period. Paul qualifies the statement and speaks volumes concerning this brother in Christ. Paul says first, “For Demas has forsaken me.” In this we would probably see a negative. Paul was an apostle

who was doing the work of the Lord. He was one who spoke with authority. This humble and serving demeanor of a faithful Christian would usually cause one to be slow to leave the side of such a stalwart servant of Christ. However, we remember at the close of Acts 15 there was a contention between the apostle Paul and Barnabas. Scripture says:

And the contention was so sharp between them, that they **departed asunder one from the other**: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God (Acts 15:39-40).

In this context we may marvel at the magnitude of the contention, but we do not cast dispersion upon either one of these brethren concerning their faithfulness to God. We may wonder who was right or wrong, but we are even quick to admit that this was a matter of judgment that was not worth dogmatic persistence to the point of stopping in service to God. Paul's initial statement could have reflected the same thing concerning Demas. Yet, Paul does not stop there.

Paul goes on to proclaim that Demas "loved this present world." The statement first reflects the relationship between Paul and Demas. Paul was working to remove the influence of the world upon those that had come out of the world, and also on those that were in the world. His own statement of the purpose of his calling is recorded in Acts 26. Paul said that he was sent to the Gentiles "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified" (Acts 26:18). Paul's work was directed at overcoming the world. However, of Demas, it says that he "loved this present world." That which Paul

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was laboring against, Demas was in love with. Yet, this was not the only relationship that was affected.

Paul's statement, "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world," also reflects upon Demas' relationship with God. There are a host of passages that speak both directly and indirectly concerning this Divine Truth. "His then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). Indirectly this speaks of the relationship that our God has with the world. Even in the Old Testament we see the same sentiment. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity" (Hab. 1:13). Again we see the thought spoken of by the prophet. If this were all that we had we would definitely see the fact that Demas' relationship with God was affected. Yet, there are passages that directly address this point.

John wrote:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever (1 John 2:15-17).

Note the distinctions and contrasts that are being made by the Apostle John. (1) **If a man love the world**—the love of the Father is not in him, (2) **For all that is of the world**—is not of the Father, and (3) **The world passeth away**—he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. Demas' love for this present world most certainly separated him from his God.

The prophet Jeremiah also spoke of a misplaced love when it came to the relationship between God the Father and His people. What began with love toward Jehovah as

a young bride for her groom (Jer. 2:2), soon was misdirected. They had loved the strangers (Jer. 2:25), and sought love among them and even taught the wicked more wickedness (Jer. 2:33). They loved the sun and the moon and all the hosts of heaven, (Jer. 8:2), but they did not love Jehovah the Creator of such. In general “Jehovah said unto this people, Thus have they loved to wander” (Jer. 14:10). The result of such is predictable It goes on to say, “they have not refrained their feet, therefore the Lord doth not accept them; he will now remember their iniquity, and visit their sins” (Jer. 14:10). Those who love the world cannot claim to love the Father!

Yet, as we continue to study, we learn that there was even more to this alienation than simply being separated from God. Consider for a moment the strong language of James 4:4. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” The first four words of this passage speak volumes to the reader: “Ye adulterers and adulteresses.”

This statement again reminds us of the dealings Jehovah had with wayward Israel. The message of Hosea the prophet illustrates very well the position that God’s people often filled as far as Jehovah was concerned. She often was an adulteress who went out as a harlot. Again Jeremiah wrote the words of God to His people and He said, “...but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers” (Jer. 3:1). In chapter Jeremiah 2:24 we find even more graphic language. “A wild ass used to the wilderness, that snuffeth up the wind at her pleasure; in her occasion who can turn her away? all they that seek her will not weary themselves; in her month they shall find her.” Though there are other passages that are at least just as graphic if not more so, we will allow these to suffice. Yet, when a child of God turns their attention back to the world, he or she is

an adulterer or an adulteress, just as Israel was in the days of old.

But James does not stop there. James said, “Friendship of the world is enmity with God” and “a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” The words “enemy” and “enmity” are words that are very closely linked. However, they are two different words and do hold some distinctions. An “enemy” is a foe or an adversary. It does not, however, speak of activity. That is to say one may be an enemy, but not be actively hostile toward their foe.

During the Cold War between the United States and Russia, there was certainly the consideration by both sides as being enemies. However, there were not bombs or missiles or bullets flying. On the other hand, one that is at “enmity” with another is **actively** hostile toward their adversary. The magnitude of the word is seen very well in Genesis 3:15. “Jehovah said to His adversary, ‘I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed.’” Consider the struggle that has existed between God and the devil since that time and you can get a taste of the strength of this term. Demas had become the enemy of God, and, because he was at enmity with God, he was considered an active and aggressive enemy. That is true not only of Demas, but any who turn their attention from God and His way, to go back into the world, stand in the same position.

Wordliness—A Plaguing Monster

It was worldliness that beguiled Demas and caused him to misplace his love. As tragic as Paul’s statement is, it stands as a grave warning to those that have gone on after this Christian man who fell away. Yet Demas has relatives today in the Lord’s church. In all honesty this is one area in which we have let the Lord down. Today the church seems to be more and more worldly and less and less distinct.

The most common meaning of the word “church” in the context of God’s Word is “the called out”. We have been called out of the world to enter into the glorious church of our Lord. Yet, it seems, instead of a dark line of demarcation between the people of God and those of the world, there has been a whitewash spread over that line.

For the most part we are good with certain sins; murder, fornication (at least some forms), theft, etc. are recognized as wrong and should be avoided. Not many who claim to be faithful Christians would think about committing these obvious sins. Yet, it also seems that we have some forms of worldliness that have become acceptable in the Lord’s church.

Where there was once a stigma tied to divorce, now stands an open acceptance. Of course, we are very well aware of the exception that Christ introduced in Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:9. Even so, we are also aware that compromise is the attitude of the day and men and women today fill our congregations with adultery because so many have accepted the world’s view of divorce for any cause as opposed to following Christ’s teaching in the Bible. It is worldliness to the core and it will cost brothers and sisters their soul in the Day of Judgment.

Men and women in the church who would not think of using a gun against any one, much less their brethren, will freely slice one to shreds with their tongue. Gossip, backbiting, tale bearing are all condemned in God’s Word and some of the plainest language in Scripture (James 3), centers on our use of the tongue. Yet it seems the aforementioned transgressions have become acceptable. It is worldliness through and through.

Perhaps one of the greatest transgressions among the world is one of the most acceptable in the church today. In the thirteenth chapter of Revelation we are introduced to two beasts. The second beast revealed, the beast of the land,

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reminds us of Jesus' teaching concerning false teachers in Matthew 7:15, and represents false systems of religion. The first beast introduced, the beast of the sea is relentless and ever on the move. It represents the Roman Empire, which was the persecuting power of Satan. The trade guilds and rampant materialism were her tools. Covetousness and greed for more and more was the driving force for those of the first century and the Lord's church was not exempt. Jesus warned, "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

Paul taught that covetousness is idolatry (Col. 3:5). Brothers and sisters in Christ become more and more infatuated with the things, stuff, and junk of this world and are less and less content. Paul narrowed the list of necessities of life drastically when he said, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:10).

Yet, his statement is magnificently consistent with Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount when he taught, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). "All these things" have reference to the clothing He associates with the lilies of the field and the food that is provided for the birds of the air. Generosity and a willingness to communicate must follow the great blessings of material things that God provides (1 Tim. 6:18). We are but stewards of that which God entrusts and it is essential that a steward be found faithful (1 Cor. 4:2).

A Kind Warning

Each child of God must exert great effort to remain free from the very charge that is made concerning Demas. It is very easy to accept the attitude of the world without even recognizing it. It takes constant care and vigilance, lest it be said that we "love this present world."

Preachers must understand the need that exists for warning. We do no one a favor if we close our eyes and our mouths to the dangers that are out there. We must apply the attitude spoken by the Apostle Paul in Galatians 1 to these areas of transgressions. "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Will brethren be upset? Some most surely will and Paul's statement later in the Book of Galatians would apply. "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). In any case we are obligated by our God to give warning, no matter how it is received (Ezek. 33).

Finally, elders in the Lord's church must not allow the wickedness of the world to seep into the body of Christ. The attitude of the world to "live and let live" must be eschewed realizing "a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6). Elders have been entrusted with the grave task of overseeing the flock that belongs to the Lord. What a tragic day it will be in the Day of Judgment if those that have been entrusted to your care have forsaken the Lord "having loved this present world" and you gave no warning nor extended any effort to bring them back to the fold of God.

Conclusion

Of those that had obeyed the gospel of Christ and then turned back to the beggarly elements of the world (Gal. 4:9) Peter wrote:

For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment

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delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire (2 Pet. 2:20-22).

It is a putrid picture but valid nonetheless. Jeremiah's description is just as graphic. Of God's people who had turned from Jehovah he wrote, "They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills" (Lam. 4:5). When we allow ourselves to be distracted from our Lord, and become enamored by the hellish world, then these are the passages that describe us.

May we ever be vigilant as we guard against the elements of the world that the devil uses to draw us away and may we ever study our Bibles more and more.

CHAPTER 29

They Loved The Praise Of Men More Than The Praise of God

Kevin Beard

Introduction

W*HY DO MEN DO* what they do? The question of motivation looms large when examining the actions people take. This was the thrust of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount when He contrasted what the people had always heard with what He now said (Matt. 5:21-48). He told His hearers: "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).¹

The Pharisees were notorious for their concern for outward appearances, and for their disregard for the condition of the heart. This general mindset often earned for them the Lord's rebuke in labeling them as "hypocrites." The "righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees" was determined by the scribes and Pharisees themselves, not by God; thus, when a person lives in such a way that he is interested only in the outward appearances of his actions, he "shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven," because his righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees.

How might a person be guilty of exhibiting a righteousness comparable to that of the scribes and Pharisees? There may be many ways, but one of the more common ways is to be motivated by a desire for the praise of men. During Jesus' time on earth there were some of the Jews' religious leaders who believed the truth about Jesus' identity; however, they refused to confess that belief because of their desire for the praise of men. John wrote about them: "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For **they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God**" (John 12:42-43). There are many valuable lessons that can be learned from these men and the choices they made.

The Leaders Who Would Not Confess

Who were these men who would not confess that they believed in Jesus? Were they unique in this hesitancy to make their beliefs known publicly? What did they stand to lose by making that confession? All of these questions are pertinent to understanding God's view of the general attitude under consideration here. These men were in a unique position to influence many people, either for good or for bad. As rulers, their attitudes and actions would potentially sway many other people's attitudes and actions toward Jesus. When they refused to confess their belief in Christ they refused to take advantage of an opportunity to assist in preparing the way for Jesus' mission.

The General Reaction To Jesus

The Jewish people were both fickle and divided when it came to their attitudes toward Jesus. In Jerusalem, Jesus healed a lame man on the Sabbath Day and

identified Himself as the Son of God. Because of this, the Jews in Jerusalem persecuted Jesus and wanted to kill Him (John 5:16-17). Some time later in Galilee, Jesus miraculously provided food for a multitude of people. After witnessing this miracle these people were prepared to take Jesus and forcibly make Him their king (John 6:15). Later in Capernaum, many of His disciples “went back, and walked no more with him” (John 6:66), because He had taught them things that they described as “hard sayings” (John 6:60).

On one of the feast days, when Jesus had gone up to Jerusalem in secret, “some said, He is a good man: others said, Nay; but he deceiveth the people” (John 7:12). After He appeared at this feast and taught the people publicly, people were divided over their opinions of Him. Some believed He must have been the Christ, while others doubted, since Jesus had come from Galilee and the Messiah was to have come from Bethlehem (John 7:31-44).

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many of the people who were there believed on Him, but some of them went to tell the Pharisees what had happened, which caused the Jewish leaders to begin to find some way to destroy Jesus (John 11:45-53). Just a few days before the Passover, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey’s foal, in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy (Zech. 9:9), and the people rejoiced to see Him, celebrating His victorious entry into the city (John 12:12-15). Then a few days later, the shouts of “Hosanna in the highest” (Matt. 21:9) were replaced with shouts of “Crucify Him, crucify Him” (Luke 23:13-21).

What changed? It certainly was not Jesus and His teaching. He had remained consistent in everything He did and said. The people changed with the changing circumstances surrounding Jesus. When Jesus did not fit their preconceived ideas regarding the Messiah, the people

changed their minds about Jesus. When He emphasized spiritual things over material things, they changed their minds about Jesus. With increasing pressure from the scribes, Pharisees, and chief priests, who never believed (with the exception of only a few), the people changed their minds about Jesus.

The Chief Rulers

Men in positions of great influence have a great responsibility to use that influence properly. The chief rulers of the Jews failed in this regard during the life of Jesus on earth. They did not see Jesus as the Messiah, or even as a good teacher; they saw Him as a threat.

After Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, some of the witnesses went to the chief rulers, telling them what Jesus had done. Their reaction was quite different from what it should have been. They called a meeting to discuss the problem Jesus posed for them. This problem grew completely out of their desire for worldly power and position. One of the prevalent thoughts expressed in their meeting was: "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:48).

That statement is telling indeed. They saw the force of Jesus' miraculous works. Without opposition, Jesus' teachings and the confirming miracles would cause "all men" to believe on Him. If that were true, why were the chief rulers opposed to Jesus? Their concern was not with the things of God. From the beginning they saw the incompatibility between Jesus' teachings and their positions of power. His was a message of humility, service, and submission to the will of God while the chief rulers craved the power and prestige that came with their position. If Jesus succeeded, they would lose their power and they were not willing to consider that possibility.

At first, they sought to undermine Jesus' work by discrediting Him in the eyes of the people. On different occasions they tried to present Him with questions they thought He could not answer. On other occasions they accused Him of different violations of their traditions. But every tactic like this failed. Jesus never was at a loss to answer their questions, and He always managed to show the foolishness of their accusations against Him. In addition to this, Jesus often turned their own attempts to discredit Him against them. Instead of undermining Jesus' credibility, these attempts often left the Jewish leaders looking bad. To put a stop to Jesus' influence, they had to turn to more drastic measures.

One of these more drastic measures was the threat to put anyone who confessed to believing in Jesus out of the synagogue. On a Sabbath Day, Jesus healed a man that had been born blind. The Jewish leaders investigating the miracle wanted to know who was responsible for this. They were not concerned with the obvious miracle that had been performed; they wanted to know whom to punish for what they considered a violation of the Sabbath. The blind man did not know the name of the one who had healed him, but he admitted that the man must be from God; otherwise, how could He have performed this miracle?

