

GOD'S LAW AND GOD'S LOVE (Part 1)

*"If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15)
`This is the love of-God, that we keep His commandments.
And His commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3)*

WHAT GOD HAS JOINED

In order to serve the Lord faithfully, we must not only distinguish things that differ but also preserve the connection of things God has joined. Law and love are two such things that God has joined. They are inseparable mates.

When Martin Luther said, "*Love God and do as you please*," his point was this: If you truly love God, you will do what pleases *Him*. But that still leaves the question, What is pleasing to God? Thus Luther's statement needs some explanation, lest the issue be oversimplified or confused.

One of the greatest difficulties in dealing with this subject is the many ways the words themselves, *law* and *love*, are used in the Bible. In chapter 6 we discussed the different meanings of the word *law*. Likewise, in Scripture we read of the love of Christ, love for your wife, love for our neighbour, love for our enemies, and a special and peculiar love for the brethren. Volumes have been written on these two little words, *law* and *love*.

Every true Christian wants to know how to please God. This desire comes with the new birth and immediately thrusts us into the Bible, where God's will is expressed. But how does God express His will? Does He simply say, "Love . . ." or does He express His will by giving us His commandments? The Bible clearly does both, all the while teaching us the proper relationship between law and love.

We must exercise our best efforts to discern what that relationship is. The assortment of books, discussions, and opinions on this subject is vast. Thus sorting through the issues requires prayer and the plentiful work of the Holy Spirit, the only true Teacher. May God give us all discernment to distinguish things that differ and to join things that must be understood together.

"ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE"?

Every heresy and cult waves the word *love* around like a banner of virtue. It is their favourite word, but it is never connected to God's law. The hippie movement of the sixties also proclaimed this word-painted on vans and placards-often in the form of "free love." Political liberals continue to speak of love divorced from individual responsibility.

In March of 1965, *Time* magazine reported a meeting of nine hundred ministers and students at Harvard Divinity School in which they considered the subject of the "new morality." The title of the article, "Love in Place of Law?" set up an antithesis. Under the heading, "*We Are Delivered*," the article said, "*Inevitably, the speakers reached no definite conclusion, but they generally agreed, that, in some respects, the new morality is a healthy advance as a genuine effort to take literally St. Paul's teaching that through Christ we are delivered from the law.*"

Though these words do come from the New Testament, they certainly do not teach what the Harvard speakers implied. Some questions need to be asked about the context of Paul's words: In what respect are we delivered from the law, and, from what laws are we delivered? People who are motivated by genuine love are certainly not lawless. They love the moral and ethical standard that Christ loved and kept, contrary to the words of Princeton president, Paul Ramsey, who said in the same article, "Lists of cans and cannots are meaningless."

Now, we are not surprised at this dangerous, destructive ignorance when we find it among cults, liberals, and agnostics. But when Bible-believing preachers set up a false antithesis between law and love, we should be shocked, appalled, saddened, and greatly pained.

Setting up a false antithesis between law and love (as if they are conflicting, opposing ideas) is one of the subtlest ways to undermine the Ten Commandments, biblical morality, and true Christianity. Granted there is a difference between law and love; but there is also an immutable connection. The failure to see this unchangeable relationship has led people into countless errors, heresies, and spiritual shipwrecks.

AN IMMUTABLE CONNECTION

Let us consider a few passages that show the immutable connection between law and love. Notice how love is joined to the Ten Commandments in the following teaching of Paul:

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Rom. 13:8-10)

Moreover, what better definition of love could we give than the biblical one we have from John, the great apostle of love himself? "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome" (1 John 5:3).

Observe, also, our Lord's conversation with the lawyer in Matthew 22:35-40. When asked in verse 36, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" our Lord immediately connected God's commandments and God's love. Jesus always connected law and love. What could be plainer than the following examples?

He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him. . . .

If anyone 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. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me." (John 14:21,23-24)

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. . . . This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. . . . You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." John 15:10,12,14)

These statements should settle forever the fact that there is an eternal relationship between God's law and God's love.

To emphasise that love itself is a command is consistent with many New Testament passages: "Love your neighbour" (Matt. 5:43); "love your enemies" (Luke 6:27,35); "love one another" (Rom. 13:8); "love your wives" (Eph. 5:25); "love the brotherhood" (1 Peter 2:17).

These passages are sufficiently clear to show that there is a vital connection between law and love. They should cause us to renounce any teaching-whether packaged in clever illustrations or dispensed via subtle implications-that would separate law and love. If ever the biblical teaching about the commandments was needed in the home, the church, and the nation, it is now! With lawlessness rampant, we certainly do not need preachers and teachers who separate what God has joined together.

The "love only" doctrine is the enemy of true Christianity, of the Bible, and of the souls of men. It is not biblical love at all. Nor is lawless love Christlike.

The gospel of Christ breathes the Spirit of holy love, namely:

Love is the fulfilling of all gospel precepts.

Love is the pledge of all gospel joys.

Love is the evidence of gospel power.

Love is the ripe fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23).

The Spirit of genuine love is never, never, at the expense of law and truth. Nor is love ever separated from the biblical directives for holy living that are objectively and eternally set out in the Ten Commandments. This is underscored in that great love chapter in the Bible, where Paul says that "love rejoices in the truth" (1 Cor. 13:6).

The connection between law and love is deeply embedded in the Old Testament, , as well as the New. This is illustrated in Exodus 20, where God gave the Decalogue at Sinai. Before giving the Ten Commandments, God reminded the Israelites of His redemptive love. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (v. 2). That was a loving redemptive act. Not only does the prologue to the Ten Commandments speak of God's redeeming love, but later, in reference to the second commandment, verse 6 speaks of God's "showing mercy" to His people. Love and mercy are harmoniously tied to the Decalogue.

Jesus reaffirmed that connection in John 14:15: "If you love Me, keep My commandments." His summary of the law in Matthew 22:37-40-the law of love for God and neighbor-echoes the love command given with the law in Deuteronomy 6:5. Not only our Lord and His apostle, but the whole Bible joins God's law and God's love.

LOVE AS MOTIVE

Love has no eyes except the holy law of God, no direction apart from God's commands. Paul spoke of the love of Christ constraining us. It moves us to duty. Love is the only true motive for all worship and duty, but by itself it does not define either. Therefore, we may not put love "in place of law." They belong together. Christian behaviour springs from love to God and our neighbour. If we loved them perfectly, our character and behaviour would be perfect because it would conform to God's will. Love is a motive for and expresses itself in obedient action.

Such action fulfils the law: "Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). Motive and action cannot be more tightly joined than they are in this passage. If love does not constrain us to fulfil the moral law, it is not the love of which the Bible speaks. The apostle Paul made this very clear when he said that "the love of Christ constrains us" (2 Cor. 5:14). It is the love of God that puts the law of God into effect.

Genuine love for God is intensely preoccupied with Him as the Supreme Object of love. It is, therefore, intrinsically active in doing His will. Love itself is commanded in the Old Testament as well as the New. Jesus said, "These things I command you, that you love one another" (John 15:17). Love is also described as a command in Deuteronomy 6:5-7: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up."

We must be very clear that the command to love will not create love or generate love. This command, like every other, cannot create the disposition or will to obey. But the mere fact that love is a command should silence those who argue for an antithesis between law and love. Moses, Jesus, and Paul all connected law and love, as does John in 1 John 5:3: "For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome."

Woe to anyone who separates what Moses, Christ, and the apostles have said belong together! *What God has joined let no man put asunder!*