

Believing The Love Of God

In recent weeks the Holy Spirit has been leading me to pray for a greater understanding of God's love to me. After reading 1. John 4:16, I realized how very little I knew about living and walking in God's love. John wrote in his epistle: *"We have known and believed the love God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."*

I believe most Christians know about God's love for them only theologically. They have learned the Scriptures on love and have heard them preached - and yet their understanding is limited to a line from the children's chorus: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so..."

We say we believe God loves us, the world and the lost. But it is an abstract faith! Not many Christians can say with authority, "Yes, I know Jesus loves me - because I have understanding of what His love is. I have apprehended it - I live in it. It is the foundation of my daily walk."

The daily life of a majority of Christians, however, is not one of walking and believing in God's love. Instead, they live under a cloud of guilt, fear, condemnation. They have never really been free they have never rested in God's love for them. They may be able to sit in church, raise their hands and rejoice - but they carry a secret baggage with them at all times. There has never been a time when they were totally free from a nagging sense of never really pleasing the Lord. They say to themselves, "Something is lacking in me - I'm not measuring up. Something is wrong!"

Listen to Paul's words: *"Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us"*

(EPH 5:2). The apostle urged the Ephesians, "Jesus truly loves you - so walk as one who is greatly loved by God!"

I have heard the confessions of many "older" Christians - people who have walked with the Lord for thirty or forty years - who confessed they never knew the joy of being loved by God. They appeared happy and contented outwardly - yet, inside, they dragged onward, always carrying heavy burdens of doubt and fear. I believe these brothers and sisters simply never understood, deep down, the love that God has for them. They never experienced the peace that knowing God's love brings to the heart!

You will never go after a Revelation of God's love to you until you become sick and tired of living with fear, guilt, condemnation and confusion!

You have to wake up one day and say to yourself, "This is no way to live! I can't go on serving God with this sense of wrath on me, always feeling condemned and unworthy. As much as I love Jesus and believe my sins are forgiven, why am I so heavy - hearted?"

The fact is, God did not save you to allow you to live in guilt and condemnation. Jesus said: *"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that*

sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (JH 5:24).

One meaning of the word "condemnation" here is "wrath." Jesus is saying you won't come under His judgement - that on the Judgement Day you will be free from His wrath. But condemnation also means "the feeling of never measuring up to standards." And Jesus is saying the believer shall not come under the feeling of never measuring up!

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (ROM 8:1). All guilt and condemnation are clearly of the devil. And Paul warned of *"fall(ing) into the condemnation of the devil"* (1.TIM 3:6). He was saying that when you fall into condemnation, you've fallen from grace - from the security that God has offered us through the blood of His own Son.

Beloved, the Holy Ghost convicts, but He never condemns. His ministry is to convict of sin. But He does this only to heal - to bring men and women to a place of peace and rest in Christ. And he does this redemptively, not with wrath.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is

risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (ROM 8:34). The Lord is saying, "Who condemns you? Why are you walking around under condemnation, when your Saviour is before Me right now, pleading your cause?"

The only condemnation remaining is upon those who refuse the light of the gospel: *"And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil"* (JH 3:19).

If you love to have the Word of God come and expose everything in your heart, then you are no longer condemned. Condemnation remains only for those who hide sin and love darkness ! You do love the light, do you not? So why allow condemnation?

Yet perhaps you are assaulted by a temptation you can't seem to shake off. Or maybe you carry a sense of never measuring up, of unworthiness - a fear that the devil is going to trip you up and you're going to fail God.

This is the day for you to wake up to God's love to you! I pray that as you read this message, something will strike deep in your heart, and you'll be able to say, "You're right, Brother Dave that's me. I don't want to live this way!"

Christians who live in guilt, fear and condemnation are not "rooted and grounded" in the love of God:

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (EPH 3:17-19).

"Rooted and grounded" here means "to build under you a deep and stable foundation of knowing and understanding the love of God to you." In other words, the knowledge of God's love to you is the foundational truth upon which all other truths must build!

