

The Bond of Perfectness

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

For acceptable walk in the Truth, and for ecclesial health and harmony and a state of true mutual spiritual joyfulness to which we as the sons and daughters of God are freely invited, it is necessary that the Spirit's teachings on the subject of love be continually and repeatedly presented before the mind.

The love which the Scriptures present to us as the fundamental characteristic of godliness is not a natural thing. It is contrary to all that is natural. It is purely a spiritual thing. It is a divine, transforming, unearthly principle of life.

It is a power and force that overcomes and subdues all that is natural. It is the "bond of perfectness" -- the bond -- the binding together -- the uniting, the unifying power of perfection -- unity of perfection -- perfect oneness -- based upon the only possible basis for perfect oneness -- an enthusiastic mutual striving toward perfection.

Any aim short of perfection is not unifying, but dividing and breaking up. **No group can have true unity unless it is wholly and wholeheartedly dedicated to the pursuit of divine perfection.**

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And Love is the "bond of perfectness." Unless we as a group mutually possess this bond together, we might as well go our separate ways -- because we shall never have any true ecclesial unity or spiritual life without it.

Let us face this basic fact of ecclesial life. If we are not prepared as a whole body to love each other with a pure heart fervently, then our assembling together is utterly meaningless; we are just another poor little lost group among millions of others. It is worse than meaningless -- it is a sad, pitiful delusion -- destined only to failure.

The Body of Christ is not a lot of little isolated individual compartments. It is not a limited association merely for form and convenience -- it is one intimate, closely-knit intensely interdependent unity --

"By one Spirit are we all baptized into one Body."

"The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of thee."

"God hath tempered the body together ... that the members should have the same care one for another."

These are Paul's remarks toward the end of 1st Corinthians 12, where he is leading up to the revelation of the "more excellent way" of love so beautifully delineated in chapter 13.

The Scriptures are very specific about what this love is of which he speaks -- what are the evidences of its presence or absence among us.

It is a terribly sad fact that many accept the Truth and spend their whole life in it -- often very actively -- without ever perceiving this basic first principle of godliness.

It is always more profitable, wherever it is possible, to allow our train of thought and meditation to be shaped and guided by some specific portion of Scripture, for there is never any better, or more powerful, or more effective, way of presenting a subject than the way God Himself presents it in His holy Word.

The principle of love is very prominent all through the Scriptures. As Jesus points out, the two greatest commandments of the Law concern love, and furthermore, he says that love is the fulfilling of the whole Law -- that all the Law hangs upon these commandments concerning love.

Love is the declared basis of all God's dealings with Israel, throughout both the Old Testament and the New.

But when we think of a specific portion of Scripture in relation to this subject, we naturally turn to the first Epistle of John.

John's words throughout are beautiful and sublime. if we could continually live in their atmosphere, it would cleanse and purge us of all fleshliness and earthiness.

John's first use of the word "love" in this epistle emphasizes a truth which it is essential to make clear at the outset -- that love in the true, scriptural sense is not the flabby, shapeless, foggy sentimentalism as presented by the churches of the world, but a clear, precise, careful adherence to specific divine instructions based upon a pure zeal and affection for God.

Love is not something contrary to law and command, but rather that which gives all divine law its power and purpose and life and meaning and beauty (1 Jn. 2:4-5) --

"He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar ... but whoso keepeth his word, in him verity is the love of God perfected."

This expression, "the love of God," involves more than either our love for God or God's love for us -- it implies the love that appertains to God -- that divine, spiritual, mutual relationship between God and the child of God. For love to be perfected, it must be a mutual, reciprocating love.

Me keeping (that is obeying) of the Word is the only path to the perfecting of the divine relationship.

In verses 7 to 9 he speaks of the new commandment which was not a new commandment, but which was the same from the beginning.

Jesus said, speaking to his disciples during the last evening before the crucifixion --

"A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another."

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another."

He gives this command special emphasis in circumstances, too, that add to its weight and importance.

We may ask ourselves: **Are we Jesus' disciples?** He said this could clearly be determined from whether we manifest love for one another in the special, spiritual way he describes.

