

## A Commandment to Love

It is a truth which is abundantly obvious in our day, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor. 2:14). The natural man can take no pleasure in the things of divinity, for they condemn his lifestyle utterly. They call upon him to forsake his sins, and serve a new life of devotion to the Will of the Most High God. So, men love darkness rather than light, and the Jews, as the power of darkness crucified Messiah, upon the accursed Tree.

There is a reason, therefore, why Yahweh *commanded* the love of Israel. It was not something that would come naturally to them, for their wayward hearts often lusted after the things of this world, and rebelled against Him. So the commandment had to be given:

“Hear O Israel: Yahweh our Elohim is One Yahweh. And thou shalt love Yahweh thy Elohim with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart” (Deut. 6:4-5).

Here was the appeal – nay, more than an appeal: a “commandment” for Israel to have love for their Great Redeemer. It has sometimes been said that you cannot legislate love; that it is an emotion which subsists between two or more parties whose ways and aspirations are similar, and who like each other immensely. It is either there, or it is not; it cannot be dictated or manufactured, else it would not be true love.

There is a certain truth in this. If a man does not want to love, his position cannot be changed by a piece of legislation. However, the Mosaic Law was more than a mere piece of legislation; it was a national code of conduct. Every aspect of it taught the Greatness of Yahweh, and his merciful provisions He made for them in the wilderness. The Law of Moses was designed (in part) to make those who lived under it, think on spiritual things. And as they thought on those things, they ought to have had them written indelibly into their hearts. Consider the words that follow the above citation:

“and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when they walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Deut. 6:6,7).

In every aspect of life, the people were to give due consideration to the Word. When they spoke, when they sat, when they walked, when they lay down, and when they rose up again in the morning. Their entire day was to revolve around the revealed things of God. And as the knowledge of the Law grew in men’s hearts, it would bring with it a love and delight for such things ... at least, in the hearts that were fertile ground. By the Law, they were taught to love their Redeemer as a loving Father, in thankfulness for His Mercies extended to them. It is true that you cannot legislate love – but you can put a people through circumstances which will teach them reliance and love for the One though Whom all their blessings flowed. And that is what the Mosaic Law did perfectly.

The Apostle Paul was one such man who was taught the love of the things of God. Under inspiration, he wrote: "*I delight in the law of God* after the inward man" (Rom. 7:22). The Word had transformed him from being part of the power of darkness, to being a Child of Light. His delight was in the things of the Spirit of God – he delighted in Yahweh's Law.

The Pharisees on the other hand, sought to present an outward appearance of keeping the Law, when in fact, they had no love for it:

“Woe unto you, Pharisees! For ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment *and the love of God*: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone” (Lu. 11:42).

The Pharisees and the lawyers, who saw themselves as being the custodians of the Law passed over “the love of God”! Indeed, this can be seen in their treatment of their fellow brethren. The Master continued:

“Woe unto you also ye lawyers! For ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers” (Lu. 11:46).

Seeking to add their traditions to what was already a yoke which could not be borne (Acts 15:10) the lawyers were imposing a burden which just could not be carried. And they made no efforts to help the people to bear such a weight.

Contrast this with the spirit of Christ:

“Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2).

The Law of Christ then, is about helping our brethren and sisters to the Kingdom. We each need to carefully examine ourselves, and ask; Are we laying burdens upon the brethren by our own crotchets that add to the Law of Christ? Or are we seeking to lift the burdens of our brethren and sisters? Messiah himself knew what it was like to bear a burden, for he bore the burden of the Cross. Carrying it to the place of execution after being cruelly scourged by the Romans, he could not physically do it alone. Even the Master needed help to bear his burden, and Simon of Cyrene was chosen to bare it with him (Mat. 27:32). Bearing the burden together, there was a close bond of fellowship between these two men, something which had a lasting impact upon Simon, as he appears to have become a disciple following this event (Acts 13:1). The Master himself exhorted: “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23), and this Simon did literally, as he followed his Master, bearing his cross.

Living a life of self-denial under the weight of the cross is not always easy. Trials come upon us to refine our faith – and to test whether the brethren are willing to work together in love or not. As we bare the burden of crucifying the flesh daily, so are our brethren. Let us therefore help them in love – and be helped by them also, that together we might appear before the Throne of Judgement, having overcome at the last.

The love which believers have for their God is to find a practical manifestation in daily life. The love that God requires of us, is not merely a shallow emotion, but it is something which ought to be seen in every aspect of our walk in life. John exhorts us:

“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, that we keep his commandments” (1 Jno. 5:3).

Here, we have the love of God defined: it is to keep his commandments. Again, the Master similarly taught:

“If ye love me, keep my commandments” (Jno. 14:15).

The Spirit through John demonstrates that to love God means to be separate from those things which are at enmity with God:

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him ...” (1 Jno 2:15).

This principle also comes out elsewhere:

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God?  
Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God”  
(Jas: 4:4).

To love God then, is to love the things of God, and to hate every work of evil (cp. Psa. 97:10). We must be a separate people, showing forth the spirit of love for the Father in all things, especially in our dealings with each other.

Whilst we tend to think of the Law as being mainly to do with severe judgements against transgressors, the Lord Jesus Christ informed a certain young man that the entire law was based on 2 fundamental principles: The Love of God, and the Love of the Brethren:

“Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets”  
(Mat. 22:37-40)

So it is, that love is the fulfilling of the Law (Rom. 13:10), and upon reflection we can see the truth of this. Every aspect of the Law was either to do with how man was to worship his Maker, or how he should deal with his neighbour. The Law was designed to teach, and promote the principle of love amongst the people of God.

Again, we must examine our own selves. Is the prime motivating force of our lives the love of God, and then the love of our brethren and sisters? Only we can know the answer for ourselves, for it is quite possible to have an outward zeal for the things of the Truth, yet departing from the principle of love. So Paul wrote: “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth

me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:3). And again, the Master warned the ecclesia at Ephesus: "I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:4,5).

The "first love" is the love of God, the second, the love of One's neighbour. They had left their "first love", which is to say, they were no longer motivated by the force of a love for God. Let us take heed, lest we do likewise.

Any consideration of Love in Scripture would be very deficient indeed without a mention of the Love of God towards men. For, as John tells us:

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 Jno. 4:10).

God extended His Love towards us first. It was not that we loved God, and that therefore because of that He gave Christ to save us from our sins – it was rather that He Loved us, and extended an arm of salvation in His Mercy, and we must reciprocate that love thus manifested. And the Love of God towards us itself contains many lessons: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us" (1 Jno. 4:11-12).

Because the Father extended his love towards us, we ought to love our brethren. But to what extent? How far would we be prepared to go for our brethren? Would we be willing to give our lives for the brethren? For that is how far, logically, we should be willing to go:

"Hereby perceive we love, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 Jno 3:16).

As we consider the emblems before us, we see the love of God declared to man. We behold the symbols of Christ's love towards us – and in considering these things; we ought to be provoked to love and good works towards our brethren. Let us then love our God in all purity, with all our hearts, souls, and might, that in the coming days, love may be extended to us, and we be granted a place in the Coming Kingdom.

*Christopher Maddocks*