

(Power From on High) 17. the Spirit of Love

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon emphasizes the importance of divine love, which is a new creation and the fruit of the supernatural life imparted by the Holy Ghost.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, John 13:34-35, Romans 5:5, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2-3, Colossians 1:8, 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 3:18, 1 John 4:7-8

Topics: "Divine Love", "Unity in the Spirit"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the profound nature of 'love in the Spirit' as reported by Epaphras regarding the Colossian Church, which was characterized by divine love that transcends mere human affection. This love, rooted in the Holy Spirit, fosters unity, selflessness, and a deep connection among believers, contrasting sharply with natural love that is often selfish and conditional. Simpson illustrates that divine love is patient, enduring, and unconditional, reflecting God's own love for humanity, especially in times of suffering and wrong. He calls for believers to embody this love, which is a manifestation of Christ within them, and to see every challenge as an opportunity to grow in love. Ultimately, he urges the church to embrace the Holy Spirit's guidance in cultivating this divine love that fulfills the law and embodies holiness.

Transcript

"Your love in the Spirit." Col. 1: 8.

This is the only reference to the Holy Spirit in the Epistle to the Colossians. The theme of this beautiful letter is the fullness and glory of Jesus. But Jesus cannot be glorified without recognizing the Holy Ghost; and so we have this brief reference to the blessed Spirit. But brief as it is, it shines like a heavenly pearl, reflecting the deepest and most important truths concerning the blessed Comforter.

The apostle had just been visited by Epaphras, one of the ministers of the Colossian Church, and he had reported to him the condition of that Church. It was all summed up in one sentence, "He declared unto us your love in the Spirit." This seems to have been the one characteristic of this Colossian Church; it was full of love. Its fellowship was perfect, its union unbroken; its members were filled with charity, unselfishness and consideration for one another. There were no gossiping tongues; there were no slanderous rumors; there were no misunderstandings and quarrels; there were no criticisms, murmurings and bad feelings, but all were joined together in harmonious love and beautiful cooperation in the testimony, work and worship of the Church. And this was manifestly a divine unity. It was "love in the Spirit." It was not mere partisanship, nor personal friendship; it was not because they were clannish, and united in little cliques of

personal favoritism, but it was all so heavenly, so holy, so Christ-like that it was evidently the prompting of the Holy Ghost. And so, as the apostle hears of it, he exclaims with thanksgiving and deep joy, "We give thanks to God, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven."

Would to God that this beautiful picture might be more frequently repeated. Let us look at it as a pattern of true Christian love and an illustration of the choicest and noblest work of the Holy Spirit.

There is plenty of love in the world and always will be. It is the secret of every romance, the theme of every poem, and the center of every play that has ever touched the heart of humanity, or charmed the ears of men. It lies back of all that is heroic in national history. It gilds every record of patriotism and glorifies every home altar and fireside. But there is a great difference between the love of nature and "love in the Spirit."

I.

Natural love is an instinct and a passion; the love of the Spirit is a new creation and the fruit of the supernatural life imparted by the Holy Ghost, when the soul is born from above. The natural heart knows nothing about it. Human love may only be a little higher in measure, degree and character than the instinct of the mother bird over her young, or the fondness of the lioness for her cubs. It is born of earth and with earth it will pass away. But the love of the Spirit descends from above. It is part of the nature of God and it must last forever. It is the kinship of a heavenly family and the bond of an eternal home.

II.

Natural love is selfish in its nature and terminates upon its own gratification; divine love is unselfish and reaches out to the good of its object. And therefore the strongest affection born of earthly passion may turn to the bitterest hate, if it is crossed and disappointed. It can strike down, with the deathblow of vengeance, the one for whom it would have given its life, when that one awakens its jealousy and resentment. Divine love on the other hand, forgets itself, and seeks to bless its object.

It does not love for the sake of the pleasure of loving, nor for the sake of the pleasure the loved one can afford; but it loves in order to bless and help and elevate and it shrinks from no sacrifice even the sacrifice of its own happiness, if it may accomplish its high purpose for its object.

III.

