

Chapter Fifteen (15:1-32)

THE SON OF MAN SEEKING THE LOST

IDEAS TO INVESTIGATE:

1. If Jesus received sinners, should the church (15:1-2)?
2. How can heaven rejoice over one sinner more than over ninety-nine who need no repentance (15:7)?
3. Why do angels, who have never known what it is to be lost, rejoice over saved sinners (15:10)?
4. How could a man "come to himself" (15:17)?
5. Why did the father say his prodigal son was "dead" (15:24)?
6. Why would the elder son refuse to go in and enjoy the return of his brother (15:28)?
7. Had the elder son *never* disobeyed the father's commands (15:29)?

SECTION 1

Lost Sheep (15:1-7)

15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

³ So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? ⁵And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. ⁶And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.' ⁷Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance."

15:1-4 Rescue: Jesus had left the home of the Pharisees where He had been a guest at dinner (Lk. 14:1-24) and journeyed on through Perea. Great multitudes accompanied him (Lk. 14:25). Many publicans and "sinners" joined the crowds to hear Him teach about the kingdom of God. His words were so different from those of most religious teachers of that day. He

taught that God was gracious and forgiving to those who would repent and believe His word. The compassion Jesus exhibited in His deeds was electrifying in comparison with the hypocrisy and unloving attitudes of the Pharisees and rulers of the Jews.

We do not know exactly where the following parables were spoken nor exactly when, but He was somewhere in Perea and it was sometime in the winter (probably February) of A.D. 30. After these parables of chapter 15, He went on to teach more parables to the same crowds and in the same general area. His trip to Bethany and Ephraim (Jn. 11) should be inserted immediately between Luke 17:10 and 17:11. No doubt the multitudes were dwindling as a result of the stern and severe admonitions about the cost of discipleship. But His glorious descriptions of the ideal society where everyone is humble, loving and committed to God attracted those whom the self-righteous and proud had declared "outcasts." Jesus offered a kingdom where penitent publicans and sinners would be welcomed as citizens with all other penitents on an equal basis.

Jesus had long ago established Himself as a friend of publicans and sinners (cf. Lk. 7:29, 34, 37). He had even called a publican to be one of His apostles (Mt. 9:9-13; Mk. 2:14-17; Lk. 5:27-32). These Pharisees contemptuously refused to use Jesus' name when they said, "This fellow (Gr. *hoti houtos*) receives sinners and eats with publicans." The Greek word *prosdechetai* is translated "receives" but means, more emphatically, "allows them access to Himself—gives them welcome." He not only welcomed them, He ate with them. He accepted formal invitations from Levi and Zacchaeus and took His meals with other "sinners" when He was teaching out of doors. These Pharisees were correct in their statement but they were saying this to destroy Jesus' reputation and His ministry. They were insinuating that because He received sinners and ate with them He was a sinner also.

To stop their slanderous and malicious cavilling Jesus told three simple stories in one parable which contained irrefutable truth and logic. Each story is an illustration of the main subject of the one parable—God sent His Son to seek and save the lost. Actually, there are four parables in one. The "Elder Son" is a parable in its own right. All these stories answer the accusation that Jesus "receives sinners" with a passionate and resounding, "Yes!" The theme of the entire parabolic discourse is The Grace of God. The grace of God is what the publicans and sinners were seeking. The grace of Christ is what the Pharisees criticized and rejected. Publicans and sinners know they are lost; Pharisees are too proud and self-righteous to acknowledge they are lost. The Greek word *apollumi* in the active voice means, "to destroy, to kill," (Mt. 10:28; Mk. 1:24; 9:22); in the middle voice it means, "to perish," (Mt. 8:25; Jn. 3:16). Someone has said, "A man is lost when

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he cannot define his present or plan his future." Millions of human beings are lost today in the black night of guilt, fear and anxiety or in the jungles of passion, hatred and vengeance. These gracious words of Jesus are as relevant for today's sinners lost in the vast confusion of our age as they were for sinners of the first century.

The Lord's first parable is of the lost sheep. The figure of "lost sheep" was a familiar figure to Jewish people. The Old Testament is replete with such usage (cf. Psa. 119:176; 23:1ff.; Ezek. 34:1ff.; Zech. 11:16-17; Isa. 40:11). There is much quoted passage from Isaiah "All we like sheep have gone astray . . ." (Isa. 53:6). Sheep are rather dumb and helpless animals. They "nibble" themselves lost. Drawn by first one clump of grass, and then another, the animal just keeps on following the grass without looking up. Finally when he does look up, he finds himself in a canyon far away from the shepherd and with night coming on. The sheep is *lost*! He just kept on "nibbling" unaware he was becoming lost. He didn't even realize he was straying from the shepherd. What happens to sheep, happens to people. Few sheep or men ever start out to get lost. Becoming lost is usually something that happens almost imperceptively. Getting lost is almost always the result of "nibbling" farther and farther away from the shepherd and the flock. One little morsel of sin, then another, and another, until suddenly it is night and man is lost in the canyons of guilt, fear, rebellion and wastedness.

"Lost" is not a word most people would use to describe their condition. Many men even prefer to think of themselves as sinners rather than lost. There is a certain glamour or levity to the term "sinner." But when men are told they are "lost" it means they are misdirected, wasted, useless and no one wants to own up to that! No man likes to confess he is *lost*. It is unmanly, humiliating, and a man will do almost anything to prove that he is not a poor lost child. Most men are like the Indian chief who says, "Indian not lost—*wigwam* lost!" But God knows, and so do we, we are lost. The young German soldier in "All's Quiet On The Western Front" turns away from the chaos and carnage of the battlefield, so symbolic of the confusion of his generation, and says, "I . . . I think we are lost!"

The logic of Jesus' presentation is undeniable. Everyone in His audience would admit they would leave ninety-nine and go after one lost sheep until they find it. Everyone leaves everything to look for so little a thing as a pin, or a key. Now what would you do if you were a father and one of your children was lost? What could be more expected than for God to look for lost men who look for lost pins and keys? It is tragic but true that while men will look for lost pins and keys, they often will not look for lost men. But God is not like men—He took upon Himself the servant-robe-of-flesh and descended into this dark and dangerous canyon of wickedness to find His lost men and women. God cares and will not quit as long as there is opportunity to rescue the lost.

