
Love — God's Eternal Strategy

When Jesus plainly revealed to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things of the elders, the chief priest, and the scribes, and to be killed . . . and raised again, Peter began to rebuke Him, saying "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee . . ." (Matt. 16:22).

Isn't that interesting? Peter thought that he knew more about Christianity than Jesus did and was attempting to "save" the kingdom by avoiding the cross. It is indeed fortunate for the world that Peter did not succeed. Peter was thinking like a human and human strategy against a superhuman opponent is suicide. Our only chance for victory against Satan involves the cross.

A few days later to help Peter understand, Jesus took him to the Mount of Transfiguration. There, with Moses and Elijah, Jesus spoke about his impending death (Lk. 9:31). Once Peter grasped that Calvary was an essential ingredient in the over-all strategy of God, his attitude toward the death of Christ experienced a dramatic change. He came to understand that we are

not redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Jesus, as of a lamb without blemish . . . foreordained before the foundation of the world (I Pet. 1:19-20).

In a similar fashion our objections to the preeminence of love may also disappear when illuminated by the light of God's eternal purpose. Whether they do or not, it is still imperative that we avoid the fatal blunder of "correcting Jesus." When we endeavor to overcome evil with evil, we have destroyed our chance of victory. Our only hope is in Christ who overcame evil with good.

Love is God's eternal strategy for victory!

Please Consider!

Fact #1. *God does not change.*

... I am the Lord, I change not . . . (Mal. 3:6).

God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent; hath he said, and shall he not do it: or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" (Nu. 23:19).

The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent . . . (I Sam. 15:29).

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: *But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail* (Heb. 1:10-12).

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb. 13:8).

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning (Ja. 1:17).

Nothing is more obvious or consistent with the Christian concept of Deity. God does not vacillate or cast a shadow by turning. He is the Eternal and unchangeable standard by which all the variables of creation are to be judged. He is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Fact #2. *God's strategy has not changed.*

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of the mystery, *which was kept secret since the world began*, But now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith (Rom. 16:25-26).

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden

wisdom, *which God ordained before the world unto our glory*" (I Cor. 2:7).

And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, *which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the Eternal Purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Eph. 3:9-11).

Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints (Col. 1:26).

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, *which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began . . .* (II Tim. 1:9).

In hope of eternal life, which God, *That cannot lie promised before the world began* (Tit. 1:2).

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was *foreordained before the foundation of the world*, but was manifest in these last times for you (I Pet. 1:18-20).

Barabbas

The word "Barabbas" is a compound of two words which are familiar to most students of Scripture. The word "bar" means "son of." We read of "Bar-Jesus," "Bar-Jonah," "Bar-timaeus," etc. The book of Acts explains that "Barnabas" means "son of exhortation" (Acts 4:36). The word "Abba" means "Father." This word is explained in Galatians 4:6 where we are informed that the Holy Spirit enables us to cry out "Abba, Father."

The word "Barabbas" therefore literally signifies "Son of the Father." The Scriptures teach us that Barabbas was:

A notable prisoner — Matthew 27:16

Was bound with them that had made insurrection with him — Mark 15:7

Had committed murder in insurrection — Mark 15:7

Made sedition in the city — Luke 23:19

Was a robber — John 18:40

Now there was a custom that as a gesture of good will a prisoner would be released unto the Jews at Passover time. Pilate gave the people a choice between Jesus and Barabbas. Both claimed to be the "Son of the Father" and both had designs on establishing a kingdom. Barabbas, however, tried to establish the kingdom by force. Jesus preached the non-violence of love.

The multitudes, as you know, chose Barabbas. It was an understandable decision, but it was wrong!

There is an old saying that Alexander the Great conquered the world at the age of 33 and it killed him, and Jesus was killed by the world at the age of 33 and He conquered it.

What choice would you have made between Jesus and Barabbas?

Commandment Number One

When Jesus was asked: ". . . which is the greatest commandment in the law?" He responded that it was to: ". . . Love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind"

Mark and Luke in reference to this thought also add "strength." (see Mark 12:30 and Luke 10:27).

These are overlapping and redundant expressions which say essentially the same thing in four different ways.

The Bible word for "heart," for example, refers to man's intellect, emotion and will. Proverb 23:7 states: ". . . as he THINKETH in his heart, so is he" Jesus said: "Let not your heart be TROUBLED . . ." (John 14:1). Paul wrote: "Every man as he PURPOSETH in his heart, so let him give . . ." (II Cor. 9:7). The Bible word "heart" therefore refers to man in his entirety.

The same is true with reference to each of the other words used in this verse. It is impossible to separate and to segregate "heart, mind, soul, and strength" from the very essence of man. Each of these attributes, or characteristics, is inter-related with the very identity of man.

The first and great commandment is therefore to love God with your entire being. Every thought, and every emotion, and every desire, and every ability must be surrendered to the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

There is a sense in which it is easier to love God than it is to love our neighbor. Since God is a "Spirit" he doesn't interfere with our self will in the same way that fleshly people do. Therefore, we shall focus our attention in this book primarily on loving our neighbor. If we do not learn to love our brother whom we have seen, how can we love God whom we have not seen? (I John 4:20).

Conclusion

Since God does not change . . .
 since God's strategy has not changed . . .
 God has always wanted the same thing.

Jesus informs us that the thing which God wants is love!

The commandment to love is not uniquely Christian. It is the same message which God has espoused since the beginning of creation, and it will be much in vogue when faith has become sight and hope disappears into reality.

For this is the message ye heard *from the beginning*, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one . . .
 (I Jn. 3:11-12).

Things created by God not only can bear up under careful scrutiny, but actually become more beautiful and intricate the more carefully they are examined. A snowflake, for example, is beautiful on the landscape but even more so when magnified a thousand times. The works of men, by contrast, become more ragged and imperfect when carefully scrutinized or examined. A painting, for example, which appears flawless from across the room will reveal many brush marks and human imperfections when seen more closely.

God is love! Those who come to love somehow share in the very nature of Deity and the more carefully love is examined, the more wonderful it becomes. When placed under the microscope of Paul's inspired intellect, love is: Longsuffering — Kind — Without Envy — Not Self Exalting — Not Puffed Up — Well Behaved — Doesn't Insist On Having Its Own Way — Isn't Easily Provoked — Takes Not Account Of Evil — Doesn't Rejoice In Iniquity — Rejoices With Truth — Bears All Things — Believes All Things — Endures All Things — Never Fails.

These are the ingredients which God desired in the lives of Cain and Abel

Moses and Joshua
 Peter and Paul

You and Me!

This is the message ye heard from the beginning . . . prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, *But Love Abides Forever!*

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 3

1. What would have happened to Christianity if Jesus had taken the advice of Peter and avoided the cross?
2. Did Jesus practice what He preached about love?
3. Does love mean no warnings or punishment?
4. List any ways that you feel God has changed.
5. List any ways you feel that God's plans have changed.
6. If love is the ultimate goal, why did God command so many different things?
7. I Corinthians 13 lists many attributes of love. Select three and tell how these would revolutionize your church if they were applied.