Natural love is based upon the attractive qualities of its object; divine love springs from something within, and is the outflow of an irresistible impulse in itself. Mere human love is attracted by the goodness and loveliness of the one it loves, fancied or real. But divine love can seize upon the most unlovely, can love it into loveliness, and can keep on loving through an impulse in its own heart, when everything in the circumstances would render it impossible. And so, "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

We see a faint approximation to this kind of love in true motherhood. Who ever saw a mother yet that did not have a "beautiful baby?" Others might not see it but she sees it. And even when that babe is decrepit, feeble and fretful, and a source of constant trial and strain, instead of lessening, it intensifies that maternal affection. Night and day it is her joy to minister and suffer and serve; and when that little sufferer passes out of her life, her loss is all the greater because it cost her so much, and she knows not how to get on

without the frail and feeble dependent one, which was almost her very life.

God loved us because of something in Himself and so if Christ is dwelling in us, we shall love because of the Christ within us, and we shall love even the unworthy and the unlovely, because He loves them, even when we cannot love them for themselves.

IV.

Natural love is sensitive and lives in the sunshine of responsive affection, but divine love is long-suffering, patient, and true, in the darkest hour of suffering and wrong. The very element of divine love is suffering. In the sublime picture given in First Corinthians, the thirteenth chapter, love begins her march by "suffering long," and ends by "enduring all things," while in the center stands the signal, "love is not provoked." The whole environment of her being is suffering and wrong. She can suffer without being unkind and endure without being hard. Her sublimest example is the Son of God in the midst of His cruel foes; the more they wronged Him, the more He felt that they needed His love and the more He longed to suffer that He might bless and save them. This is ever the spirit of Christian love.

A few weeks ago, when half a score of martyrs fell in Southern China, one of the survivors, in speaking of that hour, said that when they were all expecting death, the only consciousness which she remembered was the intense joy and love which seemed to be breathed into their hearts from the very gates of heaven. And when the tidings reached their friends in England, there was no word of resentment, even from those who loved them best, but a still deeper longing to go forth in yet diviner love and save men from the ignorance and the blindness which could make them perpetrate such a crime.

The love that blesses those that bless us is only earthly, "do not even the publicans the same?" But the love that reaches out to those who can make no return, the love that blesses them that curse us, and prays for them that spitefully use us and persecute us, and would die for those that would take our very life, this is the love of God; this the Holy Ghost alone can produce in the heart.

V.

Natural love is fitful; divine love is abiding and everlasting. Natural love depends either upon our moods or the moods of those we love. But divine love is the eternal Christ within us, loving on the same through good and ill forever. Oh, how much we need to pray, "Search me, oh God, and see if there be in me any evil way, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

Do we not want the affections that shall be forever? Are we not tired of having our heartstrings torn? He is able to give us His own everlasting love.

VI.

Natural love is exclusive, partial, and partisan; divine love is comprehensive and universal, like the very heart of God. It does not love its favorites, but it loves for love's sake all that need to be loved. It does not ignore the closer ties and fellowships of life. It does not love all alike with the same affection nor even with the same degree; but it loves each in the place where God has fitted him and her into our life, and loves all in due proportion and world-wide sympathy.

It gives the husband a deeper affection to the wife, who has her peculiar place in his heart. It gives the friend a yet more delicate and special bond of fellowship with the one that fits into the closest sympathy

and fellowship of the heart. But it has room for every fellowship, every tie, and every friend, each in his true place, and all in perfect symmetry, and fullness. Like the broad bright sunshine, it goes wherever there is room, and it goes most quickly where there is largest room. Like the blessed Master, it has the John, that leans upon its breast, and the Mary, that enters into its deeper confidences; but it has also the Peter who, in his place, is loved as truly, the Thomas, who finds the sympathy he needs, and the little child, that lies in His bosom with confiding delight. This is the love of God.

Human love becomes antagonistic and dislikes those who are not within the charmed circle, but God's great love has a universal fairness, justness, and rightness, and yet a sweeter tenderness, and a finer delicacy in its every heart-throb and holy tendril, than the finest sentiment of human affection.

VII.

Human love is intemperate; divine love is moderate and self-restrained. The petulant, passionate mother, in one moment can hug to her bosom her beloved child with passionate affection, and in the next can pour out the fierce invectives of wrath upon his head. The impulsive father can love his boy so intemperately and indulgently, as to be unwilling to deny him the wishes and gratifications which he knows may cost him his character and his future life. True love restrains and even dares to displease, that it may do even greater good in the end to its object. And thus God loves us, even to wounding us that He may heal, and chastening us, that He may save.

