

A.B. Simpson:

"Walk in love." Eph. v: 2.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love." Gal v: 22.

The legend has come to us that when the apostle John was old, and waiting for His Master's call, he used to rise in the pulpit of the church in Ephesus each Lord's Day as it came, and looking tenderly in the faces of the assembled people, simply say, "Little children, love one another," and sit down. And when the brethren asked him why he said nothing else, he simply answered, "There is nothing else to say; that is all there is, for, He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."

Certainly, both Christ and His apostles have given to love, at least, the supreme, if not the exclusive place in the circle of Christian graces. It was the new commandment which Christ left with His disciples, and to which John exclusively refers in his epistle, when he says, His commandments are not grievous, and this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment. Paul also declares, "Love is the fulfilling of the law;" therefore, he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. And Christ Himself has declared that the whole law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Someone has beautifully analyzed the fruit of the Spirit in Gal. v: 22, and shown that all the graces there mentioned are but various forms of love itself. The apostle is not speaking of different fruits, but of one fruit, the fruit of the Spirit, and the various words that follow are but phrases and descriptions of the one fruit, which is love itself. Joy, which is first mentioned, is love on wings; peace, which follows, is love folding its wings, and nestling under the wings of God; long-suffering is love enduring; gentleness is love in society; goodness is love in activity, faith is love confiding; meekness is love stooping; temperance is true self-love, and the proper regard for our own real interests, which is as much the duty of love, as regard for the interests of others. Thus we see that love is essential to our whole Christian character, and indeed is the complement and crown of all else.

In the catalogue of spiritual gifts described by Paul in 1 Corinthians, it is named as pre-eminent to all the gifts of power, and the more excellent way than any endowment even of miraculous working or transcendent wisdom, without which all else will make us but as "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal."

In the investiture of holy character, described by the apostle in Colossians, after all the old habiliments have been laid aside and the new robes of sanctity been put on, over all the rest we are invited to put on love, which is "the perfect bond" that is the girdle which holds all the other garments in their place and keeps them from falling off. And so, a soul without love must lose even the chief advantage of all other gifts, and faith and service be rendered ineffectual for lack of love. Therefore, it is the chief ministry of the Holy Spirit to teach us this heavenly lesson. In doing this

1. We must learn from Him that love is not a natural quality, but a direct gift of divine grace. The very word for love is charity, or caritas, and this is derived from the root charis, grace. So that the primary idea conveyed by the Bible term for love is, that it is a gift and not a natural quality. There is much earth-born love, and it would be narrow and blind to ignore the human virtues which have adorned the annals of history. The exquisite instinct of maternal love, the tender affection of the husband and wife, the brother and friend, the many refinements and amiabilities of the human character, the devotion of the patriot to his country, and the philanthropist to his kind-these are holy affections which we would not, and do not, need to ignore. But human love has its limitations.

The love which the Holy Ghost teaches is not confined to any class or condition, but, like the love of God Himself, is able to reach and embrace not only the stranger and the alien, but also the unworthy, the unlovely, the unloving, and even the most malignant enemy and the most uncongenial object. It is nothing less than the very heart of God Himself infused into our heart. It is the love of God Himself imparted to us through the Holy Ghost. We cannot wring it out of our selfish hearts, or work it up by any effort of our will; it must come down to us from the very heart of God, and be shed abroad by the Holy Ghost Himself. This delightful fact makes the exercise of love a possibility for even the coldest and hardest heart. If it is a gift of grace, then it is available for all, and we have but to realize our need, yield ourselves unreservedly to God, be willing to receive it and exercise it and then claim it, and go forth to fulfill it in His strength. And as it is a gift, it involves no merit on the part of the receiver, for it is not our love, but the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom must ever be all the glory.

