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A PRACTICAL SELF-EXAMINATION ON LOVE

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." – 2 Cor. 13:5.

IT SEEMS impossible to describe Love, this wonderful quality without which nothing is acceptable in the sight of God! The Apostle does not attempt to define Love, but contents himself with giving us some of its manifestations. Those who possess a love with such characteristics are able to appreciate it, but not able otherwise to explain it. The fact is that Love, like life and light, is difficult to define; and our best endeavors to comprehend it are along the lines of its effects. It is of God; it is god-likeness in the heart, in the tongue, in the hands, in the thoughts – supervising all the human attributes and seeking to control them. Where Love is lacking, the results are more or less evil; where Love is present, the results differ according to the degree of Love, and are proportionately good.

In the Christian an outward manifestation of amiability, meekness, gentleness, patience, etc., is not sufficient, either in God's sight or in his own. These graces must be produced by the spirit of Love, filling and expanding within his own heart. Many of the graces of the Spirit are recognized by the unregenerate and are *imitated* as *marks of good breeding*, and in many cases are successfully worn as a cloak or mask, covering hearts and sentiments wholly antagonistic to the holy spirit of Love.

The measure of our appreciation of Divine Love will be the measure of our zeal in conforming our characters to the Divine pattern. A naturally rough, uncouth, depraved disposition may require a long time, after the grace of Divine Love enters the heart, before that grace is manifest in all the thoughts and words and acts of the outward man. Others, on the contrary, of more [R4917 : page 422] gentle birth and cultured training, may, without the grace of God within, have many of

the outward refinements. None but Him who reads the heart is competent, therefore, to judge as to who have and who have not received this grace, and of the degree of its development in their hearts; but each one may judge for himself, and each one begotten of this Holy Spirit, Love, should seek to let its light so shine out, through all the avenues of communication with his fellow-creatures, as to glorify his Father in Heaven and "show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light." – I Pet. 2:9.

Amongst the "gifts" of early Apostolic times, prophecy, or oratory, was one highly commended. Knowledge of the mysteries of God was also highly commended, and large faith was reckoned as being amongst the chief of Christian requirements; yet the Apostle declares that if he possessed all of these in their fullest measure, and Love were absent, he would be nothing – a mere cipher – not a member of the New Creation at all, since Love is the very spirit of the begetting to the new nature.

What a wonderful test this is! The Apostle Paul counsels, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." Let us each apply the test to himself: Whether I am something or nothing in God's estimation is to be measured by my love for Him, for His brethren, for His cause, for the world in general, and even for my enemies, rather than by my knowledge, or fame, or oratory!

Yet we are not to understand that one could have a knowledge of the deep mysteries of God without having been begotten by the Holy Spirit of Love; for the deep things of God knoweth no man, but by the Spirit of God; but one might lose the spirit before losing the knowledge it brought him. In the measure of character, therefore, we are to put Love first, and to consider it the chief test of our nearness to and acceptance with the Lord.

LOVE IS THE SECRET OF TRUE POLITENESS

Having given us such a conception of the importance of Love, the Apostle proceeds to describe what it is and what it is not – how it operates and how it does not operate, or conduct itself. Let us each make a practical application of this matter to himself and inquire within:

Have I such a love, especially for the household of faith, as leads me to *suffer considerable* and *for a long [R4918 : page 422] time*, and yet to be *kind*? Am I patient with the weaknesses and imperfections of those who give any evidence of good intentions? Am I patient even with those who are out of the way, realizing that the great Adversary blinds the minds of the masses and remembering that this manifestation of Love was very prominent in our Lord Jesus, who was patient with His opponents?

Am I kind in my methods, seeking to guard my manner and my tones, knowing that they have much to do with every affair of life? Have I *this* mark of Love pervading my *actions* and *words* and *thoughts*? Do I *think of* and *am I considerate of others*? Do I feel and manifest kindness toward them in word, in look, in act? A Christian, above all others, should be kind, courteous, gentle *in the home, in his place of business, in the Church – everywhere*. In proportion as *perfect Love* is attained the constant effort of the heart will be to have every word and act, like the thought which prompts them, full of patience and kindness. With the child of God these qualities are *not to be mere outward adornments*, they *cannot be*; on the contrary, they are fruits of the Spirit – growths from or results of having come into *fellowship with God*, having learned of Him, *received of His Spirit* of holiness, of Love.

Have I the Love that "*envieth not*," the Love that is generous, so that I can see others prosper and *rejoice in their prosperity*, even if, for a time, my own affairs be not so prosperous? This is true generosity, the very reverse of jealousy and envy, which spring from

a perverted nature. The root of envy is selfishness; *envy will not grow upon the root of Love*. Love rejoices with them that rejoice, in the prosperity of every good word and work, and in the advancement in Christian grace and in the Divine service of all who are actuated by the Divine Spirit.

