



A V O I C E F R O M T H E W I L D E R N E S S

By THIS Shall All Men Know

Can you finish this verse? Jesus says there is something that you and I can experience that will reveal our union with Him to all men. By this! So what is it? **“If ye have love one to another.”**

There is a love that will unmistakably convince people that how we are responding to them and how we are caring for them is coming from a source of power greater than we ourselves can generate. By this they will know, even if they make no profession of Christianity. But this love has very purposefully been counterfeited and adulterated by Satan. This love has been so misstated and confused that many today in the world equate the word love with “anything goes,” and to many in the church “come as you are, stay as you are and go to heaven as you are.” Then there is a love that appears genuine but only works on our human terms and conditions but quickly fades out when self is wounded.

The love that will reveal our union with Christ is clearly described in I Corinthians 13. Paul says that this love (charity) suffers long, is kind, does not envy, does not vaunt itself, is not puffed up, does not behave unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil, bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things and never fails. How do we measure up?

Before our wedding Alane and I made the decision that beginning on that day we would read 1 Corinthians 13 together daily. We had a book with 30 different renditions of the chapter and began our first reading on our wedding night. I even wrote my own paraphrase and gave it to my bride. Everything seemed so wonderful. We enjoyed I Corinthians 13 together, had a great honeymoon and had no idea that we didn't have that kind of love for each other. Not until the honeymoon was over and the pressures of temporal life set in did we begin to recognize something was wrong with our version of love. It wasn't long until we decided it was futile to keep reading about a love that was long suffering, that didn't seek its own way, was not easily provoked, would bear all things and in the process of all that, would not think evil. We did not understand that our greatest battle was the surrender of self to the will of God. Our intentions were good, our human love was as good as anyone else's, but we needed a power outside of ourselves to bring heaven's kind of love into our lives. We needed a practical understanding of what was happening when self was crossed and the tools to begin to respond to God and to each other. I'm so thankful that we didn't give up on each other and that God has not given up on us as we continue to learn more of His kind of

love in our marriage and in our relationships with others.

When Jesus said, “**By this** shall all men know that ye are my disciples,” He knew that any person, whether a professing Christian or not, would recognize that this kind of love cannot be generated through anything but a moment by moment surrender to His will. They will “know” that our response could not be rehearsed, fabricated or because we are gritting our teeth to prove that we won’t allow ourselves to get upset.

So are we to conclude then that there will be some great moment in our Christian experience that we become partakers of this Christ like love, and until then we are all just doing our best to express our human love? No! This I Corinthians 13 kind of love is being learned and experienced on the same basis as other aspects of our character growth. It is being cultivated, tested and revealed through the trials, associations and circumstances we find ourselves involved in. Often we are blinded to our lack of this deeper love because circumstances have not called forth a deeper need. Let me illustrate.

I find myself involved with someone who has made accusations against me of lying to him in a real estate transaction several years ago and blaming me for a series of events that he believes unfair. I have attempted to work through these things on a basis of principle, tact and a deepening understanding of love toward someone who is vehemently angry and at times irrational toward me. When this situation began unfolding I soon recognized that my **love** was being tested and as I have been willing for God’s will to be done, He is bestowing a deeper love. At least I am aware that it is deeper and different than I had been called upon to express before. But it seems to be easier for me to experience this love toward this person for one very important reason; he does not profess to be a Christian. Therefore my expectations of a good response from him are not there and I’m not disappointed. It is also easier because I’m not confronted with regular association that necessitates renewed surrender and the feelings associated with being maligned.

But what happens to us when we are falsely accused, misunderstood and maligned by our spouse, child, parent or friend(s)? What do we do when we are told by someone that

we really love and care for, that they know our thoughts and they don’t, when they misconstrue our words and motives and then accuse us of things that they themselves struggle with? **The human response**, our natural tendency is to say something like, “With friends like that, who needs enemies?” I can remember the day this happened; as we listened we were both overwhelmed with emotion and literally lost all appetite in a feeling of nausea. For more than one and a half hours we were told things very hard to hear; some of them were true, some were misconstrued and some of them

(where they told us what we were thinking) were wholly untrue. Our minds raced as we went back over the various scenes where we had reached out, and now we were being told that it was “plastic.”