The Jewish rulers asked the man's parents for information. All they were willing to say was that the man was their son and that he had, in fact, been born blind. They were unwilling to say anything more because they knew that these leaders had already determined to put anyone who confessed Jesus out of the synagogue (John 9:22). The Jews had different degrees of censure that could be levied against those found guilty of some infraction, from a thirty day suspension from the synagogue to complete excommunication from all social and religious rights and activities. By threatening such drastic punitive

action, the Jewish leaders hoped to intimidate the people into rejecting Jesus.

The Leaders Who Believed

Regardless of the attempts to discredit Jesus, and the threats of excommunication, people of all classes still saw the miracles Jesus performed and concluded that there must be some truth to His claims. Even some of the leaders, themselves, could not deny the force of the evidence in favor of Jesus. Many of them believed (John 12:42). But mere belief in Jesus was not sufficient. As James pointed out, faith that is not coupled with and manifested by works is dead (Jas. 2:14-26). Many of these leaders who believed on Jesus refused to demonstrate that belief by confessing Him. The threat of being put out of the synagogue intimidated them into remaining silent.

John identified the root cause of their problem: “they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). It would have been a completely humiliating thing for a leader among the Jewish people to be completely cut off from all social and religious activities among the Jews. He would have been thrust out of a position of great respect and influence. These men were simply unwilling to risk such personal loss, no matter who they believed Jesus to be.

It is ironic that these men feared being expelled from the synagogue over believing that Jesus was the Son of God. Did they not see the synagogue and all that was associated with it as a function of God’s service? Apparently not. They looked at it as a means of acquiring and maintaining personal power and prestige. The synagogue did not exist to bring glory to God; it existed to bring glory to them—at least in their minds. It is truly sad that these men who professed themselves to be spiritual leaders, who showed the people the way to please

God, refused to confess the One Whom God sent to deliver the people, because it would mean giving up their own positions of privilege.

The Praise Of God Versus The Praise Of Men

At this point it would be appropriate to examine the concepts of “the praise of God” and “the praise of men.” When considering “the praise of men” the thought that comes to mind first is that of receiving honor and recognition from others for one’s own accomplishments. Pride is at the root of this kind of thinking. The Pharisees had a big problem with this particular sin. Jesus warned of their hypocritical, self-righteous attitude (Matt. 23).

It is interesting that in His condemnation of their ways He was careful to distinguish between the law of God that they taught and their own personal conduct, which was contrary to the law of God. He said, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not” (Matt. 23:2-3). Sitting in Moses’ seat described the religious authority they exercised over the people. By commanding the people to observe the Law of Moses, the scribes and Pharisees were binding the law of God. Therefore, the people were obligated to follow what they said—not because the scribes and Pharisees taught it; but because God had already commanded it.

There is a valuable lesson to learn in that statement. The personal conduct of anyone who teaches God’s Word does not in any way change the authoritative force of the Word of God. The most hypocritical sinner could teach someone that to be saved he must be baptized. The sinner would be obligated to obey the hypocrite’s teaching, not because of the man who taught it, but because of God Who

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commanded it. The personal imperfections of the teacher offer no excuse for disobeying God.

Once He had clarified the matter of Divine authority, Jesus turned His attention to the scribes and Pharisees' character. Though the people should have obeyed what these men taught they should not have followed their personal examples. The reason for this was that they did all their works to be seen of men (Matt. 23:5). They made an outward show of their religious "fervor." They craved the public recognition of being called "Rabbi" and being given special consideration at feasts and in the synagogues. They were not at all concerned with pleasing God and helping others to grow spiritually. Theirs was a religion of an outward profession of what was completely lacking inwardly.

As pointed out above, pride is the root of this problem. Pride is the sin of thinking of oneself first. It causes people to think that they are much more important than what they really are. It causes people to think that others should see them as being just as important as they see themselves. It produces a sense of entitlement. The person filled with pride cannot think of anyone who is greater than himself, and that includes God; therefore, if anyone is to receive praise it should be him, not God. The sin of pride is terribly dangerous. "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Prov. 29:23). Pride proved to be the downfall of many. It cost Haman his life; it cost Nebuchadnezzar his sanity.

In contrast to desiring the praise of men is the desire for the praise of God. It would seem that receiving the praise of God would be far more desirable than receiving the praise of men. However, receiving the praise of God involves concepts requiring a vastly different outlook on life. The praise of men brings pride and satisfaction only in this life and involves only the things of this life; but

receiving the praise of God requires one to value what is beyond this life.

In His parable of the Pharisee and the publican who went to the temple to pray (Luke 18:10-14), Jesus addressed this concept. The Pharisee's whole outlook on life centered on him and the pleasure he could acquire in life. Thus, he compared himself to others around him and found them sorely wanting. By setting his own standard of righteousness, he became the best example of righteousness he could think of. He held himself in high esteem and thought others (even God!) should do the same.

The publican did not examine himself in the light of other men's standards. Because his concern was with his standing before God, all he saw in himself was a need for Divine mercy. Jesus said the humble publican received God's blessing, but not the Pharisee, because, "every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14).

Herein lies one of the great paradoxes of Christianity. Exaltation comes only to those who do not seek it—at least they don't seek it from their fellow man. Peter and James both emphasized this point: "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Pet. 5:6); "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (Jas. 4:10). The way to true exaltation is through humility. The faithful follower of the Lord never seeks glory for himself in what he does for the Lord. Rather, he does all that he can so that God may receive the glory. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

Christians should never be afraid or ashamed for others to know of the good works they do. Jesus said to do them so that others may see them. However, the attitude that motivates is not the desire to be seen, but for God to

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receive the glory. This means that the child of God never calls attention to himself in what he does, as Jesus described as not sounding a trumpet beforehand (Matt. 6:1-2). Rather, the Christian is concerned with the good work he does for the sake of the good itself. Whether it is helping someone in need, visiting someone who is sick, teaching someone the gospel, encouraging a weak brother, or any other good work a Christian might do, his primary concern is doing good because he wants to be like the Father in heaven.

Sometimes people notice these good works; sometimes they do not. Regardless, God takes note of them and has promised to bless the servant who lives to do His Master's will. When others do notice these kinds of good works, they may commend the Christian for doing them, but the Christian should always direct that commendation to God. After all, it was God who made it possible for him to do any good works in the first place.

But how is it that the faithful servant will receive the reward and praise of God? At first glance, this whole teaching might seem somewhat contradictory. Jesus told us not to seek the reward and praise of men for the good we do, but then He motivated us to do that good work so that we may receive the reward and praise of God. There may still seem to be a problem with self-serving pride in this—just with the pay-off coming at a different time—unless we see the concept of God's rewards in a different light.

The Christian's goal should be to become as much like God as he can be. The New Testament teaches Christians to love the way Christ loved (John 13:34-35), to be perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48), to be holy as God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16), to have the same mind as Christ (Phil. 2:5-8), to forgive as God forgives (Eph. 4:32), to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7), and so on. The more the child of God becomes like his

Father, the more he delights in the things in which his Father delights. What brings glory and honor to the Father brings glory and honor to him. The reward is not some special gift or recognition that sets the child of God apart from everyone else, but it is the joy that comes from knowing that love has been fulfilled. Stott made a very interesting observation regarding the reward that the Christian receives for practicing a religion not designed to draw attention to itself (Matt. 6:1-4):

What, then, is the 'reward' which the heavenly Father gives the secret giver? It is neither public nor necessarily future. It is probably the only reward which genuine love wants when making a gift to the needy, namely to see the need relieved. When through his gifts the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the sick healed, the oppressed freed and the lost saved, the love which prompted the gift is satisfied. Such love (which is God's own love expressed through man) brings with it its own secret joys, and desires no other reward.²

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Only the person who grows to be like the Father fully understands this and realizes the great blessing that there is in helping to alleviate some real need.

The praise one stands to receive from God should be seen in much the same way. Jesus promised to those who would confess Him before men that He would confess them before the Father in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33). This confession Christ will make will be a recognition of approval. It will be the opposite of what He will say to those who did not do the Father's will: "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). This praise will be the ultimate expression of God's acceptance and approval. Only those who are like Him can be with Him. John said:

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Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1-2).

God's plan for man is for man to be like God that they all might be together in eternity. Paul spoke of this glorious plan:

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:29-30).

The ultimate praise of God will be when God recognizes those who have been made like Him, and welcomes them into His home eternally.

Conclusion

The root of the problem when men love the praise of men more than the praise of God is as old as the human race itself. Satan exploited it when he convinced Eve that God was withholding something good from her by forbidding her to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Selfish pride seeks to elevate self above all others, even above God. Thus, some seek the praise of their fellow men, that they might be elevated to a level only God truly deserves.

This problem has caused men to commit many kinds of other sins. Some preachers have compromised the truth. They are very much aware of what the Scriptures teach, but because they desired acceptance from a larger group

of people than they would have received by teaching only the pure gospel, they have compromised the truth. Whether they have begun actively teaching things that are not true, or whether they have simply omitted some things from their teaching, the desire to be praised of men has caused some men to compromise.

Other Christians have conformed to the world's standards in many different areas of life because they could not bear being different from the world. This desire to fit in is nothing more than a desire for the praise of men. When Christians refuse to be distinct in their morals or in their doctrine, they have abandoned that desire for the praise of God in favor of the praise of men.

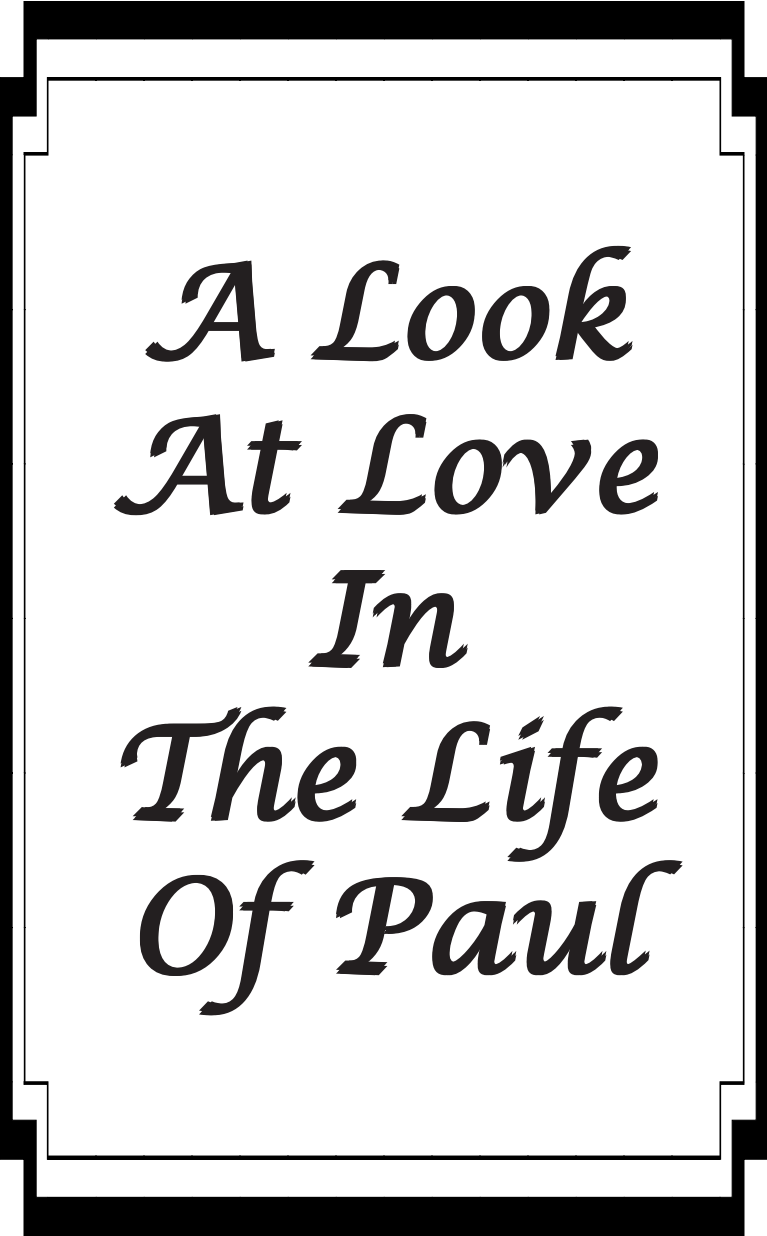
May God help all of His children to see the importance of ordering their lives after a godly standard. Nothing of this physical, material world can ever compare to the glory of heaven and the praise of God. Therefore, every Christian ought to seek to humble himself before God so that any praise and exaltation he receives is truly worthwhile—that which comes from God.

Endnotes

1 All Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version, unless otherwise noted.

2 John R. W. Stott, **Christian Counter-Culture: The Message of the Sermon on the Mount** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 132.

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In
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CHAPTER 30

A Look At Love In The Life Of Paul

Paul Sain

Introduction

T^{HE ONE WHO} “**BREATHED out threatenings and slaughter**” against the church (Acts 9:1) for which Christ died; the same one who was largely responsible for “**havoc of the church**” (Acts 8:3) as he entered houses and sent Christians to prison because of their faith in the Son of God is the same powerful and influential one who serves as a grand example for all Christians today concerning faithfulness, sacrifice, zeal, a Christ-like attitude and spirit, and **Love**.

The apostle Paul is truly, undeniably one of the most faithful followers of Christ to ever live! His life of devoted service to His Master is unparalleled. His sacrifice of all that mankind considers to be precious is monumental. His trials and great persecution is almost unimaginable for God’s people today. His compassion for the lost, courage to declare and stand for the truth; and without doubt, his genuine, selfless **Love** is unequalled and serves as an excellent example for us today.

At the outset, let us capture again the beautiful definition and instruction of Paul regarding love, as written

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by inspiration to the Corinthians. A portion of these treasured words include:

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth...And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity (1 Cor. 13:4-8; 1 Cor. 13:13).

Why is it natural to love our mother and father? They loved, gave, sacrificed, and trained us. Why should it be very natural for us to love God? Because He loved us, gave, sacrificed, and has instructed us. Before the foundation of the world, God's plan to redeem man was a reality (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20). While we were yet in sin, Christ died for us (Heb. 5:8-9).

If we will but seriously compare our condition before salvation in Christ to how richly blessed we are as saved in Christ, then we will be more and more like the apostle Paul and other faithful servants. In our study, let us examine the life and writings of the servant and soldier, Paul, and his love for God, the church, his brethren, and for all mankind. Then in a brief summary we will look at the church today and how it would be if more members possessed the **Love** as our beloved Paul.

Paul's Love For Jehovah God And The Lord Jesus

In Paul's epistle (letter) to the Corinthians, he declared simply that he was "constrained" by love (2 Cor. 5:14). Love (the Lord's love for him and his love for the Lord) compelled him; not only motivated him, but forced him to be and live as he did for his Lord. Note a few of the

inspired statements of this soldier, regarding his love for God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself...In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace (Eph. 1:3-7).

