

A close-up photograph of a person's hands pouring water from a brown clay jug into a silver metal bowl. The person is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt. The background is blurred, showing more of the person and some greenery.

# Understanding Love and God's Sovereignty

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JACOB ABBOTT & JOHN TODD

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Revised and edited by  
Michael J. McHugh

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# THE PRINCIPLE MOTIVE FOR LOVE

One word that virtually all people will hear numerous times, is the word love. Although the word love is one of the most frequently used words in the English language, its meaning is often misunderstood or perverted in society, as well as in the religious community. It is a mistake, therefore, to assume that even church-going people understand the significance of the word love, simply because they hear it spoken on a regular basis.

As we begin to consider the topic of Christian charity, it is important to stress the fact that love is pre-eminently something we do, not merely something we feel. It was Jesus who said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

This view of the doctrine of love is well summarized by Christian author, George Grant, in his book entitled *Bringing in the Sheaves*. On pages 45–48, Mr. Grant writes:

The Good Samaritan is the unnamed lead character in one of Christ's best-loved parables (Luke 10:25-37). When all others, including supposed men of righteousness, had skirted the responsibility of charity, the Samaritan took up its mantle. Christ concluded the narrative, saying, "Go and do thou likewise" (Luke 10:37). . . .

God desires all of us to display the Good Samaritan faith. . . . The testimony of Scripture is clear: All of us who are called by His name must walk in love (Ephesians 5:2). We must exercise compassion (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). We must struggle for justice and secure mercy [as well as provide comfort] and liberty for men, women, and children everywhere (Zechariah 7:8-10).

In Matthew 22, when Jesus was asked to summarize briefly the Law of God, the standard against which all spirituality is to be mea-

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sured, He responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and 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."

Jesus has reduced the whole of the Law, and thus, the whole of faith, to love. Love toward God, and then, love toward man. But, at the same time, Jesus has defined love in terms of the Law. In one bold, deft stroke, He freed the Christian faith from subjectivity. By so linking love and law, Christ has unclouded our purblind vision of both. Love suddenly takes on responsible objectivity, while the Law takes on passionate applicability.

This sheds a whole new light on what is meant for us to "walk in love." If our love is real, then it must be expressed; it will be expressed. If our love is real, then action will result because love is something you do, not merely something you feel. Love is the "Royal Law" (James 2:8).

The writings that follow are intended to persuade the reader that the impulse which should lead Christians to perform charitable works in this world, is something other than the vain hope of fitting themselves for heaven by meritorious deeds. Readers will be confronted with the truth that genuine acts of charity must flow out of a principled love for God and man, that urges us forward in such a course, while our hope of forgiveness for sin rests on other grounds altogether. (The only remedy for sinful man is to trust in the substitutionary work of Christ on Calvary.) Some other considerations in respect to the motives that should influence us as we seek to love others shall be considered as well.

It should be stressed at the outset, that by engaging in the work of Christian charity, we do not ultimately undermine our own happiness. Indeed, although we may often set aside some of the ordinary means of enjoyment, we do not sacrifice the end. The blessed truth is that when we love our neighbor we secure our own richest, purest enjoyment, though in a new and better way.

We also change the character of our happiness, for the pleasure which results from carrying happiness to others, is very different in its nature from that which we secure by aiming directly at our own. Now, the reader should consider these things, and understand distinctly at the outset whether he is in such a state of mind and heart that he wishes to pursue the happiness of others, or whether he means to confine his efforts chiefly to the promotion of his own. Perhaps the following illustration will be helpful in this regard.

On some cold winter evening, let us say, you return from the business of the day to your home, where I will suppose that you have the comforts of life all around you. You draw up your richly stuffed elbow chair by the side of a glowing fireplace, which beams and brightens upon the scene of elegance that your living room exhibits. A new and entertaining book is in your hand, and fruits and refreshments are by your side on a table. Here you may sit hour after hour, enjoying these means of comfort and happiness. During this time, you are carried away by the magic of the pen to distant and different scenes, from which you return now and then to listen a moment the roaring of the wintry wind or the beating of the snow upon your windows. If you have a quiet conscience, you may find much happiness in such a scene—especially if gratitude to God as the giver of such comforts, and as your kind Protector and Friend warms your heart and quickens your sensibilities. Here you sit, hour after hour, until Orion has made his steady way through the clouds and storms of the sky, and high into the heavens.

