

Oh, For the Love of GOD

Inarguably One of the Vital Components in Our Relationship with GOD is Love, unfortunately, as Misrepresented in Expression, as are other Popular Conceptions of what the Bible Actually Teaches with Respect to Our Relationship Requirements and Gods' PLAN for Man!

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It doesn't take very long when among evangelical Christians, especially in the environment of a religious service, that a passionate love for God, primarily the person of Jesus, comes to the fore. 'Praise and Worship' is structured around what is often a profuse outpouring of expressed heartfelt love of the Lord.

Not to suggest in any way that the Love **of** and **for** God and an open expression of that love is inappropriate. After all, the first recitation in the 'greatest commandment' is that we must '*love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind!*' (Matt. 22:37, quoting Deut. 6:5) This, at least, seems to be non-negotiable, as is the second recitation, "*you shall love your neighbor as yourself.*" (Perhaps we should ask, should our visible emotional expression be drastically different in the first recitation from its expression in the second?)

But it isn't the love itself that is at issue. Rather, it is the wide range of expression. The Jews of Jesus' day would have affirmed most emphatically that they fervently loved God, yet their external expression of it would be quite different than a modern evangelical would exhibit. The question is, what amount of visible expression ought we to demonstrate? Is there a minimum? Is there an 'upset boundary' after which it becomes 'too much'?

Then there's the question about witnesses. If some in audience are turned off by what they regard as too much expression, should we defer to their sensitivities? (There's 'political correctness' after all!) Secularists and atheists often see only peoples' emotional expressions, and regard their faith to have little more to it than that. Are there situations where the profusion of expression would be better if lessened and substantive dialog increased? In other words, can there be such a thing as religion that's **too** emotional and **insufficiently** informational?

Can 'faith's expression' be over-demonstrated while under-substantiated? This is often another 'dividing line' between religious organizations, as if Christianity didn't have enough division without this one also.

Then out in front we have the professional expressionists, who are most spectacular with their stage performances, but who turn the switch off as soon as the cameras are turned-off and the crowds dissipate. Who doesn't recall seeing the broadcast of the world-famous charismatic TV evangelist's tearful repentance after having been 'de-frocked' for frequenting brothels, only to learn later that after being 'forgiven' by his peers, his habit continued. Such examples cast a long malodorous shadow over sincere people.

This brings us to another question. Where does the emotional expression come from? Is it **put** within us, or is it something we add into the picture from within ourselves? How should it be? Then, are those who are the most expressive the most converted?

What is Required?

Basically, what does God want of us in this regard? Is there an expression of love that is appropriate, even required, and is there any expression that's less appropriate? Is there anything a person might fail to do that would negate his expression, making it immaterial? Is God bound to accept all love and praise expression presented, or are there basic pre-conditions for acceptance? Would Cain's offering experience provide a useful clue?

Are there proscribed components in our expression of our love that are essential? After all, not everyone is as expressive or as outwardly emotional as others. Does that render their love inferior to the more expressive worshippers? We should know.

This really is **not** a hard question to answer.

The New Testament says much about love, even the love of God. In addition to the quote above in the second paragraph about loving God and also our neighbor, we have the one whom Jesus loved personally quoted as making specific statements in this regard. In fact, He makes love a pre-condition to acceptable worship. Here also, not only love toward God, but toward neighbor as well. 1st John 4:20-21 makes the case well: *“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we **from him**, That he who loveth God love his brother also.”* From this we can detect a quality in the kind of love that God requires. One in which it is demonstrated widely, not just toward God to the exclusion of fellow man! Also, the point that it’s possible to think we love God when in fact we don’t even know Him. How often does this happen?

If You Love ME...

Jesus said, *“If you love me, keep my commandments.”* That leaves a major portion of His modern day followers scrambling to identify a set of commandments attributable to Him that they’re willing to keep. In MANY cases, NOT the Ten Commandments, as those are ‘Old Testament’! So, already there’s a considerable ‘problem’. A prime condition of love toward Jesus is a subject embroiled in controversy right in the thick of the ‘Grace versus Law’ issue!

Jesus posed an insightful rhetorical question when he observed a common situation in His day. He said, *“And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46) He continues: “**Not every one** that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that **work iniquity.**” (Matt. 7:21-23) This disturbing affirmation speaks volumes! That an obedient response is an essential to personal acceptability. Here we see actively*

religious people who ‘worship’ the Lord, doing all kinds of commendable things, but those things don’t count for much, being largely ‘disobedient’ despite what they do being done ‘in the name of the Lord’! Obedience is not such a minor issue! Our own personal conduct path, no matter how ‘devout’, can be a trap. Cain learned that lesson, and in him it provoked murderous rage! He thought he’d get back at God by killing His true servant.

Then, there’s a whole orthodoxy in evangelicalism, adamant that no ‘deeds’ at all *should* be practiced. They see that as just ‘works’, an affront against the grace of God! A quote from a booklet by the Berean Call says: **“The gospel is all about what Christ has done. It says nothing about what Christ must yet do, because the work of our redemption is finished...To combat ‘the gospel of the grace of God’, the great deceiver has many false gospels, but they all have two subtle rejections of grace in common: ritual and/or self-effort...Ritual makes redemption an ongoing process...and self-effort gives man a part to play in earning his salvation.”** In contrast to that, in Philippians 2:12, Paul said, *“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always **obeyed**, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.**”* Hardly expressing a view that their salvation is a foregone conclusion from the first moment. And Ephesians 2:10 *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which He has before ordained that we should walk in them.”* Not the all-time favorite verse of evangelicals!

