

God's Purpose of Love

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Study 1: God's Purpose Of Love

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Introduction

There is much talk of love today, and probably that has always been. Every person on earth knows love, or knows what love should be - or thinks he does! And every person has his or her view of who or what God should be, if in fact He is not that. That is why to say 'God is love!' (1John 4:7-8, 16) is perhaps one of the hardest things to say in our world. Every person thinks he knows, and maybe there is no real knowledge in the confident and often strident voices.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1Cor 8:1).' Paul does not mean 'build up' in the sense some use it today, i.e. of giving a person self-confidence or making him feel good about himself. To be built up, for Paul, is to be brought to maturity, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ in connection with the whole body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13.) That is, love works in us to bring us to the goal that God the Father has intended for us. What that goal is we will consider in a moment, but first we will consider what this purposeful nature of love excludes.

The love of God is always purposeful and never wasted or wasteful. It is certainly extravagant, even prodigal, but never profligate. The Jerusalem Bible at some place (in Isaiah I think!) speaks of God who is 'prodigious in prodigal prodigies!' Paul tells us in Romans 8:28, '...in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.' The ideas of 'random acts of kindness' and of 'loving wastefully' are ideas that are entirely existential in nature, and have little to do with the God who has revealed Himself to us as the God of love. These ideas presume no ultimate goal for love or for the world, merely the expression of some feeling, emotion or action in the present.

God's Purpose of Love

Eph. 1:3-10 says this:

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. 5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace 8 which he lavished upon us. 9 For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

The purpose of God is set out in various terms, all of which belong together and inform each other. So we see that God the Father's plan has these elements:

- that we were chosen to be holy and blameless before Him in Christ
- that we have been destined in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will
- that His will, set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, is to unite all things in Christ, all things in heaven and earth.

This is a breathtaking intention that the Father has for His creation! Paul calls it in v. 8 'the mystery of His will.' A mystery is a matter which can not be penetrated by human reasoning or searching, but which is known only by revelation. It is not unknown to those, who by the grace of God have been given knowledge in all wisdom and insight into that mystery.

For the purpose of this study, we want to note particularly the phrase of Paul in v. 5 - that this plan was determined by the Father 'in love.' It is a little unclear in the Greek whether that phrase belongs at the end of v. 4 (i.e. '...that we should be holy and blameless before Him in love.') or as the RSV has it at the start of v. 5. If the former, the focus is on the summation of all things, and especially us, into love in the Father's presence; if the latter, the focus is on the fact that the whole outworking of this plan was begun and pursued in history in love. Geoffrey Bingham writes:

Love is of God, and no other being or thing. Any love that is not of God is not true love. Everything must begin in love and go on being in it, and find its goal and fulfilment in it and by it. There can be no other way. God is love, and this another way of saying that everything has its being from Him, goes on being by virtue of Him, and must find its goal - its telos - in and by Him.

The goal of God the Father is that Christians be admitted, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, into participation in the inner life of the Triune Godhead. Geoff Bingham quotes Jürgen Moltmann as saying:

To throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the triune God: that is the meaning of creation, reconciliation and glorification.

The goal of God in history is that we brought right into the very heart of love, the heart of God himself. Everything that is happening in history is the outworking of the Father's plan that this be so. In history there is the terrible contesting of that plan by Satan, his hosts and fallen humanity. Yet 'in everything God works for good...' i.e. God the Father pursues relentlessly and effectively His plan to have a holy and blameless family in His presence in the plenitude of His love.

This purpose of love was worked out and secured in the deepest place of love in the whole of human history, the Cross of Jesus Christ, the Son of God given and giving himself for the world in love. There all the opposition of evil to love was met by love and defeated. He was not overcome by evil, but by good overcame evil. In his 'high priestly prayer' in John 17, Jesus spelled out the coming action of the Cross in terms of the purpose of God, particularly in verses 20-24:

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

The purpose of the coming Cross is that those who belong to Christ may be with him where he is (in John that is in the bosom of the Father - John 1:18) and to see his glory - not simply as spectators but as participants. This glory is the glory which the Son has as the only begotten (John 1:14) and which he receives from the Father in eternity, before the world was made (John 17:5). This glory was given by the Father to the Son in love (John 17:24). The purpose of God in His love is that we should be holy, blameless sons of God through Jesus Christ, sharing in the Son's receiving of glory from the Father and fully sharing in the life of love that is the inter-personal dynamic of the triune Godhead.

Study 2: Coming To Know God As Love

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In his essay, *Thy Nature And Thy Name Is Love*,¹ Geoffrey Bingham says this simple and yet immensely penetrating statement:

When God appears to a man, he comes to know God - as a man may know Him.

In our world, shaped as it is by Cartesian philosophy, Enlightenment principles and scientific methodology, we have grown up assuming that we can know a matter by investigation and analysis. We may approach the matters of knowing God, love and truth in a similar way. In so doing we would be entirely wrong. An analytical approach only ever leads us to the outside of a thing, and not its real interior. The interior of a thing, its true being and nature, can only be given, never gotten. This giving is by the thing itself, or by the One who created the thing. No one else is able to give it, or to get it. All true knowledge is by revelation and in relationship. Apart from God's own appearing and revealing of Himself, we have no true knowledge of Him, nor of ourselves or of the creation - God's creation - in which we live.

'God is love (1John 4:8, 16).' 'Love is of God (1John 4:7).'

To know God as love means that we meet God revealing Himself to us as love. This revelation is not abstract, but comes in His action of loving us. Since God is love, then we must see also that to know love we must know God. This knowledge must flow out of His own self-revelation and which is known in relationship with Him. We can only know the truth of God being love as we receive that love and live in that love and respond in love to Him. As offensive as it may be to the proud human spirit, we must say that it is impossible for human beings to love or to know love purely if they are apart from God. All love worked out at a human level outside of relationship with God must be less than genuine love, however fine, practical and useful it may appear.

John tells us in the first chapter of his Gospel, 'No one has ever seen God.' It is certainly true that in the Old Testament we have accounts of the appearing of God to men and women of faith. Yet this appearing is not the fulness; there is still a hiddenness of the revelation, lest those to whom the Lord appeared be destroyed by His appearing. Moses was promised that he would see the goodness of God pass before him (Exod. 33:19ff), and yet he was told also that he would not see God's face. The Lord appeared to Abraham (Gen. 12:7, 15:17, 18:1), Isaac (Gen. 26:2, 24) and Jacob (Gen. 35:1, 9, 48:3) - and yet for all these appearing, Moses was given greater revelation than to them, as 'incomplete' as that revelation was (Exod. 6:3). Throughout the journey from Egypt to Sinai to the Promised Land, the Lord appeared to His people (Exod. 16:10, Lev. 9:23, Num. 14:10, 16:19, 42, 20:6) - but this glory was in the shekinah cloud, which acted both as revealer and hider of the glory of God's presence. At times in the Promised Land, faithful people of Israel would have the Lord appear to them - e.g. Gideon (Jud. 6:12), Manoah and his wife (Jud. 13:3,10), Samuel (1Sam. 3:21), and

¹ Geoffrey Bingham, *Ah, Strong Strong Love!* p.25 NCPI: Blackwood, SA 1993

Solomon (1Kings 3:5, 9:2). again this was at times in the mysterious person of the 'angel of the Lord' or by dream or vision, or in Samuel's case 'by the word of the Lord.'

In all these appearances it is important to note that right at the heart of the revelation was the revelation that God is love. 'When God appears to a man, he comes to know God - as a man can know Him.' Jeremiah says this in his prophecy:

2 Thus says the LORD: "The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, 3 the LORD appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. 4 Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. 5 Again you shall plant vineyards upon the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy the fruit. 6 For there shall be a day when watchmen will call in the hill country of Ephraim: 'Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'" (Jer. 31:2-6)

Speaking of the current captivity of Israel as a new wilderness wandering, the Lord through Jeremiah reminds the people of the grace that came to rebellious Israel in the first exodus, and of how the Lord appeared to Israel. That was the appearing and action of His love (v. 3), love which remains faithful despite Israel's unfaithfulness and the judgments which have come to the nation, and which will lead Israel into renewal of covenant love and blessing.

So in saying that no one has ever seen God, John is not denying the fact of God's revelation of Himself to His covenant people, Israel. He is stressing that in all the great gifts to Israel that came, there was a coming fulness of which those prior revelations were only the shadow. As the writer to the Hebrews says:

1 In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3 He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs (Heb. 1:1-4).

John puts it this way:

18 No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known (John 1:18).

It is in the event of the coming of Jesus Christ that the truth of God and so the truth of love was made manifest to the world. This sending of the Son was not simply to display on the world stage the fact of love, but love appeared in order that we be drawn into the knowledge, the life of that love. Knowing God as love is known only through His saving act accomplished in His Son.

3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another; 4 but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, 6 which he poured out upon us

richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, 7 so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. 8 The saying is sure (Titus 3:3-8).

We don't arrive at this knowledge simply by a formal, careful exegesis of the Biblical texts on the matter (as important as such is.) The love of God is known only through new birth, that is by the Holy Spirit effecting in our lives all that Christ accomplished by his death on the Cross. The Holy Spirit effects new birth in us by so showing us the Cross of the Lord Jesus Christ that we know that the Father who gave His Son for us, and the Son who gave Himself up for us, and the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son as the fruit of that Cross, are love.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1John 4:9-10).

Coming to know God as love we come to know God. The Father has loved us and given up His Son so that we be not condemned. Love is not an abstract 'thing' we receive from God, like a power or influence or emotion. Since God is love, we receive God Himself loving us. 'The Father, the Son and the Spirit as the one God enter into our lives and dwell there. Jesus said this was how it would be. Of the Holy Spirit he said, he dwells with you, and will be in you.... If a man loves me he will keep my word, and my father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'

So, we read of the cloud driving out people from the temple, not allowing access (Exod. 19:9, 40:35, Lev. 16:2, Deut. 4:11, 1Kings 8:10-11, 2Chron. 5:13-14.)

