

## The Path of Love

by Ray C. Stedman

One of the most emotion-charged times in my recent trip to the Holy Land was to come around a corner of the Mount of Olives and catch a first glimpse of the city of Jerusalem. We spent a week in Jerusalem (on the Jordan side). Our hotel was located right on the Mount of Olives, commanding the most spectacular and dramatic view of the entire Old City lying beneath us. We arrived there in the evening and the next morning I was up early to go out into the brilliant sunshine and stand there on the Mount and look out over that city with its ancient wall and the temple area directly below, and the warren-like streets filling the area beyond the temple wall. From that vantage point I could see all the historic spots of Christian interest. My mind went back to the time when our Lord sat on the Mount of Olives and looked out over that stubborn, recalcitrant city. Tears came welling up into his eyes from a bursting heart, and he cried, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you would not!" {cf, Matt 23:37, Luke 13:34 RSV}.

The most compelling emotion I experienced while looking out over that city was the awareness that came drifting across twenty centuries, of the compassion and love of the Lord Jesus Christ for that city. The love of Jesus Christ! It has been the most compelling force in all history. The Apostle Paul could write to his Corinthian converts and say, "The love of Christ constrains me," {cf, 2 Cor 5:14 KJV}. It drove him out into all the cities of the ancient world. Throughout the twenty centuries that have followed, the love of Christ is the one force that has succeeded in breaking through the hard crust of human hate and suspicion. Time and time again it has melted the cruel, arrested the rebellious, and changed the implacable.

Years ago, in Virginia, I met an old man who was the rector of an Episcopal church. He had been converted in D. L. Moody's meetings in Cambridge, England. When Moody came to the center of English culture and education in Cambridge, the students were very much in rebellion against him. They felt he was a backwoods American who could not even speak the English language properly – and he couldn't! They were affronted by the idea that this coarse, crude, vulgar American should be asked to speak to the cultured students of Cambridge. The man I met in Virginia was one of those students opposed to Moody. A band of them had agreed that, when the meeting began, they would break it up with catcalls, hooting, and mockery, and refuse to allow Moody to continue with his message. Sounds rather up to date, does it not? But when the meeting began, his associate, Ira Sankey, sang a beautiful number that greatly moved the hearts of those students. As soon as the song ended, Moody strode to the front of the platform and, in his characteristic blunt fashion began, "Young gentlemen, don't ever let anybody tell you that God don't love you, for he do." It arrested them. They were so startled by this ungrammatical beginning that they all paid attention. Again he came back to the theme and said, "Don't ever let anybody tell you that God don't love you, for he do." This student said that as he left the meeting that phrase ran again and again through his mind and he thought to himself, "Why do I fight a God who loves me? Why should I be in rebellion to such a God?" Later that day he sought out D. L. Moody, and Moody led him to Christ. As he told me that story, he looked back across the years to recall the time when he first came to realize the love of God.

That is the new theme to which we now come in the epistle of John. John has been talking about

maintaining fellowship, maintaining truth, maintaining righteousness, and now he comes to the theme of maintaining love. It begins in Chapter 3, Verses 11-18:

**For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth. {1 Jn 3:11-18 RSV}**

You will note a familiar pattern in John's epistle, one of handling various contrasts. We have already heard him speak about light and darkness, death and life, truth and error, God and the devil; now he ties together these twin themes, love and hate.

He presents them exactly as they occur in life; not in watertight compartments, isolated from each other, but intertwined together. In order to study them, however, we must separate one from the other. Today we shall look at John's tracing of the path of love, and next Sunday, at the course of hate.

Here are two opposing emotions, love and hate, mingled together, and John traces them out for us that we might understand what these two mighty, powerful influences are. There are no two forces on earth today more powerful than love and hate. This section, therefore, has much of value for us.

Now you will notice in Verse 11, where John begins his word about love, he suggests to us that the origin of love is the conversion of a Christian.

**For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, {1 Jn 3:11 RSV}**

It is evident that John sees love here as beginning with Christian commitment and conversion. It is produced, he suggests, by the message "which you have heard from the beginning." That is a familiar phrase. We have seen it many times in John. He speaks of "that which you heard from the beginning" which, if it abides in you, then you will also abide in the Son and in the Father. Perhaps a dozen times before this we have had this phrase, "from the beginning."

The epistle opens on that note. "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, ... we proclaim also to you," {1 Jn 1:1-2 RSV}. This is a reference to the beginning of a Christian life. These who received this first letter are reminded of the beginning when they first heard the gospel of Jesus Christ. From that very moment they received a new awareness of the requirement of God in human lives, that we should love one another.

The implication is clear here that this is not merely a command, such as we have in the Ten Commandments, but rather is the realization of the beginning of the possibility of loving one another. Such possibility originates with conversion.

I know there are many who are troubled by this. They are upset by the fact that Christians claim to have a monopoly on love, that real love only begins when you are a Christian and that it is impossible for a non-Christian to show genuine love. There are, as you know, certain words for love in the New Testament that indicate various qualities or aspects of love, but I shall not go into these now. I want merely to answer briefly some of these challenges.

1. There are those who say, "Isn't it true that atheists love their children as wholeheartedly and as genuinely as Christians do? Isn't that real love? Is not the love of a boy for a girl, or a friend for a friend equally as beautiful and as tender whether they are Christians or not Christians?"

The answer of course is, "Yes. Love is love."

The Bible never claims that Christians have a monopoly on love. But it does claim that love of the highest quality, love in its true aspect, begins to flow only in a Christian experience; that there is a difference between the love of a Christian and the love of a non-Christian, and it is a difference which is described in this very letter as the difference between death and life. We shall see, in Verse 14, that John says we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love, and he who does not love remains in death.

Well, what is this difference?

We must, of course, recognize that all love is from God. God is love, John tells us. Love pours from God into human hearts like sunshine and rain, upon the just and the unjust alike. No human being would love if he were not in some relationship, in some contact, with the God who is love. All love comes from God; the love of parents for children, the love of friends for friends, the love of sweethearts for each other – all is a gift of God to the human race, like sunshine and rain, food, shelter and raiment, and all the other things that make life beautiful, happy and wholesome. But something happens to the love of God; this pure, unspotted love which comes from God's heart upon mankind.

As the love of God comes into the twisted, distorted heart of fallen mankind, it becomes twisted and distorted, deflected from its true goal, and in fallen man it becomes love directed only toward himself. This is what happens to love before Christianity comes. It is self-centered love. There is nothing wrong with love itself; it is the direction it takes, the object upon which it focuses, which distorts it. Love comes from God, true; but love in the fallen heart is always twisted and distorted and centered upon self. Therefore, the love we show as non-Christians is really a love of ourselves. We love our children because they are extensions of us. We love our father or mother because *our* life is related to theirs. We love *our* relatives (presumably) because they are ours. We love *our* dog, *our* cat, *our* horse. We love the friends who please *us*, we love those who help *us*. If you observe human life you will see how true this is. Love is always directed to those who do something to, or for, or receive

from *us*. Therefore, what we really love is the projection of *ourselves* in others. Thus, human love is self-centered.

Jesus recognized this in the Sermon on the Mount. He said, "if you love those who love you, what reward do you have?" {Matt 5:45}. Why, even those despised tax collectors do that, he said to the Pharisees. If you love those who are kind to you, you are no different than anyone else. There is a quality of love which is manifest in human life, but it is always self-centered. But at Christian conversion something happens. At conversion there is born a different kind of love. When a person is born again he passes, as John says, "from death unto life," and he begins to love those he never loved before, and to love those he has loved before in a different way. I have seen this happen many, many times, and you have too. One of the clearest marks of a genuine Christian conversion is that almost immediately the individual involved begins to express concern for someone else, usually someone that he has had difficulty loving before.

2. That brings John to the second thing about love, in tracing the course of it here. The origin of it, he says, is conversion. The pure, unadulterated love which God intended love to be, begins only at the new birth; and it is the evidence of a new life that has been imparted.

**We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. {1 Jn 3:14 RSV}**

Now it is rather fascinating, is it not, that the apostle who wrote this has become known as the apostle of love. John says more about this great quality than any of the other writers, even though it was Paul who wrote that glorious paean on love in First Corinthians 13. But if you read the Gospel records of John, you will note that this is not his nature at all. He and his brother James earned from Jesus the title, "sons of thunder" {Mark 3:17}, because they were constantly wanting to blast back at those who opposed them. It was John and James who came to the Lord when a village refused to have them come in and said, "Shall we not call

fire down from heaven upon them?" {cf, Luke 9:54}. It was John and James who were constantly quarreling with the other disciples. The temperament of this man, John, was not one of naturally showing love. But when he was born again, when he believed in the deity and lordship of Jesus Christ, there was born into his heart the life of God and this man began to show love. So mightily did he master the lesson that he became known as the apostle of love.

Such love is the sign of the new life. It is a love which not only loves those who love you, but which loves those who do not love you. It is a love which does not depend upon a reciprocal relationship, but loves anyhow, loving the unlovely, loving the unqualified, loving the ungrateful, and the selfish, and the difficult. To view people apart from the relationship of Christian love is to see them as either our friends or our foes, as either rivals or helpers, as those who can help us along to the object we want or as obstacles that stand in our pathway to keep us from it. In other words, we do not look at people as people like ourselves, we look at them as either obstacles or helpers for us. We see them always as related to us. But when Christian love is born, a change takes place and we begin to see people as people, people like ourselves, needing love, having problems, feeling fears and anxieties and experiencing troubles. We are able to empathize, to sympathize, to enter in. This, then, is the character of true love, and it is always evidence that a new life has come, the life born of God.

Many of you remember from World War II the story of Jacob De Shazer, one of the members of Col. Doolittle's crew who bombed Tokyo early in World War II. He was captured by the Japanese and put in prison. He hated his Japanese captors and was so violent and vicious that his captors feared him because he himself feared nothing they did to him. They kept him in solitary confinement because of the hatred with which he lashed out against them. But in a remarkable way he obtained a copy of the Bible, and began to read it through. Reading through that book, in the loneliness of his cell, he came to realize the life that is in Jesus Christ. There came an amazing change over this man. His hatred of the Japanese changed

completely. He began to love his captors and to show love toward them, and they were utterly astonished by what had happened to him. Instead of burning with wrath, resentment, and viciousness against them, he became the most docile of prisoners, eagerly cooperating with his captors, and praying for them. Eventually, the story of his change of heart was written up in a little tract, and, after the war, it fell into the hands of a young Japanese, Captain Mitsuo Fuchida, the man who led the air raid against Pearl Harbor, and who gave the command to drop the bombs on that fateful day of December 7. Mitsuo Fuchida was a hero in Japan after the war because of that exploit and others, but his own heart was empty. Somehow he read the tract that told the story of De Shazer's amazing change of heart. He was arrested by the story and puzzled by it. From somewhere he obtained a New Testament and began to read it with growing interest and amazement. At last he came to the story of the crucifixion. When he read the Lord's words from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" {Luke 23:34}, his heart broke. He realized that this One who could love his enemies and pray for those who persecuted him and spitefully used him, was manifesting a quality of life that no natural human being could possibly show. Mitsuo Fuchida became a Christian. Some of you may remember that he gave his testimony in the early days of Peninsula Bible Church, while we still met at the Community Center. Now he is an evangelist going up and down Japan telling forth the story of a love that can change human hearts.

Love like this is the sign of a converted heart. As John says, "if we do not love, we remain in death." If there is not this quality of love in us which can make us love those that ordinarily we would not love, then we remain in death. Of course, the most obvious place for it to show is with our brethren, with other Christians, for the hardest people to love are those closest to us. I have often quoted that jingle,

To dwell above with saints we love  
O, that will be glory;  
But to dwell below with saints we know –  
Well, that's another story!

It is true that it is difficult to love those who are close to us. It is those who are close to us who can get to us to irritate us. The ordinary encounters we make with nasty baggage-handlers and bell boys we can easily pass off. They do not bother us because they are remote from us. But the ones who are near to us, if they mistreat us, we find it difficult to show love. But this is the test of true love.

Can you love those that are near you, those that are your brethren? Well, if you cannot, you remain in death, for this is the mark of new life.

In February, I was privileged to be in Bellingham, Washington, at a conference of non-Christian couples meeting together. We had a wonderful time presenting the story of the gospel in a very simple and open way to these couples. This last week I received a letter from one of those couples, telling of their reactions during the week. At the end of the week they had made a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ, but they did not say anything to anyone at the time. Later, when they went home with the couple that had brought them, they acknowledged to them that they had come to faith in Jesus Christ. They wrote me to tell me about this and to thank me for being an instrument of God in bringing the gospel to them. Then they added a *P.S.* that set my heart to rejoicing. In one line they said:

*P.S:* Our two younger children, sensing the change in us, have asked to become Christians too.

That is the mark of new life – a change, the change of love. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, that you have love one to another,” {cf, John 13:35}.

Now, because there are many attempts to imitate this valuable quality, John goes on to trace for us the essence of love.

**By this we know love, that he** [and it is as though the Lord Jesus is standing right there, and he points to him, ‘that one’] **laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** {1 Jn 3:16 RSV}

That is the essence of true love. It is a laying down of life, a giving up of self-interest; that is the quality that marks God’s kind of love. “He laid down his life for us,” John says. That was a once-for-all laying down, and he uses the aorist tense here which asserts that. Once-for-all he poured out his soul unto death, laid down his life for us. Now, because of that, we ought to be laying down (and here he uses the present continuous tense) our lives for each other, our brethren. Not in the same way he did for we cannot die for another, but we can live for one another. The “laying down” here means the giving up of self-interest, the voluntary surrender of the right to meet our own needs in order that we might meet the needs of another. It is the giving up of self in order that we might minister to another. That is the quality that marks genuine love. As he goes on to show, it will manifest itself, not in word, but in deed.

**... if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? {1 Jn 3:17 RSV}**

That is not God’s love. If we can see others in need – physically, emotionally, or spiritually – and pass them by unconcerned, then all our words and our fine talk about love are as Paul says nothing but “a clanging cymbal” {1 Cor 13:1 RSV}, a loud noise, a mere banging upon metal.

**Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth.** {1 Jn 3:18 RSV}

It is this easy talk about love but an actual withdrawing from contact with those who are in need that constitutes the phoneyism that is so widespread in evangelical circles and which is turning so many away from Christ.

On the way home from my trip I stopped off at a Christian College where several of us talked with hundreds of students there. In so many cases we found them reflecting an attitude of disinterest and even burning resentment against Christianity. Why? Because, as they put it, “it’s nothing but a fellowship of phoneyes.” I pointed out to some of them that they were as phoney as the ones they were complaining about. But what they had to say was often all too true. The great sickness of fundamentalism lies right here. We have talked much

about love. We have uttered glowing words about God's love for us, and our love for men, but we have built barriers of isolation around ourselves, and refused to let others see our inner lives, and refused to seek out and find them. Because we have become isolated units, refusing to blend hearts together, we have lost the glory of body-life through which Jesus Christ intends to manifest the glory of his Spirit at work. God only works through a body, and therefore it is absolutely essential that we:

- Take down these isolating barriers, and stop pretending to be something we are not;
- To be willing to admit our faults and our failures, and
- To pray together, and
- To stop being critical and judgmental,

pointing the finger at those among us who fall or stumble, and gathering our skirts of righteousness about ourselves to pass by on the other side, lest we be contaminated by them. That is phoniness. John says so, does he not?

If you see a brother in need, and you shut your heart against him, and go on in your isolated way, how does God's love abide in you? It is but talk, it is word, but it is not deed. Therefore, comes the exhortation, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth." When this special kind of love which is not based upon the loveableness of an individual, but loves for Christ's sake, and puts up with difficulties and irritating qualities about another, is shown, it becomes the most powerful force in all the world. When it is seen, it hits with amazing impact.

Yesterday I heard a young Jewish convert give the story of his life. It is a most amazing story:

His name is Arthur Katz and he is a teacher in the public schools in Berkeley. He was raised as an atheist, even though he was of Jewish descent. Early in his life he became a Marxist, a committed Communist. He was always a left-wing radical, a

trouble maker, at the heart of every uprising that was going on.

At the close of World War II he happened to be in Germany with the American Army and personally saw the gas chambers at Dachau and Buchenwald. He came away from them shocked and sick at heart, filled with hatred, first toward the German race, and then, realizing that this was not merely a national problem but a human problem, filled with an all-pervading sense of disgust and loathing for the whole human race. He came back to Berkeley and tried to give himself to education, but more and more he realized that education was not the answer. Education could not change hearts, education could not and did not touch the basic problems of human beings. Finally he gave it all up and resigned his position. His wife lost her mind, and was put in a mental institution. Divorced, footloose, and fancy-free, he went out to wander up and down the face of the earth, hardly knowing where he was going.

One rainy wet day he was in Greece, hitchhiking, with a week's growth of beard upon his face, and a dirty rucksack on his back, standing in the wind and the rain thumbing a ride. Of course, no one wanted to pick him up. He stood there for hours when at last a big Cadillac came by, and stopped.

To his amazement the man did not merely open the door and gesture for him to get in; he got out of his car, came around, and began to pump his hand and to welcome him as though he were some kind of king. He took the dirty rucksack and threw it on the clean upholstery. Art said he winced himself when he saw that. Then the man invited him to get in the car, and they drove on. The man treated him as though he were a welcome guest. Art Katz could not understand this. He was taken to a hotel and the man bought him a room and cleaned him up and gave him some food.