According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord (Eph. 3:11).

That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 15:6).

For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's (Rom. 14:8).

Paul further stated: that there is One God to Whom we belong (1 Cor. 8:6); he was thankful to God the Father through Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:25); we should glorify God, the Father (Rom. 15:6); and love the Lord in sincerity (Eph. 6:24).

How do we prove our love for something or someone? Merely saying "I love you" does not confirm one's love. Giving a portion of time alone does not convincingly prove our love. Offering a few dollars of regular contribution is not sufficient to prove our love to Almighty God. Being a good neighbor, father, or mother will not convince anyone of genuine love. True love involves the heart, the depth of man. Remember how we are to love God—"with all of our heart, mind, body, soul and strength" (Deut. 6:5; Deut. 30:6; Matt. 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27).

We prove our sincere and genuine love by what we are willing to do, sacrifice, or suffer for a person or cause.

A LOOK AT LOVE IN THE LIFE OF PAUL

Reflect again on the quantity and depth of the suffering of Paul for his Lord and Saviour. His body bore the marks of his suffering for Christ (Gal. 6:17). He wrote to the church at Corinth of his suffering as a Christian:

...as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings...By honour and dishonour; by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (2 Cor. 6:4-10).

He told the truth when he declared:

But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:10-12).

Yet, in light of the great suffering of this faithful child of God, he confidently demonstrated his love:

We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:8-11).

Oh, how Paul loved Almighty God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit!

Paul's Love For The Church

How can we know of Paul's love for the church? His daily actions were consumed in spreading the doctrine of Christ to bring others into Christ, into the church. His teaching was centered on "**Christ and Him crucified**" for the sole purpose of saving lost souls (in the church). His words of praise and commendation to others (in various congregations) for their labours in the church emphasized the value of building, strengthening and growing in Christ.

First, let us go back to the time of conversion of Paul (formerly known as Saul of Tarsus). As recorded in Acts 9, Acts 22, and Acts 26, we know Saul viciously persecuted the church, breathing out threatening and slaughters against the church (Acts 9:1). He was sincere and conscientiously honest in his efforts to destroy Christianity (Acts 23:1). On the way to Damascus (seeking to capture or destroy Christians) he was surrounded by a light from heaven. It was astonishing as the voice from heaven spoke to him. Saul trembled and fell to the ground. Upon being told what to do in Damascus, Saul immediately obeyed and was baptized.

Note what the Scripture states next: "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God" (Acts 9:20); "he preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus" (Acts 9:27); "And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians" (Acts 9:29).

In Acts 28:31, we hear of the zealous teacher of truth: "Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:31).

Hear more from this wonderful and loving servant:

Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body...the church is subject unto Christ...Christ also loved the church, and gave

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himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish... For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones...I speak concerning Christ and the church (excerpts from Eph. 5:23-33).

Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father (1 Thess. 1:3).

For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister (Heb. 6:10).

As Paul gave instructions to Christians at Corinth (in two epistles), he would frequently admonish them in their work and faithfulness. In 1 Corinthians 15:58, he wrote: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).

Christ was the very "life" of Paul. The church of our Lord was that for which he was willing to die. Note the depth of his love for the church at Philippi:

For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ...I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God...the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather **unto the furtherance of the gospel**...I am set for the defense of the gospel...my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be **by life, or**

by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain (excerpts from Phil. 1:8-21).

If there was yet a flicker of doubt regarding Paul's love for the church, recall the tremendous, overwhelming, almost unbelievable ways in which Paul suffered for the cause of Christ, the church:

...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches (2 Cor. 11:23-28).

This list, as extensive as it is, fails to encapsulate the entirety of this faithful servant's suffering and trials. Through it all, he wrote: "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. 12:10).

How very much the apostle Paul loved the church spoken of by the prophets of old, the church that Jesus built, the church for which our Lord died, the church that continues to exist today.

Paul's Love For His Brethren

The church is comprised of individual members (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Paul loved the church for which his Lord

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died, collectively as well as individually. He realized the truth of the Lord's declaration as recorded by Matthew (Matt. 16:26) regarding the value of every soul. Not only in the evangelistic efforts of Paul, but in matters of strengthening and edifying the body of Christ in love, has there ever been one more diligent and efficient? Love for all the saints (Col. 1:4; Eph. 1:15), knit together in love (Col. 2:2), forbearing one another in love (Eph. 4:2), unfeigned love (2 Cor. 6:6), abounding love (2 Cor. 8:7).

Paul instructed the brethren:

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another...Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 12:9-10; Rom. 13:10).

Love is to be pure, genuine. Love is shown in kindness one to another. Love does not seek hurt or harm for another. Thus the conclusion of love is the fulfilling of the law. Love motivates us to serve one another (Gal. 5:13). Love conditions us to be kind and forbear one another (Eph. 4:2). And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you (1 Thess. 3:12).

Paul likewise wrote to the brethren at Thessalonica: "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you," and regarding "brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another" (1 Thess. 3:12; 1 Thess. 4:9).

Paul's Love For All Mankind

Each precious soul is worth more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26). Paul was willing to do whatever

necessary to save one soul, “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor. 9:22).

Hundreds of miles, journey after journey, difficult travel from place to place—**Why?** He loved the Lord. He loved the church. He loved the souls of men and knew the gospel of Christ was **the** power of God unto salvation.

Paul was constrained (2 Cor. 5:14), compelled (1 Cor. 9:16), and committed (Rom. 1:14-16) to preaching the pure and powerful gospel of Christ.

His love for all mankind erupts in his sermons of passionate pleas (Acts 13:16-41; Acts 17:22-32; Acts 20:13-28; Acts 22:1-29; Acts 24:1-23; Acts 24:24-27; Acts 26:22-32). He preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), without fear or favor of God or power (before Felix [Acts 24] and King Agrippa [Acts 26]).

Conclusion

Can we be an apostle Paul in the twenty first century? Was he super spiritual? Did he possess faith greater than what is possible for Christians today? The Bible declares that **every** Christian has the power and ability to follow Paul, as he followed Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

What condition would exist in the Lord’s body today if more individual servants possessed the **Love** as demonstrated in the writings and life of the apostle Paul? Just think of the awesome influence upon the entire world if we were willing to give ourselves 100% in service to the Master as did Paul. Note the following:

- 1. Faith** in Christ to live a righteous, godly and sober life.
- 2. Fervently press on** in spite of great trial and difficulty.
- 3. Zealously evangelize** at every opportunity.
- 4. Diligently defend** the truth against false teachers and false ways.
- 5. Restrict and restrain** himself to make certain he did not become a castaway.

6. Lovingly cared for the weak and less fortunate.

7. Sacrificed his personal needs and preferences for the welfare and benefit of others.

8. Strengthen the brethren in word and example.

9. Obediently submit to the Father at all times.

10. Keep the heavenly goal ever before his eyes.

Of these few areas, which one is not possible for any and all Christians today? From the time in Damascus when he was told what the Lord wanted him to do, he passionately endeavored to accomplish it. So can we! He was not perfect. Neither are we! He had to work steadfastly to continue his journey to his heavenly home and so must we!

Do we love our Lord (as did Paul)? Jesus convincingly declares that “if ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15); and that we are His friends, **if** we keep His commandments (John 15:14).

Do we love the church for which Christ died (as did Paul)? Do we prove our love by full allegiance and loyalty? Is it the “**all**” of our life, with everything else a mere secondary position? Do we love the brethren (as did Paul)? Do we give of ourselves, think of others first, seek ways to encourage and speak well of our spiritual family? Do we have all things common with our brothers and sisters in Christ?

If we can answer in the affirmative to the initial question in the last three paragraphs, then without fear of contradiction, I can promise that we will be as successful as Paul in serving the Lord and as confident as Paul in heaven eternally (2 Tim. 4:5-8).

CHAPTER 31

Love Is...

Billy Bland

Introduction

“BUT COVET EARNESTLY THE best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (1Cor. 12:31). So stated Paul to the badly divided church of God at Corinth. The church was divided over the use of miraculous gifts. Some thought that since they had the ability to speak in tongues (languages they had not learned naturally), they were superior to other members of the body of Christ.

God had given miraculous gifts to the church in the first century for a purpose, and Christians in Corinth were missing the point of these gifts. Because God had given them the ability to speak in tongues, etc., they began to think of themselves more highly than they should.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul illustrates by the members of the human body that the members of the spiritual body (the church) should all work together for the good of the body. Each member of the body is important! God had Paul to write:

Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers?
are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of
healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?
But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I
unto you a more excellent way (1 Cor. 12:29-31).

Love for God and one another was the “more excellent way.” Paul next explains that if one has extraordinary gifts from God, but does not have love, it profits him nothing!

**Great Things Done
With Wrong Motives
Profits The Doer Nothing**

To explain just how important love is, Paul stated:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Imagine having the ability to speak with the tongues of men and of angels, to have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries, have all knowledge and have all faith so that you could remove mountains, be so benevolent that you give all your goods to feed the poor and even give your body to be burned and then learn “at the end of the day,” all those **Great** things you did profited you **Nothing**! People may think they are accomplishing great things in the service of the Lord and profit themselves nothing, because of their lack of love.

The above statement must have been a great shock and wake up call for the Corinthians, who had become haughty in their attitude and actions. Today, we also must remember that God knows the hearts of all men (Acts 1:24). When God was selecting a king to replace Saul, Samuel thought that God would select Eliab. But Eliab was not the one God would choose:

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart (1 Sam. 16:7).

Again, God knows our hearts. We should contemplate the words of admonition David gave his son, Solomon. He stated:

And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever (1 Chron. 28:9).

God searches our hearts and understands all the imaginations of our thoughts. It is a sobering thought to know that God knows **what** we are doing and **why** we are doing it. "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. (Jer. 17:10). God knows the heart (Acts 15:8).

It is possible "in the thick" of things to lose focus of **why** we are doing what we are doing! Some of the Christians in Corinth lost sight of the purpose of the spiritual gifts. The spiritual gifts had become a way for them to promote and exalt themselves, rather than edifying the body of Christ. If they continued in their actions they very likely could have destroyed the church in Corinth. If we are not motivated by genuine, Biblical love, both for God and man, our actions, no matter how great, profit us nothing!

Love In Action

Am I motivated by love? Am I a loving individual? Sometimes it is difficult to correctly assess (or admit) our real motives. It is easy for us to "excuse" ourselves. However, God identifies love for us. He tells us what **love is**. In 1 Cor. 13, love is **personified**. Love takes on the characteristics of a person and tells us what a person of

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love does. It identifies his thinking and his actions. Consequently, one can place his name where the word “charity” is located and see “if it fits.” It can be rather revealing unto us, if we are objective and honest.

Charity suffereth long: A person who loves is a person who is longsuffering. Regarding this matter, Matthew Henry observed:

It can endure evil, injury, and provocation, without being filled with resentment, indignation, or revenge. It makes the mind firm, gives it power over the angry passions, and furnishes it with a persevering patience, that shall rather wait and wish for the reformation of a brother than fly out in resentment of his conduct. It will put up with many slights and neglects from the person it loves, and wait long to see the kindly effects of such patience on him.¹

McGarvey and Pendleton stated; “Love suffers evil and confers blessing, and seeks to thus overcome evil with good.”²

“God is love” (1 John 4:8) and is longsuffering with mankind. God revealed Himself to Moses with these words:

And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation (Exod. 34:6-7).

God’s longsuffering doesn’t mean that He will clear the guilty if he remains in his sins, but God is not anxious to condemn, but seeks to forgive. Among us, who is it that does not appreciate the longsuffering of God. All of us have sinned and none is righteous. What if God were not longsuffering with us? None of us could be saved!

One reason that Christ has not come as of yet is due to God being longsuffering with man and is giving mankind an opportunity to repent. Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

One of the most amazing statements in the Bible is—"Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots" (Luke 23:34). The word "then" is located in a most remarkable place! After man had ridiculed, mocked, spit, struck, scourged and crucified Jesus, "**Then said Jesus, Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.**"

Man might have been tempted to say—"your day is coming and God is going to get you." But Jesus didn't think in such a manner. He was still trying to save mankind, even those who were doing such horrible things to him! Jesus did not come on a mission to "seek and destroy" but rather, "to seek and to save" (Luke 19:10).

Now friend, why is it that we aren't longsuffering with others?? Why is that we seek revenge on those that mistreat us?? One should not conclude that God's longsuffering implies that God will forget or overlook impenitence.

Paul wrote:

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the

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truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God (Rom. 2:4-11).

Christ is coming and the judgment will take place. After stating that God is longsuffering and wanted all to come to repentance, Peter continued:

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

Charity Is Kind: Regarding the word “kind” Strong stated it means “to show oneself useful, that is, act benevolently—be kind.”³ Paul instructs:

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you (Eph. 4:31-32).

God has been “kind” to us in that He has forgiven us for Christ’s sake. According to the above passage, if we are kind, we will not possess bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, evil speaking and malice in our hearts and in our lives. Again, each should ask himself—“Am I a loving person?”

Tony Lawrence observed:

Kindness is almost a lost art in modern era. Love demonstrates itself by being good-natured to people, even when they are not in return. God is kind even to the ‘unthankful and evil’ (Luke 6:35). In turn, those who are Christians are to be kind to one another (Eph. 4:32).⁴

Charity Rejoices In The Truth: Rather than rejoicing in iniquity, love rejoices in the truth. Love rejoices when truth is accepted and applied, and iniquity is put down. Love does not rejoice when sin is committed, but does rejoice in the truth. Again, Jesus is our perfect example. He never compromised the truth. While He loves all mankind He stood firmly against evil and upheld the truth.

We are to love the truth. In the long ago, Zechariah informed the Jews who had been restored to Jerusalem (after having been in Babylonian captivity) that there was coming a time of rejoicing. He encouraged them to love the truth. He wrote:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace (Zech. 8:19).

Those who do not love the truth will be led from it and lose their souls. Paul stated:

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

Inspiration has connected the words “love” and “truth” many times in the Scriptures. We are to speak the

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truth in love (Eph.4:15). After we have obeyed the truth, we are to make sure that we love one another. "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). And, "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18). To the elect lady and her children, John penned these words; "The elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; For the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever" (2 John 1:1-2).

Love does not compromise the truth. It is a false concept of love which thinks love will compromise God's Word. Love doesn't justify the wicked and neither does it condemn the just. "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD" (Prov. 17:15). Paul loved the truth (as well as the Galatians), when he wrote:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

He warned them: "Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). He also stated: "Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you" (Gal. 5:7-8).