Study 3: Love Before The Beginning

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How can a person know the nature and dynamic of the relationships which exist in the Triune Godhead?

It is a question as to whether we can be spectators of the action and being of the Three Persons. Apart from the self-disclosure of the Three, of course there is no way in which we could possibly penetrate into Their being and so wrest knowledge from Them. All we could possibly have if this be the case were images which approximate to some experience we have, but which always would leave us short of any confidence that this is, of the truth, God. Yet, we are not simply left by God to guess as to His nature and action. It is an axiom of Christian theology that God is Self-revealing. He is ever and always revealing Himself to us. Apart from that, let every mouth be dumb! The Self-revealing of God comes by means of the acts and words which are His and by which He chooses to declare Himself to us. Whatever we say about the nature and being of God, we must only ever say what He has said to us. Apart from that Self-revealing, whatever analogy or figure we devise is only an idol which keeps us from the truth of God rather than leading us to Him. To build away from that word leads us into a philosophical and alluring deceit, an intellectual idolatry.

Theologians have talked about the immanent and the economic Trinity, and about the works of the Trinity in extra and ad extra. By 'immanent Trinity' is meant the life of the Godhead within itself (this the sphere of the in extra works), and by 'economic Trinity' is meant the Trinity in its actions outwards in creation, providence, redemption, etc (these are the ad extra works.) Recently many have come to see that there can be an artificial division between these two, and that we should see that there is one God! It is important to note that we only know the truth of God not by pressing baldly and boldly into the mysterious realm of His own divine life, but through being taken into fellowship with Him through His actions towards us in Christ His Son, by the ministry of the Spirit, i.e. through the works ad extra we come to know the beauty and glory of the works in extra. This is another way of saying there is no knowledge of God outside of His revelation in Christ in His Son. 'No one comes to the Father but by me.' As Geoffrey Bingham says,

'For us the enquiry into the nature of the Triune Godhead is an amazing privilege promising us thrilling results: we can actually come to know God as He is, at least to the point that is beneficial and necessary for us to know. Most of all it is thrilling because we can come to know Him as love!'²

² Geoffrey Bingham, *Ah, Strong, Strong Love!* NCPI:Blackwood SA, 1993 p.84

The Son Reveals Eternal Love

The statement of John in John 1:14 may be so familiar to us that we have become numb to the extraordinary nature of what John is saying: 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.' In the man Jesus Christ the Word of God has taken on our nature in order that we can come to know the truth of God. In John 1:18 we are told that this Word is also the Only Begotten who is at the Father's side. That tells us we must understand the designation of Christ as the Word in relational and not abstract, philosophical terms. The Word is the Word because He is the Son who so hears the address of the Father to Him and so responds in loving obedience to that address that He is identifiable as the Word of God.

In John 1:1-2 John had already told us that 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.' 'In the beginning' here means really 'before the beginning, from eternity, in the eternal truth of God's own being.' To speak of the Word being with God, we can understand this as being 'face-to-face' with God, a statement of rich relational meaning. When this Word became flesh, when this Son who was in the bosom of the Father became Man, then the rich revelation of the truth of the Father is brought before Man by the Son. The truth of God that we come to know in Jesus Christ is absolutely trustworthy, as he is 'full of grace and truth.' later in John's gospel, Jesus was able to tell Phillip, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:8-14).'

Five times in John's Gospel Jesus explicitly says that the Father loves him:

- The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into his hand. (John 3:35)
- For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. (John 5:20)
- For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. (John 10:17)
- As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. (John 15:9)
- Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which You have given me in Your love for me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

It is in the last of these verses that we see explicitly that this love is not just love that Jesus knew as a man, but love which he had known as the Son in eternity. The Father is love! From ever and always, the truth is that the Father is love! And this Father who is love has ever had face-to-face with Him, by His own begetting, His Only Beloved Son. From them proceeds eternally the Spirit of love. The Spirit does not create or distribute the love that binds Father and Son together - in fact there is no such love as that. Rather, from the love of Father and Son, the Spirit proceeds outwards and in return. He is called the Spirit of your Father, the Spirit of God and also the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of His Son.

This eternal Family of love, Father, Son and Spirit, has an order, a hierarchy of love. This hierarchy must be seen in connection with the deep inter-dwelling of each Person in the others. (Aside from that we may well read into the truth of hierarchy our own situations of domination and tyranny, thus making of God an idol.) There is a priority, not a superiority, of the Father within the Godhead; it is an order amongst 'equals' (though that is an inadequate, almost meaningless term when speaking of persons.) He is what the theologians call the *fons divinitatis*. Twice in John's gospel (10:29, 14:28) Jesus speaks of the Father being greater

than he. This is 'not as we evaluate greatness, for according to the real values of God the servant is the greatest; subordination is not an indication of inequality, but of order.'

In chapters 12 and 13 of *Ah, Strong, Strong Love!* (pp. 93-113), Geoffrey Bingham traces the ways of love within the Godhead, as they are revealed in the words and deeds of the incarnate Son, and in other places in Scripture. He selects three elements as the main ones that help us to see the open mystery of Divine relationships.

The three ways the Persons of the Godhead exist in love are

- (i) by each glorifying the others,
- (ii) by each giving to the others, and
- (iii) by each serving the others.

As blandly as those words might read in such a statement, the reality of this for ever and always being so in the heart of God - what a heaven to know! This has always been the flow and dynamic of the Godhead, and it is the eternal plan of God to throw open the circulatory movement of the divine light and the divine relationships, and to take men and women, with the whole of creation, into the life-stream of the Triune God. Praise Him!

Many today speak of the 'unknowability' of God. They would say that we can only ever describe God in analogical terms, and, whatever terms we use, we do not come to the reality, that God remains outside our figures and descriptions. They would say that the writers of the Scriptures were in the same position as us, and so they have less difficulty than I do in discarding with the language of the Scriptures and replacing it with images, figures and descriptions they find more amenable. I believe such an approach is fatal to living faith.

See Col. 1:13, 'the kingdom of His beloved Son' (or 'the Son of His love'), cf. Matt. 3:17, 17:5 'My beloved Son'. Geoff Bingham (*ibid*, p. 67) quotes H. M. Carson as saying, 'The phrase 'his dear Son' is literally 'the Son of His love'. This is a richer expression than would be the case if the epithet beloved, *agapetos*, were used. The Son who is the only-begotten of the Father is not only the eternal object of the Father's love, but is also the embodiment and expression of the love in His gracious dealings with men. Thus to be translated into the kingdom of His beloved Son is to move from the loveless condition of darkness and death into a spiritual realm in which we have the love of God shed upon us.'

Study 4: Love At The Beginning

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

Psalm 145 says this:

- 1 I will exalt you, my God the King;
I will praise your name for ever and ever.
- 2 Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever.
- 3 Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
his greatness no-one can fathom.
- 4 One generation will commend your works to another;
they will tell of your mighty acts.
- 5 They will speak of the glorious splendour of your majesty,
and I will meditate on your wonderful works.
- 6 They will tell of the power of your awesome works,
and I will proclaim your great deeds.
- 7 They will celebrate your abundant goodness
and joyfully sing of your righteousness.
- 8 The LORD is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and rich in love.
- 9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.
- 10 All you have made will praise you, O LORD;
your saints will extol you.
- 11 They will tell of the glory of your kingdom
and speak of your might,
12 so that all men may know of your mighty acts
and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.
- 13 Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
and your dominion endures through all generations.
The LORD is faithful to all his promises
and loving towards all he has made.
- 14 The LORD upholds all those who fall
and lifts up all who are bowed down.
- 15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food at the proper time.
- 16 You open your hand
and satisfy the desires of every living thing.
- 17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways
and loving towards all he has made.
- 18 The LORD is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
- 19 He fulfils the desires of those who fear him;

- he hears their cry and saves them.
20 The LORD watches over all who love him,
but all the wicked he will destroy.
21 My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD.
Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.

Three times the phrase 'all He has made' appears in that Psalm, and we see that the Lord has compassion on all He has made and is good to all (v. 9), He is loving towards all He has made in His faithfulness to all His promises (v.13), and that He is righteous in all His ways and so loving to all He has made (v. 17). What a great thing to see! - that everything is under the Lordship of God's holy love (no matter how many things have seemed to be to the contrary.) God in His great love has created the world with the purpose of sharing in the goal of His love. All the way along from the glorious beginning in love to the final consummation in love, the history of creation is the history spelled out in Psalm 145, where God is loving to all He has made. Apart from the constant action of God in love to creation, then there be no history, but only the degeneration of creation into chaos and destruction. (This is actually quite a stupid statement, given the impossibility of there being a time when the constant action of God should not be!) Psalm 36:5-9 and Psalm 136:1-9 also tell of the steadfastness and security of the love of God for His creation:

- 5 Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies.
6 Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep.
O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.
7 How priceless is your unfailing love!
Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings.
8 They feast in the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. (Psalm 36:5-9)

- 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures for ever.
2 Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures for ever.
3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures for ever.
4 to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures for ever.
5 who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures for ever.
6 who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures for ever.
7 who made the great lights - His love endures for ever.
8 the sun to govern the day, His love endures for ever.
9 the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures for ever. (Psalm 136:1-9)

The chorus resounds throughout history - His love endures forever! - even where that holy love, and the Holy Lover, have been despised, ignored and rejected by angry rebel hearts. Nothing has stopped the flow of love from God to all He has made, or frustrated His purpose that men and women with all creation be taken into the heart and life of His love. It is this very thing that assures us that the world is firmly established, it shall never be shaken; it is certainly not the care or faithfulness of Man in his stewardship of creation that gives us such assurance. 'For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and on them he has set the world (1Sam. 2:8).'