Finally he asked him what he was doing, and where he was going. There came pouring out of this young Jewish atheist all the pent-up heartache, misery, and resentment of his life. He told him the whole

thing, just pouring it all out. The man sat and listened, and when he was all through, he spoke one sentence. He said, "You know, Art, what the world needs? -- those who are willing to wash one another's feet." Art Katz said, "I never heard anything more beautiful than that. Why do you say that?" And the man said, "'Because that's what my Lord did.'"

For the first time in this young atheist's life he heard a Christian witness. That was the beginning of the end.

I do not have time to tell the whole story of how this young man came to know Jesus Christ. But the thing that arrested him and broke through all the years of hatred, all the pent-up resentment and bitterness of his heart and life was one act of kindness which manifested to an apparently undeserving young man, genuine courtesy and kindness in the name of Jesus Christ.

"By this," Jesus said, "shall all men know that you are my disciples," {John 13:35 RSV}. That is the path of love. If life is there, that kind of love will be there.

Now, let it show, is John's exhortation. "Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth."

**Prayer:**

Our Father, may these words come home to our own hearts with great power. May we realize that we are not to love others because they love us, we are not to be kind to people because they are kind to us, we are not to be friendly to other people because they show some friendship back to us; but a Christian is to love because he has been loved by God, and he has in him a life which loves despite any reason to love. Grant to us that we may let that life show. Let us respond to the feelings that well up within us from you, to the impulses to be kind, to be courteous. Make us quick, Lord, to respond to these. We ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, who loved us with that kind of love, Amen.

## The Course of Hate

by Ray C. Stedman

We are engaged now in studying, through the eyes of John, the beloved apostle, the two most powerful forces at work in the world today: love and hate. We have already looked together at the path of love. John has traced it for us as to its origin, its essence, and its evidence. Today we shall take the same passage, but now follow the course of hate.

As we meet, there is a very bitter and ugly war raging in the Far East. On both sides, the fine strong bodies of young men – and all too often the bodies also of women and helpless innocent children – are being torn by bullets and bombs, are being horribly burned by flamethrowers and napalm, and left to rot and decay in the hideous odor of death. Twice in this century the world has been engulfed by a tremendous cataclysm of hate and evil, of darkness and death, and the sickening horrors of war. Yet the forces that are at work that produce these modern slaughters are no different and no more violent or awful than those that were present in a meeting of two brothers in a field long, long ago, when one suddenly took his ax and with one swift blow caved in his brother's skull and crimsoned the earth with his brother's blood.

That is the scene John sets before us in the third chapter of this letter, beginning with Verse 11. The ax of Cain has now become a hydrogen bomb, but the motivation that sets either on its deadly swing is always the same. If we understand the act in the field long ago, we will understand the reason for the wars and the rumors of wars of our own day. John traces for us the intertwining of these two forces, love and hate, beginning with Verse 11:

**For this is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his**

**own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. {1 Jn 3:11-13a RSV}**

What is the origin of love and hate? Where did these two powerful forces come from?

It is rather remarkable in this passage to note that in neither case do these forces originate in man. That is contrary to the way we usually think, is it not? We conceive of ourselves as having the ability to love, or the ability to hate. We think of ourselves as being the originator of these attitudes. But this passage reveals quite otherwise. Love, John says, springs only from God. It flows into the human heart from the Holy Spirit, and only God is capable of love.

As we saw last time, when that flow of love which comes to all men, the just and unjust alike, enters the natural heart of man it is grasped and seized by a centrifugal force that centers around self. God's love, as expressed through natural man, is always self-centered love. It is only at conversion that love begins to flow out to any persons, as God intended it to do. Then it ceases to be exclusive and becomes inclusive, taking in anyone who needs love. John brings this out with the words, "this is the message which you heard from the beginning," and by means of that message we are taught to love.

Now, if it is true that love comes from outside man, it is also true that hate originates outside man. John makes this very clear. He says Cain was "of the evil one," which is a reference, of course, to the devil. By this John indicates that this powerful force of hate is always a devilish thing. It is hellish. Its presence in the human heart reveals a terrible fact. It reveals that the individual who is expressing hate has fallen into the silent remorseless grip of the devil. He is a slave of the devil's will.



We shall never understand these forces in life unless we understand them from this biblical point of view. We are told repeatedly in the Scriptures that it is here that we have the truth, the truth as it is in Jesus. It is in the coming of the Son of God that the fundamental foundational realities of life begin to be unveiled to us. If we disregard these revelations simply because they do not accord with the way we have usually thought, then we are blindly shutting our eyes to the truth. But if we heed them, we will have an understanding of life. Therefore, it is very important that we understand that love and hate both originate outside of man. Love comes only from God; hate comes from the devil. Hate is really love, twisted, diverted from its intended object and centered upon a false object. This is what the devil does with the life and the love of God. He diverts it, twists it, mutilates it; he changes it, and it comes out as hate. Therefore, anyone who hates is, as Cain was, in the grip of the devil, he is "of the evil one."

That is a rather sobering thing, is it not? But let us start with that significant fact. I am sure that Cain was very unconscious of the fact that when he hated he was in the control of another mind, of another purpose. He felt no different, he felt no premonition that something was taking over in his life. There was no sudden chill that ran up and down his backbone that made him aware that a sinister, evil spirit was possessing him, just as we feel no different when we hate. Yet, when his heart began to burn with hatred for his brother, there was a quiet takeover, with no outward evidence or visible sign or inward feeling to betray it.

We see the same thing in the Gospels. Remember that as the Lord gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room for the institution of the first Lord's Supper, after they had partaken of the Passover Feast, the Lord stood to break bread, instituting the very Supper that we are to celebrate today. John's Gospel says that as Judas sat at the table with the Lord, Satan entered into his heart. Now he did not feel any different. There was nothing that betrayed it outwardly, but there was within an open door through which the spirit of evil entered, and he was in the grip of a remorseless force from which he could no longer escape by an act of his will.

You see the same thing in the story of Ananias and Sapphira, those early Christians who became jealous of the spiritual privileges that Barnabas and

others were enjoying and decided to claim a holiness for themselves that they did not really possess. They wanted the reputation before other Christians that they, too, were fully dedicated, wholly committed Christians and had given all their property unto God, as the others were doing. But, you remember, they kept back a part of the proceeds without saying a thing to anyone. When they came before the Apostle Peter, who was filled with the Holy Spirit, do you remember what his question was? "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?" {cf, Acts 5:3}. It is possible even for Christians to come under the grip of the devil. This is the first great revelation that the Scriptures give us of the course of hate: It begins with that evil, sinister being whose whole life and ministry is opposed to God and who silently takes over the heart of anyone who consents to give way to envy or jealousy.

As we know from the Scriptures, the natural man, the unregenerate man, the man who is not yet born again, the man or woman who still remains in the life into which he was born, continually lives in this unrealized control by Satan. The epistle to the Ephesians makes that very clear. "We all once walked," the apostle said, "following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air" {Eph 2:2 KJV}, under his control, not realizing it, not aware of it at all, but nevertheless under the silent remorseless control of an evil spirit. This is why hate is always so close to the surface in the life of the natural man. Any rebuff, any crossing of his will brings it right out. A burning spirit of anger or of hatred comes bursting to the surface immediately, because this is the nature of the evil spirit who is at work in the children of disobedience.

Civilized man often recognizes much of the evil that comes from hatred. In our world today many thinkers and philosophers are genuinely concerned about human events and are aware that the fountain from which much of the world's unrest springs is hatred. They are concerned about the evil, harmful, hateful results that come from the exercise of this passion and so they attempt to control it. But the natural man is unable to come up with anything that really answers this burning evil in his life, or that can control it. All he does is to attempt by education to limit the manifestation of hatred, or by moral restraint to keep it suppressed and bottled up inside. Of course, all he succeeds in doing is merely to change the name on the door. Hate be-

comes at best, indifference or avoidance of another person. The best that an unregenerate person can do in handling this force in his life, if he hates anybody, is to come to the place finally where he says, "Well, I won't have anything to do with him. Let him go his way, and I'll go mine." That is the highest level to which unregenerate man can rise. At worst, hatred becomes disguised under other words – contempt, disdain, prejudice, and other evil names which are nothing but synonyms of hatred at work among men today. Thus, we learn that a skunk by any other name still smells, and though we do not call it hatred, it is still the same thing. You can sprinkle the perfume of a finer word or a better label on it, but it still remains the same ugly thing and it still produces the same ugly results in human life.

Now let us look deeper at what this powerful force is. John reveals the origin of hate – it is from the devil, he says – but he also lets us know its essence, i.e., its character, its nature.

"Why," he asks, "did Cain murder his brother?" The answer is very startling. Was it because Abel was a bad person? Was it because he did something evil to Cain, and Cain was but revenging himself? No, no. It was because Abel was good that Cain murdered him! It was because he was doing proper, rightful, helpful things. That is why Cain murdered his brother.

**Why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. {1 Jn 3:12b RSV}**

Think of that! Cain murdered his brother because his brother was good, not because he was bad. What do you think Cain would have answered to the question, "Why did you murder your brother?" I have often wondered, did Cain ever stop to ask himself that? Perhaps sometime later, after the whole thing was over, in some moment of self-examination, did he ever say to himself, "Why did I do that? Why did I murder my brother?" I am sure if he did that undoubtedly the answer he gave would have been very much like the answers we give to justify our attitudes of hate and dislike of other people. Probably he would have answered on the emotional level, something like, "Oh, I couldn't stand him anymore. He was so pious, so smug. He was always showing me up, and I couldn't stand it anymore." That is the kind of excuse we often

give, is it not, of our attitude toward another. Or perhaps he would have resorted to some form of self-defense. Perhaps he said, "Well, he was a threat to me, to my reputation. The world was simply not big enough for us both. It was either him or me, so I got rid of him."

But what are the facts of this story? As you turn to the Genesis account of their encounter in the field together, we are told only a few things about them but the few things we are told are very crucial. Both of them, we are told, brought an offering to the Lord God. They were both religious men, and both of them brought an offering: Abel of the firstlings of his flock, a lamb out of his flock, while Cain brought the fruits of his field. He was a farmer and so he brought a gift of grain or fruit to God. In the Epistle to the Hebrews we are told that it was "by faith" that Abel offered his offering unto God {Heb 11:4}, and faith is always an obedient response to a command or a promise of God. Abel offered his in obedience to what God had asked; Cain did not offer his by faith, and therefore he refused to offer what God had asked. He did that deadly thing which so many millions are doing today – he devised his own religion. He said, "I have my own way of serving God," and he came up with his own plan for an offering and brought the firstfruits of the field. When it was rejected, he was angry. The account tells us "his countenance fell" {Gen 4:5}, i.e., he began to pout and sulk and was angry and sullen, stewing within himself because God had not accepted that which he had brought.

Even then, according to the account, he was not judged by God. God does not lash out with a lightning bolt against him, but there is a word of warning brought to him. God says to him, "Why does your countenance fall?" Why are you angry? Do you not know that a sin offering is lying at the door?" {cf, Gen 4:6-7}. "You can go back and bring the right offering. I'm not going to wipe you off the face of the earth because of your disobedience. You can still repent, you can still change your mind. You can go back and bring the right one." But even with that word of warning, there is absolutely no change in the heart of Cain, and he continues to stew and to burn against God. At that moment he fell into the snare of the devil, as so many times you and I have fallen into the same snare when we have allowed some fancied sense of injustice to burn within our hearts and to upset us.

Because we feel that we are not treated fairly, we begin to burn against God. At that moment the silent control begins. The invisible sinister force takes over, we become “of the evil one.” The result in Cain’s case was the deadly swing of the ax and the gush of his brother’s blood.

Now why? It was because Cain was angry with God. He refused to accept God’s evaluation, God’s judgment of what was right and wrong. He was angry at God’s ordering of life. He was angry because God would not play according to his rules. In other words, he wanted to be God, himself and he was angry when God refused to let him exercise the sovereignty which only God can have. In his mind, twisted now by the devil, all of this seemed to focus upon his innocent brother. All of his anger at the invisible power of God, the invisible Person of God, became focused in a visible object, his brother. So, in blind delusion, he struck him down and did him to death. That is a revelation of the nature of hate. It is directed at a human object, but it is always an attack upon God. It is a rejection of the rule of God.

I was interested in reading this past week of Billy Graham’s crusade in London. Among other things recounted there was his reaction and his marvel, his astonishment, at the strength of the opposition they met in London. He said he marveled at the unreasoning opposition that was against him there. Men seemed determined to believe that his converts would all fail, and that he, himself, was running a religious racket, out only to make money, and that it was all a big show. They were utterly blind to logic, impervious to the facts, and deaf to every explanation. They were simply determined to believe that it was all a big farce. Why is that?

Well, John says, “Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you.” Hate is a deeper force than we usually think it to be. It is more than a mere psychological reaction of one human being to another. It releases sinister powers into the human stream. It brings dark powers into control of human minds and human hearts. It twists and distorts, deludes and blocks, so that when we act we act in utter delusion, completely out of line with reality, out of accord with the facts. What we do, therefore, is always folly, foolish, senseless, without any reason behind it.

Many years ago, Joseph Parker said, “The man who preaches repentance sets himself against his age, and will be mercilessly battered by the age

whose moral tone he changes. There is but one end for such a man. Off with his head! You had better not preach repentance until you’ve pledged your head to heaven.”

That is what Billy Graham found in London.

“Do not wonder,” John says, “that the world hates you.” The nature of hate is such that it is an attack against God himself.

Remember how David discovered that after the murder of Uriah, the Hittite? He coveted this man’s wife, committed a foul act of adultery, and, in order to cover his tracks, had the husband sent in to battle and put in the front ranks and thus contrived to bring about his murder. After months had gone by, and his guilty heart had not repented, God in grace sent Nathan the prophet to stand before him and trap him with a little story. When David fell into the trap, and judged himself, the prophet turned and said to him, “Thou art the man!” {2 Sam 12:7 KJV}. There follows then the repentance of David; he wept before God for days. Out of that experience was born the fifty-first Psalm which echoes the situation into which David fell. In that Psalm David cries out the great truth he had learned, “Against thee, O God, thee only have I sinned,” {Psa 51:4 KJV}. That is always what hatred is: an attack against God.

Now throughout this account John reveals that the outcome of hate is murder, and he adds a very striking word in Verse 15.

**Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. {1 Jn 3:15 RSV}**

The latter part of that makes clear that he is aiming this particularly at the Christian. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer. Does your heart burn with hatred toward another today, or has it this week? You just cannot stand him (or her). You wish he would go away and leave you alone; you do not want him around at all. Well, then, if the circumstances are right, and the penalty could be avoided, you would murder him if you could! That is what this reveals. All that keeps you from it is a fear of reprisal from God or man. If some way you could get away with it, hatred would always, invariably, flash out into murder – as it did in that first scene between Cain and Abel.

Wherever hate is, murder is always the possibility and, in the eyes of God, it is as good as done. God reads the heart, he does not need to wait for the actions. Jesus taught this. These are not the words of the so-called harsh God of the Old Testament, this is what the Lord Jesus himself taught in Matthew 5, the Sermon on the Mount:

**You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire." {Matt 5:21-22 RSV}**

Anyone who hates is a murderer already, and only lacks the proper opportunity or he would accomplish the deed.

Now what does it reveal when a Christian hates? Let us be honest, and admit that it is all too frequently true. Christians hate one another, and show hatred toward each other and toward others outside of Christ. But John tells us, "You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him," i.e., the eternal life which Christ has given is no longer in control of that individual, it is no longer "abiding" in him.

We have already seen that this relationship of abiding is an additional one to that of the indwelling of God's life. It does not mean that the person ceases to be a Christian when he hates, but he ceases to act like a Christian. He is no longer being the Christian that he has become. Eternal life is no longer abiding in him and he has slipped back, temporarily, into the control of the devil. He is acting out of the evil one. You see something similar in Verse 17, where the Christian who is indifferent to the needs of another no longer has God's love abiding in him. It is not that love is not available to him; but that it does not abide in him. Thus, the apostle brings us to the reality of the situation of hate. If we hate someone we have become the temporary slave of Satan. We are God's child doing the devil's work, and we need to face it on that level.

Now, what is the answer to this?

What is the way to control hatred?

Well, for the world in general, it is very clear, is it not? There can be no answer, there can be no

effective control of this force, apart from the regenerating work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the cross of Calvary. It takes the power of God to break the power of hate, and only God can do it. That is why there is no ultimate hope for the control of wars and strife and anarchy and trouble, apart from an acceptance on the part of individuals everywhere of the redeeming grace of God. That is why we Christians are quite right when we tell people they can never solve their world problems at the peace tables, or the conference tables, and negotiate an ultimate control of warfare. That can never happen. This force is ingrained too deeply into human life to submit to that kind of superficial treatment.

But what about with Christians?

How do you handle this problem of hatred?

What do you do about it?

Do you resort to the folly of trying to suppress it, push it down, repress it, hide it, cover it over, bite your lip, don't say anything, but go away with your heart burning, seething, miserable, unhappy? You are still under the control of the evil one and, sooner or later, he will take you farther than you want to go. The only control is what we find all through the Scriptures, and what you find here in the Epistle of John. Judge this thing. Deal with it as God sees it. Call it what it is – hatred – originating from the devil, a devilish thing at work in your life and heart. Then confess it, agree with God about it, tell him so. Of course, you will receive, then, the answering power of love from the Son of God who dwells in your heart. The fount of the Holy Spirit is ever ready to pour out, in place of hatred, words of love and appreciation, approval, and acceptance. There is no other answer.

