

TRUE LOVE

By

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True love is love that acts voluntarily. It cannot be bought, bribed nor coerced. In fact, that which is bought or forced is not love at all.

As in all other areas of life, the perfect example of love is revealed by God and demonstrated by Jesus. “For God so loved the world that He gave ...” “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (John 3:16, 1 John 4:10). We did nothing to buy His love nor earn it, and certainly God could not be forced to love us. “Not that we loved God, but that He loved us” voluntarily.

Jesus said, “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” “You did not choose me, but I chose you ...” (John 15:13, 16). He then voluntarily laid down His life for His friends. “No one takes it (life) away from me, but I lay it down of myself” (John 10:18). Surely no intelligent person could entertain the thought that such love as this could be generated or even encouraged by temporal rewards, whether they be in the form of material gifts, prestige or honor.

The masses in the first century were not unlike the public today. Except for the technological progress, the numerous mechanical things in use today, humanity was not much different then. They loved sports, entertainment, recreation and free circuses. Yet Jesus never used any of this motivation to advance His purpose, neither to draw a crowd nor to influence decisions in His favor. The miracles He performed were not for entertainment and were of such a nature that they usually resulted in making him unpopular, and losing his following instead of increasing it. His healings were not for the purpose of attracting crowds, and most of them seemed to have been performed without audience. He did not feed the multitude to get their attention; He already had that. He offered no prizes, except eternal life. Instead he cautioned that following Him meant self-denial, the world’s animosity, and even persecution and death.

If it had been the intention of God to persuade humanity by spectacular displays and the purchase power of His treasury, then we cannot help but wonder why Jesus didn’t utilize all the fireworks of Heaven, the angelic choirs and an endless variety of programs from His super-creative mind in order to accomplish His purpose. Obviously it was not intended to be this way. Man’s response to God must be just that, a response to God, and not a response to stimulation that massages his ego or tickles his ears or fills his belly. For a mess of pottage a man will sell his birthright. Whether the pottage is promised by a clever politician or a clever preacher, it still amounts to the same thing, and stands in the way of a clear-cut consideration of a true commitment on the basis of love.

So Jesus said to the apostles, “If you love me, ye will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Just that! He offered them no prizes for reading Bible verses. He did not threaten them if they missed a communion service. He did not lure them out to preach by setting up competition with one another. He only commanded. “If you love me,” He said, “You will keep my commandments.”

Did they love Him? And how do we know they loved Him? The evidence was in their actions. Their fellowship was cemented together by the truth which they all believed, and by the love of Christ Who had first loved them.

Can we demonstrate that same love today? In many cases it would be impossible to do so. Is that young person regular at Youth Meeting because of his love, or is it to win a camp-scholarship, or a perfect attendance pin, or help the group win a contest? Is this man giving to the church because of love, or because he was high-pressured into signing a pledge card?

One day a wealthy young man approached Jesus and asked how he might inherit eternal life. We can imagine such a youth today. He drives an expensive sports car, lives in a high class neighborhood, has or is acquiring a degree from the university, knows and is known by the more influential people of town, is of high moral standards - the kind of youth naturally admired by preachers and community leaders. One can also imagine the kind of answer he would get from today’s go-getter preacher who expects to be a “success.” “I know you have the finest of morals and already are an example to those about you. All you need to do then is to be baptized and get to work in our church. You know, we have one of the finest congregations in town, friendly, lively - some of the biggest men in town are members. You will fit right in with the “Join Up” class. They bowl on Monday, play ball on Tuesday — of course we all know how busy the youth are and we really can’t expect them at the Wednesday night study. They are live-wires at our church. And if you will sign up to come next Sunday — that’s Decision Day — you’ll help that class to win a trip to the lake for water - skiing. You’ll see what a friendly bunch we are. And, by the way, we can sure use a young man of your caliber to appeal to some of the more sophisticated people around here.”

Now, don’t tell me I’m overdrawing the picture. As a song-evangelist I made too many rounds with evangelists and preachers to miss the picture.