Creation was a love act. As Martin Bleby says in his song, 'God Is Love':

God is love! A river of fire that can never be quenched or run dry,
A love full and free that for eternity could not be just kept up on high:
The Father, the Son and the Spirit all love and together in love They are one,
And the love was spilled over to make all creation, so that others could join in the fun -
Yes, the love was spilled over to make all creation, so that others could join in the fun!

There is no sense of God being self-serving in act of creating, as though He created because He were bored or were lonely or just had to express His creative self! Creation came gift-wise. It is true, as Isaiah 43:5-7, Psalm 19:1f and Romans 1:19f indicate, that creation was made with a view to displaying, revealing the glory of God. If we see that as divine egotism, then it shows that we haven't understood what an enormous gift and act of love it is to be drawn into sharing in God's only glory in such a way as we can display or reveal it. When Jesus prayed to the Father that He glorify His name (John 12:28), he knew that this glorification would come through the Cross, and that the Father would glorify the Son in order that there at the Cross the Son would glorify the Father (i.e. set forth His glory so as to bring Him honour and praise and love.)

The creation is structured then as a love creation, being as it is the creation by which the glory of God is revealed. Creation is made to be love-oriented, just as also it is to be 'righteousness, holiness, truth and goodness'-oriented'. In fact, creation is shown in the Scriptures to resist and reject all that opposes the truth, goodness, righteousness, holiness and love of God, as well as suffers from that opposition and in its judgment, as well as rejoicing in the redemption. (See Lev. 18:25, Num. 11:32, 26:10, Deut. 4:26, 28:23, Prov. 30:21, Isa. 24:19-20 just for starters! Look at the word 'earth' in a concordance for a full picture.) All that is dislocated or distorted in creation with regard to the light and love of God is foreign to the creation, to its intrinsic created being.

This love creation always had before it the great goal of God, so the love that was in action in creation was purposeful. Just as love was before the beginning, so too love was at the beginning. 'This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and set His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.' The world was created by the Father, Son and Spirit with the Cross at the heart of its history. we can say that Calvary love was in existence before time began. there was a Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, and it is the truth that is the guarantee of the creation.

Study 5: Man And Law - Love In Action

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

Man, The Image of God

If God's purpose of love for creation was always to be worked out within the creation through mankind. Man the creature was created with a view to being a key participant, in obedient communion with God, in creation's reaching the goal for which God had destined it. This is seen in the two accounts of the creation in Genesis 1 and 2.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (Genesis 1:26-31)

The first account of creation (Gen. 1:1-2:3) uses the word 'create' (Heb: *arb*) in only four places - right at the start (1:1) in the introduction, right at the end (2:3) in the conclusion, at 1:21 in describing the creation of the sea and air creatures, and at 1:27 where the verb occurs three times in connection with the creating of humanity. The verb *arb* is used exclusively of God and so we are led by the thrice-repeated use of this verb here to know that 'It is He that made us, and we are His (Psalm 100:3)' - and it is not we who made ourselves to live for ourselves. Genesis 1:27 underscores for us our utter dependency upon God. The language of image also does this, for an image exists only by derivation. Being the image of God stresses the radical nature of our dependency upon God. We are placed alongside the world before God, not alongside God apart from the world. 'From its very first page the bible excludes the pagan theme of the divinization of man and all the dreams of hidden divinity and self-creation.'

In saying this though we must also see that the Lord God in making us in His image has exalted us by calling us into participation with Him in His purposes for creation as under-King. To be created as the image of God is the privilege of the human race, shared by no other of the creatures God has made. (Note that there is a key difference in the blessing of the animals (1:22) and the blessing of Man (1:28), in that the blessing of the animals is done by

divine fiat, whereas the blessing of Man is done in conversation or address, i.e. in a relational and responsive way.) Psalm 8:3-8, as it echoes Genesis 1:26, picks up this theme in wonderment at the kindness and magnanimity of God in this bestowal of honour on humanity:

3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? 5 You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honour. 6 You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, 8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

The crowning with honour and glory is paralleled in the Genesis creation account with being 'made in Our image, in Our likeness.' The honour and glory with which humanity is crowned is honour and glory of God Himself. To be in the image of God is to be a recipient of and participant in His self-giving of His glory. It is not so much that we are in the image of God, as we are as the image of God, made according to the reality of God Himself.¹ Another way of saying this is that 'man is then the visible representation in the created world of the invisible God.' Man belongs to the visible world, as befits 'image', as the created representative of his Creator. This representation, or visibilization, of God can only be fulfilled through beholding God and being in relationship with Him. (See Isaiah 60:1-3. we cannot be the light of the world without beholding the light of the world.)

We have seen in previous studies that the Scriptures reveal the eternal God to be the eternal Family of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These Three subsist eternally as love, in Each giving to and receiving from, serving, and honouring the Others. We have seen that the glory of God is His moral glory - His holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love. Man made to be His image, to be crowned with glory and honour, is thus created to be in the world the visible expression of God's full holiness, righteousness, goodness, truth and love. This is always relational and active, i.e. these are not abstract states but persons in relation to God, Man and the rest of creation, this relationship being expressed in concrete actions. (If these things are just 'states' abstracted from relational activity, they remain invisible in the visible world, let alone being separated from the fact of the eternal relational activity of love within the Godhead.) Because God is love, Man is made for love. 'The human race was to live in love, by love, as that love flowed from God to humanity.'¹

Law, The Image of God

The summary of the law which Jesus approved tells us of all that is given to Man in being the image of God. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. (Luke 10:27)' That is, responsively behold and visibilise the truth of God as love.

Motyer says, 'Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written, preceptual image of God.' The Law then has been in existence long before the enscripturation of the Law for Israel in the Torah given to Moses. The Law is the royal law of love (James 2:8), it is the 'Law of God.'

Geoffrey Bingham says, '... the law of God is the law of the three Persons subsisting in total unity. This would not be so if the Father Himself were not love. he is love, and the Son is eternally generated from Him and therefore is the Son of His love. the Holy Spirit proceeds from these two Persons and is the Spirit of love.... the ways in which they subsist

together is their law. It is not imposed on them from a source other than themselves, but arises from themselves as the divine Community.'

Paul says in Romans 7:22, 'For I delight in the law of God, in my inmost self...' Again as Motyer says, 'When man in the image of God and law in the image of God come together in the fully obedient life, then man is indeed 'being himself.' His nature is the image of God, and the law if given both to activate and direct that nature into a truly human life; any other life is subhuman.... OT law has, to a far greater extent, the function of liberating man to live according to his true nature.' What a glorious thing to be able to say of a man or a woman - that the law of the person corresponds with and resonates with the law of the Persons, the law of God!

Some scholars believe that it is better to speak of one creation account, and that the focus of the second account is not so much on creation but on sin's entry into creation.

Henri Blocher, *In The Beginning* p. 82, IVP: Leicester, 1984

Blocher sets this out thoroughly and coherently in pp. 84-5, *ibid*.

William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, p. 34 Paternoster:Carlisle, 1984

Geoffrey Bingham, *Sweeter Than Honey, More Precious Than Gold* p. 12 NCPI: Blackwood, 1995

J. A. Motyer, 'Law, Biblical Concept Of' in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, pp. 623 ff. ed. Walter A. Elwell Baker Book House:Grand Rapids, 1984

Motyer, *ibid* p. 624

Study 6: The Refusal of Love - The Unthinkable Disobedience

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

In Eden, there was utter joy and bliss in the presence of God. In creating Man, God did not throw him into desert or into the jungle, but brought him into His own presence of love in the Garden, where He showed Him kindness by taking care of him, and adding to the gift of life an abundance of good things for his happiness. If Canaan be a land flowing with milk and honey, how much more then the Promised Land! This kind love flows on for ever into creation, even given the entrance of sin into the world:

5 Thy steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
thy faithfulness to the clouds.

6 Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God,
thy judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast thou savest, O LORD.

7 How precious is thy steadfast love, O God!
The children of men take refuge in the shadow of thy wings.

8 They feast on the abundance of thy house,
and thou givest them drink from the river of thy delights.

9 For with thee is the fountain of life;
in thy light do we see light. (Psalm 36:5-9)

The garden was planted with all kinds of tree which the Lord gave for food for the man and the woman. These trees represent all the riches of the earth, placed at Man's disposal. God reveals Himself as the God of superabundant kindness who rejoices in the happiness of His children. In fact, the text makes clear that this enjoyment and happiness was commanded (Gen. 2:16). The proper response to the love of God in creation is to enjoy it, to not be content with a stunted existence. The tree of life was one of the trees to which Man was to enjoy free and continued access. Man is to have life and have it abundantly! In communion with God (symbolised by the tree of life, for God Himself is the inexhaustible source of life) Man has been given all things.¹

The command to not eat the fruit of one tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was the safeguard of this happiness of the human race. The command to not eat shows Man his limit, that he is a creature and not God. It calls Man to freely approve his creaturely status in order to continue in his happiness. It is in this status that Man has and enjoys the fulness of the love of God. This command did not constitute a temptation or a test. In order for it to have stirred up any covetousness, it would have required a sin that was already latent in man and which was simply waiting for the command to 'revive' the sin. In Eden Man is pure and has nothing to rebel against, and nothing in him prompting and stirring for rebellion. There is no weakness waiting for the stress to fracture it.

The knowledge of good and evil that this tree gives is not the proper moral discernment that a man or woman should have; that discernment is given in creation (how else could the man and woman know to keep the command to not eat?). Rather it is the pretended higher knowledge above both good and evil which decides about good and evil. It is assumed moral autonomy by which Man apes the independence of God, even though this autonomy is imagined and illusory, and actually slavery. Calvin explains the forbidding of the tree to Man thus:

Not because God would have him to stray like a sheep, without judgment and without choice; but that he might not seek to be wiser than became him, nor by trusting to his own understanding, cast off the yoke of God, and constitute himself an arbiter and judge of good and evil.