Until we live on these terms, we have not begun to demonstrate the life that is in Jesus Christ. Oh, the power of love – wonderful power to attract and to draw men irresistibly to contact and encounter with the Living God. But that love can never be manifest where there is a protection, an excusing, a justifying of the spirit of hate. That is why the exhortation comes, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth."

How we need that word today!

### Prayer:

Our Lord Jesus, like those disciples of old, we gather now with thee about the Table in the Upper Room to remind ourselves anew

## The Course of Hate

of that manifestation of love supreme, a poured-out life, a life laid down on our behalf. Like those disciples we pray that our troubled hearts may be drawn to thee to understand anew the power of love over that of hate, the need to be open and honest and severe with ourselves in these areas,

not to protect, not to justify, not to excuse these attitudes, not to pass them off or to blame them on some human being, but to remember that every manifestation of hate is a direct attack against thee, and thy rule, and thy love in our life. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

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## The Christian's Tranquilizer

by Ray C. Stedman

In the letter of First John we are now examining the theme of love which, as you recognize, is unquestionably the most talked-about subject in the world today. In the beatnik brothels of Haight-Ashbury it is perhaps the most popular word in the hippie language; the jargon of psychologists and psychiatrists is certainly replete with references to love; and from Hollywood we encounter their version of love in enormous quantities of technicolor and stereophonic passion. Thus, this is easily the most talked-about subject in all humanity. Yet it is easy to see that, though the world continues to talk about love, it actually grows increasingly more loveless. The less we know of love, the more are inclined to talk about it.

In this passage in First John, the third chapter, we see that John is contrasting the themes of love and hate. Hate is self-centeredness; love is self-giving. Hate originates with the devil; love comes only from God. Hate results in deception and destruction; love results in helping and healing. These are acts, and this process exemplifies the evolution of all action; first is born passion, the attitude, the thought, and then follows the act. Love, when it has conceived, brings forth help and health; hate, when it has conceived, brings forth deception and death.

Now, in the rest of the chapter, the Apostle John is stressing the importance of the act, or deed, of love. Love must issue at last in something you do, or say. It must be more than simply a warm thought of the heart, or an intended or imagined act. But as John now will tell us, when love becomes a deed, it does three very valuable and important things for us:

- It reassures a doubting heart,
- It gives boldness and effectiveness to prayer, and

- It evidences a Spirit-filled life.

Those are the themes that John develops in the latter part of Chapter 3, from Verse 19 to the end of the chapter. Today we shall take the first of these.

**By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. {1 Jn 3:19-20 RSV}**

In that phrase, "whenever our hearts condemn us," the Apostle John is recognizing that the problem we face is that of a condemning heart, a condemning conscience. He suggests here in this phrase that this is a rather frequent and oftentimes involuntary experience on our part. Who of us as a Christian has not had trouble with a bad conscience or a condemning heart? As we saw in our studies in Ephesians this is often because of an attack of the evil one. Sometimes it can come about from nothing more serious than having eaten too late the night before. There are physical problems which affect us spiritually, but all too often this is the result of an attack of the evil one upon our faith, an attempt to try to dislodge us from faith in Jesus Christ, to overthrow us and disarm us and annul our effectiveness as Christians. And all too often this attack succeeds.

Perhaps there is nothing more common than this very problem – Christians who are suffering from a bad conscience, from a condemning heart. Sometimes these attacks come upon us in the midst of our most spiritual moods, attacking us when we least expect, with no apparent reason whatsoever. We can go to bed at night, happy and relaxed and refreshed in the Lord, and wake up with a gnawing, guilty spirit, a condemning heart. We can be enjoy-

ing the fellowship of God's people and feeling at ease with the Spirit of God, with everything well between us, and only a few hours later be suffering from a sense of uneasiness, a vague undetermined sense of guilt or condemnation.

Now this is the problem that John is facing, and you will recognize how common it is, and how frequently it occurs. When it occurs it usually does so because of at least one of three conditions that are present in our lives.

The problem often occurs when we have committed some very gross or repeated sin, i.e., if we fall into a bad temper, or indulge in some lustful experience, or we give way to the urge to take someone else's property, or steal another's reputation, or to injure another person, these things in our life that we know to be wrong. As Christians, if we fall into these experiences, we are bound immediately to suffer from a guilty conscience. The Spirit of God is quick to make us feel guilty about these things. But this is not the condition that is in view in this paragraph. John has already handled this problem. If we have a guilty heart because of the commitment of some evil act or sin, there is only one channel of return, only one way back: "Confess your sin," John says, "our God is faithful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," {cf, 1 Jn 1:9}. There is only one thing to do when we are conscious of having committed something that is wrong, and which produces a sense of guilt or condemnation. Confess it! Agree with God about it, and the cleansing that God has already provided in Jesus Christ will abundantly wash away the sense of guilt. You well know that experience, but that is not what John is talking about here.

In this passage it is the other two conditions that are primarily in view. Here John is concerned about the times when we have a sense of guilt or condemnation because we have been ignored or misunderstood or mistreated.

Who has not had this experience? Perhaps you are suffering from it right now. Perhaps you have a sense of resentment and a sense of failure because of something you have done to which nobody has paid any attention. You have been working so hard and you have been ignored. Perhaps some of you mothers feel that way this Mother's Day. You feel that you are not properly appreciated and from that comes a sense of condemnation in your spirit. How frequently this can occur. You have labored long

but no one seems to notice it, no one seems to care that you have put forth so much effort.

Or, perhaps, you did something out of a perfectly honest and open motive, intending to bless and help someone else, but they misunderstood. Instead of being grateful they were angry with you and even denounced you, scolded you, or accused you of wrong or of a less-acceptable motive. You feel condemned and guilty over that. Here you are, appalled by the reaction you have experienced, crushed, hurt. And at that moment you are tempted to believe some of these accusations. You say to yourself, "Maybe they're right, maybe I haven't been motivated rightly after all. How do I know that my heart was right? I thought it was, but perhaps others see more clearly than I. Maybe I'm not even a Christian at all." The enemy is quick to use this to bring condemnation, if he can. You may say to yourself, "Perhaps my motives were selfish, after all. Perhaps I'm only self-deceived in this matter." And thus your heart condemns you. That is the experience John is describing here.

In the second case, it may occur when, for one reason or another, you have been long inactive as Christian. You have not been doing much; perhaps you have not been able to. You have been disabled, laid aside, sick, or even you have been on too long a vacation, and you have a sense of not accomplishing much. You have been resting a long time, and have not done anything. Here again, the enemy is quick to come in and try to twist this into a sense of condemnation. He says, "The trouble with you is, you don't care anymore. The reason you don't care is because, basically, you're not even a Christian. You've grown indifferent. Look how useless you are, look how worthless you are to the cause of Christ. How can you call yourself a Christian and feel this way? You have such a lack of concern for the things of God and the work of God." You do not recognize this as the voice of the evil one, you feel it is your own heart speaking and you feel a sense of condemnation.

A number of years ago I was called on to visit a dear old Presbyterian pastor, retired, who was then over 94 years old. He had grown old in the service of God, with a wonderful record of faithful service to the Lord behind him. He called me on the phone one morning and asked me to come to see him. I found him plunged into the depths of gloom and despair. He said to me, "I've been thinking about my life and how little it has counted for

Christ.” With tears running down his face, he looked up at me and said, “Oh, Ray, I wonder sometimes if I’m even saved.” What was the trouble? The enemy was using the circumstances of his long inactivity, his inability to do something active for the Lord, as an opportunity to bring him under condemnation. “Whenever our hearts condemn us,” that is the problem, is it not? What a common one it is. It occurs so frequently and seemingly without good reason at all.

Now what is the remedy? Well, look at what John says. We must “know that we are of the truth.” That is the essential thing. We must reestablish the great fact of our relationship to Christ. We must have ground for believing and reassuring ourselves that we are indeed “justified by faith,” standing in God’s presence not by our own righteousness, but by the righteousness of the Son of God, that we are accepted in the Beloved, that we are “in Christ,” because, as Paul tells us in Romans 8, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those that are in Christ,” {cf, Rom 8:1}. In Christ all that he is appears on our behalf and therefore there is no condemnation to us. Now, therefore, if we are going to silence the doubts of our hearts, we must know that we are “of the truth.” That is where we must begin.

This is what we saw in Ephesians where the Apostle Paul urges us to put on the breastplate of righteousness {cf, Eph 6:14}, by which the heart is guarded, the emotions, which are so easily subject to discouragement, gloom, and despair. Put on the breastplate of righteousness. Realize again that you are “of the truth,” for it is by the mind’s knowledge that the heart’s doubts are silenced.

Now how do you do that? Notice his argument here. “By this,” he says. “By this we know that we are of the truth.” We must know that we are of the truth in order to reassure our condemning hearts, and how do we do it? By this! By what? Well, what he has just mentioned in Verse 18. “Little children, let us not love in word or speech [only] but in deed and in truth.” By this shall we reassure our hearts by the knowledge that we are of the truth. He is referring here to the deed or act of love, i.e., to deliberately, and with specific intent, do a kind and helpful deed, or speak a loving word to the one (or ones) who has injured us or has caused us to be plunged into this morass of condemnation. “Return good for evil,” in other words. This is what John is teaching here, just as Paul

taught, and as all the apostles taught, following the words of the Lord Jesus himself, “Bless those that persecute you. Do good to those who do evil to you. Return good for evil,” {cf, Matt 5:44}.

Now that is radical, is it not? That is revolutionary – so much so that we find it very difficult to do. We reject it, for the most part, and that is why so much of our time is spent under a sense of condemnation. For, as John says, it is this that makes us know that we are of the truth. It is when the love and good intentions of our heart actually work out into some response, some deed, some activity of love and concern for those who injure us.

Now take the two conditions that we have set before you. When you are ignored or misunderstood, when you have done the right thing and somebody has taken it the wrong way, what is your reaction, what do you feel like doing?

Well, I know how I feel, and I am sure you feel the same way, for all of us are made in the same mold – only some are moldier than others. You want to strike back, do you not? You want to say a caustic, nasty thing in return. You want to refuse any further contact with that individual. “All right, let him go. If that’s the way he feels about it, I’ll go my way and let him go his.”

Well now, what is John saying? “Don’t do this,” he says. Leave the whole matter in God’s hands. Do not strike back. Forgive that individual and forget the thing that is causing you difficulty. Take it patiently. Forget the offense, as the Lord Jesus gave us the example: Peter reminds us, “When he was reviled, he reviled not again but committed himself into the hands of him who judges righteously,” {cf, 1 Pet 2:23}. That is a radical response, is it not? What a revolutionary activity this is that we are called upon to perform, to act in love.

But when we do, John says, there immediately comes a sense of peace, a sense of reassurance. The Spirit within quickens us with the knowledge that we are of the truth. We are indeed sons and daughters of the Father, “who is kind to the ungrateful and to the selfish,” {Luke 6:35b RSV}. We are manifesting the character of the One to whom we truly belong.

In 1960 it was my privilege to visit Viet Nam and to speak to a conference of pastors gathered from the length and breadth of that little country. It was just before the outbreak of the war that is now raging there. We met with some 300 pastors down



in the delta area where the fighting is now so intense, in the little village of Vinh Long. During the course of the conference one of the pastors came to the interpreter and asked if he would arrange a meeting with me. The meeting was set up and the pastor came to see me, and, through the interpreter, poured out a tale of distress of heart. He recounted how he had been woefully mistreated by his brethren in the ministry, how he had been cut out of an office that he had felt was properly his and had been set aside (rather roughly he felt) and another man put in his place. The thing was rankling in his spirit and he was very disturbed. At this conference he wanted to have a full airing of the matter while all the men were gathered together. He said, "What do you think I ought to do? Don't you think I should take advantage of this and see that the whole matter is brought out and have this other man thrown out so I can have my proper place?" I turned to the second chapter of Philippians and had the interpreter read to him in his own language those wonderful words,

**Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. {Phil 2:5-8 RSV}**

I suggested that he forget the whole matter. He did not accept this then, but later on, as the conference went on and the Holy Spirit began to work in wonderful ways, I could see that he was struggling with the matter. At the end of the conference, after a wonderful time of blessing, he came up to me and said through the interpreter, "You were right. God has been dealing with my heart. It was only to try to justify myself that I was thinking all these things. God has helped me to put the whole matter aside. What a sense of joy and peace is mine now."

Now, that is exactly what John is talking about. By this, by this response of genuine self-giving love to another who has injured us, we prove to ourselves that we are of the truth and thus reassure our condemning hearts. Dr. F. B. Meyer sometime ago wrote this:

"We make a mistake in trying always to clear ourselves. We should be wiser to go straight on, humbly doing the next thing and leaving God to vindicate us. 'He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light and thy judgment as the noonday.' There may come hours in our lives when we shall be misunderstood, slandered, falsely accused. At such times it is very difficult not to act on the policy of the men around us in the world. They want to appeal to law and force and public opinion. But the believer takes his case into a higher court and lays it before his God."

That is exactly what John is suggesting to us.

"Well," you ask, "what about the third condition? What about the problem when I have been inactive or disabled, unable to do something, and my heart feels guilty or condemned because of this? What does John say about that?"

The same thing!

Do a deed of love, he says, even if it is no more than to say a prayer for someone, or to write a letter, or to send a gift. Let that nature of love which is within you express itself in some form. Help another. Give of yourself.

I am personally convinced that this is one of the greatest causes for doubt and torment among Christians. Especially is it true among older Christians, those who have retired, who have served a long time and feel themselves entitled to a rest. Perhaps in many ways they are entitled to a rest, but we are never entitled to retire from the Christian faith and the proper expression of it. I am afraid oftentimes older Christians succumb to a sense of self-pity and give themselves over to self-interest. Everything they do is related to what they want, and, as a consequence, there is little expression of concern for others or ministry to others. There is, therefore, no power to resist an accusing conscience.

John is suggesting something very practical here. Call up a lonely friend. Write a cheerful letter. Call on another person. Read a story to a child, for Christ's sake. "By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us."

Now John offers an explanation of why this works. "Because," he says, "God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything." God knows that self-giving love is not a natural thing for the human heart. It is not natural to respond in kind-

ness to those who do evil to us. It is very unnatural for one who is an unbeliever. To genuinely return good for evil is simply impossible to an unregenerate nature. Therefore, God knows that the accusations of our hearts are wrong. He knows everything. God is greater than our hearts. He knows that these lying accusations that we are really not Christians, not really in Christ, not really of the truth, are wrong. You are of the truth, and therefore you can forgive another, and you can bless another heart, and you can minister in grace to another. You can do something to help someone else in need. Now do it.

And when you do, that great underlying truth which God knows but which you have temporarily forgotten, will be things that you can point to in your life that are not merely professed or imagined or intended, but actual things that God has enabled you to do that are entirely unnatural to the Adamic life, that can reassure you that you are of the faith. "By this we shall know that we are of the truth and reassure our hearts before him."

I was struck by the words of John R. W. Stott, of All Souls Langham Place, in London, in his commentary on this passage. From them I borrowed the title of this message. Dr. Stott says, "Stronger than any chemical tranquilizer is trust in our all-knowing God." I am sure these words have great practical value for God's people. What is a tranquilizer but an attempt by chemical means to achieve ease of spirit, peace of heart? Has not God made ample provision for this through the spiritual mechanism of reassuring our hearts before him by means of the expression of active love in our lives? All this passage is really saying to us is that most of the problems of anxiety, restlessness, and guilt would be tremendously alleviated, if not completely eliminated, by some deliberate, active expression in deeds of self-giving love.

Now be deliberate about it. There is nothing wrong with that. You do not have to wait until you are forced to be nice to somebody. Do it deliber-

ately. Set yourself to the task of finding another person in need and helping him out. "Let us not love in word and speech but in deed and in mouth."

For a dozen years now I have been watching this spirit of practical love take hold of the lives of many here. It has been a joy to see how many times these words have proved true. People have discovered that much of loneliness and weakness and emptiness of their lives was simply a result of shutting themselves away from the needs of others. As soon as they began to minister to another's life, to be no longer concerned with their own interests but pouring themselves out on behalf of others – others who oftentimes had no claim upon them – they discovered that there was an accompanying wonderful sense of reassurance and an awakening of the spirit of joy in their own hearts.

What a practical way to apply this great truth.

#### **Prayer:**

Our Father, we thank you for these words which are of such intense practicality that we tend to escape them and to lose the effect of them upon our own hearts. But, Lord, teach us now to be responsive and thus discover that your word is wonderfully true; that anyone who begins to obey it will find for himself that these things work exactly as you have outlined to us. Make us, therefore, responsive today, to return good for evil, a loving word for a harsh one, a kind and thoughtful expression in place of sarcasm and causticness of spirit. Grant to us, Lord, to find the lonely and the distressed and the depressed and to speak to them, encourage them, and to share something of ourselves with them that we might thus express this kind of love. By this shall we know that we are of the truth. We thank you in Christ's name, Amen.