It is a false concept of love if one believes that love will never oppose false doctrine and those who teach it. Love seeks to reclaim people to the truth from which they have departed. But as stated previously, it is also an abomination to God for one to condemn the innocent. Love will not falsely accuse the righteous.

Charity beareth all things: Love will cause one to bear the various burdens and trials of life that come his way. Perhaps you know some who seemingly have very difficult situations, yet they bear it with an optimism. Others, however, are ready to complain at the slightest difficulty or disagreement.

Unfortunately, the first generation of Israelites who came out of Egypt were not very good at bearing all things. They repeatedly murmured and complained. They even accused God of hating them (Deut. 1:27), as the reason why He brought them out of Egypt. This attitude and lack of faith caused them to miss the promised land.

Bob Winton stated it well when he wrote:

Love teaches us to be strong and steadfast; to bear up under all circumstances. Mothers endure many things during the course of their lives. They bear up under the stress and pain of pregnancy. Their children sometimes disregard their will, ignore their sacrifices, and think nothing of their many good works. How can the mother endure such? Their mother's love enables them. Because she loves her neglectful or rebellious child, she bears the burden.⁵

Jesus silently endured shame, agony, and hatred on the cross (1 Pet. 2:22f; Luke 23:34). How was He able to bear up under these? His heart was filled with genuine love for God and all mankind.

Paul suffered at the hands of the Jews, but his heart's desire for them was that they might be saved (Rom. 9:3; 10:1). He was not bitter and resentful toward them even when in prison on account of their false charges (2 Cor.

12:10; Rom. 5:3f). Patience produces steadfastness, and experience (approvedness) furnishes us with hope. It is to our benefit that we bear up under all trying circumstances.

How can we bear up under the weight of our Christian struggles?—by developing genuine love. How can we cultivate this love?—by studying the Bible (Acts 20:32), by obeying the Bible (2 Tim. 4:6-8; Rom. 5:3f), by praying fervently and frequently (Jas. 5:16; Phil. 4:6f), and by worshipping sincerely (John 4:24; 1 John 4:8).

Charity believeth all things: Is this statement teaching a person of love will blindly accept whatever is taught. No, not for a moment. The Bible constantly warns against false doctrine. We are to “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:21).

John, the apostle of love, stated; “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). Obviously, God would not say “believe all things” no matter the doctrine and then admonish “believe not every spirit.”

God does not want us to believe false doctrine. What then does the statement, “**charity believeth all things,**” mean? “It takes the kindest views of men’s actions and circumstances. It sees things in their brightest, not their darkest, colors; and, as far as it consistently can, puts the best construction on conduct.”⁶ It is a sad commentary on us when we are quick to believe the worst about another. We would not want others to believe such about us.

Consequently, we violate Christ’s words; “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” (Matt. 7:12), when we fail to believe all things. We are not loving when we are seeking the worst in others and/or attempting to “dig up” any juicy gossip that we can find and spread about another individual.

But again, this doesn't mean that one should not be aware of that which is evil or the evil ones promoting it. However, "love causes us to maintain an open mind. If we love a fellow Christian, we will accept what he tells us unless a good reason arises to the contrary. It does not encourage gullibility or naivety."⁷

Charity Hopeth All Things: Hope has been defined as, "favorable and confident expectation."⁸ Hope has to do with what is not yet seen or experienced. Paul wrote; "For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. 8:24-25). Love causes us to have a certain optimism.

Even though Christ, Paul and others faced many difficulties and trials, they faced their lives with optimism. They could endure because of "hope." Jesus endured the cross because of the joy that was set before Him—"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2).

Jesus knew He had a position with the Father after enduring the cross. Paul could face life and even death with optimism because of what was set before him. He wrote to Timothy, stating:

For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The Christian today has hope. The Hebrews writer encourages us with the following comforting and reassuring words:

And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec (Heb. 6:11-20).

Charity Endureth All Things: The word means “to abide under, to bear up courageously.”⁹ McGarvey stated:

The word ‘hupomenoo,’ translated ‘endureth,’ is a military term, and means to sustain an assault; hence it has reference to heavier afflictions than those sustained by the ‘beareth’ of verse 7. It refers to gross ill-treatment, violence and persecution, and such grievance as provoke resistance, strife, etc. (2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:24; Heb. 10:32; Heb. 12:2; Matt. 5:39; comp. John 18:22-23, with Acts 23:2-5). The enduring is not simply that dogged persistency which bears up despite adversity; it is an endurance which forgives offense (Luke 17:4). From love as it manifests itself in daily life Paul now rises to speak of love in its essence.¹⁰

Lipscomb comments: “It suffers, endures, bears all evils, and is not driven from the true course by the wrongs and injuries of the wicked.”¹¹

To be a good soldier, one must endure hardships, trials and battles. This is also true with reference to the soldier of Christ. Paul admonished Timothy:

Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits. Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things (2 Tim. 2:3-7).

The race does not always go to the fastest, but to the one who endures. To succeed in any worthwhile endeavor, one must endure. What is more worthwhile than the salvation of souls? Love for God, our fellow man and our own soul will cause us to endure.

**Conclusion:
Love Was (Is) The Cure**

Love was (and is) the cure for the problems in the church. There will always be problems that arise in the church. The devil is an enemy that works against the church. Sometimes we ourselves become a problem. However, the cure for the problems that arise is true, genuine Biblical love.

If the church in Corinth had practiced the “more excellent way” it could have saved itself from many of its problems. It was divided over personalities and spiritual gifts. Had they been more longsuffering and kind to one another, if they had rejoiced in the truth and borne all things, believed and endured all things, they would have experienced fewer problems.

The church today is faced with problems. Will we be so naive as to believe that we are exempt from the same

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type of problems that existed in the church at Corinth? We today do not have the spiritual (miraculous) gifts the early church had, but we can still divide over personalities and party-ism.

What if we were more longsuffering with one another? What if we treated each other with more kindness? What if we rejoiced less in iniquity and more in the truth? What if we would bear up under difficulties? What if we chose to believe all things good about each other unless there was compelling evidence to contrary? Then, what if we were willing to endure all things?

Would the church today be in any better shape than in its present condition, if we practiced love as per 1 Corinthians 13? May each of us examine ourselves and resolve to be the person described in 1 Cor. 13:4-7. May we be what “**Love Is.**”

Endnotes

1 Matthew Henry, **Matthew Commentary**, E-Sword Software.

2 J. W. McGarvey, and Philip Y. Pendleton, **Commentary on Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians and Romans**, (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Foundation, ND), p.129.

3 Strong's Dictionary, E-Sword.

4 Tony Lawrence, “The Greatest of These Is Love” IN: **Epistles To Corinth**, MSOP Lectureship, (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 2007), p. 320.

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CHAPTER 32

Love Is Not...

Gary Colley

Introduction

F*EW ARE THE JOYS* in life that exceed the pleasure of having fellowship in the gospel with good brethren. The elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, preachers, and the entire membership of the Southaven church of Christ have proven themselves through the years to be faithful in the work and doctrine of Christ. Brother B. J. Clarke, director of this year's lectureship, has certainly distinguished himself in the preaching of the pure gospel, and in bringing together this great lectureship. We rejoice in this year's theme, "The Greatest Of These Is Love." We strongly commend this study to all.

Love in the Bible is a very important word, basically meaning concern and interest. It is a word that describes a new attitude, an attitude of charity never attainable prior to Christianity. The inspired John wrote, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love (1 John 4:8). It brings us into action concerning the Bible, the church, the lost, all men, and is to the Christian the mainspring of living the Christian life. Without it, nothing we do is acceptable to God, beneficial to ourselves or to a degree to our fellowman. The world would be dark, dreary, and almost unbearable, without love. It cannot be purchased, or known by the senses. Love is not passive, but a positive force

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causing men to fight for that which they love, such as the Bible, the church, our home, and our country. Through the study of the Scriptures, we learn that every positive teaching also contains the negative. Paul in the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, gives not only the positive but also the negative of love. Hence, we need to learn "What Love Is Not." There are seventeen qualities of love given by Paul to show the nature and characteristics of love: nine are negative and eight are positive.

Love In The Negative

Christ and the apostles personify love. Anyone who makes their definition of love to contradict the action of Christ and the apostles needs to restudy the subject. It was in love that Jesus went to the cross. But it was also love that caused Him to call the Pharisees hypocrites (Matt. 23), run the money changers out of the temple (Matt. 21), and to tell the blind guides and their followers that they would be lost (Matt. 15:6-13), and to tell the rich young ruler what he needed to hear (Mark 10:21). Paul, out of love for the soul of Sergius Paulus, the deputy of the country, who wanted to hear and obey the Truth, blinded Elymas the sorcerer who was opposing them and the Truth (Acts 13:6-12).

Understanding Love

The concept of *Agape* (unselfish) love is perverted, misused, is misapplied, and misunderstood by many today. *Agape* love does not deal with the one who receives the love as much as the one who gives it. It does not consider who the one is that receives it as much as to the one who gives it. It is unqualified love, even as God loved us (1 John 4:11-12; John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). The poet writes:

Love never reasons but profusely gives,
gives like a thoughtless prodigal it's all,
and trembles then lest it has done too little.

Some ask, "Do you love me?" but they seem to be asking "Are you willing to allow me to do as I want all the time?" When any request or desire is denied, the reaction is seemingly immediate, "You don't love me!"

This can be illustrated in numerous ways in our society today. A young man may tell his date, "If you really loved me, you would allow me to have my way with you and engage in premarital sex with me." But the young lady understands that this would be fornication, which is forbidden except with a marriage partner (1 Cor. 7:2).

The child says to his parents, "If you really loved me, you would allow me to have my way!" But the mother may reply, "I love you enough to want to know where you are going, with whom, and what time you will get home. I love you enough to let you see anger, disappointment, disgust, and tears in my eyes." Someday when the child is old enough, he or she will realize the logic that motivates a mother!

The husband may say to his wife, "If you love me, you will let me spend all the money I make for the things I want." This is not unselfish love.

The church member may say to the elders, "If you really loved me, you would stop the preacher from preaching about my sin, and you would allow me to live as I please! You ought to fire him!" Paul by inspiration said, "We are to let love be without hypocrisy (deceitful profession, mockery). Abhor (hate) that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9).

Noting Paul's "Nots"

In the negative of love, Paul says first of all, "love envies **not**" (1 Cor. 13:4). By these words, Paul means that correct love is **not** jealous of the gifts, goods, or fortune of another, nor of his spiritual prosperity. The Corinthians took much pride in the gift of tongues, one of the nine

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spiritual, supernatural gifts given in the early church, until the Scriptures were written (Heb. 2:1-4). The gift of tongues, when it had attained its highest development in eloquence and persuasion, is inferior to the language of angels (1 Cor. 13:1). Neither of these gifts are profitable without love, just as faith, which does **not** work in supreme love to God and good will to men, profits little for salvation (Jas. 2:26; Gal.5:6; 1 John 5:3). Even willingness to fight and die for Christianity will **not** take the place of loving obedience to Christ (Matt. 7:21-22).

Moses said to the seventy elders, “Art thou jealous for me?” (Num. 11:26-29). And John the Baptist said of Jesus. “He must increase, and I must decrease” (John 3:26-30). What mother, who loves her child, can be envious or jealous of his or her accomplishments? She rather rejoices in their abilities!

“Love Vaunteth Not Itself, Is Not Puffed Up” (1 Cor. 13:4)

Love “vaunteth **not** itself” means one does **not** boast of his or her own excellence, is **not** a braggart! Jesus our King ordered, “Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them; else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 6:1). Simon the sorcerer vaunted himself, when he styled himself as a great one (Acts 8:9). Few if any men are able to uphold that for which they boast! Jesus our perfect example said, “I am meek and lowly in heart” (Matt. 11:28-30). We are to guard our hearts with all diligence against pride (Prov. 4:24; Psa. 9:12). Of our Lord Jesus it is said, “He shall not cry aloud,” or seek popularity (Matt. 12:18-19). As the followers of the Son of God, we are to act in love, without pride and ambition.

“Is **not** puffed up” shows one is **not** to be inflated with his own importance. This denounces one who parades

himself in pride or arrogance, false self esteem, because of his wealth, education, or knowledge. Being puffed up will destroy the feeling and expression of love in the minds of others. Following the beheading of James and imprisonment of Peter, Herod gave an oration from a high throne, and the people shouted that he was a god not a man. "And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave **not** God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost" (Acts 12:20-23). Take a look at the contrast between Herod and the King of glory who washed the disciple's feet (John 13:1-5). The Bible says "he loved them unto the end."

**"Does Not Behave
Itself Unseemly" (1 Cor. 13:5)**

Love does **not** violate decency or delicacy. It does **not** act disgracefully and indecently around superiors or inferiors. Self-love betrays its lack of care and sympathy toward others. It takes no action to curb its offensive conduct to those who it desires to offend.

How many times have we heard our mothers say, "Mind your manners?" Without overemphasizing manners in a person, it does reveal much about the measure of a man or woman. Jesus went to the house of Simon, a Pharisee, for a meal. Simon did **not** show the customary marks of hospitality toward the Lord. But there was a woman, known to be a sinner, who bathed His feet with her tears, kissed His feet, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. She anointed His feet with ointment. Jesus showed Simon that he had acted "unseemly" while the woman acted in a seemly manner, and was forgiven by the Lord.

Jesus taught us that a servant is not greater than his Lord when he said, "Ye also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14-17). He was **not** teaching the popular

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doctrine of “foot washing,” but rather the lesson of humility, which we are to show to one another. Every Christian should have a courteous spirit. Peter wrote, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (1 Pet. 3:8-9).

Love “Seeketh Not Her Own”

We have noticed in this study that love is unselfish, and does **not** seek her own happiness, especially to the injury of others. “Seeking **not** her own” shows that this self-interest will **not** be the main object of life, but rather is happy in the happiness of others (Rom. 12:9-10). “For even Christ pleased **not** himself; but as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me” (Rom. 15:1-3).

We are therefore to do nothing through faction or through vain glory, “Not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others” (Phil. 2:4). The highest position in the kingdom of Christ belongs to those who are willing and ready to serve others (Matt. 20:26-27). Of the Savior it is said, “Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:28). Boastful, vain, self-centered love for self to the exclusion of others is always productive of evil (Matt. 10:32-33). This is illustrated in the Scriptures as seeking only our own without any thought of others and their needs (Luke 12:13-21).

Love “Is Not Easily Provoked”

The word “provoke” is used in the Bible both in a good and a bad sense. Paul wrote to the Hebrew brethren that we are to provoke one another unto love and good works by not forsaking the assemblies of the Lord’s church

(Heb. 10:24-25). But to the Corinthians Paul wrote that we are **not** to be easily provoked, in the bad sense. Here he speaks of the love that does **not** quickly fly into a rage, and is **not** prone to violent anger without self-control, thus teaching us that we must practice self-control.