What we have then in the taking of the fruit forbidden and the eating of it is quite simply and terribly - devastatingly - the refusal of the God of love. There is no explanation given for this disaster. Even the freedom of the Man in no way explains this rebellion. Completely free and completely good by creation, the creature has no reason to bring forth evil. In Eden freedom was not arbitrary or separate from the love of God; it was the fulness of communion with the Father. To posit the revolt in the freedom given by God is really to shift the blame for the revolt to God Himself. So too is the idea of the fallibility of Man - for one can only properly speak of fallibility after the sin. Such is the deceitfulness of the human heart.

When God speaks in love to humanity and then Man blocks his ears, refuses to give ear, disobeys that word of love we have the eating of the fruit prolonged through human history. The history of the human race is the sad history may be summed up in three words - 'You would not.' (See Deut. 1:26, 1:43, 8:20, Isa. 30:15, Jer. 29:19, Matt. 23:37 and Luke 13:34.) This is the statement of refusal. Refusing God involves refusing His commandments and laws (Exod. 16:38), refusing to believe in Him despite the signs and wonders of deliverance (Num. 14:11), refusing to give up the evil practices of the idols and persisting in stubborn rebellion (Judg. 2:19), refusing to listen to Samuel and demanding a king like the nations (1Sam. 8:19), refusing to listen and to remember God's saving work (Neh. 9:17,29), refusing to acknowledge the Lord (Jer. 9:6), refusing to obey and instead transgressing the law of God (Dan. 9:11). Perhaps Zechariah 7:11-12 puts it most succinctly:

11 But they refused to hearken, and turned a stubborn shoulder, and stopped their ears that they might not hear. 12 They made their hearts like adamant lest they should hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great wrath came from the LORD of hosts.

To not hearken to the Lord, to not obey but to listen to another voice is at heart the refusal to hear Him who speaks as Love. To do this it is necessary to reinvent God in our minds as being not love. The snake did not so much invite the woman to doubt the word of God as to outright reject it. He imputed hidden motives in his scornful derision, and tried to portray God as selfish, jealous, oppressive and repressive - that is as anything but love. To refuse God as love of course then cuts Man off from the true source of love, and so it is not surprising to see working out then in the history of the rebellious descendants of the first couple the terrible effects of lovelessness. Next week we will overview the sad history of idolatry and hate which issues from the rejecting of God as love.

'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, so that who ever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.' The world loved by God is this world, the world which He would gather to Himself as a mother hen her chick under her wings, but they would

not. It is the world to which He has held out His hands in love day after day, but which would not receive that love, being obstinate and disobedient. Those hands held out were taken by wicked men and nailed to a cross, an act where the refusal of love by the whole race reached its fever pitch, its most burning intensity. In the face of that fierce refusal, that adamant heart against the God of love, God who is love, Father, Son and Spirit, loved to the utter end. I draw much of my study from Henri Blocher, In The Beginning

We must ever be guarding ourselves against the 'cheapskate' view of God, that He be miserly and reluctant in His giving to us in this life. 'He has given us all things richly to enjoy (1Tim. 6:17 - n.b in context that knowing this saves us from crass materialism and greedy trust in riches.)' 'How much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him! (Matt. 7:11)'

The translation, 'Did God really say...?' is not the best. The serpent does not ask a question, but makes a strong affirmation, an affirmation which a distortion of the facts. Luther said of the phrase used that it was as though the serpent turned up its nose and jeered or scoffed.

Study 7: The Sad History Of Idols and Hate

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

Psalm 81

- 1 Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob!
- 2 Raise a song, sound the timbrel,
the sweet lyre with the harp.
- 3 Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our feast day.
- 4 For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
- 5 He made it a decree in Joseph, when he went out over the land of Egypt.
I hear a voice I had not known:
- 6 "I relieved your shoulder of the burden;
your hands were freed from the basket.
- 7 In distress you called, and I delivered you;
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.
- 8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you!
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!
- 9 There shall be no strange god among you;
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.
- 10 I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.
- 11 "But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would have none of me.
- 12 So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.
- 13 O that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
- 14 I would soon subdue their enemies,
and turn my hand against their foes.
- 15 Those who hate the LORD would cringe toward him,
and their fate would last for ever.
- 16 I would feed you with the finest of the wheat,
and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."

The event in Eden in which the Man and the Woman sought to be as God was the denial of God's purpose of love. It was a denial of the truth of God being love, it was the refusal of the response of obedient love and it was the beginning of the failure to participate in God's purpose of love for the world. Those who will not live as the people of love in the truth of the

love of God are in a terrible bind. Every day the truth of God being love is beating out, to them, and so every day they have to live in denial of that truth. Paul says in Romans 1:18-20

‘18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.’

Because of this Man lives every day with an evil conscience. Those with an evil conscience are those who are antagonistic toward God and refusing faith in Him and love toward Him, and so guilty in His presence, angry for that guilt, and resentful of the wrath and judgment of God on sin. Such a conscience is driven to works that lead to death (Heb. 9:14, lit. ‘works of death’). These works would be either the acts of defiance, the works of the flesh that are the fist in the face of God, or they could be the desperate and urgent works done by the guilty person to appease or ameliorate the sense of judgment but which finally at best only sedate the conscience whilst the judgment still draws near with its terrible finality. What we must see is that with an evil conscience, Man hates God, and that this leads to hate working through the history of the human race.

This may seem a harsh thing to say, and some would say the prevalence of spirituality in history and now is evidence of the seeking for God that disproves the universal antipathy of Man to God. There are a number of places in the Old Testament which speak of those who hate the Lord (Exod. 20:5, Deut. 5:9, 7:10, 32:41, 33:11, 2Chron. 19:2, Psa. 21:8, 68:1, 81:15, 83:2). This hatred is linked with idolatry.

4 You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me... (Exod. 20:5, see also Deut. 5:8-9).

Loving God is linked with true worship and obedience, and hating Him with disobedience to His laws.

9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10 and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face. 11 You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment, and the statutes, and the ordinances, which I command you this day. (Deut. 7:9-11).

The prevalence of spirituality and religion is proof of the hatred of God and not the opposite!

The refusal of the love of God leads Man to devotion to the idols. Paul makes this very clear in Romans 1:21-22. Jesus spoke of idolatry in terms of love of the false gods and hatred of the true God in Matthew 6:19-24.

19 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where

neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. 22 The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is sound, your whole body will be full of light; 23 but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness! 24 No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon. (Matt 6:19-24)

The idols themselves are nothings, but behind them lie demons who operate through the idols to hold Man in deception and bondage. Cut off from the love of God and held captive by demons, fathered by Satan himself, the idolatrous race becomes one which seeks to carry out its father's desire - to kill and to lie (John 8:44). Murder and deception are the expression of hate. Paul describes the sad history of idolatry and hate this way:

3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by men and hating one another... (Titus 3:3)

This is seen from the very start in the blaming of Eve by Adam when confronted by the Lord (Gen. 3:12), and which was the opposite of the deep love and honouring that he showed her in his cry of delight at her creation (Gen. 2:23). In their child Cain we see it too, in his hateful murder of his brother, which was the outflow of his sullen resentment towards the Lord's rejection of his false, self-justifying worship (Gen. 4:1-8, Heb. 11:4). Cain's descendant, Lamech took the pardon given to Cain for the murder of his brother as licence to exact harsh, murderous judgment against those by whom he felt wronged (Gen. 4:23-24). By the time of Noah, this spiral of evil had come to the point where 'the Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil all the time. (Gen 6:5)' 'The earth was corrupt in God's eyes, and full of violence. (Gen 6:11)' Later one of the descendants of Ham, Cush, was to father Nimrod (whose name may mean 'We shall rebel!') and from him came the dread nations of Nineveh and Babylon (Gen. 10:8-11). The building of Babel, founded by Nimrod, into a city to reach into heaven (Gen. 11:1-4) was an expression of hatred toward God and refusal of His purpose of love.

And so on we could trace this terrible and sad history through the pages of the Scriptures. What the writer of Genesis does though is move the focus onto the covenant action of God in His calling of Abraham to himself. 'Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded....'

This murder and deception may take a very pious face. When Christ was before Pilate, the Jewish leaders argued strongly for his crucifixion saying, 'We have a law (meaning the law of God) and by that law he ought to die... (John 19:7)' In fact, even by God's law they had not established their case (John 18:23) and Pilate himself saw that there was no crime in him (John 18:38, 19:4,6,12).

Study 8: The God Who Loves In Covenant

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

Psalm 25 is a great psalm of trust in God which flows from His gracious covenant love:

- 1 To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul;
- 2 in you I trust, O my God.
- Do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- 3 No-one whose hope is in you will ever be put to shame,
but they will be put to shame who are treacherous without excuse.
- 4 Show me your ways, O LORD,
teach me your paths;
- 5 guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Saviour, and my hope is in you all day long.
- 6 Remember, O LORD, your great mercy and love,
for they are from of old.
- 7 Remember not the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you are good, O LORD.
- 8 Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.
- 9 He guides the humble in what is right
and teaches them his way.
- 10 All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful
for those who keep the demands of his covenant.
- 11 For the sake of your name, O LORD,
forgive my iniquity, though it is great.
- 12 Who, then, is the man that fears the LORD?
He will instruct him in the way chosen for him.
- 13 He will spend his days in prosperity,
and his descendants will inherit the land.
- 14 The LORD confides in those who fear him;
he makes his covenant known to them.
- 15 My eyes are ever on the LORD,
for only he will release my feet from the snare.
- 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
- 17 The troubles of my heart have multiplied;
free me from my anguish.
- 18 Look upon my affliction and my distress
and take away all my sins.
- 19 See how my enemies have increased
and how fiercely they hate me!

- 20 Guard my life and rescue me;
let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
21 May integrity and uprightness protect me,
because my hope is in you.
22 Redeem Israel, O God,
from all their troubles!

