

Love That Is True

by John Bunyan

As there is a twofold faith, two sorts of good works, and the like, so there is also a twofold love to Christ; the one standing or stopping in some passions of the mind and affections; the other is that which breaks through all difficulties to the holy commandment to do it. Of both these there is mention made in the Scripture; and though all true love begins at the heart, yet that love is but little set by that breaks not through to practice. How many are there in the world that seem to have the first, but how few show the second (Mark 10:17). The young man in the gospel did by his running, kneeling, crying, enquiring and entreating of Christ, to show him the way to life, show that he had inward love to Christ and his own salvation, but yet it was not a love that was strong as death, cruel as the grave, and hotter than the coals of juniper (Cant. 8:6). It was a love that stopped in mind and affection, but could not break out into practice. This kind of love, if it be let alone, and not pressed to proceed till it comes into a laborious practising of the commandment, will love as long as you will, namely, as long as mouth and tongue can wag; but yet you shall not by all your skill drive this love farther than the mouth. "For with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness" (Ezekiel 33:31).

Nor may this love be counted for that of the right kind because it is in the heart; for the heart knows how to dissemble about love, as much as about other matters. This is feigned love, or love that pretends to dear affections for Christ, but can bestow no cost upon him. Of this kind of love the world is full at this day, especially the professors of this age, but as I said, of this the Lord Jesus makes little or no account, for that it hath in it an essential defectiveness.

Christ and his servants, therefore, thus describe the love that is true and of the right kind, and that with reference to himself and church.

First, with reference to Himself. If a man love me (saith he) he will keep my words" (John 14:21, 23, 24). And again, "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me." And He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings." And, "The word which you hear is not mine, but the Father's which sent me." Behold you now, where Christ placeth a sign of love; it is not in word nor in tongue, not in great and seemingly affectionate gestures, but in a practical walkinly in the law of the Lord. Hence such, and such only, are called the undefiled in the way. (You know who says "I am the way.") Blessed (saith, David) are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord" (Psalm 119:1).

But here again the hypocrite will give us the slip by betaking himself to exterior matters, as to his mint, anise, and cummin, (Matt. 23:23) still neglecting the more weighty matters of the law, namely, judgment, mercy, faith; or else to the significative ordinances, still neglecting to do to all men as he would they should do to him. But let such know that God never ordained significative ordinances, such as baptism, the Lord's supper, or the like, for the sake of water, or of bread and wine; nor yet because he takes any delight that we are dipped in water, or eat that bread; but they were ordained to minister to us by the aptness of the elements, (through our sincere partaking of them) further knowledge of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and of our death and resurrection by him to newness of life. Wherefore, he that eateth and believeth not, and he that is baptized, and is not dead to sin, and walketh not in newness of life, neither keepeth these ordinances nor pleaseth God. Now to be dead to sin, is to be dead to those things forbidden in the moral law. For sin is the

transgression of that; and it availeth not to vaunt that I am a saint and under this or that significative ordinance, if I live in the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4). For I am convicted of the law as a transgressor, and so concluded to be one that loveth not Christ, though I make a noise of my obedience to Christ, and of my partaking of his significative ordinances. The Jews of old made a great noise with their significative ordinances, while they lived in the breach of the moral law; but their practice of significative ordinances could not save them from the judgment and displeasure of their God. They could frequent the temple, keep their feasts, slay their sacrifices, and be mighty apt about all their significative things. But they loved idols, and lived in the breach of the second table of the law. Wherefore God cast them out of his presence. Hark what the prophet saith of them, Amos 4:4, 5: "Come to Bethel and transgress, at Gilgal multiply transgression, and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the freewill offerings: For this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God." Thus, as I said, the hypocrite gives us the slip; for when he heareth that love is in the keeping of the commandments of God, then he betakes him to the more external parts of worship, and neglecteth the more weighty matters, to the provoking of the God of Israel.

Secondly, as love to God is showed by keeping his commandments; so love to my neighbour, is the keeping of the commandments of God likewise. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God (in us, both to God and man,) that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:2, 3). He that keepeth not God's commandments loves neither God nor men.

Thus, then, we must learn to love one another. He that keepeth God's commandment, doth to his brother what is right, for that is

God's commandment. He that keeps God's commandment, doth to his brother even as he would be done unto himself, for that is God's commandment. He that keeps God's commandment, shutteth not up his bowels of compassion from him, for the contrary is his commandment. Further, he that keepeth God's commandment, showeth his brother what he must do to honor the Christ that he professeth aright: therefore, he that keeps the commandment, loves his brother. Yea, the keeping of the commandment is loving the brethren.

But if all love, which we pretend to have one to another, were tried by this one text, how much of that that we call so, would be found to be nothing less? Preposterous are our spirits in all things, nor can they be guided right, but by the word and Spirit of God; the which, the good Lord grant unto us plentifully, that we may do that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Yea, and that there may, by them, be wrought sound repentance in us for all that hath been done by us amiss, lest he give Jacob to the spoil, and Israel to the robbers; for that they have sinned against him by not walking in his ways, and by not being obedient to his law (Isa. 42:24).

Let me add, lest God doth not only punish us in the sight, and by the hand of the wicked; but embolden them to say, it was God that set them on; yea, lest they make these sins of ours, which we have not repented of, not only their by-word against us to after generations, but the argument, one to another, of their justification for all the evil that they shall be suffered to do unto us: saying, when men shall ask them: "Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land? (Deut. 29:24, 25) What meaneth the heat of this great anger? (1 Kings 9:8; Jer. 22:8) Even because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, and walked not in his ways."

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