15:5-7 Rejoicing: God is not satisfied with just ninety-nine—He wants every one. God is not willing that any should perish, but wants all people to come to repentance and salvation (II Pet. 3:9). Love cannot rest until that last one is at least searched for, and, hopefully safe. The great heart of God would have sent His Son to this world if there had been only one to be saved (cf. Jonah 4:11; Acts 17:30; 18:10).

When the shepherd found the lost sheep he did not berate the sheep for getting lost; he did not kick or strike the sheep. He gave it a seat of honor—a ride of glory—he put it on his shoulders and helped it back to the flock. Henceforth the shepherd would use his rod and staff to protect, to chasten and guide the errant sheep from straying again.

The shepherd was overcome with joy at finding his lost sheep. He rejoices all the way home and upon arriving there calls all his neighbors and friends to celebrate with him. This is the way men are. They feel compelled to share joys. It is human nature that the finding of something lost gives much more joy than the possession of things that are safe. Men rejoice more in recovery from sickness than they do in daily health. How much more intense and infinite is the joy of Heaven's King over the recovery of the lost!

The ninety-nine "righteous persons who need no repentance" probably refers to the self-righteous Pharisees or others who *thought* they needed no repentance. There are no human beings without the need of repentance! Barnes thinks the ninety-nine are angels: "They know of how much value is an immortal soul. They see what is meant by eternal death; and they do not feel too much, or have too much anxiety about the soul (angel's) that can never die." We believe Jesus meant the Pharisees for they were the ones who murmured against the Lord's associations with "publicans and sinners." Jesus places in sharp contrast the value Pharisees place on publicans and sinners and that of God!

SECTION 2

Lost Silver (15:8-10)

8 "Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? ⁹And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.' ¹⁰Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

15:8-9a Rescue: The coins the woman had were, in Greek, *drachmas*. They are, in the LXX, equivalent to the Hebrew *bega'* or "half-shekel." The half-shekel was equivalent to the Roman "denarius." The coin was worth about 16 cents American today—but then worth a day's wages.

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Hebrew women usually wore coin "frontlets," called *semedi*, as part of their dowry and thus a sign they were married. These coins were a daughter's "inheritance" from her father to take and share with her husband as they formed a new family unit. These coins had sentimental, financial and status-symbol value.

This parable pictures the *intensity* of God's interest in finding the lost. The woman is totally absorbed in finding the lost coin. All other pursuits become secondary to finding it. Searching for it cannot wait until morning—she lights a lamp and makes the dust fly until she finds it. A casual, superficial one-time search will not do. No distraction is strong enough to divert her. Diligently, doggedly, passionately she searches everywhere! Will God give up any one of His children for lost with any less determination and feeling? Shall we?

All three of the parables in this chapter cry out—ONE! We decide ourselves into thinking that size, more and bigger is always better. We are constantly bombarded with the propaganda that God will be impressed with mass—with sheer numbers. We cannot get a god-of-quantity out of our heads. Of course, God loves all men and wants all men to be saved. We tend to think of God more as the Creator of the millions of constellations and universe and generations upon generations of men and forget that He cares as intensely for "little ol' me" as the woman did for her one coin. Our God is infinitely careful for each snowflake—making each one different. God is personally, passionately and emotionally searching for one lost person at a time—no matter how unknown or how long they have been lost. The church must turn the world upside down searching for each lost person.

15:9b-10 Rejoice: These parables show us a God quite different from that of the philosophers and theologians. The God of these parables is a God who hurts when one of His is lost and knows how to be happy when one of His is recovered. Men are thrilled when they find a lost coin, but imagine how ecstatically happy God is when one of His, for whom He made this whole creation, for whom His Son died, is found and returned to His society of precious ones. When we see God we shall see Him as He is—these parables state unequivocally that we shall see Him expressing His joy. When one lost sinner is recovered the news flashes across Heaven and anthems of praise and joy are shouted. This is the only news Heaven is interested in. When men and women are baptized into Christ, Heaven does not say, "Ho hum" but "Hallelujah!" Heaven is soul-centered. Evangelism is the business which occupies and satisfies all who love God.

SECTION 3

Lost Prodigal Son (15:11-24)

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; ¹²and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property

that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. ¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. ¹⁵So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. ¹⁶And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants."' ²⁰And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²²But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; ²³and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; ²⁴for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry.

15:11-16 Roaming: This parable has never lost its grandeur or poignancy in two thousand years of reading and telling. It is still as relevant as the day it was told. It is still provoking, puzzling and its ending as shocking and unbelievably wonderful as it was to those who heard it in the beginning. One commentator said, "It is the most divinely tender and most humanly touching story ever told on earth." Charles Dickens said: "It is the finest short story ever written." In 21 action packed verses the reader learns the profound secret of the kingdom of God—*grace!* Of all the things Jesus said, this parable alone gives the clearest insight into the very heart of God. Most often it is called, "The Parable of the Prodigal Son"; sometimes it is called "The Parable of the Perfect Father." As a matter of fact, the "Father" (God) is the hero of the story. "A certain man" (God) and his response to his two sons is what the parable is all about. The primary lesson of the parable is to show the difference between God's attitude toward sinners and that of the Pharisees (the elder brother).

It is undoubtedly intentional that Jesus said this "certain man" had only two sons. Two sons—prodigal ("sinner") and petulant (Pharisee)—that is all the sons God has (except His Perfect Son). All mankind falls into one category or the other—those who openly rebel and admit they are sinners, and those who try to pretend they are not. You and I were either prodigal or Pharisee—there is no other breed of man outside the grace of God.