In Spirit and in Truth

Another statement relevant to this matter is that as components of worship, we must incorporate two essential elements. *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him **must** worship him in spirit and in truth.”* (John 4:24) This suggests rather pointedly that incorporating doctrinal views or practices that are not true or which violate the spirit of the law, or which frustrate the leading of the Holy Spirit can contaminate worship. What if ones’ theology was infused with pagan concepts? What if Biblically ordained practices were to be repudiated and non-biblical customs embraced. Are we to believe that it makes little difference? What if Christian worshippers were to insist that Jesus was born on a day that He wasn’t born on? And then, what if that date was found to be the ‘birth date’ of “Sol Invictus”?

What if the day of Jesus' resurrection were to be re-named after a female pagan goddess, does that fall within the auspices of *spirit* and of *truth*?

In the doctrinal area, if elements of paganism or Gnosticism had been blended into official teaching, would complicity with that persuasion diminish the acceptability of one's expression? If a worshipper didn't bother to "...*study to show himself approved unto God*", as 1st Timothy admonishes, would his worship be just as acceptable as the student who did? If a worshipper was aware of doctrinal discrepancies in a particular denomination's belief system and disregarded it, preferring instead their 'worshipful environment', would that matter at all? What if he were to grow only to a certain level and then stop growing in grace and knowledge, would his worship be just as acceptable as the person who did continue growing?

In 1st Corinthians 3:1-2 Paul lamented the obvious lack of spiritual growth of that congregation. "*And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.*" He saw this condition as not only lamentable, but the source of other spiritual problems, as described in his following chapters. How many charismatic worship environments are structured around meat rather than just milk, and diluted milk at that, often as not?

We live in an age in which professing Christians are less educated in the fundamental truths of the Bible than at any time in history. Should the mass audiences of the popular charismatic ministries **ever** become exposed to a Biblical Scholar who laid out before them the important matters of substance, the clear fundamentals of the New Testament, we'd see the demise of those audiences in short order! It isn't what they're there for, it isn't what they want!

The 'love of God' and the 'love of the Truth' have been severed and made exclusive of one another in modern times, though Jesus showed them to be co-dependent! "...*they that worship (God) must worship him in spirit and in truth.*" Being 'in the Spirit' does not inspire or lead us toward truth rejection! God's Spirit would not lead toward error, nor can it work fully in its environment.

The love OF God

Hearing the expression 'the love of God', we're more inclined to visualize that phrase as referring to our love toward Him. But there's another quality to this that we ought to be careful to notice. The kind of love that the Bible refers to is that which He instills within us, that we would otherwise be unable to genuinely express. "*And hope makes not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.*" (Romans 5:5) Here, the love of God is receptive, imparted by the Holy Spirit. "*Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;*" (Romans 15:30) This isn't love directed toward the Spirit, but that which is imparted **by** it, in this case toward Paul's need.

The Love of God is something that over time becomes more matured. The uncomfortable thing for some is that they prefer to define love their own way and express what wells up from within themselves, while dismissing important elements. "*But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.*" (1st John 2:5) Jesus discerned an attitude among God-worshippers of His day: "*But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.*" (John 5:42) "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall **abide in my love**; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love.*" (John 15:9-10) Love is perfected by keeping something! There is an aura of love which extends out from the Father and from the Son in which we and He abides. This love is from God, not toward Him! We can swoon with heartfelt emotion toward God, and yet be 'outside' of His love, if we don't commit ourselves to following His obedient example, as defined by His Law!

John the Apostle in 1st John 2:6-7 has more to say on this theme: "*He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even **as he** walked. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.*" The way He

walked was in keeping with the Father's Words and Commandments!

1st John 2:15 is particularly disturbing when we consider what it's actually saying. "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.*" Here, the love of the Father clearly is not ours toward Him, but His toward US! If we 'love the world', we are not in receipt of that love which emanates out from Him, and our affection for the world, which He does not have or generate, is clear evidence of that!

"But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1st John 3:17) This also, in the way it's worded, can not be referring to our love for God, but rather, the 'love' component in ourselves that is FROM God. 1st John 4:7, 12 & 17 affirms the same: *"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God...If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world."* Do you see where Godly love comes from?

A Difficult Point to Miss!

For those who need specific definition, 1st John 5:3 provides it! *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." ... "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.* (2nd John:6) Love defined! The kind of love that matters to God! This isn't the kind emphasized most of the time!

To sever love from its proper expression, to sever love from its proper source, to sever love from its proper definition, places self-generated love that we might otherwise present into the category of Cain's offering. It's not wrong to have emotion toward God, so long as the other practical elements are present: A heart willing to obey His Commandments, an equal expression toward our fellow man, and a heart in receipt of that love-enhancement that comes from Him. HIS love working within us!

It isn't well published, nor would it be well received in all places, but it is possible to express profuse love toward God and the person of Jesus and have it **not** be received! The old song says 'love is a many-splendored thing'. As any lover knows, the love received can sometimes be more to serve the interests of the 'giver' though supposedly expressed toward the other. The Love of God 'is a many-factored thing'. It requires certain component factors be present for it to become fully acceptable to God. He does not 'receive' it from a worshipper who by his lifestyle is willfully disobedient. Who does not and will not demonstrate love toward his neighbor. Who will not keep all His Commandments. Who is so in love with himself and 'his own world' that God can not place His love within him. Who's so wrapped-up in self-absorbed worship expression that the Truth into which the Spirit continues to lead us becomes excluded.

If I Have Not Charity

First Corinthians 13 is a comprehensive lesson in charity (love). *"Charity suffers long, and is kind; charity envies not; charity vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, Does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not her own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Charity never fails: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. ...And now abides faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.* We all would benefit if we'd self-evaluate and refine any love-expression that we put forth on this basis.

The elder Apostle John, sums the matter well: *"He that says, I know him, and keeps not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keeps his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that says he abides in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.* (1st John 2:3-6) Ω