

ADD ON

ADD ON... LOVE

LOVE — the last of our “add-on” qualities from 2 Peter ch.1: the one which makes not only our list, but our lives complete, if we have it. It is the last on this list because it is the culmination of everything else in the passage, just as it is first in the list of the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians because it is the most important. “And now these three remain — faith, hope and love” says Paul after a whole chapter extolling the virtues of love, “but the greatest of these is love.”

There is no exaggerating the importance of love, for “God is love” (1 John ch.4 v.8), and without it we are nothing - “Whoever does not love does not know God” (1 John ch.4 v.8) and “Anyone who does not love remains in death” (1 John ch.3 v.14).

THE HEART OF GOD

And yet, brothers and sisters how little we understand of love! Love involves the spirit, the mind and even the body; compassion in the Bible comes from the word for “bowels” — it is a gut feeling — but how often we excuse ourselves for our coldness by saying “you don’t have to like someone to love them.” There is even a saying in the world, “As cold as Christian charity” — sometimes the unbelievers know more about us than we do! For shame! That is not what we learn of Christ’s love, as he wept over Jerusalem for its hardness. No, the love of God for us, praise his name, is the love of a Father who weeps over us from his own torn heart when we sin, and with us when we suffer. And that is the kind of love we must have if we are to call it Christian love.

TOUGHNESS

And yet there is a toughness to this love which, in our sentimentality and worldliness, we barely appreciate to-day. The love of Jesus is the love that called the Pharisees “white-washed tombs” to their faces. The same Peter who wrote our passage pronounced God’s death sentence on Ananias and Sapphira. The same Paul who wrote 1 Corinthians ch.13, in the same letter insists that an adulterer cannot continue in church membership unless he repents. And even the apostle John, surely the greatest New Testament writer on love, is well documented by an early Christian writer as having hurried out of the public baths at Ephesus because a notorious heretic was inside. “Let us flee,” he exclaimed, “before the baths fall in, for Cerinthus the enemy of truth is inside!”

FRIENDLINESS?

Which of us, in the light of these examples, can say that we understand the love of God? Have we not largely replaced it with a weak “friendliness”, largely devoid of justice, righteousness and endurance? Would your love, or mine, cope with an Auschwitz or a Hiroshima when it even stumbles over our petty differences with brothers and sisters here?

Woe to us! We don’t even understand properly what love is, still less how to obtain it! Do you, like me, feel that sense of despair? If not, I venture to suggest that you are either perfect or very, very blind. But if you share the realisation that we know virtually nothing of God’s love, and if that fills you with sorrow, you are well on the way to receiving it.

RECEIVING GOD’S LOVE

ADD ON

For 2 Peter ch.1 tells us that “God’s divine power has given us everything we need for life” so that through “his very great and precious promises “you may participate in the divine nature.” We obtain love, like all the other qualities here, direct from its source — we become loving by becoming God-like; and we become God—like by being changed by God’s promise, the Holy Spirit. And we obtain the grace of the Holy Spirit by asking, and going on asking fervently and importunately, not being satisfied until God completes his promise (Luke ch.11 v 5-13). Let no-one tell you that you have already what you know in your heart you have not yet received. Let no-one persuade you that God does not mean to deliver what he promises in his Word, good measure, packed together and running over.

And let this short passage in Peter’s second letter burn itself into our minds, so that at length we may begin to know in our hearts the certainty of our calling and election — “and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”***

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