



Loving God

Genuine love bespeaks commitment. The kind of love which God has for us, and the kind He wants us to have for Himself and others, involves a profound commitment. If we say that we love someone but are unwilling to make any kind of commitment to them, what we say is false.

What we actually mean when we say that we love someone without this commitment is merely that we desire them, that they appeal to us or that we want something from them. Love on the other hand – true love – involves a total commitment to another person.

Many say that they love someone else. But often what they actually mean is that they want to get enjoyment or pleasure from the other person. They expect to get some benefit from them. They hope that the other will give them satisfaction in a variety of ways. Their “love” is in reality the expectation of the fulfillment of their own selfish desires. Frequently, if and when this other person that they claim to “love” ceases to give them the pleasure, service and feelings they expect, such shallow love disappears.

Such self-centered love is not genuine. Without commitment, when anyone ceases to please us, we simply discard them. When we don’t get what we want, then the other becomes dispensable.

Many have this kleenex tissue kind of “love.” Once they have used someone else for their own benefit and the other has ceased to be gratifying to them, they simply throw them away in the trash. This kind of self-centered love is an earthly,

natural, human variety. It does not last through much difficulty and does not really satisfy the human heart. It is a vain illusion which many chase to their own hurt.

God's kind of love, on the other hand, is based on commitment. This fact is illustrated for us by His thoughts concerning marriage. In God's sight a marriage between a man and woman involves the making of a binding covenant (Mal 2:14).

Without this covenant, intimate relationships between men and women are forbidden and are considered to be sin. From our previous discussion, it becomes clear that "sin" is a very appropriate word to describe such selfish "love."

The only difference between fornication and the marriage act is that marriage includes a life commitment. It is God's plan that before two individuals take so much from each other and share themselves with each other so intimately, they must make a commitment – a deep, lifelong, bottom-of-the-heart commitment – to one another.

This means that they agree to love one another, to stick with one another through thick and thin and to serve one another in all situations. The marriage covenant is meant to be completely binding as long as both parties live. As we have seen, without such a commitment what we have is not real love at all but simply selfish desire.

So we have clearly elucidated for us here the fact that when God through His holy word speaks to us about the subject of love, He is not simply speaking about warm, cozy or even romantic feelings but about something which involves a commitment on our part to someone. Covenant is the underpinning of true love.

THE LOVE OF GOD

The fact is that God has already made a deep, eternal commitment to those who believe in Him. This commitment of His is inalterable. His love is both deep and irrevocable.

Why is this important? Knowing that such a commitment exists on the part of God and that it is eternal, solid and without change, gives us security. When we

know that we are loved in such a way, we can then open our heart. When we are sure that we are loved deeply and thoroughly by someone, when we know that this love will never disappear or change, then we have confidence to open up to that person. In God's case, we can trust that whatever He finds within us, He will treat with the utmost tenderness, care and understanding. God will not simply use us and discard us.

How good it is that our God's love is not like the earthly variety! How wonderful it is that His love is both profound and committed! How much every one of us needs to feel loved unconditionally by someone! The fact that God offers us such love is one of the most wonderful parts of the gospel message.

God demonstrated His love for us by sending His own Son to die on the cross for our sins. This act of His confirms that His is an unselfish, serving kind of love. It shows the depth of His commitment to those who believe. It reveals the lengths to which He is willing to go to put the interests of others ahead of His own comfort and enjoyment.

TRANSFORMING THE SOUL

Our heavenly Father has a plan to do a profound, transforming work in our hearts. He desires to change us from what we are into all that He is. He wishes to free us from our darkness and sin, replacing our sinful nature with His pure holy one.

Yet, for this to occur, we must be open to Him. We must be surrendered. We must allow Him to do this work. Much of what must be altered in us involves sensitive, intimate parts of our soul. His healing hands may need to touch and change things which are painful and private. No doubt, He will need to expose in us things which are embarrassing and difficult – things which we don't like to see and hope that no one else knows about.

God will not force His way upon us. He will not push us to open up or to let Him do His work. Our Lord is extremely sensitive in this area not to violate our

will in any way. He will go not one centimeter further with His work inside of us than we are willing for Him to go.

For this reason, knowing the love of God is essential. Realizing His commitment to us, His profound passion toward His people and His unchanging love will help us to open up completely to Him. Knowing this love, we can lay our lives bare before Him without barrier or resistance, allowing Him to do His transforming work.

