

3 JOHN 1-13

LOVED IN TRUTH

“The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.

“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

“Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

“I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

“Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

“I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink.”¹

We meet Gaius only one time in Scripture, and that is here in the brief book we know as Third John. The book, if it can be called a book, is actually a personal letter to this man. In this letter, the author encourages Gaius to continue doing what he has been doing to advance the Kingdom of God. Likely, Gaius pastored a congregation, perhaps in the Roman province of Asia. He distinguished himself through faithful service to the One who appointed him to his charge, and John, occupying a position of respect among the believers, was aware of his service.

The aged Apostle uses an arresting phrase when addressing Gaius. He says Gaius is loved in truth: “The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth.” This is a theological statement affirming the orthodoxy of Gaius. “Truth” is the Elder’s way of pointing out theological orthodoxy, theological orthopraxy and Christian love in the face of challenges mounted by others, even among the churches.

TRUTH AS WITNESSED IN ORTHODOXY — Every religion claims to be orthodox—even those that are identified as cults. Christians often seem ready, even eager, to cast aspersions on fellow believers who do not agree with them. Let me say quite frankly that we will not ever agree fully on every doctrine that is presented. This should not be surprising since after all, the revelation of God draws us to explore One who is infinite. Thus, the truths revealed through His Word are far greater than we could dare imagine with our limited understanding and with the finite abilities we possess.

Orthodoxy speaks of “right doctrine.” We can always find something about which we disagree with fellow Christians. I heard of a businessman who was driving home from work when he saw a man perched on the side of a bridge. It was obvious that this man was preparing to jump from the span into the dark waters below. Moved with compassion for the poor soul prepared to take his life, this businessman stopped his car, got out and crawled over the railing and stepped onto the bridge span with the man threatening to end it all. Getting close, the businessman tried to strike up a conversation.

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“Man, don’t jump,” the businessman started. “Surely you’ve got something worth living for.”

“Life isn’t worth living,” said the dejected man, looking down at the river below. “My wife ran away. My dog died. The bank seized my car. The mortgage company repossessed my house. I was fired from my job. Life just isn’t worth living.”

Well, this was a serious situation, and so the businessman changed his tack. He decided to point the desperate man to God. “You know,” he began, “I’m a Christian, and maybe if you knew God...”

“I’m a Christian,” interjected the jumper with genuine interest in his voice.

“Yeah? What denomination?”

“I’m a Baptist.”

“Wow! I’m a Baptist too! Convention or Independent?”

“Independent.”

“Great! So am I. Missionary or Anti-missionary?”

“Missionary.”

“Okay! Armenian or Calvinist?”

“Calvinist.”

“No kidding! Eschatology?”

“Pre-millennial.”

The fellow who was trying to help became very excited, and so he asked, “Pre-trib? Post-trib? Or Mid-Trib?”

“Pre-trib.”

“All right! Dispensational theology or Covenant theology?”

“Dispensational.”

“Traditional dispensationalist or Progressive dispensationalist?”

“Traditional dispensationalist.”

By this point, the man who had been threatening to jump was relaxing and beginning to step back from the brink. The erstwhile rescuer then asked, “Open Communion or Closed Communion?”

“Closed Communion.”

With that, the man who had stopped to help gave him a shove and said, “Die, infidel.”

Truth is orthodoxy. Let’s establish that God is true, as is attested repeatedly throughout the Word. “Whoever receives [Jesus’] testimony sets his seal to this, that **God is true**” [JOHN 3:33]. Paul speaks of the Lord God as “the Living and True God” [1 THESSALONIANS 1:9]. Moreover, in his first letter, the Apostle John identifies Jesus as “the True God and Eternal Life” [1 JOHN 5:20].

For a brief moment, focus on that singular verse which states, “We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life” [1 JOHN 5:20]. It is obvious that John speaks of God as true, but that last affirmation has created controversy from earliest days. The Arians, who denied the Triune God, attempted to evade the impact of John’s words, but, clearly he wrote of Jesus. The word behind “He” is *hōutos*, or “this one” (the nearest one just mentioned). Therefore, John is referring to Jesus Christ. John was unequivocally testifying that Jesus is the True God. He was affirming the deity of Jesus, just as he had earlier affirmed Jesus humanity [see 1 JOHN 4:1-6].