But, though this might be enjoyable, there is another way of spending an hour of the evening, which would also afford enjoyment, though of a different kind. You lay aside your book, trundle back your cushioned chair, pack your fruit and refreshments in a small basket, and take down from your bookshelf a little favorite volume of hymns. Then, muffling yourself as warmly as possible in cap and coat, you venture forth in the midst of the stormy night.

The brick sidewalk is half hidden by the drifts of snow, among

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which you make your slippery way until you turn onto a narrow sidewalk, guiding your steps to one of its humble houses. You enter by a low door. It is not, however, the abode of poverty. There is comfort and plenty under this roof, though on a different scale from that which you are accustomed.

The mother who welcomes you is a widow, and the daily labor of her hands procures for her all that is necessary for her needs, and much besides, which she enjoys as luxuries. She appreciates them more highly than you do the costly splendors you have left. Her bright, brass lamps, which she toiled several days to earn, and the plain rocking chair in the corner, are to her as valuable, and far more, than your fancy chandelier with its cut glass crystals, or your splendid ottoman.

In a word, all the needs of this family are well supplied, so that I will not introduce the reader to a scene of abject poverty, as you may have supposed. You must bring something more potent than money here if you wish to do good. You have something more powerful than money—Christian charity. This I will assume you have brought.

On one side of the fire is a cradle that the mother has been rocking. You take your seat in a low chair by its side, and leaning over it you look upon the pale face of a little sufferer who has been for many months languishing there. His disease has curved his back, brought his head over towards his breast, and contracted his lungs; he lies there in bonds which death only can sunder. Something like a smile lights up his features to see that his friend came again to see him, even through the storm. That smile and its meaning will repay you for the cold blasts which you encountered on your way to the sick room. After a few minutes conversation with the boy, you ask if he would like to have you walk with him a little. He reaches up his arms to you, clearly pleased with the proposal, and you lift him from his pillow. The relief he experiences in extending his limbs, cramped by the narrow dimensions of his cradle, begins his happiness.

You raise your arms. He is not heavy. Disease has diminished his weight, and you walk back and forth across the room with a gentle step,

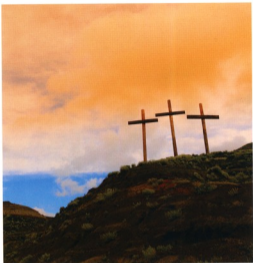
his head reclining upon your shoulder. The uneasy, restless expression which was upon his face is gradually changed for one of peaceful repose; until, at length, lulled by the gentle sound of your voice, he drops into a quiet slumber. You may walk with him frequently across the floor, before fatigue will counterbalance the pleasure you will receive in watching his placid and happy look reflected in the glass behind you when you turn.

Eventually he wakes, and you gently lay him down into his cradle again. You read him a hymn expressive of resignation to God and confidence in His kind protection. Kneeling down by his cradle and holding his hand in yours, you offer a simple prayer on his behalf. And when at length you prepare to leave, you see in his countenance a change for the better. You then feel the spontaneous pressure of his little hand, telling you that his heart is full of happiness and gratitude. In witnessing it, and in recalling the scene to your mind in your cold and stormy walk home, you will experience an enjoyment that I cannot describe, but all who have experienced it will understand. This enjoyment is very different in its nature from the solitary happiness you would have felt at your own fireside. Which kind, now, do you prefer?

True, the case I have described is an experiment on a very small scale. The good done was very little; it was only a half hour's partial relief for a sick child and his mother, and another half hour's happiness for them afterwards, as they consider in silence and solitude the kindness of their visitor. This is truly doing good on a small scale, but then it is made by just a small effort. It illustrates well, because of its being so simple a case, the point that you may take two totally different actions to make a winter evening pass pleasantly. It is not, however, merely a difference of means when the end is the same, but a difference in the very end and object itself.

"But is not the end sought in both cases our own happiness?" you ask.

"No, it is not." And this leads me to a distinction, an important spiritual distinction that everyone who wishes to perform charity on



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