## Power in Prayer

by Ray C. Stedman

In our last study together in First John, Chapter 3, we looked at the problem of an accusing heart, i.e., a condemning conscience. What do you do as a Christian when your heart condemns you? As we saw, the usual result of a condemning conscience is a tendency to ignore God, to keep in the shadows and to distrust his love, to criticize his people and in many ways to manifest the fact that we have lost contact with the God who indwells us. The answer, as we saw in First John 3:19, was to reassure our hearts by a deed of self-giving love: "Little children, let us not love in word or speech," says John, "but in deed and in truth. By this we shall know that we are of the truth, and reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us," {1 Jn 3:18-19 RSV}.

We are to give ourselves to someone who is in need or help another in his problem, repay good for evil, or give back kind words instead of caustic, sharp ones. The result, John says, will be a sense of reassurance. If we are really in Christ, rivers of love and peace will begin to flow out from our hearts again, and it will be impossible to remain condemned. That reassurance, as we saw, is the first result of the practice of love. There are two more results that follow in this section, beginning with Verse 21 to the end of the chapter, and it is this passage that we take now:

**Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him. And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. {1 Jn 3:21-24 RSV}**

You will notice that this is the other side of the case. This is the situation when our hearts do not condemn us. Here is the one who has solved the problem of a condemning heart, has resolved his situation before God, perhaps by the exercise of some gracious loving word or deed, and thus has received the assurance that he is "of the truth," that he is "in Christ." If your heart does not condemn you, then what happens? This is what is before us in this passage.

As Paul says in his letter to the Philippians, "we are those who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh," {Phil 3:3b RSV}. That is the condition of the person whose heart does not condemn him. He is not looking at himself at all; he is looking at God and the greatness, the majesty, the glory, and the power of God. He is glorying in the availability of the Lord Jesus Christ. To "glory in Christ Jesus" is to not glory in anything that man can do or hopes to do, but to glory in what Christ can do in him. He has no confidence in the flesh whatever.

Now in practical terms, what is the result of that kind of experience?

Well, John says, the result will be that "we will have confidence before God, and we shall receive from him whatever we ask." In other words, the result is the experience of a daily adventure of answered prayer, the excitement of actually seeing God working in your life and in the lives of those with whom you are in contact, the daily stimulation of asking and receiving from God. This is really the normal Christian life. This is what God intended us to experience every day.

Part of the reason why so many are finding Christianity to be boring and mediocre and often sterile is because they are not experiencing this kind of Christian living. Many young people have almost lost all hope that Christianity can ever do or

be what its glowing terms describe. The reason is that they have not entered into this kind of relationship, where each day, every day, they experience the glorious adventure of seeing a living God at work, answering prayer and giving to them things that they ask. But in this passage we have a beautiful picture of the normal life of a Christian. It is all centered in prayer, because prayer is the most characteristic and the most fundamental relationship that a Christian can experience. Prayer is the expression of dependence on a loving God, and the whole Christian life, as we have learned in many other passages, is to be characterized by a continuous attitude and spirit of prayer. "Pray without ceasing" {1 Th 5:17 KJV}, says the Apostle Paul. This is what exciting Christian living demands.

Now look at the earmarks of true prayer which John brings out in this passage:

1. First, there is the spirit of prayer. "We have confidence before God" (and the word is, literally, "boldness"); we have boldness before God. If you have boldness before someone, it implies that you are in a close relationship with them, that you have a clear right to come before them. There is no fear of rebuke but a good understanding between you. Thus, to have confidence or boldness before God implies that you have a clear understanding of your right to come before him.

Occasionally I have strangers come to me and ask me to do a favor for them, in one way or another, in terms of counseling or advice. I've noticed that they usually approach me in a rather diffident manner. Quite often they call me "Doctor," even though I'm not even a nurse! They usually have a very polite tone to their voice, and some have even confessed to me later that they approached me with some degree of trembling and fear. I wonder what my reputation was in their eyes! But there are certain people who have no fear at all of me – my children. They come to me with boldness; in fact, even brazenness at times. They seem to be perfectly confident that they have the right to come to me. I do not always grant their request, but they do not hesitate at all in coming to me because they feel they have the right to come.

That is what John is getting at here. Prayer is to grow out of such an understanding

of the truth God has declared in his Word, that we have no questions about our right to come. We do not come on our own merit or position before him, for we know that we have no such ground. We come on Christ's merit. We come in his place. We come "in his name," and thus we can have boldness, just as he had boldness before the Father.

All through that wonderful three-year ministry of his, note how many times he declared how perfectly at home he was in his conversations with the Father. He said, "Father, I know that thou hearest me always, because I do always those things that are pleasing to you," {cf, John 11:42}. He came, therefore, with boldness. Now that is the spirit out of which prayer grows.

2. But notice also the purpose of prayer, as John sets it forth here. "We have confidence before God; and we receive from him ..." That is what prayer is for. It is that you and I might be on the receiving end of God's grace, God's goodness, and God's glory. We receive from him. God is a giving God; he delights to give. He has all the resources of a superabundant universe from which to pour out to us. The cattle on a thousand hills are his {cf, Psa 50:10}. You know the figures that Scripture adopts in order to make clear to us how full are God's riches. His purpose and his plan are to give to us. Paul, in writing to the Corinthians says, "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; that though he was rich, yet he became poor in order that we, through his poverty, might be made rich," {cf, 2 Cor 8:9 RSV}. This is God's purpose, to make us rich. Not in material things always, by any means, for that is not where true riches lie. Many a millionaire would give every cent of his money if he could have a little peace of heart or joy of spirit. But riches, true riches, God loves to pour out into human life. The riches of abundant life – that is what Christ came to give. There is nothing more exciting than to see an invisible God do, in your life, visible things which only he could do; meeting your needs, satisfying your hearts, accomplishing your desires, doing what you could never do. And, as Paul adds in Ephesians, "exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or think," {Eph 3:20b KJV}. Now

that is not mere theological twaddle; those are words that the faithful God has committed himself to, for our supply. If we are poverty stricken it is only our own fault, for God has designed a wonderful process by which we might receive from him. That is the purpose of prayer.

3. Now look at the scope of it: “whatever we ask.” Not everything we ask, because sometimes, James tells us, “we ask amiss” {cf, Jas 4:3}, that we might consume it upon our own lusts. Prayer was never intended to be a means by which you could get a new Cadillac, or some other new toy your heart is set on. No, no. It is not for your own lusts. That lies outside the realm and scope of prayer. But within the realm for which prayer is intended there is no limit: “Whatever we ask.” There is no limit to the nature or the type of request. It can be in the realm of the physical, the realm of the spiritual, the material, or the emotional. As long as it lies in the direction for which prayer is intended, it is whatever you need, whatever you ask.

This is a great promise, is it not? For hours on end I could tell you tales of the supply of God in this manner; of the supply of coats, hats, shoes and food, etc.

One of the most amazing stories I know of in regard to prayer is the supply of four peculiarly-shaped bolts, designed for a certain piece of equipment, to some missionaries in a desert place in Guatemala. God supplied those unique bolts in a most amazing way amid circumstances where such supply would never appear even remotely possible.

There are many well-authenticated incidents of the supply of needs in other areas such as changed attitudes, reversed decisions, restrained violence, and many others. The record of Scripture and of Christian experience is full of remarkable answers to prayer that God has granted, whereby he has simply changed a complete situation on many levels of experience: “Whatever you ask.”

It is not only about religious things that you need to pray. You can pray about anything. As Paul puts it in Philippians, simply, “Let your requests be made known unto him,” {cf, Phil 4:6}.

4. John now suggests the conditions of prayer. This is extremely important, because God always gives his great prayer promises on the basis of certain clearly described conditions. No promise is unconditional and these conditions need to be carefully regarded.

It reminds one of that little sign, one of my favorites, “When all else fails, follow directions.” This is certainly true in this subject of prayer, we need to follow directions.

And here it is – “because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.” Those are the conditions; because we keep his commandments and do things pleasing to him.

Now there are many people who misread that badly. They read it as though it says in effect, “If you go to church, read your Bible, and witness to your friends, these are the things that are pleasing to God, and if you do all these things faithfully, he will answer your prayers.” But that is not what it says, and that is not what it means. Activity of any kind is not necessarily pleasing to God. This is where we often make a mistake.

A lady came up to me a couple of weeks ago and said, “I don’t understand why God doesn’t answer my prayers. I go to church every Sunday. I read my Bible every day, but God doesn’t answer prayers for me. What’s the matter?” It was obvious that she was reading this as though going to church, reading the Bible and witnessing to others were the things that are pleasing to God and fulfill his commandments. Thus, she thought her prayers should be answered. It is a mistake to read this as though the things pleasing to God are religious activities. This does not refer to anything you do of itself, because nothing you do of itself is pleasing to God!

This is the mistake the Israelites made in the Old Testament. They thought that the bringing of sacrifices and offering them, the fulfilling of the ritual demanded by the Law of Moses were, in themselves, pleasing to God. But God sent the prophets to them to say, “No, they are not.” “Away with your vain oblations. Your sweet-smelling incense stinks in my nostrils,” {cf, Isa 1:13, 3:24 KJV}. Why? Because their lives were not in accord with these.

It is not what you do, it is why and how you do it, that interests God.

5. John makes this clear in Verse 23. Here we have the context of prayer.

**And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as he has commanded us. {1 Jn 3:23 RSV}**

He wants to make it crystal clear that it is not activities that are pleasing to God; it is attitudes. It is not the Ten Commandments that are in view here at all. John goes on to make that clear. It is the one great commandment which lies behind all ten: “the first and great commandment” {Matt 22:38 KJV}, Jesus called it. “Thou shalt love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your strength and all your soul and all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself,” {cf, Matt 22:37, 22:39 KJV}. The only way to love God acceptably is to believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ. That is why John puts it in this way. Certain of the Jews once came to Jesus and said to him, “What can we do that we might work the works of God? You are working the works of God; what can we do that we might work the works of God?” {cf, John 6:28 KJV}.

And Jesus said, unhesitatingly, “This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent,” {cf, John 6:29}. That is the place to start. You cannot do anything until you have done that. You cannot love God until you believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ; then you can love one another, as he has commanded us.

Now it is not particularly the initial act of faith in Jesus Christ that is in view here. John is not talking about the act by which, by faith, you became a Christian when you believed in Jesus. That is included, but that is not primarily what he is after here. The word believe here is in the aorist tense which in the Greek means a single, decisive act. While it is true that is the kind of act by which you entered the Christian life, what John has in view here are those repeated decisive acts by which you count on Christ’s power and authority to do whatever

love for your neighbor demands of you. These two are blended together. “Believe in the name of his Son ... and love one another.” It is all one commandment.

What John is saying is, the condition by which prayer is answered, and answered abundantly, is that we make repeated decisive acts of fulfilling the demands of love toward another, depending upon the power of Jesus Christ within us to perform it. That is “believing on the name of the Son of God,” counting on his authority, on his power. Notice there are two things in that. There is decision and direction:

- Taking them in reverse order, there is the direction toward which prayer always moves, love for another. That is the context of prayer, the limits of prayer. That defines what is meant by the term, “whatever we ask.” Whatever we need to fulfill this demand to love one another we can have. We are not to ask for things outside that, but if you really set yourself to love another then you can have whatever you need to fulfill it. “Whatever you ask,” whatever your need may be. That is the direction.
- The decision is the action you take to accomplish this, counting on Jesus Christ to come through and make it possible. God never moves your will to make a decision. You must do that. But when you decide to do what he tells you to do in his demand to love another, he then comes through with the power to make it possible. The result is that everything you do is pleasing to God. If it is all moving in this direction it does not make any difference whether it is little or big, whether it is costly or not, whether it is a glass of water given in the name of the Lord, or thousands of dollars invested in some enterprise, even though it is but a kind word spoken to a hungry heart, it is pleasing to him. It is not the activity; it is the attitude, the motive that prompts it, that makes all the difference. It is “by faith,” counting on the living God within you to make it possible.

This was all illustrated to me recently when a couple from out of town came into my study. As they sat down, I noticed that the woman was particularly troubled. She was so distressed that she could hardly keep the tears from running down her cheeks. The man began to explain the circumstances. It seemed they had a son-in-law who was involved in a very difficult moral problem, and this dear woman found that this man was repugnant to her, absolutely repulsive, she could not stand him around. She loved her daughter and she hated the man for what he was doing to her daughter. She was eaten up with rankling resentment and bitterness against him. Every thought of him burned in her mind and heart, and she could not put him out of her thoughts. Any time she had any contact with him she was utterly revolted.

All this was destroying her. She could not sleep at night, she could not eat. She was always tense, anxious, and there she was striking out at others in her home, caustic and sharp in her words. As we talked, all this came pouring out. She was not trying to be defensive and justify it, she just poured it all out. She said, "This is the case, and I don't know what to do about it. I can't stand this fellow." I said to her finally, "Well, you know this is not what the Lord wants of you, is it? He tells us that we are to love one another. You are to love this fellow who is so repulsive to you." She said, "I know that's what the Bible says, but I just can't do it." I said, "But that's the place to start, you see. You're saying that you can't, but really you can because God says you can. You feel you can't because, of course, out of your own strength and effort you can't. But God can because God does. God loves him already. He sees him, not as you see him, as an obstacle to your family's happiness; he sees this man as a man in the grip of an evil habit, an evil thing that is wrecking and ruining his life but for which he is not wholly responsible. God's heart goes out in compassion and pity to him, and he desires to deliver him. That kind of God lives in you, and he can love that man through you, if you will let him. All he is waiting for is your will set in line with his. If you will say, 'I want to. If you will make me want to, I'll do it, Lord,' that is what he is waiting for."

She said, "Well, God knows I want to love him, if I could." I said, "You tell him that, will you?" Together we bowed there and she poured out her inability to love. She confessed her sin.

She admitted that she had refused to love him, and didn't want to do it. But she saw that this was contrary to the will of God and she asked God to love him through her. When we finished the prayer and they stood up to go she took my hand and said, "Oh, I'm so glad I stopped to see you. I feel better already."

Now, I do not know what the result has been. I trust it has been victory on her part because it certainly is possible. But even then the peace of God was beginning to possess her heart again. The weary, strained, tense lines were fading away from her face. God was fulfilling what he had promised to do.

Notice, now, how Verse 24 completes this whole picture:

**All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given us. {1 Jn 3:24 RSV}**

Jesus said, "If any man loves me he will keep my word, and my Father and we will come unto him and make our home in him," {cf, John 14:23}.

Here John completes the whole picture. The activity of love, he says, results in:

- A reassured heart,
- Power in prayer, and anyone who begins to live on that level makes evident that
- He is living a Spirit-filled life, the life that God intended. God abides in him, and he abides in God, and this is the mark of it.

When John says, "By this," he is referring to all that precedes. "By this," i.e., by this reassurance of heart, by this evidence of answered prayer, by this flowing out of love to another in active deeds and thoughts – by this we know that he abides in us and it all comes by means of the spirit of God who indwells us. As Paul says in Romans 5, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given unto us," {cf, Rom 5:5 KJV}. That is the power of all Christian experience.

Now, do you see what John is after?

You cannot bottle up the Holy Spirit in your life for your own enjoyment. There are some people today who are desperately trying to have the Spirit only because they are concerned about certain gifts that he might give, certain ecstatic experiences that they can go through and this is what they want. But you cannot use the Spirit of God that way. You cannot bottle him up. He must flow through you. If you try to keep him to yourself, your whole experience will stagnate and become mediocre, dull, sterile and lifeless. But if you let him flow through you, ministering to others in his name, by his power, then your own life will become refreshed and fragrant and fruitful – by the Spirit of God who dwells in you. Everybody else, looking at you, will see that you have discovered the secret of victorious Christian living, of the abundant life made available in Jesus Christ.

Do you want that?

Well, God is no respecter of persons. This is available for anyone, everyone, young or old, rich

or poor, it does not make any difference; this abundant life is available in Jesus Christ.

**Prayer:**

Thank you, our Heavenly Father, for this bird's-eye look at the wonderful provision waiting for us to step into and experience each day. We thank you for him, your Son Jesus Christ, who dwells within us. We pray that we may have the simple faith to believe him and to take decisive actions of manifesting love toward other people who are in need, physically or emotionally – hungry-hearted, lonely people – perhaps even our own children who need love, need to be accepted, need to have us stop our criticism and show concern and acceptance of them. Let thy love flow through us and, flowing through us, bless us. For you have promised, Lord Jesus, that if any man thirst he may come to you and drink, and out of his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water. We thank you, in thy name, Amen.

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## When Unbelief is Right

by Ray C. Stedman

Anyone who knows anything at all about Christianity knows that it puts great stress upon believing. Not believing myths and legends, as many seem to think, but believing facts. Faith is not a way of convincing yourself that something is true when you know it is not, as someone has defined it, but faith is believing something that is true. In order to be a Christian you must be a believer, because from faith comes life, strength, peace, and joy, and all else that the Christian life offers.

But, that being true, it is equally true that every Christian is also called to be an unbeliever. There is a time when unbelief is the right thing and the only right thing. The very same Scriptures which encourage us to believe likewise urge us not to believe. In fact, they not only urge us, they command us not to believe. This is no contradiction, any more than to say that in order to live it is necessary both to inhale and to exhale. These are contradictory things: You cannot inhale and exhale at the same time, but both are absolutely necessary to maintaining life. You cannot inhale unless you exhale, and you cannot exhale unless you have inhaled.