Love curbs passion, and subdues and governs one's temper (Isa. 53:7). One man told me that he would not give 10 cents for a man who did not have a temper, but that he also would not give 10 cents for a man who could not control his temper.

When Jesus stood before Caiaphas and the false witnesses at one of His mock trials, He "held his peace," or rage (Matt. 26:62-63). Peter writes that when He was reviled, He "reviled not again" (1 Pet. 2:23). Jesus rather "endured such contradiction of sinners against himself" (Heb. 12:3). If we would be like our Lord and be saved at last, we must **not** be "easily provoked" in the bad sense.

Love "Thinketh No Evil"

Love is **not** suspicious of evil motives and does **not** place designs in others without good cause. It does **not** seek to recompense or return evil for evil, but to provide things honest in the sight of all men, and to live peacefully with all men (Rom. 12:17-18). Love is careful **not** to retain the memory of evil done to us.

Husbands and wives should especially take note of this teaching. We should **not** bring up the past each time some disagreement arises. We should **not** "keep a record" in order to return evil for evil, but continue to bless. Brethren in Christ are called upon to act in the same manner.

Our perfect example shows us the proper response when we are falsely accused. When the unbelieving Jews surrounded Jesus and took up stones to stone him, "Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" (John 10:32).

**Love “Rejoiceth Not In Iniquity
But Rejoiceth In Truth”**

It appears that some today are always looking for the wrong in others. They want to remove the mote out of their brother's eye while allowing the beam in their own eye to remain (Matt. 7:1-5) Love does **not** rejoice when it finds one to be unrighteous in teaching or works, as the self-centered do in the vises and destruction of their enemies. Love neither rejoices in seeing wrong in others, nor the fact that it has been done. It does **not** rejoice in seeing sin committed, nor in the downfall of those who are overcome by it (Rom. 1:32). We are commanded to seek to restore a brother overtaken in a trespass instead of parading his sin before others (Gal. 6:1; Jas. 5:19-20).

Many seem to have pleasure in finding one in unrighteousness. There are those who rejoice in their unrighteousness whose end and result will be destruction (2 Thess. 2:12). Love will seek to restore such a one, but Christians are **not** allowed in any way to rejoice in his or her unrighteousness.

This was true in the men who brought before Jesus the woman, but not the man, taken in adultery (John 8:3-11). Jesus did **not** condemn her to death for her sin, but did warn her, “go and sin no more.” Love “rejoiceth in Truth,” that is, in its triumph! We are to be happy when the Truth prevails and puts down iniquity (2 John 4). We must in these thoughts, guard against false charity or love that compromises the Truth (Gal. 1:8-9; Gal. 2:5-11). The wise man wrote, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Jehovah” (Prov. 17:15).

“Love Never Faileth”

Paul lists several things that shall fail when God's revelation, “that which is perfect,” has been completely

written (Jas. 1:25; Eph. 3:1-5; 1 Cor. 2:9-13). Included in this list are such spiritual gifts that confirmed the Word, as prophecies, tongues, and supernatural knowledge. Paul taught that the foretelling of future events, miraculously speaking with tongues, and being able to supernaturally understand and communicate Divine truth would soon pass away and would be no longer necessary. But there is one thing he said would survive all and that is love. It will continue to eternity.

We now have in the Bible the “perfect law of liberty,” wherein all is revealed to us that is essential to our salvation and eternity. Paul closes this beautiful chapter by saying, “Now abideth faith, hope, and charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Cor. 13:13).

Conclusion

Love is the vital principle of Christianity. It is that without which all other endowments are useless and vain. Love always protects Truth and righteousness; It trusts until reason for doubt; it hopes as it looks to the promises of God; and it preserves us in the steadfastness of faith. Love, like the unity of the Spirit, demands effort, **Our Best Effort!**

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*Lectures
For
Ladies*

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CHAPTER 33

Some Loving And Not So Loving Wives Of The Bible

Maggie Colley

Introduction

OUR GRATITUDE GOES TO the Southaven church of Christ, and the director of this great lectureship, B. J. Clarke. The faithfulness of this congregation is always to be greatly commended. We are grateful for the time we have as ladies to have a part in this lectureship. We commend each of you for coming and for your interest in growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 3:18).

What Is Love?

The importance of the theme of this lectureship cannot be improved. Love has to do with our lives here and eternally. Bible love leads us to have concern and interest in living the Christian life, teaching our families, and the souls of others. We are to love the Lord, the Bible, and the church (Matt. 22:37). It is wonderful that this great and timely topic is being totally explored and placed into the hearts of men and women. Jesus said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6). The Psalmist states, "My tongue shall speak of thy word: for all thy commandments

are righteousness” (Psa. 119:172). Our love for God will cause us to obey our Lord, and faithfully teach His Word. He said, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

What Others Are Saying

We do not need a “Hollywood guru” to tell us what love is or is not. There is a new magazine out this month that tells a woman “One Hundred And One Ways To Love A Man.” This article deals with a worldly way of looking at love, and uses it in a very sensual and loose way. Many husband and wife relationships are like business partnerships. She is continually pushing for her “rights.” Constantly competing and manipulating on the wife’s part to always get her way will not make a happy marriage. If couples worked half as hard keeping their marriages together as they do tearing them apart it could succeed (Prov. 14:1).

Hollywood is sending the world a message by T.V., magazines, and the internet that marriage is all about sex, that there is nothing sacred about marriage and that their vows mean nothing. It seems to be all about who can have the most elaborate wedding. There is nothing surprising in seeing headlines in magazines and newspapers where the couples have “split up” after a few months. Often times they already have children or the bride is pregnant. It is totally unfair for innocent children to have to suffer a lifetime because two people went into marriage with no idea of staying together “until death do us part!” No wonder we are becoming a weakened society with morals spiraling downward.

We as older women have an awesome responsibility to fulfill the inspired command “to teach the young women to love their husbands, to love their

children (Tit. 2:4). In most congregations it is the younger woman teaching classes to older women. We, as older women, have already made our share of mistakes and hopefully have grown wiser.

Humility is a very important trait to develop, and it will cause the younger woman to ask advice of older women who have had long and loving marriages. By inspiration, the apostle Peter states: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder (older). Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). To be humble is an attitude which makes one think of himself no more highly than he ought to think (Rom. 12:3). We are to prefer our brethren to ourselves (Rom. 12:10). Think of all the problems that could be avoided in the church and in the family if we would be "clothed with humility."

The word love is so casually used today that its real meaning has been lost for our husbands, families, and friends. It is applied to everything from new cars, to hair products, to food, and even mayonnaise. To find real true Biblical love is to study the exquisitely beautiful and tender Word of God. The apostle John said, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:8).

Also, Paul, in 1 Corinthians 13, takes us to the source of Christianity. Paul begins by contrasting love with other things that men were familiar with in those days. He contrasts it with lofty eloquence, but without love it would only sound like a sounding brass or tinkling cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1-2). It would be hollow or empty. He contrasts love with prophecy, mysteries, and all faith. He says even if we give all our goods to feed the poor, or our bodies to be burned, and yet do all this without love, it would profit nothing! Where love is, there we find God.

**Love Is Made Up Of
Nine Positive Ingredients:**

Henry Drummond in his book, "Drummond's Addresses," gives a simple way of viewing the ingredients of love:

Patience..... "Love suffereth long."
Kindness..... "And is kind."
Generosity..... "Love envieth not."
Humility..... "Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up."
Courtesy..... "Doth not behave itself unseemly."
Unselfishness..... "Seeketh not her own."
Good Temper..... "Is not easily provoked."
Guilelessness..... "Thinketh no evil."
Sincerity.... "Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth."

Practice these ingredients in your life and everything you do will be worth doing, and that includes marriage. It is worth the effort and time of every individual. No person becomes a saint in his sleep; and to add these attributes to our lives demands a certain amount of interest, study, and prayer. We must attend to the needs of the physical body to have good health, and we must attend to the soul for it to be healthy. Neglecting the soul will bring us to ruin here and eternally (1 Tim. 4:8). We need to be governed by love in mind and action. In other words, every action we take should be motivated and controlled by love.

We Need Each Other

Having been married for fifty-two years does not mean that we wrote the manual on marriage and have all the answers, but God wrote the manual and has all of the answers. We need to follow His instruction for a happy and successful marriage. We are assured, "For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust (Psa. 103:14).

In the New Testament, Paul wrote to the young preacher Titus, concerning the aged women, "That they may train the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children" (Tit. 2:4). The greatest privilege in life is to be a loving, submissive wife. King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, said:

Two are better than one: because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Eccl. 4:9-12)

A good wife, deeply loving her husband, happily submissive, earnestly praying for him, and eager to help him can inspire a man to service far beyond what he could have dreamed of alone. Paul also wrote to the church at Ephesus:

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the Saviour of the body. Nevertheless, let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself; and let the wife see that she reverence her husband (Eph. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:33).

Our greatest privilege in life is to be a loving, submissive wife, a helpmeet to our husbands.

Men and women are different in many ways, but especially in their needs. Paul is showing us that the primary action for a wife toward her husband is to show him respect as the head of the family. His primary need from the wife is for her to show him reverence, which means fear, honor, and respect as the head of the family.

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His love motivates her respect, and her respect motivates his love. Without love, she reacts without respect. Without respect, he reacts without love. That a husband values respect more than love is a very difficult idea for many women to grasp. This is not to say that your husband doesn't value love. Of course he values your love more than words can describe, but more than likely he spells love, **r-e-s-p-e-c-t**.

Most men have a tremendous drive to work and achieve. God assigned Adam's first career, "Then the Lord God took the man, and put him in the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). God made Adam, and God made him to work. The trees provided food, but Adam was to cultivate and keep them. God set Adam up with almost everything he needed: a beautiful place, plenty of food, and a good water supply (Gen. 2:10). Seemingly, Adam had it all. God knew differently, "And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help-meet for him" (Gen. 2:18).

The Hebrew word for "help-meet" means literally "a help answering to him" or "one who answers." Paul takes this thought further. "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man" (1 Cor. 11:9). These passages are not favorites of the Feminists, but godly women heed them.

From the beginning, man was called to "work in the field." The male feels a deep need to be involved in adventure and conquest. God gave women an exalted position in creation. The fact that the Lord took a rib from Adam, near the heart, indicates the close relationship of man and woman. The real essence of this account is that man and woman were made for each other, that woman is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; therefore they are not all that God intended them to be until they are together. Woman's primary position is in the home (Tit. 2:5). At times

however, out of necessity she may have to work outside the home. As Deborah of old (Judg. 4:4), women can be called to positions of important leadership, but I want to emphasize her incomparable worth as a loving wife to her husband, and as a teacher and nurturer of her children.

A Look At A Loving Wife

We cannot overestimate the power of a loving, submissive wife. The apostle Peter reminds us of Sarah; the loving, respectful, and beautiful wife of Abraham. “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham calling him lord: whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well and are not afraid, with any amazement” (1 Pet. 3:5-6). She certainly had a high conception of her wifely duty, for she was obedient to Abraham. She became an “heir” with Abraham of the “grace of life” (1 Pet. 3:7). Sarah is mentioned some forty-eight times in the Scriptures. Sarah’s faith and her obedience are two outstanding qualities that we need to observe and emulate.

An Unloving Wife

Luke tells us to “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). Abraham had taken his nephew, Lot, with him when he went from Mesopotamia to Canaan (Gen. 11:31; Gen. 12:5) then to Egypt, and returned to Canaan (Gen. 12:1). Strife arose between Abraham’s and Lot’s herdsman, because they had obtained so many riches and cattle that there was not enough room in the land. Abraham gave Lot the first choice. Lot chose the most fertile plain of the Jordan valley and “pitched his tent toward Sodom.”

Dr. William B. Riley in his book, **Wives of the Bible**, makes a revealing comment about Mrs. Lot’s character:

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“When we have studied his affluence, we have seen her influence.” The character and conduct of children reflect the mother. The marriage of her daughters to Sodomitish men indicated her low moral standards. Their later relations with their father were a blot on their mother’s character (Gen. 19:32-35). God commanded Lot and his family to flee and not look back (Gen. 19:17). Moses records the consequences of the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah:

Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities and that which grew upon the ground. But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:24-26).

By her actions she brought down her whole family. She could not be influenced either by the warnings of the angels or by the pleadings of her husband (Gen. 19:15-17). She stands as a monument down through the centuries of a woman who loved the world more than she loved God and her family.

We are to remember that she disobeyed God and sinned grievously. Sodom had become saturated with wickedness. God was about to destroy the whole city. He first told righteous Lot to take his wife and daughters and flee to a place of safety. The instructions were clear: “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed” (Gen. 19:17). “But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt” (Gen. 19:26). God made her a monument of His displeasure. She delayed and her looking back suggests that she left with much reservation. Was she curious as to what would happen to her city, or was she thinking she would like to turn back as her family was fleeing from destruction? She may have thought that God did not mean what He said. The

Scripture doesn't tell us, but we are to remember her so that we might know that we must give up all in order to follow the Lord. Whether it be unbelief, family ties, riches, worldly pleasure, or whatever causes us not to follow the Lord (Matt. 10:37-38), we must work to find the problem and excise it from our lives. By looking back, she brought her whole family down.

Conclusion

As Christian women our greatest desire in serving God should be to love and respect our husbands. The Proverb writer says, "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life (Prov. 31:10-12). Proverbs 31:23 says her husband is "known in the gates, and that he "sits among the elders of the land."

Her husband has risen to great honor; he is a leader in the city. That is listed as a fruit of the virtuous woman. She supports her husband, encourages him, and makes it possible for him to be a leader of men. Proverbs 31:28 says her husband and children call her blessed, and that he will praise her. A good woman, who marries a good man, can multiply his service to God immensely—and this should be our greatest desire!

CHAPTER 34

Some Loving And Not So Loving Mothers Of The Bible

Grace Williams

If I Had Known Then What I Know Now...

T*HIS LESSON IS NOT* intended to cause undue grief to those mothers who have done the best they could rearing their children in a godly manner only to see them go astray. It is written with the realization that I am not perfect, and neither are my children or grandchildren. Children are born with the ability to choose the high road or the low road. Each individual, once he reaches the age of accountability, must make his/her own choice.

As Matthew 7:14 records, the straight and narrow way must be found and followed. I, my children, and grandchildren could have avoided many unpleasant situations had I known then what I know now. If I had taken more time when they were younger to teach them the way of the Lord more perfectly, many of the pitfalls they have encountered may have been avoided.