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The younger son had been daydreaming, probably, of all the excitement and happiness he could have if only he could take what his father would pass on to him and spend it in some far off, exotic land. So he went to his father and demanded, "Give me . . ." The Greek word *dos* is (2 pers. sing. aor. 2) imperative for *didomi*, which means literally, an order or a command, "Give me . . ." Impertinent, impatient and impudent he orders his father, "Gimme . . ." According to Deut. 21:17, the eldest son was to get two-thirds of a man's estate and the younger son one-third when the man decided it was time to divide his property among his heirs. This son did not ask, did not suggest, did not beg—he did not seek his father's wishes at all. The prodigal-minded son was so obsessed with his own independence and craving for excitement he did not even think to ask what he might give his father. He was not concerned at all about his father's feelings and desires. "Give me . . ." to do with as I please are the impertinent theme words of every prodigal, fallen son of man.

It is important to note in v. 12 the father divided his livelihood (Gr. *bios*) between *them*—the elder son got his share too (later he will complain he was discriminated against). God feeds and clothes all His sons; He makes His rain to fall on the just and unjust alike; He gives rain and fruitful seasons from heaven on believer and pagan alike. It is what each does with his Father's benevolence that matters.

The father graciously and wisely let the son have his freedom. He undoubtedly knew what the lad intended to do. The father knew he could not force the boy to be a son. A son in rebellion, forced against his will, is a son in rebellion still! God knew from the very start, in Eden, He could not force Adam to be a son. He knew He must take the risk of giving man his free will if He was to have a son at all. The father could have made him stay home, say "Yes" to everything and the father could have smothered the son—possessed him body and soul—but that would have robbed the boy of his personhood. The Father gave the boy his freedom to be wrong in order that the boy might be able to be right some day, independently and lovingly—not slavishly.

The younger son gathered (Gr. *sunagōn*) or collected all his father gave him. If he had been given flocks or grain he sold them and converted them into money. He then departed and traveled to a "far country." There is a certain pseudo sense of power in breaking loose from parental supervision and provision. Boys become intoxicated with the idea of independence. Many of them lose all sense of propriety and reality when they first taste it. This lad, going far, went too far. He scattered (Gr. *dieskorpisen*, see the same word translated "scatters" in Mt. 12:30) his property in riotous living. The Greek word *asotos* is translated "riotous" but literally means, "without saving." He literally *squandered* all he had. He spent everything he had. He had left nothing behind at home because he had no plans to return there.

He believed he was sufficient unto himself. Without guidance, and undisciplined himself, he fell in with a crowd of profligate parasites. His life became a whirl of self-indulgence, careless wastefulness, and perversion of every good thing passed on to him by his father.

A great famine arose in that "far off country." In a society so decadent as one where few take thought for saving anything and where harlotry is rampant (cf. v. 30), famine may naturally be the consequence of such luxury, indolence and dissipation. The lad had "frittered" away every coin he had. He apparently had many "friends" so long as he had money to spend. But then one day he was destitute—and alone. His parasitic fellow-sinners left him "in want."

"Going, he glued himself to one of the citizens . . ." That is the way the Greek reads. He did not, could not, wait around for a job-offer. He went out to find some way to live. He latched on (Gr. *ekollethe*, "glued") to one of the locals. The citizen gave him a job of feeding swine—but he was given hardly anything at all fit to eat. To tend hogs was an abomination to a Jew and Jesus paints the most degraded condition possible here. To be compelled to do so was even more humiliating to a young man who had just recently been feeling so powerful and self-sufficient in his freedom from home. The "good times" were gone, but he probably kept telling himself at first how much better it was than being under a father's thumb. Very soon, however, he began to realize how bad things really were. He would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate, but he was not allowed to do so. The Greek word *keration* is mistranslated "husks" in some versions. Actually the word means, "little horn" and is describing carob-pods, the fruit of a tree called *carob* or *kharub*, common in Asia Minor and Syria. These pods are somewhat like the common garden-variety green-bean—not nearly as wholesome or tasty. They are still used in the Middle East as food for swine. What this boy had to eat was so scarce and so unpleasant, he wanted to eat what he was feeding the hogs but he was not at liberty to do so.

In his bull-headed attempt to get away from what he thought was a prison at home, he took himself prisoner. His "friends" turned out to be his enemies. Starving, degraded and depraved, he was still crying out, "Gimme . . ." but he could no longer have what he wanted. Now he must take what others wish to give him—which is really nothing at all.

15:17-20a Repentance: The need for repentance and its definition—a change of mind—was discussed in chapter 13. The parable of the prodigal son is a classic illustration of repentance in action.

The prodigal "came to himself." The Greek literally reads, "But to himself coming. . . ." The emphasis is on "himself." He had not only been away from his father, he had been away from himself. He had not been his right self. In sin, no man is in his right mind. All sin is a form of insanity (cf. I Cor. 15:34, RSV, "Come to your right mind and sin no more . . .").

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God did not make man for sin. Man is not for himself when he is sinning—man is choosing against himself and some personality other than his right one when he rebels against God. The prodigal's realization did not come like a bolt out of the blue. Note, “. . . *coming* to himself . . .” indicates it took a while for him to wake up. It takes a while for most men to repent—some never do.

He remembered what he knew of fellowship with the father and compared that with what he was then experiencing in rebellion and decided the father's house was to be desired no matter what sacrifices he might have to make. Coming “to the end of his rope” was his salvation. Suffering the consequences of his rebellion was the necessary prelude to his repentance. If God did not allow us to “suffer in our persons the due penalty of our errors” (Rom. 1:27), many more of us would go to hell. One writer has said: “Heaven builds its hopes on the defeat of man's ego.” No man can be saved until he admits he is lost. No man can be saved until he admits no one else can help him but God.

The prodigal decided to get up and go to his father and confess his sin. He did not say, “It was my father's fault—he should not have been so strict—if he will come to me I will go back with him.” The lad did not blame his downfall on his father, on his elder brother or on evil companions. He honestly accepted the responsibility himself. Many people regret the consequences of their sin and are sorry they have to suffer them, but they are not honest enough to admit they are responsible. Most people have a tendency to blame the consequences of their sin on someone else. Most people feel they must retain their own pride and dignity even at the cost of self-honesty. But this rebellious child knew what he was, admitted what he was and decided he could honestly blame no one else or claim any goodness of his own at all. He knew he could make no claim of relationship as son to the father at all. He will beg only for a hired servant's lot. He knew his father well enough to know that even a servant's lot with him was paradise compared to the hog-pen of the far country. So we see the subjective elements of repentance: (a) deep inner struggle with oneself; (b) rational evaluation of the consequences of one's sins compared with what one knows about God; (c) honest, humble admission of responsibility for sinful choices and actions; (d) confidence that the father will forgive and accept repentance; (e) poverty of spirit that will claim no merit or goodness of his own.