Have I the Love that is humble, *that "vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up"*? the love that tends to modesty, that is not boastful, not lifted up? Have I the Love that would prompt to good deeds, not to be seen of men, but that would do the same if no one saw or knew but God only? that boasts neither of its knowledge nor of its graces, but in humility acknowledges that every good and perfect gift comes from the Father? And do I make return to Him in Love and service for every mercy? Boasting over self-esteem has led many a man not only into folly, but sometimes into gross sins in his endeavor to make good his boasts. The Spirit of the Lord is the spirit of a sound mind, which not only seeks generously to esteem others, but also soberly to estimate one's self, and not to think too highly of his character and attainments.

Have I the Love which is courteous, *"doth not behave itself unseemly"*? *Pride* is the root out of which grows much of the unseemly conduct, impoliteness, so common to those who think themselves somebody, either intellectually or financially. Politeness has been defined as Love in trifles; courtesy as Love in little things. The secret of politeness is either surface polishing or love in the heart. As Christians we are to have the heart-love which will prompt us to acts of kindness and courtesy, not only in the household of faith, but in our homes and in our dealings with the world.

Have I the Love which is unselfish, which *"seeketh not her own"* interests exclusively, which might even be willing to let some of her own rights be sacrificed in the interests of others? or have I, on the contrary, the selfishness which not only demands my own rights on every occasion, but which demands those rights regardless of the conveniences, comfort and rights of others? To have Love in this

particular means that we will be on guard against taking any unjust advantage of others, and will prefer rather to *suffer* a wrong than to *do* a wrong; to suffer an injustice than to do an injustice.

LOVE BEGINS AT HOME

Nothing in this signifies that one should neglect the caring for and providing in every way for those dependent upon him by the ties of nature, in order that he may do good to others. In every sense, "*Love begins at home.*" The proper thought, as we gather it, is that men and women, possessed of the spirit of perfect Love, would not think exclusively of their own interests in any of the affairs of life. Put into exercise, *this* element of Love would have a great influence upon all the affairs of life, *inside* as well as *outside* the *home and family*.

Have I the Love which is good tempered, "*not easily provoked*" to anger – Love that enables me to see both sides of a question, that gives me the spirit of a sound mind, which enables me to perceive that exasperation and violent anger are not only unbecoming but, worse than that, injurious to those toward whom they may be directed, and also injurious in their effect upon my own heart and body?

There may be times when Love will need to be firm, [R4918 : page 423] almost to sternness and inflexibility, where principles are involved, where valuable lessons are to be inculcated; and this might come under the head of anger, using that word in a *proper sense*, in regard to a *righteous indignation, exercised for a loving purpose*, for doing good; but it should be exercised *then* only for a time. If *justly angry* we should see to it that we sin not either with our *lips*, or *in our hearts*, in which, at no time, may we entertain any but loving and generous sentiments toward those who are our enemies, or toward those of our friends whom we would assist or instruct or correct.

To be *easily provoked* is to have a *bad temper*, fretfulness, bad humor, touchiness, quickness to take offense. This is wholly contrary

to the spirit of Love; and whoever is on the Lord's side and seeking to be pleasing to Him and to attain to an overcomer's position should jealously guard himself against this general besetment of our day. To whatever extent this disposition is fostered, or willingly harbored, or not fought against, it becomes an evidence of a deficiency and imperfection of our development in the Holy Spirit of our Father, and of the *deficiency of our likeness to our Lord Jesus*, our Pattern.

Very few of the evidences of a wrong spirit receive from one's self as much kindness and as many excuses for their continuance as this one. But however much natural depravity and heredity and nervous disorders may tend toward this spirit of fretfulness, taciturnity and touchiness, every heart filled with the Lord's Spirit must oppose this disposition to evil in his flesh, and must wage a good warfare against it.

It will not do to say, "It is my way," for all the "ways" of the fallen nature are bad; and it is the business of the New Creature to overcome the old nature in this as well as other works of the flesh and the Devil. In few ways can we show to our friends and households more than in this the power of the grace of Love. This grace, as it grows, should make every child of God sweet-tempered. In no way can we better show forth the praises of Him who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light than by the exhibition of the spirit of Love in the daily affairs of life.

LOVE THINKS NO EVIL

Have I the spirit of Love which "*thinketh no evil*," which is guileless, not suspicious of evil or looking for faults *in others*, not attributing to them evil motives? Have I the Love which seeks always to interpret the conduct of others charitably, to make all possible allowance for errors in judgment rather than to impugn the motives of the heart? Perfect Love is good intentioned itself; it prefers and, so far as possible, endeavors to view the words and conduct of others from the same standpoint. It does not *treasure up*

animosities and *suspicious*, nor *manufacture a chain of circumstantial proofs* of evil intentions out of trivial affairs. "*Faults are thick* where *Love is thin*" is a very wise proverb.

