

**"KEEP YOURSELVES IN THE LOVE OF GOD."**

– JUDE 21. –

WE CANNOT KEEP ourselves in this love unless we have gotten into it. And that all men do not possess it, or are not in this condition of heart, is not only manifested to our senses through the experiences of life, but testified to by our Lord Jesus, who said to some of the holiness people of his day, "I know that ye have not the love of God in you." – John 5:42.

We are to distinguish then between natural love and the love of God. All mankind has some share at least of natural love – self-love, love for family, love of friends. Our Lord, speaking of this kind of love, implies that it is not the love of God, saying, "If ye love them that love you, what thank have ye? For sinners also do even the same." (Luke 6:32.) The love of God, therefore, is a different kind of love to that which is common to the natural man, and we need to be directed into it, and to grow or develop in it, as the Apostle testifies, saying, "The Lord *direct* your hearts into the love of God." (2 Thess. 3:5.) We are directed into this love through the divine Word which brings to our attention the peculiarity of God's love as distinguished from that of the natural fallen man. While love in the natural man is more or less selfish, even in our very best exercise of it, on behalf of friends, God commendeth his love toward us as being of a superior kind, in that while we were yet sinners, aliens, strangers, enemies through wicked works, under his gracious, loving plan Christ died for us. This kind of unmerited, sacrificing love is wholly different from anything that is known to fallen humanity. As our Lord Jesus said, the greatest love amongst men would be that a man should lay down his life for his *friends*, but to lay down his life for his enemies is certainly a much higher type of love, – unselfish, gracious, heavenly. – John 15:13; Rom. 5:7.

The first blessing that comes to us, as the eyes of our understanding open and we come to some knowledge of the divine character and love, is that we perceive or discern or come to realize this higher type of love – the love of God. As the Apostle says, "Hereby *perceive* we the love of God, because he [Christ] laid down his life for us." "Herein was *manifested* the love of God toward us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him." – 1 John 3:16; 4:9.

It is after we have thus perceived the love of God that it begins to operate upon us, if we are in a favorable condition – if our hearts are good ground, prepared under divine providence for this knowledge. Of such the Apostle says, "The love of Christ constraineth us" – draws us, awakens a reciprocating love in our hearts, so that in turn we love God. Not that we first loved God, but that his love attracted and developed ours. (1 John 4:19.) The effect of this love upon the good-ground heart is that very shortly it decides that it could do nothing less than love similarly in return, and thus be willing to lay down life itself in God's service. It esteems that this would be but a reasonable service, a reasonable recompense for divine favors.

The Apostle Paul sums up this transformation from selfishness to the love of God in a few words, saying, "We ourselves also were at one time foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers desires and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another; but when the goodness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared he saved us [delivered **[R2648 : page 183]** us from this evil condition of heart], not on account of works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his own mercy, he saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the holy spirit, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior." – Titus 3:3-6. – See *Diaglott*.

This newness of spirit, this new mind, this mind in accord with the love of God, the Apostle assures us is not received except by those who

receive the holy spirit. Those who merely take the step of justification may to some extent experience a reformation of life, so that instead of living an openly evil course they will seek to live at least moral lives. But none can expect to receive the begetting of the holy spirit of love, and thus to become possessed of "the love of God," a self-sacrificing love, unless he takes the step of consecration to the Lord, which brings him into the condition in which he may indeed have the holy spirit, the spirit of divine love, shed abroad in his heart. Let none then hope to obtain the love of God in any other way than the way which God has provided. Undoubtedly in the Millennial age it will be made possible for the natural man to come into "the love of God" through a process of restitution; as he shall more and more attain to the perfection of human nature in that time he may to that extent more and more become possessed of the love of God until, when finally perfected, he may possess this love of God in full measure, – because humanity, in its perfect condition, is a fleshly image of the invisible God. But now, while we still have these mortal bodies that are imperfect, and while restitution has not commenced, there is only the one way of attaining the love of God – by obedience to the call of this age, to present our bodies living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, through Jesus our Lord.

The new creature is to grow and to be more and more filled with the holy spirit – more and more filled with the love of God; hence we may expect that there will be differences of attainment in this matter, and we should know what to look for as evidences of our growth in grace and of our attainment of this love of God. The Apostle John declares, "This is [proof of our possession of] the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and *do not find them grievous.*" (1 John 5:3.) He who keeps the Lord's commandments, but who finds them grievous, has thus an evidence that he is not in heart-harmony with them, that he has not made a full consecration of himself to the Lord – the obedience of such an one would be no proof whatever of the possession of "the love of God." But whoever of the Lord's people is so in harmony with him that they delight to do his will, have in this an evidence that the

love of God is dwelling in them [R2649 : page 183] richly and abounding. This is the same thought which the Apostle again expresses, saying, "Whosoever keepeth his word [loves the word of God, and takes pleasure not in turning, twisting and endeavoring to avoid the force of that Word, but who keepeth or cherisheth it, loveth it, and seeketh to conform thereto] in him verily is the love of God perfected." – 1 John 2:5.