Brotherly love was an *old* commandment in that, as Jesus pointed out as regard the Law, it was at the heart and root of all commandments.

It was a new commandment in that it was the foundation of the new man, the new birth, the new and living way, the new creation, the new Name, the new covenant, the new Jerusalem, the new heaven, and new earth. It was new in the depth and beauty which his own example gave it --

"As I have loved you. . ."

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

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Before John goes further into the subject of love, he speaks of what must not be loved -- verses 15 to 17 of the first epistle (ch. 2)-

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

"If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

These are serious words, and we do well to ponder them deeply, and honestly test ourselves by them. We all desire eternal life. We all recognize the great desirability of God's favor and blessing and acceptance.

Let us then have the wisdom to face and accept this clear instruction in the way of life. It is very small and unworthy and childish to want to have it both ways.

What are the "**things of the world**" we cannot love if we truly love God -- if we truly understand what the love of God means? They are its honors, associations, activities, pleasures and amusements. The world is pressing in on us during all our waking hours -- seeking our love and attention and interest. It takes a deep and strong comprehension of the love of God to withstand and hold firm.

"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."

"And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

There is the great contrast between life and death.

John is about to tell us of the life-giving joys and glories of divine love, and he must clear the ground first. He must make the issue crystal clear. He must leave no misunderstanding about the fact that we must put away all interest, desire, and affection for the things of the world if we want to be part of the glorious company that are united in the unspeakable joys of the love of God.

In the remainder of chapter 2 he speaks of the unfaithful ones who had not remained steadfast to the love of God. He speaks of the promise of eternal life and urges them not to be drawn away but to hold fast to what they had received and faithfully abide in him.

Then, beginning chapter 3 he returns to the subject of love --

'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!'

It is fitting that he should begin there for, as he tells us, the love of God for man is the root and well-spring of all our love for God and for each other. It is the motive and force behind all love.

God's love for man, as supremely manifested in His only begotten Son, is the transforming power and incentive of all holiness and righteousness --

"We are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

"The life I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

"The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14).

'We love, because He first loved us" (1 Jn. 4:19).

Beginning chapter 3, and arising from the thought of this marvelous manifestation of God's love in calling us, as weak, erring mortals, to be His children in glory, the apostle stresses how this hope and promise must lead us to holiness, how out of place and out of harmony any worldliness or ungodliness is with this divine relationship.

Then he says (v. 10) --

"In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil."

"Whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother."

Any ill feeling to any of our brethren cuts us off from relationship to God.

"For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

We notice that he divides all mankind into two relationships -- the children of God and the children of the Devil.

This is a very sobering thought -- if we are not one, we are the other. There are no neutrals -- we are either of the Seed of the Woman -- that is, of Christ in harmony with the mind of Christ, or we are of the Seed of the Serpent.

And he gives two identifications of the children of God --

1. Doing righteousness.
2. Loving his brother.

Let us try to fully realize the prominent and vital place this matter of loving our brethren is given in the commands of God. We find that John returns to it again and again.

Let us closely follow his thought here as he continues (v. 14) --

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren."

Here is a simple, but deeply searching test that we can each apply to ourselves, to see if we really have passed from death to life -- to see if we really are "in the faith," or just living a lie.

Do we find ourselves powerfully moved and motivated by love, kindness, concern, gentleness, sympathy, patience, and desire to render comfort and service to all our brethren? Not just a limited few who happen to please us and appeal to us, but to all --especially to those who seem least lovable -- these are the ones most in need of patience and guidance and brotherly kindness.

If this is not honestly true of us, then we must face the implication of John's searching words --- we have not passed from death to life -- we are not "in Christ" -- we are not "in the faith" - - we have not properly learned the Gospel -- we have not entered the divine family -- we are still "children of the devil," for John continues in this 14th verse --

"He that loveth not his brother ABIDETH IN DEATH."

He says in verse 16 --

"Hereby perceive we love, because He laid down his life for us."

As other versions put it --

"By this we know love," or "From this we learn what love is" -- "that he laid down his life for us."

