

LOVE

AND

LUST

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We acknowledge the additional works of the various Scholars and Bible Commentaries used in conjunction with the College material. This is not to say that we agree with all their theology, but we certainly value their contribution to the Body of Christ.

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LOVE AND LUST

The subjects “love” and “lust” are, in a spiritual sense, total opposites - for true love gives for the benefit of others whereas lust always seeks to fulfill its own desires. In this study we will examine the various ways in which lust expresses itself. We will also learn what true love is and how we can walk in the love in which Jesus walked during His earthly ministry. Firstly, however, we will look at the definitions of lust.

LUST

Background Reading: 1 John 2:15-17

In the New Testament, the word “lust,” as a translation of the Greek noun “epithumia,” means a strong desire of any kind. Sometimes this word is used to denote a good desire, e.g. Luke 22:15, 1 Thessalonians 2:17. Mostly, however, it is used in connection with desire which is evil, e.g. Galatians 5:16. The Greek verb “epithumeo” has the same twofold application. It is used, for example, in relation to the desires of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:17), as well as those who lust after sinful things (1 Corinthians 10:6).

Today, in the English language, the word “lust” is used almost exclusively in the negative sense. Its meaning has been reduced, for the most part, to that of mere sexual hunger. However the word “lust” really indicates a strong desire of any kind. Generally it does have a negative connotation, especially as used in common speech, but it can also be used in a positive sense.

So the word “lust” can mean:

- a greedy, obsessive desire
 - an excessive desire
 - in particular, a sexual drive
- a strong wish for what promises enjoyment or pleasure.

The subjects “love” and “lust” are, in a spiritual sense, total opposites - for true love gives for the benefit of others whereas lust always seeks to fulfill its own desires.

Lust is not necessarily base and immoral. It may be refined in character, but if it is inconsistent with the will of God, then it is evil. For example, if a person had not eaten for a long period of time, they would have a strong desire or lust for food, which of course, in this instance, would not be evil. But if one lusts after something purely for selfish gain, beyond the boundaries of the will of God, this is then an evil desire which will bring one into bondage.

Lust in the general sense is the natural tendency of the flesh to desire those things which are evil in nature. The Bible speaks of this lust in various ways, e.g. the lust of the mind or the flesh, evil lust, passionate lust, foolish and hurtful lusts, ungodly lusts, youthful lusts, worldly lusts, lusts of men, the lust of the eyes, etc. All of these examples are referring to lusts of the sin nature.

In its most basic form, lust in the negative sense is selfishness, for its hallmark is that it is concerned only for the desires of the one in whom it is operating. Before we were regenerated and grounded in the Word of God, we would all have operated in this kind of selfishness (lust) in one form or another to a large extent. We know this because selfishness involves doing what we want regardless of what the Lord commands, whether we are aware of it or not. Even as Christians, if we are not grounded in the Word of God, we will continue, for the most part, to be controlled by selfishness (a form of lust). This means therefore that in these areas of selfishness, we are controlled and ruled by the sin nature. Paul tells us, however, that this ought not be the case - for Christ delivered us from sin's grip at the Cross, and this includes the domination and control of the sin nature (Romans 6:6).

“. . .Lust in the general sense is the natural tendency of the flesh to desire those things which are evil in nature - in its most basic form, lust in the negative sense is selfishness. . .”

OUR LIFE IN TIMES PAST

Background Reading: 1 Corinthians 6:9-11

Ephesians Ch.2 tells us that, as unsaved people, we walked according to the desires of our sinful flesh (the sin nature):

EPHESIANS 2:1 And you has He quickened (made alive), who were dead in trespasses and sins;

EPHESIANS 2:2 Wherein in time past you walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air (Satan), the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience (unbelievers):

EPHESIANS 2:3 Among whom (the children of disobedience) also we all had our conversation (lived our life) in times past in the lusts of our flesh (according to our sinful nature with its evil desires), fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind (darkened and unrenewed); and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Before regeneration, the evil and corrupt affections of our hearts showed themselves in our perverted thinking as well as in our general conduct. In this state our minds were darkened by the lusts of the flesh (sinful nature), and this situation gave rise to acts of unrighteousness. Of course this happened to varying degrees with different individuals, but nevertheless, the fact is that we were all, by nature, “*children of wrath.*” Again, the word “lust,” when applied in this context, is not referring to sexual desire alone, but also to a general lust for sin, greed, selfish ambition, strong negative

emotions, sensual desires, drunkenness, etc., as Galatians 5:19-21 indicates:

GALATIANS 5:19 *Now the works of the flesh are manifest (clearly seen), which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness (impurity), lasciviousness (sensuality, debauchery),*

GALATIANS 5:20 *Idolatry, witchcraft (sorcery), hatred, variance (discord), emulations (jealousy), wrath (fits of rage), strife (selfish ambition), seditions (dissensions), heresies,*

GALATIANS 5:21 *Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do (practise) such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.*

Willpower only goes so far in giving us the strength to say “no” to some of the lusts of our flesh. It was not enough in times past, as the Old Testament Saints found out. The Law of Moses was given to show how far man diverged from the mark of righteousness, i.e. being right with God. It is the same today. Willpower is woefully inadequate to handle our spiritual condition of sin and the power exerted through the sin nature.

“ . . . Before regeneration, the evil and corrupt affections of our hearts showed themselves in our perverted thinking as well as in our general conduct. . . ”

The answer to man’s shortfall is found only at the Cross of Calvary. Only in Christ can we die and yet live. Only through Him can we dwell with the power to conquer the dictates of the sin nature, and only through Him can we overcome the lusts of sin.

OUR LIFE AS CHRISTIANS

Background Reading: Ephesians 5:1-20

Through the baptism of regeneration, our spirit was cleansed of the unrighteousness we inherited from our forefather Adam, unrighteousness which caused us to be born in a state of sin, having also a nature of sin. While our spirit has been washed clean of pollution, the sin nature still resides within us and needs to be constantly denied any expression if we are to walk in victory. This can only be done through the power of the Cross.

At salvation the sin nature is removed from the spirit. And while it is decommissioned and dethroned in a legal sense in the area of our mind and senses, this may not be the case at an experiential level. In order to keep the sin nature dethroned experientially, we must renew our minds with the light of God's Word, and then act, with God's help (His grace), on this renewal. Indeed, unless we gain knowledge and heart revelation of our wrong thinking and attitudes, how can we be corrected? Ephesians 4:22-24 instructs us as follows:

EPHESIANS 4:22 Strip yourselves of your former nature - put off and discard your old unrenewed self - which characterized your previous manner of life and becomes corrupt through lusts and desires that spring from delusion; (Amp.)

EPHESIANS 4:23 And be constantly renewed in the spirit of your mind - having a fresh mental and spiritual attitude; (Amp.)

EPHESIANS 4:24 And that you put on the new man, which after God (in His image) is created in righteousness and true holiness (created to be like Him)

To “**put on the new man**” means that we must yield to the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge of God's will, through the power given at the Cross. We need to believe and trust that the Spirit will energize our human nature with the energies of His Divine Nature that we, in Christ, are partakers of (2 Peter 1:4). With this energizing will come the desire and power to live righteously. We have all we need, as

Christians, to do this. It is matter of first using our will to choose to go in the right direction by yielding. Then as we focus our faith, God's power becomes available to us to enable us to do the right we have chosen.

