

Studies in Galatians (18/22)

Love, the Fulfilling of the Law.*Galatians 5:13-15*

Our lesson in Galatians has been largely on the subject of liberty. We have had presented to us the condition of bondage in which all men find themselves by nature. Then we saw the liberty which Christ gives, namely, freedom from sin. Being made free from sin means at the same time to be made free from the law, since when we cease to sin we come into harmony with the law, and it no longer holds us prisoners. This is a most desirable state, and therefore we have the exhortation to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.

Then we are again warned against the presumption of thinking that we can by any works of our own satisfy the law, and are shown that any such attempt is a complete rejection of Christ, and therefore leaves us wholly in sin,—in debt to the law in every particular. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision avails anything, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” Gal. 5:6. A person is either circumcised or uncircumcised. Those two words cover every possible condition of mankind. Therefore the statement is that there is no power in humanity, under any circumstances whatever, to do the law, but that the law is fulfilled only by faith, working by love. And this brings us to the

Lesson for the Week.

“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” Gal. 5:13-15.

What Is Love.

Since the whole law is fulfilled by loving, it follows that all we have to study at present is the nature of love. We can by no means hope to exhaust the subject, but we can in a few words consider some of the important features of love, which are commonly overlooked.

Love Means Service.—Our text shows this: “By love serve one another.” It therefore means consideration of others, instead of one’s self. Jesus Christ, who had greater love than is known among men, said that He “came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.” Matt. 20:28. Said He, “I am among you as He that serveth.” Luke 22:27. When He came to this earth, He “took upon Him the *form* of a servant.” Phil. 2:7. He did not act the hypocrite. He did not appear to be something that He was not. All that He changed was *His form*. He did not need to change anything else; for He was already a servant. He was in the form of a King, even the King of kings; and if He had

come to the earth in that form, everybody would have been so overawed, not to say dazzled by the brightness of His glory, that they could not have appreciated His character. Therefore He changed His form, so as to appear like a servant, so that the world might see that, altho He is Lord and Master, He is also Servant, and that the depth of His service is measured by the greatness of His power as King.

Love Is Unselfishness.—This follows from the foregoing; for since love means service, and service means the doing of something for others, it is evident that love takes no thought of itself, and that he who loves has no thought but of how he may bless others. So we read, "Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil." 1 Cor. 13:4, 5, R.V.

A Deplorable Error.—It is just on this vital point that everybody in the world is making or has made a mistake. Happy are they who have found out their mistake, and have come to the understanding and practice of true love. We have seen that love means unselfishness. "Love seeketh not her own." Therefore self-love is not love at all, in the right sense of the word. It is only a base counterfeit. Yet the most of that which in the world is called love, is not really love for another, but is love of self. Even that which should be the highest form of love known on earth, the love which is used by the Lord as a representation of His love for His people,—the love of husband and wife,—is more often selfishness than real love. Leaving out of the question, as unworthy of notice, marriages that are formed for the purpose of gaining wealth, or position in society, it is a fact, which all will recognize when their attention is called to it, that in nearly every case the parties to a marriage are thinking more of their own individual happiness than that of the happiness of the other. Of course this condition of things exists in varying degrees, and in proportion as real, unselfish love exists, is there real happiness; for it is a lesson that the world is slow to learn that true happiness is found only when one ceases to seek for it, and sets about making it for others.

"Love Never Faileth."—These are the words of Inspiration, found in 1 Cor. 13:8. Here, again, is a test which shows that much that is called love is not love. Love never ceases. The statement is absolute, *never*. There is no exception, and no allowance made for circumstances. Love is not affected by circumstances. We often hear about one's love growing cold, but that is something that can never happen. Love is always warm, always flowing; nothing can freeze the fountain of love. Presently we shall better understand why this is so; but now it is sufficient for us to learn the fact that love is absolutely endless. We have the Word of the Lord for this, and that should be enough. We may reject love, we may refuse to love, we may drive love from our hearts; but the quality of love is unchanging.

Love Is Subjective.—Perhaps this sub-title needs explanation. It means simply this, that love depends upon the individual who loves, and not upon the one loved. That is really to say, as already said, that love does not depend on circumstances. Love is impartial and unlimited. The word “neighbor” means whatever dwells near. Love, therefore, extends to everything with which it comes in contact. He who loves must necessarily love everybody.