Such yielding is essential. Such opening to God is the only way in which His work in us can progress without hindrance. Only when we are completely ready and willing for Him to touch, expose and tenderly change everything in us will we experience His transforming work. Such complete surrender of our inner man can only occur when we know that we are fully loved.

In Ephesians chapter 3, Paul prays for those who will believe. His heart's desire is that they would know the love of God in such a profound way that they could be considered to be "rooted and grounded" in it (vs 17).

This knowledge of divine love then becomes a basis for our relationship with Jesus. It opens the way for us to be: "...able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height [of God's person and plan]" (vs 18). The end result of knowing such an amazing love is almost unbelievable. It is so that we could be: "...filled with all the fullness of God" (vs 19). Here is an amazing thing. It is God's revealed will that we be filled with "all the fullness" of who and what He is.

Yet how is such a wonderful thing possible? It is only by being completely open and yielded to Him. This can come to us exclusively by knowing and being completely confident in His committed love for us.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

With this understanding we will now examine a well-known verse. This passage speaks about our part in this wonderful, holy relationship. We read: "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” (Mr 12:30). The fact that God is commanding us concerning this love is a clear indication that this is what He is seeking.

As we have been seeing, if we are to fulfill God’s plan, it will not be enough for us just to have a few warm feelings towards Him. It will not be sufficient merely to have a little desire for Him, to appreciate things about Him, or even to enjoy His presence occasionally.

What God is asking of us here is a total, unreserved surrender of all that we are, everything we have and all that we possess, to Himself. This verse speaks of a complete yielding to God. It means that we offer ourselves to love Him, open to Him and serve Him, doing everything we can to please Him. It also means that we realize that this is a binding, lifelong commitment.

It is possible for a person to seek God with another, human kind of love. Some seek Him for success and/or prosperity. Others are looking for healing, blessings and solutions for any number of other personal problems. Many look to God for what they can get from Him, with little attention to how they can actually reciprocate by loving Him in a way which will be of benefit to Him too.

It is conceivable that many in the church today see their relationship with God as a one way street. In their minds, they picture God doing all the giving and them all the receiving. Perhaps they imagine God as a sort of celestial dispenser of good things, but not as a living Person with whom they can have a love relationship.

This sad condition does little to change our souls. It impedes spiritual growth. It limits the work of God in our lives. Without seeing God’s love and corresponding to it by yielding ourselves to Him and loving Him without barriers, we cannot make much progress in the spiritual life.

In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve were naked, yet they were not ashamed. When a person is naked, it means that there is nothing secret. Nothing is hidden or reserved. Interestingly, when God’s celestial woman is revealed in Revelation chapter 12, she too appears to be virtually naked. We read that she is only “clothed with the sun” (vs 1).

But a celestial orb makes for very poor clothing. It cannot fit very well. What we can understand here is that, instead of garments, she is clothed with glory, an intense bright shining which resembles the sun. This must be the glory of God. Confirming this, we read in Revelation 21:11 that the bride of Christ has “the glory of God.” This must be part of, or perhaps all of, her clothing.

What does this mean to us? Certainly neither we nor the scriptures are promoting nudism. But what we understand here is that in our relationship with God, there should be nothing secret, nothing hidden.

Between us and Him, there should be an openness and transparency of uninhibited love. We should have no emotional barriers or resistances. We don't need any “clothes” to hide ourselves from Him. Through our love relationship with Jesus, we can arrive at a holy intimacy with Him which allows Him to transform our lives.

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

As you probably already realize, the second commandment is similar to the first. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mr 12:31). In this matter also, if we are to be real Christians, this should be our experience. This commandment too involves a commitment – not a partial concern or passing interest – but a total, unreserved commitment of ourselves to our neighbor.

This verse, although it certainly does apply to everyone, has a very special application in our relationship with other Christians. If we are to live in harmony with God and the thoughts of His heart, we must know a heartfelt, complete, lifelong commitment to other men and women who are believers in Jesus Christ, just as He does.

Through Jesus, we have become members of the same body. We have all been bought with the same precious blood. We have been drawn by God into a relationship with others which we are able to nurture.

Every part of a human body has an integral life commitment and life relationship with the others. Without this the human body could not function properly.

