

VALENTINE'S DAY LOVE-Part Two

I John 3:16, 18; 4:12-17

I John 4:7-12 (ESV): "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins [sacrifice by which our sins are paid for and forgotten].¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us."

I John 3:16, 18: (ESV): "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.¹⁸ Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."

INTRODUCTION

Valentine's Day took place this past Tuesday. How much of the estimated \$18.2 billion spent on flowers, chocolates, and other heart-sent gifts did you contribute this year or previously? Last week, we told of the kindly cleric named Valentine who died more than 1,700 years ago and, according to legend, is the reason behind giving sweethearts a special day. In A. D. 268, in the declining days of the Roman Empire, Emperor Claudius II grew desperate to recruit enough soldiers and officers to protect the Empire from takeover. He believed married men were so emotionally attached to their families they would resist defending the Empire's distant borders for long enlistments. He issued an edict forbidding soldiers to marry. Bishop Valentine realized the injustice of an edict that defied God-ordained marriage. He put his life on the line by choosing to counter the Emperor's decree by secretly uniting lovers seeking a Christian marriage. After being arrested, he developed a deep attachment to the blind daughter of his jailer, opening her heart to a love of learning, music, and the Lord **Jesus Christ**. Quite possibly Claudius' offered he could marry the daughter if he would renounce Christ in favor of Rome's pagan gods. He refused. Just before the Emperor's orders for his execution were carried out, Valentine wrote a farewell message to the jailer's daughter, "From Your Valentine"; a phrase that has lived ever after. Valentine is believed to have been executed February 14, 270 AD. This is why February 14 became a day to celebrate all lovers and greetings of affection addressed to those who are beloved became known as "Valentines."

Saint Valentine, as he's known today, modeled celebrating our Savior **Jesus** as our foremost love in life. And he took to heart **I John 3:16**: "By this we know love, that He laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers." Such love is not to be celebrated just one day each year! Valentine had just a few brief months to enjoy the romantic love we most associate with his legend. Perhaps we will not be too disrespectful if we parody God's Ten Commandments, as found in **Exodus 20:1-17**, with the Valentine's Day Ten Commandments for married couples, in honor of Saint Valentine:

- I. I am thy Main Squeeze; thou shalt have no other squeeze before me.
- II. Thou shalt not take the name of thy Squeeze in vain, nor badmouth him/her behind his/her back.
- III. Remember our Anniversary, and keep it holy—or else.
- IV. Honor *My* mother and father. *Thine* are just too weird.
- V. Thou shalt not kill my love by behaving tackily or cause undo embarrassment when I am with thee.
- VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery, nor shalt thou even *think* about it least you be smitten from the earth.
- VII. Thou shalt not steal from my wallet/purse while I am at my bath, nor use my credit cards.
- VIII. Thou shalt not talk about our personal problems to our friends.
- IX. Thou shalt not covet the higher market price of thy neighbor's house without first putting down the remote and learning how to use a paintbrush!
- X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's main Squeeze, nor his son, nor his daughter, nor his stereo, nor his BMW, nor anything else that belongs to thy neighbor.

At the time of **Jesus'** birth, three types of love were commonly spoken of in the Greek language that served as the universal tongue of the Western world: 1) *phileo*: friendship love; 2) *eros*: romantic love; and 3) *storge*: family love. *Agape*—the ideal of unconditional, selfless love—was celebrated but rarely used. But after **Jesus'** stunning demonstration of selfless, sacrificial love, *agape* became the standard for recognizing the quality of love practiced by **Jesus'** followers. *Agape* appears in some form over 300 times in the Greek of the New Testament to express the depths of God's selfless, unconditional "love," as in **I John 4:10-11**, "In this is love, not that we have loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

Jesus taught us in **Matthew 22:37-38**, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and most important command." Using the word LOVE as an acronym, the first two letters can challenge us to demonstrate *agape* love in our relationship toward God. **Jesus** immediately added, "The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets depend on these two commands" (**Matthew 22:39-40**). The last two letters in LOVE challenge us to demonstrate *agape* love in our relationship toward our fellow human beings.