2. The love of God must be founded, like every other spiritual grace, on the exercise of faith. The apostle John, who understood this subject better than any other, gives the simple philosophy of love in these words, "We love Him because He first loved us;" and "we have known and believed the love that God hath to us." We must believe without wavering in God's personal love to us before we can love Him in return. A single doubt in the heart respecting this will cloud the whole heavens. The spirit of implicit confidence in God will always lead to a spirit of filial love; and if we love Him that begetteth, we shall also love them that are begotten of Him.

Faith is, indeed, the channel of all spiritual blessings; hence the apostle Peter has said, "Add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, and all the other graces." Hence, also, the apostles, when Christ was enjoining upon them the height and depth to which the forgiveness of injuries should extend, exclaimed, "Lord, increase our faith." They did not say, increase our love, for they seemed to have learned that if they had the faith which they should possess, they would inevitably possess the love. This is true. The fountain of love will always spring to the same height as the head-waters of faith have reached.

3. In order to receive this heavenly gift, the soul must be wholly surrendered to Christ, and receive the Holy Spirit as an abiding presence to bring into the heart the life of Jesus Christ, and to write the law of love upon the heart according to the terms of the new covenant. "I will write my law upon their hearts," is the promise of this new covenant, and put it into their inward part." This law is nothing but love, for love is the substance of the law, and the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, the university of the law, as the spirit of power and obedience.

We enter into this new covenant, therefore, when we receive the Holy Spirit as our personal life, and indwelling guide and strength. And He brings into our spirit the abiding presence of Jesus Christ, uniting us to His person in such an intimate and perfect manner that we receive His very life into our own, and love in His love, and live in His very being. In order to do this there must, of course, be a renunciation of our own life and will, and the complete consecration of ourselves to Him. Then we receive Christ to abide, and all our life henceforth is through the virtue of His abiding union with us. This is the true secret of divine love.

A distinguished French evangelist was converted to God by preaching on the text, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and mind, and strength." And finding, as he preached, his own inability to meet the demands of love, he was forced to fall back, even while preaching, upon the Lord Jesus Christ to meet his helplessness, and publicly acknowledge to the people that there was one way alone through which he could have help to obey this supreme law, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. In short, the secret of love is the same as all other graces, "Not I, but Christ that liveth in me." And this is what He is waiting to do for every willing heart.

4. But it is in the exercise of love in our practical Christian life that our chief lessons in walking with the Spirit must be learned, as our heavenly Teacher leads us in detail through the blessed, yet often painful discipline of the school of experience, and grounds us not only in the principles, but in the most difficult practice of this heavenly grace. One of His most frequent leadings is to bring us into a situation where we are required to exercise a love which we do not ourselves possess. We are confronted with circumstances which sorely test our spirit. Perhaps somewhere unkindness is allowed to be done to us, or we are associated with persons most uncongenial and disagreeable to us, or we hear of some trial that is before an enemy and are strongly tempted to conclude that they deserve the affliction, and are only suffering the judgment which they have brought upon themselves, when, on the contrary, the Holy Spirit is simply teaching us not to judge them at all, or even think a thought of condemnation, but rather pray for them and get our victory of love.

And yet, it is not in us to do this; our selfishness or pride leaps to the front, passes its judgment, recoils from the uncongenial touch, is tempted to take pleasure in their calamity, and at the same time is intensely conscious of condemnation and humiliation because of this ignominious failure in the grace of love. It sees the divine standard, "Charity suffereth long and is kind," charity maketh no account of the evil, charity is not provoked, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things, and yet it feels its inability to meet it. There is a painful conflict, perhaps a struggle with self, and the stronger uprising of the old spirit of prejudice and malice; and then the cry, "Oh! wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?"

It is just at this point that Christ is revealed to us as the source of victory and the spirit of love. And, as we look away from our hearts to Him, and cling to Him in our helplessness, we find His love sufficient, and the heart is sweetly rested and filled with His thoughts, His gentleness, His divine forbearance, His forgiveness, meekness and patience, and we are strengthened according to His glorious power into all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

It often seems very strange to those who have just yielded themselves to God that they should be immediately thrown into circumstances more trying than they have ever experienced, and every right thing they try to do seems harder than before; but this is just God's way of impressing the lesson upon us, showing to us our own need, and throwing us upon His power and grace. When we have learned the lesson, the difficulty is always removed or made easier. It is a great thing to recognize in our trials as they meet us, not so much obstacles that have come to overwhelm us, as teachers that have met us on our way to bring us deeper lessons and higher blessings.