Thus it was that Joseph loved his brothers, restraining the bursting affection of his heart, while he sternly stood off from these guilty men, and brought them to repentance; and then, when they saw their wrong, he was the first to forgive, and help them to forget; throwing himself upon their bosom, with passionate intensity he cried, "Be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, it was not you, but God."

This is divine love, a thoughtful, sober, far-seeing devotion, brave enough to wound that it may heal, and to correct that it may save.

VIII.

Human love lives by sight; divine love walks by faith. And so we read, "love believeth all things, hopeth all things." When it cannot see the quality of loveliness in its object now, it prays that God may place it there, and it believes in the answer to its prayer, and acts as if it were already fulfilled; and then hope joins hands with faith and looks out into the future, until the vision becomes a present realization, and it covers its object with all the glory of that which some day is to be.

Thus God loves us. He sees us, not as we are today in our unworthiness and sin, but as we shall be, some day, when we shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of our Father, and reflect the glory and the beauty of our Savior's face; and this is what He recognizes and delights in. He treats us every moment as if we were already glorified. He sees us "in heavenly places in Christ Jesus." He "believes all things, and hopes all things" for us, and purposes to fulfill all things in us. This is the love with which we should bless our friends. Thus should we pray for them, believe for them, and see them in the light of God and heaven; and thus our love will lift them up to its own vision, and realize in them its own holy purpose.

IX.

Human love is human; "love in the Spirit" is the love of God within us. It is the love of the Holy Ghost Himself, filling and flowing in our hearts. It is not the best that we can feel, or say, or do, but it is the very

heart of Christ reproduced in us. And so it has been well said that the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is just a photograph of Jesus, and the true way to read it is to insert Christ instead of love, and then to transfer to it our hearts and lives and insert Christ instead of self in our experience. Then, indeed, it shall be true that "Christ in us suffereth long and is kind; Christ in us seeketh not His own; Christ in us envieth not, is not puffed up; Christ in us rejoiceth not in iniquity but rejoiceth in the truth; Christ in us is not provoked; Christ in us beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and never faileth."

And so we are thrown back again upon Him, and constrained to sink out of self into Christ, and to say, "Not I, but Christ that liveth in me." This is the purpose of the Holy Ghost, to show us our insufficiency and Christ's all-sufficiency and, step by step, to transfer the living picture to our lives and reproduce the living reality in our experience.

This, then, is "Love in the Spirit." The blessed Spirit of Love has come down from heaven to teach us this crowning lesson of righteousness, holiness, and divine conformity. For "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in Him," Love is the fulfilling of the law. Love is the sum of all goodness. Love is the essence of holiness. Love is life.

The Holy Ghost has come to train us in the school of love. Day by day He leads us out into some new lesson as we are able to bear it. And when things seem hard and trying, it is just another class in the school of discipline, another opportunity of putting on Christ Jesus and learning either the patience, or the long-suffering, or the gentleness of love.

An injured bishop was once complaining to Francis De Sales how a brother had wronged him, lied about him, and tried in every way to defame him; the good saint listened and assented, saying, "Yes, my brother, it's all true; it's very wrong; it's very unkind; it's very unjust; it's very cruel;" and then he added, "but there is another side to it." "But," said the Bishop, "do you mean to say that there is any excuse or reason to justify this?"

"Not on his part, my brother, but there is on the other side of the question, a still higher reason for it, and it is this: that God has let all this happen to you, and all this to be said about you, to teach you the lesson that is worth more to you than even your good name, and that is to hold your tongue when people talk about you, which it is very evident you have not yet learned."

The good Bishop saw the lesson, and silently received it. Would to God that we might see in everything our Master's hand, our Teacher's lesson, our Father's love. Life would become to us a school of love, and we so sweetly perfected in this highest grace, that nothing could part us but, above the hand of every enemy we should see the hand of love more richly blessing us and making "even the wrath of man to praise" God, and minister to our perfection. Then, perhaps, we should some day be able to say, like one of the Medieval saints, "It is so sweet to love my enemies that if it were a sin to do so, I fear I should be tempted to commit that sin, and if it were forbidden by the Lord, I fear it would be the greatest temptation of my life to disobey that commandment."

God, give us the "love of the Spirit," and say to us afresh the new commandment : "Love one another, as I have loved you."

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