I know that there are scholars who argue that John is saying that the Father is the true God. These scholars argue that since Jesus testified in His high priestly prayer [see JOHN 17:3], “This is eternal life, that they know You the Only True God,” then John would not say that the Son of God is the Only True God here. However, such an argument is redundant, for then John has said that the Son of God has given us understanding “so that we know God who is true ... He is the true God.” They are forced to admit that such wording is highly artificial and fails to hold to the Greek that John employed.

Calvin, in his commentary on this letter, wrote of this verse: “Though the Arians have attempted to elude this passage, and some agree with them at this day, yet we have here a remarkable testimony to the divinity of Christ. The Arians apply this passage to the Father, as though the Apostle should again repeat that he is the true God. But nothing could be more frigid than such a repetition. He has already twice testified that the true God is he who has been made known to us in Christ, why should he again add, *This is the true God?* It applies, indeed, most suitably to Christ; for after having taught us that Christ is the guide by whose hand we are led to God, he now, by way of amplifying, affirms that Christ is that God, lest we should think that we are to seek further; and he confirms this view by what is added, *and eternal life*. It is doubtless the same that is spoken of, as being the true God and eternal life. I pass by this, that the relative *hōutos* usually refers to the last person. I say, then, that Christ is properly called eternal life; and that this mode of speaking perpetually occurs in John, no one can deny.”²

If we know Christ, we know the True God. Moreover, knowing Him, we delight in the truth. We are not content to hear what others think about Him—we want to know Him. One of the great tragedies of contemporary Christianity is that so many of the professed followers of the Christ really know nothing of Him or of His will. Professed Christians generally have a vaguely religious idea of what God expects, but they are actually incapable of making wise decisions because they are effectively ignorant of what God has revealed in His Word. Early in my Christian walk, I was stunned when I discovered how little time “mature Christians” spent in the Word—reading what God has provided for our instruction and meditating on what has been written. It is now some thirty years ago that I participated in an informal survey that included a large number of Christian leaders—all that participated were either pastors or Sunday school teachers. The survey revealed that on average these leaders invested less than ten minutes a day reading the Word of God. I assure you that for these leaders, far more time was spent reading the daily newspaper, watching television or listening to music.

Orthodoxy does not mean that we all agree with one another on every detail of doctrine. It does mean that we adhere to certain truths that define us as Christians. We believe that ***Jesus Christ is very God*** in human flesh, that He was born of a virgin and walked among men. We believe that ***He died a sacrificial death***, giving His life as atonement for the sin of all mankind. We are convinced that ***He was buried***, and that on the third day ***He rose from the grave***, and that He was seen by those who knew Him and who had walked with Him. We believe that ***He ascended into Heaven*** where He is seated at the right hand of the Father, from whence He shall return at a time determined by the Father. We are certain that ***all who look to Him in Faith—without relying on any human effort—receive the forgiveness of sin***, being born from above and into the Family of God. We know these truths because ***God has revealed them to us in His Word***, which is inerrant and infallible. Then, having received Jesus as Master over life, we received His Spirit who now lives in us, gifting us and guiding us into truth.

These truths define the Christian Faith. One may be religious, or even nice; but denial of these truths precludes being a Christian. John has written, “Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” [2 JOHN 9-11].

The “teaching of Christ” defines the essence of this Faith. Should someone ask you for the tenets of the Christian Faith, it is the teaching of Christ. Let me stress these truths again. Jesus Christ is God. He died a sacrificial death. He was buried and rose from the dead. He ascended into Heaven. He is coming again. Faith in this risen Son of God without any works secures the forgiveness of sin. We know these truths because He has revealed them in His Word, which we accept as true and accurate.