GOD-CENTERED LOVE

A. LOYALTY:

Last week we got only as far as what the "L" in love represents: Loyalty. Love is the moral and spiritual glue of the Universe, attaching angels and people in heartfelt loyalty to our Creator. Prior to our world's creation, "Lucifer" let his heart be darkened by treasonous, prideful desires of *being* worshiped by the angelic hosts as "the Most High" God and betrayed being entrusted with *leading* angels in worship of the one true God. Breathtaking Lucifer (whose name is literally "light-bearer") was created "perfect in beauty." Because he allowed self-serving desires to numb his loving loyalty toward God, he has "fallen" into the hideous evil know as "Satan" (**Ezekiel 28:12-18; Luke 10:18; Isaiah 14:12-14**).

In **Revelation 2:1-7** (NIV), our risen Savior communicates the first of His seven letters from Heaven through the Apostle John. **Jesus** commends "the Church in Ephesus" by declaring, "I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. ³ You have persevered and have endured hardships for My name, and have not grown weary. ⁴ Yet I hold this against you." What on earth could **Jesus** have against such a hardworking church that carefully holds its teachers accountable to the truth of Scripture and patiently endures whatever suffering they encounter as Christ's followers? Hear the answer of the one "who searches" our "hearts and minds" (**Revelation 2:23**, NIV): "You have forsaken the love you had at first ["you have left your first love," NKJV]. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." Why did **Jesus** threaten to shut down this church that remained in most ways remarkably righteous and Christ-honoring? Because He knew their loyalty to Him had already begun to waver. These church members were still going through all the motions of devotion toward Him, but self-serving desires had already begun to numb their loyalty to **Jesus** as their foremost love!

Someone remarked, "Marriage teaches you loyalty, forbearance, self-restraint, and a lot of other qualities you wouldn't need if you stayed single." Quite true! Most wedding vows include this pledge not required of single people: "Forsaking all others, I will keep myself for you alone." Without a commitment to avoid all entanglements with the opposite sex, including adultery, which would betray the loyalty our spouse deserves, is our profession of true love for our spouse meaningful or meaningless? How much more is this true of our profession of true love for our Creator and Lord? Country preacher Vance Havner had a way of making big points with a few words, as when he stated, "A wife who is 85% faithful to her husband is not faithful at all. There is no such thing as part-time loyalty to Jesus Christ."

B. OBEDIENCE

Ron, a Christian young man, was discussing with his girlfriend how fragile many marriages are today. To test her staying power should their marriage struggle at times, he asked her, "What if you wake up one morning and don't love me anymore?" She immediately responded, "There's always obedience." The supreme test of our genuine love for the Lord, or commitment to any cause greater than ourselves, often boils down to a question of obedience. Will we allow this greater cause to master our personal desires or will we allow our personal desires to become our master? Scottish theologian P. T. Forsyth (1848-21) was right when he said, "The first duty of every soul is to find not its freedom but its Master."

Roger Staubach, nicknamed Captain Comeback, led the Dallas Cowboys to victory in the NFL Super Bowls of 1972 & 1978. Staubach is such a devout lover of **Jesus** that a Ft. Worth newspaper in the 1970s devoted the full front page of its Sports section to his Christian testimony. Staubach admitted that his greatest trial as the Cowboy's quarterback was not being allowed to call his own signals. Hall of Fame head Coach Tom Landry sent in every play. He told Roger when to pass, when to run, and only in emergency situations could Roger change the play (and he had better be right!). Even though Staubach considered coach Landry to have a "genius mind" when it came to football strategy, his pride told him he should be able to run the team. Roger Staubach confessed much later, "I faced up to the issue of obedience. Once I learned to obey there was harmony, fulfillment, and victory" for myself and our team!

Such "harmony, fulfillment, and victory" are God's goals for every person who has ever walked His Earth. The most compelling difference between the life on Earth we now experience and the quality of life we will experience in Heaven is that in Heaven God's will is always done. God's character consists of perfect goodness, perfect love, and perfect kindness. Every time we reject His will, we turn towards what is bad, what is unloving, or what is cruel, despite what we think. This is why the more our will is done on Earth, the more we turn this world into a Hell on earth. Catastrophic rises in murder, rape, theft, assault, child & sexual abuse, divorce, violence, and addictions, after we swung away from being a "nation under God" in the 1960s, provides bitter testimony to the fruit of ungodly disobedience in our land.

