
Love — God's Many Sided Wisdom

The third chapter of Ephesians teaches that God's wisdom is "manifold" or "many-sided." The Spirit world is greatly concerned with the activities of earth and they observe our actions with great interest (I Pet. 1:12; Matt. 18:10; I Cor. 11:10, etc.). Ephesians 3:10 explains that the principalities and powers in heavenly places (the world of spirit beings) see God's many sided wisdom through the church. Christians are "on stage" before eternal witnesses. We run in the arena before a great crowd of spectators (Heb. 12:1ff.). The way we behave is intended to display God's many sided wisdom and love has an integral part to play in our behaviour.

The Selection of the Apostles

Jesus is all knowing and wise. Then why did He select unlearned and ignorant peasants to be His apostles (see Acts 4:13)? He could have selected men adept at rhetoric and debate. He could have selected men of prestige and influence. He could have selected men of wealth and power. Instead He selected peasant people. They were not theologians by any stretch of the imagination. They were not priests in the family of Aaron nor

Levites in the service of God. They were totally unprepared to debate the issues with the scholars of the day — but they were taught not to debate, but to love. The disciples of Jesus were not to be distinguished by “having all the answers” but by love. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one toward another” (Jn. 13:35). The selection of such men ought to say something to us about our priorities in evangelism.

Pure Religion Is to Love!

Sin accomplishes two things:

1. It separates man from God:

... your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that he will not hear (Is. 59:2).

2. It separates men from one another: Sin not only drove man from the presence of God in Eden, but it was directly responsible for the murderous animosity between Cain and Abel and the myriad of untold woes thence arising.

The word “religion” literally means to “bind back.” Pure religion will:

1. Bind man back to God.
2. Bind men back to one another.

We cannot have a proper love for God if we become corrupted by the world, and we cannot have a proper love for humanity if we are insensitive to those in need. Thus the Scriptures teach:

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world (Ja. 1:27).

This concept is in perfect harmony with God's eternal purpose for man.

Some may say, “If this is God's idea of pure religion, then He must have changed His mind.” Not so! On the surface it may seem that God has changed but in reality His plan has always been the same. He dealt with the patriarchs differently for a reason, but His plan was the same. In the age of Moses He implemented another phase of His plan but His ultimate goal remained unchanged. The apparent contradiction is easily resolved by remembering that God's commandments are not an end in themselves, they are a means to an end, and the “end of the commandment is love” (I Tim. 1:5).

For example, Leviticus 6:1-7 describes the law of the trespass

offering. A soul that sinned against the Lord by defrauding his brother was penalized in two ways: (1) He was to make restitution to his brother adding the fifth part thereto. (2) He was to bring a trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish.

Now we might ask ourselves, why did God command these things? Does God enjoy seeing people deprived of money? Does He take sadistic delight in blood running down an altar? Preposterous!

The truth of the matter is that the sacrifice was not an end in itself; it was a means to an end. The sacrificial system was not for God's benefit but for ours. God wanted people to love Him in the right way and also to love their neighbors. To go through a ritual without love was to miss the point totally. This was Jesus' meaning when He said:

If you bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; *leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift* (Matt. 5:23-24).

The genius of the sacrificial system is that when properly implemented it would not only promote a reverence for Deity, but also a reconciliation with an offended brother.

Similarly, the commandments of Christianity are not an end in themselves, but a means to an end. The ordinances of Christianity are: (1) Baptism, (2) The Lord's Supper.

You may be interested to note that the commandment to be baptized is the only commandment in all of the Bible given in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (see Matt. 28:18-20). There is no cause and effect reasoning associated with baptism. It is not something that was arrived at by a group of logicians at some ecclesiastical conference. It is simply a commandment from Heaven and we obey seeking for a good conscience toward God (I Pet. 3:21). When the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the baptism of John they rejected the counsel of God against themselves (Lk. 7:30). The same must also be true with reference to Christian baptism. Those who refuse the authority of Heaven have missed the most important commandment of all. For additional Scriptures regarding baptism see Acts 2:38, 22:16; Romans 6:1-6; Galatians 3:27-29; etc.