² John Calvin and John Owen, **Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles** (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Bellingham, WA 2010) 274

This recitation of foundational truth is neither all the truth nor even a majority of Christian truth. It is not the full definition of the Christian Faith; however, all Christians hold these truths in common with every other believer. There are many doctrines about which we may disagree and over which we may argue. However, the truths that are named constitute the heart of our Faith—they define what it means to be a Christian. There are yet other truths that distinguish us as orthodox, as evangelical, and even as Baptist. However, beyond these basic doctrines, each of us is well advised to carry our beloved doctrines lightly. Some fellow saints with whom we disagree on significant points are wonderful believers who merit our respect and admiration.

I could never be a Methodist. Nevertheless, I rejoice that Charles Wesley loved God and wrote the hymns that continue to bless Christians to this day, even as the preaching of his brother pulled a nation back from the brink of destruction and fanned revival fires in the New World. Similarly, I could never be a Presbyterian. However, some of the great divines from within this communion have blessed me just as they have multitudes of Christians. Dr. James Montgomery Boice has often blessed me as I read his sermons. The insight into deep doctrinal truths provided by J. Gresham Machen, Benjamin Warfield and James Orr has provided training that has blessed thousands of ministers throughout the years; and the incisive mind of John Calvin has challenged believers throughout the centuries. Likewise, though I would make a very poor Anglican, I appreciate godly men such as John Stott, J. I. Packer and Philipps Brooks who held to the holy Faith that we share.

A man whose messages greatly encouraged me in years past, John R. Rice, frequently took heat from fellow believers who disagreed with his policy of publishing the sermons of people who were aligned with groups that were not precisely to their liking. I have witnessed Doctor Rice declaring, both in print and from the pulpit, the precept espoused in the Word of God:

“I *am* a companion of all *them* that fear thee,
And of them that keep thy precepts.”³

[PSALM 119:63]

He is correct in this matter. Each individual who holds to this set of essential truth is a fellow believer in the Risen Son of God; thus each one holding to these truths is my brother or my sister. Those who hold such truth have a desire to know God, to know His will and to know all that He reveals of Himself. They may not have all the answers, but they know where to look.

Let me illustrate what I mean by noting an incident that occurred many years ago while I was still pursuing my doctorate. I had developed a friendship with a brilliant technician. Richard was studious, and he was well versed in philosophical issues. He was religious, though he was uncertain about this “born again” stuff. Day-after-day he came to my lab during his breaks to speak with me about issues of philosophy and religion. He was adamant that he could not accept the Bible as authoritative because it did not agree with his view on origins. We discussed this on multiple occasions—he would thrust with an argument, and I would parry with a Bible verse.

I invited him to bring his wife and join Lynda and me in a Bible study that I was starting in our home. We would meet on Tuesday evenings for about an hour to look into the Word of God. He agreed to be there the following Tuesday evening. I proposed that we study the Gospel of Mark. When he and Mary Ann showed up, he was carrying two complete copies—four massive volumes—of the Jerusalem Bible, as they were approved by the church in which the couple had been raised. We looked into the Word, studying that first chapter of Mark’s Gospel, carefully examining what was written; and I endeavoured to answer as thoroughly as possible the questions that arose from our study.

³ Holy Bible: Authorised Version

We were enjoying some refreshments when Mary Ann commented, “I really look forward to the day when I can write in the front of my Bible that I have been born again.”

Without hesitating, I said, “Lynda, go get a pen.”

Sitting in our living room, we looked again to the Word of God. We read **ROMANS 3:23**, that dark passage that informs us that “all have sinned and lack God's glory.”⁴ When asked, Mary Ann quickly agreed that she had indeed sinned, and that therefore she indeed lacked God's glory.

She almost wept as she read **ROMANS 6:23** where we are warned, “The wage paid by sin is death.” However, her dismay was turned to joy when she continued to read from that verse and learned that, “The gift freely given by God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁵

I pointed her to **ROMANS 5:6-8**, and as she read you could see a glorious light dawning on her face. “When we were still helpless, at the appointed time Christ died for the godless. You could hardly find anyone ready to die even someone upright; though it is just possible that, for a really good person, someone might undertake to die. So it is proof of God's love for us, that Christ died for us while we were still sinners.”⁶ She was so excited when she read that the death of Christ was proof of God's love. But her excitement turned to consternation when I asked, “How does one appropriate this love?”