What you are reading are lessons learned from the experience of living, coupled with the Word of God, as recorded in Holy Writ. As you read, it is my prayer that you will enrich your lives, the lives of your children, and grandchildren with the application of God's Word.

Definitions

Now let's look at the definitions of the word **mother**. The **Strong's Concordance** implies that a mother is the bond of the family. **The Second Edition of the American Heritage Dictionary** gives these definitions for the word mother: "(1) a female parent, (2) a female who holds a position of authority or responsibility similar to that of a mother, and (3) qualities attributed to a mother such as capacity to love, to watch over, nourish, and protect."¹ Except for being a female, all of the above characteristics and qualities of a mother must be learned and practiced for them to have their full impact on children.

There is a prescribed way for the qualities of a godly mother to be acquired. I base this assertion on Romans 1:28 which states, "And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting." Although this verse is not speaking about the art of motherhood, the implication is that the godly character of a mother must be learned and practiced or those qualities will be replaced with ungodly characteristics.

A mother is a most important being in the family. She is the uniting force that bonds the family together. She is the agent that provides coherence in the family. As implied by the definition for mother, she holds a position of authority and responsibility in the family. Mother provides love, protection, and both physical and spiritual nourishment to her household.

A Mother's Preparation

A mother's responsibility starts with her baby's conception. Not that the fetus knows anything about accountability, but the child's mother is in charge of taking care of herself both physically and spiritually so that she may produce a viable human being and provide the

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appropriate care for her offspring. Once the child is born, the mother must continue to care for her infant, both physically and spiritually.

Mom will provide a loving, structured environment that is conducive to the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual growth of her children. Mothers have the awesome responsibility of loving their children enough to rear them to be God-fearing youngsters and adults who will become God-fearing parents. There is but one way to fulfill that obligation. That is to be a God-fearing mother. There are several things a godly mother will do to ensure the salvation of her children's souls.

First, before the child is born, a mother will pray for herself to be a strong Christian, following God's Word to the utmost of her ability. That means she will have a daily devotional period in which she allows God to commune with her from His Word, the Bible. She needs the Bible first and foremost, and then she may use good self-help books to help her along the way. Mom must make sure that those self-help books do not contradict God's Holy Word.

Second, she will daily "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) for herself, her husband, her children, and her nation (1 Tim. 2:1-2). She will be filled with good works at home, in the church, and in the community where she will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23). As 2 Peter 1:5-7 says, she will give "all diligence to add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love."

Third, a godly mother will present herself to the world in "modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing,

but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works” (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

Fourth, a godly mother will teach her children how to be God-fearing, responsible adults. A father is told to bring up the children “in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), but the Bible implies that a mother also has a voice in the instruction of the children. Proverbs 1:8-9 says, “My son, hear the instruction of your father, **And do not forsake the law of your mother**; For they will be graceful ornaments on your head, And chains about your neck.” Proverbs 6:20 tells a son to “keep your father’s command, And do not forsake the law of your mother.”

Proverbs 29:15 shows the rewards for a mother who is diligent in teaching her children the way of the Lord, and the consequences of a mother’s lack of concern for providing instruction to her children. “The rod and reproof give wisdom, But a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.” The reward for the child is that with teaching he/she will gain wisdom, but the consequences for the mother and the child are shameful if the child is not taught.

As has already been stated, the characteristics of a godly mother are not in and of themselves innate. They must be learned and practiced daily, or they will be replaced with lackadaisical attitudes that will allow Satan to overrun our homes with ungodliness. We will lose our children to the world if we don’t keep the world out of our homes.

Biblical Examples Of Mothers Who Did Not Love Their Children

Let’s look now to the Bible, for it gives us some examples of ungodly mothers who showed no concern for building a godly home; instead, their concern was for political power and prestige. These mothers were not concerned about the good of the whole. They were

concerned about their own thoughts, wishes, and impulses of the moment.

The first one is **Jezebel**. She was not reared to revere God. She was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians (1 Kings 16:31). The Sidonians were idol worshipers. Jezebel was the wife of Ahab, a king of Israel. When she and Ahab married, she brought with her the idolatrous lifestyle in which she had been raised. She hated any authority placed on her by God. However, as we will see, she knew how to “use” God’s Word to achieve her ungodly purposes.

Jezebel had righteous Naboth killed because he would not give up his God-given inheritance to Ahab, who wanted Naboth’s vineyard for a garden. When Ahab learned that he could not buy Naboth’s vineyard, he went into his house, lay down on his bed, and pouted. Jezebel went to Ahab and told him not to worry; she would get the vineyard for him (1 Kings 21:1-7). She wrote letters to the nobles dwelling in Naboth’s city saying, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him saying, ‘You have blasphemed God and the king.’ Then take him out, and stone him that he may die” (1 Kings 21:8-10). Thus, because Jezebel accused Naboth of blaspheming God, she was able to have him speedily executed (1 Kings 21:11-14). Jezebel was also guilty of having many prophets of God massacred (1 Kings 18:4).

Although Jezebel is not usually thought of as being a mother, 1 Kings 9:22 identifies her as the mother of Joram. Joram was a wicked king who reigned in Israel after the death of his father Ahab. Joram, like his father and **mother**, practiced idolatry and other wickedness. Because of Jezebel’s legacy, upon her death, she was given the indignity by God of being eaten by dogs.

As Jehu approached her palace, she painted her eyes, fixed her hair, looked through a window, and defiantly

asked, "Is it peace, Zimri, murderer of your master?" (2 Kings 9:31). Jehu commanded two or three of her eunuchs to throw her from the window to the ground where he trampled her underfoot. While Jehu was eating his meal, the dogs ate Jezebel so that her corpse would be "refuse on the surface of the field, in the plot at Jezreel, so that they shall not say, 'Here lies Jezebel'" (2 Kings 9:37). God knew that there were some people who would acknowledge Jezebel as a heroine, and He did not want her to have a monument erected over her grave. He wanted her to be completely destroyed.

Another very evil woman was **Athaliah**. She was the mother of Ahaziah, an iniquitous king in Judah, who reigned only one year in Jerusalem. Athaliah was a descendent of a long line of very wicked people. She was the granddaughter of Omri, and Omri was Ahab's father. When her son, Ahaziah, was killed, Athaliah had all but one of the royal heirs destroyed and took over the throne herself. She reigned six years in Jerusalem, until the one heir she did not destroy was old enough to become king (2 Kings 11:1-12). When the coup occurred, Athaliah was carried through the horse gates to the king's house and killed. Because of her wickedness, Athaliah died a very violent, shameful death (2 Kings 11:13-16).

These two women give us a glimpse of what irreverence, disregard, lack of respect for, and disobedience to the God of heaven and His ways, will bring upon a person, especially a mother and her children. Neither woman had taught their children to respect God enough to obey His commandments, and as a result they died very brutal deaths. They were removed by God from their thrones because of their evilness.

The women did not have the kind of love God desires because they found their joy in iniquity; they were arrogant in their defiance of God; they behaved rudely, were easily provoked, and self-seeking. The attitude of

these two women was perpetuated in the lives of their children and grandchildren for generations. Jezebel and Athaliah provide examples of the consequences of idolatrous worship, a lack of love, and a disregard for God and His Word.

Biblical Mothers Who Loved Their Children

At this time let's turn our attention to some mothers who exemplify godly characteristics. **Hannah** was a mother of prayer. She shows us how we should conduct ourselves when we are being tormented by others and are sorrowful of spirit. Hannah's husband, Elkanah, had another wife who had born several children to him. However, Hannah was barren for many years, a condition which was very grievous to her.

Eli, the priest, found her as she prayed a silent prayer to the Lord for a child. She promised that if God would grant her a male child, she would lend him to the Lord all the days of his life. Though she prayed silently, her lips moved. Eli thought she was drunk and rebuked her for being in an intoxicated state. Hannah explained to Eli that she had been in a very sorrowful spirit and had poured out her petition to God.

Eli offered her what I suppose would be an apology for jumping to conclusions based on her appearances. He told her to go about her business and God would grant her the petition which she had requested of Him (1 Sam. 1:1-18). Hannah gave birth to Samuel and kept her promise to lend him to the Lord. When she weaned the child, she carried him to Eli and told him that God had granted her petition in that He had given her the child for whom she had prayed. Hannah also told Eli that the child was to stay with him and be lent to the Lord all the days of his life (1 Sam. 1:19-28).

The next mother is **Mary**, the mother of Jesus. Mary was such an humble, grateful, righteous woman that God found her suitable to bear and raise the Savior of the world. Although a pregnancy out of wedlock could have cost Mary her life, she did not seem concerned with that. Mary was a student of the Scriptures and knew that the prophecy of old had stated “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa. 7:14). Her focus was on the wonder of bearing her Savior and the Savior of the whole world (Luke 1:46-55).

The Bible gives no indication that Mary ever complained about her plight in life. When the days of her pregnancy came to an end, and she had to deliver her child in an animal stable with no bed for herself or her child, she used the materials that were available to make her child as comfortable as possible and did so without complaint. She did not blame the child for inconveniencing her life in such a way. She knew that she had been blessed by God to bear the Savior of the world, and she was thankful.

Mary was a loving mother. She loved her Son, not just because He was the Savior, but because He was her child. During His crucifixion, she stood by and watched helplessly as He died the cruel death of the cross. Mary was a faithful woman who was at peace with herself, with God, and with the circumstances of life. She could look at her life and see fulfillment of Scripture. She joyfully accepted her circumstances, counting it an honor to be chosen to bear the Son of God, the Savior of the world (Luke 1:46-55).

Mary was also a woman who was in control of her emotions. Nowhere in Scripture is there a record of her trying to keep Jesus from going to the cross. Although she must have experienced excruciating pain, she knew, because of her study and knowledge of the record of prophecy, that Jesus must go to the cross and be killed as

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a sacrifice for her sin and the sin of the entire world. She was willing to let Him fulfill His purpose on Earth without interference.

The book of Ruth gives an account of two women who were highly esteemed for their humble faith. **Ruth** and **Naomi** were two women who had a magnificent relationship. Though they were mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, they loved each other in a very influential manner. After they were widows, Naomi was old and apparently not able to earn her living in the fields. Ruth went to the fields and earned enough to take care of both of them. She was blessed enough to come to the field that belonged to Boaz, a near kinsman of Naomi. Naomi schooled Ruth, who was from Moab, in the appropriate behaviors of the Jewish culture and helped her become familiar with the correct procedures to build a godly character.

As a result of Ruth's compliance with Naomi's teachings, she caught the eye of Boaz and became his wife. Ruth had enough respect for her mother-in-law to follow those procedures, thus becoming the great-grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus Christ (Matt. 1:5). Naomi set such a wonderful example of faith in God and love for her daughters-in-law that Ruth was willing to go with her wherever she went and be a part of her household forever (Ruth 1:16-17). Ruth's care for her mother-in-law was so obvious that Boaz said to her, "The Lord repay your work, and a full reward be given you by the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge" (Ruth 2:12). Ruth learned from Naomi to become dependent on God for her survival in this world and in the world to come.

Both **Jochebed** (Numbers 26:59), the mother of Moses and Aaron, and **Rahab**, the mother of Boaz (Matt. 1:5), were women who were very faithful to God. Jochebed is remembered because she saved her infant from death

by hiding him in the Nile River among the reeds and stationing her daughter as a lookout for him. When Pharaoh's daughter found the crying baby, Moses' sister appeared and offered to call a nurse for him from among the Hebrew women. Moses' mother was called and allowed to care for her child until he was old enough to be given to Pharaoh's daughter (Exod. 2:1-10). During this time, Jochebed must have instructed Moses about his heritage; otherwise, how would he have known to be the humble, God-fearing man he became?

Rahab is an excellent heroine of faith. Hebrews 11:31 records, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace." Rahab, according to Joshua 2, was a Canaanite woman who lived in Jericho. Joshua sent two spies to Jericho to view the land and search out the country. As they were going through the land, they came to Rahab's house and lodged there. The king of Jericho had undercover agents checking on the Israelite spies, and when he was told that the Israelite spies were spending the night at Rahab's house, the king of Jericho sent men to capture them.

Rahab's faith in God gave her the incentive she needed to be kind enough to provide protection for the Israelite spies and in turn to ask them to provide protection for her when the Israelites came to destroy the city of Jericho. Rahab confessed her faith saying that "the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (Josh. 2:11). Because of her faith in God, Rahab became the mother of Boaz, who was the great-grandfather of David (Matt. 1:5-6).

Present Day Applications For Mothers

With these women in mind, let's make some present day applications for godly mothers. What did we see in Jezebel that the women of today should not want to

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emulate? Jezebel was a very wicked woman who thought nothing of lying, deceiving, and murdering the prophets of God or anyone who got in her way. She was defiant of authority, selfish, and full of political ambition to the detriment of her soul, the soul of her husband, and the souls of her children. Jezebel knew how to use God's name to achieve her selfish political aspirations (1 Kings 21:10).

Like Jezebel, Athaliah was a woman who was full of political ambitions to the point of committing murder. She was selfish, filled with hatred, and defiant of authority. These ungodly characteristics led to her destruction. Jezebel and Athaliah are not women worthy of imitation.

On the other hand, there are Mary, Sarah, Jochebed, Rahab, Hannah, Ruth, and Naomi who were faithful to God. They were able to control their godly emotions—kind, gentle, long-suffering, filled with joy, peace, and goodness. They were women who knew the role God had created for them and were willing to stay in that realm. Mary studied the Scriptures and knew what they meant. When Gabriel explained to her how the conception of Jesus would occur, she said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). She willingly accepted her position in life.

Hannah was a woman of prayer and faith. She prayed believing that God would provide her with her requests.

Rahab was able to look around her community, see the consequences of sin, and turn from it, confessing that there is only one true God.

Naomi, by her verbal teaching and example, was able to lead her daughter-in-law out of an ungodly lifestyle.

Sarah was loving, respectful, and submissive to her husband. We aren't told in Scripture whether or not Jochebed prayed, but, oh, how she must have! The extremes that she used to save her child's life must have been accompanied with prayer.

A Godly Mother's Duties

What are a godly mother's duties? Her duties before she becomes a wife are to study the Scriptures to educate herself to become a godly woman who will not stray from the faith in the face of trials and hardships. She will find a husband to whom she can be submissive (Eph. 5:22) and that she can respect as she is commanded in Ephesians 5:33.

If she is to build a godly home and rear godly children, she must have a husband who will love her enough to take the spiritual as well as the physical lead of the family as he is commanded to do in Eph. 5:23-29. She will attend to the affairs of her own house, providing a comfortable atmosphere for her family. She will not be so busy with people and obligations outside her home that she has no time left for the duties of her household.