In this Psalm David expresses confidence (v. 2,4,13,20-21) that the Lord will hear his prayer and the prayer of all God's people (v. 22), a confidence which is based entirely on the character of God Himself as he has made himself known to David. The mercy and love which he calls for the Lord to remember are –'from of old' (v. 6), i.e. part of the eternal character and being of God Himself. This 'love and mercy' is paralleled in the Psalm by 'the name of the Lord (YHWH)' (v. 11 cf. vv. 6-7 - and see Exod. 34:6-7). Twice in the Psalm - vv. 10 and 14 - David mentions the covenant of the Lord. Although clearly aware that he is sinner, David has confidence in the Lord's being gracious and merciful to him because of the Lord's own character and being, and knows that the forgiveness of the Lord brings the sinner into the experience and reality of the covenant.

In the RSV v. 14 says 'The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.' This compares with the NIV 'The LORD confides in those who fear him...' The verb underlying this verse has the idea of engaging in friendly, confidential speech. Things are that close to the heart of the speaker are shared with those who are close to His heart, an intimate circle of friends. It developed into the sense of the (trusted) council of the king with whom he would share the secrets of state - a sense probably at the fore in Amos 3:7. This helps us to understand the deep matter of covenant.

Hermann Hoeksema, Geoffrey Bingham and many others have very helpfully demonstrated in their writings on covenant that creation has a covenantal base. From eternity the relation of the Three persons in the divine essence is a covenant relation. This then is determinative in the nature of the creation that They set out to establish. The relationship given to the man and the woman with God was one, of friendship, in which they were taken into His counsel and called to partakers with Him in His purpose for creation. This relationship was innate in the creating of Man in God's own image; there can be no likeness apart from relationships. The covenant was not an additional, new agreement made after the creation. Hoeksema says this in his Reformed Dogmatics:

However, as soon as we present the matter of covenant in this wise, if the life of the covenant in God is such a life of most perfect friendship, of the most intimate communion, of the deepest knowledge and the most affectionate love, it follows, in the first place, that the idea of covenant cannot be found in an agreement of pact.... The covenant idea is given with the life of the Triune God in Himself. It rises in spontaneity from the divine Essence and realises itself with perfect consciousness in the three Persons. God knows and wills Himself, loves and seeks Himself eternally as the covenant God. The covenant is the bond of God with Himself.

But if this is so in God Himself, this must also be applicable to the covenant idea as a relation between God and man. For all things are only out of God, through Him and unto Him. Also the covenant relation can never be anything but an ectypal reflection of the covenant life in God Himself. If the essence of the covenant in God is the communion of friendship, this must also be the essence of the covenant between God and man.... If this communion of friendship

in the Trinity implies a perfect knowledge of one another, then also the covenant life of man must consist in this, the God reveals Himself to him, causes man to know Him, reveals His secrets to him, speaks to him as a Friend with His friend, walks with him, eats and drinks with him, lives with him under one roof. If the covenant life of God consists in this, that the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity are united in the bond of perfect love, then also the covenant relation between God and man must originate in this, that God opens His heart for man. Then the life of the covenant is eternal life itself.

The terrible sin, the entrance of evil into the human scene has not undone God's covenant relationship with His creation nor His intention for creation. 'He set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved. (Psa. 104:5)' 'The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. (Psa. 93:1)' In the course of the history of hate and of idols, this truth remains so. In the course of that history, the Lord has reaffirmed or reiterated His covenant faithfulness in the various covenants with His people - Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and the promise of the New Covenant. Each of these covenants participated in the eternal covenant, the covenant of creation.

Each of these covenants is marked by the fact that they came upon people who in no way expected or deserved this covenant grace. (In saying this we must recognise that the grace of the covenant whilst for the particular person always had the wider view of God's love for the world as its primary focus.) Noah we are told was a righteous man (Gen. 6:9) but it can be argued that it is significant that this is stated after we are told that he found grace in the eyes of the Lord (6:8); it is certainly clear in his drunkenness after coming out from the ark that he was not sinless. Abraham was an idolater (Josh. 24:2), caught up himself in the history of hate. Moses did not even recognise the presence of the Lord in the burning bush (Exod. 3:1ff), and he treated the covenant with a free and easy hand, not the holy and immediate obedience it deserved (Exod. 4:24ff). David was looking after sheep when the Lord came looking for him. We are told he was a man after God's own heart (1Sam. 13:14), and he was chosen because the Lord looks on the heart, not the outward appearance (1Sam. 16:7). 'To be after God's heart' must surely mean one who lives and abides in the truth of God in covenant love and faithfulness; being after God's heart was the fruit of covenant grace and mercy in David's life, not the grounds for it. When the Lord gave the new covenant promises to His people it was while they were under judgment for their terrible slide into apostasy and idolatry.

The covenant action of God re-establishes men and women in His purposes for creation. It creates a people of faith. And a people of faith are a people of love. Through history alongside the terrible actions of hate and idolatry, there has been, by the mercy of God the people of love amongst whom God dwelt. He travelled with them in their travelling. They were called to eat and drink in His presence. He opened His heart to them through His prophets, speaking of the deep things of His heart as Friend to His friends. He gave them His law, His wonderful law of love, and at the high points of their history, they were a people of love.

Hermann Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Reformed Free Publishing Association, Grand Rapids, 1966, pp. 321-2, qu. by Geoff Bingham, *Comprehending the Covenant*, New Creation Publications, Blackwood 1999, pp. 34ff.

Study 9: The Judgments and Judgment Of Love

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

In our first study in this series, we saw that in love God purposed that, in His eternal Son incarnate, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, men and women be admitted into participation in the inner life of the Triune Godhead, into the life of divine love. In this happening, all creation will be brought to its goal and consummation. This purpose has been outworked (and continues to be) through God's action in history. This outworking has focussed particularly in the covenants that God Himself has established with people of faith throughout history. The faithful Creator, the Father of love who is loving to all His works, is faithfully, patiently, strongly bringing all things to their goal. What peace we know when we see and rest in this great truth, that everything is under the Lordship of love, no matter how things may have seemed to be to the contrary.

One of the things that to our minds, affected by sin and guilt as they are, seems to speak against this great truth is the awesome matter of judgment. (In fact, as we will see, judgments and judgment are indispensable to the purpose of love in a world of rebels.) What is that makes us see things as contrary to love? Paul Tillich said that we fear death not so much because we have to die, as because we deserve to die (see Heb. 9:27). Judgments haunt the mind of the human race because of the reality of guilt. Despite various attempts to deal with sin and guilt, which are all doomed to fail, every person suffers in, from and because of his or her own sin. This suffering and misery is not simply humanity being left to stew in its juices, but God's own personal, holy opposition to sin and judgment of the sinner. The judgments bring to mind the reality of the final judgment; in fact they seem to threaten its very present breaking upon our heads. And that final judgment hangs over us as the end of love as a possibility for us.

A key to understanding the nature and matter of God's judgments is that 'Judgment begins with the household of God. (1Pet. 4:17)' God certainly loves His people, borne out in so many places in the Scriptures, e.g. Deut. 7:6-10 –

6 For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; 8 but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. 9 Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations, 10 and requites to their face those who hate him, by destroying them; he will not be slack with him who hates him, he will requite him to his face.

This love for His people is of course love He has had for all men and women, the special people being chosen to bring that love to the ends of the earth. Note at the end of the passage above the fierceness of judgment on those who reject that love. Where there are those who belong to His people who then themselves wander, through idolatry, into a despising of Him and His love, then that fierce, moral opposition comes upon them.

This opposition though is the opposition of jealous love. It is opposition which holds on! It is opposition which is essentially for the one it opposes. This opposition to unfaithfulness issues in fierce judgments on God's people,¹ but this fierceness is not unrestrained nor untimely; it is always serving the purpose of God for the world. There is nothing more evil than that a human being should transplant the divine love implanted by God Himself for the love and worship of any other than God. There can be no greater iniquity than to give love to the idols and other so-called gods. As evil as this is, the fierce judgment of the Lord comes in order to loose idolaters from their snares and to bring them back to moral sanity. God persists with His people even in their apostasy and idolatry, but this persistence is not sentimental. It is strong, holy love in action.

Jeremiah had to announce the terrible judgment of Israel in the Babylonian invasion and exile. He had to declare the coming destruction of Jerusalem. He had to make clear that so sinful had Israel become, and so persistent in that sinfulness, that there was no remedy to turn away this judgment. He had to urge the people of God to accept the judgment and not to fight against it. His prophecy is fierce, e.g. Jer. 25:34-38 –

34 Wail, you shepherds, and cry, and roll in ashes, you lords of the flock, for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come, and you shall fall like choice rams. 35 No refuge will remain for the shepherds, nor escape for the lords of the flock. 36 Hark, the cry of the shepherds, and the wail of the lords of the flock! For the LORD is despoiling their pasture, 37 and the peaceful folds are devastated, because of the fierce anger of the LORD. 38 Like a lion he has left his covert, for their land has become a waste because of the sword of the oppressor, and because of his fierce anger.

Yet it is clear through Jeremiah that these judgments come to purify and heal the Lord's people. They are part of the outworking of God's plan of blessing for the world:

10 For thus says the LORD: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfil to you my promise and bring you back to this place. 11 For I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me; when you seek me with all your heart, 14 I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile. (Jer. 29:10-14)

10 Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, says the LORD, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for lo, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid. 11 For I am with you to save you, says the LORD; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will chasten you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished. (Jer. 30:10-11)

18 Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings; the city shall be rebuilt upon its mound, and the palace shall

stand where it used to be. 19 Out of them shall come songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who make merry. I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will make them honoured, and they shall not be small. 20 Their children shall be as they were of old, and their congregation shall be established before me; and I will punish all who oppress them. 21 Their prince shall be one of themselves, their ruler shall come forth from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me, for who would dare of himself to approach me? says the LORD. 22 And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” 23 Behold the storm of the LORD! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. 24 The fierce anger of the LORD will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intents of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this. (Jer. 30:18-24)

Apart from the action of judgment then in history, there would be no people of God released into, and sustained in, a faith-participation in the life of God. ‘The Lord disciplines those whom He loves.’ The judgments of history are towards the goal of our participation in the life of God, in the divine nature. Praise be to God for His righteous judgments!

