

The Law of Love

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by David A. DePra

For all the law is fulfilled in one word, [even] in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (Gal. 5:14)

Good works for a believer are to be like FRUIT. We are IN CHRIST – He is the Vine and we are the branches – and His life in us will produce good works. Our love for God will motivate us to OBEY HIM.

Relationship with God must be based upon faith in Christ and the love of God. But if I am under the law I am not living by faith – and therefore my relationship with God is upon the wrong basis.

The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith. (Rom. 3:11-12)

There are some Christian teachers who claim that if I live by faith – if I am under grace – that this will empower me to keep the law. They are, in effect, saying that the law IS of faith. But they are wrong. The grace of God does not empower us to keep the law – being under grace does not put us back under law. Rather, the grace of God is LIFE IN CHRIST. The life that emerges does not walk according to law. It walks according to Christ.

Now, life in Christ will be moral, holy, and will keep the law. But it is not governed by law. It is governed by love. Can we see the difference?

Suppose you get married. You take marriage vows. But do you love your spouse and live like you love your spouse -- only because you took those vows? Do you keep those vows on a piece of paper in your pocket and reference them each day? No. You keep those vows without referencing them in the letter because you LOVE your spouse. The legal document isn't the marriage; the ceremony isn't marriage. The union and life lived is marriage. Love produces those works and love produces those attitudes of a right marriage.

Suppose you walk into a house of a relative or friend and they need to leave the room. You see a hundred dollar bill lying on the table. Why don't you steal it? Is it merely because there is commandment that says, "Thou shalt not steal?" Is that why? Or is it because stealing is incompatible with your walk with Christ – and there is nothing in you that can steal?

We can be a thief without stealing. We can be a murderer without murdering. We can have all manner of sin IN US – but not act upon it because we are GOVERNED BY LAW. Being under the law can keep us out of trouble. It can make us appear holy – even to ourselves. It can deceive us into thinking that God commends us for not sinning. It can deceive us into thinking we are righteous. But this kind of life is not

a relationship by faith with Jesus Christ. It is actually a relationship with LAW – or if you will – a relationship with God THROUGH law. It is a false Christianity.

Our relationship with Jesus Christ must not be based upon anything about ourselves. It must not be based upon whether we are successful in keeping the law – ANY law – inward or outward. It must be based upon Christ: “Yet not I, but Christ.”

We are told in scripture that, “the law is a shadow,” of the real. It is that at best. But how can we live in a relationship with a shadow of Christ? There would be no communion – no relationship that is living. In the end, it would be deception.

Love that is freely received freely gives. That is because the love that is freely received changes the one who receives so that they can freely give back to the giver. “We love Him, because He first loved us.” (I John 4:19)

Love, grace, Truth, and faith: These are all voluntary. They are the outcome of experiencing Jesus Christ. They are woven into the very fabric of our resurrection union with Christ. They will result in actions and works. But you cannot create these by works. May God show us the difference.

We are married to Jesus Christ. He has given Himself to us. If we realize this it will change us. And then we will give ourselves freely back to Him – and we will freely obey and serve Him. Because of His grace toward us, we can then live and move in His grace.

The Christian Life

There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love. (I John 4:18)

The Christianity of many of us is based in FEAR – based in being afraid of God. We may not think we are motivated by fear – because maybe we don’t feel afraid – but many obey God out of fear. If I am under the law, I am living under fear. It is fear of losing out on what I must earn. It is the fear of not being on God’s, “good side.”

If I am blind to the grace of God I will be blind to the love of God. I will be blind to God Himself. It will be impossible for me to walk, “by grace through faith,” which is to walk in LOVE.

This is not true Christianity. Christianity is, “faith working through love.”

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. (Gal. 5:6)

“Faith working through love,” is not a thing unto itself. It is not a state of mind, an emotional condition, or intellectual assent. It is not a sentimental feeling. “Faith working through love,” can only be the result of KNOWING Jesus Christ and belonging to Him. I can have no faith and no love unless Jesus Christ has me.