The same is true of the body of Christ on the earth today. We are instructed to have a commitment to other Christians in which we have determined that we will serve them with the life of God.

If we have this genuine love for the other members of Christ's body, our relationship with them will be as follows: We will seek their good above our own (both financially and spiritually), we will spend time praying for their needs, we will be alert for ways in which we can help them (both practically and spiritually) and we will spend time with them. (This means seeing them more than once or twice a week from a distance in church meetings.) We will make every attempt to encourage them and look for opportunities to build them up – in short we will cultivate a body relationship with them which will allow God the opportunity to minister to them through us.

Additionally this infers that we will say nothing – absolutely nothing – about them which would cause anyone else to think less of them or in any way diminish their love for them.

Obviously, this kind of love is not natural. It is not the normal response of the human heart. So, this love must have another source. It must come from God. And it does. When we are willing to enter into a love relationship with Him, we begin to experience His love for others also. The love that He has for the world can begin to fill our hearts too.

Our love for God and then our love for one another should be first and foremost in our lives. What we are talking about here is a love for other people – a commitment to others – that is going to change our lives. It is going to alter our priorities.

It is going to necessitate putting others first and “self” last just as Jesus did. It is going to put demands upon our time and energies that will interfere with our own plans and pleasures. It may sometimes make us uncomfortable. It, no doubt, will take us beyond our “comfort zones.”

However, these difficulties will only last until we realize through experience that God's blessing is upon this way. We are going to find God while we serve others – as we gird on the towel and minister to their needs – in a way that we have never

experienced Him before. We are going to discover what the word “blessing” really means.

A PROPER CHURCH EXPERIENCE

Such love is the substance of the true church. It is an essential ingredient. Without it genuine “church” really does not exist. It is all too possible to have a religious organization which is full of “good” Christians, wonderful programs and crowded meetings – something which everyone would call a “church” – that is almost devoid of the real thing. How often it is that believers relate to each other only superficially and sporadically.

When a human body is functioning normally, its members are intimately associated with each other. If this commitment breaks down, the life drains away. This same rule also applies to the church. To the extent that believers have a life covenant with one another, they actually express the body of Christ.

Conversely, to the degree that Christians fail in this area, they cease to experience the church in any practical way. While it is true that all God’s children are part of the church, if our experience of God’s love is missing, we are living in spiritual poverty. What a tragedy it is that so much of what passes for Christianity has strayed so far from God’s priorities!

The true expression of Christ’s church which we have been describing is the best environment for spiritual growth. While believers can and should grow individually, it is when all the members of the body are functioning in a love relationship with each other that the most spiritual progress can be made. In this situation all the needs of everyone, especially new converts, can be met satisfactorily.

Just as a family which is full of love is the best place to raise a child, so the church which practices love for one another is the ideal environment in which believers can grow to maturity.

Imagine for a moment the effect this sort of thing would have upon your walk with the Lord and also upon those with whom you are acquainted. It could not take long before real progress became evident.

This is not a “pie-in-the-sky” suggestion. It is God’s revealed intention for His church to function in precisely this way! These things are clearly taught throughout the whole New Testament. If our experience is anything less than this, we should fall on our faces before God and plead with Him to change us and those around us so that we can fulfill His will.

There is no doubt that this is God’s plan. There can be no mistaking the fact that this is exactly what Christ desires. How then can we proceed on without experiencing it? How can we continue to claim to be Christians, imagine that we have a relationship with the Lord or suppose that we are having any meaningful church experience while not living in God’s love for one another? The answer must be that we cannot.

I am not suggesting that we can practically enjoy this kind of relationship with every other Christian in the world. However there should be some – those whom God has pointed out to us – with whom and to whom He wants us to have a loving commitment. Just as bricks in the wall of a building are most intimately associated with the ones immediately around them, so it is in the Christian life.

Our commitment to a few will be something which we experience practically. Our commitment to those whose lives are more distant from ours will of necessity be somewhat less experiential. Nevertheless, it should still exist and should manifest itself whenever the opportunity arises. This fact is clearly demonstrated by the New Testament’s teaching on showing hospitality to strangers (Rm 12:13, Heb 13:2).

