



The Love of God

Today I want to talk about the most profound, yet mysterious subject in the universe--the subject of love. On one hand, love is inexplicable in the same way that God is inexplicable; but on the other hand it is something we need every moment of our lives. Blessed is the child who was raised in an atmosphere of love between the parents and the children. Growing up without love is much like growing up without essential amounts of food, water, and air.

Perhaps you remember hearing the story of the experiment a doctor contrived with orphaned babies in World War 1. Nurses and caretakers were told to treat half of the babies in a normal, loving way, with holding and nurturing as is usual for mothers and babies. The other half of the babies were to have no cuddling, holding and interaction with the caretakers but only the physical care which was necessary. As you can imagine, the first half of the babies progressed normally; but unfortunately, the second half of the babies died. I doubt if this experiment has ever been tried again!

But recently, because of the Mexican border crisis where children were being separated from their mothers, studies have been done to show how quickly damage can happen to a young child when separated from its mother. I watched one such experiment where a baby of perhaps nine months of age was shown happily interacting with its mother face to face. Then the mother had been instructed to sit in the same position facing the child, but cease any interaction or facial expression toward the child. The reaction was immediate. In just a few minutes, the baby was screaming and throwing herself in anguish because of the lack of interaction and response with the mother.

What is this strange, ethereal entity called love? The Bible tells us that God is love. Perhaps the best known and loved text in Scripture is John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." As we study the Bible, we see that this wonderful entity called love began with the relationship between the Father and the Son in eternity. I am going to read a beautiful passage from Proverbs 8. The topic here is called "wisdom;" but the inspiration of the Spirit gives us a peek into the eternal relationship of love between the Father and the Son:

"The Lord brought me forth (mg. possessed me) as the first of his works, before his deeds of old. I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began. When there were no oceans, I was given birth, when there were no springs abounding with water; before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was given birth, before he made the earth or its fields or any of the dust of the world. I was there when he set the heavens in place, when he marked out the horizon on the face of the deep, when he established the clouds above and fixed securely the fountains of the deep, when he gave the sea its boundary so the waters would not overstep his command, and when he marked out the foundations of the earth. Then I was the craftsman at his side. I was filled with delight day after day, rejoicing always in his presence, rejoicing in his whole world and delighting in mankind." Prov. 8:22-31, NIV.

Ellen White also comments on this beautiful, eternal love relationship between the Father and the Son:

"The Sovereign of the universe was not alone in His work of beneficence. He had an associate, -- a co-worker who could appreciate His purposes, and could share His joy in giving happiness to created beings. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.' (Jn. 1, 1,2.) Christ, the Word, the only begotten of God, was one with the eternal Father,--one in nature, and character, in purpose,--the only being that could enter into all the councils and purposes of God. 'His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of peace.'" PP 34. [She then quotes Proverbs 8:23-30 from the KJV.]

This love relationship between God the Father and God the Son is revealed throughout the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and especially in the life of Jesus when He came to earth to save our dying world and win us back from Satan's power. Behold Jesus receiving His Father's approval at His baptism: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." See Jesus praying to His Father through the long nights to receive the strength He needed to serve mankind during the day. See Him struggling with death in Gethsemane as His Father's presence was being withdrawn from Him, and then resting in the arms of Gabriel, who was sent from heaven to strengthen Him to go through the trial ahead. Hear His dying cry on the cross of Calvary, "My God! My God! Why have you forsaken me!"

My friends, love holds in its hands the power of life and death for you and me, too. We must have the love of Jesus in order to experience real life; and we must be conduits of that love to those around us to bring them to Jesus' life-giving love. When we are separated from this love, we may not die like the little babies during World War 1, but Satan tries to drive us to the things

of this world in the hope of supplying our internal loneliness and hunger for the things that only true, heavenly love can supply for our souls.

Brothers and sisters, there is no way for us to escape the desperate internal need we have for the love of God. We were created with this need from the moment of conception until our last breath. And fortunately, we can have this need completely fulfilled when we come into a personal love relationship with Jesus. Then when our emptiness is filled with Jesus' love for us, we cannot help but share it with others, for our hearts will be overflowing with adoration and thankfulness to our Savior. Here are some quotations from the Spirit of Prophecy which emphasize the character of love that compelled Jesus to sacrifice His life for each one of us:

"I point you to the life of Jesus as a perfect pattern. His life was characterized by disinterested benevolence. Precious Savior! What sacrifices has He made for us that we should not perish, but have everlasting life! Heaven will be cheap enough if we resign every selfish interest to obtain it. Can we afford to have our own way, and take ourselves out of the hands of God, because it is more pleasing to the natural heart? God requires perfect submission and perfect obedience.

Eternal life is worth everything to us. You may come in close connection with God if you will agonize to enter in at the straight gate." 4 T 218.

"The Savior of the world was adored by angels, He was a prince in the royal courts of heaven; but he laid aside His glory and clothed His divinity with humanity. He became the meek and lowly Jesus. He left His riches and glory in heaven and became poor that we, through His poverty, might be made rich. Three years He journeyed from place to place, a homeless wanderer. But selfish men will repine and murmur if called to leave their little earthly treasure for Christ's sake, or to labor in the work of saving souls for whom He gave His precious life. Oh, what ingratitude! No one can appreciate the blessings of redemption unless he feels that he can joyfully afford to make any and every sacrifice for the love of Christ. Every sacrifice made for Christ enriches the giver, and every suffering and privation endured for His dear sake increases the overcomer's final joy in heaven." 4T 219.

"We are the Lord's little children and we are to be led and upheld by Him. If we will learn lessons from the kindness and patience and tenderness of Jesus, we will be a blessing to all with whom we are associated. The Lord would have us take comfort in His promises, and praise Him much more than we do. 'Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me.' (Ps. 50:23). Let us learn how to express our gratitude to God for His wonderful condescension and love for mankind.

"The only begotten Son of God consented to leave the heavenly courts and come to our world to live with an ungrateful people who refused His gracious mercies. He consented to live a life of poverty, and to endure suffering and temptation. He became a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And the Word declares, 'We hid as it were our faces from him' (Isa 53:3). Of His own disciples, Peter denied Him, and Judas betrayed Him. The people whom He came to bless rejected Him. They put Him to shame and caused Him untold suffering. They placed upon His head a crown of thorns that pierced His holy temples. They beat Him with a scourge, and then they nailed Him to the cross. Yet amid it all, no word of complaint escaped His lips...

"Christ bore all this suffering in order to obtain the right to confer eternal righteousness upon as many as would believe on Him. O, when I think of this, I feel that no complaint should ever escape my lips....

"When we are having a hard time, let us consider how much our salvation cost the God of the universe." TD 216.

Dear friends, as I see the end of time closing in on us, and the coming of Jesus drawing near, I am learning that having a relationship with Jesus, and loving Him, is the only thing that can keep us stable and trusting in the days ahead. With our hand in the hand of Jesus, we can reach out to those around us who may not know Him as we do, and together we can face the unknown future. As Paul says in Romans 8: 35-39:

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

"And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." 1 Cor. 13:13.

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