It is the same with this matter of belief and unbelief. You cannot believe truth without rejecting error. You cannot love righteousness unless you are ready to hate sin. You cannot accept Christ without rejecting self. "If any man come after me," Jesus says, "let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me," {cf, Matt 16:24, Mark 8:34}. You cannot follow good unless you are ready to flee from evil. So it is not surprising, therefore, that the Scriptures tell us we are not to believe, as well as to believe. This is what John declares in the first three verses of Chapter 4:

**Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of anti-christ, of which you have heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. {1 Jn 4:1-3 RSV}**

This section, you will notice, comes as a parenthesis in the discourse on love. It grows out of the word which we looked at last time, the last verse of Chapter 3, Verse 24: "All who keep his commandments abide in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit which he has given to us." It is the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life that makes manifest the qualities of truth and love which reassure us that we are in Christ and "of the truth." It is that presence of the Holy Spirit which makes all the difference. But John says not to believe every spirit. There is one true Spirit, but there are also other spirits as well, false spirits, deceiving spirits that have gone out into the world.

It is significant that this warning comes in the midst of John's discourse about love, because it is rather evident that the false spirits which are abroad make a great deal of the subject of love.

It is significant and striking that every cult, every deviant group, every movement of our day that seeks to solicit support, religiously speaking, does so in the name of love. As we have already commented, this word is used in a thousand different ways to describe a thousand different reactions and impulses. Love means one thing to a hippie in Haight-Ashbury; love means quite something else

when it is used by a psychologist in his counseling room. Love is still something different on the lips of a movie-struck teenager; love is different yet when used with reference to the relationship of nations. There is no word, perhaps, in our language, that is capable of being stretched in so many directions as this word, *love*. Yet so many people seem utterly gullible about it. If someone comes talking about love, this to them is the earmark they must be of God, they must be “of the truth,” despite the fact that the oldest trick in Satan’s bag is to show a spirit of friendly concern and to appear to offer the fulfillment of love and desire.

Is that not what you see in the Garden of Eden? The devil comes to Eve and says, “Is it really true that God is so harsh, so difficult, so unloving toward you that he has forbidden you to eat certain fruit of a tree? Why, I think more of you than that. I’d never do anything like that to you. Could God actually say a thing like that and be God of love?” That is the implication of his argument, is it not? “Why,” says the devil, “if you take of this fruit you will discover wonderful things. You will become as gods. You will enter a wonderful world that you’ve never dreamed of before. You will discover the thing you were made for, and which God is trying to keep you from. As your friend, as your counselor, I suggest you hold back no longer. Take of the fruit and eat it,” {cf, Gen 3:1-5}. Is that not his approach? Does that not sound familiar? That is exactly the line of approach that cults, ’isms, and schisms are using today, everywhere. “If you really want to *live*, try what we have in stock.”

But the Scriptures warn us that the mark of childish immaturity is to be caught up and taken in by that kind of approach, “to be tossed about by every wind of doctrine” {Eph 4:14}, every new teaching that comes along. It is childish to gullibly swallow every slick line and go along with it. It is quite true, therefore, that a mark of maturity is unbelief, as well as belief.

It is as important that you do not believe certain things as it is that you do believe others, and John is making that clear.

Notice, he indicates that this is a widespread problem. “Many false prophets,” he says, “have gone out into the world.” In Matthew’s Gospel, the Lord Jesus warned of this: “beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves,” {Matt 7:15}. Wolves in sheep’s clothing – outwardly appearing

to be loving, tender, and concerned, but inwardly desiring only to wreck and ravish and to ruin. There are many false prophets, says John. Here again we have underlined for us the fact that we live in a world of deceit. We live, in many respects, in a hostile environment in which falsehoods are widely accepted, and we are greatly pressured to conform to these things.

In John’s day, in the 1st century, there were teachers going about doing certain signs, perhaps giving predictions of things to come, or manifesting tongues, miracles and other such things.

It is of this that John writes and says, “Do not believe these spirits – until you have tested them.” First test them. Don’t be a sucker, don’t believe anyone who comes along. It is important to note that there is here a very clear recognition of what the Bible teaches all the way through – that behind the false prophet or false teacher is an evil spirit. Men simply do not speak out of their own intellectual attainments. Quite unconscious to themselves they are being guided – and misguided – by an evil spirit, a “spirit of error” John calls it, an anti-Christian spirit which is behind these false prophets and teachers. There is a true Spirit, the Holy Spirit of truth, the Spirit of love, and just as he speaks through men, so evil spirits, false spirits, the spirits of error, also speak through men. When you hear men and women talking about religious things or values, do not gullibly swallow everything they say, especially if they appear to be attractively setting forth something about love and sweetness and light and concern for others. Especially test that line, for it is the usual approach of error. Recognize that behind the individual may be a spirit of error.

We moderns are in much greater danger than the ancients, for in the world of John and Paul’s day, the 1st century, there was a widespread recognition of the existence of invisible spirits, the invisible realities behind the scenes of life. Everywhere the ancient world recognized these as gods and goddesses, and bowed down to them. Though they seriously deformed and twisted these realities, making them into mythological and legendary figures and worshipping them as demigods, nevertheless there was a widespread recognition that man does not exist in the universe by himself; there are superior beings who influence the thinking and attitudes of men everywhere. This kind of teaching was, therefore, much easier to accept in the 1st century than it is in our day. In the 20th cen-

ture, we pride ourselves upon the fact that we have grown beyond this, we have come of age. Man is intellectually unable to accept this kind of thing today. As a result we expose ourselves without my defense at all to the control of these evil spirits.

But if we are going to follow the words of Jesus Christ we must accept what he says is the explanation of the power behind evil in the world. He makes clear that it comes from a host of evil spirits. We have seen this before, in Paul. "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, wicked spirits in high places" {Eph 6:12 KJV}, against the very headquarters of evil that is at work, affecting the minds of men. Part of the blindness of our generation, resulting in chaos and anarchy that is increasing on every side today, is a direct result of man in his arrogance and pride saying, "I reject the whole concept of evil spirits and demons. It is intellectually unacceptable to me." The blindness of that attitude precludes any defense against it. If we are going to be Christians we must look at the world as Christ sees it, we must understand it from his point of view. We must recognize that the pronouncements of men in this field of religion and spiritual teaching, no matter whether they be professors in seminaries or colleges, or whether they be pastors behind pulpits, or whatever they may be, are not a result of their keen logic or their academic training or their perceptive thinking, alone. These men are oftentimes unaware of the twist that is given to their thinking by the activity of evil spirits, spirits of error. The premises they adopt, which they never seem to examine, are often totally wrong, and in their blindness they base logical deductions upon illogical premises. But we so often seem to be unaware of this.

You must remember that you can never recognize this kind of error by listening and reading the arguments. I am not saying it is wrong to read the arguments, but you will not see the error in them that way. For if you read these books, and listen to the messages, they always sound clear, convincing and logical, taken by themselves. That is the way error makes its approach to us. The only way to discover it is to do as John says – test it. Test these spirits, try them. Lay them alongside a measuring stick, and if they do not match, throw them out.

Well, what is the test?

**By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. {1 Jn 4:2-3 RSV}**

There is the test: Two things.

1. First, the acknowledgment of the historical incarnation of the Son of God, his appearance in history as a man in the flesh. I think almost all Biblical scholars are agreed that this, Verse 2, should read this way:

**... every spirit which confesses that Jesus is Christ, come in the flesh, is of God ... {1 Jn 4:2b RSV}**

Jesus is his human name. He never was called Jesus when he was the eternal Son of God, before the incarnation. It was only when he was born as a babe in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth that he bore the human name of Jesus; Jesus of Nazareth. But the whole teaching of Scripture is that this Jesus of Nazareth, this historical Jesus, this man who grew up and lived and ate and slept and walked with men, who prayed and talked and taught them, is the Messiah of the Old Testament, the predicted One, the Son of God who was to come, the eternal One, God himself, who would come into human history – they are one and the same. This is the Spirit of truth. Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh. Jesus of Nazareth is identical with and indivisible from that promised Messiah of the Old Testament.

Have you noticed that Jesus makes this claim about himself? In John 10, he says of certain who have gone before him,

**"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber [i.e., if someone comes to you by another process than the predicted way, the way that has been announced, he is a thief and a robber; he is a false prophet, he is a false Christ, he is an antichrist]; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper**

**opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out,” {John 10:1-3 RSV}.**

Then he says, “I am that good shepherd. I came in the predicted way, the way the prophets announced. I was born in the right place, at the right time, in the right way. I came exactly as it was announced. I am the door; I am the shepherd of the sheep,” {cf, John 10:14 ff}.

Now any teacher of spiritual matters who confesses this, John says, is of the truth, is of God. But any teacher who stands up and professes to teach men about God but who does not confess this, is not of God. Do not listen to him, pay no attention to him. Regardless of how beautifully he talks, he is not of God. He is of the spirit of error, the spirit of antichrist, that has already gone out into the world.

Plain language, is it not? It is amazing how we have forgotten and neglected it. This is the paramount doctrine which can never be compromised, the divine-human person of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the one thing that is basic and fundamental to all Christian faith. He appeared in the flesh, he came as a man, humbled himself, and became obedient unto the death of the cross.

2. Now the second thing that John brings out here is that this must not only be acknowledged as a historical fact, but it must be confessed by the one who teaches it. There must be a commitment of the life to this truth. This is what the word *confess* means here. It is more than a mere acknowledgment or a profession that this is true; it is a commitment. It means to actually trust this great declared fact and this great historic person. Anyone who does not actually trust it, and live by it, do not listen to them either. They may acknowledge it, but they must also *confess* it, that is the important thing.

Remember that back in the Gospel accounts there were demons that acknowledged the deity of the Lord Jesus? When he appeared before them they said, “We know who you are, the Holy One of God,” {cf, Mark 1:24, Luke 4:34}. They acknowledged what the Jews were too blind to see, the full deity of Jesus Christ, as well as his humanity. But, though demons acknowledged this, they never *confessed* it.

They never trusted him. They did not commit themselves to him, they did not live by this truth.

Through the course of history there have been many religious leaders, popes, priests, and many others, Protestant and Catholic alike, who have acknowledged the deity of the Lord Jesus and his humanity, but they have never trusted it, they have never committed themselves to it, they have never confessed it. Therefore, even though acknowledgment is there, there is failure, and it is the spirit of error that prevails.

Now, there you have the fundamental questions that we must ask every group, or any teacher of religion today:

- Do you acknowledge the entrance into history of the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth, the man who labored and loved and died and rose again from the dead?
- Do you acknowledge the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ? – that he who was with God from the beginning, and was God, became man and lived among us?
- Do you acknowledge that? That question ought to be asked of every religious teacher, everywhere.

Then:

- Do you follow him?
- Do you live by this? Are you committed to him – is he your Lord, your strength, and everything you need?

How many would fail if we gave that test? How many fail, even at the first question? Just test in your mind some of the voices that speak today in the name of Christ:

There are those who style themselves liberals who say that the Jesus of history is not important to us; that his virgin birth, his miracles, his resurrection, even his crucifixion are but myths, legends

gathered about the figure of the man, Jesus, highly exaggerated ideas that the churches added to the facts. They tell us that these things are not important and it does not make any difference if he rose from the dead, or if he died on the cross, or if he was born in a manger, of a virgin. These do not make any difference, the great thing is the truth he taught, the things that he said – those are the important things. But John says if they do not confess that Jesus is the Christ, come in the flesh, this is the spirit of error, of antichrist.

In the current issue of the *Christian Digest* is a very interesting story of a young man who grew up in a godly home and became a Christian through the influence of his family. When he went away to college, his faith was undermined by the clever presentations of teachers who challenged him to think for himself. Now there is nothing wrong with that, but what was omitted was a standard of thinking, a measurement by which human thought could be evaluated. When that is omitted the result is always that the individual himself becomes the final measuring stick, the standard. This young man fell into that trap. He began to measure everything by what he thought, including the gospel and the Bible and all the things that are in it. Little by little he drifted off into liberalism, or modernism, or whatever term you might call it. He became a minister of a liberal church, involved in social crusades, declaring nothing of the gospel, the Word of God, the life-changing message that Christ came to give. But there was an increasing emptiness in his heart and life. Gradually he found his ministry crumbling, and he was unable to accomplish the things he wanted to. Sincere, earnest, dedicated, but increasingly hungry for something real. Finally a word from his wife, which irritated him immensely when he first heard it, struck a note of fire in his heart, and the Lord used it to wake him up to the great and saving truth that Jesus Christ alone can change the hearts of men. No social revolution is worth the snap of your finger if it does not rest upon that. He began to preach this and soon his church was changed. His congregation began to come back, the pews began to fill up, and his church became a living force in his community.

Now, measure some of these voices today:

- Here is the Christian Scientist, who says that Jesus – as a man upon whom the Spirit of

Christ came – the Spirit of Christ is the eternal One and he came upon Jesus at his baptism and left him again before he died upon the cross. Jesus, therefore, was born as a mere man and died as a mere man, and the only part of his ministry that is worth anything to us is his public ministry of teaching when he was influenced by the Spirit of Christ. That is not what John says. John says that the spirit which confesses that Jesus is the Christ, that the two are identical, one and the same, never to be separated – that is the Spirit which is of God. Anything else is the spirit of error and of antichrist.

- Take the gospel of the Mormons. They say that Jesus never was the eternal unchangeable God, but he was a man who became God and came to show us how we, too, might become gods some day. Is that the gospel? Of course not. It is the spirit of error, of antichrist.
- Take some of these modern cults to which our young people are giving such close attention these days. And who can blame them, when their hungry hearts are so earnestly desirous of seeing something real in life? Dr. Timothy Leary, the high priest of the psychedelic cult, is constantly urging young people to try LSD. He calls his organization, using the letters *LSD*, “League of Spiritual Discovery.” What is the hope that is set forth in it? Why, that LSD can open your eyes to the world of reality about God and about life, and show you wonderful things that you never could have known otherwise and make your life rich and full and vibrant. Echoes of Eden, are they not? He has reversed the famous words of Karl Marx, “Religion is the opiate of the people.” Dr. Leary says, “Opiates are the religion of the people.” And what does this apostle of pot have to say about the Lord Jesus? Why, that he was a man who was “turned on” by psychedelic drugs, and that is why he spoke in such an amazing way. He, too, was a user of LSD, in some form or another. Is that the gospel? Can that lead to life and liberty and joy and peace? No, no! It is the spirit of error and the spirit of antichrist, which is abroad in the world.

- There are even many who are orthodox in doctrine and who say, “Yes, of course we believe Jesus is the Christ come in the flesh. We have that in our creed, we can show it to you. It is written in our hymn books. We confess it every Sunday morning when we stand up in church, ‘We believe in God the Father Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord.’” But do they confess him, do they live by him? Have they committed themselves to this One in whom they profess to believe?

This is the searching question John asks. If they do not confess him, if they do not live by him, then do not follow them, their error is as deadly as those who deny that he came in the flesh. Many young people are finding today that dead orthodoxy has no more power to deliver than heresy and apostasy has. It is those who live by him, follow him, obey him, live by his life – these are the ones to follow. If you do not do that you can never be my teacher. I do not want to listen to any voice that professes to talk about the inner things of man’s life and his relationship to an eternal God, which does not confess that Jesus is Christ come in the flesh, or who does not demonstrate in his life that he lives by that principle. Test it.

“What think you of Christ?” is the test  
To try both your state and your scheme.  
You can never think right of the rest  
Until you think highly of him.

That is where we must begin. The gospel, the good news, stands or falls by faith in Jesus Christ come in the flesh, and by the availability of his life to us now – by which to live and move and have our being. God help us to be unbelievers, as well as believers.

### Prayer:

We are always amazed, our Father, at the searching quality of thy word which so clearly exposes reality to us, if we will but heed it. Help us then to acknowledge that we do live in a hostile world in many ways set against the things of faith, the things of true life. Teach us not to be gullible, and credible, swallowing every line that comes along. But help us to test each on the basis of this One who came and proved himself to be the truth, by doing what no man could ever do, rising again from the dead, thus solving the deepest problem of human life, and who manifested his love toward us, love unchangeable. Lord, we pray that we might trust the One who truly loves us, and recognize him as the good shepherd of the sheep who loves, and who cares for his own, and not like the hireling who fleeces the sheep and runs away leaving them battered and bleeding and wounded by the side of the road. We pray that our trust in the Lord Jesus may be renewed now. In His name we ask it, Amen.

## God is Greater

by Ray C. Stedman

Some months ago I received a letter from a friend of mine, a man with whom I once shared wonderfully deep and precious moments of fellowship together. In my opinion he had evidenced in his life a keen insight into the understanding of Scripture. We enjoyed talking with each other about the things of God. He was trained in the same seminary that I attended. Yet this letter brought deep sorrow to my heart because in it he renounced his Christian faith and declared that he was forsaking both the Christian ministry and the Christian church, no longer having any confidence in its message or in its power but was himself abandoning all pretense to Christian testimony.

Now what had happened to a man like that? How could this occur with one who understood so thoroughly the essentials of the Christian message and had come into contact with a living Christ? The only explanation is that he had failed to heed the admonition we have been looking at in John's gospel. He failed to "test the spirits, whether they be of God or not," as John exhorts us in the opening verse of Chapter 4: "Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits ... whether they be of God." Then he goes on, as we saw last time, to give us the test, the measure, by which we can tell truth from error in this mixed-up, confused, bewildered world in which we live. That test, as we saw, was two-fold:

- It was, first, an acknowledgment of the historic incarnation of Jesus Christ – the fact that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the Holy One of God, described in glowing terms in the Old Testament, had actually come into human history, come as a man in the flesh; that, in a word, Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ. This is the test.