Christianity is Christ in us – and a growing inward realization of Him that will renew our minds and bring us into the reality of grace and Truth that is of Him. This will

result in a life lived to God's glory. It will result in good works.

True good works are freely given – out of love for God -- without any expectation of any pay back or reward. Good works are the outcome of being rightly related to Christ by faith.

If I love God I will obey Him. I will love others with HIS LOVE. Law cannot produce this. It can FAKE it. But only God can produce love because only God IS love. He wants to love through His people.

Good Works

Relationship with God – based upon Christ alone – will result in good works:

All scripture [is] given by inspiration of God, and [is] profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all (II Tim. 3:16-17)

Our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:13-14)

[This is] a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:8)

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members [as] instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members [as] instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (Rom. 6:11-14)

As we have noted, good works done under law may look the same as good works done under grace. But the person doing them is not the same. And consequently, they are not from out of Christ – they are not truly good works. They will carry self-interest. They will not ultimately glorify God.

Paul said, "The life which I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God." (Gal. 2:20) This is the source of truly good works. They are an expression of HIS LIFE.

The Love of God

We love him, because he first loved us. (I John 4:19)

In John 4:19 we are given a great Truth: We cannot freely love God or others unless we first freely receive God's love for ourselves. This is in line with the words of Jesus that we read earlier: "You have freely received. Freely give." (Matt. 10:8) If we will realize and freely receive God's love for us personally – which can manifest in many ways – then we will be changed by that love. And it is that changes in us – including

the renewal of our mind – and will enable us to love others. In effect, we can only freely pass on to others what we have freely received from God.

A Personal Example

When I was young, I had a terrible time forgiving and loving others. I tried and tried to do so – and then I felt condemned because I could not do so. I knew I was supposed to love others. Why could I not do so if I were a Christian?

I did not realize two things. First, I was trying to love with my emotions. I was trying to make myself FEEL loving and forgiving in my natural man. In effect, I had created what amounted to a LAW in myself – and I was trying to live up to it. I continually failed. What Paul said came true for me: The more I tried to keep my law the more I was shown to be unloving – and the more I felt condemned. From this there seemed to be no escape.

We can apply this principle to ANY standard we set up in ourselves. The law of sin and death takes many forms. It may be some obvious form of God's law, or it may be a subtle, inward law of attitudes, feelings, forgiveness, or love. But if we are UNDER such a law it will produce death.

Second, I did not realize that I could never love anyone else – not with the AGAPE of God – until I myself freely received AGAPE from God. And I could not freely receive the love of God until I was exposed as one who did not deserve it – I had to be brought to the end of myself and shown the Truth of grace. Once that began to happen – and it is a life-long learning of Christ – once that began to happen all of my efforts to try to love through my natural man were exposed for what they were: An attempt to make myself righteous; an attempt to create in myself that which can only be realized in Christ. I had to confess my folly and repent of that sin of unbelief.

As these convictions began to dawn on me, it became clear that I would never be able to love or forgive anyone unless I realized how much I needed to freely receive the love and forgiveness of God for myself. I had to be reduced down to nothing more than a recipient of His love and grace.

That sounds so simple and easy. But what a mess God must plow through in order to reduce us down to where we will freely receive what He freely gives – so that we can freely give back to God, and freely pass on to others.

I had already known that the Bible said -- that we can only love God because He first loved us. I knew that. But I had not yet experienced it. There is a huge difference. It is like this with ALL the Truth in Christ. We may know the verse and the doctrine. But now we must experience the reality of it in Jesus Christ.

What is Agape?

***And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.
(I John 2:3)***

***For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his
commandments are not grievous. (I John 5:3)***

God's love can be realized and manifested in many ways. Perhaps we grasp the forgiveness of God for us. Maybe we have come to see that we are nothing -- but that God has given us His grace. All of these dimensions of our experience in Christ can be gathered up in God's AGAPE love. It is why John is able to simply declare: God IS love. (John 4:8, 16)

Agape – the love of God – is an unconditional commitment to God on the behalf of the one who is loved, regardless of cost. It is Christ-centered, with God's interests and His glory being the goal. It may carry along some emotions and intellect. But it is not human love. Agape carries the TRUTH, and is redemptive in nature.