“ . . . While our spirit has been washed clean of pollution, the sin nature still resides within us and needs to be constantly denied any expression if we are to walk in victory. . . ”

There are many Christians who are operating in lust (selfishness) in certain areas of their lives because they have not bothered to study God's Word, or they have not believed and trusted, or they have believed but have not gone on in faith to trust. All three scenarios mean that these Christians have not applied the Word's principles and truths to their lives in these areas. This will mean that they will be continuing to operate in carnality in those areas to which this neglect of God's Word applies. For instance:

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal (fleshly, dominated by the carnal nature), even as unto babes in (your new life in) Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:3 For you are yet carnal (spiritually immature): for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are you not carnal, and walk as (unregenerated) men (i.e. men of the world)?

Through the Apostle Paul's writings, which are primarily directed towards Christians, continual mention is made of the problem of Believers listening to and obeying the voice of their flesh. This is to operate in selfishness, or to heed the desires of the sinful nature rather than the voice of the Spirit - the direction given by God's Word and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul instructed in Colossians Ch.3 that we are to:

COLOSSIANS 3:5 Mortify (put to death) therefore your members which are upon the earth (the sin nature as expressed through your body); fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection (lust), evil concupiscence (unholy desires), and covetousness (greed), which is idolatry: (N.I.V.)

COLOSSIANS 3:6 For which things' sake (such works of the flesh) the wrath of God comes on the children of disobedience: (N.I.V.)

COLOSSIANS 3:7 In the which you also walked some time, when you lived in them (prior to conversion). (N.I.V.)

COLOSSIANS 3:8 But now you also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. (N.I.V.)

COLOSSIANS 3:9 Lie not one to another, seeing that you have put off the old man with his deeds;

COLOSSIANS 3:10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge (through the renewing of the mind) after (in) the image of Him Who created him (it)

Notice in verse 10 that in order to live in the image of the One Who created us, we need to put on the new man through the application of truth (according to God's prescribed order). We also need to put to death the evil desires of our earthly nature. We do this by first recognizing that these evil desires still exist, and then refusing, via the grace of the Divine Nature, to yield to them. As we refuse, by God's empowerment, to allow their expression, the lusts of the sinful nature will not gain ascendancy over us. To do this, however, we need to be desiring to operate in the love of God and actively seeking His empowerment to live a Godly life.

“. . . To “put on the new man” means that we must yield to the Holy Spirit, in the knowledge of God’s will, believing and trusting that the Spirit will energize our human nature with the energies of His Divine Nature, giving us the desire and power to live righteously. . .”

The real battle-ground will always be in the mind. Therefore we need to be constantly bringing our thinking into line with God’s thinking, as revealed in His Word, if we are to live righteous and holy lives in Christ. As we know, the sin nature will remain with us during our natural human existence, but is meant to remain dethroned and so non-active. Unless we find and rely on God’s graces, however, we will allow the sin nature to be enthroned in many areas of our lives, with the result that we will act like unregenerate people in these areas. Whether we decide to yield to the sin nature, moment by moment, or to deny its expression is largely a product of whether or not we have renewed our minds and our thinking - by God’s grace. This includes understanding the doctrine of the Cross and us in Christ, being dead to sin and partakers of God’s Divine Nature. Proper renewal comes through the digestion of truth which means we become one with it, and so one with God in that area. Simply put, this means we will have faith in this area of digested truth.

Because the real battle-ground will always be in the mind, we need to be constantly seeking to set our affections and desires on eternal things, not temporal things - the things of this world:

COLOSSIANS 3:1 If you then are risen with Christ, seek those things which are above (spiritual things which come only from the Lord), where Christ sits on the right hand of God.

COLOSSIANS 3:2 Set your affection on things above (eternal things), not on things on the earth (temporal things).

Only the grace of God can bring us to this heart condition and this strength.

“ . . . The real battle-ground will always be in the mind. Therefore we need to be constantly bringing our thinking into line with God’s thinking, as revealed in His Word. . . ”

WHICH MASTER ARE YOU SERVING ?

Background Reading: Romans 6:12-22

Many Christians have been deceived into living for themselves and fulfilling their own desires. They do not realize they are not doing what God wants them to do, and they are ignorant of the fact that you cannot serve God outside His will. The real problem is as Romans 6:16 tells us:

ROMANS 6:16 Do you not know, that to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants you are to whom you obey; whether of sin (the devil’s way) unto (which leads to) death, or of obedience (God’s way) unto (which leads to) righteousness?

Another version reads:

ROMANS 6:16 Do you not know that to whom you put yourselves at the disposal of as slaves resulting in obedience, slaves you are to whom you render habitual obedience, whether slaves of the sinful nature resulting in death, or obedient slaves [of Christ] resulting in righteousness? (Wuest)

The key to this scripture is contained in the phrase “to whom you yield yourselves servants to obey.” This statement clearly indicates that we have a God-given ability to serve a master of our

own choosing. Therefore we willingly submit ourselves to either the Lordship of Christ or the lordship of the devil, in every area of our lives. If Christians make a habit of yielding to sin, this will produce various kinds of bondage, and in the extreme, the forfeiting of one's salvation. Remember the will is only the trigger to point us in the direction of that which we have desired or already said "yes" to in our hearts. From choosing to yield to the Holy Spirit or the sin nature then comes the power to do that which we have desired - whether to sin or to act righteously.

“. . . Many Christians have been deceived into living for themselves and fulfilling their own desires . . . and they are ignorant of the fact that you cannot serve God outside His will. . . ”

When a Christian chooses to live for self (operate in selfishness) in any area of their lives, they place themselves under the dominion of darkness in that area. So in fact they become a servant of sin in that area. Indeed there are only two masters we can choose to obey, God or Satan, and Christians who are trying to stand on "middle ground" are, in fact, serving the latter (in those areas of their lives they are refusing to yield to God). Concerning the deeper issues of life, self-determination and self-control will block the light of God from shining, and darkness will be the result. There is no "middle ground" in which self rules. If we are not yielding our lives to God, we will be serving darkness, which is to serve Satan.

MATTHEW 6:24 No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (that is, deceitful riches, money, possessions or whatever is trusted in). (*Amp.*)

2 PETER 2:19 . . . for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. (*N.I.V.*)

Scripture clearly reveals that it is impossible to serve two masters. We cannot have divided loyalties where the Lord is concerned, for ultimately this will result in the loss of all spirituality and sometimes even salvation itself. So we need to continue to measure ourselves against the Word of God to see, in every area, whom we are serving.

GUARDING THE THOUGHT LIFE

Background Reading: Isaiah 55:6-9

Some Christians believe that because they do not seem to be doing anything wrong in a physical sense, they are not sinning and so are not serving sin in any area. The scriptures show us, however, that the real battle-ground is in the mind. Thinking is, in reality, an action, and the way we think will determine whether we experience victory or defeat in our Christian walk (Matthew 12:37). We know the principle contained in Luke 6:45 of the good man speaking forth good things into existence from the good treasure which has been deposited in his heart. Likewise the evil man will speak forth evil things into existence from the evil treasure which has been deposited in his heart. So we see that it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. It is the same with our thought-life. From that which we continually think about and meditate upon, we will bring forth fruit accordingly. Intent will develop and with this will come the power to do what we desire.

“. . .Thinking is, in reality, an action, and the way we think will determine whether we experience victory or defeat in our Christian walk. . .”

If people allow wrong thoughts to become lodged in their minds so that they entertain them and meditate upon them, they will adopt these wrong thoughts and develop wrong attitudes. This will bring them into bondage. We can see an example of this in Matthew 5:28 where Jesus is speaking:

MATTHEW 5:28 “But I say unto you, That whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her (meditates upon thoughts of sexual immorality) has committed adultery with her already in his heart.”

