

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."