

# LOVE . . .

By

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History does not record a time in which so much was said about love as in this day of violence and rebellion. Many Christians are puzzled over whether or not they possess the “love” they are told they must feel for all people.

In the account of Adam, in the original Paradise of God, there is no mention of love. Yet, “God is love”, and since He is changeless, the attribute of love was His at creation. While the word “love” was not mentioned, the entire account of creation was a great pouring out of infinite love. Man, who had not existed, was called from nothing into the image of God Himself. The perfection and glory which characterized Adam and Eve has never again been seen among men (unless it was seen in Christ’s transfiguration), but its magnificence was indicated by the fact that after their sin Adam and Eve immediately were filled with consternation because they saw that they had lost that glory, and sought to cover themselves and hide.

Besides the glory of their own perfection, they had been provided with every “good” thing and favored with the very presence of God. There could be no seeking after God, no searching for peace, no racial conflict, no environmental problems. There was nothing withheld from them nor any influence from “society” to furnish them the kind of excuses we hear from the modern generation. All they had and were the result of the overflowing love of a loving Creator.

Their responding love was to be shown in one way: obedience to God. Just as God had manifested His love in the desire to give man life in His image, man was to respond by fulfilling that desire. The requirement was simple: Believe God and obey Him. It was as if God had said, “I want you in my image. This is the best that even I can offer. Here are the rules which make it possible.” Had Adam and Eve loved God as God had loved them it is hard to conceive of any break in the relationship; they would have kept the world gladly.

But such love must be coupled with faith. In fact, it is rooted in faith and springs from it. Was this life actually good? Was it totally and absolutely good as God had said? They were not sure. They lacked faith, and so began to consider an alternative. Was it possible that God was holding out the best from them? Could there be an even greater good which Jehovah had not mentioned! Satan’s answer was emphatic, “Yes. . . . Eat of the forbidden tree,” he suggested, “And you shall be as God, knowing good and evil.” Not that they could not already know what was right and wrong; they knew exactly what God had said, and knew it was wrong to eat of the forbidden tree. In love God had warned them, “Thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). Therefore they knew right from wrong. But the devil’s promise was that they would become as God, that is, they would be able to set up their own laws; they would say what was good and evil; they would decide for themselves.

This was denial of God’s truth. When their faith in God’s word failed, then love failed, and disobedience followed. Immediately the glorious perfection in which they lived with no sign of death and decay gave way to deterioration. Without faith, love

failed to motivate them to respond to God. The image was marred, fellowship broken, and God's reason to preserve life destroyed. Hence death.

They now cringed in fear. The same fear prevails today where people talk of love, yet live in fear because they have abandoned faith. "Perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18). But perfect love is rooted in faith "for this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (I John 5:3).

In the place of perfect love — obedience to God's word — men have invented many substitutes. They say "love" but actually mean sexual passion and indulgence, a fiery emotion which causes a person to make another an instrument to minister to his lust. Some think it is love to meddle in other people's business, to try to force them to conform to the mass standard of fallen man. Forced integration and other crimes are committed in the name of love. Is it love for the Negro to try to destroy his race?

Love will not end war. It will not end poverty. It cannot solve economic problems nor can it bring harmony among people of different cultures. Even in marriage where husband and wife love each other intensely, the problems and differences which arise must be solved by going to the commandments of God, placing faith in His word and obeying the commands in spite of emotions to the contrary, thus applying the principle of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6). Commands of God supply the solution. It is faith that works obedience which applies the love.

Love without the commandments is a blind and dangerous force, and commandments without faith in them result in rebellion, as in Adam's case. He failed to love God because he failed to believe Him. I can imagine Eve's heart overflowing with what she felt to be love when she offered the fruit to Adam, with tragic results. Such is the modern madness that upholds adultery, abortion, homosexuality and host of sins on the grounds that they are committed with love. Communal living is upheld on the basis that it breeds love. It also breeds children without lawful parents, a disregard for God's laws resulting in wasted lives, because it is not rooted in faith.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10). Just as it was His love which brought man forth in creation to be in His image, by the same token it is God's love that demands a total and absolute judgment against sin and all that stands in the way of this eternal goal. Nothing is further from the truth than the sickly idea that God overlooks sin because He loves the sinner. In God's holy administration of the universe all that is out of harmony with Him must be excluded. To allow His creatures to be victimized by wickedness would be a denial of His love.

It is the tender love of God which tells us of the fate which we should avoid, even at the cost of our temporal lives. "In the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" must have been spoken in the tender tones of love by the Father whose greatest desire is to preserve His children in His image. Yet, tender as they were, they were words of hard and irrevocable law. John's epistles, so full of love, are also filled with warnings against sin and anti-Christ's as well as exhortations that we are to overcome the world because it is to be judged and destroyed. He who in love spoke man into existence, by the same love can speak him out of existence. The hatred God holds for sin and the inexorable justice to be meted out for it is plainly demonstrated for all to see in the death of Christ where God's wrath is poured out on the One who "bare our sins in His body upon the tree" (I

Peter 2:24). Judgment does not violate love, rather it is the final step in perfecting it for the saints forever.

There are two dangerous doctrines afoot today. First, that it is love, not faith, which determines our acceptability to God. This school insists that truth is not as important as attitude, that whether or not we have an enlightened faith in the gospel, we can make up for the lack of it by love. They might as well say that it doesn't matter whether the sun shines, as long as we have heat. The sun comes first, then the heat, just as faith comes first, then love. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the holy spirit which is given unto us" (Rom. 5:5). And what does the holy spirit do to shed this love? He is the "spirit of truth" and was sent to "guide you into all truth." The Holy Spirit dwells only in men of faith, and faith comes by the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17). Love without faith is misguided and is a counterfeit of Christian love. Preach the truth and the fruit will be faith that "works through love". Grow in faith and you grow in love. Salvation is not promised on the basis of love, but on the basis of faith in the gospel of Christ.

The second danger is the idea that Christians must manifest love by never expressing disapproval of the sinner. This fallacy leads one to keep silent when he should speak up against evil, to give the impression that he approves of sin, when the sinner actually needs to be brought up against the holy commandment of God. If one is inclined to think that tolerance of sin is an indication of God-likeness, let him see the attitude of God to sin when Jesus was "made to be sin on our behalf" (II Cor. 5:21). On the cross Jesus was dying for every sinner, not just the extremely vicious ones, but also for the least offensive one. He was subjected to the full rejection and wrath of the Father, who "condemned sin in the flesh" of His own dear Son (Rom. 8:3).

God's love is not a weak indulgence of His creature's destruction of the good and perfect creation. It is such that it demands an unlimited hatred of any and all sin which defiles what He has made. Therefore, Godly love is not an indulgence in sin nor the condoning of it in others. The more we love God the more we hate sin. This does not mean we become ascetics, withdrawing from the world. But it does mean that we cannot embrace the world — "love not the world, neither the things of the world" (I: John 2:15). "He that does sin is of the devil", writes John (I John 3:8). He then continues to warn: "Marvel not if the world hates you" (I John 3:13). Let us beware of gaining the world's friendship by silent consent to its sin.

Faith is to believe that God's commandments are just and perfect, and issued for our good. It is to believe that His people are to receive an inheritance glorious beyond description, the crown of life in His presence and in His image. Such goodness, when fully believed, draws forth love, love which motivates one to want to do God's will in every respect, and at any cost.

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