This history is captured up in the word ‘Christ’ (Hb: **xysM**) which is meaningless without its Jewish background. The fact that Jesus was the Christ reminds us of the purpose of God for the world being worked out through Israel.

This is how some have sought to interpret Romans 1:24,26,28 - ‘He gave them up’ or ‘He handed them over’. But this giving up or handing over is a personal act of God. (We must remember too that He hands them over with purpose of taking them back; this judgment is to shut them up to the mercy of the Cross.)

The following verses make clear this personal involvement of the Lord - Ps. 7:11, 10:13, Ecc. 8:11-13, Ps. 32:3-4, 38:3-4

Study 10: God So Loved The World That He Sent His Son

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

The purpose of God for the world, that in love we stand before Him holy and blameless, a purpose determined before the creation came to be, is fulfilled in, and only in, His beloved Son. It is in Christ that every spiritual blessing is known. The blessing is being brought to share in all the blessedness that Christ knows as the eternal Son. Paul, in Ephesians 3:16ff, prays...:

16 that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, 17 and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, 19 and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fulness of God.

Being filled with all the fulness of God is linked to knowing the love that surpasses knowledge, the height, depth, breadth and length of the love of Christ, and this in turn is linked to having Christ dwell in our hearts through faith. This 'love of Christ' (v. 20) may be an objective or subjective genitive - i.e. the love that Christ loves or the love with which Christ is loved (by the Father.) It seems to me more likely to be the latter than the former for a number of reasons. Firstly the New Testament, including Paul, seems to favour speaking of the love of God or of the Father. Secondly, this love is known as Christ dwells in our hearts, and brings us to the fulness of God, which seems to me to point to the love that Christ knew so fully from his Father.

There are a number of places in the New Testament where the sending of the Son by the Father is given its rationale. The most well-known is probably John 3:16 - 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.' Another is 1John 3:8b - 'The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.' Jesus himself explained the purpose of his ministry right at its commencement when he quoted the Messianic mission of the Servant from Isaiah 61 -

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, 19 to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke 4:18-19)

In a disputed part of Luke (9:56) Jesus says this - '...for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them.' In Mark 10:45 (parallel - Matt. 20:28) Jesus teaches,

'The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' The purpose of love then involves the destruction of all that is evil in creation, the liberation of those who have been enslaved by the Devil, and the bringing of them into eternal life, which is knowing the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. This great purpose will involve not the exercise of raw power but the giving of the Son, and his own self-giving, as a ransom for many.

The end and the means are one; God never uses any means which are contrary to His nature and being. 'Surely the judge of all the earth shall do right.' 'God is not a man that He should lie.' (Num. 23:19) 'For I will proclaim the name of the LORD. Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.' (Deut. 32:3-4)¹ And so in the sending of the Son in the purpose of love, it is only to be expected that this means is the action of love. There is only one direct reference to Jesus loving a person in the Synoptic Gospels¹ but the whole of the Gospels is the narrative of love, from beginning to end. This is seen especially as Luke summarises Jesus' three years of ministry in Acts 10:36-38 thus:

36 You know the word which he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace by Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), 37 the word which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: 38 how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him.

It is John's Gospel which speaks more freely - though still reservedly¹ - about the love of Christ for particular people. Lazarus was one whom Jesus loved, as were Martha and Mary (John 11:3,5). His love for Lazarus was recognised by the crowds when they misinterpreted his tears at the grave - 'See how he loved him!' (11:36). The foot-washing was a sign of the full extent of his love for his own (13:1). There is a disciple present at that 1meal who is designated as 'the disciple whom Jesus loved' (13:23, also 19:26, 20:2, 21:7) and this is quite probably John the Evangelist's own way of referring to himself. It was not an exclusive love for that particular disciple, but his way of expressing what it means to belong to Christ. Each of us who are in Christ is 'the disciple whom Jesus loved.' At that last meal before his arrest Jesus commanded the disciples the new commandment to love one another, just as he had loved them (13:34) and he speaks of that again at 15:9 and in his high priestly prayer in chapter 17.

The action of love in the Son incarnate was the beginning of the new creation. He is the New Adam and through his defeating Satan in the temptations and his destroying the works of the devil both in his acts of ministry and then in the great ministry of the Cross and resurrection, Jesus Christ has recreated humanity, and so has opened up the possibility of love. He is the one true Man in all history, the One and Only from the Father who has become the One and Only for the Father. He alone has fully obeyed the Father, he alone has the verdict in all history 'This is my Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.' But he has this verdict as a man, as one who stands with us and for us, the one in whom the purposeful love of God for all creation will reach its goal.

It would be better to translate this phrase (in Eph. 1:3) 'the whole spiritual blessing.' We are not to conceive of the blessing as made up of distinct parts, but rather being the 'fulness of Christ' with which we are to be filled (see John 1:16, Rom. 15:29, Eph. 3:19; 4:13, and Col. 2:10.)

Study 11: Love At The Cross

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

In his great prayer which preceded his ministry at the Cross, Jesus prayed this:

24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which You have given me in Your love for me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world has not known You, but I have known You; and these know that You have sent me. 26 I made known to them Your name, and I will make it known, that the love with which You have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” (John 17:24-26)

This prayer expressed the earnest desire of Christ for the great act which lay ahead of him in going to the cross. The great end, the great desire of Christ was that, through this necessary and indispensable act, the love from the Father, which he knew, delighted in and responded to obediently in love, may be in them. The whole goal of the cross of Christ is the personal infilling of men and women with the love of God to the same measure as that love fills Christ. When John cries out in his first letter,

1 See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. (1John 3:1)

it was this that he was overjoyed by - that we share in all that the Son knows and enjoys. At the end, when all that God has done in history is known to sight, then

2 ... we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. (1John 3:2)

The infilling of men and women with love, when they have been hated and hating one another through their sad history of hating God without a cause, is no small action. It is the greatest work of all history.

This high priestly prayer (as it is now known) tells of Christ self-concentration of obedience to the Father. This self-concentration involved his own self-sanctifying action (v. 19), but also required the fulfilling of the prayer that the Father glorify the Son (vv. 1-5). That is, the coming action of the Cross required the utter love of the Son for the Father and the utter love of the Father for the Son, for the actions of sanctification and glorification are essentially meaningless without love. We know that it was by the eternal Spirit that Christ offered himself to God (Heb. 9:14), and we know that the Spirit is the Spirit of love.

All of Christ's life was the life of love to the Father, and there was never a moment when Christ acted contrary to movement of the Spirit of love that filled him. Through the temptations in the wilderness, the constant attacks from those who proudly opposed the grace of God, the attempts to sidetrack him away from the purpose of God (even by his own disciples), Christ had remained faithful and obedient to the Father. Yet the action of the Cross was the deepest point of that obedience, and Christ sanctified himself for that action in this prayer. Just as his whole life had been the life of love, so we see too that love overflow in this most terrible of times - his refusal to fight against the arresting troops, his refusal to justify himself in the trial, his piercing look of love at Peter which undid him, his great cry, 'Father, forgive them; they don't know what they are doing', his word to the penitent thief, his care for his mother as he put her in John's care, and his final word of trusting love to the Father 'Into your hands I commit my spirit'

At the Cross he bore the sins of the world in his own body, and bore all the judgment of that sin in himself - Isaiah 53:4-6, 10, 1Pet. 2:24. He was the man of sorrows at that Cross - Isaiah 52:13-15a, 53:3 - and those sorrows were the intolerable, grievous burden of our sins. His sorrow was the experience, that totality of which we have never really known, of the loss of glory. No one can compute or estimate the totality of the loss or the depth of sorrow that sin and its judgment bring, but the Holy Spirit as He brings home to us the Cross takes us to the place where that loss and sorrow has been fully exposed and borne in love.

12 Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger. 13 From on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend; he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back; he has left me stunned, faint all the day long. (Lamentations 1:12-13)

In the sorrow was the knowledge of love's holy opposition to unholy opposition of love. It was this that lay at the heart of his cry, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' Nothing less than this could achieve all that Christ prayed for in his high priestly prayer. Yet his being there was according to the Father's will, and he had given himself to that will, consecrated himself for that very purpose. Underneath that terrible cry of abandonment was the deep song of love of the Son for His Father. And even as the Father abandoned him, He was also well pleased with him, for the Son obeyed his Father even to death, even death on a cross.

In saying all this, we must see that this love was not simply the internal life of the Trinity on show, but actively together the Three were in the great act of the Cross bringing their love to bear its power in the world. The Cross was not simply Christ's act of love which he pled against an angry Father - 'Here I am and my children; now leave them alone!'. Rather it was the Father's act of love in which He loved the world so much that He sent His Son to ensure that His love may come to men and women in a thoroughly holy way. The Son did not return to the Father following the Ascension declaring the victory of his love and demanding the Father now leave people alone! He went to the Father declaring in love, 'Here I am, and the children you have given me! (Heb. 2:13)'

Study 12: Love And The New Birth

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

John tells us in his account of the Gospel of Christ:

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and proclaimed, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. 38 He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified. (John 7:37-39).

This promise of Christ - of the overflowing Spirit of God in the heart of any person who believes - anticipated all that Christ was going to do in his death, resurrection and ascension. Having done the great atoning work, he then poured out the Spirit on all who believe, and that Holy Spirit brought to them personally in fully dynamic reality all that Christ had done. Paul in his letter to Titus makes very clear that there is this dual aspect to the one work of salvation - the work of Christ, full and complete and the sending of the Spirit to actualise that for the believer.