One last thing remains—to get up and go! “And he arose and came to his father.” Driven by his need and drawn by his hope that the father will receive him, he exercises his will and his body to perform the overt action of returning to the father's house. Repentance is a change of mind and attitude which must result in action. The penitent son took with him words of confession and a heart of obedience (cf. Hosea 14:1-9). He returned, willing to obey the father even as a servant would obey. There may be tears

of regret and remorse but without obedience to the Father's (God's) will, there is no repentance.

Repentance is voluntary. The father did not force the son to return against his will. The father did not send servants to hypnotize, emotionalize or pressure the son into returning. If the son had returned under any other circumstances than a completely rational and voluntary surrender of his will, he would have been a son still in rebellion. The mission of the church is to speak the truth in love and with rational persuasiveness and then let the prodigal son voluntarily come to himself and to the Father. The church is *not* commissioned to seduce anyone into coming to the Father against his will. The church will do well to constantly review her purpose and methodology.

15:20b-24 Regeneration: "When he was a great way off . . ." The father had been mourning his lost son; he had been lovingly and longingly looking down the road each day hoping the prodigal would return. God is not willing that any should perish (II Pet. 3:9). When the father saw the son returning, he ran to meet the prodigal. The father did not wait to see if the son had cleaned himself up, or if the son had any means of reimbursement for all the heartache he had caused. The son had not run home—he had probably returned in a half-halting, hesitant manner, anticipating the humiliation he would have to endure and the scolding he would get. But the father saw the son first and ran to meet him and fell on the son's neck (embraced him) and wrapped him in love's arms. Eager to receive his son back no matter how destitute, the father kissed him before he could even finish his confession. The son was looking for, "I told you so . . ." but he received an excited embrace and profuse kisses (Gr. *kataphilesen*). Instead of a lecture and punishment (which the son was anticipating), the father was moved with emotional feeling (Gr. *esplagchnisthe*, "compassion") and ordered his servants, "Bring quickly . . ." (Gr. *tachu exenegkate*) robe, ring and sandals to put upon his son.

The robe was (Gr. *proten*, lit. "first") the best and signified honor; the ring signified authority; the sandals signified sonship since slaves went barefoot and only children of the house wore shoes. They were also ordered to bring the calf, the fattened one (Gr. *ton moschon ton siteuton*); there is only one such calf, reserved for some special occasion (cf. I Sam. 28:24). The father also invited the household to join the feast and merrymaking. The word "merry" does not precisely express the meaning of the Greek word *euphranthomen* for it is a combination of two words, *eu* and *phren*, which mean literally, "think well," or "be of a good mind." "Merriment" might infer frivolity whereas the Greek word allows for no superficiality but means deep, mental joy and happiness.

Why such a celebration? Because this father's son who was "dead" is "alive again"; the son, having been lost, was found. Because through the

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son's repentance and the father's forgiveness, the son has been born again. Notice that the rebirth came as a result of action on both the part of the son and the father. The lost and dead son could not be found and reborn until he came to himself, got up and returned home. Only then could the father constitute him reborn. The son was not passive, but active in the event. This scene is the supreme moment in all literature! It is the greatest love story ever told. Jesus did not make up this story. It is true. Jesus Himself wrote this story indelibly in the blood of His cross. Our God is like that father! And the boy? He is you and me. This is our life's story, if we have been found.

SECTION 4

The Lost Pharisaical Son (15:25-32)

25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. 27 And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' 28 But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29 but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' 31 And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32 It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'"

15:25-30 Resentment: The primary thrust of this parable is to illustrate in a real-life situation the attitude of the Pharisees toward publicans and sinners. All that has gone before in the prodigal's story illustrates how publicans and sinners repent and how mercifully God receives them. But the prodigal's story is primarily background for the story of the elder brother which now follows. This story will cast the attitude of the Pharisees in black contrast to that of Jesus' (and God's).

Enter the villain—the elder brother. Outwardly this elder brother had presented the picture of correct conduct. He was industrious (out working in the field), respectable (he had never caroused like the prodigal), outwardly respectful to his father but his heart was that of a resentful, petulant hireling. He was only working in anticipation of getting more than his prodigal brother. One day he was out working in the field and upon returning to the house he heard music and dancing as he drew near. He called one of the hired servants and asked what the meaning of the rejoicing was.

The servant told him "Your brother has come . . ." Note, *your* brother—but the elder brother later calls him, "This son of yours . . ." to his father. He will not acknowledge the prodigal as *his* brother. How like the Pharisees—both ancient and modern! The servant told the elder brother that his father had killed the one calf they had been fattening and was using it to celebrate the return of that boy who had long ago left the household and squandered his inheritance in profligacy. The elder son had probably been anticipating the day when that fatted calf would be used to celebrate *his* taking over the father's estate. The prodigal had not only come back (which the elder son resented), but the father *received* him as a son again!

Upon hearing this the elder son flew into a rage (Gr. *orgisthe*, from which we get the English words, *orgasm*, *orgy*, etc.). He was invited to enter the house and join the celebration, but he expressed that he had no desire to enter into the celebration. So the father came out of the house and begged (Gr. *parekalei*, literally, "call upon call; call after call") him to come in.

Now the elder son's true feeling toward the father manifests itself. He had stayed home and behaved—but for the wrong reason. The elder son was respectable, but only on the surface. Beneath the veneer of propriety is the self-righteous, jealous, hateful heart. His mask of hypocrisy has slipped off and he is exposed for what he really is. He is an ingrate. He should have been thankful his brother was home safe—even if only for his father's sake! He should have been grateful that a celebration was being made and have enjoyed himself participating. He should have been thankful that he was going to get any inheritance at all. After all, it was all to be inherited—it was not his, or his brother's, but *given* to both.

