

Perfect Love

by Thomas Cook

Thomas Cook's sermon 'Perfect Love' explores the transformative power of Divine love in the believer's life and its implications for service and obedience to God.

Scripture: John 15:13, Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:13, 1 John 3:1, 1 John 4:7, 1 John 4:12, 1 John 4:16, 1 John 4:18-19

Topics: "Divine Love", "Sacrificial Service"

Description

Thomas Cook delves into the two types of love mentioned in the New Testament: philo, representing natural human affection, and agape, symbolizing Divine affection imparted by the Holy Ghost. He emphasizes that Divine love is a gift from God, transforming us into His children and enabling us to love others. Cook explores the profound truth of God's love being bestowed upon us, leading to a love that mirrors Christ's sacrificial love. He highlights the importance of serving others as a demonstration of our love for Christ, emphasizing that love service is a joyful offering of a grateful heart.

Transcript

In the New Testament there are two words for love. One is philo, which is the word used to express natural human affection. This exists in greater or less degree throughout the entire animal kingdom, including all natural affections of human nature apart from Divine grace. The other word, agape, is invariably used to express a Divine affection, imparted to the soul by the Holy Ghost. Natural love existed within us before we were regenerated, as it exists in human nature generally; but of Divine love we had none until we were born into the kingdom of God. The love of God was then "shed abroad in our hearts," and by this alone can we claim the title of children of God, as partakers of His nature. "The love of God here means not our love to God, nor exactly the sense of God's love to us, but God's love itself for us." "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us," not manifested or demonstrated, but bestowed, imparted, given to us as a gift. What a wonderful truth this is, that God's love for us shall be in us, and become our love to others. Was this not what our Lord asked for when He prayed, "that the love wherewith Thou hast loved Me may be in them, and I in them"? The truth declared is that God gives us His love to love with; He has made His love our property, absolutely given it to us, so that it is now ours. Who can tell all that this means? Inspiration itself can only find relief in adoring gratitude. "Behold what manner of love."

Perhaps we shall now better understand the new commandment to love "as I have loved you." On Calvary we see love stronger than death. There we learn what love really is, and what it can do. When that same

love drives our chariot wheels, we shall be ready to do as He did. It is where sacrifice begins that the proof of love begins. We must not offer, either to God or man, what costs nothing. The noblest thing in God's world is a lavished life. Carnal selfish men cannot understand the service and sacrifice of those.

Who spend their lives for others, With no ends of their own.

But when our love is in kind like His, we cannot help doing it. Our "must" then is like the "must" of God. God must give His love, whether souls accept it or not. Let the love of Christ, the most sublime of all motives, and the glory of Christ, the most sublime of all ends, become the ruling principle of action, and who can help living magnanimously for man and for God?

More of Christ's love in our hearts means always increased sympathy with His dominant passion, the salvation of the lost. There is a grave mistake somewhere when a person imagines that he has mounted up to the plane of the "high life," and feels no quickened impulse towards those who are perishing in their sins around him. Zeal in soul-winning is only love on fire. Give us more of the hidden fire, and all the rest will follow.

In serving the poor, the suffering, and the lost, we serve Him, and nothing is counted too good for Him by those who are filled with His sanctifying love. We prove our love to Christ by what we do for our fellow-creatures. Love cannot treat its Lord meanly. She will not give Him the remnant, the drift, and the dregs of life. Giving of our surplus is no proof of love at all. She always offers the most that is possible, and the best. The one motive that has the power to lift us out of self, and to exalt life to its highest and loftiest phase, is a heart brimful of love to Christ. "For Christ's sake." These three little words are the touchstone of love.

Jeremy Taylor represents love as going on an embassy to St. Louis, and meeting a strange woman, who had fire in one hand and water in the other. He asked what these strange symbols meant, and she replied: "With fire I shall burn up heaven, and with water quench the flames of hell, that men may serve God without incentives, either of hope or fear, for His own sake." This is what Perfect Love does. If there were no heaven, and if there were no hell, hearts filled with the love of God would serve Him just the same. Love service is the spontaneous, glad offering of a grateful heart, like that of the woman who broke the box of ointment and poured it on the feet of Christ. It is not clearer views of our duty to God that will win us over to new obedience; but as the love of Jesus floods our souls, a deeper, fuller, and ever augmenting stream, the life of duty becomes transformed into a life of liberty and delight.

