

Special Study

THE CHRISTIAN SYNDROME

(John 15:1-17)

If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my life; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full (John 15:10, 11).

The word "syndrome" is a technical word used in the field of psychology, applied to a group of symptoms or signs that occur together and characterize a mental or physical state. The word "syndrome" is from two Greek words *syn* and *dramein* and literally means "run together." There are three fundamental elements (symptoms) which "run together" and form the joyful Christian syndrome. If any of these elements is missing, the syndromatic cycle is broken and the Christian life is unstable. Interestingly enough, all three elements in the Christian syndrome were present in man's experience in the Garden of Eden before man sinned. And the thrust of the redemptive plan of God through Christ is to restabilize man in this cycle of joy.

Liberty—Before a person can have joy, he must be free. The real hindrances to true freedom are not rules and regulations, but guilt, fear, and selfishness. The man who is free of guilt, fear, and himself is a truly liberated man no matter what his circumstances. Guilt, fear, and selfishness are the elements the devil uses to keep men in bondage (compare Heb. 2:5-18; John 8:31-36). Psychiatrists tell us that guilt and fear and selfishness are probably the most mentally and spiritually enslaving, unbalancing elements affecting men.

The real and only cure for this bondage—the only way to be set free—is simple, complete, unreserved faith in the substitutionary, atoning death of Christ. There is no way in this world or the next for man to punish himself enough, or do enough good works, or sacrifice enough to get rid of his guilt, fear, and selfishness. There is no way for man to psyche himself into good and positive feelings each day to get rid of his bondage. The only way for man to be absolutely certain he is not guilty is to believe God. God has said in His Word that Jesus Christ died your death for you. He suffered your guilt for you.

Many Christians today bring themselves into bondage by refusing to accept God's offer of liberty, gratis. They insist on atoning for their own guilt or trying to earn their own righteousness by competing, even in the Christian ministry, for success according to a

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carnal or worldly standard. Before the Christian life-style or ministry can ever become a joy the Christian must be freed of the guilt that comes from a sense of failing to meet worldly standards of success.

God's standard is faithfulness. We are going to be surprised when we get to heaven—Jesus says so in Matthew 25:31-46. God does not count success as the world does. He keeps a different set of statistics from those of worldly-minded, success-oriented, guilt-ridden men.

God has punished my guilt in Jesus Christ. His Word says it. I believe it. That settles it. I'm free. I don't have to earn my own absolution or succeed as the world measures success. I don't have to get rid of my own guilt—I couldn't if I tried! When Christ died, the guilty me died.

Love—Because God has objectively, judicially, and propositionally freed me, I love Him. Loving Him is not something I can produce without an adequate cause. "We love because he first loved us" (I John 4:19). Jesus commanded His disciples to love others as He had loved them. Perfect love has its origin in the divine Lover. Our love is a rebound—a reaction—a response.

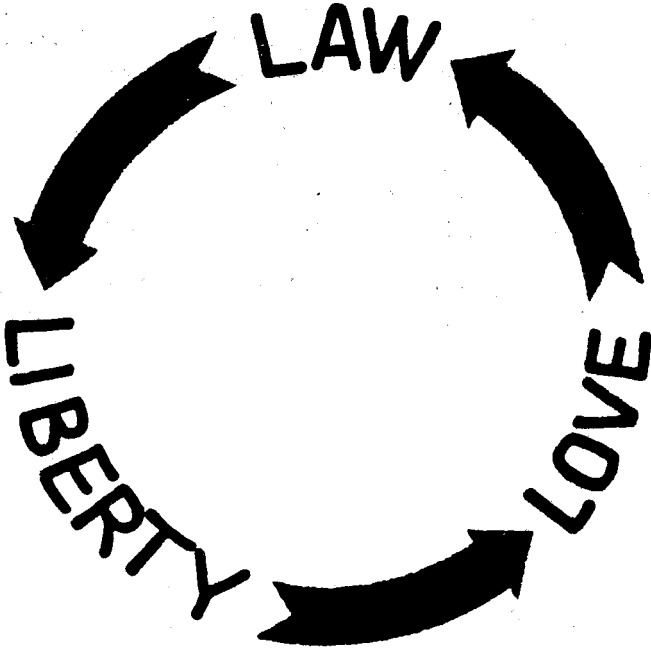
God motivates love in us. Love in us is the motivating factor in the syndrome. This is where the system of situation ethics falls into a fundamental fallacy. It makes love the standard rather than the motivation of Christian conduct.

Love can never of itself be a standard to determine what is right or wrong. I might love my country with all my heart but that love itself does not tell me how to express my feelings for my country. There must be laws to tell me what taxes to pay as my share in government and what rights and privileges my neighbor and I have in relation to each other. Without such laws it is obvious that anarchy would prevail (Donald A. Nash, "Situation Ethics or Social Ethics," *Christian Standard*, March 8, 1969).

Love moves me to want to do something. Love demands and insists that I seek an acceptable expression of the urge to do. Just doing will not satisfy love—doing what is pleasing is the only acceptable expression of love. Who is to say what is pleasing and edifying? Ultimately God alone can say!

Law—This is where law becomes a necessity in the syndrome of joy. Law defines love. Even before man sinned, God defined how Adam was to love his Creator. God gave Adam the command that he should not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God also gave Adam

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the command to till the Garden of Eden. As long as Adam believed God and remained free of the bondage of selfishness, guilt, and fear, Adam loved God. But Adam's love did not of itself tell him *how* to love God. God told Adam how, by giving Adam commandments.

We do not even know how to love our fellowman properly without the divine commandments of God. Love does not indulge—it edifies. But who knows what is edifying for his fellowman? Who even knows what is edifying for himself? God, the master psychologist, knows. He made man. In Him man subsists (lives) and consists (holds together). Without Him, man comes apart.

Once for all, keeping the commandments of God is not legalism! Nor is the keeping of the rules and regulations of man necessarily legalism. Legalism is an attitude. If the laws are made, or kept, with the intent that in so doing one is justified before God in the keeping—this is legalism. If, on the other hand, the commandments are made in love and kept from a motivation of love—this is where true liberty is found!

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If commandments are given from a motivation of love they will be given only to assist the one obeying to reach the fullest potential for which he was created. If commandments are obeyed from a motivation of love they will become a way, a method, a tool both pleasing and profitable (certainly, not grievous) to reach toward that highest potential for which the obeyer was created.

This is truly liberating, maturing, perfecting. Now whether we make laws or keep laws in love depends on whether we are truly liberated in the grace of God.

The syndrome of Christian joy—liberty, love, law—one follows the other and they all run together in a never ending cycle.