4 ...but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, 6 which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, 7 so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

It is by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit that the saving grace of God established in Christ comes home to us. This happens through the Spirit-filled proclamation of the message of grace, and is received through faith. That is, in speaking of a dual aspect we are not in any way speaking of two separate acts, as though the regenerating power of the Spirit comes after hearing the message of the Christ. It is only by the work of the Holy Spirit that this revelation comes to a person.

The new birth involves the whole harvest of the fruit of Christ's work. The believing person

- (1) comes out of death and into eternal life (John 3:14-16, 3:36, 5:24, 6:40, 6:47);
- (2) receives the cleansing and forgiveness of all his or her sins (Acts 5:31, 10:43, 26:18, Col. 1:13-14)
- (3) is justified from the guilt and penalty of sin by grace (Rom. 10:4,10, 1Cor. 6:11, Gal. 2:16, Tit. 3:7)
- (4) is adopted as a son or daughter of God in Christ (Rom. 8:15, Gal. 4:5, Eph. 1:5); and
- (5) is sanctified to be holy just as his or her Father is holy and to be pure just as Christ is pure (Acts 28:16, Rom. 15:16, 1Cor. 6:11, Heb. 10:14, 1Pet. 1:2,15, 1John 3:2-3).

In Romans 5:1-5 Paul shows us the dynamic effect of saving action in the believer in these words:

1 Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. 3 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

The new birth involves the love of God being shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. By this, the believer began to dwell in love, as love came to dwell in him or her through the presence of the Father, Son and Spirit. The living reality of God's own being and purpose is known in the depths of the person through the rebirth in the Holy Spirit. Where before the new birth there had been ignorance of the truth of God, now by the new birth there is knowledge that God is love. This knowledge cannot be arrived at any other way, except through receiving in faith the action of the love of God for us in Christ, by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Knowing God is love is not a theoretical idea, but a relational reality, a dwelling in and being indwelt by God Himself.

Such an act of God - and new birth is only His act, for it is only 'from above' that one comes to see the kingdom of God - has enormous effects in the life of believers. In 1Corinthians 6:9-11 Paul reminds the Christians in Corinth of what the work of salvation had accomplished in them. It was utterly life-transforming:

9 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor sexual perverts, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

When Paul spoke to Titus of the loving kindness of God our Saviour appearing it was in a situation where hate, foolishness, disobedience, deception and bondage dominated (Titus 3:3-4). The salvation that came broke that terrible, Satanic death-style. Love was poured into the heart through the Holy Spirit; God's wisdom - the wisdom of the Cross - became known; hearts that had hated the law of God now were made obedient as children; the lie was overcome by the truth; and the bondages of sin and fear of death and judgment (which had all their lives held men and women captive) were smashed and the liberty of the children of God was known by faith.

Study 13: The Community Of Love

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

What an enormous subject we come to when we come to this study on the church as the community of love. It may be possible to say that all the epistles deal with this great theme and have this great truth as their foremost pastoral concern - i.e. that the community of love live in the reality of the love of God.

The phrase 'beloved' occurs 58 times in the epistles. Often Paul speaks of particular persons or the congregations to whom he writes as 'my beloved ... ' and this would seem to indicate that the love with which the beloved is loved is Paul's love (although that love, being agaph, is from God.) To the churches though Paul makes clear that they are those who are beloved of God:

7 To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 1:7)

4 For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; (1Thess. 1:4)

13 But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. (2Thess. 2:13)

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience... (Col. 3:12)

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. (Eph. 5:1)

The first thing to say then about the community of love, the church is that it is the recipient of the love of God; it is the beloved. How amazing that is to say! In Colossians and Ephesians we find that the Beloved is first and foremost the Son, Jesus Christ:

13 He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Col. 1:13-14)

5 He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:5-6)

So, the beloved church is the recipient of the love known by the Beloved, the eternal Son. We are those baptised into the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit - i.e. into the eternal Family of love - translated into heaven whilst here on earth to do His will! We only ever love because God first loved us, sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1John 4:10,19) and because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (the

Spirit of adoption / sonship - Rom. 8:15-16) who has been given to us through the Beloved Son (Rom. 5:5). This love poured into us, we now respond in love to the Father, Son and Spirit and also, with and by this love, we love the brethren sincerely and purely, and also take that love to the whole world through the proclamation of the Gospel of God's love.

This love that has come to us is unchanging, sure and certain:

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (Jer. 31:3)

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:35-39)

The love of God come to us in Jesus Christ will bring us to the promised goal! This great love carries with it the imperative that we 'keep ourselves in the love of God. (Jude 21). Keeping ourselves in His love means then too that we keep ourselves free from other false loves:

5 Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." (Heb 13:5)

Love springs from knowing God's own unchangeable, free, gracious love. Where the church is diverted from dwelling on and in this love, she dries up in her own living as the community of love.

The community of love works out its love in obedience to the commands of the Father. This was the case for the Son:

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. (John 15:10)

31 ...but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. (John 14:31)

It is the way it has always been for the people of God:

12 And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good? (Deut. 10:12-13)

And so it is especially the case for the church on whom the Spirit of love has been so abundantly poured:

3 And by this we may be sure that we know him, if we keep his commandments. 4 He who says "I know him" but disobeys his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps his word, in him truly love for God is perfected. By this we may be sure that we are in him: 6 he who says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. (1John 2:3-6)

2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome. (1John 5:2-3)

Love is always active and is essentially practical, not simply a matter of feelings. 1John 3;17-18 is very clear on this matter:

17 But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? 18 Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

Love is exercised in the fulfilling and working out of the plan of God - these are not simply acts in themselves. When Jesus said 'My Father is working still, and I am working' (John 5:17), this work was the bringing of creation to its great goal of love, and all the love-acts along the way were part of that plan. Love is not 'do-goodism.' Both are responses to misery; do-goodism is a response (often unconscious of this fact) to the misery of guilt and sin in the do-er and an attempt to alleviate the existential pain of it, whilst love is a free response to the misery of the recipient of the love and an act to bring that person into the plan and purpose of God for them in Christ. Do-goodism lives under judgment and seeks to evade it; love is in those who have passed through the judgment of the Cross and no longer are under judgment but are in life.

Always the people of God must have in the heart 'the first love' else their life together freeze-dries into the cold formalism of the Ephesian church in the book of Revelation, to whom Christ says:

2 "I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and found them to be false; 3 I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. 4 But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." (Rev. 2:2-4)

Outwardly perhaps they resembled the Thessalonian church to whom Paul writes so ardently and joyfully:

2 We give thanks to God always for you all, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, 3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labour of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brethren beloved by God, that he has chosen you; 5 for our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit... (1Thess. 1:2-6)

Yet the drift from the first love - the love with which He first loved us, the love of the Cross - made the Ephesians not a model for all the churches, but in danger of losing their identity as the church. Arise of Bride of Christ, shake off the sleep of death; love Him who loved you.

See Geoffrey Bingham, Ah, Strong, Strong Love! (NCPI, 1993) chapters 18-24 for a rich and thorough treatment of the New Testament material on this vast topic.

Study 14: The Fruit And The Gifts Of Love

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

In Romans 15:30 Paul speaks of 'the love of the Spirit':

30 I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf...

This 'love of the Spirit' almost certainly means that the Spirit communicates the love of God to us, and so we too love. We have seen something of this in previous studies where we have often looked at Romans 5:5-10 which shows that the love of God comes to us through a revelation of the Cross and the work effected there by Christ. It is the Holy Spirit who brings this revelation home to us, and so 'the love of God is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us.' Charles Wesley captured this up in his wonderful hymn:

Come, Thou everlasting Spirit,
Bring to every thankful mind
All the Saviour's dying merit,
All His sufferings for mankind.

True Recorder of His passion,
Now the living faith impart;
Let us see His great salvation,
Preach His Gospel to our heart.

Come, Thou Witness of His dying,
Come, Remembrancer divine,
Let us feel Thy power applying
Christ to every soul, and mine.

The fruit of the Spirit is, Paul tells us, 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.' That is, as the Spirit reveals the truth of the Cross to us, applies it in the depths of our beings, evokes the response of love from us, and keeps us warm in the love of God, a wonderful harvest arises from this work of His in our beings. The fruit is His harvest, not ours, and is the fruit of the Gospel in us. It is not our cultivation of a particular character or trait, but His intimate work.

In 1Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul exults in the truth of love:

4 Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; 5 it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrong,

but rejoices in the right. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

We see that many of the fruit of the Spirit listed in the Galatians passage are nominated here as characteristic of love. The whole of the fruit of the Spirit is love, and that each of the other elements identify for us the reality of that love as from God. A love which was not joyful, peaceful and peaceable, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, and self-controlled would not have the character of God's own love, and so would be *eros* and not *agape*. As they are the character of God's own love, the Spirit actually produces for us and in us a foretaste of the goal, when we shall 'be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.'

All elements of the fruit of the Spirit are not simply internal qualities, but realities lived in relationship with others. Love is not simply a delightful, commendable 'higher state' to aspire to - no! love is a strong necessity, indispensable to true Christian living, and essential for the purpose of God as He works in history. The fruit of the Spirit must never be cut off from the great action of God in history, displayed like some ornament on the mantelpiece but kept out of danger! It is in the tumults of history, the hurly-burly and suffering of the Kingdom of God, that the harvest of the Spirit comes to full maturity.

In this present time, we become enlarged by love for love. Paul prays for the Ephesians that they 'may have power, with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ (Eph. 3:18)' and for the Thessalonians that 'the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you (1Thess. 3:12).' It is not that love increases, for love is always a whole matter - 'all your heart, mind soul and strength' - but that we mature in it and in its action.