A man who continually looks upon women with thoughts of intense sexual desire will come into bondage and find it very hard to resist these thoughts. A spirit of lust will come to control the person concerned, and they will need to be delivered from the power of Satan in that area.

That which is imagined by the mind, is, to the mind, true. In that area, therefore, a spirit of adultery and a spirit of lust will then attack the Believer to try to bring into reality in the physical realm that which is already reality in the mind. This attack has success when there is an infusion or permeation of evil desire. Such is the power of sin. So working in conjunction with the sin nature, such spirits give added intensity of desire - to the point where the person concerned becomes a slave to this desire, through their own making. Scripture tells us of this kind of bondage:

MATTHEW 15:19 For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

MATTHEW 15:20 These are the things which defile a man (make him unclean) . . .

“. . .If people allow wrong thoughts to become lodged in their minds so that they entertain them and meditate upon them, they will adopt these wrong thoughts and develop wrong attitudes. . .”

You can thus see that sinful thoughts which are meditated upon and accepted will give demonic forces permission to promote the evil desire - and this will allow bondage of varying degrees to enter into the life of the person concerned.

Therefore do not be fooled. Just because you may not be saying or doing anything which is contrary to God's Word does not mean you are not giving ground to the devil in some way. This statement is not intended to condemn people, but to make us aware of any doors the enemy may try to use to gain access to our lives. You may have a problem with fear, or you may find yourself easily caught up in resentment or anger, etc. Other people have difficulty controlling their temper. As Christians, when we indulge in the wrong thought patterns involved in any of these examples, we are giving the enemy legal ground to enter our lives and create problems. So remember, to accept wrong thoughts and to meditate upon them is to give admittance to their source (our adversary). Therefore we need to be aware of our thinking and guard our thought-life so that we make every thought obedient to Christ and do not give legal ground to the devil to afflict us in some way. And if we have particular weaknesses in any of these areas, we should ask the Lord to help us gain the victory through the empowerment of His grace.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4 (For the weapons of our (spiritual) warfare are not carnal (natural, man-made), but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5 Casting down imaginations (philosophies), and every high (proud) thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity (by God's grace) every thought to the obedience of Christ;

Another version reads:

2 CORINTHIANS 10:4 For the weapons of our warfare are not physical [weapons of flesh and blood], but they are mighty before God for the overthrow and destruction of strongholds, (Amp.)

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5 [Inasmuch as we] refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and

purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One (Amp.)

“*Strongholds*” as found in the Word are areas of thinking which oppose God’s Word and onto which we hold tightly. Anything that sets itself up against the Word is based on pride. And strongholds of pride can be hard to dislodge because by its very nature, pride will never acknowledge it is wrong. Therefore we need to come humbly before God, and ask Him to reveal areas in our thinking that are wrong, areas which hinder our walk and our growth as Christians.

“ . . .Strongholds as found in the Word are areas of thinking which oppose God’s Word and onto which we hold tightly. . . ”

We need to set aside every proud stronghold which sets itself up against the Word of God. This includes strongholds of worldly thinking and intellectual reasoning which have come from human minds, not the mind of God. For example, many Christians and even ministers of God today think that their lives and ministries will be enriched if they study psychology and use it as a supplement to the Gospel. This is like trying to mix oil with water, God’s thinking with man’s thinking, and it will not work. At no time did God ever intend His people to use humanistic teaching to deal with what are essentially spiritual problems, rooted in sin. It is God’s way of thinking and God’s teaching, based on His prescribed order, which will deliver the captives - not philosophies which are derived from the mind of man with the help of Satan, philosophies which excuse his sin.

ISAIAH 55:8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,” says the Lord.

ISAIAH 55:9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.”

ISAIAH 59:8 The way of peace they know not (the world does not know peace); and there is no judgement in their goings (no wisdom in their decisions): they have made them crooked paths (elaborate plans arising from faulty foundations): whosoever goes therein shall not know peace. (“Peace” is not a philosophy, creed, dogma, theory, or doctrine. It is a Person, and that Person is Christ: E.S.B.)

ISAIAH 59:9 Therefore is judgement far from us, neither does justice overtake us: we wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but we walk in darkness (because of our wrong thinking and wrong focus).

We also need to be very careful that we do not begin to think according to human standards in areas of morality. Just consider how we are constantly being bombarded by the influence of media which would tell us, for instance, that euthanasia is an act of mercy, that homosexuality is a valid alternative lifestyle, and that sexual immorality is both desirable and liberating. The Word of God is to be our guide, not the deception of secular humanism (man’s philosophy of man, devoid of the knowledge of God’s existence or influence) or changing cultural dictates which again give justification for man’s sin. The Word tells us, “*I am the Lord, I change not*” (Malachi 3:6). And neither do His principles and righteous standards.

***“. . .The Word of God is to be our guide,
not the deception of secular humanism
or changing cultural dictates which
again give justification for man’s sin. . .”***

The people who are experiencing emotional problems in this world, primarily have a sin problem. And the answer to every sin problem is found at the Cross. Remember Jesus’ words at Calvary, “*It is finished.*” What was finished? The need for sacrifices was finished. The ceremonies and feasts had become obsolete. The Old Covenant was finished in the sense that it had been fulfilled. But the

state of sin, the guilt of sin and the power of sin were also finished in the sense of having been defeated. Jesus conquered sin at the Cross, and made this defeat effective for us when He rose from the dead. Now all those who put their trust in Christ's finished work at the Cross, and the resurrection power we have in Him, will find the pathway to truth and deliverance as they seek it sincerely.

So do not become entrapped and ensnared by false teaching and worldly thinking. Determine that you will know the Word of God as your guiding light, and keep your mind free from any philosophy or system of thought which opposes its principles and commandments. In this way you can both avoid and demolish enemy strongholds, and *"imagination and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God."*

We thus need to examine every thought, making each thought subject to God's Word and rejecting those thoughts that are worldly or fleshly. We need to have our minds renewed so that we are thinking according to God's standards, rejecting that which is wrong and embracing that which is holy, right and true. We need also to meditate on things that are Godly and wholesome, things that will edify us, as Philippians 4:8 instructs.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue (excellence), and if there be any (thing worthy of) praise, think (let your mind dwell) on these things.

THE OFFERING OF OURSELVES FOR GOD'S SERVICE

Background Reading: 2 Timothy Chapter 2

Although we may sometimes fall into sin's grip in an area, we are not to remain there. Acknowledgement of wrong then true repentance will bring God's forgiveness and remove all sin's legal ground.

1 JOHN 1:9 If we (Christians) confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we believe also for the cleansing of all unrighteousness, then the aftermath of sin will also be removed. Therefore when we ask for forgiveness and believe that it has been granted, we should also always believe for this spiritual cleansing.

Romans 6:12 tells us:

ROMANS 6:12 Let not sin (the sin nature) therefore reign (rule) in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.

We can see from this scripture that it is possible for Christians to allow sin, in an area, to dominate them - and we know that this is true. The verse also indicates that it is our choice as to whether we allow our sin nature to gain the upper hand so that we obey our fleshly lusts - or whether we do not. Indeed we, as Christians, through our resurrection with Christ, have been given access to the Divine Nature. Through the graces and energies of the Divine Nature, we can order our behaviour, therefore denying the sin nature any expression in our lives - as faith is exercised. Correct focus is needed, however, in regard to our faith. Therefore we need to be taught and refreshed, year after year, concerning the things that pertain to our new life in Christ. This the Spirit will do as we seek truth with all we have. As part of this commitment we need to meet daily with the Lover of our souls so that He may reveal His will for our lives. Through seeking truth and the Author of it, we can obtain the victory we need - through His empowering graces.