“I don't know,” she confessed.

So we turned to another passage in the Letter Paul wrote to Romans Christians, where she read, “If you declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you believe with your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved. It is by believing with the heart that you are justified, and by making the declaration with your lips that you are saved” [**ROMANS 10:9, 10**].⁷ We quickly scanned down to read God's promise that “All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved” [**ROMANS 10:13**].⁸

“Now, Mary Ann,” I asked, seeking to draw her out, “what must you do in order to be saved?”

“Why, I must declare that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised Him from the dead,” she confidently asserted, “and I do believe that God raised Him from the dead, and that He is my Lord.”

“Then, why don't we kneel right now and you can tell the Master that you are prepared to believe Him, to receive Him as Master over your life?” So, we knelt at the chesterfield. She folded her hands and bowed her head and prayed the sweetest prayer you have ever heard, asking Jesus to receive her because she believed His promise.

As we were kneeling there, I reached over and placing Richard's hand in Mary Ann's, I asked him, “Richard, shouldn't you join your wife in making Jesus Master over your life.” As though making a decision about the conduct of an experiment, Richard responded, “Yes. Yes, I believe I should.” Then, he also knelt and asked Jesus to receive Him as one who believed in His death and resurrection.

I taught them of baptism. If Jesus was to reign over their life, shouldn't He have a coronation ceremony? Baptism was the sign which has been given to all who believe to openly identify their allegiance to the Saviour as Master. They quickly grasped the significance of what I was saying. Mary Ann astonished me with her immediate insight as she said, “Why, it is like getting married, isn't it? We don't put on a ring in order to get married, but because we have made a commitment of love we put on a wedding ring.” So, I urged them to join me in church the following Sunday where they would confess their newfound faith and we would make arrangements to follow the Master's command for those who are born from above to identify with Him in baptism after they believe.

⁴ **New Jerusalem Bible**, Catholic Online Bible, (http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=52&bible_chapter=3), accessed 26 March 2010

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

The next day, Richard wandered into my lab as I was preparing some tests. Seating himself on a stool at my lab bench, he said, “You know, Mike, I still believe in evolution, but I find myself wanting to believe that is written in the Bible.” Richard and Mary Ann were baptised and they did continue with Christ; and he ultimately began to play organ for a vibrant congregation in Irving, Texas near his home.

That is the work of God’s Spirit in the life of His child. We may not have all our questions resolved at once, but we know where to look; and we find ourselves wanting to believe the Word of God. Frankly, when I see professing Christians who are combative, who want to suppress questions and who want to coerce uniformity, I know they cannot have known the Spirit of Christ. Their actions demonstrate that they are ignorant of Christ, who would not break a bruised reed nor quench a smouldering wick [see MATTHEW 12:20]. Those who know Christ rejoice whenever they hear of others walking in the truth, and especially when they have been privileged to share in bringing those fellow saints into the truth. Each Christian loves the brothers, rejoicing that they share this glorious truth.

TRUTH AS WITNESSED IN ORTHOPRAXY — The Christian Faith is not expressed solely through confessions. The truths we hold dear are lived out through lives that endeavour to honour the Master. *What I believe is seen in how I live; all else is mere talk.* If I believe God is sovereign, it will be reflected through quietness and confidence in my response to the world about me. If I believe the Spirit of God dwells among His people, I will treat them with respect and honour. If I believe Christ is the head of His church, I will encourage the people to prayerfully seek His will rather than forcing my will through a vote. Let me say again: *what I believe is seen through my life; all else is mere talk.*

You see the encouragement to live godly lives revealed throughout the pages of the New Testament. The Apostle urges the churches scattered throughout the Meander Valley in the Letter we know as Ephesians, “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” [EPHESIANS 4:1-3]. As you have heard me say on other occasions, whenever you see a “therefore,” ask what it is there for.