We know the way Jesus answered this young man. “Go sell what you have, and give to the poor and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me” (Mark 10:21). Jesus made it crystal clear that if this man became His disciple, it was to be out of love for Him. It was a commandment, “Go, sell ... come follow.” If he loved Him, he would keep His commandments. Jesus loved this young man. The Scripture says so. I can think of a hundred things He might have said or done which might have served as a slight added incentive to help this fellow make the “right” decision. All of us find it hard not to use a little added “bait” to clinch that decision. But Jesus refused to do it, and He is our example.

The ones who finally did choose to leave all and follow Jesus did so without the extra lures. They thought it over, considered His eternal purpose, the truth which He taught them, and finally decided that the ultimate and eternal destiny He offered them was worth everything else and then some. Peter put it: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of Eternal Life” (John 6:68). Jesus actually offered them nothing else.

Often it is argued that even people who love God still need “stimulation” of some kind to stir them up to do what they ought to do. For stimulation, new gimmicks, entertainment and carnival-style programs are offered. It is true that a “stimulant” is needed, but that stimulant is simply more of the truth of God. **THE STIMULUS WHICH BRINGS A RESPONSE FROM A PERSON INDICATES THE MAIN INTEREST OR LOVE OF THAT PERSON.** If a man likes rare whiskey, invite him over to your house for a taste of rare whiskey and he’ll go out of his way and be late for appointments in order to accept your invitation. But if he likes whiskey, and you invite him in for a glass of milk, he’ll have other more pressing engagements. Christians who love God never get enough of Him. The man who has had a taste of the bread of truth, and liked it, hungers for it. His “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law does he meditate day and night.”

He attends church because he loves the truth that is preached, and the company of others who believe that truth and love the one who is the Fountain of Truth, Jesus Christ. His attendance is voluntary. He gives because he loves the cause to which he is giving. His giving is voluntary — neither tricks, high-pressure nor committees for pledges are necessary.

Notice that we said above that a Christian attends church because he loves the truth that is preached. There are many things preached today besides truth. Opinions, stories, denunciations, Carnegie self-important talks and Peale inspirational anecdotes will not satisfy those who hunger for righteousness. Neither do Christians grow by a continual feeding on the milk of the word, the rehashing of the plan of salvation, and themes concerning the particular doctrines of a particular sect. Saints need the meat of God’s word that they might continually “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” A letter just received from a Christian in another city, one who has been in the church for many years, reveals the sad preaching situation of our day. She writes that her daughter has just moved to another city, and would like to know of a good church there. “We are grateful for every minister that is preaching the true gospel,” she says. “It seems there are so few who really preached.” No doubt this is the reason that a great many churches feel they must find some other motivating power, some other stimulant, for if the bond of truth is absent there is nothing to produce the love. If there is no response to God out of a pure love, there must be found some other way to entice them to do what love should do. Christianity requires action, and if it is not produced by love, then men will find some other means of prying the action, the money, the service out of the people.

In spite of good intentions, the bribes, lures and promotional gimmicks in the church provide a barrier in worship, rather than a bridge. What kind of relationship would long exist between husband and wife if he actually thought her affection for him was to be obtained by so much money? Would he not be classifying her with the harlot whose love

is for sale? If a woman truly loves her husband she would be insulted were he to suggest that she responds to him for a price. Then is not a congregation insulted when a preacher suggests that he or the worship committee or some other agency will reward them for attending worship?

Jesus said that God seeks for worshippers, those who worship Him in Spirit and truth (John 4:43). Worshipping in “spirit and truth” simply means that one worships God intelligently on the basis of the truth God has revealed. Such worship does not thrive on worldly embellishments and a carnival type huckstering. In fact it is only hampered by such. Think how pleasing to God it must be for Him to see Christians worshipping Him, praising Him, serving Him and learning of Him simply out of their love and gratitude to Him. Be thankful if yours is such a church. But not only is God pleased with such voluntary love for Him, but there is far more benefit to the entire church when this is the case. The saint undergoes tremendous pressure from the world all week long. It is a great blessing to him to be able to assemble with others where this pressure is absent and he can freely and voluntarily give full expression to his love, and find fellowship with others, all adding to one another’s joy in the purpose of God.

The real test of a congregation’s faithfulness to Christ is whether or not they will walk together in a voluntary love of Christ, by the bond of truth He has given.

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