When the Scriptures speak of love, they do not mean some puny little part-time hobby. Love, in the scriptural sense is a tremendous, all-consuming passion for goodness and service to others -- and if we haven't got it we are not the children of God. John goes on --

"And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

Not just be willing to face death for them in some very unlikely far-off emergency -- but give our whole PRESENT lives for them.

The next verse should be imperishably engraved on our hearts. It carries the seeds of a deeper, broader, more world-shaking revolution than this planet has ever yet seen --

"Whoso hath this world's goods, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion, how dwelleth the love of God in him?"

It is for each alone to search his heart and, as standing in the presence of God, to decide just what, and how much, that statement means to him, remembering that it is impossible to obey it too much, but fatally easy to obey it too little.

"WHOSO HATH THIS WORLD'S GOODS, AND SEETH HIS BROTHER HAVE NEED -- HOW DWELLETH THE LOVE OF GOD IN HIM?"

And let us remember that the Scriptures are not speaking of little, conscience-salving, token handouts, but on the large scale of the love of Jesus --

"Love one another, as I have loved you."

Are we BIG enough to be children of God, or are these teachings too vast and noble for our petty, selfish, earthy natures to rise to?

John presses the point further --

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (v. 18).

There is much -- SO much -- talk about love, but where shall we find that life-giving, self-sacrificing love of which John speaks as essential to salvation? Is it the rule among us? Are we the children of God, or is our "love" that of word and tongue, such kind words of sympathy --

"Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled -- we are so sorry to hear of your trouble, we hope everything will be all right. We'll come and see you again."

What a noble feeling it gives us to be so kind and sympathetic "in tongue and word!"

"Let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

There is a terrible reckoning in store on the matter of selfishness and unfaithful stewardship.

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It would be profitable at this point to give some thought to just what the Scriptures mean by love. For that, 1st Corinthians 13 is the most informative. Paul tells us there in detail just how true love acts, so that by comparing ourselves with what he says, we can easily determine whether or not we are really children of God, and on the way of life.

After saying, with the strongest possible emphasis, that no other service or sacrifice is of any value in the absence of this scriptural love, Paul says --

"Love is long-suffering."

Long-suffering means long and patient endurance of offense. Long continued gentleness in the face of provocation. Why? Because love desires only good.

Love is saddened by the failure of others to manifest goodness, but it has the divine wisdom to realize that only by infinite patience can good be accomplished, and yielding to impatience is failure and defeat.

This word "long-suffering" carries the sense of a tremendous power of self-restraint and self-control -- more powerful than the natural passions of anger and impatience. Love is -- first and foremost -- long-suffering.

When we find ourselves becoming angry or impatient or annoyed, that is the danger signal - the time to stop and examine our hearts, and seek the help of God to overcome, for it is a sign that the diabolos is forging another link in the chain of our bondage to sin and death, and only the power of God can break that fatal chain.

"Love is kind."

"Kind" means having a consistent disposition to do good and confer happiness and to avoid anything that offends or creates unhappiness. Kind is the opposite of harsh, stern, unfeeling or selfish.

No one who is kind in the scriptural sense can be any of these things. Kindness often has to be firm, but it is never harsh or bitter or rough or rude.

No one who manifests these opposites of kindness is kind according to the divine definition, and they do not, therefore, have the love without which, Paul says, all else is useless, and they are not, therefore, children of God.

These two characteristics, then are the two main pillars of spiritual love -- long-suffering and kindness, not just as surface efforts, and on certain occasions, but consistently manifested under all circumstances as the deepest and strongest motives of life.

Let us stand along side of the Scriptural standard and see what our actual stature is.

The apostle continues --

"Love envieth not."

Love desires nothing that others have, but is completely satisfied and content with the infinite riches of the grace of God. Knowing that if a man truly has that, he has everything for all eternity, and there is nothing more to have -- nothing more to be desired.

"Love vaunteth not itself."

It does not boast or seek notice or attention. It does not seek gratification through the manifestation of its abilities or knowledge or accomplishments.

It is not always relating little incidents or circumstances of which it is the hero or center of attention.