All this petulant, pouting, pretender can do is verbally attack his own father because his father was forgiving and gracious to the prodigal. The elder son rebukes his father, saying, "Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; *yet you never gave me* a kid, that I might make merry with my friends." He rebukes his father for not being aware of his obedient service; he rebukes his father for never rewarding him; he rebukes his father as being wrong for receiving the prodigal who had "devoured" his inheritance on "harlots." He even rebukes his father for thinking he should accept the prodigal as his "brother"—he will not recognize the prodigal as brother, only as the father's son.

One very perceptive writer asks, "Who is the prodigal after all? One came back—but one got lost at home. He locked himself out of the banquet—the key he lost was love."

The elder son: (a) wanted to be a son, but not a brother; (b) did not share his father's concern for the lost brother; (c) was envious of his brother and suspicious of his father; (d) was unable to enjoy what the father gave him because of his envy of the prodigal; (e) boasted of an obedience which he really did not have and revealed it by his attitude. The elder son was a classic Pharisee—unmerciful toward the prodigal whose sins were those of the

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flesh, but he refused to admit the sins of pride, jealousy, hypocrisy and self-righteousness were worse sins. Jesus was hardest on hypocrisy. Doing the right thing for the wrong reason was not Jesus' idea of goodness (cf. the Sermon on the Mount). *Pride*, not prodigality, is the chief sin!

15:31-32 Rebuke: There is pathos in the father's "Son, . . ." The father was made happy when the prodigal returned. Now he is saddened at the elder son's loveless resentment. God wants to save Pharisees as well as publicans. So, firmly but gently the father rebukes the petulant son, reminding him, ". . . you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours." The elder son could always have what the father wanted to give him if only he was of the right spirit to receive it as a gift. So long as he remained self-righteous and hateful and uncooperative, he could never have it. What the father has to give, he gives to his *family*. It was "fitting" to receive back the lad who came in humble penitence, wishing now to be an obedient son and sharing brother. It is also "fitting" that the elder brother join in the reception and sharing—if not, he can no longer claim family status. Yes, our salvation depends as much on *brotherhood* as it does sonship (cf. I Jn. 3:14-18; 3:23; 4:7-12; 4:20-21; 5:1-2, etc.). If the father forgives a prodigal son, *brethren must also* forgive or they lose their own sonship.

The story ends here with no indication whether the elder brother changed his mind or not. The Pharisees kept on despising publicans and sinners. God, in His Son, kept on receiving them and saving those who repented. This, perhaps the greatest of all the parables, stands as a judgment on the Pharisaical self-righteousness which will not forgive a prodigal brother even when the Father has forgiven him. It also stands as a beacon of hope to those thousands of prodigals who have squandered their Father's inheritance in riotous living but come to themselves and want to be received back home.

STUDY STIMULATORS:

1. When you "eat with publicans and sinners" do you ever mention the will of God for their lives as Jesus did?
2. Have you ever been lost? Do you think all men not in covenant relationship with Christ today are *lost*?
3. Why are men like sheep in getting lost?
4. Do you think the church is as intense in finding the lost as the woman was in finding her lost coin?
5. How does your church react to baptismal services? "Ho-hum" or "Hallelujah!"
6. Did you find, while you were a "prodigal," that you were starving?
7. How would you tell another "prodigal" to "come to himself . . .?"
8. Do you recognize in the elder brother any of yourself?
9. Are you willing, and have you, forgiven every person God has forgiven? Who are those whom God has forgiven?
10. Is brotherhood with the forgiven as necessary to salvation as sonship?

LOVE IS A MANY SLENDORED THING

(Text: Heb. 12:5-11)

By Paul T. Butler — OBC Chapel, Spring 1973

INTRODUCTION

I. NOW THE WORLD HAS A SONG BY THAT TITLE

- A. But the popular song of a few years ago by that title failed utterly and miserably to really plumb the depths of love's splendor.
- B. Splendor means glory-sublimity-brilliance.
- C. Love is the most glorious, sublime capability any person has.
- D. Love is the most precious, the rarest jewel of all virtues.

II. BUT WHAT IS LOVE

- A. How many sermons I have heard over the years exhorting, "What we need is simply to love one another," or chastising, "If we don't get some love around here we're no better than the heathen."
- B. But how few sermons I have heard explaining what love is or how we are to love.
- C. Love is not self-defining. This is the supreme fallacy of situation ethics which says "do the most loving thing in every situation."
- D. No man has enough wisdom or experience to be guided only by his own instincts to do the most loving thing in every situation.
- E. We must go to the Word of God for precept and example.
- F. And I Corinthians 13 is not the only definition of love in the Bible.

III. SOME WILL INVARIABLY SAY, LOVE IS:

A. Concern

But how do you explain the many people who were hungry Jesus did not feed; the many lame He did not heal; the Greeks who came seeking him and He did not talk with; Herod who questioned Him about His teaching, to whom Jesus would not speak but called "fox," MUST A CONCERNED LOVE ALWAYS BE MANIFESTED THE THE WAY WE THINK?

B. Giving

But how do you explain Jesus' rebuke of Judas and the disciples when they suggested that the precious ointment Mary had poured upon Jesus could have been sold and given to the poor. MUST A GIVING LOVE ALWAYS BE MANIFESTED IN THE WAY THE WORLD THINKS?

C. Speaking Pleasantly

But how do you explain the words Jesus spoke to the Pharisees and sometimes to His disciples which were harsh, demanding and rebuking. How do you explain Paul's letters to the Corinthians;

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how do you explain Peter's words to Simon concerning being in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity. MUST LOVE ALWAYS BE COMMUNICATED TO PLEASE THE HEARER?