Once the children are born into the family, a godly woman will continue to study God's Word, continuing to build her spiritual strength. She will teach her children to love God enough to be obedient to His commands. She will remember Deuteronomy 6:6-9 which states:

And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your head, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

But What Will Mom Teach Her Children? Let's See.

Godly mothers will teach their children, when they are small, to adjust appropriately to social situations. For example, as children grow and mature to the point they

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are recognized by other youngsters, mom will teach her children how to interact appropriately with their peers. When children go to school, they are taught that running in the building, interrupting adults who are talking, and committing other social crimes are wrong. They are taught in school to stay with their group. Children are assigned homework and given rewards for completion, and consequences for not completing their assignments. Parents see that their children complete their secular assignments.

Why is it that we mothers cannot teach our children that running in the church building, pulling away from us, and generally making a scene in a public place is wrong, and that there will be immediate, unpleasant consequences for both them and the parent? Why is it that we cannot teach our children to stand quietly and respectfully listen as their parents are in conversation with other adults? Why is it that we can get our children to a ball game and to school on time, but we bring them into a Bible class fifteen or sometimes thirty minutes late? Why is it that parents cannot help their children complete their Bible class homework assignments, study the Word of God every day, and pray without ceasing? Why is it that parents will not teach their children the consequences of living a life that excludes God, except on Sunday mornings, Sunday nights, Wednesday nights, and maybe at mealtime?

Students are taught that evolution is the explanation for why people exist today. They are taught that there is no God, and even some of our Christian young people believe it. Why is it that we can get our children to school on time where they will be taught the theory of evolution as a fact, but we cannot get them to a Bible class where they will learn that the God of heaven created them? Why is it that mothers teach their children to brush their teeth, take a bath, put on clean clothes so that they will appear

well-kept to the public, but we won't teach them how to cleanse their souls so they may spotlessly present themselves to Jesus Christ, their Judge, as they enter eternity?

I submit to you that it is because we, as mothers, have not prioritized our own lives to have God's method clearly manifested at all times. Mothers have not recognized the fact that we are teaching our children to live for the moment when we encourage them to complete secular assignments, but we are teaching our children to live for eternity when we encourage them to complete Bible class assignments. When we mothers love our children enough to encourage, discipline, and teach them to the point that they are inundated with a godly lifestyle at home, we can expect them to go into adulthood as responsible, God-fearing individuals who will uphold the principles they have been taught from childhood (2 Tim. 1:5).

Mothers, teach your children good work ethics. Assign them chores from the time they are able to understand commands. They can pick up their toys and put them in the toy box, but you must show them what you mean when you tell them to pick up their toys. When you are cooking and your child wants to "help," pull a chair to the counter so that he/she may become engaged in the activity with you. Yes, you will need a few extra minutes to work around the little hands and to clean up a bigger mess, but the end result is the satisfaction of spending a few teachable moments with your child. Moments like these provide good, teachable opportunities to train your children in the way of the Lord.

Mothers, set the right example of what type of clothing your daughters should wear, and school your sons on the importance of appropriate apparel. 1 Peter 3:3-6 describes how Sarah, who was extremely beautiful (Gen. 12:11), adorned herself with righteousness and obeyed God

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by being obedient to Abraham. Isaiah 3:16-24 provides a picture of women who were more concerned with their outward appearance than they were with glorifying the God of heaven. In fact, they were not interested in giving God any glory. They were more anxious about their momentary ease and comfort and how they appeared to the world.

The consequences for the shallow character and accompanying behavior of the women of Judah were grievous. They would lament and mourn because of the desolation that would be brought on their nation. Instead of being humble enough before God to repent and ask for the forgiveness of the sins of Judah, the women were so self-centered and worried about their physical appearances that they totally ignored the righteousness required of them by God.

These Scriptures do not imply that we should not be concerned about wearing beautiful clothes and making ourselves appear as attractive as possible, but that our priority should be our godly character rather than the adornment of the body. The character of a mother and her children will be seen in the type of clothing she chooses for herself and allows her children to wear.

Clothing designers know that clothing, or lack of it, sells sex. If you don't believe it, look at the magazines, watch television shows, and look at the Internet. Do you recall seeing pictures of the kinds of clothing the movie stars were wearing to the awards shows? They were most revealing from top to bottom and in between. The body-baring clothes are described as "sexy," and mothers have bought into the notion that young people will not be popular if they do not dress according to the fad of the moment. This is Satan's hoax to keep people, young and old, from focusing on the deeper, godly attributes of life.

Mothers, teach your children to be content with their lifestyle. I am not saying that one should not try to improve

himself/herself. I am saying that it is wrong to be consumed with activities that bring only carnal rewards. Teach children the satisfaction of completing a day's work and pillowing their heads at night knowing that they have an eternal reward coming at the end of this life. Teach your daughters that the work they do at home rearing their children, in a godly lifestyle, has far greater riches than anything this world has to offer.

Teach your sons that a woman has a fulltime job caring for her home and family. Teach your daughters to be frugal and to live within their husbands' salaries. Teach your sons and daughters to be content with what they have (Phil. 4:11). Teach your children that there is no greater satisfaction than building a godly home and rearing godly children.

Mothers, teach your children how to choose a spouse. Teach them, starting with their birth, to identify godly characteristics in people. A child should see his/her mother exhibit the godly characteristics which were described earlier in this chapter. A life cannot hold to two separate concepts at the same time (Matt. 6:24). Either one will follow an evil path or he/she will follow the righteous path that God has shown us through His Word. Therefore, a mother must keep herself focused on the straight and narrow path so that she may teach her children by example, and with the Word of God to follow the same road.

Finally, teach your children that life is not a bed of roses where only sweet scents and glorious days of joy abound. Hardships and thorns will come along, and they will be dragged down, in spite of all their labors to live godly lives. Remind them of Job and Christ and how they handled their horrible situations. Explain to them how Job was stricken by Satan, but during all of his anguish, he forgot not the Lord God. Job knew there was no other place to go (Job 2:9-10). Educate your children about how

Christ, when he was tempted by Satan, remembered the Scriptures of old (Matt. 4:1-10). Indoctrinate them about how Jesus Christ fell prostrate on His face and turned in prayer to the God of heaven for the strength that was required to endure the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual anguish of His trial and crucifixion (Matt. 26:39).

Conclusion

Mom will remember that she is an authority figure in the house, that she must have a voice in rearing the children, and that she must firmly, but lovingly, teach her children the way of God, being diligent to present herself and her children “approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15). She will do so verbally and by example. Her faith will be exhibited in the manner in which she conducts herself in the home, church, and community. She will keep all ungodly activities out of her home. She will direct her children’s lives into activities that will keep them on the pathway to heaven.

Mothers are very important beings in the family. They are the bond that holds the family together. Without a mother’s attention to the details of teaching and training the children, keeping the house in order, and providing a pleasant, loving atmosphere, there is a lack of continuity in the home. Mothers must always be diligent to fulfill their responsibilities to their God, their husbands, their children, and themselves. May every mother be blessed with the desire to live the life of a Godly mother.

Endnote

1 **The American Heritage Dictionary**, Second College Edition, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1982), p. 816.

CHAPTER 35

Some Loving And Not So Loving Daughters Of The Bible

Celicia Grider

Introduction

BYOND THE MARRIAGE RELATIONSHIP, the bond between a mother and daughter is perhaps the sweetest. A mother gives sacrificially of her time and energy for years to cultivate a daughter who will one day become a mother herself. One current pop song sings, "Girls become mothers, so mothers be good to your daughters." What a true statement!

There are important seeds such as love, care, gentleness and that special touch that must be planted in a little girl's heart that will grow throughout her life. A mother is the main sower of these seeds. Each child has a unique personality. A daughter's personality can be suppressed by parental authority or can be cultivated through love and guidance.

A mother's love is a special gift. A mother's role is monumental in her child's rearing. She plays so many parts in a child's life. A mother's natural affection is demonstrated in the life she lives, the lessons she teaches, and the love she bestows on her child. The phrase "like mother, like daughter" is one to be feared by some mothers and heard with pride by others. Obviously the outcome of

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the previous statement depends on our roles as mothers to the precious girls given to us, our daughters.

It has been said, "Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see."¹ Parents must take to heart the sentiments expressed in the lyrics to the song, **In My Daughter's Eyes**, by Martina McBride:

In my daughter's eyes I am a hero;
I am strong and wise and I know no fear
But the truth is plain to see;
she was sent to rescue me
I see who I wanna be; In my daughter's eyes

In my daughter's eyes everyone is equal;
darkness turns to light and the world is at peace
This miracle God gave to me;
gives me strength when I am weak
I find reason to believe; In my daughter's eyes

And when she wraps her hand around my finger;
oh it puts a smile in my heart
Everything becomes a little clearer;
I realize what life is all about

It's hangin' on when your heart has had enough;
It's giving more when you feel like giving up,
I've seen the light
It's in my daughter's eyes

In my daughter's eyes I can see the future, a
reflection of who I am and what will be
Though she'll grow and someday leave,
maybe raise a family

When I'm gone I hope you see
how happy she made me;
For I'll be there
In my daughter's eyes.

Disapproved Daughters

Lot's Daughters—Shame A Name

We must learn from examples in Scripture who behaved contrary to God's Word. All sinners usually suffer

consequences as a result of their sin. Unfortunately, those who are innocent sometimes grow to partake of the same sins as their parents. It is proven Sodom had more influence on Lot than Lot had on Sodom. As a result of Sodom's influence, Lot lost his wife to the wicked city. The same could be said with his daughters, in that they were more influenced by Sodom than their parents.

Have you ever wondered why there is no name for Mrs. Lot? What about the two daughters, Misses Lot? Nevertheless, Scripture does not reveal their names; yet their behavior speaks volumes to us. One would be speculating to figure out what happened to this family during these girls' formative years when teaching and guidance is so vitally important to a young girl becoming a young woman.

While they had not known men in a sexual way, their father offered them to the Sodomites to protect his guests (Gen. 19:8). Lot's wife loved Sodom so much, she looked back on the city as it was burning to the ground. She is in hell even this day. Jesus warned, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). Regardless of the reason, they committed the sickening act of incest with their drunken father. Other than a defiance of God's law, there is no explanation for such an abominable act, procreation notwithstanding. Lot allows himself to **twice** commit an act, which almost "out Sodom's" Sodom.

Considering the town in which the daughters of Lot had been reared, the mother of whom they were the offspring, and the example they had received from their father (Gen. 19:8), "We can understand, though we cannot cease to abhor their incestuous conduct."²

In today's societal vocabulary, it could be said that with the trauma caused by the loss of their mother and the sinful surroundings of Sodom and Gomorrah as a place to be raised, the result of this 'upbringing' caused them to

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commit this sinful act of incest. No doubt Lot's daughters 'snapped' when they devised the plan to get their father drunk and then lay with him.

Is this a valid excuse for their actions? No! It is true long ago, and it is true today, that those who do not behave according to God's will **are responsible for their actions**. We must teach our daughters they will suffer consequences from their decisions. Some consequences will be good, some will be bad:

As I live, saith the Lord GOD, Sodom thy sister hath not done, she nor her daughters, as thou hast done, thou and thy daughters. Behold, this was the iniquity of thy sister Sodom, pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness was in her and in her daughters, neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me: therefore I took them away as I saw good (Ezek. 16:48-50).

Daughters must be loved by both parents in a way that is healthy and harmless. When this love is expressed and received openly and unmolested, then a daughter is able to accept and reciprocate such emotion.

How often do we tell our children to watch their actions because of their family name? Well, the slate of the Lots' was once again marred with the ugliness of sin.

Dinah—Shatters A Reputation

In Genesis, we read of Laban, Jacob's uncle who had two daughters, Rachel and Leah. Not much is revealed in Scripture regarding their personalities. It is stated, however, that Leah was tender-eyed; but Rachel was beautiful and well favored (Gen. 29:16-35).

Another physical trait was that Leah could bear children, but Rachel could not. In addition to six sons, Leah had a daughter.

Leah's whole life seems to be dedicated to her sons. Her only daughter, Dinah, was left to follow her own inclinations, for we read, "and Dinah went out to see the daughters of the land." (Gen. 34:1). Perhaps she reminded Leah she was fifteen years old, perfectly able to take care of herself; and besides the girls of Shechem were so friendly and charming. So she goes, and goes alone. How many mothers follow the line of least resistance where the desire of a child is concerned?

Prince Shechem, son of King Hamor, saw Dinah; and she must have been as beautiful as her famous grandmothers. Perhaps she was pleased and flattered at the attention of the Prince. "Surely," she thought, "no harm can come of one little visit to the palace of a king." And the end of the adventure was that Dinah was seduced and held a captive in the palace. We feel sure that Dinah was forced and did not surrender her virginity willingly.

What a price she paid for her longing to be with the daughters of the land! Her desire for the friendship of the world enticed Dinah to Shechem and robbed her of her purity. And Jacob cries that he as her father was "caused to stink among the inhabitants of the land" (Gen. 34:30). There is no sadder sight than disgraced parents whose children have brought shame and dishonor.

Today, many of the youth of Christian homes are seeking the friendship of the world. They do not ask for much--they only want to be like other girls and boys. Too often worldly pleasures and the association of worldly friends involve the moral and spiritual death of our youth. This is often a serious indictment against Christian parents as it was of Jacob and Leah.³

Devoted Daughters

Miriam-Shows Responsibility

As Scripture records for us in Exodus 2:2-9, Miriam heeded her mother's command to take her baby brother

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to the river and stand watch from the bulrushes until he was discovered. Miriam responded quickly and retrieved her mother, as instructed, to care for Moses. It is evident that Miriam was taught well. This action on Miriam's part demonstrated a desire to respect and obey her mother's instruction. The life of baby Moses was saved in part because of the seed of obedience sown in the life of Miriam by their mother Jochebed. A great faith was exhibited by Jochebed, and therefore a great lesson was taught to Miriam. Where would we be had this daughter not obeyed and saved Moses' life? From the inspired Moses, we read:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up (Deut. 6:6-7).

Ruth—Showers Care On Others

The love story of the Old Testament is a fine example of a relationship between daughter and mother-in-law. However, before that association began Ruth was taught the right way to treat others. It is evident by her relation to and care for Naomi that the golden rule was taught, applied, and instilled in Ruth's life.

Though grown, Ruth was still influenced by the lovely Naomi. So much so that Ruth decided to stay with widowed Naomi after Ruth's husband died. The words that are a favorite Scripture to this writer are as follows:

And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God (Ruth 1:15-16).

The dedication and devotion depicted in the previous passage does not happen overnight. Those are taught characteristics that a mother teaches her daughter. How fortunate Ruth was!