Paul urges this on the believers because Christ rescued us from darkness and alienation, bringing us into His glorious light where we are growing into a holy temple in the Lord [see EPHESIANS 2:11-21]. We are also “being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” [EPHESIANS 2:22]. Moreover, the Apostle had encouraged those who read his words to recognise his status as a servant of God on their behalf, and to realise the privileged position they occupied as followers of the Saviour [EPHESIANS 3:1-21]. Paul is teaching that our actions reflect our theology—what we believe dictates how we live. The worst theology to have is none at all, for then we are left to swing from one extreme to another, susceptible to every impulse generated by our fallen flesh.

Listen, as the Apostle builds on this concept of belief directing the life. As I read the words of this extended portion of the letter, take special note of the manner in which the Apostle weaves orthodoxy and orthopraxy, assuming that what is believed dictates how one lives. “Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that you must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds. They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart. They have become callous and have given themselves up to sensuality, greedy to practice every kind of impurity. But that is not the way you learned Christ!— assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness” [EPHESIANS 4:17-24]. The way in which you learned Christ demands that you live according to the doctrine you hold.

“Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbour, for we are members one of another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you” [EPHESIANS 4:25-32]. What you believe dictates how you live.

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God” [EPHESIANS 5:1, 2]. If you believe Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us, you will endeavour to be an imitator of God.

“Sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not become partners with them; for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” [EPHESIANS 5:3-12]. As one who knows God, as one who is in the Kingdom of Christ, as one who has an inheritance from the Father, you will reflect this divine heritage through seeking to do what is right.

Whenever someone says they are concerned because of the direction the world appears to be heading and in fear or in rage they advocate taking up arms or they seek to injure others, they demonstrate that they know nothing of the God who saved them. I am not saying that a Christian cannot be wrong—they can. I am, however, saying that if we have our theology right we will not choose to dishonour Him who loved us and gave Himself for us by choosing to use the means of this dying world to accomplish the spiritual goals of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Whenever a cabal within a church resorts to political stratagems or manipulating others in an effort to accomplish their goals rather than seeking to instruct the congregation from the Word of God, we can be assured that those people are ignorant of the Person of Christ and know nothing of His design for the church of the Living God. Theology determines how we will live.

Note just a couple of points that substantiate this frequently neglected truth. The Master said, “You will recognize [false prophets] by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will recognize them by their fruits” [MATTHEW 7:16-20]. What is believed dictates how one lives.

Jesus also taught those who are His disciples, “What comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person” [MATTHEW 15:18-20]. What one believes determines how they live.

Listen to one final portion of the Word on this matter. “As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” [COLOSSIANS 2:6, 7]. What you believe determines how you live.

Paul continued by writing, “See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” [COLOSSIANS 2:8-15]. What is believed dictates how one lives.

Gaius was loved in truth, and truth led him to live a godly and holy life. The truth which he had embraced and the godliness lived out through his life was reflected in the hospitality shown to itinerating preachers—the missionaries that had come to his church. The truth of Christ that he had embraced was seen in his refusal to imitate evil, and in his desire to imitate good. Similarly, you and I, when we have sound theology, will live godly and righteous lives that reflect what we have embraced.

TRUTH AS WITNESSED IN LOVE — There is an affinity between Christians; they love one another. Though they may not have been introduced previously, when they meet, they love one another. This love should not be defined as an emotion; rather, it is a preference, a choice, a conscious decision to accept one another. It is not a conditional acceptance as is often practised in the world; but it is an acceptance because of shared relationship to the Father through the Son of God. Therefore, it is fair to note that though Christians may not like one another, they love one another. And therein lies a significant difference between followers of the Risen Son of God and earth dwellers.

John wrote of loving Gaius in truth. While we have explored the fact that the realm in which we who are believers love one another is the realm of truth—orthodoxy and orthopraxy—it is vital to note that we do in fact love one another. The world about us is frequently confused about the love we share. Seldom are inhabitants of this fallen world able to rise far above sexual gratification, claiming that this is love. What the world considers to be love gratifies, but it can never satisfy. What they seem to seek is a poor substitute for the love of which John writes. Love was not the creation of this present generation, though to observe the shenanigans of the world you would imagine that this generation alone discovered sex and renamed it love. Interestingly enough, the Bible does not ever use the Greek term *eros*, referring to the sexual act, to describe love.