- But, further than being acknowledged as true, it must be confessed. John uses this word. He says, "he who confesses Jesus Christ," {1 Jn 4:2}. By that special word *confess* he means "he who lives on this principle," he who reflects it in his thinking and has committed himself to it and launched out upon it in his life, that is the one to listen to about the things of God. There is where religious truth comes from.

Now, in the section we take now, beginning with Verse 4, John continues to unfold certain factors at work in this whole matter of truth versus error. How important these are today you well know who are aware of the confusion that exists everywhere.

**Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. {1 Jn 4:4-6 RSV}**

You will note that each of these three verses begins with an emphatic pronoun. That is true both in the Greek and the English. There is first *you* – "you are of God." Then, in Verse 5, "they are of the world"; and, in Verse 6, "we are of God." There are three distinct groups set forth here and they are not the same at all.

1. The first group is addressed as "little children." These are the readers of this letter from the Apostle John and they are said to be "of God."

Here obviously are Christians whom John declares have overcome the false teachers; that is, they have escaped their blandishments, and have not been deluded by their error. They have heard all the arguments of the false teachers and have successfully been enabled to see through them and to see the truth. So he says, "You are of God and you have overcome these false teachers."

Now, what is important in this verse is to note the ground of their victory. How was it that they overcame? If there is any way that you and I can escape the extreme pressures of theological error today, it will be by this same way. This way is indicated not so much by observing what he says as what he does not say. These "little children" who are "of God" overcame the false teachers with all their subtle, pernicious error so beautifully and attractively presented, first, not because they had a superior intelligence. You'll notice that it says nothing about them being smarter than the teachers. Nor was it because they had been subjected to intense training in the cults. There is no word about that either. Nor is it that they had been supported and bulwarked by clever arguments with which they were able to answer the errors of the teachers. Nor was it their broad theological knowledge. There is none of this. John says, "you overcame them because greater is he that is in you than he who is in the world." In other words, it was not anything these Christians had that delivered them, it was the One who dwelt within them. It was the greatness of God that kept them straight. It was the fact that God was greater than the spirit that was at work behind the teachers of error. This is what will keep us straight today.

When you look around at the success of evil in history, and especially in our day, you can see that the enemy has great power. Think of our world and all that it is going through in terms of agony, struggle, evil, violence, and heartache, with confusion abounding on every side and no statesmen able to see any further than the end of his nose. All of them in one way or another, are publicly admitting that they don't know any answers – they do not know the way out. Think of the despair that spreads like the tides of the sea across whole nations today.

I learned this morning that one out of every four suicides in Sweden is that of a teenager, and the suicide rate is mounting everywhere today.

Why this terrible wave of despair? When we think of the violence, the passion, the tears, and the death with which our world is characterized, we can see something of the greatness of the power of the enemy. No wonder someone has said:

"Our race had a hopeful beginning,  
But man spoiled his chances by sinning,  
We hope that the story will end in God's  
glory,  
But at present the other side's winning."

It does look that way, doesn't it? But it isn't – despite all the appearances. God is greater than the power of the enemy. In fact, it is almost ludicrous to put it that way. God is so incomparably greater than there is no contest whatsoever. This is where the eye of faith must always turn in hours of darkness, discomfort, or despair; turn to what the Scriptures reveal as the truth about God and how incomparably greater he is than anything that is present among men or behind men. Read of God's greatness in Isaiah, the 40th chapter. What an encouraging chapter that is. I turn to it frequently these days. The prophet cries out at the unbelief of the people of God in Verse 21,

**Have you not known? Have you not heard?**

**Has it not been told you from the beginning? {Isa 40:21a RSV}**

"What is the matter with you people," he is saying. "Why all this gloom and despair? Why this mood of pessimism? Why this wringing of the hands and rending of your clothes? Haven't you been told what God is like?" He goes on:

**Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?  
It is he who sits above the circle of the earth,  
and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;  
who stretches out the heavens like a curtain;**



**and spreads them like a tent to dwell  
in;  
who brings princes to naught,  
and makes the rulers of the earth as  
nothing. {Isa 40:21b-23 RSV}**

**To whom then will you compare me,  
that I should be like him? says the  
Holy One.  
Lift up your eyes on high ... {Isa  
40:25-26a RSV}**

That is what people need to do in these days of  
darkness.

**Lift up your eyes on high and see:  
who created these?  
He who brings out their host by num-  
ber,  
calling them all by name;  
by the greatness of his might,  
and because he is strong in power ...  
{Isa 40:26 RSV}**

**Why do you say, O Jacob,  
and speak, O Israel,  
“My way is hid from the Lord,” {Isa  
40:27a RSV}**

Imagine that! Do you think that God is un-  
aware of what is happening in your life and the  
problems that you are going through? Why do  
you talk like this?

**“and my right is disregarded by my  
God”? {Isa 40:27b RSV}**

Would that we could get men to hear that today  
when so many are insisting upon their rights  
and saying that no one is standing up for them.  
The prophet says, “Imagine thinking that your  
right has been disregarded by God.”

**Have you not known? Have you not  
heard?  
The Lord is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary, ...  
{Isa 40:28a RSV}**

**He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he in-  
creases strength. {Isa 40:29 RSV}**

Do you remember what Paul says in his  
first letter to the Corinthians as he came into  
Corinth, that beautiful city of culture and re-  
finement with its love of great wisdom and the  
philosophers and the great thinkers of the  
golden age of Greece, how he forswore every  
approach on the basis of human wisdom and  
said, “I decided to know nothing among you  
save Jesus Christ and him crucified,” {1 Cor  
2:2 KJV}. The reason he gave was that the  
weakness of God is stronger than men and the  
foolishness of God is wiser than men. That is,  
even when God acts in some way that seems to  
be utterly weak, it is still stronger than any-  
thing that man can do. When he says things  
that appear to be utter folly, foolishness in our  
eyes, remember that if you follow those, they  
will prove to be wiser than anything that man  
has ever said. That is the greatness of God.  
God is greater than all else. “He who is in you  
is greater than he who is in the world.”

I love that wonderful cry of triumph on the  
part of the Apostle Paul in Romans 11 after he  
concludes his great treatise on the providence  
of God and the free will of man with the cry,

**O the depth of the riches and wisdom  
and knowledge of God! How un-  
searchable are his judgments and how  
inscrutable his ways! [past finding out.]  
“For who has known the mind of the  
Lord,  
or who has been his counselor?”  
“Or who has given a gift to him  
that he might be repaid?”  
For from him and through him and to  
him are all things. To him be glory for  
ever. {Rom 11:33-36 RSV}**

God is greater – incomparably greater –  
than the wisdom of the enemy.

Now the point of all this is, as John brings  
out, that all this incomparable, superior wis-  
dom is available to the humblest Christian be-  
liever, so there isn't a chance, not a chance,  
that he will be swept away by the silken errors  
of the day, attractive and alluring as they may  
be, if he combines the two things together that  
John mentions here. These two factors guaran-  
tee deliverance. They are the relationship of  
being “of God” and of being “little children.”  
You see, it is not by accident that John uses

this title, “little children,” for that is the name that indicates the trust – the childlike trust of one who believes the Word of God. Now, you don’t have to fully understand it; simply accept it, trust it, and act on it. You will discover that all the wisdom and greatness and superior intelligence of God is imparted in that simple word, and, though it may appear foolish to others, it is wiser than men. He who in childlike faith trusts the Word to guide him through life, acting upon it, regardless of how widespread are the opinions of men who speak contrary to it, will find that he will be safely kept through all entrapping errors. He can sing as we do sometimes sing together,

“Thro’ many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
‘Tis grace hath bro’t me safe thus far  
And grace will lead me home.”

God is greater, and it is this simple trust in his wisdom that makes it possible for you to lay hold of all the greatness of God.

Now it is right here where the subtle attack of the enemy occurs. Through the years I have watched students come here to Stanford University, San Jose State, Foothill College and other schools where they are often exposed to clever arguments to undermine Christian faith. This not only occurs in universities, but is everywhere today. The world, in its general outlook, is hostile to the faith of Christians. There is no question about that. But often in these places there is a very clever and subtle approach to unbelief. I have seen it happen many times that those who have been raised in godly homes, raised to believe the Scriptures, have entered college and have found their faith gradually and subtly undermined by the clever arguments of those whom they respect and honor as teachers, men of intelligence, men of perceptiveness and insight, and apparent understanding of the ways of life.

It always begins the same way. They swallow first the rather subtle line that it is necessary for each to think for himself, to judge everything by the light of whether it appears reasonable to him. There is never any examination of that basic premise, though what it is really saying is that the mind of man becomes

the ultimate test, the ultimate authority of all life. It is necessary for man to reason and it is necessary for him to think for himself and to examine things. But we are creatures under God, and we never can examine accurately or rightly until we begin with the basic recognition that all of man’s thinking, blinded and shadowed as it is with the confusion of sin, must be measured by the Word of God. There is the ultimate authority. There is the test. There is what can help us to know whether we are right or wrong, whether we are living according to reality or drifting off into the never-never-land of relativity and fantasy. That is the test. This is how the drift into error begins. They forget that the authority they are challenging is that of Jesus Christ himself, for the authority of the Scriptures is the authority of Christ. He himself accepted them. He said they were the Word of God. Everything in the book is wrapped up with the authority of the Lord Jesus himself, and that is ultimately where all Christian faith rests. We have committed ourselves to the fact that this one who appeared among us as a man in history knew more about life than anyone else that has ever lived. He understood it from the beginning to the end, and came down, as he said, from heaven, understanding the things of God and the deep things of men. That is why he did not need anyone to tell him what was in man because he knew men and he knew what was in their hearts. This is the one who solved the unsolvable problems of human life, who rose from the dead! Who ever has done that in human history, who has ever presented those kind of credentials to be believed? It all comes back to the authority of Jesus Christ.

Now you don’t begin with the authority of Scripture, obviously not. It is wrong for Christians to get the idea that the first thing we have to convince people of in presenting the Christian faith is that they must accept the Bible as true. No one accepts the Bible on that basis. This is unintelligent and unreasonable. We should never ask them to do this. What they are asked to accept is the living Christ, the Lord Jesus, to come into a personal relationship with him and then having come to know him, and having discovered in their own life that he is real, that he lives, that he delivers,

that he changes, that he transforms, on that basis, on that unshakable experience which they themselves have encountered, confirming the objective testimony of the Scriptures, they are to accept the authority of the Word of God. That is quite different, isn't it? When they once come to Christ, then they are to accept the Word, and, if they trust it in simple, childlike faith, they will discover that it has a way of taking them safely past all the devious errors of men and all the clever stratagems of the enemy, into living life as God intended life to be lived.

Recently a number of us were having a conversation together, and, as so often seems to be happening these days, the topic turned to Bishop Pike. As we discussed him, and his popularity among people today, and the fact that he has said some rather startling things, one of the members of the group said a very significant thing. He said, "You know, if Bishop Pike would just admit that he isn't an authority in religious matters, if he would just acknowledge his own heart's need, I think he could learn a great deal because behind that facade is probably a very hungry heart."

Now that is exactly what John is saying. It is the attitude of being a little child that is necessary. That is the teachable attitude. We are to come to the Scriptures always and forever as little children, needing to be taught out of the wisdom and greatness and superior intelligence of God. One of the most helpful verses to me as a young Christian, which I pass on to any young Christians here is Proverbs 3:5-6:

**Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not to your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your path. {cf, Prov 3:5-6 KJV}**

What a guide through life that is. God is greater than the spirit of the world.

2. Now look at the second verse, Verse 5:

**They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them. {1 Jn 4:5 RSV}**

"They" here are the false teachers of all varieties, including those who rant and rave

and those who speak in cultured tones and with apparent logic. They are "of the world." The one revealing thing about them is that they say what the world wants to hear; therefore, they are almost invariably popular. Popularity generally accompanies these teachers. They find an easy and quick popularity.

Have you noticed it? Let one of these theologians come out with some startling statement that denies some basic fundamental Christian truth and it is spread across the papers immediately. Soon they form a "school of thought" and this begins to spread and others jump on the bandwagon. The world listens to them. Why? Because they are saying what the world wants to hear. And what is that? Well, if you analyze what they are saying, you will find that running as an undercurrent through everything they say is a basic assumption of the greatness and glory of man. That is it. The world loves to hear man exalted:

- How smart we are.
- How mature we are.
- How we have "come of age" at last.
- How we are right on the verge of being able to manipulate every earthly power to our advantage.
- How clever we are at solving the problems of earth.

That is said in the face of the most astounding and appalling chaos existing on every side and growing every moment. Isn't it amazing that man can have such intellectual pride in the face of such appalling failure? Yet that is what the world wants to hear and so the popularity of these false teachers is assured.

A few weeks' ago just such an incident occurred when this woman in Washington, D. C., who purports to be a prophet, announcing things that are going to happen, evidently gave some prediction about an earthquake occurring on the west coast. One of my children came home from school and said that the children in school were troubled by this, terribly disturbed

by it, and some of them were afraid the whole {San Francisco} Peninsula was about to sink into the Pacific Ocean. People were worried by this and frightened by it. Isn't it amazing that someone, speaking quite apart from the inspiration of the Word of God or the Spirit of God, should be so widely believed? But read a passage from Hosea or Daniel or Isaiah or one of the great prophets who accurately predicts what is coming in human history and people yawn and go to sleep.

Now popularity is not necessarily a mark of false prophets. God in his grace has sometimes allowed teachers of truth to be very popular; otherwise, how can you explain a man like Billy Graham? But the test is whether the message glorifies man or God.

3. Now John concludes in Verse 6, "We are of God." Who does he mean? Here he is speaking of the apostles, of which he was one. "We apostles" he says, in contrast to you who are Christians, are "of God." We form a special band of authoritative apostles who were with the Lord Jesus and have been commissioned to the task of declaring authoritatively the full message of Christianity.

**We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. {1 Jn 4:6a RSV}**

John could say that the apostles were of God because he, with the other twelve, were one with Jesus Christ. They had entered into a union and a relationship to him that grew out of hearing his teachings. John, himself, you remember, describes this in his Gospel. He says this awareness came to them all rather gradually:

They watched him. They listened to him. They followed him. They saw the things that he did. They heard the things he said, and gradually there dawned on them, as they listened, an increasing awareness which John records in these words – "We beheld his glory as of the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," {cf, John 1:14 RSV}.

Then, as they watched him, their faith was weakened and shattered by the crucifixion, but on the morning of the resurrection they were

convinced again, almost against their will; they could hardly believe this incredible thing that he who was dead was alive again. But they had to acknowledge it by the evidence their own senses gave them. Here was one who had broken through the bonds of death. They saw him, they handled him, they felt him, they touched him, they lived with him again for forty days and forty nights and they were convinced.

Then, finally, on the day of Pentecost, all doubt was taken away forever when, in the courts of the temple, as the Lord Jesus had promised, the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them and they were commissioned to be the men to begin the task of heralding out this great message unto the far corners of the earth. That is why he says "we are of God"; therefore, those who are of God listen to us. Here is another test of truth and error. He says,

**By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. {1 Jn 4:6b RSV}**

Do men receive the apostolic witness, or do they think that to sit behind a desk in some American city removed by some five to eight thousand miles from the scene of these amazing events and by twenty centuries of history, somehow makes them know more than the apostles of the Lord Jesus? "No," John says, "we are of God and those who are of God listen to us."

Remember, that was one of the things which encouraged the Apostle Paul when he came into the Greek city of Corinth. He had encountered much opposition there. A rising tide of resistance was mounting against him. One night the Lord appeared to him when he was sorely tempted by discouragement and said to him, "Fear not Paul, for no man will set on thee to hurt thee, but I have yet many people in this city," {cf, Acts 18:9-10}. Now what did he mean? These "many people" were not Christians yet. They were pagans. But they were "of God" in the sense that they were willing to listen. They were open to the Word of God. They were ready to hear what God had to say. So God said, "Paul, while you go about the city preaching the Word of God, don't worry. Out in that crowd, though you

won't be able to tell them from any others, are some in whom my Spirit is working and they will hear what you have to say. Others will not hear, but those who hear will come to you." This is what Jesus meant when he said, "All that my Father has given me shall come unto me," {cf, John 6:38-40}. This is the sign then of truly open hearts. Do they hear the apostolic witness? Do they believe what the apostles have said?

May I add this note, however, to all this. This is the test of what to believe, not whom to befriend. Christians sometimes make the mistake of thinking that if someone doesn't give immediate response or receive the Word of God, they are to cut off any contact with them, commit them to Hades, and go their way. No, no! This has nothing to do with whether we befriend people or not. We need to get to know them and show them compassion and understanding.

What John is writing about here is how to know whom to believe, or what to follow. This is the test:

- Does it acknowledge the historic person of Jesus Christ?

- Does it follow him, believe him?
- Does it accept the apostolic witness?

This is the way that we shall know the difference between truth and error today.

### **Prayer:**

Our Father, how grateful we are for this wonderful word, this word of wisdom, magnified even above thy name. How grateful we are that you have given it to us at the cost of blood, and sweat and tears. The death of many who have supported it and befriended it has occurred in order that we might have this word. Lord, we pray that we may value it, read it, search it, seek its wisdom in every relationship of life, knowing that here are the answers, if we will but give ourselves to finding them. We pray that we might be found faithful servants, faithful students, workmen who need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. We ask in Thy name, Amen.