“ . . . Through the graces and energies of the Divine Nature, we can order our behaviour, therefore denying the sin nature any expression in our lives - as faith is exercised. . . ”

Sin springs from the desire to gratify the lusts of the sinful nature, and one sin can give an entry point that leads us on to more sin. Therefore Christians cannot afford to entertain sin of any kind, or to think that small areas of sin don't matter. Sin itself is full of deceit. It promises pleasure or gain but returns nothing but emptiness and defeat. And if sin becomes a habit, it can cause a hardening of the heart to take place whereby Christians can become insensitive to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if we continually yield to the Spirit, thereby living righteously, our hearts will be softened towards God. The writer of Hebrews gives warning in this regard:

HEBREWS 3:12 Take heed, brethren (the writer is warning Christians today based on Israel's track record in the wilderness), lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief (the Israelites' problem), in departing from the living God (not receiving the message preached).

HEBREWS 3:13 But exhort (urge and encourage) one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened (into settled rebellion) through the deceitfulness of sin.

If our heart can be “hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,” then it can also be softened by us living in God's Word. Because of the destructive and deceitful nature of sin, Paul instructs us to yield every part of ourselves as an instrument of righteousness in God's service.

ROMANS 6:13 Neither yield your members (the parts of your body) as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin (the sin nature): but yield yourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead (raised in newness of life), and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

ROMANS 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present (dedicate) your bodies (as) a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God

(by taking up your cross of self-denial and continuing in God's Word), which is your reasonable (spiritual) service.

In response to God's great mercy, it is our duty and our reasonable service to present and dedicate our body, which means our whole being, to Him (Luke 9:23). The reason for this is found in First Corinthians 6:19-20 where we are told that our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that both our body and our spirit belong to God.

The instruction to present ourselves in Romans 12:1 is speaking about the voluntary act of yielding every aspect of our life to the Lord. It not only implies the avoidance of sin but also the yielding of one's body as an instrument to be used in God's service, not as we see fit but as He sees fit. This means that every part of us should be used to serve God, not Satan or self.

“. . . Sin springs from the desire to gratify the lusts of the sinful nature, and one sin can give an entry point that leads us on to more sin. . .”

The offering of ourselves also includes our mind (our thought-life), for as stated, we must dedicate and consecrate our whole being to the Lord if we are to live a holy life by His grace.

ROMANS 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed (changed) by the renewing of your mind (the way you think, i.e. we begin to think spiritually), that you may prove (and know for yourself) what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

To not be conformed to this world in our thinking we must commit ourselves to the study and application of the Word of God by which our mind will be renewed. We thus offer our minds for His service by seeking truth and yielding ourselves to the Holy Spirit. This is not a “let go and let God” affair but a process where we co-

operate with the Spirit, striving in His power to achieve a desired result - that of pleasing the Father.

We either yield our bodily members to be servants of sin or servants of righteousness. There is no middle or neutral ground. Even Paul found this difficult at times, experiencing in himself the inner conflict between his fleshly desires and those of his regenerated spirit (Romans 7:15-25).

In this chapter, Paul speaks about his early Christian experiences. He had assumed that once he had accepted Christ into his heart and was baptized in the Holy Spirit, he would have had enough strength to keep the Law of God (God's righteous standards). In time he realized that the Lord didn't intend for him or anyone else to keep His commandments by their own strength, i.e. by willpower and determination. Rather, the Law of God, as pertaining to New Testament Christians, is to be kept by us relying on the grace of God at work in and through us.

At this point in time, as described in Romans Ch.7, Paul was mistaken and even deceived through ignorance and false hope, having been trained for his whole lifetime in a religious system which taught that through works we please God. But God revealed to him the prescribed order by which we must live in order to walk according to God's righteous standards (constituting law for us in this New Testament Age of Grace). In Romans Chs. 6, 7 and 8 these truths were openly laid out to the New Testament Church - so that we may have victory not only at a positional level but also at an experiential level. The conclusion in this is that man cannot, by himself, live up to God's holy and righteous standards. To do so he needs God's help - even after salvation. Summing it up, to please the Father we are to live by grace, not by law. If we try to live by law (so as to obey God's laws in our own strength, which is to try and please God by works), the sin nature will be enthroned, producing self-effort and so self-righteousness.

***“ . . . Rather, the Law of God, as
pertaining to New Testament Christians,
is to be kept by us relying on the grace of
God at work in and through us. . . ”***

Paul speaks of his inner conflict and obvious frustration before he gained insight into these truths. Indeed the desire to sin can be very strong, especially when we are faced with situations where we are unjustly treated, persecuted or provoked. We may also have persistent weaknesses in areas which prompt us to sin in response to particular circumstances. We should never, however, attempt to deal with a sin problem through self-effort alone, or by formulas and methods.

Self-dependence or self-effort alone cannot meet the need of the day in our Christian walk. If we are relying on ourselves alone, then what we are doing is no better than the Pharisees of Jesus' day. They were trying to please God through works, resulting in the sad state of pride, self-righteousness and error. Failure, defeat and sin will follow this format for living.

Sometimes we can use our will to override sin in the short term. To achieve a long term solution to any sin problem, however, we need to deal with it through submitting ourselves to the Word of God and believing for God's empowerment to assist us in our time of need. Natural thinking will never gain us victory over the flesh - only doing things God's way. If we find we still lack the ability to overcome, we will then need to seek help from a mature Christian.

It is really not so much a matter of defeating sin, but a matter of character. If we allow God to build our character by the graces and energies of His Divine Nature at work in us, then sin will be on the outside of us instead of the inside. If we walk in the light, the lusts of the flesh will not have sway and any darkness will flee (1 John 1:7).

Paul encourages us to recognize our position in Christ and to make a concerted and consistent effort against the flesh - in the strength the Lord provides. If we choose to love truth and hate sin, we will yield our whole being as an instrument of righteousness, being then empowered by the Spirit to act accordingly. As a consequence, the enemy will have no legal ground to enter or remain in our life and sin will have no dominion over us. This is certainly to be our goal - to love truth and hate sin, and to be faithful to God and His Word.

“ . . . It is really not so much a matter of defeating sin, but a matter of character. If we allow God to build our character by the graces and energies of His Divine Nature at work in us, then sin will be on the outside of us instead of the inside. . . ”

The following scriptures are taken from Wuest’s translation of the Greek New Testament. They proclaim the way of victory for the Christian, so that righteous fruit is brought forth:

ROMANS 6:13 Moreover, stop putting your members at the disposal of the sinful nature as weapons of unrighteousness, but by a once-for-all act and at once, put yourselves at the disposal of God as those who are actively alive out from among the dead, and put your members as weapons of righteousness at the disposal of God,

ROMANS 6:14 for [then] the sinful nature will not exercise lordship over you, for you are not under law but under grace.

ROMANS 6:17 But God be thanked, that [whereas] you were slaves of the evil nature, you obeyed out from the heart as a source a type of teaching into which you were handed over.

ROMANS 6:18 And having been set free once for all from the sinful nature, you were constituted slaves to righteousness.

ROMANS 6:19 I am using an illustration drawn from human affairs because of the frailties of your humanity. For just as you placed your members as slaves at the disposal of uncleanness and lawlessness resulting in

lawlessness, thus now place your members as slaves at the disposal of righteousness resulting in holiness.

