
More of God's Wisdom

The Narrow Way is to Love

Note that the teachings of Jesus about the "narrow way" are immediately preceded by the "golden rule."

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. Enter ye in at the straight gate for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it (Matt. 7:12-14).

The narrow way of which Jesus spoke was the confining philosophy and lifestyle of loving your fellow men in the same way you love yourself. The word "narrow" is from *thlibo* which comes from the word for pressing or pressure and relates to that which presses or burdens the spirit. The word "strait" is from *stenao* which means to groan. The narrow way and the strait gate is the way of compassionate concern for others which presses down upon us and causes us to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Operating under a philosophy of legalism, the priest and the Levite could go about their religious obligations oblivious to the pain and suffering of a man who had fallen among thieves. The way of the Samaritan, however, was not so broad. His life was not

regulated by legal documents and decrees of jurisprudence. It as regulated by love. Compelled by love and compassion, he bound up the wounds of the injured man, transported him to an inn and paid for his expenses.

Jesus told the story of the rich man and Lazarus in the presence of the Pharisees "who were covetous." From the legalistic standpoint the rich man seemed to have an impeccable record. Our Lord does not impugn the manner by which his money was obtained nor cite one Scripture which he violated in the course of his daily conduct. He simply observed that a lowly beggar was at the rich man's gate desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his table — and the dogs of the street came and licked his wounds.

To neglect such a beggar may be defensible in a legal court where loopholes and technicalities sometimes obscure the condition of the heart. *But it is not defensible in a judgment based upon love!*

. . . Whoso hath of this world's goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion upon him, *How dwelleth the love of God in him?* (1 Jn. 3:17).

A person who is calloused and insensitive to human need is out of step with the army of King Jesus. A philosophy which demands of us that we consider someone else's needs on a par with our own is narrow by any standards. It is a code of conduct so restrictive that it probes into every aspect of being. "By love" we become enslaved one to another (Gal. 5:13).

To be Perfect is to Love!

Remember that Job was called: "a perfect and upright man." He feared God and turned away from evil. The religion of Job involved loving God.

And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually (Job. 1:5).

But note that the religion of Job also involved loving his fellow men.

. . . I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me: and I caused the widow's heart to sing for

joy, I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame. I was a father to the poor: and the cause which I knew not I searched out, And I brake the jaws of the wicked and plucked the spoil out of his teeth . . . (Job, 29:12-17).

The word for "perfect" in Hebrews is *tawn* and in Greek it is *teleios*. Both of these words refer not to a person who is sinless, but one who is complete! God intended for man to love Deity with all his heart and his neighbor as himself—Job was complete!

Notice how beautifully the life of Job harmonizes with the teachings of Jesus.

Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect!* (Matt. 5:43-48).

To be perfect is not to be sinless. *It is to love as God loves.* If we only love our friends, we are imperfect or incomplete. Those who have the Spirit of Christ must love everybody.

Once suggested, this concept of the "total" Christian lends insight into a number of passages throughout the Scriptures. Take, for example, the story of the Rich Young Ruler. He had lived an exemplary life in striving to please God, but he had neglected his humanitarian responsibilities. He was "incomplete" or "imperfect" because he had attempted to love God without due concern for people. Jesus therefore instructed him ". . . If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor . . . and come and follow me" (Matt. 19:21).

The book of Colossians contains many commandments regarding Christian conduct. We are to put off such things as anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication, etc. and we are to put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forgiveness, etc. On top of all these things we are to put on *Love, which is the bond of perfectness* (Col. 3:14).

The book of James likewise places a strong emphasis upon

inter-personal relationships. Our faith in God is dead unless it is accompanied by works for one another. In this context love is designated as "the perfect law" or the "law of liberty" (Ja. 1:25).

The conclusion to the Corinthian correspondence contains a final appeal for maturity.

Finally, brethren, farewell. *Be Perfect . . . be of one mind, live in peace and the God of love and peace shall be with you* (II Cor. 13:11).

To be perfect is to love!

To "Walk In the Light" is to Love!