This reminds us of our dear Redeemer, in whom verily the love of the Father was perfected, and who is represented by the Prophet as saying, "I delight to do thy will, O God; yea, thy law is within my heart." (Psalm 40:8.) And our Lord marked out the same spirit, as being essential to those who would be his disciples, saying, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love." (John 15:10.) There is no suggestion in any of these or in other Scriptures that mere outward formalistic obedience and piety count anything with the Lord. The Lord "seeketh such to worship him as worship him in spirit and in truth" – such as have the spirit of righteousness, love for righteousness, love for truth, love for all the qualities of the divine character, and a desire to conform thereto in thought, word and deed.

Nor are we to make the mistake that some have made, of supposing that the commandments referred to by our Lord are the Ten Commandments upon which hung the covenant which God made with the Jews. We are not Jews, and hence have nothing whatever to do with their covenant, given through Moses, its mediator, at Sinai, nor with the Law upon which it was based. We are Christians, and have to do with a better covenant, sealed with the precious blood of Christ our Mediator, and based upon a still higher law than the Decalogue – a law which instead of saying, "Thou shalt not" do this, "Thou shalt not" do that, is positive, and declares what we shall do, saying, "***Thou shalt love*** the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy mind, with all thy being, with all thy strength; and ***thou shalt love*** thy neighbor as thyself." This is a higher law, of which our Law-giver, Jesus, said, "A

new commandment I give unto you, that ye love," and of which the Apostle said, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." The Apostle John says, "He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God; he that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love." – 1 John 4:8,16.

Altho the first evidence of the possession of "the love of God" is a love for God, nevertheless the Scriptures distinctly point out to us that an additional requirement is specified, viz., love for the brethren – for those who have the spirit of God, especially, but in a general way at least a sympathetic love for all mankind. Thus the Apostle says, "If we love one another, [it is an evidence that] God dwelleth in us, and [that] **[R2649 : page 184]** his love is perfected in us." (1 John 4:12.) The same Apostle emphasizes this same point, saying, "Whosoever hath this world's goods [interests, affairs], and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17.) The intimation is that such a lack of love and sympathy, and such a restraint of assistance from a brother in need, would imply that the love of God either did not at all dwell in such an one, or that it was but slightly developed – far from being perfected.

Nor does this love merely exercise itself toward the brethren in matters of temporal necessities; rather, it affects all the affairs of life, leading the one who enjoys it to "walk in love," "forbearing one another in love." (Eph. 5:2; 4:2.) And even were it necessary to speak an unpalatable truth, the spirit of the Lord, "the love of God," will dictate the speaking of the truth in love, which the Apostle assures us is essential to our growth in Christ. – Eph. 4:15.

Knowledge is valuable, but only incidentally; of itself the Apostle assures us knowledge would be inclined to puff us up, make us vain and boastful, and thus quite out of harmony with the spirit of God, the spirit of love, meekness, gentleness. Knowledge might make us merely tinkling cymbals giving out a sound, but possessing no real merit in the Lord's sight. But knowledge, when it serves its proper purpose, brings

us to the appreciation of "the love [that is] of God" and to a realization of the wisdom of copying his character, that we should seek so far as possible to be like our Father which is in heaven, copies of his dear Son, our Lord. The Apostle brings this position clearly to our attention when he says, "That ye being rooted and grounded in love may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height and to know [appreciate] the love of Christ... and be filled with all the fulness of God. – Eph. 3:17-19."

Undoubtedly love is the principal thing to be studied, to be appreciated, to be copied and practiced in our lives. We trust that a large proportion of the WATCH TOWER readers have already become partakers of this "love of God," and that all such are seeking to have it perfected in them, and to be rooted and grounded in it. We have the Apostle's assurance that only those who take this standpoint can make permanent and thorough progress in grace and knowledge. Those who have entered the school of Christ, and who refuse to progress in it toward perfection, may assuredly expect that sooner or later their knowledge of the divine plan will slip from them; while those who do make progress in this proper direction may expect that the lengths and breadths of the divine plan will continue opening before them, and that their growth in knowledge will keep pace with their growth in love.

Finally, in harmony with our text, let us remember that this is not a matter that God attends to, but a matter which requires our own attention. God has made all the provisions whereby we may know of his love, and may be constrained by it, and may be accepted into it, but it devolves upon us to keep ourselves in the love of God: and we can only thus *keep ourselves in his love* by seeking to practice in the daily affairs of life the principles of his love: permitting the love of God to constrain us daily to sacrifice ourselves in the Lord's service, for his honor and for the spread of his truth; permitting the love of the brethren to so fill our hearts that, as the Apostle expresses it, we may be glad to "lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16); permitting a sympathetic love for mankind in general, the "groaning creation," in all

of its trials and difficulties, to exercise our hearts so that we shall more and more feel kindly and generously toward all with whom we have contact and to make us helpful to them as we have opportunity; permitting this love even to extend to the brute creation under our care, so that we will not be negligent of their interests; all this seems essential to our keeping ourselves in this love of God. Let us more and more practice, and thus become more and more perfected in this love, which is the spirit of our Father, the spirit of our Lord, and the spirit of all who are truly members of the body of Christ.

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