ROMANS 6:20 *For, when you were slaves of the sinful nature, you were those who were free with respect to righteousness.*

ROMANS 6:21 *Therefore, what fruit were you having then, upon the basis of which things now you are ashamed? For the consummation of these things is death.*

ROMANS 6:22 *But now, having been set free from the sinful nature and having been made bondslaves of God, you are having your fruit resulting in holiness, and the consummation, life eternal.*

As we have said, to please the Father, and to produce the righteous fruit described in Romans 6:22, we need to be living by grace not law. This is to live according to the prescribed order of victory as set out in the Word of God. To explore this issue, which very often becomes a stumbling block for Christians, we will look at the dichotomy that exists between “law” and “grace.”

“LAW” OR “GRACE”

God’s Law as such is good, but if it is obeyed without grace, it becomes a false means by which one tries to obtain righteousness or live according to a righteous standard. This then brings in the question for the Christian of law or grace. Which is the Christian seeking to live under and by?

If a Christian wants to please God (this being their true heart intent) and doesn’t properly understand the truths of the message of the Cross (the Atonement), they will ultimately and inevitably seek to function under “law.”

If a Christian does not understand the Cross, then their foundation for doing anything for God will be based on a false premise. Indeed only through an understanding of the Cross, which is found in Romans Ch. 6, can a Christian begin to live in “grace”

experientially. If we obey by grace and continually rely on God, the very desire to do wrong diminishes.

“ . . . If a Christian does not understand the Cross, then their foundation for doing anything for God will be based on a false premise. . . ”

The faith needed for the Christian to draw on the graces afforded to us through the Cross, can only come to us if we understand and rely on the way faith is developed in us. Therefore:

1. We must know that faith is God-given and that only through the Divine Nature energizing our human nature can we really believe and trust.

2. We must know that faith comes by hearing God’s Word and digesting it. The grace of the Divine Nature gives us the Divine energy to believe and trust in this Word - which constitutes faith.

We speak here in regard to God’s Word, repentance, the Blood, God’s forgiveness, and the “*newness of life*” by which we walk. The prescribed order by which we are to live our lives comes through the Cross. Anything outside of this will result in “law” which will frustrate the grace of God in this New Testament Age of Grace (Galatians 2:21). To frustrate the grace of God is to stop Him from empowering us with His grace because of our intent to self-rule and be self-reliant.

The intent of many Christians is to please God, but sadly, as we have said, they attempt to do this under “law” and not grace. Anything done under law is done by and through the power of self. Not to understand the Cross, with the Holy Spirit’s help of course, means that the Christian cannot draw on God’s graces so as to do His will. This can only result in the Christian living his life by self-effort and therefore self-rule, no matter how noble his intentions. This is to frustrate the grace of God - to keep Him and the blessing of His grace at bay.

The proper object of one's faith must be the Cross. Every other object, no matter how seemingly good, if it does not encompass the Cross will frustrate (stop) God's grace, which is to prevent this grace being received in one's life. There is no other road or way. Good works, intellectual study, prayer alone, water baptism, fasting, sacrificing of time and goods, all if used alone as objects to attract God's attention and favour will cause one to come under law and so fail in one's most noble ambition.

“. . .Not to understand the Cross can only result in the Christian living his life by self-effort and therefore self-rule, no matter how noble his intentions. . .”

The Christian whose intention is to please God, will, without grace, always operate under the laws of religion. This must lead the Christian, of course, to an experientially dead life, at best, in Him. Yes, saved if in Christ, but dead to the experiential side of grace and so the outworking of “*newness of life*” (Romans 6:3-4).

Indeed concerning our spiritual affairs, we either function under “law” or “grace.” If we are functioning under “law” then, in those areas, we will come under condemnation (judgement) (Romans 4:15).

The result of this condemnation will be that in these areas of law in our self-empowered world of religion, we will frustrate the grace of God - that is, we will block Him from doing what He wants to do as our loving Heavenly Father (Galatians 2:21).

You see where there is “law,” there is no room for anything else, for the Christian is “full up” in that area of their life. We, with God's help, must be emptied of self and allow God to fill us with His graces, including the power that comes through His Divine Nature and His Word. However if we have religion, or have turned our faith into formulas, thereby making it a religion, then a position of “law” results. This is because religion always works in “law,” otherwise known as self-effort.

One writer comments concerning this subject: “*Whereas the effect of law is condemnation, the action of grace is “justification.”*”

The doctrine of justification by works generates religious pride - that of Justification by Faith produces contrition and humility. In the matter of Justification, Faith and works are opposite and irreconcilable - as opposed as Grace and Debt. Since God declares ungodly men righteous, works cannot in any sense furnish a ground for Justification, and hence the first step toward Salvation on the part of a sinner is to humble himself and accept the Divine pronouncement that he is "ungodly."

Regrettably, the vast majority of mankind accepts the human doctrine of salvation by merit; a very small minority believes the Divine Doctrine of Salvation by Grace. As the Lord Jesus Himself said, few tread that narrow way. It is abhorrent to human pride."¹
(underlines added)

This same principle applies in regard to works. Because the Cross is not involved, those works done in the power of self alone will never please God or bring victory into our lives. Therefore man's works, no matter how good or well intentioned these may be, cannot be deemed "good" or "acceptable" in a spiritual sense.

When man looks for God's favour in the doing of good works alone, even though it is "good" to do them, it does not gain approval from God. This is because man is seeking credit for his self-effort, and is not giving credit to anyone else for he has done it himself. This in fact is self-reliance and comes under the "law of works," for while these works are "good" they are not "Godly," and so are of no eternal value.

“. . . With God's help, we must be emptied of self and allow God to fill us with His graces, including the power that comes through His Divine Nature and His Word. . . “

To the natural mind such works may appear altruistic, certainly good, for example to help one's fellow man in need. However, God's Word tells us that we are first to love our fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40), not just meet his natural need. This love, if we

are to follow God's prescribed order, must be a Godly love, "agape love," and we can only love like this if we:

1. Are in Christ
2. Understand the Cross
3. Come to faith in the Cross (the Atonement) and what it has afforded
4. Receive the empowerment of the Divine Nature to love as God loves.

All the "doing" in the world to try and help our fellowman will not replace our responsibility to love him. God has said in His Word that we must love both Him and our fellowman. Only when we do this can we please God. Of course God would not ask us to do something we cannot do. We are able to love in the way God wants us to love only in Christ as we yield to the Holy Spirit and allow Him to fill us and energize us with His graces.

Returning to the distinction between law and grace, another example can be seen in the Saint who has sin in their life. After realizing they are doing wrong, they manage to stop sinning, after much struggle, by willpower.

However while to cease doing this wrong is good, it does not deal with the spiritual side of the sin. In order for any sin in a Saint's life to be dealt with in accordance with God's Word, the Blood must first be applied (through repentance) so that grace can then be received.

If this is not done, the Saint will live under "law" and its penalty. Just stopping the sin is not the end of law. The arm of the flesh (willpower) cannot deal with a spiritual problem, for only God's grace can deal with it completely. Only the Blood of the Cross can afford us this grace that deals with sin completely and brings us under "grace," even the forgiveness of sins.

The process begins when we allow ourselves to be humbled under the mighty hand of God (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). Then through His Anointing, we encounter the power of truth that not only brings conviction to the heart but also the knowledge of this forgiveness. As we respond to God's conviction power, we will repent and put our sin under the Blood of the Cross to be forever obliterated (1 John 1:9; Ephesians 1:7; Psalm 103:12).