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## Love made Visible

by Ray C. Stedman

Who will deny that love is the dominant theme of the age in which we live? Everyone talks about love, though not everyone practices it. A kind friend sent me a recent survey conducted by a team of professional pollsters, asking the question, "What do people love the most in life?" Categories were children, animals, God, the United States, their enemies, and themselves. It was discovered that 92% of the people said they loved children, barely edging out God at 86%. The United States, surprisingly enough, came third at 75%; animals were fourth, at 66%. Only 33% would acknowledge loving themselves (fifth place), and only 20% confessed to loving their enemies, all of which probably reveals that Americans love surveys most of all, and understand themselves least of all.

The Christian faith has always emphasized preeminently two very important things – truth and love. Jesus Christ himself was the preeminent expression of both of these – truth and love – held in perfect balance. He was fully the expression of truth, and fully the expression of love. Therefore Christianity, which is but the expression of his life in the world, is, to use that wonderful expression of the Apostle Paul, to be an experience of "truthing in love." That is the literal rendering of the phrase which Paul uses in Ephesians, translated in our Authorized Version, "speaking the truth in love," {Eph 4:15 KJV}. Literally it is "truthing in love," living the truth in love. This is what Christianity is to be.

Now, we have studied, from time to time, the tactics of the devil in this modern world by which he seeks to overthrow and disrupt Christian faith. We have discovered that one of the most commonly employed tactics of the enemy is simply to overemphasize a truth, to make it a half-truth, or a completely distorted aspect of truth. This is what the devil does in this matter of truth and love. All he needs to do in order to distort Christianity is to produce the one without the other. Any survey of

our present world will indicate how successfully he has done this.

To emphasize love at the expense of truth is to produce what is usually called liberalism, with its blindness to the hard realities of sin and evil in human life, and its glowing proclamations of sweetness and light. On the other hand, to emphasize truth at the expense of love, produces a cold, hard, legalistic fundamentalism which, though it holds to the right creed, is as empty of genuine Christian life as is the former. Increasingly, I meet individuals whose Christian faith has been sorely shaken, if not completely disrupted, by exposure to vicious attack and railing abuse from certain Christians who are self-appointed defenders of the faith and accusers of the brethren. In the light of what the Apostle John has to say to us now, beginning with Verse 7 of Chapter 4, this kind of conduct on the part of professed Christians raises serious questions about the genuineness of their faith:

**Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. {1 Jn 4:7-8 RSV}**

Three times in the passage immediately surrounding this, the phrase "love one another" occurs. It is here in Verse 7, also in Verse 11 ("Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"), and in Verse 12 ("No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us..."). Obviously, the primary exhortation here is this three-fold repetition, "love one another."

The nature of this love is inherent in the very statement John makes. "Love one another," he says. Thereby it is indicated that love is not to be only for those who are pleasant to us, or who are nice, congenial, clever people. We are not to love because people are lovable, but because each is another. Every one is a person, capable of a unique relationship to God, and therefore not a thing to be

dealt with impersonally, or to be opposed or accepted as it suits our purpose, but a living, breathing, searching creation of God, just like us. That is why we are to love one another, without regard to what that person is like. This defines what love is meant when the Bible talks about love. True love is an interest in and a concern for another person, just because he is a person, and for no other reason. It does not matter whether he is rich or poor, black or white, old or young, male or female, Republican or Democrat; it makes absolutely no difference. He or she is a person.

A high school girl said recently: "You know, all my life I've been doing like everyone else. I've been kind to my friends, and polite to strangers, and nasty to all those I didn't like, until it suddenly dawned on me that Christians are not to be kind only to those who are nice to them, or to their friends, but Christians are to be kind to everyone because they are people, and because we're Christians."

That puts it exactly. That is what love is. It takes no notice of what a person is like, or what he does, or how he dresses, or how he looks, or anything about his background. It sees one thing only, and that is, "Here is another person, another one like me with all the longings, the heartaches, the searchings, the problems, the aspirations, the hopes, dreams, and frustrations of life like me. Here is another one, struggling as I am to face the problems of life. What can I do to help?" That is love.

In these two verses we have this great exhortation to love one another because, as John marvelously declares, that kind of love can only originate with God. This kind of love is "of God." In fact, God *is* this kind of love, God *is* love. Therefore, wherever the life of God is present that love is found. And if that love is not found, the life of God is not present. The argument is clear, is it not? It is so simple. It is no good claiming that you know God if the love of God is not found in your life.

- If you cannot treat people objectively and see through the irritating qualities that may offend you to be nice to them because they are in need of love;
- If your reaction to those who offend you is one of opposition, rejection, and instant antagonism;

- Then it is no good saying you belong to him. That is not God's life, that is not God's love.

John's argument is, if the life of God is present in us, then the love of God will be there too.

Now, here we come face to face with that tremendous declaration of the Scriptures, "God is love." As John R. W. Stott says, "This is the most comprehensive and sublime of all the biblical affirmations of God's being." It means that at the root of all God does is love. No matter how difficult it may appear to us, the fountain from which all God's activity stems is this kind of self-giving love. Even his judgments, his condemnations, arrive from love. We need to understand this. Judgment is not something separate from love. If you convince me that a holy, loving God cannot judge an evil being, then you will also convince me that he cannot love him. It is inherent in the quality of love to be antagonistic to that which opposes the thing loved. You see that in every mother. Attack a child with the mother present and see how that mother-love flames out in immediate resentment, opposition, and antagonism to all that threatens her loved one. God's love is the same. Inherent in it is the quality of judgment. God is a purifying fire, consuming and burning away the dross in order that he might preserve the gold. That, incidentally, is how the book of Hebrews describes him. "Our God is a consuming fire," {Heb 12:29}. Love is not always easy to live with because of that very quality, yet it is the most attractive and wonderful thing in the world because of its warmth and its all-embracing inclusiveness that takes in all kinds and all conditions, without looking for merit on the part of the object loved. That is the love of God.

Dr. H. A. Ironside used to tell of a woman who came to him and said, "I don't have any use for the Bible and for all this Christian superstition. It's enough for me to know that God is love." He said to her, "Well, do you know that?" She said, "Of course I know that, I've known it all my life." "Well," he said, "do you think that everyone knows that?" "Oh, yes," she said, "everyone knows God is love." "Well," he said, "do you think that woman over in India, who is persuaded by her religion to take her little child and throw it into the river as an offering to the crocodiles, has any concept or idea that God is love?" She said, "Well, no, but that's mere superstition." "Do you think that

that savage in Africa, bowing down to his idols of wood and stone, trembling with fear lest they should strike back at him and destroy his crops and take away his children and even injure his own person, do you think he has any idea that God is love?" he asked. She said, "No, but in every civilized country we know that God is love." "Well," he said, "how do we know that? How do we know that God is love? Do the ancients teach this? Do the other religions of earth teach that God is love, and show that God is love? Let me tell you something. Do you know that the only reason we know that God is love is because he sent his Son and manifested himself as love? The book that tells about the Lord Jesus Christ is the only book in the world that contains the idea that the God behind all created matter is a God of love? Creation reveals his power, his greatness, and his might, but there is nothing in nature that says, 'God is love.' The only way we know it is that God manifested his love in the giving of his Son." And John moves on to declare this in Verses 9 and 10:

**In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. {1 Jn 4:9-10 RSV}**

Note again the character of love, what kind of love it is. It is love for the unlovely. "God so loved the world ..." {John 3:16a}. What world? Why, the world that you and I are part of. The world made up of men and women like you, like me. The world that consists of the people who fill the pages of our newspapers with the ugly reports that are so abounding these days.

Some time ago a mother said to me, "I've come to the place where I almost hate my son." Why? The evil in her own son had turned her against him. The evil in him had so offended her, that which was ugly and wrong in him had loomed as such a frightful thing, that she had found her love almost turned to hate.

Some time ago a husband and wife who were in my study for counseling became so angry that the husband in rage stood up, and, right in my presence, spat in his wife's face. Yet he had promised to love, honor and cherish her until death shall them

part. Why would he do such a thing? Well, because the evil and ugliness of sin in his wife (though he was not seeing the same in his own life) so enraged him that he struck out against it. It offended him. It was repulsive, revolting to him.

How angry we get sometimes at the stubbornness and insolence of others, the rudeness and hate that is manifested toward us. It makes our blood boil and our tempers rise, we burn and writhe within. Why? Well, that is what evil does, that is how ugly it is. Yet that evil is in every single heart of those born of Adam. It is constantly revealing itself to the eyes of God. It may be hidden away from others, and even from our own eyes, but God, who sees all things, sees the whole world of men in all their blatant ugliness and evil. And what is his response? Is it anger? Is it rejection? Is it judgment? Did he pour out the fires of wrath upon a world so repulsively ugly as that? Oh, no. He responded with the most costly of all loves: He gave himself, he sent his Son. In the Person of his Son, God himself came and lived among us and died upon a cross of shame in the very world his hands had made.

Why? As John says, "that we might live through him."

Is that not love? Does that not grip you? He did it that all the chains of fear, hate and evil which bind us and shackle us might be broken, these powerful forces within us might be subdued and brought into control, and quarreling, bickering, and abuse might cease between human beings. That is why he came. That it all might be replaced, not by negative nothingness, but by patience, acceptance, and the power to remain calm – "in order that we might live."

Now that is the measure of love. John says if you want to measure love, use that as your standard. Do not measure love by the warm affection of your heart toward God, the gratitude you feel toward God. Naturally, if God has blessed you, helped you, and strengthened you, you will feel a warm affection toward him arising within you, but that is not the measure of love. God is altogether lovable, so do not define love as that quality of warmth and gratitude which rises up when you meet a lovable and lovely person. That is not love. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiration for our sins." That is the sign of love. Stamped forever in human history, the greatest sign of love is a



bloody cross. If you have ever been to that cross and seen the love of God manifested there, you never can go back to a life of selfish indulgence and quarreling behavior.

Will you notice, in Verse 10, the linking of love and expiation? There are those who tell us that God's love is comparable to that of an indulgent grandfather, that he loves us so much that he will let us get away with anything. He will forgive it solely on the basis of his kindness to us. He will not demand an accounting, nor will his love ever insist on any punishment, but it is of the kind that says, "That's all right, just forget it." No, no. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and" What? – "sent his Son to be the expiation [a propitiation] for our sins." He came to satisfy justice, to meet the demands of a broken Law, to pay the full debt, to satisfy the penalty. It all must be met; it cannot be ignored. God's love is also just – love must be just – and therefore, the only love that is worth talking about is a love that satisfies justice.

Remember, we saw earlier in First John that love must be this. Love that satisfies justice – that is, righteousness. It is not mere sentiment poured out as indulgence upon someone, letting him have what he wants, or do what he likes, and paying all his bills. That is not love. It is love that satisfies justice. That alone is righteousness.

Now, in this last pair of Verses 11 and 12, we will see a declaration of the possibility of this kind of love among us, and also the perfectibility of it:

**Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. {1 Jn 4:11-12 RSV}**

Verse 11 is the answer to every lame excuse on our part which says, "Oh, I just can't love that person. You don't know what she's like. If you had to live with her (or him) as I have to, you wouldn't be able to love her, either." No, no. "Beloved, if God so loved us ..." If you have experienced this kind of love, if you have been to the cross and have felt the overwhelming cleansing of God's love for you, despite the antagonism and hatefulness you have shown him, and your loving of your own way and wanting to do what you like; if you have felt the cleansing grace of God wiping that all out with-

out any recriminations or calling up of the past, forgetting and forgiving it all, then as John says, you not only can love someone else but you "ought to" – you owe it. That is where the word *ought* comes from: owe it. You "owe it" to love one another.

This is why Paul could say in Romans 1, "I am a debtor to every man," {cf, Rom 1:14}. I owe something to everybody. And he himself said later on in that very epistle, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another," {Rom 13:8 KJV}. We owe it, because we have within us the fountain of love in the life of God. Now if you do not have the life of God, of course, you cannot love one another like this. Do not try – admit that you cannot. Above all, do not come up with the shabby, shoddy, sleazy imitation of love that is nice to another's face and cuts him to death behind his back. That is not love. Or merely to tolerate another for a time. That is not love. Unless you have the life of God, you cannot love. But if you have the life of God – that is the whole point – you can love like this and you ought to do it. God, in you, can love through you and will love through you. All he is waiting for is the acquiescence of your will, your willingness to love; then he will do the loving. So, beloved, "if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" with this kind of unjudging love, not basing it on the qualities we see in the other person, but loving just because he is a person.

Verse 12 declares a great and daring concept: It recognizes that God is invisible and no man has ever seen God. How true this is. Even in the Old Testament days, though there appeared manifestations of God in human form, these were but God in human disguise. It was not God made visible. There is a sense in which it is possible to say, I have never seen you, and you have never seen me. You see this tabernacle, this shabby, rather tattered tent in which I live. But you have not seen me, and I have not seen you. Men, like God, are spirits and invisible. I can feel the force of your personality, and I can certainly see that there is a spirit living in that tent you are in, but I have not seen you, and you have not seen me. So no man has ever seen God, at any time. God is a Spirit, and therefore invisible. Thus the love of God cannot be demonstrated in nature, cannot be made visible in God's creation.

Well, where is it made visible? John says, "If we love one another. God abides in us and his love

is perfected,” i.e., reaches its final end, “in us.” That is where men see God’s love, and it is the only place it can be seen.

The fact of an indwelling God becomes visible only when we manifest love one to another, the kind of love that we have been talking about. As long as we are nice only to our friends or to those who are nice to us, no one has any idea that God is around. But when we start being nice to those who are nasty to us, when we start returning good for evil, when we start being patient, tender, thoughtful and considerate of those who are stubborn, obstinate, and selfish, and say difficult things to us, then people get the sense that God is somewhere around, close at hand, that he is in the situation. Then God’s dwelling in us becomes visible to them.

Men today are not acquainted very much with the *Gospel according to Matthew*, or Luke, or John, but every man is somewhere reading the *Gospel according to You*. If they cannot read it clearly, it is because there is not much manifestation of the love of God in your life as a Christian. But it is there, if God’s life is there. So the appeal of the Apostle John is, “let us” do this. This is not an automatic thing; it demands also the agreement of our will:

- Let us deliberately love one another.
- Let us make channels for this life to be manifested.
- Let us allow it to be expressed in deliberate activities

of kindness, thoughtfulness and consideration, one to another, and of understanding, patience and tolerance of each other’s views.

And then note what he says here. The result is such a daring thing that actually some of the commentators are so staggered by it they refuse to accept what it says.

What John says is that God’s love, this love pouring out from this amazing Being whose concern for the vast millions on earth is individual, each one wrapped in his amazing love; this love is perfected, only when it becomes visible in us.

Is that not amazing? God’s love reaches its ultimate and final conclusion when it becomes visible in us. It is an abortive thing, incomplete, and, therefore, unreachable, incomprehensible, until it finds its manifestation in a living human being, in flesh and blood, incarnate again in you and me.

Here is a world dying for love. The word is on everyone’s lips, they are talking about it on every side, thereby indicating the vast, surging hunger of the heart. And we are the only channels by which the love the world is searching for can ever be loosed among humanity. Therefore, brethren, above all else, put on love.

Let us love one another and be known as people who love one another. For, your concern for another, or my concern for another, completes God.

#### Prayer:

What a barren world this is, our Father, apart from the manifestation of the great warmth of love. How empty life would be if this great quality were withdrawn. And yet how true are these words of the apostle, you alone are the source of this love, the only kind that satisfies, the only kind that meets the clamant hunger of the heart. So, in this moment, our Father, we pray that these words may burn themselves into our hearts, and that we may recognize ourselves as called preeminently, above all else, to this great task of being a demonstration, an abundant demonstration, of this kind of love. We ask that you will help us to take it seriously, and to begin to reflect this immediately. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

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## Love's Accomplishments

by Ray C. Stedman

This week an editorial caught my eye as I was reading through the paper. The heading said, "Love Menaces The City." It struck me rather forcibly that love should ever be considered a menace. This week in Tampa, and in Cleveland, and in other cities, there has been violence in the streets menacing the life of a city, but in San Francisco it is love that is a menace. In the editorial there were quotations from Dr. Eric Hutchinson, who is professor of chemistry at Stanford University, who was discussing the situation in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco, and the hippie society there with its emphasis on love. Among other things, he said these perceptive words:

"The proclaimed doctrine of the hippies, that they turn away from a hateful, unloving world and establish their own society of love, as they call it, seems to me has to be either selfish, materially erroneous, or completely hypocritical. I think it is selfish, in the sense that it is no great problem to love those who share the same viewpoints and habits as oneself. It is a greater sacrifice and constructive tolerance, to love those whose point of view is radically different.

"To escape the responsibilities of loving those whom we do not like by alienating oneself from the rest of society and entering a self-made ghetto, strikes me as being about the most ignoble form of self-centeredness that one could conceive – quite the opposite of the society of love. It is in fact the worst kind of childish, sulky withdrawal from a society that one cannot control and that one is unwilling to convert."

Those are unusually keen insights into the character and nature of love. It is easy to love those who love us, and who share the same viewpoints that we share. But that is not really love.