A Sunday school teacher one day asked if anyone could explain the difference between sins of "commission" and sins of "omission." A boy named Derek told the class the sins of omission are, "Those sins that we want to do but we just haven't gotten around to yet." This youth's honesty proves Satan has a master's degree in trickonometry. While still Lucifer, his own betrayal of "the Lord GOD" involved repeatedly exalting his selfish "I will" over God's will. He may have then tricked "a third" of the angels to reject God's love and authority by making a "god" of their self-serving, "I will" desires (**Revelation 12:3-4**). Augustine (A.D. 354-430), the greatest Biblical scholar of the early Christian centuries, said, "It was pride that changed angels into devils"; the pride of being ruled by their own will over God's. These former angels are most likely devil-serving demons appearing in the New Testament and in our world today. Satan tricked Eve into believing a self-serving "I will" action against God's will would put her into more godlike control of her life, though Satan knew it would unleash death and destruction upon her, Adam, and the human race (**Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-24**). **Jesus**, despite being God the Son on earth, never asserted His "I will" over God the Father. **Jesus** announced, "I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (**John 6:38**). Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), the foremost preacher of colonial America and perhaps the most brilliant mind American soil has ever produced, commented, "Nothing sets a person so much out of the Devil's reach as humility."

John 8 (NASB) describes **Jesus** addressing a crowd where many seem to be genuinely interested in Him. **Vs. 12** is powerful: "Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, 'I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.'" **Vs. 30** reveals the impact of His words: "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him." But then **Jesus** knocks these new

"believers" back on their heels in **vss. 31-32**: "So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you continue in My word ["teaching"-NIV] *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'" These Jews do not like His words at all! They are rightly proud of their religious heritage, but they are wrongly self-righteous. **Vss. 33-36** continues the action: "They answered Him, 'We are Abraham's descendants and have never yet been enslaved to anyone; how is it that You say, "You will become free"?' ³⁴ Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin. ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son does remain forever. ³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'" These "believers" became so disgusted with **Jesus** that **vs. 59** provides the heartbreaking conclusion of this incident: "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

There is good reason why first century Christians often referred to "Jesus Christ" as "our only Master and Lord" (**Jude 4**). They realized putting faith in Christ to be forgiven of God-dishonoring actions is not enough. Their heart cry was to be freed from their sinful selves; not just from sin's penalty. They embraced **Jesus** as their "Master" as their best hope to escape being mastered by the ruinous control of self-serving impulses and desires that pull us away from the "harmony, fulfillment, and victory" **Jesus** alone makes possible for His followers (**I John 4:9**). If you accept the "truth" that your full salvation from sin depends upon how much you obediently allow yourself to be mastered by **Jesus**, this "'truth will make you free'" from being a slave to sin. And "'if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.'"

Here is a fivefold litmus test to help us know the extent to which we remain "the slave of sin" or have been set "free" by surrendering full control of our lives to "Jesus Christ, our only Master and Lord."

- 1) *Surrender* isn't giving up to Jesus something you don't want. It's giving up to Him what you do want.
- 2) *Victory* isn't walking across the goal line of Heaven. It's struggling through opposition of the world while we persist toward the goal of pleasing our Savior.
- 3) *Trust* isn't going just where the lights are in service to our Master. It's following Him through the dark valleys where He leads us to accomplish His will.
- 4) *Love* isn't giving when others are giving to those who need Christ's love. It's giving when others are not giving.
- 5) *Faith* isn't overflowing the excess of what Jesus fills our hearts with to others. It's emptying ourselves of what Christ's Spirit fills us with upon others.

CONCLUSION

Karl Barth (1886-1968) of Switzerland is often regarded as the greatest Protestant theologian of the 20th century. When asked by a student one day, "What is the greatest thought you ever had?" he replied, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." Barth quoted the opening lines of a hymn. It first appeared as a poem in a children's novel written by Anna Warner in 1860. A character in the story comforts a dying child with the words of this poem. Two years later, William Bradbury, a musician and composer, found the poem while reading the children's book. Struck by its lyrical, meaningful words, he sought permission to set it to music. Anna granted his request. In 1862, Bradbury published the hymn as we know it, *Jesus Loves Me*, with its added chorus. Within months this hymn spread across North America like wildfire. It became the most well-known hymn in the world. It's been translated into more languages than any other song. It's often used by missionaries as a teaching aid, because they favor its simple and easy-to-learn chorus. There are 12 stanzas in the poem, *Jesus Loves Me*. They would have made a rather long hymn if Bradbury had included them all in the hymn. But two stanzas are quite remarkable and express with fervency the intimate walk with **Jesus** Anna Warner experienced after giving her heart to our Savior around age 10. #4: "Jesus loves me still today, walking with me on my way. Wanting as a friend to give, light and love to all who live." #11: "Jesus loves me! God's own Son over sin the victory won. When I die, saved by His grace, I shall see Him face to face."