

The Walk – Part 1

MOTIVATION

WISE UP!

Proverbs 1:7 states "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Fear has to be; for drawing closer to God than we ever were, His purity and holiness stuns and awes with light so bright it can reveal flaws to the very core of our being. Little love, if any, is in us. And it is not the type of love we need to have, which is that of our Lord and Savior Jesus, who was obedient unto death because of His love for His Father.

Jefferson said that "...man will be ruled, either from within or without, the Bible or the bayonet."

Clearly, the bayonet has been used throughout history to "guide" the behavior of the populace and is a known method of control to be feared. While the governance of our actions is important to the society in which we live, as a matter of course Christians should carefully consider the motivations behind their thoughts, words and deeds by constantly "testing the spirits", as indicated in 1st John 4:1. The Bible certainly establishes a standard of conduct; and may have been viewed in this way by Jefferson as he looked for a reference point for society to follow. But for the believer, the truths of the Bible are of a more personal nature, for they

speak deeply to the heart, whose condition and state provide the impetus for all manner of behaviors. In Mark 7:21, after the Pharisees fault Jesus (essentially calling Him unclean for not washing His hands before eating), He responds by telling them that it is not what enters a man's stomach that defiles him, but that, "...from within, out of men's *hearts* come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly" and that these are the evils that make a man "unclean". The state of the heart is key to the Christian walk, yet it is a fearful place to gaze for the soul who honestly assays it's worth by God's standards.

This past year, as we were about to part company, a friend remarked something to the effect that uncovering the motivating source for his words and deeds was an important effort that provided a good indicator about the quality of his Christian walk.

Examining the reasons of why we do what we do is a worthwhile task, but not often a pleasant one. For it may soon become evident that more changes are required in our person than what we saw when we first came to know Christ. This is especially frustrating for a new believer as they have already become convinced and convicted of their sin to the point where they have accepted the Lord Jesus as Savior, and have consequently swept sin out their house as best they can. Indeed, new found "old sin" is discouraging, especially if it continues to rule and the effort to be free of it does not come quickly or thoroughly. In his book "The Passion of Jesus Christ", John Piper states that this slow rate of change is a great heartache for many believers. While this can be a

struggle for us, we should consider it a blessing that we are not presented with the enormity of our sinfulness all at once; for who would be able to stand it?

Let's remember here that our efforts and actions are not about salvation – Christ's work has provided that and the believer is already justified in God's eyes. Yet there is work to be done, and God will start His work in us and continue it “to fruition” (Ph 1:6), helping us to change and to overcome as He sanctifies us. While we rightfully fear the One who “...can destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mt 5:28), we should be careful to trust Him for this work, lest we let our fear become misdirected into a form of legalism; where we try to improve ourselves through the strict keeping of rules and schedules; where we quench the Spirit and live in a manner where love is absent. To be sure, we must abhor the sin inside us; but we must gain mastery over it (Ge 4:7). To be free from sin is to not be enslaved to it. (Jn 8:36)

Let's look at some of the things the Bible teaches which can help us to understand more of the this topic.

First, notice that in our opening Bible verse that fear of the Lord is the “beginning” of knowledge, not the end. The “end” contains something marvelous for us. Herein lies a great wonder of God's plan that we (as new creations) should be made more into His likeness and love as He loves. This is the beautiful spiritual gift that Paul refers to in 1st Corinthians as “a more excellent way”.

Love

Of the several types of love, God's love is the best. To clarify this thought, we will first look at an interesting change that took place at a particular time described in scripture, known as Pentecost. Our focus is a short study of the several Greek words used and yet translated to the one same English word “friends” as found in the King James version of the Bible.

Philos – prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), the Greek word “philos” is the predominant word behind the English word “friends” in the KJV; it is commonly translated or thought of by most, as brotherly love, which sounds fair enough as good things go.

Agapetos – after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the Holy Spirit was sent to the church at Pentecost. From this time forward in scripture, it appears that “agapetos” is the predominant Greek word used when the word “friends” is encountered. This is God's love for us. The power of the indwelling Spirit allowed the followers of Jesus to see each other in a new and different way; as through the eye's of God; they were now the “beloved” and nothing would ever be the same for His children.

Paidion – At the end of the gospel of John, there is one curious and beautiful use of a Greek word, that is also translated to “friends”:

As evening approaches, it all starts with Peter, who says he is going out to fish. Others quickly join him and they fish all night without catching anything.

At daybreak, the disciples are still fish-less fishermen when the risen Lord calls from the shore to ask about their catch. He addresses them as “friends”. But here, the Greek “paidion” is used in the diminutive and indicates a degree of camaraderie or friendly familiarity that might be better translated as “boys” or “lads”. It feels like the down to earth expression we so often hear as one fisherman, whether “urchin or king”, joins another on the banks of the water to simply ask how the fish are biting. This aspect of Jesus' love and affection for his “boys” is furthered by His call for them to join Him for breakfast. Indeed, the fast was broken, for they were once again with the one they loved so dearly, the very “bread of life”.