Friends, I don’t share this brief account so you can sympathize with me and think how unkind this was of these people, but rather to draw from it the lesson that is the subject of this article. I use this example to illustrate that there is often more freedom to express genuine love for the non-Christian or casual acquaintance than to **choose to love** in circumstances where you are likely to be misunderstood no matter what you do. You see, this situation has driven - not drawn - yes, driven

me to see my greater need and my greater dependence upon my Saviour. It is revealing to me that I need a much greater divine love than I’ve ever recognized before. God is using this experience to show me yet another part of me that is very much alive and must be crucified and replaced by His divine love. One of the hard things and yet at the same time beautiful is that we really can’t hide from it. When we’ve been stung repeatedly, our human nature wants to recoil from it and avoid having it happen again. We’re fearful of becoming vulnerable and risk being misunderstood and maligned. But the Lord in His mercy comforts us with words like these, “We cannot afford to let our spirits chafe over any **real or supposed wrong** done to ourselves.” That means I have no excuse for holding wrong feelings toward the person who has wronged me even if I’m 100% right, and this is not the case! The next line of the statement says, “Self is the enemy we most need to fear.” *Ministry of Healing* p. 485.

Theoretically we should not be disturbed with what others may think or say about us, or even what they do to us, if

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we are in oneness with Christ and in fellowship with His Spirit. This brings us to the stark realization that we are not at one with Christ when we start blaming, surmising and feeling hurt and wounded over the supposed or real wrongs we think someone has done to us.

One reason why we experience so much difficulty in practically implementing this oneness with Christ is that often when we're not in circumstances that require our conscious dependence, we thoughtlessly drift back into a self-management mode of operation. Then even though self may not be shown in a particular behavior, it is quietly, by neglect of watchfulness, positioning for the ascendancy when temptation strikes. So now let us place ourselves in an interaction with a friend or loved one. If one or both of us slips into self we are being set tip for misunderstandings and wounded feelings. Then there is the tendency to cast blame, point the finger and wonder why we are being treated this way, especially when the other person professes a high standard. In other words we hold the person accountable and view them through their profession rather than through recognizing that they are weak and need encouragement like I do. The problem is compounded when the person you are talking with tells you that they are in the Spirit and not in the flesh. Should we really need to tell someone we are in the Spirit? These kinds of situations are not easy and certainly reveal and call us to our need of divine love.

The point of it is this, **the devil is working vigorously** to create scenarios that will break down friendships, marriages and families and rob us of the unity and steal from us the very mark that reveals we are Christ's disciples, "If ye have love one to another."

For some of you as you read this you may not relate to it on the basis of a misunderstanding with a friend or a non-Christian who has falsely accused you. You may find yourself going through a similar experience; maybe it is with a spouse, another relative or a church relationship. You may also be recognizing along with me that without this heaven born love we aren't prepared to enter heaven. Satan taunts us with our weakness and tries to convince us that we'll never make it. But this is only a lie from the accuser of the brethren.

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Let us turn all of our attention to **the solution** because the solution is a practical part of the title of this article. Think for a moment what it would be like if each one of us would heed the following words, "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing." I Peter 3:8 & 9.

Listen: Really be willing to listen to what the other person's perspective is. Even if they don't do it in a very courteous way and even if they are just venting. James 1:19 says be "swift to hear." That means try to hear through the avenue of humanity what the Spirit wants to communicate. "Slow to speak" - don't be so quick to respond human to human - it only makes things worse. "Slow to wrath" - whether we are right or wrong our irritation and frustration does not work the righteousness of God - it only slows the process.

Confess and repent: As we have honestly listened, even if the person is projecting upon us their own faults and weaknesses or we have done the same to them, we must be willing to confess and repent of our part. We are told, "If you have committed one wrong and they twenty, confess that one as though you were the chief offender." Review & Herald vol. 1 p. 489. If our motive here is to lead them to confess their faults, God's blessing will not attend. My confession must be specific, relating to my wrong and my side of the relationship.

