

RELATION OF TRUTH AND LOVE

By

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I am amazed these days at the difficulty some have in reconciling the issues of theological truth and Christian love. On the one hand is the effort to guard the doctrine, recognizing that destiny depends upon what God has revealed. On the other hand the emphasis is upon the Christian attitude, recognizing that one may “know all mysteries and all knowledge” but if he has not love, he is nothing. In application it would seem that these two issues are set at opposite poles, so that he who would know truth must leave off love, and he who would practice love must abandon truth.

But it is not an “either-or” situation. Real Christian love is related to the truth the Christian seeks to bear, and is in fact rooted in it and stems from it.

The apostle Paul, who wrote the “love” chapter of 1 Corinthians 13, wrote that anyone who preached a different gospel was accursed! (Gal. 1:8-9). While he had much to say about love, he filled the New Testament letters with sound theological arguments and set forth Christianity in exacting terms. Obviously he was able to know the truth, to defend the truth and preach the truth and at the same time set an example of Christian love.

Much of the present difficulty is probably due to the corruption of the term, “Love.” The Greeks divided love into three types: “agape,” “eros,” and “philia.” Roughly translated they mean “charity,” “desire,” and friendship.” The kind of love the Bible demands is Agape. Here the King James Version (for once) comes closer to a true translation when it renders it “charity.” It carries with it the idea of a concern for the other person’s welfare, whether we “like” him or not. C. S. Lewis, in his book, *THE FOUR LOVES*, suggests that it is a God-given love, a love one receives after becoming a Christian, as a result of his change of aim and change of nature.

But in spite of our knowledge of what the term means we still have the tendency to splatter the word around until it has no meaning. Christian love is not a love of getting together with everyone and everything for the sake of togetherness. It is not a love of brotherliness for the sake of destroying differences. It is not an indiscriminate display of so-called fellowship in the hope that differences will simply be overlooked. It is rather a consideration of the other person in recognition of differences! A love that ignores the welfare of the beloved for the sake of appearances is a very poor love-like the fellow who pours another drink for the weak soul who is already on the road to alcoholism. Love seeks the other’s welfare, to bind the other to God, not merely to bind him to himself, nor to blind him to his need.

In this sense the Christian is to love even his enemies in that he is to have a concern for their welfare and, stand ready to go to their aid if by so doing he can help them to know God. “But God commends his own love toward us while we were enemies; we were

reconciled to God through the death of his Son” (Romans 5:8, 10). God was concerned with our welfare even in our rebellious and sinful condition. Hence we read that “God so loved the world.” Christ did not show affection nor friendship for those whom he considered his “enemies” such as the Jews who rejected, the truth and whom He labeled as children of the devil (John 8:34-44). But he loved them, in that He was willing to die on the cross to save them from inevitable death in the Day of Judgment. And He said, “Greater love has no man than this.”

Here is the example of the relationship between truth and love. It was out of a knowledge of man’s condition and God’s judgment that the Truth Himself acted in love to effect salvation. Our own love is manifest not by ignoring man’s theological poverty and God’s judgment, nor by reducing our own feeble knowledge to unintelligible platitudes which can be interpreted by each man to suit himself. But we manifest love by acting as best we can to make this Good News significant to every man. Therefore theology, an understanding of God’s concern for man, becomes the motive and springboard for love.

Of course there are difficulties also from the side of theology. These difficulties arise when doctrinal beliefs become the end and ultimate goal instead of the path to the goal. One can hold to true doctrine and at the same time be unconverted. He may be very careful to believe the right facts and observe proper Biblical ordinances, and yet have no concept of the relationship between the facts, the commands obeyed and the object desired. A great amount of Christian religion is nothing more than a stubborn adherence to some segments of Bible truth, such as baptism and communion. Now as essential as these are, they are worthless without the faith upon which they rest and the purpose for which they are designed. Hence one may be baptized and regularly keep the communion without having repented and without having brought his mind to the purpose toward which God calls him. He may hide behind his legalistic “rightness” and hurl the rocks of condemnation at all who differ with him. He may “fellowship” all who agree that the facts he believes are the facts they believe. He may be straight on his facts, but terribly warped in his attitude and totally lacking in love!