God's grace and love falls as He wills it and we cannot presume to know the great mysteries that are too wonderful for us; but the Holy Bible itself bears the truth of God's love to us that we should not perish but have everlasting life through belief in the power of the Son's atoning death. Our fear of punishment for our sins is reduced when we wholeheartedly believe and receive Jesus as our Saviour and, unlike the marked man Cain, we can remain in God's presence.

Becoming as little children, we may then dwell with Him continually in love while He teaches us and starts the good work that He will bring to fruition (Ph 1:6). The right to *become* children of God (Jn 1:12) has to be exercised daily

through a steady diet of God's word along with a willingness to submit to His discipline and instruction. While God gives us everything we need, even our faith, He does not force us to love him. Yes, we are commanded to love Him and our brothers and sisters, as well, but this is only possible in the purist sense, with the placement of His love in our hearts. Apart from Him, we can do nothing good.

1st Corinthians 13 tells us of a “more excellent way”, and of faith, hope and love; that love is the greater spiritual gift, and should be desired above all. Other gifts may pass away but love remains.

From Paul we learn that as “doers of the word”, we should sow to please the Spirit. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love (Ga 5:6). Abraham's obedience as he raised the knife, came from fear (Ge 22:12). Jesus obedience to death on the cross, came from love. Perfect love drives out fear (1st Jn 4:18).

“Suffer the little children to come unto me.” There was no fear at that time the little ones climbed into Jesus' arms. And some bright day there will be no fear for us (Rev 21:8), for as our love grows, the fear in us will change its nature as well, as it turns in to reverent awe over the One who could rightfully cast us into hell, but instead patiently disciplines like a loving father, so that we continue to grow into the likeness of His Son Jesus.

Someday, every knee will bow to the Lord Jesus (Ro 14:11); there will be a new order (Rev 21:4); and in the day of judgment the weeds will be thrown into the fire (Mt 13:40).

But for now the King of Kings does not force us in any way, nor does he make us to yield ourselves to Him.

He commanded that we should love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and that we should love our neighbor as our self (Mk 12:30-31).

But with regards to the commands He gave us, Jesus said “If you *love* me you will obey what I command.” (Jn 14:15)

To Peter, who had denied Him, He asked “...do you *love* me more than these?” (Jn 21:15). We must ask ourselves the same question, for it is key to our walk.

God is *love* (1st Jn 4:16). It is God's desire to make His children perfect in *love*. (Mt 5:48) Perfect *love* drives out fear (1st Jn 4:18). Indeed, those who are chosen are even now, perfect in His eyes, because of Jesus' sacrifice.

Yet, the believers in this world continue to wrestle with evil while they struggle to change through God's loving rebuke and discipline (Rev 3:19); and they prayerfully await that glorious moment when the mystery of God will be completed. (Rev 10:7)

Meanwhile, if we are to take up our cross and follow Jesus, we must strive to be like Him, praying continually that His perfect love will fill our hearts so that we may be obedient in love; we must listen to and feed on the words of our blessed Saviour, which are spirit and are life (Jn 6:63) and glory in the counsel of the abiding Holy Spirit who will help us to bear fruit that will last.

As for fear, we should heed what Paul says in Romans 8:15, “For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry “Abba, Father.””

Would you break the heart of, cause pain to, or otherwise grieve the One you love? His Love can keep us from that, and it can also provide us with the purist of motivations as we live in this world while preparing for the next.

Summary

We should remember that the absence of sin does not mean the presence of love. In speaking of the end of the age, Jesus said “Due to the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (Mt 24:12-13) Continued review of our true motivations through self-examination that is guided by the Holy Spirit and the truth found in the Holy Word is important if we are to discover the extent to which His love governs our hearts. Easy to say, harder to do. Especially on our own. To gain headway and grow, we need the strength and nourishment that only God can provide. The next section of this series, DIET, speaks to the importance of abiding in Christ at all times as we continue to seek His will while being grown into His likeness. (Jn 15:2)

APPLICATION POINTS

- ❑ God's Love is the only agent that can change us in a manner befitting His righteousness.
- ❑ As our love for Him grows, our love for the “things of this earth” will become less, along with our love of “self”.
- ❑ As our love for Him grows, our love for others will also start to fall in line with His commands.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- ❑ How are you exercising your “right to become a child of God”?
- ❑ Have you decided whom you love the most?
- ❑ Is Jesus your all? Do you want Him to be that?

SONG

Put Your Love In My Heart, Lord