With divine wisdom it sees through the pitiful childishness of seeking to impress others, which is at the root of a vast proportion of all human conduct.

"Love is not puffed up."

It is free, not only from outward show, but also from inward pride. To be pleased and satisfied with ourselves is the most disastrous form of self-deception. Love knows that all mankind is weak and ignorant and helpless, and all good is solely of the grace of God. Jesus said --

"Why callest thou me good?"

"Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly."

"I can of mine own self do nothing."

If that was the mind of Christ, what room is there for any self approval in the sin-stricken sons of men? The love of which Paul speaks as vital to salvation is no small or common thing.

"Love doth not behave itself unseemly."

Love does not act out of harmony with the holiness of its relationship to God -- does not speak foolishly according to the sudden impulses of the flesh. Love is **always** gentle and gracious and courteous and well-behaved -- nothing silly, or changeable, or erratic, or course, or rude.

"Love seeketh not her own."

Her own what? Her own ANYTHING. Her own way, her own desires, her own rights, her own advantage, her own comfort, her own honor. LOVE DOES NOT SEEK AT ALL, BUT GIVES.

Love's great secret is the knowledge that all true, worthwhile pleasure is in giving, not seeking. There is no real satisfaction in seeking and accumulating, but only disappointment and frustration in the end.

But giving, whether it be goods, or labor, or time, or the foregoing or yielding of any advantage, is deeply satisfying and rewarding and uplifting and ennobling. It is getting closer to God, and the way He operates, and that always yields pleasure and blessing and satisfaction.

"Love is not easily provoked."

The insertion of this word "easily" by the translators is utterly unwarranted, and takes all the power out of the expression. All other versions correct this. The true translation is, as the Revised Version has it --

"Love is not provoked."

When we say "I am provoked," or "That is provoking," we are actually saying, "I do not love; I am permitting the flesh to rule, and not the Spirit; I am not big enough to be on God's side."

If we examine ourselves by the light of God's Spirit-Word, we shall often find that in our fleshly, self-assertion we are declaring our own condemnation, and glorying in our shame. Let us think of this before we blurt out our feelings.

David, in Psalm 119, states this same searching truth that "Love is not provoked," and, therefore, if we are provoked we have not found the power of love without which all else is hopeless. He says --

"Great peace have they which love Thy law: and NOTHING shall offend them."

"Love thinketh no evil. "

The Revised Version gives the meaning more clearly -- "Love taketh no account of evil." That is, "overlooks it, does not impute it, bears no resentment." Literally, it is - -"Love reckoneth not the evil" -- passes it by, makes loving allowances, "Love shall cover a multitude of sins."

All these tests of love are deep and searching, but this is one of the deepest. No ecclesia can be a true, joyous ecclesia of God where this loving passing over of evil is not practiced.

It does not mean condoning of evil -- never that. The Scriptures are very clear on that point. The Truth must be defended, both in doctrine and in precept, but the reference here is to personal reaction to personal injury -- the attitude love takes toward the offender --

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

In chapter 5, John expresses a very important principle in this respect -- one which we do not fully realize the importance and power of (v. 16) --

"If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death."

Therefore, when others injure us, or we see them doing things that grieve us as not in harmony with the Truth, we have a great responsibility, for their salvation may be in our hands, in the power of prayer. This is how love -- instead of spreading a matter or taking offense, or causing agitation and trouble may cover a multitude of sins and save a sinner from the error of his way. Nothing can stand before the invincible power of righteous prayer.

"Love rejoiceth not in iniquity."

Love enjoys no gossip -- gets no satisfaction out of the trouble or suffering of others, even when it is deserved. Love can have no part in any unfairness or injustice or discrimination -- gets no enjoyment from anything unclean or unrighteous or unholy.

"But rejoiceth with the Truth."

All love's allegiance and pleasure and rejoicing are on the side of the Truth.

In all our emphasis on love, we must never forget that it must always be grounded on and in the Truth. Love is the power of life, but Truth, and Truth alone, must be in its form and shape.