The Bible does speak of that love which defines the sense of commitment between members of a family. The term *philēō* defines love or affection between persons (even for things) based on association. This type of love can be very precious, indeed. However, this particular form of love can become a source of condemnation. Jesus warned, “Whoever loves (*philēō*) father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves (*philēō*) son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me” [MATTHEW 10:37]. Likewise, James cautions that “friendship (*philia*) with the world is enmity with God” [JAMES 4:4].

I find it interesting that throughout the pages of the New Testament that there is not a single instance of God commanding His people to love with *philēō* type of love. *Philēō* seems to be a naturally occurring affection that we feel toward others when we share a close relationship with them. This is not an inferior form of love; it is simply descriptive of a love that can flow somewhat naturally in many instances. Indeed, this sort of love describes the relationship between God and those who follow Him [e.g. JOHN 16:27]; it also describes the love shared between the Father and the Son [e.g. JOHN 5:20].

However, we Christians are commanded to love one another with the love that is often used to describe God's nature— *agapáō* and *agápā*. This is love that is based on appreciation and high regard. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love (*agapáō*) one another; just as I have loved (*agapáō*) you, you also are to love (*agapáō*) one another" [JOHN 13:34]. Likewise, we are taught that "The Father loves (*agapáō*) the Son and has given all things into His hand" [JOHN 3:35]. In fact, the commandment we received flows naturally from the nature of Him who is our Father. We are taught, "We love (*agapáō*) because He first loved (*agapáō*) us" [1 JOHN 4:19]. Finally, Christians are taught that "Love (*agápā*) does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love (*agápā*) is the fulfilling of the law" [ROMANS 13:10].

There is affection that is natural; and though this may be subsumed at times, it wells up in each life that has not been utterly contaminated by wickedness. On the other hand, we who are children of the Living God are commanded to choose to love one another with the same sacrificial love that we received from the Father. Perhaps we find it difficult to imagine how we can cultivate such love for one another. The answer is that we cannot. We must confess our own inability to so love, drawing deeply from the love that we have received from the Father. Frankly, we have lived so long in this world that we struggle not to define our feelings for one another by how we feel. Let me say very clearly that the love we are to have for one another is independent of how we feel about one another.

Perhaps there isn't really such a great difference between these two loves, other than the fact that we choose to love as God has taught us, even though we may not feel the natural affection that comes from association. In drawing the message to a close, I invite you to consider what I trust is a familiar portion of the Word of God. The passage is found in John's Gospel as Jesus was re-commissioning Peter after he appeared to have fallen from such a great height.

"Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love (*agapáō*) me more than these others?' 'Yes, Lord,' he replied, 'you know that I am your friend (*philéō*).' 'Then feed my lambs,' returned Jesus. Then he said for the second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love (*agapáō*) me?' 'Yes, Lord,' returned Peter. 'You know that I am your friend (*philéō*).' 'Then care for my sheep,' replied Jesus. Then for the third time, Jesus spoke to him and said, 'Simon, son of John, are you my friend (*philéō*)?' Peter was deeply hurt because Jesus' third question to him was 'Are you my friend (*philéō*)?', and he said, 'Lord, you know everything. You know that I am your friend (*philéō*)!' 'Then feed my sheep,' Jesus said to him" [JOHN 21:15-17].⁹

Peter acknowledged that he felt deep affection for Jesus, but he was no longer able to say that he could live in such a way that esteem for the Master controlled his actions. Nevertheless, that is the sort of love that God calls us to have. Perhaps we need to begin with the affection we have that grows out of the fact that He redeems us from our sin and calls us to be His child. It is a great starting place for each of us. To enter into this relationship, we must be born from above and into the Family of God.

The Word of God tells us of Christ's love for us, witnessed through the fact that He gave Himself for us. As we saw earlier, He now calls us to respond to His love by voluntarily surrendering to His reign over our life. We are taught in the Word of God, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:17-21]. Amen.

⁹ J. B. Phillips, The New Testament in Modern English (<http://www.ccel.org/bible/phillips/JBPNT.htm>) accessed 27 March 2010