*“ . . . Through His Anointing, we
encounter the power of truth that not
only brings conviction to the heart but
also the knowledge of this
forgiveness. . . ”*

God’s grace orders our life or comes into our life through God-given faith. Only in Christ, as we absorb the graces of the Divine Nature with a proper focus in regard to God’s truth, wisdom and will, can we live in this higher order to which Christ has given the Saint access through the Cross.

To understand what the Cross has done for us and what it has afforded us, we must, with the help of the Holy Spirit:

1. Seek God’s Word and will in regard to the Cross
2. Find God’s Word and will in regard to the Cross
3. Embrace God’s Word and will in regard to the Cross, e.g.

Romans 6:11.

However we must know that in order to partake fully of the graces of the Divine Nature:

1. The Saint’s intentions must be God-created
2. The Saint’s motive must be God-given (pure)
3. The Saint’s steps must be God-directed.

In other words, everything that is good or holy or righteous within we who are in Christ has already been placed there by the Lord Himself. Our responsibility is to yield - His is to supply us with grace and empowerment. Then the glory goes to Him and Him alone. Amen.

Ways of operating in “law” therefore involve:

- (a) Using willpower alone to do right. This is to do things, to try to please God, in our own strength.
- (b) Formularizing God’s do’s and don’ts - in other words His principles or His Word - so that our faith is turned into a religion in these areas. This is to use religious works to try to please God.

The Saint, to please God and reach his potential, must not only identify with Christ, but in all that he does he must identify in Christ. Positional salvation is not the goal but it is the gateway to conditional (experiential) salvation. The first is salvation from hell; the second is salvation from self. Only by experientially being in Christ can we know the joy and power of God's strength which enables us to say "yes" to His way, will and Word. All this amounts to us living our life not by obedience to "law" but by God's "grace" afforded to us through the Cross. And to live under grace will cause us not to break God's laws.

“. . . Positional salvation is not the goal but it is the gateway to conditional (experiential) salvation. The first is salvation from hell; the second is salvation from self. . .”

On a practical level, to live under grace is to acknowledge God in all our ways (Proverbs 3:5-6), so that we can order our lives by His direction and through His empowerment. In this we must serve God first, not man, for outside His empowering grace we cannot obtain merit. This is, in fact, to live by law, seeking to please God by our own efforts. In fact we sin when we don't submit to God first, for then self-rule gains ascendancy. And remember that we cannot serve two masters, the Lord and ourselves.

The Lord desires that we seek Him continually, desiring His direction and His will to be done in our lives. We also seek Him to ask for His enablement at a holy level so that we will not frustrate the grace of God (Galatians 2:21). As we have said, this means that we stop God from doing what He wants to do in our lives by preventing Him from bestowing His grace upon us.

As we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways and seek to put Him first in everything we do, we develop our relationship with Him and learn greater levels of trust. This is to function under grace not law, not seeking to please Him through works but according to His direction and empowerment. As a result we can then give God the glory for whatever fruit is manifested in and through our lives. This

is the way of the Cross, this is the harvest and the outcome of the Spirit-led life (Romans 8:1). Amen and amen!

It should be our desire and goal to produce such fruit that our Lord may be glorified in all that we do. Then others may see Christ and His love through us, so that we become living witnesses to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We need therefore to rid ourselves of lust, if it is in our lives, and to live a life of love. We have two options - to live in lust (selfishness through a self-ruled life) or to live in love (selflessness through a Spirit-ruled life). The only way we can do the latter is by allowing God to empower us through the Divine Nature to walk after His Spirit. This is the way we walk in His love. Let us examine this subject more closely.

“ . . . On a practical level, to live under grace is to acknowledge God in all our ways (Proverbs 3:5-6), so that we can order our lives by His direction and through His empowerment. . . ”

LOVE

Background Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Love is one of the focal points of the Bible, the reason being that God is Love and that he who dwells in God, dwells in Love. Therefore love is not an attribute of God which can be tacked on or taken away - it expresses His very nature and identity.

1 JOHN 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God (speaks of agape love, of which the world knows nothing, and, in fact, cannot have to any degree); and every one who loves is born of God, and knows God. (This is the God kind of love, and cannot be faked. In fact, something will always happen to show what type of love the person possesses, whether it's the God kind or that of the world.) (E.S.B.)

There are, however, many different human views of what love is, and because of this, the true meaning of God's kind of love is usually clouded in misconception.

In the dictionary, love is defined as an emotion, a sentiment or a feeling of pleasurable attraction toward or delight in something (a principle, a person or a thing) which induces a desire for its presence, possession or well-being, or the promotion of its object. This gives us a general impression of what love is, but we need to look at its meaning much more closely if we are to obtain a true Biblical understanding of this powerful yet overused word.

1 Corinthians 13:13 tells us:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:13 But now abides faith, hope, love (agape love), these three (which will remain forever); but the greatest of these is love (agape).

There are various types of love, but within the confines of our language, only one term is employed. Therefore, in the English language, we find that the individual distinction between different types of love is missing. For instance, the word "love" in English can refer to anything in the Greek language from "agape" (God-type love), to "philadelphia" (brotherly love), to "philandros" (love of a wife for her husband), to "philarguria" (love of money), etc., etc.

Thus the Greek language uses many words to distinguish between the many different forms of love. We, however, will be concerned here mainly with the God-type love known as "agape."

The Greek word "agape" describes a giving, active love which expresses itself on behalf of others. It is the highest form of love, for it has no vested interests in receiving a return from the loved one. Agape love is thus characterized and epitomized by selflessness. Agape is the term used in describing God's love for man (John 3:16), man's love for God (2 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 John 2:5) and man's love for his fellow man (John 15:12; Galatians 5:14).

“. . .The Greek word “agape” describes a giving, active love which expresses itself on behalf of others. . .”

Agape love is not a love which emanates from unregenerated man because without the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, man's love is basically rooted in self. This means that unsaved man's good works and deeds will be performed with a selfish motive of some kind - for man's love expects a return of some kind, even if this is only to feel good or rewarded because of the expression of that love. God's love has a totally different foundation - for His love is unconditional and does not expect a return for His sake. Even Christians who lack yieldedness to the Holy Spirit cannot love with this kind of love. It comes about by the nature of God being expressed through man (via the Divine Nature). Agape love also encompasses God's justice and love of righteousness. It will eventually usher in perfect order and perfect peace, when all evil is eradicated (Revelation 21:1-4). This is the love of our God, and because everything He does is motivated by this love, we need to respect all God's ways as just and perfect. Indeed in every situation, and in all His dealings, God is loving and God is just.

DEUTERONOMY 32:4 He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment (just): a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He.

“. . . Agape is the highest form of love, for it has no vested interests in receiving a return from the loved one. Agape love is thus characterized and epitomized by selflessness. . .”

AGAPE LOVE

Background Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

In the Old Testament, man's highest expression of love was commanded by Moses, and in the New Testament, it was quoted by Jesus: to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul and body.

This is still the highest level or expression of love to which we can ever attain.

DEUTERONOMY 6:5 *And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart (spirit), and with all your soul (mind), and with all your might (strength or body).*

MARK 12:29 *And Jesus answered him . . .*

MARK 12:30 *“And you shall love (with Holy Spirit generated love) the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength: this is the first commandment (this is the type of “love” which the world doesn’t have, and in fact, cannot have, which only a Believer can have, and which can only be given by the Lord: E.S.B.)*

MARK 12:31 *And the second is like, namely this, You shall love (with Holy Spirit generated love) your neighbour as yourself. There is none other commandment greater than these (if we truly love God, we will love our neighbour also).”*

MARK 12:32 *And the scribe said unto him, “Well, Master, You have said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but He:*

MARK 12:33 *And to love (with Holy Spirit generated love) Him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love (with Holy Spirit generated love) his neighbour as himself, is more (important) than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”*

Agape love is full of goodness and is selfless in nature. We can see this type of love in action in John 3:16 where it tells us that God gave to the world His only begotten Son, the very best He could give.