All these beautiful qualities of love, exercised outside the divine framework of the Truth, lose all their beauty and divinity, and become mere whims of the flesh, Divine love is always "rejoicing in -- **within** -- the Truth," and never wanders outside of it -- anything masquerading under the guise of love, that is out of harmony with Truth, is a deceiving counterfeit.

"Love beareth all things."

The word for "beareth" means to contain, to hold in, to be watertight. Love is strong enough to hold in and contain all other emotions and desires, and love is the only power that can. Apart from this power -- which arises, as John says, from prolonged contemplation upon the love that God has freely manifested to man -- apart from this power, the control of the flesh according to the will of God is utterly hopeless.

But love can contain and restrain all things. The word means to keep out as well as to keep in. Love is an impervious shield and protection against all destructive, misleading or contaminating influences from without.

"Love believeth all things."

What are the "all things" that love believes, and is it particularly a virtue to "believe all things?"

Love's infinite capacity for belief of good is one of its greatest beauties -- belief in God and belief in the capabilities and possibilities of man with the help of God.

James says the wisdom from above is easy to be entreated, or, literally, "easily persuaded." It takes a tremendous power of belief to truly forgive seventy times seven and wholeheartedly mean it. There is nothing cynical or pessimistic or sour about love -- it is always willing to believe the best, and give the benefit of every doubt.

To the wisdom of the world, this is gullibility and stupidity, but love will be found. In the end to have been the wiser way when all the wise of the world are exposed in the pitiful nakedness of their foolishness.

"Love hopeth all things."

Love comprehends all hope, as it does all belief, or faith. Love never gets discouraged, never gives up hope, regardless of circumstances or appearances. It is clear from the general trend and direction of the apostle's remarks that the hope he has in mind is hope for, and in regard to, others. He is speaking of love as a relationship -- as a way of conduct and attitude toward others.

Love never gives up trying and hoping -- is never soured or embittered by failure or rebuff.

"Love endureth all things."

The word means to stand firm, to be unshaken and unmoved in the face of difficulty, attack or hardship.

Finally --

"Love never fails."

It never wears out, never dies, never comes to an end. The apostle points out that this is the only human attribute that carries over into eternity. If we have this, we shall endure. Lacking this, we pass away with the perishing world.

We turn again to John's epistle, and read again the words at which we left it (3:18):

"My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth."

And he continues --

"And hereby --by this -- we know that we are of the Truth, and shall assure our hearts before him."

-- that is, **IF** we are living and rejoicing in this divine love which the apostle has so beautifully described.

John goes on --

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things."

Do our hearts condemn us as we measure ourselves by this one and only way of life?

"And this is His commandment, That we should believe on the Name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment" (v. 23).

Nearly twenty times in this epistle this same command is emphasized -- that we **MUST** love one another. It is the key and theme of the whole epistle.

After warning against false teachers in the early part of chapter 4, he returns to the same theme (v. 7) --

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God: and everyone that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God."

When we consider all that is involved in the love of which he speaks, we can well realize that we must be born of God to be able to manifest it, and that to achieve this love is truly to know God. And it further follows (v. 8) --

"He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love."

Now Jesus said that to know God is life eternal, so the implication is clear that the achievement of this love of which Paul speaks is a necessary step to obtain eternal life.

"GOD IS LOVE."

Here he reaches the heart of his subject. God is not just loving, but He is LOVE ITSELF -- That is His essential nature and personality. As we shape ourselves to this divine ideal of love, we make ourselves one with God -- we conform ourselves to, and lay hold on, eternity.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (v. 10).

Love does not originate with us. It was not in return for our love that God sent His Son. All the love originated with Him, while we were yet loveless sinners.

He did not wait till we were lovable before He put His redeeming love into action on our behalf. Nor does He withdraw the offer and manifestation of His love because we continually fail and disappoint Him in our reciprocation of it. This gives force to the exhortation that follows (v. 11) --

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

Love is needed most where it is at first undeserved and appreciated least. God set His infinite love in motion toward the ungodly in order to create and kindle love in them. If, then, we are to follow God's example and be God's children we can never justify not loving by the fact that the recipient is not lovable, for that is all the more reason for giving him our love.

"No man hath seen God at any time. ff we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us" (vs. 12).