LOVE MUST BE GUIDED BY GOD

We must be warned here that this love which we express towards others, since it is from God, must also be guided by God. We cannot simply be led by human sympathy or feelings. Our “love” must not be motivated by merely human instincts. When we are speaking about a commitment to love, this is something which must not be guided by natural compassion, but by the Lord.

It is obvious that we are not able to meet every human need in the world. It is not even possible to meet those which we see around us every day. We must be led by God, not by human sentiment or necessity. Our love must be an expression of the leadership and authority of the Holy Spirit.

Not even Jesus tried to meet every need. An example of this is the beggar whom God used Peter and John to heal. He sat at the entrance to the temple every day. It was his place to beg (Acts 3:10). It is probable that Jesus passed him there, perhaps several times. Yet the Father did not lead Him to cure this crippled man at that time.

If and when we try to help people without the leadership of the Holy Spirit, we will get into trouble. Sometimes, we will even suffer for it. For example, when we try to help someone whom God is disciplining, we can end up on the receiving end of a few blows from the Divine rod also. This is a warning I pass along which comes from many hard and painful experiences.

When our heart is submitted and willing, God will guide us in fulfilling His will by expressing His love both to the church and the perishing world. It is essential to make a love commitment to others. But is also imperative that, as in all other Christian acts, we be led by the Holy Spirit. If we do not follow Jesus, being guided by Him in our quest to love, we will encounter many frustrations.

OTHER COMMITMENTS

Please notice here that I am not speaking about commitment to a church, religious organization or group. The Bible nowhere teaches this sort of commitment. In fact, it protests against it (I Cor 1:12,13)! I am also not speaking here about commitment to leaders, to those “over you,” or to some kind of hierarchical arrangement which some Christians advocate. Neither am I urging a slavish allegiance to some doctrinal position.

Such commitments, either to organizations, leaders or teachings are powerless to produce the result that God desires. It is all too easy for Christians to be “good church members,” to be loyal to some ministry or to be faithful to a particular reve-

lation and still possess very little of this kind of love. A cursory examination of the situation in present-day Christendom should serve to graphically illustrate this point.

The great danger of these other commitments is that they are often substituted for the true love covenant about which we have been speaking. An example of this occurs when people think that because they have made a commitment to a certain church group, perhaps by “joining” or signing a membership agreement, that this is the extent of their obligation. In reality, their responsibility to God and to other believers is not even touched by this kind of activity.

The commitment which we are discussing here is much, much deeper than this. The results which can be achieved with group, leadership or doctrinal commitments and the “unity” which is brought about in this way is unfortunately outward and artificial.

While these commitments involve a devotion to things, God’s way is commitment to people. Only that which results from a total love covenant one with another is either real or scriptural. Furthermore, it is only this kind of commitment that God commands.

A further difficulty which these extra-biblical commitments raise is that of divisiveness. This sin occurs when people’s love for each other is affected by their group allegiances. How often we do not love, or even hate, those who disagree with us. How common this practice is today, yet nothing could be more destructive and contrary to real love. Understandably, the scriptures soundly condemn such activity (I Cor 3:3ff).

THE CHURCH REVOLUTIONIZED

Truly this is the great lack in the Christian Church today – brotherly love. If all believers had this deep commitment to one another, a love which involves a life covenant to serve all other Christians, regardless of their opinions, backgrounds or creeds, present-day Christianity would be revolutionized.

Many people today speak about unity among the churches in the body of Jesus Christ. But with such efforts the big question always is: How is such a thing going to come about? Should we just shake hands over our doctrinal fences? Should we produce some kind of world-wide organization in which we can exhibit an appearance of oneness while still maintaining our separations? Or should we get off in still another corner, rally around still another doctrinal position which will “guarantee” unity and insist that all others come and join us? I think not.

I believe the only hope we have for real unity is brotherly love. The only chance believers have to arrive at the place where God manifestly wants us to be, is to truly know His love for us and then with this love begin to “...love one another with a pure heart fervently” (I Pet 1:22).

This love about which we are speaking must transcend denominational barriers and boundaries. It must be a love which is heartfelt for everyone regardless of their disposition or affiliation. It cannot be selective but must be based upon the same criterion upon which God has received others.

We should love other believers for only one reason: the Father has loved them and chosen them to be His. There are no other options. Once God has saved someone by giving them His life, we are commanded to love that person. It is our Christian responsibility.