IV. LOVE IS MANY FACETED

- A. There is more to love than often meets the spiritual eye.
- B. I hope to present you three oft unseen facets of the brilliance of God-like love, agape love, this morning.
- C. LOVE IS: DISCERNING. . . . DEMANDING. . . . DELIBERATE
- D. "Those whom I love, I reprove and chasten; so be zealous and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

DISCUSSION

I. LOVE IS DISCERNING (discriminating; critical; judgmental; penetrating). All of those are words of love if the motives are right.

A. In Reality

- 1. Love is truth-oriented; truth-focused; truth-centered. Love is something done but always in a TRUTH frame-of-reference. Agape love makes every attempt to see things, issues, and persons as they are in reality for a purpose—a good purpose.
- 2. Agape love could never reject truth in favor of falsehood—it could never be satisfied with only half-truth about issues or persons.
- 3. "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and *in truth*" (I Jn. 3:18).
- 4. "The Christian loves truth (Eph. 4:15; II Thess. 2:10), but he never cruelly or unsympathetically uses the truth in order to hurt. . . . The Christian is never false to the truth, but he always remembers that love and truth must go hand in hand" Wm. Barclay, *More New Testament Words*, pg. 22, Harper & Row (article on Agape).
- 5. "Christian love does not shut its eyes to the faults of others. Love is not blind. It will use rebuke and discipline when these are needed. The love which shuts its eyes to all faults, and which evades the unpleasantness of all discipline, is not real love at all, for in the end it does nothing but harm to the loved one." *ibid.*
- 6. ". . . love . . . does not rejoice in wrong, but rejoices in the truth . . ." (I Cor. 13:6).
- 7. Would Jesus have loved Judas if He had concealed from Judas the truth about himself? Would God have loved the Hebrew

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people if He had concealed from them the truth about themselves in the days of the prophets? Would Paul have loved the churches and people he wrote the epistles to had he concealed from them the truth about themselves?

8. In that penetrating, piercing confrontation between Jesus and the Jews in John 8, Jesus seemed almost astounded that they would seek to kill Him because He told them the truth about themselves (Jn. 8:39-47). He did it because He loved them.
9. Paul wrote the Christians in Galatia, "Have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth" (Gal. 4:16)?
10. All through the Old Testament there is example after example of God's dealing with men trying to get them to see themselves as they really are; with men dealing with other men in the same way (God ? David; Nathan & David; David & Saul; Moses and Miriam; Jethro & Moses, etc.).
11. Now when God's Word pierces our facade of sham and discerns us as we are and deals with us realistically—IT IS GOD'S LOVE.
12. When men or women, older and wiser, more experienced and learned than we, discern us and judge us according to truth, LET US EXPECT IT TO BE SOMETHING DONE IN LOVE!

B. In Relationships

1. Love is person-oriented; it deals with persons discerning, judging estimating what they ought to be and can be with the help of God and Christian brethren.
2. A person who, by experience and wisdom knows something that would benefit me, and keeps it from me, does not love me.
3. If I tell my children the truth about themselves but do not share with them some truth that will help them I do not love them.
4. Jesus' dealing with the Syrophenician woman would have been considered harsh, even cruel, by some (Mk. 7:25-30) but He dealt with her on the basis of what she could become.
5. Jesus' dealing with Peter when He said, "Get thee behind me, Satan," was discerning love in order to bring Peter to what he could be.
6. THERE ARE SOME OF YOU HERE THIS MORNING LIVING IN THE JOY OF BEING BETTER THAN YOU WERE BECAUSE ONE OF YOUR TEACHERS OR A GROUP OF TEACHERS HAVE DEALT WITH YOU ON THE BASIS OF THEIR JUDGMENT OF WHAT YOU COULD BECOME!

It seemed distasteful to you at first—you disliked us and accused us of putting you down at first—but now you know we judged that you could be better than you were and we insisted on it.

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7. Love demands that those who have the advantage of experience and leadership relate to others on the basis of building up—
NOT LEAVING OTHERS TO GO BACKWARD . . . OR EVEN TO
REMAIN WHERE THEY ARE!

C. In Remedies

1. Love is always seeking that which is practical—helpful.
2. That which is the most helpful in a situation, may not always be the most glorious or win the most applause. It may not even be the most soothing.
3. But love is interested only in that which is helpful.
4. Love seeks the long-range remedy. Love is never satisfied with superficialities or stop-gap measures.
5. "Now obviously no chastening seems pleasant at the time: it is in fact most unpleasant. Yet when it is all over we can see that it has quietly produced the fruit of real goodness in the characters of those who have accepted it in the right spirit" (Heb. 12:11-12) J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament In Modern English*.
6. NOW THERE MAY BE SOME OF YOU WHO HAVE HAD REMEDIES PRESCRIBED TO YOU THAT MAY HAVE SEEMED LIKE BITTER MEDICINE. SO FAR AS I AM ABLE TO JUDGE THE MOTIVES OF THOSE DIRECTING THIS COLLEGE, I BELIEVE THEIR REMEDIAL PRESCRIPTIONS WERE MADE IN GOD-LIKE LOVE.
7. In their years of experience and saturating their mind with the mind of Christ as revealed in His Word, they have always sought the long-term, helpful, strengthening remedy.
8. Their motives are, as far as I am able to judge, pure and loving. The wisdom of their decisions, I think, will be proved over the long-haul.
9. I have more than 100 letters from former students proving that hind-sight is usually more perceptive than fore-sight.

In an old book given to me by Bro. Wilson, I found some ageless principles stated as well as I have ever seen them stated. One of those principles is: ". . . if the moral powers (of man) are not employed on right objects and directed to a right end, there is not only perversion but deterioration. The more active they are the more they deteriorate. If, therefore, we would do the highest good to men we must seek, not only to perfect their powers, but to perfect the moral powers by directing them rightly. Our object must be to produce a change not merely in the condition, but in the state of men; and not merely in their intellectual state involving acquisitions and capacity, but in their moral state which involves, or rather which is, character." *The Law of Love and Love as a Law*, by Mark Hopkins, 1881, pg. 199.

LOVING, DOING THE HIGHEST GOOD TO MEN, MEANS DISCERNMENT!