Forgiveness: There must be a willingness to forgive and press onward even if that person has not asked for forgiveness. While it is ideal when both parties seek forgiveness we cannot depend upon this for our peace. This true forgiveness, as with each other step in this process, requires a Power outside and above us. None of this can be done by good intentions, emotional moments, or gritting our teeth. "The just shall live by faith." Romans 1:17. **True faith** exercised brings the enabling power of Christ needed.

Deal with the thoughts: This step could be placed at the beginning, in between and at the end for this whole solution process. In II Corinthians 10:5 Paul tells us of the importance of "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." Why is it so critical to have our thoughts brought under such strict obedience to Christ? Think for a

moment and please do this little exercise. Think about someone that right now you are not fully at peace with or that has misunderstood you or possibly misrepresented you. Did you think about them? Well, unless your thought was governed by Divine grace the thoughts naturally turn toward your own self-perspective. Next, if the situation is particularly hard and resolution is not coming quickly, feelings started to mix with those thoughts. Maybe you felt anxiety, hurt, frustrated, irritated, angry, or bitter. With these feelings that are emotional, often there is also a corresponding physical response like lack of appetite, nausea, increased pulse, blood pressure and tension. You see friends; our thoughts have a very close relationship to our feelings and the two combined very quickly become who we are at this moment, regardless of our profession. We are told that "if our thoughts are wrong, the feelings will be wrong, and the **thoughts and the feelings combined make up** the moral **character**." *Testimonies* vol. 5 p. 310. Do you see how quickly the delicate nature of love can be squashed by our thoughts and how vital it is that we cooperate with the Holy Spirit when He prompts us about a thought and where it will soon lead us? I have found that part of the solution to cultivating love is to ask God to prompt me when my thoughts are going to lead me away from my surrender and dependence into unlovely traits of character. If your human nature is like mine you may find yourself having to repulse and turn from certain thoughts many times. Don't become discouraged; just keep responding to the Spirit, His grace is sufficient. When we choose to yield ourself to Christ, He will give us His divine power and the temptations to wrong thoughts will lose their strength as they find no answering cord in our heart.

When we have been misunderstood or misrepresented, when it seems that it must always be me that must give. Remember, to give back understanding when misunderstood, to continue to reach out when the hand has been slapped, is to experience more of His love for another. This is a freedom that is higher than being understood and this freedom only comes when we are willing to **fully surrender** the situation, no matter how difficult, and **choose** to focus our prayers and thoughts on allowing the heaven born love to work in us and through us. We need to allow God to show us that "when self is unsubdued, we can find no rest." *Desire of Ages* p. 336. Do not assume that finding or implementing the solution means that everything will turn out comfortable, it didn't for Christ. Do not assume that you will be understood and then

rest will come. **We must find the rest alone in Christ, not because the situation is resolved humanly.** Our rest comes from how successfully we respond to the Holy Spirit, not the outcome of the situations that burden the soul.

Dear reader, as you have read this article the Spirit may have impressed upon you some person, some difficulty, some painful misunderstanding that is robbing you of the peace and rest that only comes from Christ. It is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will help you, as He has helped me even as I write, to measure it with Calvary. Measure the hurt or difficulty, the unwillingness to let go, with Christ in Gethsemane as He cries for another way if possible than the cup that trembles in His hand. He was despised, oppressed and afflicted; yet He opened not His mouth.

Friends, to have the love that Christ is calling us to experience, we must have the unconditional giving of our all and the partaking of His all. Just as our peace can only come from Christ, so also can this love only come through our surrender and dependence upon Him. Then and only then will you and I be able to love and truly give ourselves for the other person as Christ loved and gave Himself entirely for us. May we be merciful to one another as we learn this kind of love. He loves us when we misunderstand Him, betray Him and even when we crucify Him afresh. May God help us to experience this kind of love one to another. Then, **by this shall all men know!**

A Voice From the Wilderness

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