As we come before God and allow Him to fill our hearts with His love for all of His people, we will no longer recognize any separations in the body of Christ. We will be genuinely “discerning the Lord’s body” (I Cor 11:29). If by some mighty act of God, all Christians could be given this viewpoint, the denominations and divisions, which are so familiar to us today, would cease to exist.

Love is the opposite of division. The sectarian situation in Christianity today is a shame to the Lord. It is a disgrace to His name and a blot upon His precious testimony. If we could be brought by God to repentance concerning this sin of not loving one another, the church would truly be revolutionized. Love is an unconquerable force that should bind believers together in these last days. May we seek God until we have it!

A TESTIMONY TO UNBELIEVERS

Not only would love revolutionize the church, but it would also have a tremendous impact on unbelievers. The testimony of Christianity would be sent forth with such power that it would be irresistible.

Jesus said: “By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). It is our love that will be a witness to the world. It is the fact that we have been so delivered from self and sin – the things which separate us today – which will persuade unbelievers that Jesus Christ is real. Love is the evidence of true salvation (I Jn 3:14).

If our hearts are right with God and with one another we will also love unbelievers. God certainly does. As is clearly seen from the parable of the good Samaritan, the word “neighbor” includes everyone. Jesus instructed us to go “...into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mr 16:15).

But what gospel do we have to preach if we don't have love? We may have doctrine to teach or a form of religion to propagate. We may be trying to straighten out others' thinking. But unless the love of God is truly “poured out in our hearts” (Rm 5:5), unless it has wrought an eternal change within us which is seeable, we have very little chance to reach the unsaved millions for Christ.

Brothers and sisters, please take heed to this message. This is not an inconsequential consideration. This is not a side issue. This is perhaps the most crucial problem facing the church today!

Do we love as He loves? Do we have the kind of life commitment to Him and to others which the scriptures so clearly exhort us to have? Are we willing to lay down our lives for each other or for Him – literally (I Jn 3:16)?

Do we have more than good feelings for, or an appreciation of, other Christians and the world around us? In short, do we really know and enjoy the love which God has for us and are we too being filled with it?

If we do not have this sort of love in our Christianity, then we are missing something. If this variety of love is lacking, we have only a superficial religion and are

failing to know the heart of God. It is evidence that we have not yet known and experienced for ourselves the unlimited love of God.

May God have mercy upon us! May He shine His light into us, revealing what is in our hearts concerning these things, so that He could bring us to yield ourselves totally to Him, thus opening the way for the love of God to be perfected in us.

Naturally, after reading this message, many people will ask such questions as: “How can all this come about?” or “Where can we go to find a group which is practicing these things?” The answer is that it must begin with you. Don’t wait for others to do it first. Don’t delay until you find a church or “fellowship” which “has it right.” Start where you are and begin to practice these things yourself.

While this might sound quite difficult, I believe it can be accomplished by following these simple steps.

Firstly, we must clearly understand that this love is not something which we can find within ourselves. It only comes from God. The scriptures are clear— “God is love.” He has a deep, irreversible love for His people and for all mankind. When we come to Him and open our heart fully, He will fill us with the love that is necessary to fulfill His commands.

Next, it will be necessary to make a decision – a conscious, deliberate, firm decision – to commit yourself to others. Such love does not often come spontaneously. You will probably not be drawn into these relationships by your feelings. In fact your natural reactions to others will probably keep you from it.

Therefore you must resolve from the very beginning not to let anything turn you from this way. Although such a commitment will no doubt have to be remade again and again and will deepen tremendously over time, it is the only place to begin.

While your commitment can and should apply to everyone, only reciprocated love is deeply satisfying. Therefore, secondly, it will eventually be important to find a few like-minded individuals who are willing to join with you in these things.

As you ask Him in prayer, God will lead you to them. No doubt it will take some time to establish intimate relationships with others. It will also involve some sacrifice, patience and possibly tears. Nevertheless, nothing is quite so gratifying as fellowship with people who live in real unity with each other (Ps 133:1). Such experiences are part of the substance of what the Bible calls “the church.”

Lastly, once such relationships begin to be established don't keep it to yourself. Start reaching out to others with the love of God and teaching them these truths. This is a message that the world needs to hear! God will undoubtedly bless your efforts and you will begin to bring forth fruit abundantly.

By David W. Dyer

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