Right here it may be objected that love does make distinctions, and the case of husband and wife, or of any of the members of a family, may be cited. But the objection does not hold, for the family relation, rightly understood, was instituted in order that by a union love might the more effectually be manifested to others. On the principle that strength is not merely doubled, but increased tenfold, by union, as shown by the statement that “one shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight,” union multiplies the working value of love. If two persons, each of whom has this unselfish love to all mankind, unite in love, then their union makes them ten times better able to serve others.” That is too high an ideal,” you say. Well, we are talking of a very great and high thing now; we are talking of love, absolute and unqualified. Poor, frail, needy human beings can not afford to accept anything but the best.

Why Love.—Sometimes when a declaration of love is made, the loved one asks, “Why do you love me?” Just as if anybody could give a reason for love! Love is its own reason. If the lover can tell just why he loves another, then that very answer shows that he does not really love. See; whatever object he names as a reason for love, may sometime cease to exist, and then his supposed love ceases to exist; but “love never faileth.” Therefore love can not depend upon circumstances. So the only answer that can be given to the question as to why one loves, is, “Because”—because of love. Love *loves*, simply because it is love. Love is the quality of the individual who loves, and he loves because he has love, irrespective of the character of the object.

“Love Is of God.”—This statement, found in 1 John 4:7, is an explanation of all the difficulties that may appear in the foregoing statements. God exists, and no explanation of His existence can be given. Even so it is with love, for love is simply the life of God. “Every one that loves is born of God, and knows God. He that loves not knows not God; for God is love.” 1 John 4:7, 8. He who does not love those who do not love him in return, does not love at all; for God’s love is the only real love, and He loves even those who hate Him. “We also were aforetime foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Saviour, and His love toward man, appeared, not by works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves, but according to His mercy He saved us.” Titus 3:3, 4, R.V. We naturally love those who are lovable, and think that we can not be expected to love those who are hateful,

and who hate us; but God loves the hateful, and those who hate Him. "If ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same?" "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Matt. 5:46, 48.

Some one may quote 1 John 4:19, "We love Him, because He first loved us," as at least a partial contradiction of the statement that love takes no account of the loveliness or unloveliness of the object, but loves simply because it exists, and must love, regardless of the object. But the text is only a repetition in another form of the fact that "love is of God." Rightly translated, as in the Revised Version, the verse reads, "We love, because He first loved us." But for the love of God, it would not be possible for any human being to love; just as, if it were not for the life of God, there would be no life in man.

Perfect Peace.—From the statement in Rom. 13:10, that "love works no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law," it will be seen that Christian love does not possibly admit of wars and fightings. Its possession makes it impossible for one to say, as is frequently said in these days, "I have been an advocate of peace and arbitration for twenty-five years, but"—and then go on to say that under such provocation as now exists war is welcomed. "Love worketh no ill to his neighbor;" and no philosophy can ever make it appear that it does a man any good to kill him. When the soldiers asked John the Baptist what they should do, as followers of the Lamb of God, to whom he pointed, he replied, "Do violence to no man." Luke 3:14. Those who asked were "soldiers on service," as we see from the margin of the Revised Version. And the margin also gives as the alternative rendering of John's answer, "Put no man in fear." It would be a very mild war in which this command was followed. Love never does any harm to anybody; but love is active, since it is the life of God; therefore love is always doing good. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, "went about doing good."

How Possible.—It appears that it is no light thing to fulfill the law of love. How is it possible for anybody to fulfill the law? With man it is impossible, but with God all things are possible. Therefore this love is possible to man only as God dwells in the heart. "The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." Rom. 5:5. Love is of God, and that is why love is the fulfilling of the law of God. The Holy Spirit puts God's own life of love into the heart, and because it is His life, it flows back to Him in love. The reader will notice that only love to one's neighbor is spoken of in the text; but since love is of God, and one can not love at all unless the love of God is in the heart, it follows that whoever loves his fellow-men must necessarily love God. If one does not love his fellow-men, that is an evidence that the love of God does not dwell in him. 1 John 3:17, 18. "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" 1 John 4:20.

The Only Question.—From all this it is evident that the only question that love can ask is, “How much can I do?” When the love of God is fully shed abroad in the heart, there is no such thing as seeking to do as little as possible. The one who has that love will not be seeking to minimize the law of God. He will not spend any time trying to show that a part of it, if not the whole, is abolished. In fact, he will not be negative at all. Negation, contradiction, never yet did anybody any good; but whatever does not do good does harm; and “love worketh no ill to his neighbor.” It is not by telling what you do not believe, and telling what is not true, that men are saved, but by “speaking the truth in love.” “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.” 1 John 5:3. His commandments are not grievous, because love is not grievous. Put up no barrier in your hearts to the love of God, and you will find no difficulty with a single one of His commandments.

E. J. Waggoner.

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