The "communion" is described in I Corinthians as a "communion of the body of Christ" (I Cor. 10:16). The "Body of

Christ" is made up of Christians. People from every race and social strata have become one body by means of Jesus. If we break bread without discerning the body we eat and drink damnation to ourselves (I Cor. 11:29). This was the very problem at Corinth. Their meetings displayed discrimination, not unity. Therefore they came together, not for the better, but for the worse (I Cor. 11:17).

Baptism and the Lord's Supper, the ordinances of Christianity, are in perfect harmony with God's eternal purpose for mankind. The first reflects our love for God, and the second displays our love for one another.

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Love Fulfills The Law

Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. *Love worketh no ill to his neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law,* (Rom. 13:8-10).

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,* (Gal. 5:13-14).

If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well, (Ja. 2:8).

The law was not given to save:

... for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified, (Gal. 2:16).

The law is not opposed to God's promises:

Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid (Gal. 3:21).

The law was to prepare for and point to Jesus Christ:

Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith ... (Gal. 3:24).

The law is fulfilled by love:

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, ... love ... (Gal. 5:14).

The Christian is not under the law:

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law (Gal. 5:18).

The "law of Christ" is to love:

Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

The royal law of love is also the law of liberty:

"If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, *as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty*. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment, (Ja. 2:8-13).

Love Fulfilled the Prophets

Jesus said:

Love the Lord your God with all your heart . . .

Love thy neighbour as thyself . . .

On these two commandments hang all the law *and the prophets* (Matt. 22:37-40)!

Therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law *and the prophets* (Matt. 7:12)!

When the contemporaries of Jesus challenged His behaviour on the Sabbath day or His willingness to fraternize with publicans and sinners, He would sometimes respond by urging them to study the message of the prophets. "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice" (Matt. 9:13).

The passage quoted is from Hosea 6:6. "For I desired mercy and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."

Micah 6:6-8 is quite similar:

Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the high God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the

Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

The scribes and Pharisees were students of the prophets, but they had missed the point of prophetic teaching. Jesus correctly looked beyond the various rites and rituals of Judaism to the ultimate aim of God. God was not just interested in seeing blood on an altar or rivers of oil flow from a priestly sacrifice. He was interested in producing love.

It is both interesting and frightening to remember that all of the prophets were persecuted and that Jesus died on a cross. For some reason the religious world is determined to pervert the will of God and make "sacrifice" more important than "mercy."

The prophet Isaiah dealt sternly with this perversion of truth.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to treat my courts? Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood . . . Thy princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; every one loveth gifts, and followeth after rewards: they judge not the fatherless neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them (Is. 1:10-15, 23).

The divine cure for the problem is in the following verses:

Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool (Is. 1:16-18).

The essence of pure religion has never changed. Pure religion is still to "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (Ja. 1:27).

God does not depend upon us for sustenance:

If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? (Ps. 50:12-13).

The Psalmist was not pleading for more sacrifices for all the beasts of the forest belonged to God and the cattle upon a thousand hills. He was pleading for a change of heart that would cause men to be right with God, vs. 14, and at the same time reconciled to their brothers, vs. 20.

The message of the prophets is in perfect harmony with the eternal purpose of God. A scribe once put it this way in a conversation with Jesus:

Well Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God: and there is none else but he: and to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, *is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*

Jesus responded: "*Thou are not far from the kingdom of God*" (Mk. 12:32-34).

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 4

1. What kind of men do we select when we try to get something done for God?
2. Do we differ from Jesus in this regard? If so, how?
3. Where did the Apostles receive their ability to love?
4. Is baptism associated with love? If so, how?
5. How is the Lord's Supper associated with love?
6. How does love fulfill the law?
7. How does love fulfill the prophets?