Another way by which the Spirit teaches us the exercise of love is by showing us God's thoughts in regard to ourselves, teaching us, like Himself, to see persons, not so much in their present character or personal unworthiness, as in their relation to Christ, and especially in the light of what His grace is working in them, and going to finally develop in their future character. God Himself looks at us, not as we are, but as we are to Christ; and loves us, not for our sake, but for Christ's sake, and for His own sake, because of something in Himself which cannot help loving even the unlovely. And then, God always looks beyond our present to the future ideal, which His love has for us, and to which, it is bringing us. God sees us, not as we are to-day, but as we shall be by-and-by, when He has accomplished the purpose of His grace in us, and we shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of our Father. And if we would, like Him, thus look at others, not of ourselves, but in Christ, and not in the present, but in light of the glorious future, we should love them as He loves them, and be lifted above all that is trying into the victory of faith and love. If we truly believe in God's purpose of grace for us, we must likewise for them.

There is nothing more beautiful than this spirit in God Himself, which refuses to recognize the faults of His children. He said, "Surely, they are my people, children that will not lie;" He was not willing to see their faults and sins. It was the blindness of love; the blessed blindness which He would teach us also, and in which we shall find our sweetest victories, and lose most of our burdens.

There is a parable of a man who met a traveler on the road, dragged down almost to the earth by an unequal burden which he carried on his shoulders. He had two sacks upon his back; one hanging in front, the other behind. The one that hung before contained the bad deeds of his neighbors, and it was so full that his head was bowed almost to the ground, while the odor that came up from the offensive mass almost suffocated him. The sack which he carried behind contained their good deeds, but it seemed almost empty, and was not able to balance the overwhelming weight that hung before. While the man was trying to persuade him to reverse the load, another traveler came up behind, walking lightly, with head erect and shining face. He, too, had two sacks upon his back, but they did not seem to oppress him, but rather to rest him. The one in front contained the good deeds of his neighbors, and he seemed to never tire of contemplating the present burdens, which, he said, instead of weighing him down seemed always to draw him forward on his journey. When the gentleman asked him what he carried in the other sack that hung behind, he said, "O, that is where I keep the bad actions of my friends;" "but," said the other, "I don't see any there." "Well," said the traveler, "I have made a little hole in the bottom of the bag, and when anything disagreeable occurs I just pitch it over my shoulder into the sack and it drops out at the bottom, and so I have nothing to hold me back, but everything to press me onward, and my journey is a very delightful and easy one."

The greatest blessing of love is the blessing that it brings to us. The heaviest curse of hate is the corrosion it leaves upon the heart. Every time a temptation comes to us to judge harshly of another, and take any pleasure in their calamity, and we pray for them instead, we have ourselves obtained a blessing far richer than theirs. Every time we linger on an injury, even in our thought, and harbor an ungracious spirit, we have eaten so much carrion, and have depleted our spiritual strength in proportion. Therefore, love is not only duty, but it is also life, and selfishness is self-destruction. Never was there a truer sentence spoken than this, "He that loveth his life shall lose it, but he that hateth his life shall keep it unto life eternal."

While it is true that the Holy Spirit will always give us the victory and grace of love, yet we have a more solemn part ourselves to perform; we must be willing to choose it, and this is often the very crisis of defeat. Pride and bitterness are not willing even to receive the love of God; some would rather have their revenge than their victory. They would not forgive even if they could, and the Lord lets them have their way, and their sin become its own avenger.