"Perfect love casteth out fear." The two words "love" and "fear," placed in contrast in this Scripture, represent the two different motives that may actuate us in Christian service. Some serve from love, as Jacob did in the pastures of Laban; and some from fear, like the Hebrews in the brickfields of Egypt. Mrs. Pearsall Smith puts the difference well; it is simply the difference between "may I" and "must I," between enjoyment and endurance. In law service we do our duty, but too often as the unwilling schoolboy creeps off to school; but in love service the will is won, and we do our work not like the slave under the lash, but with eagerness and joy.

How sluggishly the men in yonder workshop are using their tools; how they weary for the hour of dismissal to strike! But after they have rushed away home, you might have seen one youth remaining, singing at his work; and when you ask the reason, he sweetly said. "Those others are hirelings, paid by the hour, but I have an interest in the business; it is my fathers business, and a loving father he has been to me." Alas! how many Christians forget that they are sons, and work for wages as hirelings do. Perhaps in most

Christians the two motives exist together, the pure gold of love is mingled with the dross of fear in service; but when our love is "made perfect," our will elects God's will with unspeakable gladness. We shall keep the law then, not from dread of its penalties, but from love for the law itself, and the Lawgiver. Filled with Divine love, we love what God loves, and in this condition the will of God is no longer as a yoke upon the neck; Christ's service is perfect freedom. Faber sings:

He hath breathed into my heart

A special love of Thee,

A love to lose my will in His,

And by the loss be free.

This is not freedom from law; that would be license. Nor is it being under law; that would be bondage. It is being inlawed, God putting the law into our love, so that we keep it from our very love of it, by a glad assent as naturally as water runs down-hill. Before we reach this experience we are often like a man carrying a burden up-hill, but when we reach it the burden and the hill suddenly disappear, and we can joyfully appropriate the words of the Son of God, and say, "I delight to do Thy will, O my God; yea, Thy law is within my heart."

The old Covenant was an outside, coercive force, a law written in stone. The new Covenant is written in the heart, rectifying and inspiring all the springs of action. God fulfills the promise of the new Covenant, "I will put My law into your hearts," when His love is so fully shed abroad in the heart of the believer as to effect a complete release from the fear of the law as a motive to obedience.

Never, until the love of God becomes the all-absorbing, all-controlling, dominating principle of life, can we understand the seeming contradiction in Psalm cxvi. 16, "O Lord, truly I am Thy servant; I am Thy servant, and the son of Thine handmaid: Thou hast loosed my bonds." But when every faculty is energized, every capacity filled, and the whole nature pervaded with this transcendent gift, the bondage, the irksomeness, the subtle legalism which more or less characterize the service of incipient believers, are entirely removed. The yoke of Christ no longer chafes, the last trace of servile feeling is gone, and the will of God becomes our free, spontaneous, delightful choice. We can sing then, not as mere poetic fancy, but as a glorious experimental reality

I worship Thee, sweet will of God,

And all Thy ways adore;

And every day I live, I seem

To love Thee more and more.

But do you ask, "How am I to enter into this blessed experience? We brace our wills to secure it. We try to copy those who have it. We lay down rules about it. We watch, we pray; but these things do not bring the fullness of love into our souls." Love is never produced by straining and struggling, or by any direct action of the soul upon itself. "A man in a boat cannot move it by pressing it from within." Love is an effect, and here is the cause. We receive love when we receive God. If we would have love we must seek Him. God is love and love is God. More love means more of God. Perfect love means that we have opened all the

avenues of our being, and that He has come and taken possession of every chamber. Some writer has said, "Take love from an angel and you have a devil, take love from a man and you have a brute, take love from God and there is nothing left." When Sir James Mackintosh was dying, a friend saw his lips move, and when the ear was put down it caught the whisper, "God -- Love -- the very same." Yes, love is the only word convertible with God. It is not His mere name, but His nature -- His being -- Himself. When He comes to the heart, He comes not empty-handed. He brings His love with Him, and that, consciously received, produces a corresponding and answering love in our hearts to Him. Says Lange, "When God's love to us comes to be in us, it is like the virtue which the lodestone gives to the needle, inclining it to move towards the pole." There is no need to ask whether the Perfect Love of which St. John speaks means Christ's love to us, or our love to Christ. It is both. The recognition of His love, and the response of ours, are the result of His entering and abiding in the heart. "He that has made his home in love has his home in God, and God has His home in him."

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