

~Other Speakers M-R: Thomas Reade:

63. ON LOVE

True Christian love is of an enlarged, unselfish nature. It loves all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Party spirit is confined within the limits of a sect. But Christian love outsteps the narrow boundary; and can recognize a brother in each humble believer, who practically exemplifies the holy doctrines of the Gospel. When we love our own party exclusively, or people only of our own peculiar train of thinking, we love ourselves in them. We see our own image, and admire it. But when we love those who differ from us in nonessentials, because we discover in them the humility, meekness, purity, patience, and benevolence of the Redeemer; then, our love is truly Christian. It is Christ in them, whom we love. How little of this enlarged affection on pure Christian principles do we discover in the professing world! We hear much about it, but see little of it. It is highly extolled, but little cultivated. The heart of man is naturally selfish and contracted, bigoted, and full of jealousies. It suspects a foe, where charity hails a friend.

Nothing is more evident than this truth—that Christian charity increases our happiness with its own increase. A narrow, contracted spirit, under the influence of prejudice, and blinded by fond partialities, can never enjoy the refined pleasures of Christian communion. Such a spirit chills and freezes the soul; it checks exertion, except when party is concerned; and looks badly on those, however excellent, who "do not follow us." Distinctions seem necessary in this state of imperfection; but real Christians know well how to distinguish between the expansive charity of the Gospel, and that undefined latitudinarianism, which would level all distinctions.

There is a perfect consistency in preferring our own peculiar communion, to which we are attached from judgment and conscience; and in loving those of other communions, who bear the image of the blessed Jesus. Lord, preserve me from all selfish and uncharitable feelings. Be the center of my affections; and may their only boundary be yourself, Oh unbounded ocean of eternal love! Enable me to give the right hand of fellowship to all who truly love you; and to rejoice in being in any measure instrumental in hastening on that glorious period, when Judah shall not vex Ephraim, nor Ephraim envy Judah; but when all shall love as brethren.

God is love. Love, therefore, brings heaven into the soul, and diffuses happiness wherever its influence is felt. Where love reigns, there is peace and joy, gentleness and goodness. How clearly does this consideration prove to us the divine origin of the Gospel of Christ, which breathes nothing but peace. Earth would indeed be blessed, if pure Christian love dwelt in every breast, and regulated every thought.

The period so glowingly depicted by Isaiah is fast approaching, when "they shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain." But what is described as the cause of this blessedness? "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" What a stimulus should this be to strenuous exertion and fervent prayers! Every true believer should esteem it his privilege and duty, according to his ability, to aid in building the spiritual temple, and in ushering in the latter day of glory.

Daniel has foretold, that "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased;" while the diligent laborers are thus encouraged by Zechariah; "I will strengthen them in the Lord, and they shall walk up and down in his name, says the Lord." Happy are those servants who shall be found so doing; may an increasing company of faithful missionaries ever abound in their labors of love, until all shall know the Lord, from the least unto the greatest; until righteousness shall run down as water, and judgment as a mighty stream.

Heaven is the place where love is enjoyed without alloy. In that blessed region of delight, no pride, no envy, no discord dwells. In the angelic world, God is supremely loved, and feared, and obeyed. Each blessed spirit loves its fellow; and all are knit together in one family bond of love. Happy state! Lord, mold my soul to theirs, or rather to your own most lovely image. Let me drink deep into your Spirit, and be daily preparing for those mansions, where all is harmony, and peace, and purity, and joy.

From the word of truth we are clearly taught, that nations however correct, forms however excellent, creeds however orthodox, ordinances however scriptural, labors however abundant, and sacrifices however costly, will avail nothing in the sight of God, if genuine love be lacking in the heart.

Love is the very essence of true religion. It is the main spring which puts all in motion.

Precious faith unites the sinner to the Savior; while love, the fruit of faith, produced in the soul through the power of the Holy Spirit, gives vitality to the new creature, and enables him to act for God alone. It is evident then, that, without love, all religious profession is hypocrisy. Our real character is not estimated by him who looks at what we know, or what we say, nor even what we do; but from the inward ruling principle of the mind.

We may speak with the tongues of men and of angels, we may understand all mysteries and all knowledge; we may give all our goods to feed the poor, and our bodies to be burned; and yet be accounted by a heart-searching God as no better than sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. We may attend the house of God with scrupulous exactness, and yet have no heart in the work. We may admire the preacher, without loving the word; and extol a form of devotion, while destitute of pious feeling. Oh! what need there is for inward searching of heart. True religion is less common than many imagine "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leads

unto life, and few there be that find it."

Formality and hypocrisy are two powerful and successful agents of Satan. The enemy of souls is not very anxious whether men travel to hell by the road of profaneness or false profession. The latter, being more creditable, is generally the most frequented. Gross vice startles the conscience; while the garment of decency thrown over the general conduct, quiets the mind, and makes the deluded sinner more easy in his sins.

Blessed Lord, save me from the delusions of Satan, and the deceitfulness of my own heart. Let me know myself. Guard me against self-deception, self-love, and vain-glory. Make me humble, simple, and sincere. Fill me with love, and fit me for your service and glory.