Often have we met even Christian hearts who have said, "I do not want to love some people; I shall not respect myself if I did; I take a real pleasure in disliking them." Sometimes have we been asked by a heart that has struggled long for this grace of love, "Why is it God does not give me love?" and we have looked into their face and asked, "Do you really want it? Do you really choose to love some persons, and would you be glad this

moment to be able to treat them, with all your heart, with tenderness and sweetness?" and they have looked into their heart and honestly replied, "I believe I am not willing;" and in that moment they have felt that they did really want this blessing, and therefore did not have it.

Are any of our readers in this state? Beloved, pause and remember with deep solemnity your earliest, simplest prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." There are two unpardonable sins; one is the unbelief that rejects Christ, the other is the bitterness that refuses to love our brother. For He has said, who died for His enemies, "If ye forgive not, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you." It is vain to say we cannot love; He knows we cannot, but He is willing to give us the love if we are honestly willing to receive it, so that we are without excuse.

There are many lessons in the school of love into which we shall be led as we walk in the Spirit day by day. We shall find the love of God Himself shed abroad in our heart, and our own love to Him shall be kept alive and quickened as an ever-burning fire. It shall not always be emotion, but it shall ever be the purpose of obedience, which is the truest test of love, for He has said, "If ye love me keep my commandments." And we shall find it so utterly His love, rather than our own, that we need not watch it as a transient and uncertain feeling which we are always afraid of losing, but it will possess us as a divine principle, springing up when needed as a well of water whose fountains are in the very heart of Christ. It will be the love of Christ Himself to the Father living and working in our hearts.

So, also, will we find our natural affections intensified, and we shall love our friends more fervently than before, and yet more restfully, more purely, and more for His sake and glory, and less for their sakes and our own.

So, too, shall we find our Christian ties divinely quickened, and our love to the brethren, like the great tides of God's own heart. We shall understand the language of the Bible which speaks of our Christian fellowship and unity. Our hearts shall be knitted together in love, and we shall know what Paul meant when he spake of the consolation in Christ, the fellowship of the Spirit, the bowels and mercies, the mutual love of Christ's disciples, until it shall be indeed true that the ties of spiritual relationship seem to be even more intense than any of the bonds of human affection.

Our love for souls shall also be thus divinely-imparted and sustained. Men and women will be laid upon our hearts until we shall long over them with an intensity of desire to which there is no parallel in human nature or experience, and it will be a luxury of joy to labor for them, minister with them, and suffer, for their sake. We shall be able to spend our lives in the very cesspools of iniquity, and not feel the hideous surroundings. Our mission rooms, crowded with poverty and sin, and the air fetid with foul breath, unclean attire, and moral pollution, shall seem to us like the gate of heaven. Joy will give radiance to our face, and wings to our feet, in the errands of ministering love. No task will seem trying, and no sinner unattractive, to one whose heart has been thus possessed with the Saviour's heart of love.

Love will make that mother bear for her child humiliating drudgeries and excruciating agonies which no servile wages could bribe her to endure, and love for souls will give zest, freshness, and perpetual delight to all the ministry. "So I was had home to prison," wrote the quaint John Bunyan of the place that the love of God had made a paradise; and "I wrote because joy did make me write," was his explanation of the book that has charmed all generations. And such service for Christ, and such alone, will sustain us amid the toils and sacrifices, amid the fields of wretchedness and sin. This love the Holy Spirit alone can give, and this He will freely give to every consecrated heart that receives Him fully. This is just the spirit of His own ministry. For eighteen hundred years the Holy Spirit has dwelt in a hospital of moral leprosy and contagion, and nothing could have held Him in such scenes of sin and repulsion but love more strong than aught that mortals know of love. This earth has been His chosen home, and the heart of sinful men His willing abode; and He will shed abroad the same love in every heart that receives Him.

Beloved, shall we open all our being to His heavenly power, and enter into all the fullness of the love of God? This is the divine nature; this is the substance of heaven; this is the essence of all enduring holiness and happiness; and this the Holy Spirit longs to teach to every willing disciple. So let us receive Him, and walk in Him, and so "walk in love."