JOHN 3:16 *For God so loved the world (with the God kind of love), that He gave His (one and) only begotten Son (to die for the sin of the world), that whosoever*

believes in Him (Jesus) should not perish, but have (with God) everlasting life.

God could give nothing of any greater value than His Son - to be the ransom payment for the souls of men. And Jesus displayed His love for the Father through His obedience to the Father's word (will) - for Jesus said, "I came down from heaven not to do My own will but the will of Him Who sent Me" (John 6:38). Likewise we show our love for the Father by obeying Him - His Word and His will (John 14:21).

“. . . Jesus displayed His love for the Father through His obedience to the Father's word (will) – likewise we show our love for the Father by obeying Him - His Word and His will. . .”

The love of God for mankind was displayed in its fullness when Jesus suffered and laid down His life for us. Jesus, the Lamb of God, was God's love manifest in the flesh.

ROMANS 5:8 But God commends His love toward us (His death for the unrighteous is proof of that love), in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. (He died for those who hated Him, He died for those who hate Him.)

ROMANS 5:9 Much more then (how much more will He do for us now we are reconciled to Him), being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from (the) wrath (of God) through Him.

ROMANS 5:10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, it is much more [certain], now that we are reconciled, that we shall be saved [daily delivered from sin's dominion] through His [resurrection] life. (Amp.)

The extent of God's love was shown by the fact that Christ died for people in whom there was nothing to evoke that love. In reality, when He died for us, we were enemies of the Cross of Christ. Yet He willingly laid down His life.

Jesus revealed that the highest expression of love we can ever desire to operate in is to do likewise - to lay down our lives for others, even strangers.

JOHN 15:12 This is My commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you.

JOHN 15:13 Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

1 JOHN 3:16 Hereby perceive we the Love of God (speaks of knowledge gained by experience), because He laid down His life for us (the highest proof of love is the Sacrifice of that which is most precious): and we ought to lay down our lives for the Brethren. (This proclaims Christ as our example, and what the meaning of true love actually is.) (E.S.B.)

“ . . . Jesus revealed that the highest expression of love we can ever desire to operate in is to do likewise - to lay down our lives for others, even strangers. . . ”

Many people have misinterpreted this statement of Jesus concerning the laying down of one's life. It simply means that we should deny our fleshly wants and desires, and serve God with our whole being in whatever capacity He has called us to. (And when we say “fleshly” wants and desires, this does not necessarily mean our sinful desires - it can simply mean the desires we have for our own life which are not shared by God.) To serve Him in this way involves taking up the cross of self-denial and bringing our wants and desires into line with God's will for our life. Jesus described the attitude we should have towards God and His will in the following verses:

LUKE 14:26 If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his [own] father and mother [that is, in the sense of indifference to or relative disregard for them in comparison with his attitude toward God] and [likewise] his wife and children and brothers and sisters, [yes] and even his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. (Amp.)

LUKE 14:27 Whoever does not persevere and carry his own cross, and come after (follow) Me, cannot be My disciple. (Amp.)

“The Greek term for “hate” (misei - Luke 14:26) does not mean hate the way we normally utilize the word. Instead, it relates to preference. . . . God must have priority in our lives. Actually, only when He is first can we truly love our parents, spouses, children, siblings, and self in a biblical way.”²

“The phrase, “And hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea,” speaks to the dearest affections of the human heart. It speaks of a proper relationship with Christ.

The word “hate” here simply means “an idiom of preference.” It means to love less.

The nearest affections are the strongest; but no affection however strong must be permitted to compete with, or displace Christ (Williams).

To be sure, if one truly follows this command by the Lord, making Christ all in all, the love for one’s nearest relatives, will be even greater and stronger than previous, but in its proper place.”³

The message of Luke 14:26-27 is still our guideline today, for this is to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. As we have said, man can only love this way with God’s help, through His empowerment. To love as the scriptures declare is to love God first, and this is the basic condition of discipleship. This is to “*seek first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness*” (Matthew 6:33), as the Word instructs.

In the Godly man, agape love is both spontaneous and commanded (John 13:34-35, 15:9). We are to love as Christ loved us,

and allow God to express Himself through us. Indeed scripture tells us that we are to be imitators of our Heavenly Father.

EPHESIANS 5:1 Be ye therefore followers (imitators) of God, as dear (dearly loved) children

EPHESIANS 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us, and has given Himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

Through Jesus, God's love has been made available to the Saint through the energizing grace of the Divine Nature, and we are commanded to pass this love on to a lost and hurting world. It should be every Christian's goal to be a living expression of the Lord's nature so that in all we do, He is indeed glorified. In this way, as the Word of God tells us, by our love for one another the world will know that we are His and that God is alive and active in the earth today. And we need to remember it is only through God's Divine Nature enmeshing with our human nature and energizing it that we can love as God wants us to love - in the sense of "agape." Otherwise our greatest expressions of love will be grounded in self, and this constitutes human love, not agape love.

1 JOHN 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue (just in speech); but in deed and in truth (in action).

JOHN 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you (more is required than the old commandment to love your neighbour as yourself), That you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another (in the way of agape).

JOHN 13:35 By this shall all men know that you are My Disciples (not only proclaims this "Love" as the foundation of the New Covenant, but as well, proclaims it as the basis for recognition that one is truly in the New Covenant), if you have love one to another (this type of Love is the "God-Kind of Love," and is impossible for anyone to have without accepting Christ as one's

Saviour; as well, “Love” and the “Cross” are indivisible). (E.S.B.)

“. . .To love as the scriptures declare is to love God first, and this is the basic condition of discipleship. . .”

OPERATING IN AGAPE LOVE

Background Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

Many people think that living in love is merely being “nice” to people and not offending them by saying things (presenting them with truths) which they may not want to hear. Such people justify themselves and their position by saying that everyone has the right to do as they choose, and that challenging or confronting people or making them feel uncomfortable is not profitable or “nice.” While this may be true to some degree, this view has been distorted and exaggerated to the point where good (that which God calls love) is being called evil, and evil is being called good (Isaiah 5:20-21). For example, some Christians are reluctant to share the Gospel with people, in wisdom, when the opportunity arises because they do not want to make them feel uncomfortable or lose their favour. In doing so, such Christians feel they are operating in love. The truth is, however, that they are either misguided, or simply operating in selfishness (lust) and the compromise brought about by the fear of man. What they are doing is denying people the opportunity to hear the truth concerning what is destined for them if they do not make Jesus the Lord of their lives. And it is not an expression of love towards the unsaved if we do not care enough about them to try to save them from eternal torment.

This may seem very blunt, but nevertheless it is the truth. We find in Christian circles that concepts such as love have been greatly polluted with worldly ideas, as well as a fleshly, lazy, complacent desire to do nothing - to the extent where people are deceived in regard to what true love is all about.

“ . . .Some Christians are reluctant to share the Gospel with people, in wisdom, when the opportunity arises because they do not want to make them feel uncomfortable or lose their favour. . .”