Love is the distinctive characteristic of all God's people. The soul which is savingly enlightened by the Spirit of truth, must, as a natural consequence, love God. There is a knowledge which may be acquired by reading, hearing, and reflection. Religion may be learned as a science. Its doctrines may be arranged with all the accuracy of systematic precision; and its precepts be admired as lessons of the purest morality. But such knowledge, springing only from the exercise of the intellectual faculties, leaves the soul in its natural state of pride, earthliness, and self-sufficiency. Such knowledge puffs up, while charity edifies.

Every awakened soul needs to feel the love of God as its actuating principle; and the glory of God as its constant aim. Oh that I may experience these blessings more and more! Nothing can eradicate the love of the world from the heart, but this ardent and supreme love to God as the highest good, implanted in the soul through the power of the Holy Spirit. God is love. When, therefore, he draws forth the arrows of conviction, and lodges them in the sinner's conscience, he graciously dips them in the blood of Jesus, that he may heal, as well as wound. Thus, the blessed Spirit, by first convincing of sin, and then revealing the Savior, gives the broken-hearted penitent a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

How gracious are the operations of mercy! No sin, however great, can exclude that soul from heaven, whom the Lord makes a monument of his sovereign grace. As soon might the black vapors of the night which skirt the horizon, prevent the rising of the sun. "By grace are you saved." "By the grace of God, I am what I am," is the language of Paul, who styles himself the chief of sinners, and whose delight is to magnify the exceeding riches of redeeming love.

God is love. Hence all holiness proceeds from him. He must first draw the heart to himself by the powerful attractions of his own eternal love, or it will forever remain hard as adamant, and vile as hell. "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you," are the sweet accents of mercy to a family of backsliding children.

The Spirit of God can alone fill the heart with love. The apostle gives love the first place among the fruits of the Spirit; for if this heavenly grace be lacking in us, all the rest of our benevolent or amiable qualities will profit us nothing.

How important, then, is self-examination on a subject which involves our present and eternal happiness! If I am a child of God, I shall love him supremely. It is impossible to be in the family of God, and not love God; for every one that loves, is born of God and knows God. He that loves not, knows not God, for God is love. Oh my soul, think what you owe to your great Creator. I am indebted to God for my being, my daily preservation, my hourly comforts. From him I receive every blessing; health, friends, and domestic enjoyments. To him I owe myself and all my powers; yes, all that I am and have. He not only made me; but, Oh wonderful love! he took my nature upon him, and died, the just for the unjust, that through his atoning blood, I might be saved from sin and the wrath to come.

If I am a child of God, I shall love all his children. If I am in the family of God, I shall love all the members of his family. This John declares as evidential of a state of salvation; "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." "For every one that loves him that begat, loves him also that is begotten of him." Thus Christian love passes over the threshold of home, sect, and nation and embraces all who love the Savior, whether inhabiting the torrid or the frigid climates.

If I am a child of God, I shall love the commandments of God. His law will be my rule of life, while Christ crucified is the sole foundation of my hope. I shall have more delight in his Word than in all manner of riches; for these can only gratify my carnal nature, while that can satisfy my immortal soul.

If I am a child of God, I shall be anxious to live to his glory; to employ my talents in his service; and to promote his cause among men. I shall not be ashamed to confess myself his servant. If reproached, I shall rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer shame for his name, and shall be willing to be accounted even the offscourings of all things for Jesus' sake.

If I am a child of God, I shall bear the image of God. In God's family there is a family likeness. All the children resemble their heavenly parent. They have the mind of Christ, and are renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created them. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; but if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." I may possess an extensive knowledge of divine truth, and a facility of utterance, which, when combined with strong natural warmth of feeling, may cause me to make an imposing appearance. But what will knowledge avail, if destitute of humility; or glowing eloquence, if devoid of love?

Let me, then, seek most earnestly the sweet graces of the Spirit—love, humility, and purity. These will make

me like the blessed Jesus, whose whole character bore these sacred features, and whose gentle command is, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls."

Blessed Jesus! be pleased to sanctify the desires of my heart. This is your will, even my sanctification. Let it be my will also. Oh put forth your healing hand and touch my leprous soul; yes, speak the word only, and your servant shall be healed. Let me never for one moment doubt your willingness to save, though I be the very chief of sinners. Your grace is infinite; if it were not infinite, I might indeed despair; but being infinite, how can I despond? Oh what a word is infinite! There is no depth of guilt in which infinite mercy cannot reach me; and no height of glory, to which infinite love cannot raise me.

Rejoice, then, Oh my soul, and be filled with thanksgiving. Jesus is your all-sufficient Savior. Believe in him; trust in him; come to him; and love him; and then shall you be saved with a present and everlasting salvation.

How blest are they who love the Lord,
Who lean upon his word;

They feel a joy, a peace within,
Which earth cannot afford.

By faith they see the heavenly world,
And taste the Savior's grace;
The bliss concealed from carnal eyes
They view "with open face."

They know their interest in his love,
Who bought them with his blood;
And with assured faith can say,
My Savior, and my God.

You blessed flock—you chosen few,
Let grateful praise ascend;
And, as you pass the vale of life,
Extol the sinner's Friend.