Serious students of the Scriptures will be interested in this expression "walking in the light" for it bears a direct relationship with our cleansing in the blood of Christ (see I Jn. 1:7).

But what does it mean to "Walk in the light as He is in the light"?

Perhaps our understanding will be illuminated by a brief review of the term "light" as it is employed by John. It is found 23 times in his Gospel, 5 times in his first epistle, and 7 times in the book of Revelation.

John's first usage of "light" associates it with the nature of God (Jn. 1:4). It is therefore also naturally applied to Jesus (Jn. 1:9, etc.), and ultimately to the Christian. We are commanded to "walk in the light" in the same way that Jesus "walked in the light."

Fortunately John explains what he means by this expression:

He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in the darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes (I Jn. 2:9-11).

John employs the expression "love" so often that he is sometimes known as the "Apostle of Love." Such a title is quite interesting in view of the fact that earlier in his life Jesus had designated him as a "Son of Thunder" (Mk. 3:17). How beautiful! Love that "forbears all things" and "endures all things" replaced that violent nature which once erupted like thunder on a hot summer day. Feelings of animosity and violence came to be deemed by John as so utterly out of character with the Jesus kind of life that he branded them as "darkness" which blinded the eyes.

The Epistle of I John has only five chapters and 105 verses, yet the word love occurs 33 times. It is woven into the fabric of everything expressed in the letter. It is said to be the nature of

God, the nature of Christ and the nature of the Christian. To be without love is to be without eternal life (I Jn. 3:15).

Love Is the Key to the Kingdom

Mark 12:32-34 relates a story quite similar to the one surrounding the text of our book. It differs in at least one important respect. The scribe in Mark's story had come to his own conclusion about the importance of love. When he affirmed that "The Two Commandments" were more important than "all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices," Jesus responded by saying, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mk. 12:34).

In other words, this man was on the right track. The Kingdom of God was not an earthly kingdom ruled by the enforcement of law; it was a spiritual kingdom controlled by the power of love.

For some reason men feel insecure in the absence of law. We sometimes endeavor to insure a holiness on the part of believers by passing laws of our own. The commandments "touch not, taste not and handle not" do have an appearance of wisdom but the Scriptures categorically affirm that they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (Col. 2:23). You cannot make men holy by passing laws!

The brethren in Rome also had some legal hang-ups. The Roman letter reflects their controversy regarding the merits of certain "holy days" and "kosher foods." Such arguments, however, are totally beside the point in a Kingdom based upon love. Romans 14:1 forbids argumentation about the weak brother's opinions and Romans 14:17 reminds that the nature of the Kingdom is not regulations about eating and drinking but "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Colossians 1:13 teaches that the Christian has been transformed out of the power of darkness and into the Kingdom of the Son of His love. For further study into this process on conversion as it relates to love see: John 14:15,21; 15:10; I Corinthians 8:3; I John 4:7,12,16, etc.

Love and the Holy Spirit

The process of conversion involves the mystery of life which somehow eludes the finite mind. A little grain of wheat possesses the germ of life. Synthetic seeds do not! The seed which is alive can wrest that intangible something from the dust, press its way through the crust of the earth and twist toward the sun that life may continue. It not only has the power to grow but also to

reproduce. The process is so simple that even little children can plant a garden. It is so profound that the world's greatest scientists do not grasp its full significance.

Human procreation is similar but even more complex. The writer of Ecclesiastes reflected upon the development of the human fetus and wrote,

As thou knowest not what is the way of the Spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child, *Even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all* (Eccl. 11:5).

Since we do not understand the mysteries of being born the first time, it is logical that we will be unable to comprehend completely the mysteries of being born again. Living seeds can grow, even when planted by accident, but the process which makes them grow is beyond the finite mind.

Those who are born of the spirit experience a remarkable transformation. They become "new creations" in Christ Jesus. They no longer view their surroundings from a human point of view but have a tendency to see all things through the eyes of Jesus. It is His Spirit which reproduces His likeness in the believer.