We can see examples of true love in action throughout Jesus' earthly ministry. True love overturned the tables of those who were buying and selling in the Temple, and drove them out (Matthew 21:12-13). True love told the Pharisees of their hypocrisy and likened them to a brood of snakes and white-washed tombstones (Matthew 23:13-33). Love proclaimed the Gospel to the lost regardless of the opposition. We need to remember, however, that all through Jesus' earthly ministry, He was led by the Spirit to do the things He did. This does not mean that we are to rebuke people as He did, unless we are directed by the Spirit to do so - and this is very rare, being usually done by Five Fold ministers when they are led and anointed by the Holy Spirit to do so. It does mean that when an opportunity arises to share the Gospel with someone, we should take full advantage of it and help bring that person to the truth. For as we have learned, if we truly love other people, we will do all we can so that their physical and spiritual needs can be met in Christ. This entails firstly, of course, the salvation of their spirit, and then the application of God's principles to other areas of their lives.

To walk in agape love, we must walk in the light of the truth, yielding to the Spirit. But if we do not seek to love as God has directed, we will be allowing the devil to blind us spiritually and we will be choosing to walk in darkness instead of light. This will cause us to stumble about in the darkness, even though we are saved.

1 JOHN 2:8 Again, a new commandment I write unto you (the commandment to love), which thing is true in Him and in you (who live in Him and so should live like Him): because the darkness is past, and the true Light (Christ) now shines (and will shine forever).

1 JOHN 2:9 He who says he is in the Light, and hates his brother (a fellow Believer), is in darkness (does not truly know God) even until now.

1 JOHN 2:10 He who loves his brother abides in the Light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him (nothing in him that would cause him to stumble). (To walk in the light is to be governed by love, which removes the stumbling blocks: E.S.B.)

1 JOHN 2:11 But he who hates his brother (a fellow Believer) is in darkness, and walks in darkness, and knows not where he goes (has lost his way), because that darkness has blinded his eyes (in that area).

True holy light gives the energy to love at an agape level, e.g. to love your enemies so that you may even give your life for them, even the worst kind - Jesus did. If we seek this and find it, then darkness is kept at bay. If we don't bother to seek it, then darkness will be the order of the day. Darkness in certain areas will prevent us loving with a pure heart and pure motives. That darkness will separate us from God's truth and frustrate His grace from being made available to us (Galatians 2:21).

How much we need the energy that comes from the Father of Lights, energy to love and serve God. Only in Him is this wonderful energy (grace) available and only through Christ can we enter into this blessing and way of life.

“. . . True holy light gives the energy to love at an agape level, e.g. to love your enemies so that you may even give your life for them, even the worst kind - Jesus did. . . ”

Outside this prescribed order, men and women (this can include Christians) stumble in dark corridors, rebelling against their Creator and sinning against their fellow man, having no concern for his eternal future. Again only in Christ, and according to His

prescribed order, can we escape this darkness into which we were born.

This problem of darkness in the Christian life is addressed in the scriptures:

MATTHEW 6:19 *Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth (everything on the Earth is temporal), where moth and rust does corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal (if the eye be set upon treasures on Earth, the life and character of the Believer will be shrouded in moral darkness):* (E.S.B.)

MATTHEW 6:20 *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven (spiritual not temporal, worldly treasure), where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:*

MATTHEW 6:21 *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (a man's aim determines his character; if that aim be not simple and Heavenward but earthward and double, all the faculties and principles of his nature will become a mass of darkness; it is impossible to give a divided allegiance).* (E.S.B.)

MATTHEW 6:22 *The light of the body is the eye (a figure of speech; He is, in effect, saying that the light of the soul is the spirit): if therefore your eye be single (the spirit of man should have but one purpose, and that is to Glorify God), your whole body shall be full of light (if the spirit of man is single in its devotion to God [meaning not divided] then all the soul will be full of light).* (E.S.B.)

MATTHEW 6:23 *But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness (if the spirit be evil, the entirety of the soul will be full of darkness). If therefore the light that is in you be darkness (the light is not acted upon, but rather perverted), how great is that darkness (the latter state is worse than if there had been no light at all)!* (E.S.B.)

As we live as God has instructed, which we can only do with singleness of heart and consecration, we will be living in the law of love - empowered by God to do His will, for our sake as well as others. If we don't live in this way, there will be darkness in various or even many areas of our life.

1 JOHN 4:12 No man has seen God at any time. (But) If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His love is perfected (brought to maturity) in us.

In order to understand the love of God more fully, we must come to the point of realizing that before regeneration, we, in ourselves, were of no value to the Kingdom of God, being immoral, bent sinners (Romans 3:10-12). But God's love saw the potential value in us through Christ. So while we were still sinners and enemies of God (Romans 5:8-10), He demonstrated His great love towards us through Jesus (1 John 3:1). As we allow the Spirit of Truth to renew our mind with the Word of God, we can gain understanding of these mighty spiritual truths. Then we need to allow the Divine Nature, of which we have been made partakers, to be expressed through us. This takes place as we activate our will in agreement with the Word of God and not our fleshly nature. In this we are choosing to do right, and from this will begin to flow the empowerment to do that which we have chosen. The will acts as the trigger by which either the Divine Nature or the sin nature is enthroned, and therefore engaged in that area of choice. Through God's power, as we do not yield to the sin nature, we will be crucifying the flesh and acting upon the desire of our regenerated spirit which has been educated according to the Word of God. As we do all this, people will begin to see the fruits of discipleship being displayed in our life.

“. . .The will acts as the trigger by which either the Divine Nature or the sin nature is enthroned, and therefore engaged in that area of choice. . .”

As we have said, we need God's empowerment to love as He loves. To gain God's empowerment we need to:

1. Allow God to teach us, through the hearing of faith: Romans 10:17.
2. Yield to the Holy Spirit Who will then energize our human nature with the energies and graces of His Divine Nature.
3. Then act in faith upon the Lord's teaching and the direction it gives.

Then, when the Lord sends you out, operating in His love and anointed with His power, you will see the captives set free because you have obeyed the voice of the Lord (Luke 11:33-35).

So are you operating in love or lust? Are you loving the ways of God and the will of God above your own desires and interests, or are you seeking self-fulfillment through fleshly or ungodly pathways of your own making? This may only be in specific areas, and you may even be trying to serve God on your own terms and in your own way. However in either case, if you are doing this, it is still lust (selfishness) and not agape love that you are walking in.

“. . . Are you loving the ways of God and the will of God above your own desires and interests, or are you seeking self-fulfillment through fleshly or ungodly pathways of your own making? . . . ”

Another thing of which we need to be mindful in this area of love or lust is: are we obeying God in the very basic areas - going to church and performing essential Christian duties, but avoiding a full surrender of ourselves to Him? Are we really not wanting to abandon self-interests, self-direction and self-rule so that we can grow to maturity in Christ and love God with all our heart, mind, and strength? There is love and there is lust - and there are different levels at which we may operate in both. Our goal, however, should

always be to walk in the unselfish love of God through His empowerment. To do this we need to be disciples, fully committed and surrendered to Him, spirit, soul and body. And the Holy Spirit Who dwells within will give us, when this commitment is apparent, both the desire and the power to do God's will (Philippians 2:12-13). We may fail from time to time in our Christian walk. But as long as we are honest with ourselves and God, we can acknowledge any failure, repent and continue on in faith with His empowerment. The main consideration in all of this is that we are truly goaling, on a day to day basis, to walk in God's will for our lives. In and with the Lord, the journey is just as important as the goal.

May you have the victory in Christ. Amen!

For further information or teaching material to help you grow in the Christian faith, please visit:

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NOTES

NOTES

- 1 S.B.C. Daniel, pg.332.
- 2 Dr Bernard Rossier, Studies in the Books of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Vol.1, pg.71.
- 3 S.B.C. Vol.9, Luke, pg. 391.

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to see people living
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through Jesus Christ"*



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