

Love's Perfection
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I do not usually quote scripture at length in our writing ministry, and in fact, were it not for Jan Antonsson's addition of book, chapter and verse to the passages that I do quote, the reader would have to use a concordance to find them and check if I am quoting correctly and if I am interpreting them in their context. So it's really handy to have such a friend and webmeister who is dedicated to producing quality writing, including chapter and verse of bible references. Thanks again Jan.

But in this article I will begin with a text in the traditional mode of bible teaching and quote it at length and from The Amplified Bible which I believe captures the essential and full meaning of the passage, though in its usual, quite lengthy manner. Let's look together (and please do read and reread the passage in your favorite translation or in several if possible) at 1 John 4:16 through 18:

"And we know (understand, recognize, are conscious of, by observation and by experience), and believe (adhere to and put faith in and rely on) the love God cherishes for us. God is love, and he who dwells and continues in love dwells and continues in God, and God dwells and continues in him.

"In this [union and communion with Him] love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, with assurance and boldness to face Him, because as He is, so are we in this world.

"There is no fear in love, dread does not exist; but full-grown (complete, perfect) love turns fear out of doors and expels every trace of terror! For fear brings with it the thought of punishment and [so] he who is afraid has not reached the full maturity of love... is not yet grown into love's complete perfection." (End of quote).

Perfection is not an option for us saints of the Most High. Though the common concept seems to be that we will be perfected some day if we make to heaven, because God simply won't allow anything

imperfect to enter there; so on our way through the pearly gates, He will zap us into perfection. Well, it doesn't work that way. The active agent in the perfecting of the saints is the perfect love of God and our text informs us that it is in the communion of knowing and believing that love that we are perfected. I'm afraid that I shall be found doing nothing more than amplifying that premise for the remainder of this message.

Now be sure that the love of God itself contains within it all that is necessary to bring us to know and believe it. It is a most potent love, a love that "never fails" (1Cor. 13:8). Love's very purpose is to make itself known and to that end it will not fail. Nevertheless, God, in His love, does use us in His ministry to co-work with the beloved apostle, for the purpose of calling the Lord's people to the kind of intense focus that this essence of Christian revelation demands. So let's point out how clearly John develops his thesis.

The first two words of Vs. 17, "In this" or as the NAS puts it, "by this," refer us back to the experience of knowing, believing and abiding in the love of God, telling us that in this communion, love is perfected, "love is brought to completion and attains perfection with us." We really cannot adequately understand the richness of John's thought without calling attention to the particular application that he makes from this sublime truth.

Going on beyond our three particular verses, we see that John means to make the point that in believing, knowing and abiding in the love of God, we love, because God first loved us (Vs. 19), and especially, we love one another (Vs. 20, 21). Brother Paul is in complete agreement with brother John, for he teaches that we, the Lord's people, members of His Son's Body, and living stones in His temple, edify one (build up) one another, that is, we nourish one another with love until we attain to the perfection of the measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ. Love and only love will do that which must be done for the light of the glory of God, who is love, to shine to the last dark corner of the cosmos, so it is and must be, that "as He is, so are we in this world" (Vs. 17).

Here I must fault the translation that I've chosen, because in the original Greek it does not say, "We love Him, because He first loved

us." "Him" is properly italicized showing that it is a choice of the translators to try to bring over the meaning from the Greek to English. But it is a poor, unwarranted decision in the light of John's application. The point John finally makes is that because of this great love of God, we must love one another.

Out of the indicative of the love of God proceeds the imperative of brotherly love, and by implication, love to all the world, for, as properly translated, "We love, because He first loved us." We simply love; I repeat, we simply love, in all circumstances, whoever is part of our circumstances, because He first loved us.

That is, the initiation of divine love downward, vertically, from His transcendence, from within us, to us, fulfills itself in ever widening circles horizontally in care for others. We are not encouraged at all in John's exhortation that we ascend the Mt. of Transfiguration and fall in love with the Lord of Glory in order that we might build tabernacles there to be loved by God and love Him in return, forgetting those in the valleys below.

This love has the quality, our text tells us, of throwing fear out the door, "out of doors," because it does not belong in the house of God. Communion in the love of God allows no room for the alien factor of fear resulting in hate (vs. 20). Love's purpose is to so make itself known to us, God's firstfruits---that it will displace, not only that which is foreign to its constitution, but even that which is inferior ["that which is in part" I Cor. 13:10], because of its fragmentary, partial and temporal nature.

In the light of this most sublime overflow from the heart of the Beloved Apostle, how can one justify that demonically stubborn insistence of the extant church that fear of punishment, which our text clearly informs us is foreign to a true understanding and operation of love, is a necessary element in the perfecting of the saints.

A sermon comes to my mind, preached by one of the primary lights of the charismatic branch of evangelicalism. Being of the Arminian persuasion---the official position of his denomination--- he preached a sermon intended to shore up that view among his parishioner since a

more Calvinistic perspective had begun to rear its head among and around them.

Quite clearly he wished to distance himself from the severest versions of the it's-always-possible-to-lose-your-salvation doctrine. He had grown up in the holiness movement, and he knew that if someone really believed in the possibility that even though one had been a Christian for years and faithfully tried to obey the Lord and avoid sin, that should he get caught by temptation, and, let's say, for a moment, lust after a woman in his heart, and in the next moment step off a curb and get hit by a bus--- tough luck, off to inferno land for him---that such an understandably anxiety-ridden mentality was counterproductive to healthy Christian living.

So he had come up with a much softer version, and given his frame of reference, it was much closer to a true biblical understanding. He said that no single sin would cause a saved person to be lost, in fact, even some continual sinning might not ("might" being the operative word) unless the sinning continued until the Spirit was so grieved in that life it caused that person to abandon their faith in Christ. So, he reasoned that any sin is a step toward the possible, awful eventuality of ending up in eternal torment, though you had once known the saving grace of God.

My point in sharing this has nothing to do with whether or not a believer can be plunged into spiritual darkness for a time. I experienced such a thing. My point is that conventional Christianity always keeps reminding the sensitive conscience of the terrible possibility of God's mercy and grace finally and eternally being exhausted. And this is thought to be a rational approach to keeping believers in line, and the line marching faithfully on to heaven.

It is utterly, I repeat, utterly foreign to St. John's understanding of the means by which God insures our perfection, and hear me please, the only issue in the economy of God is our perfection; it is not going to heaven or avoiding hell. God intends to consummate all things within the perfection of the Son of His love, by the love that has come to us in His Son and He shall not fail in this glorious determination.

many sons to glory. Should we give in to the delusion that God would never allow anything of a harsh nature into our lives and refuse to believe that we must enter the kingdom through much tribulation, we shall be ill prepared to see God in those "bad" things that are tools of God for training mature saints.

In other words, we must cultivate a mind that will not be surprised that God is not always nice, but He is always passionate about finishing His work in us. Treat that passion with appropriate awe and reverence, but never fear that He shall not present us faultless before the throne of His grace (Jude 24).