Agape suffereth long, [and] is kind; Agape envieth not; Agape vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Agape never fails. (I Cor. 13:5-8)

In this passage we see not only the outward expressions of AGAPE – but we see the inward motivation. We see that AGAPE does not begin and end with emotions. It is NOT of natural man. Rather, it is a manifestation of Jesus Christ through an earthen vessel – it is a FRUIT of the spirit of God in Christ.

We also see that AGAPE is not dependent upon the one who is loved. It stands unmoved. God does not love only those who love Him in return, or who do His will. God IS love. But His love is redemptive – in other words, God loves the sinner – but His love desires the sinner to free from sin, be saved, and to come into the knowledge of the Truth. He gave His own Son to make that possible and is today working unto that end by His spirit.

As noted, our love for others ought to be same as God's love for us. AGAPE is redemptive. This means that even when others sin against us that we should never toss them in the trash. No, we should not compromise with sin – we should tell the Truth about it. But we should desire the redemption and restoration of the person who has sinned against us – and be willing to be a vehicle unto that end, even if this is not possible at present. Indeed, it may never be possible. Sometimes separation is necessary because of unrepented of sin. But the motive and attitude of love -- redemption and forgiveness -- still ought to be the attitude of someone in Christ towards all.

Agape does not mean we LIKE someone. It does not require that we allow them access to our personal lives. It does not mean we trust them. Rather, AGAPE means that we are committed to God's highest for them, and are willing to be a vessel unto that end.

The Motivation of Agape

John is telling us that this is how we will express AGAPE: We will keep God's commandments. God's commandments, in this case, are not merely the Ten Commandments, although they are included. God's commandments are everything He has spoken and revealed.

As noted, how God loves human beings is how human beings are to love each other. This is a rule of thumb and must be applied. For example, how does God treat a sinner? It is how we ought to treat a sinner. How does God love His people? It is how we ought to love His people. This can be very revealing, for if we treated each other in accordance with the twisted way in which some teach that God treats us -- it would become more than obvious – if we are honest – that those pictures of God are horrible and contrary to Him. What some attribute to God would be easily recognized as evil if human beings did the same to each other. This is a call for discernment.

God's commands as to how we are to treat each other are expressions of His love working through us. Thus, instead of thinking of them as commands under threat of punishment – we need to think of them as love expressed in attitudes and conduct.

Now, it ought to be obvious that we could mechanically keep the letter of God's commands and do it void of love. We could supposedly keep God's commands but do so for our own interests – maybe to gain favor or to look good. Some people, "keep God's Word," but use it to manipulate others; gain a following; maintain a position. None of that is AGAPE.

There are others who give the appearance of being filled with the love of God – they are always talking about the love of God and always telling others about how much God loves them. That might seem wonderful, and maybe it is – but so often such folks have never come to terms with the Truth. It is all on the surface. They have a bubbly personality. In their natural man, they are, "loving." But beneath it all they may not truly know Jesus. They might not have come to the Cross. Theirs is a human, natural love. This is not a criticism. It is simply one of the ways in which we can deceive ourselves.

This is why in order to love others we need to KNOW Jesus Christ. We need to have personally received God's love -- and need the spirit of God to shed His love in our hearts – because only then will we have agape to pass on to others. But if we have received the love of God then we will be able to express it towards others. We will keep all of the commandments of God towards them – as the product of love.

Agape love is a fruit of the spirit. It is the product of abiding in the True Vine. Thus, it is not human love. It cannot be produced BY works. But agape certainly can produce works – and absolutely will.

Agape is redemptive. It is forgiving. It does not compromise with the Truth – but is an expression of the Truth in a redemptive way.

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matt. 22:37-40)

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