

LOVE

VITAL IN PERFECTING YOUR SANCTIFICATION

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” [1Thess 5:23].

The Scriptures make it clear that the church is already sanctified, or set apart to God. This has been attributed to the blood of Jesus, the word, and the working and presence of the Holy Spirit. When Paul prayed that *“the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely,”* he was referring to a process of refinement that will further set us apart to God by delivering us from the power of the flesh and the world.

Love One Another

Jesus Commanded Us to Love

Jesus offered one test of our being sanctified or set apart to Him - the test of love. *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”* [John 13:35].

Jesus commanded us to love. *“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* [John 15:12]. The fact that He commanded us to love indicates that love is a decision. It cannot be worked out in us until we have made an irrevocable decision that we choose to love. He said that love fulfilled the whole law, and was the greatest commandment...firstly to God, then the brethren.

“Jesus said to him,” ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” [Matt 22:37-40].

Love is Commanded by the Apostles

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” [I Jn 4:7-11]. Not only are we commanded to love, but since love is an attribute of God, we are told that if we do not love, we do not know or love God.

How Do We Know That We Love?

He who hates his brother is in darkness, unaware of his spiritual position. ***“He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him.” [1 Jn 2:9-10].*** We should examine ourselves in the light of the word. A good starting point is 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter.

1 Cor 13:4-8

Love suffers long [has enduring patience when suffering wrongs]

- ***and is kind*** [to act in kindness in benevolent usefulness]
- ***love does not envy*** [when another prospers, love rejoices]
- ***love does not parade itself*** [push itself forward]
- ***is not puffed up*** [proud or arrogant]
- ***does not behave rudely*** [unbecomingly]
- ***does not seek its own*** [look to its own interests- self-centered]
- ***is not provoked*** [is not easily stirred up]
- ***thinks no evil*** [does not think the worst, or of past indiscretions]
- ***does not rejoice in iniquity*** [when people do wrong or suffer injustice]
- ***but rejoices in the truth***
- ***bears all things*** [to cover over with silence]
- ***believes all things*** [open, trusting, not suspicious]
- ***hopes all things*** [expects with confidence good in others]
- ***endures all things.*** [without being fazed]
- ***Love never fails.***

Most of the above attributes of love relate to how we react when we are interfered with. It is comparatively easy to love when self is not touched. It is another matter when we are interrupted in what we are doing and asked to do something unappealing, or when the kids are noisy, or when someone does the wrong thing. The real test of love is how we react when self is touched. Because we all fall short, Paul implored us to ***“walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering (or patient endurance), bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*” [Eph 4:1-3].** This reading acknowledges our shortcomings as Christians, and our need to be tolerant, patient, not keeping a note of each others faults and past indiscretions. We are told to be worthy of our calling as Christians, who are distinguished by their love.

Being Sanctified in Love

Since love fulfills all the law, it is not surprising that God will not let our lack of love go unchecked. Jesus said the world will know that we are His disciples by our love for each

other. In the eyes of the world it is our love for each other that sanctifies us or sets us apart. We should be sanctified, or set apart from the world by our self sacrificing love for one another - without exception.

Sanctification by the Purging of the Flesh

Since love is vital to Christian living, God will not turn His back on our persistent lack of love. The Scriptures provide us with two examples of the purging judgment afforded to those who refuse to love.

- **Unforgiveness:** To love is to forgive. In the parable of the unjust steward, the Lord tells us that God has forgiven us all, and that if we do not forgive, then we are not forgiven. He illustrates this in His account of the judgment meted out to the unjust steward.

*"Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, 'You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 'Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?' And his master was angry, and **DELIVERED HIM TO THE TORTURERS** until he should pay all that was due to him. So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses."* [Matt 18:32-35].

The *"torturers"* are demon spirits who are given leave to oppress those who are disobedient in love. When the period of God's grace for man to repent has expired, then God takes away His hedge of protection, making the disobedient person an open target.

- **Not Discerning the Body** Paul condemned those who partook of the communion meal in a self centered manner, without discerning the needs of the rest of the body. He warned, *"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep (have died). For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world."* [1 Cor 11:28-34].

In both cases God allows those disobedient in love to be afflicted by evil spirits, to the intent that they might repent and be delivered.

Deliverance

In Joel, the invasion of demon spirits is called, *"My great army which I sent among you."* [Joel 2:25]. With the prophetic warning, Joel announces its purpose. *"Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."* [Joel 2:12].

Repentance and deliverance should be seen in the light of God's work of sanctification. The process of the removal of the hedge of protection, followed by harassment by evil spirits, then repentance and deliverance, may occur over and over again. Daniel asked

the angel in his presence how long it would take to fulfill the judgment of the apostate church. The angel answered, ***“when the power of the holy people has been shattered, all these things shall be finished.”*** [Dan 12:7]. Similarly this process of refinement and sanctification will be repeated until the power of obstinate flesh has been shattered, and replaced by a reverential fear of God.

The apostle John wrote,

“My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.” [I Jn 3:18].