Part of the means by which God Himself matures us is through the gifts of the Spirit which He has given to the church:

11 And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and upbuilds itself in love. (Eph. 4:11-16)

These gifts (*domata*) operate within the body along with the *charismata* for the purpose of love. Through them, the people of God come to mature manhood, attaining to the unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God. These gifts are given for the common good, i.e. as gifts for loving. through them, God's purpose of love is worked out by (a) the building up of God's people for the ministry to which they have been called, of proclamation of the love of God to the world; and (b) by enabling that powerful proclamation itself.

Study 15: The Gospel Of Love For The World

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

Love, as we have learned in our text, is God Himself, and in the Triune relationships each Person honours the other, gives to the other and serves the other; so the believing community does just this. Each honours, gives to and serves all others. This works out in many ways, but chiefly in proclaiming the saving word of God - the Gospel. In the process of proclamation the material needs are also seen and taken into consideration, but the pain of man in guilt, and emotional crippling of sin and judgments, are relieved by the effective preaching of the grace and love of God in Christ.

This is not done just to recruit others to the believing community, but is the love of the Triune God working through His servants to redeem the lost. The outcome is not just salvation from damning judgments - though it of course includes that - but it is to bring men and women to freedom of agape in this life and full fellowship with God in the next.

In this quote taken from Geoff's synopsis of his book in the postscript at the end, he sets out clearly for us the key matter in the work of God's love in the world. The proclamation of the Gospel to the world is the great event of human history. In 1Corinthians 15:24-28 Paul sets out the goal and the nature of Christ's ministry now:

24 Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 "For God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection under him," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.

The goal is very clear - that the Son will deliver the kingdom to the Father. At that time, all will summed up in the totality of love (Paul here calls it God being everything to every one) - we'll see more of that next week. Christ's ministry until then is to destroy every rule and every authority and power, to put every enemy under his feet whilst he rules, dealing lastly with death. When that ministry is complete then comes the end when he hands the kingdom to the Father and so is subjected to Him who put all things under him,

This ministry of Christ he carries out through the witnessing ministry of his people.¹ It is always primarily Christ's own ministry. In the Revelation Christ is seen with a sword coming from his mouth - the sword of the word of God - and by this sword he himself smites the nations (Rev. 1:16, 2:12, 19:15,21). The sharp sword is the utterance of the dynamic word of God. This one who so powerfully smites the nations has with him 'the armies of heaven' (Rev. 19:14), who are his people who share with him in the smiting of the nations with the word-sword. That is, by their participation in the proclamation of the Gospel, the people of

God, the church, are the means by which the Lord Jesus smites the nations, bringing all things under his rule in order that at the end he may hand all things to the Father.

This ministry of witness-proclamation is clearly to be carried out to the ends of the world.

18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

45 Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46 and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, 47 and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. 49 And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high." 50 Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. 51 While he blessed them, he parted from them, and was carried up into heaven. 52 And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy, 53 and were continually in the temple blessing God. (Luke 24:45-53)

7 He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth." 9 And when he had said this, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. (Acts 1:7-9)

This tells us then that the Gospel work of God in the Church captures us up with the same love for the world that He has.

Without that love, the Church's ministry of proclamation is deficient. In fact Paul makes clear in 1Corinthians 13:1-3 that any action, however seemingly sacrificial, if done without love - that is in the flow of God's own love and as recipients of that love - is nothing, gains nothing, achieves nothing. There could be many reasons apart from love for proclaiming (e.g. proselytising, seeking to strengthen our groups or gain support for our ministry, base reasons of love of power or greed for money), but such proclamation would not be true. If those passages quoted above which outline the commission of Christ for proclamation are read as merely commission or obligation and not from the great vista of the love of God where they are seen in the constraint of that love, we will not go the world with love.

Being the proclaiming-witnessing community will of necessity involve us also in suffering. Numerous times in the Gospel Jesus makes very clear that suffering is the way of proclamation. A servant is not above his master. John 15 is perhaps the most clear of all the passages at this point:

18 If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. 19 If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. 20 Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. 21 But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know him who sent me. 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sinned; but now they have no excuse for their sin. 23 He who hates me hates my Father also. 24 If I had not done among them the works which no one

else did, they would not have sin; but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. 25 It is to fulfil the word that is written in their law, 'They hated me without a cause.' 26 But when the Counsellor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me; 27 and you also are witnesses, because you have been with me from the beginning. (John 15:18-27)

Attempts to avoid the suffering will only succeed in the avoiding of proclamation-witness and so in the avoiding of love. When full of the love of God, the suffering is not seen as 'cost' but as the way in which that love will break on the dry, dessicated, hateful shores of those who hating and are hated. The suffering bears witness to the greatness of the love of God. When the saints love not their lives unto death, then they love the Father, Son and Spirit and they love the world that the Triune God loves. Such love comes only from the revelation and reality of God's own love gripping the human heart.

Geoffrey C Bingham, Ah, Strong, Strong Love! NCPI, Blackwood 1993, p.266

See Geoffrey C Bingham, Proclaiming Christ's Gospel In Today's World NCPI, Blackwood 1986 for a full treatment

It seems to me that it is unlikely that the church would even seek to share the Gospel wide in the world were it deficient in its own experience and apprehension of the great love of God. This means that the church goes wide to the world as the Gospel goes deep to the heart, and this is seen in the whole life of God's people, i.e. in its love, care, unity, fellowship, purity, prayer, worship, service, guidance, use of gifts, and bearing of fruit. The going in proclamation-witness is not a secondary side-effect of this, but its very heart and drive. We cannot try to sort out the church's internal life before we start going wide to the world; these two things are of one piece, and the church which is not going wide has internal strife! How much of our pain in churches is from our inwardness and God's judgment of that terrible self-obsession?

Study 16: Husband And Lover Are Never Apart

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; 3 and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." 5 And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:1-5)

6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; 8 it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" --for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. 9 And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

'Like a bride adorned for her husband!' So comes the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the glorified people of God at the end of all things, at the great consummation of history when God's purpose of love has reached its great goal. This great goal is not a static end, a frozen achievement, but 'the marriage of the Lamb', an unending, dynamic and glorious future in which the Husband and His lover-wife are never apart. At the end of the Song of Songs, (8:5), the friends are caught up in wonder as they see a chariot come up from the desert and in the chariot are the husband and his wife, she leaning on him and standing beside him. Previously he alone had been in the chariot, as he approached the wedding (3:6ff) - but now she is with him! The richness, the glory and the dynamism of the goal should never be underestimated!

The glorious bride that appears is the purified harlot. Caught up in the filth of her idolatries and the shames of her sins (Ezekiel 16,23), in league with the foul, hateful and evil beast and dragon (Revelation 17), there was no beauty or majesty to attract Him to her, nothing in her appearance that He should desire her. She was despised and despicable; hated by and hateful of all; full of the sorrows of sin, and acquainted with the grief and the suffering of God's holy judgment. Yet He, the Bridegroom of Glory, knew this one was to be His Bride, and He loved her and gave Himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, presenting her to Himself as a radiant church (no longer the gaudy whore), without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish. So full, so powerful, so pure and holy is the love of the Cross that it purified the polluted and made her precious. Geoffrey Bingham glories in that Cross with these words:

Kneel I in wondered awe before this love.
Scarce lift these darkened eyes to Yours that saw
Your love ascend in Him on dismal Tree
To take this loveless love from loveless me.
Passion for Israel-Bride-her harlotry
Tore at the Bridegroom heart, whose love was free.
Zeal of the Lover's love wrought purity,
Bringing the Bridal heart to sanctity.
Love on that Cross for her; Father and Son
Purged through the Spirit's pain grossest of all.
All love now purified lives through the days
Until the Bridal Feast is our 'Always'.

Christ's prayer immediately before his going to the Cross was this:

24 Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which You have given me in Your love for me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

The heaven to which the Father is taking His creation is a heaven of love. The appearing of Christ is the culmination of the victory of love in the world and the taking of the whole of creation into the fulness and richness of that love. That goal is to know in fulness the glory of the Son which is the glory of the love of the Father for Him from eternity. In beholding that glory, we will behold it as those who have been made one flesh with Christ, beholders who are held in the glory. We will be with Him where He is. Even now we are seated with Him at the right hand of the Father, but at this time our lives are hid with Christ. But when He appears, we shall be like Him; His appearing is our appearing, and all that has come to us by grace through faith will then be undisputed, unhidden, impartial and full! No wonder then that the saints are called 'those who have loved his appearing' (2Tim. 4:8); no wonder that they are those who now say 'No!' to ungodliness, 'Yes!' to godliness as they have intense anticipation (*apodokaw*) of their hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:12-13).

Husband and lover shall never be apart, and this is in the presence of the Father and in the fulness of the Holy Spirit. There shall be full fellowship with Father-God, and that full fellowship will mean that the redeemed are conformed to the image of His Son, having reached the maturity of the whole measure of the fulness of Christ. This is what it means to obtain the liberty of the glory of the sons of God. It is total fellowship with the Triune Godhead, being admitted into the mystery of Their own inner life, and so becoming partakers of the the Divine nature, i.e. sharing in God who is agaph. In no sense is Man divinised - i.e. takes on deity - but he is utterly one with God who is love. In this love he receives eternal life, is glorified with a body of glory, receives the inheritance of glory, and reigns as king and priest in the kingdom forever.¹

This is the outcome of the plan and the purpose of God in His love. At that time, many things shall pass away - prophecy, tongues, knowledge. But then three things will remain - faith, hope and love. the greatest of these is love, for God is love. Love never ends, never fails, never falls to the ground - love blooms into full blossom at the end and goes on to produce an eternity of fruitfulness and joy. The perfect, the fulness, the completion will have come, all

will be new. Then we shall see face to face, we shall know even as we are now fully known and loved by the Three of love.

Geoffrey C. Bingham, from *Love That We Never Loved* #71, New Creation Hymn Book, Vol. 2, All that precedes in this paragraph is taken from the postscript at the end of Ah, Strong, Strong Love!