But where Love passes over offenses and takes no account of them, holding no grudges, this does not mean that Love would treat evil-doers in precisely the same manner that it would treat its friends. It might be proper or even necessary to take some notice of the offenses to the extent of not manifesting the same cordiality as before, but no hatred, malice or strife should be manifested – nothing but kindness and gentleness, leaving the door of opportunity open for a full reconciliation as soon as possible, doing all that *could* be done to promote a reconciliation and evincing a willingness to forgive and forget the wrong.

"LOVE REJOICETH NOT IN INIQUITY"

Have I the Love that is sincere, that "*rejoiceth not in iniquity* [iniquity], *but rejoiceth in the Truth*"? Are the principles of right and wrong so firmly fixed in my mind, and am I so thoroughly in accord with right, and so out of harmony with the wrong, that I am grieved with evils wherever encountered and sympathize with all who fall into evil or who are beset with temptations? Am I so opposed to the wrong that I would not encourage it even if it brought advantage to me? Am I so in accord with right, with Truth, that I could not avoid rejoicing in the Truth and in its prosperity, even to the upsetting of some of my preconceived opinions, or to the disadvantage of some of my earthly interests?

Every one who is seeking to develop in his heart the Holy Spirit, perfect Love, should guard carefully this point of sincerity of motive as well as uprightness of conduct. The least suggestion of rejoicing at the fall of any person or thing that in any degree represents righteousness or goodness is to be deplored and overcome. Perfect "Love rejoiceth not in iniquity" under any circumstances or conditions

and would have no sympathy but only sorrow in the fall of another, even if it should mean his own advancement.

The Love of God, which the Apostle here describes as the spirit of the Lord's people, is a love which is far above all selfishness and is based upon fixed principles which should, *day by day, be more distinctly discerned* and always *firmly adhered* to at any cost. However profitable error might be, Love could take no part in it [R4919 : page 423] and could not desire the reward of evil. But it does take pleasure in the Truth – truth upon every subject, and especially in the Truth of Divine revelation, however unpopular the Truth may be; however much persecution its advocacy may involve; however much it may cost the loss of the friendship of this world and of those who are blinded by the god of this world. The spirit of Love has such an affinity for the Truth that it rejoices to share loss, persecution, distress or whatever may come against the Truth or its servants. In the Lord's estimate it is all the same whether we are ashamed of Him or ashamed of His Word; and of all such He declares that He will be ashamed when He comes to be glorified in His saints.

Have I the Love that "*beareth all things*"? that is impregnable against the assaults of evil? that resists evil, impurity, sin and everything that is contrary to Love? that is both able and willing to endure, for the cause of God, reproaches, reproofs, insults, losses, misrepresentations and even death? "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even *your faith*" – the very life and center of which faith is the Holy Spirit of Love for the Lord and for those that are His and, sympathetically, for the world. Perfect Love can bear up under all circumstances and, by God's grace, bring us off conquerors and "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." – I John 5:4; Rom. 8:37.

LOVE IS NOT SUSPICIOUS

Have I the Love that "*believeth all things*"? that is unwilling to impute evil to another unless forced so to do by indisputable

evidences? that would rather believe good than evil about everybody? that would take no pleasure in hearing evil, but would be disposed to resent it? Perfect Love is not suspicious, but is, on the contrary, disposed to be trustful. It acts on the principle that it is better, if necessary, to be deceived a hundred times than to go through life soured by a suspicious mind – far better than to accuse or suspicion even one [R4919 : page 424] person unjustly. This is the merciful disposition, as applied to *thoughts*; and of it the Master said, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. 5:7.) The unmerciful, evil-thinking mind is father to unmerciful conduct toward others.

Have I the Love that "*hopeth all things*," that perseveres under unfavorable conditions, and continues to hope for and to labor for those who need my assistance? Have I the Love that "*endureth all things*," that continues to hope for the best in regard to all and to strive for the best, and that with perseverance? ***Perfect Love is not easily discouraged.*** This is the secret of Love's perseverance: having learned of God, and having become a partaker of His holiness, it *trusts in Him* and *hopes undismayed* for the *fulfilment of His gracious Covenant*, however dark the immediate surroundings.

This hopeful element of Love is one of the striking features in the perseverance of the saints, enabling them to endure hardness as good soldiers. Its hopeful quality hinders it from being easily offended, or easily stopped in the work of the Lord. Where others would be discouraged or put to flight, the spirit of Love gives endurance, that we may war a good warfare, and please the Captain of our salvation. ***Love's hopefulness knows no despair, for its anchorage enters into that which is beyond the veil, and is firmly fastened to the Rock of Ages.***

Let us, Beloved, with all our getting, get Love – not merely in word but in deed and in truth – the Love whose roots are in the new heart, begotten in us by our Heavenly Father's Love, and exemplified

in the words and deeds of our dear Redeemer. All else sought and gained will be but loss and dross unless, with all, we secure LOVE!