Human birth results from a corruptible seed but the believer is born from an incorruptible seed — the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever. Though heaven and earth shall pass away, the Word of God shall not.

Every living seed is programmed by God to produce something. Locked up in one seed may be the characteristics of a towering tree, in another the sweetness of a melon or the fragrance of a flower. But locked up in the Word of God are the characteristics of Jesus. When we receive that seed, we bear that likeness. "The fruit of the Spirit is love" (Gal. 5:22).

There is no way we can allow that seed to grow without love, and there is no way that we can achieve that love without allowing that seed to grow. *It is impossible to achieve the love of which the Bible speaks without the power of the Holy Spirit!* We are justified by faith . . . we rejoice in hope . . . we glory in tribulation . . . but the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1-5).

The fruit of the Spirit is love, and it is delicious beyond the ability of man to experience adequately. To know the love of Christ is to deal in a matter so profound that it passes knowledge (Eph. 3:19). It is a many-sided wonder which manifests itself in a

profusion of joy and peace. It tempers our conduct with long-suffering, gentleness and goodness. It enhances our personality with fidelity, meekness and self-control. It is the work of the Holy Spirit and cannot be replicated without His power. It is beyond the reach of mere humanitarianism and philanthropy. It is beyond the grasp of unregenerate men. To suggest that the summation of our eternal responsibility is to love God and our fellow men must not induce us to avoid or evade the miracle of conversion.

Jesus said it best — *Ye must be born again!* Our physical birth gave to us the genes and chromosomes of our earthly father so that we share his likeness. When we are born from above and become children of our Father which is in heaven, we also bear His likeness.

Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: who-soever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother. For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another . . . (I Jn. 3:9-11).

But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another (I Thess. 4:9).

And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God . . . (II Thess. 3:5).

For God hath not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of *love* and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7).

Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us (II Tim. 13-14).

. . . and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us . . . (Rom. 5:5).

Love is of God . . . (I Jn. 4:7).

Bearing Fruit and Love

At the risk of being redundant please permit a brief word about "bearing fruit." Many have felt coerced into an evangelistic fervor because Jesus said that branches which did not bear fruit would be cast into the fire. The context of John 15 does not support such an emphasis.

Please read again the entire section (Jn. 13:31-16:33). Remember that Jesus was taking an old commandment about love and giving it such significance that it became virtually a "new commandment" (Jn. 13:34). This was to be the primary mark of His disciples for "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35).

In the first 58 verses of the discourse there are 24 references to love.

Because the Apostles would be incapable of achieving this love on their own Jesus instructed them to "abide" in Him like a branch abides in the vine. In this way they would draw that supernatural something through His Spirit that would enable them to love. This love is the "fruit" referred to in John 15 (see in particular Jn. 15:8-17). The fruit of the Spirit is Love . . . (Gal. 5:22).

God is Love

God is love! He created a universe with the intention of reproducing spiritual entities who bear His likeness. Since He wanted them to be like Him, it was essential that His creation have the power of choice. Just as physical life results from seeds which are planted, spiritual life in God's likeness is the result of His incorruptible seed which takes root in the human heart. I John 3:9 teaches that the conduct of the Christian is transformed because we have the "seed" or "sperm" of God within us!

If any man does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, he is Anathema, Maranatha (I Cor. 16:22). That is to say that anyone who is not attracted to the story of a compassionate God who heals the sick and cares for little children is so utterly perverse that like a brute beast he needs to be taken and destroyed.

An intellectual and emotional appreciation of good is essential to our salvation. Even good seed cannot grow on solid rock.

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for *God is love*. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he

hath given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. *God is love*; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him (I Jn. 4:7-16).

Questions for Discussion — Lesson 5

1. Which is more demanding, law or love?
2. Who is our neighbor today?
3. Is it possible for us to be perfect as commanded in Matthew 5:48?
4. What changed John the apostle from a "Son of Thunder" to an Apostle of Love?
5. Can a person be saved without love?
6. How does the Holy Spirit produce love?
7. How did Jesus differ from God?