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II. LOVE IS DEMANDING

A. It Restrains

1. "Our love to God is shown in the keeping of His commandments (Ex. 20:6; I Jn. 5:3; II Jn. 6). Love is more than a mere affection or sentiment; it is something that manifests itself, not only in obedience to known divine commands, but also in a protecting and defence of them, and a seeking to know more and more of the will of God in order to express love for God in further obedience (cf. Deut. 10:12). Those who love God will hate evil and all forms of worldliness, as expressed in the avoidance of the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (Ps. 97:10; I Jn. 2:15-17). Whatever there may be in his surroundings that would draw the soul away from God and righteousness, that the child of God will avoid." *I.S.B.E.* Vol. 3, pg. 1933, art. "Love."
2. Love does not indulge. Dr. James Dobson, in his book, *Dare To Discipline*, says, "Perhaps the most common parental error during the past twenty-five years has been related to the widespread belief that 'love is enough' in raising children . . . the greatest social disaster of this century is the belief that abundant love makes discipline unnecessary."
3. A New York psychologist, Peter Blos, is quoted in *Time*, Nov. 29, 1971; ". . . parents should set limits, affirm their personal values, deny the 'clamor for grown-up status,' and refuse to be intimidated by charges of authoritarianism."
4. In *Reader's Digest* (Feb. 1973), an article entitled "Why Some Women Respond Sexually and Others Don't," Seymour Fisher, a clinical psychologist, researching this over many years, states: "Highly responsive women tended to recall their fathers as having a definite set of values, being demanding and holding high expectations for them. . . . conversely, most low-responsive women remembered their fathers as being casual, overly permissive and short on definite values. . . . A demanding father, gives his daughter the feeling that he is concerned enough about her to devote time and energy to trying to guide her—even if she resents this discipline . . . this relationship, speculates Fisher, could even be the prime determinant of female sexual potential."
5. Permissiveness, or indulgence, is no sign of love! Permissiveness can be the most unloving thing one person ever does to another!
6. CAN YOU PICTURE JESUS INDULGING PEOPLE? He would not indulge Peter and the other disciples even in some actions that appeared correct (e.g. when they would forbid Him from going to Jerusalem and be killed, etc.). He would not indulge the rich

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young ruler to keep the riches which were strangling his loyalties. He would not indulge His own mother in her motherly pride (at Cana marriage feast).

7. THOSE OF US WHO WATCH IN BEHALF OF YOUR SOULS ARE DETERMINED NOT TO INDULGE YOU BECAUSE WE LOVE YOU! WE ARE DETERMINED TO DEMAND OF YOU PERHAPS WHAT NO ONE EVER DEMANDED OF US, BECAUSE WE LOVE YOU!
8. If we should indulge you to your harm, we would never be able to forgive ourselves; your parents and your churches would never forgive us; and God might not ever forgive us—if our indulgence were born of deliberate cowardliness.
9. With as much love, we believe, as Paul the apostle manifested toward Timothy and Titus, his student-preachers, we want to demand of you as much as he did of them (read the letters he wrote to them).

B. It Refuses

1. It sometimes has to say No!
2. Wm. Barclay, *op. cit.*, pg. 16: "When we understand what agape means, it amply meets the objection that a society based on this love would be a paradise for criminals, and that it means simply letting the evil-doer have his own way. If we seek nothing but a man's highest good, we may well have to resist a man; we may well have to punish him; we may well have to do the hardest things to him—for the good of his immortal soul. . . . In other words, agape means treating men as God treats them—and that does not mean allowing them unchecked to do as they like."
3. Curtis Dickinson, in *Christian Standard*, Jan. 25, 1958, art. "Love's Constraining Power," wrote, "It is easy to camouflage weakness and conformity under the guise of love. . . . It is just because God loves you that He cannot overlook you. . . . It is precisely because we love our children that we cannot let them escape punishment. How ridiculous, if we said of a child, 'I love her so much that no matter what she does I will consider it all right.'"
4. God said No to the perfect man in Eden. BECAUSE HE LOVED ADAM!
5. God said No to perhaps the greatest saint of all, Paul, *three times* God said No to him. BECAUSE GOD LOVED PAUL.
6. For a good mental and moral exercise why don't you personally run through in your mind all the great men of the Old Testament to whom God said "No"!

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7. Now list mentally all the churches and people to whom the apostles wrote letters stating many emphatic "Nos"! ADD THEM ALL TOGETHER!
 8. THOSE WHOM THE HOLY SPIRIT HATH MADE OVERSEERS OF THIS ARM OF THE LORD'S CHURCH ARE BOUND BY THEIR LOVE FOR THE LORD, FOR HIS CHURCH, AND FOR YOU, TO SAY NO! WHEN IT BECOMES THE LOVING THING TO DO!
 9. It is not something they take selfish, sadistic, prideful pleasure in—it is something for which they feel an obligation, and consider a privilege, because it gives them an opportunity to *love for real*.
 10. The selfish thing to do would be to give everyone free reign to do as they please, go play golf, and when the situation became unbearable leave it to self-destruction and blame everyone else.
 11. God said No to Moses (not enter promised land); God said No to Jonah; God said No to David (cannot build my temple). These listened. God said No to Saul; God said No to Baalam. These did not listen.
 12. BE CAREFUL HOW YOU RESPOND TO GOD'S "NO!" IN HIS WORD . . . AND HOW YOU RESPOND TO THE "NO!" OF THE SHEPHERDS OF GOD'S FLOCK!
- C. It Reiterates; Reinforces
1. Love does not give up with the first discernment or demand.
 2. Love repeats and repeats and repeats (read *The Hound of Heaven*, by Francis Thompson). Love hounds, stalks, trails.
 3. The immature tend to classify discerning, demanding love as nagging or harping, nor nit-picking.
 4. Does the discerning, demanding love of God give us cause to accuse Him of nagging or harping?
 5. Were the Old Testament prophets nit-picking when they repeated and repeated and repeated God's message?
 6. CONTINUED REMINDERS TO KEEP YOUR DORM ROOM CLEAN AND ORDERLY, CONTINUED REMINDERS TO PAY YOUR ACCOUNTS, CONTINUED REMINDERS TO DRESS MODESTLY, CONTINUED REMINDERS TO DRIVE LIKE A CHRISTIAN, CONTINUED REMINDERS TO CONDUCT YOUR MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP WITH DECORUM. . . . THESE ARE NOT NAGGING, NIT-PICKING. . . . THESE ARE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES OF LIFE AND CHRISTIAN WITNESS . . . AND THE REMINDERS ARE REITERATIONS OF LOVE!
 7. It never ceases to amaze me that athletes, choir members, Impact members or others can so graciously and willingly condescend to take all the repetition of practices, take all the

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demand that they dress alike . . . and then get all upset and accuse others of the college, who love them equally as much, of nagging and nit-picking when they reiterate and reinforce moral and spiritual values.