This is the very thing that John has been pointing out, this is not true love. Yet we stand in great danger of reflecting the same attitude toward the hippies that we deplore in them. If we withdraw ourselves from any contact or concern about them, because of their unusual habits or bizarre forms of dress, we are displaying the same lovelessness, the same inability to love those who do not correspond to what we like, as they do, and that is not what love is.

Last week, in studying this outstanding treatise on love here, we saw what true love really is, what godlike love is. It is the acceptance of another person because he is a person, quite regardless of whether he is dressed the right way, has the right status in society, belongs to the same class that we do, has the same color of skin, or whatever. Love is the acceptance of an individual simply because he is an individual. It is a willingness to have fellowship with him, talk to him, share life together to some limited or more extensive degree, only because you are fellow members of a race, fellow human creatures. It means you do so without requiring that he change before you establish the relationship. That is true love.

Also, as John brought out so beautifully in the section we looked at last, this is the nature of God's love toward the world. The world of human society is not beautiful; it is an ugly thing. Hidden under the surface are all kinds of rancid and bitter reactions. Behind the facades of even the most gentle and gracious personalities, outwardly, are thoughts, desires, and reactions that are ugly and cancerous. But God loves the world; he accepts it, he has contact with it. As John says, he manifested his love in the sending of his Son, at great cost, bearing shame, abuse and heartache. He came into the world, the very world his hands had made, and died here upon a cross of shame. Thus this is the nature

of Christ's love for us. He became a propitiation for our sins, taking them all upon himself. In the mystery of those hours when darkness fell across the face of the land, some strange and remarkable thing happened to the lonely sufferer upon the cross. The sins of the world were laid on him and he became then the propitiation for our sins. His total willingness to do that marked the full extent of his love for us.

Now where God's life is, God's love will be. This is the whole argument of this central part of John's letter. As we saw last, he says in Verse 12, "No man has ever seen God; [but] if we love one another, God abides in us [i.e., it is manifest that God abides in us] and his love is perfected in us." It is these two themes – God's abiding in us and the perfecting of his love – which form the subject of John's final discussion of this theme of maintaining love.

First, there is **the relationship of belief to love**, described in Verses 13-16:

**By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. {1 Jn 4:13-16 RSV}**

If you will recall, this chapter began with a warning against wrong belief. "Test the spirits," says John, "don't believe every voice that speaks in the name of Jesus these days, but test the spirits, whether they be of God." There is one supreme test, doctrinally. There must be an acknowledgment that Jesus is the Christ, that he has come in the flesh, and is the predicted One, this Jesus of Nazareth. By this you can tell the difference between the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. That is John's emphasis on belief.

Then, in Verse 7, he moves right on to talk about love with an exhortation to love one another. Now, in Verses 13-16, he brings these two together, belief and love, and shows us the relationship between them. It is belief that produces love!

Perhaps you have never thought of it that way, for most of us think of love as produced by happy

circumstances, or by nice people, or by spending time together. I suspect that many of us are quite vague as to where it really originates. But John tells us.

"Faith," he says, "produces love," and he proves his point here. In Verses 13 and 14, he is referring to himself and the rest of the apostles by the word we. "By this," he says, "we know that we abide in him." That is, we apostles understand that we are of God and "abide in him" (i.e., have a continuous relationship to God). How? Well, "because he has given us of his Spirit."

Now, it is not "because he has given us his Spirit." It is true that on the Day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God was poured out upon these apostles and the other believers, all their doubts about Jesus Christ were forever settled. When the Spirit of God came to perform his function of taking the things of Christ and making him real to them, they realized that they knew Jesus better on the Day of Pentecost than they ever knew him when he was here in the flesh. They understood his purposes and his program far clearer than they ever did when he walked, lived, talked among them. The Spirit could make Christ more real than he ever was when they knew him in the flesh, and that convinced them that they were "of God."

But what he really says here is, literally, "he has given us out of his Spirit," i.e., he has poured out from his Spirit, by means of his Spirit, something. What is it? Well, the context helps us to know. It is love.

Remember that Paul says in Romans 5, "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who is given unto us," {Rom 5:5 KJV}. Love, God's love, the kind that accepts people for what they are regardless of what they are like, is a product only of the Spirit of God. He has given us out of his own Spirit, and, John says, that is why we know that we are of God, because the kind of love that only God can produce is in our lives and in our hearts.

Now he goes on:

**And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. {1 Jn 4:14 RSV}**

Here you can see clearly that he must mean only the apostles. "We have seen," he says, "we beheld him, we touched him, we felt him, we knew

that he was alive from the dead, and we now testify that he was sent as the Savior of the world.” This kind of witnessing, of course, followed the coming of the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, as Jesus had said it would. “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses to me ... unto the uttermost parts of the earth,” {cf, Acts 1:8 KJV}. They began to testify after they received the Holy Spirit. John reminds us that they had the evidence of his love by the Spirit, and they began to pour out in power the testimony that the Father had sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

Notice something important about that witness? He says that “the Father sent the Son.” There are many people who are confused about this, and think that Jesus became the Son of God when he was born as a babe in Bethlehem’s manger. But he was the Son before he came. The Father sent the Son. Christ Jesus was the eternal Son of God, and always the Son. This relationship of Father and Son is an eternal relationship. It was as the Son that he came to become the Savior of the world.

Again, notice that it does not say that he came to save the world. He does not save the world. He came as the Savior of the world, i.e., all the world could be saved if they would be. But as the Scriptures make abundantly clear, it is only those who believe that are saved. Jesus said to certain of his own day, “Ye will not come unto me that you might have life,” {John 5:40 KJV}. And again, “if you believe not that I am he, you shall die in your sins, and where I am thither you cannot come,” {John 8:21 KJV}. So, though he came to be the Savior of the world, in the sense of providing a redemption adequate for everyone, everywhere, it is only to those who lay hold of it by faith in his word, and make it personal in their lives, that it becomes experiential and evidential.

Now, John says, this that happened to the apostles will happen to you, if you believe.

**Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. {1 Jn 4:15-16 RSV}**

When you believe and confess that Jesus is the Son of God (and that certainly means more than

simply believing that he is divine, it means that he is God, he is the Lord, to you), it proves that God’s life is in you. Where his life is, his love will be, because love always follows the life of God. Therefore, you will begin to love. These are the marks, John says. Faith produces love. Your faith produces the love that accepts persons without distinction. The theology which robs Christ of his deity also robs man of the one belief that can generate love within him. Thus, to weaken faith is to deaden love.

How greatly we need to understand that in these days when there is so much talk about love and yet so little evidence of it. Love comes from faith, and if there is not this relationship of faith, belief in the Son of God, there cannot be the life of God and there cannot be the love of God. This is why we are seeing the phenomenon of hippies who are turning from what they regard as the phony love of the world (and in many ways they are quite right about that) and forming a society in which they produce exactly the same kind of phony love. That is why we see the square world, with its talk about love, rejecting this phony love of hippiedom, but going right on in its own way, producing phony love. Love comes from faith and without the relationship of faith it is impossible to have love. The only really loving person, then, is one whom, as John puts it, “abides in love,” i.e., habitually accepts other people as persons without respect to their niceness or any other thing; the one who, without strain, without effort, regards people as people, sees them not as objects or obstacles, but as individuals, and reflects love to them and accepts them on that basis. That is what love is and that is how it is produced.

John goes on now in this next section to show us **the tremendous practical accomplishments of this kind of love.**

- First, there is confidence in the day of judgment:

**In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence in the day of judgment, because as he is so are we in this world. {1 Jn 4:17 RSV}**

“Confidence in the day of judgment”: I doubt if there is a single person who does not

realize, deep in his heart, that at the end of life there is an accounting. We must stand before the Lord, our Maker. It does not make any difference whether we are Christians or non-Christians. Our relationship with him may be different, but we must all come face to face with the Lord himself. He stands at the end of every path we may be taking today, and we must come at last to a day of accounting. This is what Paul declared to the Athenian intellectuals on Mars Hill, "God has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all men by raising him from the dead," {cf, Acts 17:31}. That day lies ahead of us all.

But when we stop to think about it we cannot help but ask ourselves, how am I going to do in that day? Can I pass that unconscious test that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 25, when he stands to judge the nations and divides the sheep on his right hand, the goats on his left? He will say to the people on his right, "Blessed are you of my Father; enter into the inheritance which the Father has prepared for you from the foundation of the earth," {cf, Matt 25:34, ff}. Why? "Because when I was naked and hungry and in prison and sick, you visited me, you helped me, you did something for me, you ministered to my need." Do you remember their reaction? "Lord, when did this happen? We weren't aware of it. We don't remember seeing you, we don't remember doing these things."

Again, he says to those on his left, "Depart into everlasting judgment," {Matt 25:41, ff}. Why? "Because when you saw me weak and sick and in prison, you did nothing about it. You passed on your way, you showed no concern, you displayed no compassion, you did nothing." Again, remember that they say, with surprise, "Why, Lord, when did this happen? We don't have any memory of it. We don't recall it. If we had seen you we'd have done something, but we don't even remember seeing you." Of course the searching revelation of that passage is that this is now happening all about us. Christ is in all these situations of need, and when we are confronted with someone who has a need it is Jesus who is asking our help. Our reaction to that person is our re-

action to him. There is no escaping that in this passage. We may quarrel about much else in the passage, but this is clearly what he means by this story.

Therefore is there not a question in each heart now, "When I stand before him like that, will I pass the test? Am I recognizing these situations now?" Notice that John says it is love "perfected" which gives us confidence in the day of judgment. Love which is perfected is love that is made visible in deeds. We saw that in Verse 12: "If we love one another," he says, "his love is perfected in us." It expresses itself in deeds, as he said in Chapter 3, Verse 18, "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." Love, even God's love, can never find its end, its perfection, until it is expressed in a deed or word or compassionate act. Therefore, note what John is saying: If you want to have boldness, confidence, in the day of judgment, then let love express itself, let it be perfected because it is when love is perfected with us that we have confidence for the day of judgment.

Will you pass that test?

You will if you understand what John means by this wonderful little phrase that he inserts at the end, "because as he is so are we in this world." That is one of the most profound statements in the Word of God – yet it is couched in the simplest of language – every word is a monosyllable. "As he is so are we in this world."

What does that mean to you?

Do you understand that? That simply means that as Christ is now, invisibly, we are, in this world, visibly. In other words, it is a reference to what we have been seeing all along. The secret of Christian living is not in our feeble efforts to try to do something in imitation of him or in response to his command; it is to recognize his willingness to do all that he demands in us, to live in us. It is Christ living in me. It is what Paul says, "Not I any longer trying my best to imitate and obey the commands of Jesus Christ, but my trustful, quiet, confident expectation that he will fulfill his promise to live in me, and to do through me all that he wants done." That is what this means. All that he is, is continuously available

to me. Therefore whatever I do, it is he that is doing it.

Now you can see what confidence this gives in the day of judgment. If he is going to look at my life and see the activity of himself in me, then he will not deny himself at the day of judgment. I know that what I am doing, if it stems from this source, is wholly acceptable unto him, and therefore I can have confidence in his presence.

Some years ago a group of us were in Newport Beach, California, having a Prayer Breakfast together. I recall that at the close of the breakfast, which was one of those times when it was very evident that the Spirit of God was working in unusual ways, I overheard two men speaking together. They were strangers to me, but evidently they were Christians because one of them said, "Oh, wasn't this wonderful! You know, I think God was really pleased at what happened this morning." And the other one said, "Well, he ought to be; he did it." That says it exactly, does it not? It is God's activity in us that is the basis of his approval on the day of judgment. Therefore, love expressed from this source, gives us confidence in the day of judgment, for he will not deny his own activity.

- Now the second thing that love accomplishes is in Verse 18:

**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. {1 Jn 4:18 RSV}**

Love accomplishes something, not only for the future, but now. It casts out fear now. It gives us complete freedom from fear.

Before we look further at this there is a translation we need to correct. In the RSV it says that "fear has to do with punishment," but that is not exactly right. What it really says is, "fear has punishment," not "has to do with punishment," as though it always produces it. Even more literally, perhaps, since this word for punishment comes from a root word which means to limit or to restrain, what John is saying here is that fear has limitation, fear imprisons us.

Now is that not true? Fear imprisons us. Anxieties, tensions, worries, apathy – all these things are forms of fear, and they literally imprison us, they limit us. I have known people who were unable to go outside the door of their house because of fear. I have seen Christian people who were unable to drive their cars because they were ridden with anxiety, or who were afraid to meet people, afraid to be in various circumstances. It is because fear has limitation. Fear imprisons us, narrows us in, binds us up, limits our life, pushes us into corners and keeps us there, and we cannot live as God intended us to live.

This is a common experience of life, is it not?

What is wrong? Well, John puts his finger right on it. He who fears is not perfected in love. That is the trouble, that is the analysis. Love may be in him, if the life of God is there, but it is not perfected, it is not coming out, it is not expressing itself, it is not manifest, it is not taking the form of deeds and words, it is all inside. That is the trouble. Love, perfected, casts out fear.

Now do you dare try that? What a dramatic solution to the problems of fear and anxiety, and yet, how wonderfully true it is.

I have often seen it happen. There are those who have the life of God and yet never let it out; their pride and self-pity bind them up and they do not want to show love, they are afraid to. They are afraid it will open them up to be hurt, or that it will give someone an advantage over them, and so they bottle it up, keep it in, and then they wonder why they are oppressed by anxieties, tensions, and problems of nervousness. They are limited, unable to move and do as they ought to.

But love, perfected, casts out fear. John is not talking about a perfect kind of love; it is love that is made perfect, love that is perfected, love that comes to its end and accomplishes its purpose.

I have often seen people who begin to show love to somebody else, feebly at first, tentatively, perhaps saying but a kind word, but beginning to minister to another's need. As they did, they found their own heart flooded with release and deliverance. Gradually they

were set free and able to be what they were intended to be.

Just a few months ago a couple came to see me. The woman sat in my study and told me she was a Christian, and had been for a long time, but her life had become so empty, so filled with meaningless drudgery. She had no spirit, no desire to do what she ought to do. She had a husband whom she loved, and a child, and she wanted to manifest love toward them. But she said, "Every morning when I get up I feel so dead and dull, so lifeless. I lack motivation to do my housework. I just sit around. I don't want to talk to people." What is this? It is a description of imprisonment, is it not? Someone who is in prison. As we talked together I explained to her that the problem was self-pity. She was feeling sorry for herself and blaming it on others, blaming everything that was wrong on something else. At last she began to see that if there was to be any release she had to stop this blaming of others and see that it was her own unwillingness to lay hold of the riches of God, and to express the love that was in her. That was the problem.

She went back home and time went by. I did not hear from her and I did not know how things were going, until one day a letter came. I wish I could share it with you. She said, "Oh, I just want to tell you what God has done in my life. When I went home after our talk, I heard what you said, but I didn't agree with you. I spent weeks trying to fight what was wrong, and I kept trying to blame everybody else – my husband, my in-laws, everybody else was wrong. I was feeling sorry for myself, but I kept hearing that little voice within saying, 'The trouble is you. It is you. You're not showing love, you're not laying hold of the possibilities that God has given you.' One day I got so sick and tired of being miserable that I decided I'd try it. I decided to forget about myself and show some love and concern to others and to rejoice in what God was to me, and refusing to blame others. I still have problem periods, but, oh, what a difference! Now I love to get up in the morning. The day looks exciting and adventurous to me, and I find myself filled with joy and with love once again."

What had happened? Why, love perfected had done what God says it will do; it had cast out fear.

Finally, in these last verses, look at **love's possibility**, Verses 19-21:

**We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar: for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. {1 Jn 4:19-21 RSV}**

I like the bluntness of this apostle. He takes off the gloves and lays it right on the line. Look, he says, where does love come from? Don't forget, we love because he first loved us. That is where it comes from. If you know the love of God, if you know how fully he accepts you even when you are as stinky, nasty, and as miserable as you are, yet he takes you, forgives you, and deals with you; then you know what love is. You can love, because you have been loved. "We love, because he first loved us." It is not, "We love him." That is not what it says. It says, "We love – anyone – because he first loved us."

Then John really takes the gloves off. He says, "Look, don't be self-deceived about this!" It is very easy to kid yourself. But if you can say, "I love God," and yet you hate your brother, you're kidding yourself. You're a liar. How can you love God, whom you can't see at all, and not love your brother, when you can see his needs, his problems, and see what love can do in his life? God doesn't need your love, but your brother does. Also, the commandment of God, always based upon his availability to make it possible, is, "that he who loves God should love his brother also." If we have the life of God, we can show the love of God.

One of the most interesting things to me in pastoral counseling is to see how people scratch and fight like wildcats to say that they cannot love somebody when God says that they can. We want to find an excuse for lovelessness. It is not that we cannot love; it is that we will not. Is that not true? Then let us face it. John deals bluntly and honestly with us. If you really cannot, then you are not a Christian, he says. You are a liar when you say you love God. But if you love him, and you know



you do, then you can love your brother – and you must!

**Prayer:**

Our Father, let us not take these words lightly, let us not pass them off as but another sermon that tickles the heart a bit, but help us come to terms with these

words, to realize that this is the explanation for what is wrong in so many of our lives. The problem is not others, whom we have been blaming, but rather, ourselves, our own unwillingness to show a loving acceptance to those who do not do the things we like and do not act the way we think they ought to act. Forgive us, and teach us to love, in Christ's name, Amen.

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