Here is a powerful promise and incentive indeed! We cannot see God. He is unapproachable. But if we love one another, God dwells in us. He will draw near. He will make His comfort and His presence felt. He will work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure, and He will perfect His love in us, so that we are one with Him.

Again the apostle repeats the glorious revelation and promise (v. 16) --

"God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Love is the meeting place, the sphere of communion and communication.

"Herein" -- (that is, in this way, through this divine bond) -- "is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness -- (that is -- confidence, assurance, freedom from fear) -- in the day of judgment, because as He is, so are we in this world" (v. 17).

Are we, by this oneness of love, as He is in this world? -- for that alone can be the ground of confidence.

He has shown us clearly what HE is -- God is LOVE -- infinite love -- an endless, inexhaustible fountain of love, seeking to bring blessing wherever it flows.

"There is no fear in love, but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment" -- (v. 18).

"He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

"Perfect love casteth out fear."

Surely this is the deepest and most beautiful statement in all Scripture!

The world lives in fear. Its whole framework is based on mutual fear. It has always been so, but especially today. The special mark of the last days is --

"All men's hearts failing for fear."

There exist today the two greatest human powers that the world has ever seen, and they live in mortal fear of each other.

But fear goes deeper than international problems. Fear is at the roof of all human life, and much of man's efforts and contrivance is motivated by it.

Fear is a terrible, destroying thing. It is a weakness of the flesh that robs us of so much comfort and joy. How often the Scriptures remind us that all is in the all-powerful hand of God, and exhorts us to "Fear Not!"-

"Fear not, Abram."

"Hagar, fear not!"

"Moses said unto the people, Fear not!" (Ex. 20:20).

"Fear not, neither be discouraged" (Deut. 1:21).

"God will not fail thee; fear not, neither be dismayed" (Deut. 31:8).

And so the endless chain of divine assurance could be extended throughout the Scriptures, Twelve times we find these words in Isaiah alone, as in chapter 43, verse 5 --

"Fear not, for I am with thee!"

The Psalms express the confidence of the godly man --

"I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me" (23:4).

"God is our Refuge and Strength, a very present Help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear though the earth be removed" (46:1-2).

And so throughout the New Testament also: "Fear not, Joseph," "Fear not, Mary," "Fear not, Simon," "Fear not, Paul." And the first words of the Son of Man similitude to John were (Rev. 1:17), "Fear not."

The Scriptures go right to the heart of the problem in declaring that the sacrifice of Jesus was to --

"Deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage"

-- the bondage and sorrow in which the creation groans.

Sin and death are the root of all fear. But --

"Perfect love casteth out all fear. He that feareth is not made perfect in love."

This is love's greatest beauty and blessing. Only God can bestow this glorious freedom from all fear and He will bestow it upon those, and those alone, who dedicate their lives to the love of Him and of their brethren.

"We love, because he first loved us" (vs. 19).

All love must grow from the ever expanding realization of the glory of the infinite love of God --God's desire to draw near and to bestow good.

"If a man say, I love God: and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (v. 20).

What is the point? Why cannot we love God if we do not love men?

When we understand this, we understand the nature of true spiritual love. That love does not go out in limited beams, there is nothing limited about it -- it is a universal irradiation. It is not a limited attribute -- it must be the whole fibre of our character. If our love is not shining upon and blessing all who are close to us --all with whom we come in contact, how do we expect it to be real and strong enough to reach God?

Furthermore, we have no direct contact with God. We can only manifest our professed love for Him by obedience to Him in relation to things that are close to us.

'And this is the commandment we have from Him, that He who loveth God, love his brother also" (v. 21).

By this, then, we shall stand or fall in the great day of Judgment -- by the extent to which we comprehend and manifest the beauty of divine love toward all, in all our daily relationships, and especially our ecclesial relationships.

If we are too small and selfish and touchy and self-centered to love all our brethren according to the divine pattern, we are of no use in the great, eternal purpose of God. For God IS love.

(Taken from "Be Ye Transformed" Volume 1 pages 1-15 by Bro. G. Growcott)