But the absence of love in such cases is not because one holds to truth. It may be because he doesn’t hold: to enough of it. It may be because he simply doesn’t understand it. Or it may be because he doesn’t really want what God offers. But it can never be due to the fact that one has learned too much about God and that which He reveals.

Christian faith does not embrace mere facts, but the meaning of the facts and a personal life-commitment to the purpose of God as revealed in them. God’s purpose transcends congregational traditions and party loyalties. As one comes more into line with God’s purpose the more his love is able to transcend the lines of tradition and party.

Consider the Creator’s purpose, as revealed through the Bible. As the crowning glory of His creation, man was given dominion over all of God’s earthly works (Gen. 1:26-31). But man rejected his Creator’s will and chose the life that led to struggle, failure and death (Gen. 2-3). Every responsible person in the world has followed this pattern of sooner or later choosing his own way, being his own god, and becoming a victim of his

own sin, for which the result is death (Rom. 6:23). Yet, instead of bringing immediate judgment and destruction upon mankind, God in immeasurable love became incarnate in Jesus Christ and received in Himself the guilt and the penalty for sin. "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). One by one, in the most personal way, and at infinite cost to Himself, God receives man back into His loving care. Yet far more men reject God than ever respond to His love. Through the misuse of God-given abilities man increasingly corrupts God's creation, taking it further along the way to total failure and destruction. But patiently in love God waits with open arms for the very last response, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

One day (and we think perhaps soon) Christ, the Son of God will again appear to bring to a final end the present struggle. Then the whole creation shall see the glorious "revealing of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:9), and we shall receive the life of immortality in the perfect creation of a new earth.

Should not this be enough to motivate our love? But as fantastic as these sounds, it isn't all. Even after responding to God's loving sacrifice on Calvary, after committing ourselves to His purpose and looking forward to this tremendous coming event, we still try the patience of God by our selfish desires, our failure at faith and our slowness to learn. And again the Creator's role is one of love, daily forgiving, patiently providing and tenderly teaching. How can anyone help but love God when he comes to know all that He has done is doing and plans to do for the believer? Truly "we love, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). It is as one comes to know the Creator's eternal purpose and how He has chosen to accomplish it through Christ that one is moved to love. Therefore a true theology is an incentive to love, and not a hindrance to it.

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and everyone that loves is begotten of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

JUST FOR YOU-TH

Faith for the future. That's what I thought of when I came in the other afternoon and found the girls planting cherry seeds in the back yard, planting, watering and waiting with faith for that far off day in the future when cherries will blossom red and tasty.

But this will take several years. And where will we be by then? Who knows? Maybe a thousand miles away. Or maybe death will come before then. Or maybe the Lord. But for right now the thing to do is to plant and water.

Someone wrote that our teenagers are burdened with the fearfulness of the future: atomic war, population explosion, food problems and a thousand other problems. They said that there wasn't much use to prepare for anything because of such an uncertain future.

But I say this is a lot of muddled foolishness. It's stupid. Don't listen to it. The future has always been uncertain for every youth that was ever born. How did Abel know he was going to be slain by his jealous brother, Cain? And what is the difference between getting slain by someone beating out your brains with a rock and getting blown up by an atomic bomb? And food problems? Have you never read of how Mr. Khrushchev withheld food from the Ukrainians back in the early 1930's and literally starved over 10,000,000 people to death because they were opposed to Stalin's farm control?

So the future has always had possibilities of tragedy, and at the same time possibilities of greatness. Think of the challenging problems you may tackle. Racial problems, the problems of crime, alcoholism, hunger, to get the list started.

The important thing is not to sit wondering if there is going to be a future, but to get started preparing for it. The future will certainly be filled with amazing changes, but if one waits to see if it's worth it, it will catch up with him and he will be unprepared! The point is: whatever the future holds, it is what we do now that prepares us for it. The planting of a cherry seed today makes one a better prepared person for tomorrow. And if tomorrow were all we had, it would still be best to go ahead and do our daily work, accomplishing the job right before us.

No one can look into the future and see what lies ahead five or ten years from now. But we do know that the person who gets busy today with the opportunities before him is going to be the one who is able to take the next step in stride. Even death was no problem to Abel, because he had faith in God and had lived to please Him.

One thing we know. God will still be in power in the future. It is pleasing Him that counts. Not tomorrow, but doing His will today. Not IF this or IF that, but BEING faithful to Him today.

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