Sister Lottie Beth Hobbs spoke of Ruth as a daughter-in-law in the following way:

She was a devoted daughter-in-law. Unselfishly Ruth cared for Naomi, respected her as a mother, and valued her counsel and advice. Only big hearts are capable of selfless devotion. No wonder Naomi and Boaz loved her; she was lovable. It is difficult to love someone who has no lovable qualities. You may stroke a kitten, but nobody pets a porcupine. Each of us should strive to acquire the gentler qualities, which make one loveable. Love is a living thing. By attitudes and words and deeds, love will be either nourished or destroyed. Ruth succeeded in being a loveable daughter-in-law in spite of the most adverse circumstances. It would have been so easy for disagreements to come, but it seems that she felt nothing but respect and appreciation for Naomi...A Christian mother said to her daughter on her wedding day: 'As long as I live, don't say anything to me against your mother-in-law. She is the woman who brought into the world a son and reared him to be your husband. She did such a good job that you fell in love with him. So no matter what she does, don't criticize her to me, for I will not listen.' Surely such an attitude on the part of mothers would help pave the way for peaceful in-law relationships for their daughters.⁴

No doubt Naomi loved Ruth and Orpah as daughters. There was a bond closer with this triangle than even some physical mother/daughter relationships. Ruth was willing to work and provide for herself and Naomi.

Industry is a taught lesson in life. In fact it begins in the home. Recent statistics suggest stay at home moms would receive an annual salary of \$138,000 for the many

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jobs we fulfill. A mother teaches her daughter the ways of hard work. Ruth excelled in this area of life. She was not lazy. She worked hard, without complaint, to sustain not only herself, but Naomi as well.

A woman cannot smoothly run her home if she is lazy. Slothfulness has always been condemned by God (Eccl. 9:10). It is important that a mother teach her daughter the ways of hard work.⁵

Ruth also had an attitude of gratitude. This is a lost art among young people today. We need to kindly insist that our children write thank you notes and express appreciation for acts of kindness shown to them. Once we reach adulthood we should offer thanks to parents for their service, upbringing, and guidance they give us. This flows into the responsibility we have to care for our parents as they age.

Eunice—Shares The Sweet Story

Having just completed **Through the Eye of Joy** in our Ladies' class, sister Taylor's thoughts of Timothy and training are quite appropriate:

Training is more than teaching and it must begin from the very beginning of the child's life. Lois and Eunice knew the importance of such early training. It is said for Timothy that they trained him from a very young age. The scripture says 'from a child (babe, ASV) thou hast known the holy scriptures...' (2 Tim. 1:5; 2 Tim. 3:15). The names of God and Jesus should be among the first words in a child's vocabulary. Respect for the Bible must be instilled early in a child's heart. Family devotionals can do much, not only in teaching the Scriptures, but also in teaching deportment for worship. This should be a time of reverence, not light heartedness. It should be meaningful, not a mere formality.⁶

Generation to Generation, what will you pass down?
Alexander Campbell said, "The discreet and affectionate

mother lives forever in the heart of her children. There never was a man both good and great that did not owe it to his mother.”⁷ No doubt this daughter, Eunice, was taught the significance of childrearing. For as Hannah lent her child to the Lord, so did Eunice lend Timothy. They made the same vow: Raise your daughter to know the Lord and she will have a built in chaperone.⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, daughters with Christian moms are doubly blessed. Therefore, daughters have the opportunity to learn from their mothers and implement the God-given characteristics in their lives. The daughter who accepts this challenge will surely be blessed and bring much pride to her parents in addition to the fruit she will bear for the Lord. The girl who refuses to accept the examples and learn from them will be a disgrace to her parents and will choose to live a disapproving life in the eyes of our Father. God bless Christian parents who have the monumental tasks of raising the young!

Endnotes

1 Sandra Kuck, **Thank Goodness for Little Girls** (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2004), p. 27.

2 J. Exell, & H.D.M. Spence, **The Pulpit Commentary** (Hendrickson, Peabody, Massachusetts), p. 261.

3 Kitty Jones Culwell, **Sarah's Daughters** (DeHoff Publications: Murfreesboro, 1958), pp. 44-46.

4 Lottie Beth Hobbs, **Daughters of Eve** (Harvest Publications: Fort Worth, 1963), p. 86.

5 Ibid.

6 Irene Taylor, **Through the Eye of Joy** (Taylor Publications: Ripley, 2004), p. 127.

7 Culwell, p. 188.

8 Kuck, p. 13.

CHAPTER 36

How Can Ladies Show Their Love For The Church?

Mina Lambert

Introduction

“*HOW CAN LADIES SHOW* Their Love For the Church?” is the topic I was given to speak on for this lectureship series. I want to take this topic and go over it word by word. Let’s diagram this sentence. Who or what is the subject of this sentence? “Ladies” is the subject, but what kind of ladies in relationship to “the church?” They are Christian ladies. The verb or action words in the sentence are “can show.” The direct object of the action words “can show” is love. Christian ladies can show their love, but what is receiving the love? “The church” is the object in a prepositional phrase, which can show relationship or possession of the direct object. Who owns the church? The church is the body of Christ. Ephesians 1:22-23 states, “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.”

We can change the word “church” to “Christ,” changing the sentence to “How Can Christian Ladies Show Their Love to Christ?” This is the way I want to relate the topic to you. I want to discuss how ladies can use the talents or gifts God gave us for the church, knowing we are using them for Christ.

Women can show their love for Christ by not trying to assume roles of leadership they are not authorized to have (1 Tim. 2:8-13). This is a direct command for women. There is no way to argue any point; it is plain and clear. So let's see what Christian ladies can do for Christ.

Women are an important working factor in the church. There have always been women behind the scenes in the church, just like the women we read of in the Old Testament and New Testament. They made a big difference in the future of the church. They used their talents or gifts to help others to make a way for Christ. A talent is a mental or physical aptitude, a natural or acquired ability. A gift is a talent, endowment, aptitude, or bent; also the act, right, or power of giving (**Webster's Dictionary**). Let's look at the talents of a few of the women mentioned in the Old Testament.

(1) **Miriam** was Moses' sister. She nurtured and helped raise him, not knowing Moses would lead God's people out of bondage (Exod. 2:7; Exod. 15:20-22).

(2) **Deborah** became a judge of Israel and a prophetess. People came from near and far to receive wise counsel and prudent judgement. Thanks to this gifted woman, the battle she and Barak led was won, and peace lasted forty years (Judg. 4).

(3) **Ruth** showed goodness and love to her mother-in-law after her son, Ruth's husband, died. Her goodness made an impression on others, especially Boaz, who later married Ruth. Ruth was the great-great grandmother of David, from whom Jesus descended (Ruth 1:16).

(4) **Abigail** was hospitable to David after she found out how meanly and boorishly her husband had treated David's request for food and water. She prepared food for David's camp and brought it to him. With great courage she apologized for her husband's rudeness and begged for forgiveness (1 Sam. 25:3-42).

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(5) **Esther** saved her people by risking her own life. She was courageous in standing up to the king, knowing it could mean certain death. Her uncle Mordecai taught her to love God and others before herself (Esth. 1-10).

Let's now look at a few women of the New Testament who helped the cause of Christ.

(1) **Elizabeth** was an outstanding woman beyond child-bearing age, but her great faith and prayers were heard by God. God gave her a son who would lead the way for Christ (Luke 1:5-45).

(2) **Mary**, the mother of Christ, was young, but God chose her above all women. She was a godly and loving young woman. God knew her faith was great. She dedicated her life to Jesus from His birth until His crucifixion and resurrection with love, devotion, and service (Luke 1:32-38; John 19:25-28).

(3) **Mary of Bethany** was the sister of Lazarus. She was hospitable and attentive to the needs of Jesus. She was always at the feet of Jesus listening and studying every word He spoke (Luke 10:38-42).

(4) **Martha** is mostly remembered for complaining to Jesus about Mary's not helping her. But Martha was a worthy woman. She made one of the most earnest professions of faith in John 11:27. "She saith unto Him, yea Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world."

(5) **Mary Magdalene**, out of whom Jesus had cast seven devils, was a devoted follower of our Lord. She accompanied Him and His disciples on their journeys and was at the crucifixion (Luke 8:1-3; Matt. 27:56). Although not mentioned by name, many believe she is the woman in Luke 7:38 who anointed the feet of Jesus, washed them with her tears, and dried them with her hair.

We have mentioned only a few of the great women of the Bible. Do you see the talents these women had? They have influenced and affected our lives and will continue

to influence others long after we are gone. Their examples should make us realize how blessed we are as women.

We will never know what kind of talents we have until we try. There are so many ways we can be of service to the Lord. Every member should use his or her talents or gifts for the good of the church. God gave all of us talents. God made us in His image. “And God said, “Let us make man in our own image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Man in the Scripture stands for mankind, meaning both sexes. God doesn’t make junk. Finding and developing our talents is up to us.

Women have the power to change their surroundings, including the lives of people we touch. As we read in Titus 2:3-5, we are to be workers for the Lord in our homes as well as in His church. If we teach our children at home to love God and respect others, this will reflect on us as Christian women and mothers. Working and teaching in our homes are good ways to develop our talents, because we cannot be effective workers in the church if our homes are not in order.

There is a job for everyone in the church; we are never too old to learn or to teach. As Christians we are always on display; therefore, we need to be good examples. We need to make a difference in our homes, the church, and our communities. What we teach and the way we live will show the community that we are different. Matthew 5:13-16 says, “Ye are the salt of the earth...Ye are the light of the world” others will notice. We are to manifest the light (Phil. 2:15-16).

Mark 16:15 tells us we are to go into all the world and to preach and teach. As women, we can teach in our homes and church. If we can teach in our homes, we can teach classes for children. We may be the only teachers some children will ever have to teach them the stories and songs about Jesus. Remember Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:5? We need to be like his grandmother and mother—always teaching.

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Prayer is necessary in order to have a Christian life. Prayer is a wonderful privilege granted to Christian women. There is nothing of a spiritual nature which we do that can draw us any closer to God than our private prayers. We each need to examine our own prayer life and make sure we have an open communication with God. Nothing prepares our lives for God's Will better than a prayer life. God knows our needs before we ask. We need to pray that our talents will always be used for good.

Hospitality is a characteristic every Christian woman should have. The meaning of hospitality in **Webster's Dictionary** is "generosity and friendship toward visitors." The meaning in Greek is "love of strangers" (**W.E. Vine Dictionary**). As Christian women, we should always be ready to show hospitality. A quality in a hospitable home is an attitude of joy and gladness shown to people. The ability to be hospitable to strangers has to be developed through practice. Sometimes shyness and fear have to be overcome. Being a gracious hostess is indeed a gift, and for some this can be a big obstacle. The only way to overcome this obstacle is to take the first step and invite a few people over.

The church always needs ladies to be in charge of getting classes organized, such as Ladies' Devotionals. There needs to be a leader to take charge, to keep things going, and to ask people to do devotionals, and this may be your talent. If you are involved in the activities of the church, you will motivate others to get involved. Ladies can teach, inspire and give emotional support to other ladies.

Opening up our homes for a devotional is a way to be hospitable. This allows ladies to talk about issues of the church, whereas in a group with men we may not be able to do so. Women feel more at ease speaking with other women. Being a good listener is a much-needed talent and

a gift. Listening is an art and has to be learned. It takes great patience to listen. Listening shows you care. God is the most sympathetic and compassionate listener the Christian has. If being a good listener is your talent, you have an opportunity to gain trust and plant the seed of Christ. Trust is a gift to be treasured.

We are told that when we feed those who are hungry and thirsty, clothe those in need, visit those who are sick or in prison, we have done it unto Jesus. But if we don't do these things, we will be condemned into everlasting punishment (Matt. 25:31-46). The other side to this is if we do what God commands, He will give us eternal life.

As ladies in the church, we can cook food for those who are in need. We can work in a food pantry. Feeding the hungry is a duty of every Christian. Ladies can pack food for the needy in the community or organize a food drive for children's homes. We can visit people who have visited church services or visit our neighbors next door. What better way to use our talents than to cook a meal and talk to someone who may not know about Jesus or His church?

It is our duty to visit the sick. Visiting a sick child or adult at home or in the hospital will make us feel as good as it makes them feel. Just an encouraging word or a smile brightens a child's face or cheers an adult who has been waiting all day for another person's voice. Visiting a shut-in, even if only for a few minutes, can make that person's day. Those who are sick need to know that someone cares.

The church has areas of worship designed just for women. The Ladies' Day is a perfect way of using the different talents of ladies in the church. Leaders are needed to take charge and organize food committees. Song leaders, and ladies to read Scripture, or lead prayers are also needed. Invitations should be sent out to other churches.

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Most importantly, a speaker is needed, someone who can teach lessons important to women—lessons that would be edifying, lessons that would motivate us to share with others what we have learned. A Ladies' Day is always a great way of getting to meet other ladies from different congregations and serving our fellow Christian ladies with a brunch or luncheon.

There is another area in which ladies can show their talents—working in the teacher's Resource Room. There is always a need for visuals and making crafts for teachers. You may have a talent in art, creativity, writing cards, cutting, gluing, or being a teacher's aid. If your congregation doesn't have a Resource Room, you may be just the person to start one. Of course, the first step would be to discuss this with the elders of your congregation. Creating or helping in the Resource Room is an area women can get involved in to support our Bible classes. It can be a great motivation for ladies to help. Decorating bulletin boards is another helpful task. The boards need to be changed on a regular basis, and ideas need to be thought of and worked out.

Every congregation of the church should have a visitation program. This is an area women can work in with other women or with their husbands. It is our responsibility to visit, encourage, and invite people to church services. We need to make the visitors feel we genuinely care about them and to help them with any need they may have, whether it is spiritual or physical. Also, in visiting we need to encourage our own members who may be in need of help or are delinquent from services. They all need to be reminded about their responsibilities to God. The Lord is compassionate, and we should show the same trait.

We can render lives of service to God by trying to be the women God wants us to be, the kind of wives our

husbands need, and the kind of mothers our families need. We can encourage others by being leaders and motivating them to take part in the work of the Lord's church. God knows how hard it is to step up and speak when we are unsure of ourselves. But always remember God will be with us. Showing people by example is the best way. Our influence is something that will outlive us. Our lives and works should give glory to God and not us.

God knows our works and He will judge us in accordance with what we have done with our talents. In using our talents we are to give help without calculating what we will get in return. Love and giving of ourselves should become a natural reaction given from the heart. Our reward should be the happiness of giving of ourselves. Our greatest motivation should be wanting to go to heaven when this life is over.

I hope through this study we will all be motivated to use all of our talents or gifts for the cause of Christ and, in turn, help others to use theirs. May God be given the glory in every work we do in His church.

Acknowledgment

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