III. LOVE IS DELIBERATE

A. It is Real

1. Agape love is sincere, genuine. J. B. Phillips translates Romans 12:9: "Let us have no imitation Christian love. Let us have a genuine break with evil and a real devotion to good."
2. Agape love will not stand for sham, superficiality, or unstable emotionalism (note: I said *emotionalism*. Love is part emotion but not all emotion.).
3. Agape love is not the silly, selfish sentimentalism so often portrayed by the world.
4. Wm. Barclay, *op. cit.*, "This agape, this Christian love, is not merely an emotional experience which comes to us unbidden and unsought; it is a *deliberate* principle of the mind, and a deliberate conquest and achievement of the will. It is in fact the power to love the unlovable, to love people whom we do not like."

It is important to understand. . . . Agape has to do with the *mind*: it is not simply an emotion which sweeps over us at intervals when we are in the right mood. It is a principle by which we deliberately live, every day, no matter what *mood* we're in or how we *feel*. It is a conquest, a victory, an achievement. No one ever naturally loved his enemies.

5. Agape love demands the whole man; mind, will and heart.
6. There may be some of you students I know more intimately than others. This often is due to circumstances outside ourselves. BUT IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT MY AGAPE LOVE FOR ANY OF YOU IS ANY MORE OR LESS THAN THE OTHER. THAT IS WHY AGAPE LOVE IS THE HIGHEST FORM OF LOVE . . . IT DOES NOT DEPEND UPON CIRCUMSTANCES! IT IS A REAL LOVE!
7. Many is the time we have been *tempted* to love some of you only according to how we *feel*, on emotions alone, BUT THAT IS NOT REAL LOVE!

B. It is Reliable

1. Decisive, dependable, firm, stable, consistent
2. Dennis Vath wrote it *Christian Standard*, Nov. 5, 1966: "*Jesus loved consistently*. True agape love is consistent. It does not always compliment. It is not always manifested in a pat on the back, for this is not always in our best interests. Agape love does not always agree. Scripture tells us that the one God loves

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is the one He chastens. Agape on the human level does not allow itself to be dominated or abused, because it is not in a person's best interests to allow him to take advantage of one."

3. One mark of love often overlooked is that characteristic of being able to make a decision, a consistent decision, a stabilizing decision and stand firm in that decision.
4. COULD YOU HONESTLY SAY YOU BELIEVED THE LEADERSHIP OF THIS COLLEGE LOVED YOU IF IT COULD NOT MAKE A DECISION, CONSISTENTLY, AND STAND FIRM!?
5. A LEADERSHIP WHICH IS UNABLE TO MAKE A DECISION, CANNOT MAINTAIN CONSISTENCY, AND IS UNSTABLE, IMPRESSES ME AS A SELF-SEEKING LEADERSHIP!

C. It is Risky

1. Agape love will never let a man be selfishly-safe.
2. Agape love insists upon self-sacrifice.
3. Eugene Nida writes in *God's Word in Man's Language*: "The Conob Indians of northern Guatemala . . . describe love as 'my soul dies.' A man who loves God according to the Conob idiom would say, 'My soul dies for God.' This not only describes the powerful emotion felt by the one who loves, but it should imply a related truth—namely, that in true love there is no room for self. . . . True love is of all emotions the most unselfish, for it does not look out for self but for others. False love seeks to possess; true love seeks to be possessed. False love leads to cancerous jealousy; true love leads to a life-giving ministry."
4. The person who will not risk being hurt or thought badly of—the person who is afraid to do what is best for another because he is afraid of that person's displeasure with him—that person does not know how to love!
5. BELOVED, IT MAY SEEM TO YOU THAT WE DELIBERATELY SET OUT AT TIMES TO COURT YOUR DISPLEASURE WITH US! *WE DO!* BECAUSE WE WANT TO LOVE YOU WITH A REAL LOVE, WE ARE NOT PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH WHAT YOU FEEL TOWARD US AT FIRST BECAUSE WE KNOW THAT ALMOST ALWAYS YOU WILL SOMEDAY UNDERSTAND THE LOVE BEHIND OUR COUNSEL AND LOVE US IN RETURN!
6. Any parent who is afraid to risk his child's temporary displeasure rather than enforce some genuine loving restraint, is not worthy to be a parent. AND THIS APPLIES IN THE FAMILY OF GOD!

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CONCLUSION

I. LOVE IS A MANY SPLENDORED THING

- A. Splendor means: glorious, sublime, superb, brilliance.
- B. Love is like a many-faceted jewel; there are many sides to it and they all reflect the glory of God.
- C. I hope I have caught your spiritual eye with three of the more dazzling facets of love this morning.

II. OUR LOVE FOR YOU IS AN ATTEMPT TO REPRODUCE IN YOU THIS SPLENDORED THING

- A. We are going to love you discerningly, demandingly, deliberately.
- B. We are going to love you with our mind and our will as well as our emotions.
- C. You may not be pleased with us always, but we are not going to let our love be directed by that.

C. S. Lewis writes in *The Four Loves*: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one. . . . Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable."

III. TO YOU, MY BELOVED BROTHER OR SISTER, I AM VULNERABLE

- A. I cannot lock myself up . . . break my heart if you will, I will still love you discerningly, demandingly, deliberately.
- B. To appropriate a phrase from Isaiah, "Behold, I have graven you on palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me."