

Love and Perfect Love the Same

by Daniel Steele

The author's argument that love and perfect love are the same is flawed and misinterprets the context of 1 John ii, 5.

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 4:7-8, 1 John 4:17-18

Topics: "Divine Love", "Perfect Obedience"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches on the distinction between love and perfect love in John's first epistle, emphasizing that every child of God, in possessing God's love, also possesses perfect love. He refutes the idea that perfect love is solely divine love from God to us, highlighting that believers become 'partakers of the divine nature' by reflecting God's holiness and moral character. Steele challenges the notion that 'perfect love' is a meaningless term, asserting that it signifies the complete observance of God's commandments, leading to the perfection of love for Him.

Transcript

THE author labors very hard to prove that love and perfect love in John's first epistle are exactly the same. He says : "Every child of God, in having God's love, has perfect love." He assumes that "perfect love" is always divine love; that is, God's love to us. "God, as it were, takes a portion of himself and infuses into our being, thereby making us 'partakers of the divine nature.' And this nature is always the same, pure and perfect." The phrase, "as it were," saves the author from the pantheistic assertion that we are scraps of God.

Whedon and Alford explain "partakers of the divine nature" as becoming "like God in holiness and all his moral nature." Alford's note on 1 John ii, 5, is: "It is manifest that 'the love of God ' must be our love toward God, not his love toward us;" and our author's exegesis "is manifestly alien from the context," the sum of which is that "the perfect observation of his commandments is the perfection of love to him." Everyone who continuously keeps [present tense] God's commands is perfected in love.

This is rarely, if ever, true of babes in Christ. This, then, is not "precisely the same as to say that every child of God, in having God's love, has perfect love." The idea that the adjective "perfect," the biggest in the New Testament, is a meaningless expletive, in the First Epistle of John, is a novelty in exegetics which the theory of our author has driven him to invent. Let us apply it to other texts: iv, 7: "Everyone that loveth perfectly is born of God." This rendering would be a very wet and cold blanket for a newborn babe whose love is feeble and fitful.

Another blanket still more frosty is iv, 18 : "He that feareth has no love," and hence is no Christian at all. Again, iv, 8: "He who does not [perfectly] love does not know God, for God is [perfect] love." In iv, 17, the rendering of perfect love as "God's love to us" is " forbidden by the whole context." Alford. Moreover God's love cannot become perfected, for it is always perfect. Our friend's exposition of 1 John is a conspicuous failure, so far as he attempts to prove that there is no difference between love and perfect love.

His declaration that perfect love is God's love to us was very early made by Beza to rob the Roman Catholics of a proof text for their doctrine of perfection by keeping the three counsels of perfection -- chastity, in the sense of celibacy, poverty, the gift of all possessions to the monastery or nunnery, and obedience to the ecclesiastical autocrats placed over them. We are inclined to think that some modern expositors are swayed from the correct exegesis by a desire to wrest this text from the advocates of Christian perfection found among the Protestants.

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