For example, this is what the fear of God is built upon. A holy fear of God isn't a dread that He is ready to strike you down if you're caught in some little fault. Rather, it is the dread of His holiness against rebellion-and of what He does to those who love darkness rather than light!

Our heavenly Father sent His Son to die for our sins and weaknesses. And without knowing and fully understanding that kind of love to you, you will never have a stable or permanent foundation!

"That ye... may be able to comprehend... the love of Christ..." The Greek word for "comprehend" here suggests "to eagerly seize or lay hold of." Paul means for you to seize this truth and make it the foundation of your Christian life. He is saying, "Put your spiritual hands out and say, I'm going to lay hold of this!"

Let me share with you three things that the Holy Spirit has been teaching me about the love of God to us. I pray that you will get hold of His truth - that it will open your eyes and help you enter a whole new realm of joy and peace in your daily walk with Him:

1. The love of God to us has to do with His treasures in glory!

You cannot divorce God's provisions from His love. His love to us has to do with the abundant riches laid up in glory for our use. He has given us provisions for every crisis in our life - to help us to live victoriously at all times!

For weeks I had prayed, "Lord, I want to know Your heart. I can't get a revelation of Your love to me from any of the books in my library, or even from the holiest men who ever lived. That can come only from You. I want my own revelation of Your love - directly from Your heart! I want to see it so clearly it changes the way I walk with You and the way I minister."

As I prayed, I didn't know what to expect. Would a revelation of His love come rushing into my soul like a flood of glory? Would it appear as some great insight that would leave me breathless, or as a manifestation of His nearness? Would it be a feeling of being very special to Him - or a touch of His hand on me so real it would change me forever?

No - God spoke to me in a simple little verse: *"God so loved... that He gave..."* (JH 3:16). His love is tied to His riches in glory - His bountiful provisions for us!

The Bible says our love for the Lord is shown by our obedience to Him. But His love for us is evidenced in another way - by His giving! You cannot know Him as a loving God until you see Him as a

giving God. God so loved us, he invested in His Son Jesus all the treasures, glory and bounties of the Father - and He gave Him to us! Christ is God's gift to us, in whom is wrapped up all we need to be overcomers.

"For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell" (COL 1:19). *"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him"* (2:9-10). In other words, "In Him you have all provisions - everything you need!"

The problem is, very few Christians appropriate what God has freely offered. We don't go after it or take possession of it - and the treasures of Christ lie in glory unclaimed!

What a shock we're going to have when we get to glory! At that time, God will show us all the riches His love had provided and how we didn't use them.

We see an example of this in the parable of the Prodigal Son. This story reveals God's love in a profound way - and it proves that His love to us has to do with His abundant riches and provisions!

2. God's love insists we come to the end of all our human resources - and claim and appropriate His bountiful treasures!

This is what the parable of the Prodigal Son is all about. It is the story of two sons - one who comes to the end of his own resources, and one who would not claim his father's resources.

The younger son came to his father and said, *"Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me"* (LK 15:12). The substance he received - and then wasted - represents his own interests: his talents, abilities, all the things he used to face life and all its problems. He said, "I've got intelligence, good wits, a good background. I can go out and do it on my own!"

That attitude describes many Christians today. Yet, when things get hard, how soon we come to the end of our own resources! How quickly we spend all that we have within ourselves! We can figure our way out of some problems and find inner strength for some trials. But a time comes when famine strikes the soul!

You come to the end of yourself, and you don't know which way to turn. Your friends can't help you.

You are left empty, hurting, with nothing left inside to draw upon. You are spent - all your fight is gone! All that's left are fear, depression, emptiness, hopelessness.

Are you still hanging around the devil's pigpen, wallowing in emptiness, starving to death? That is what happened to the Prodigal Son. There was nothing left in him to draw upon! He had exhausted all his own resources. And he realized where all his self - reliance had brought him.

But what was it that finally woke him up? When was it that he came to himself? It was when he remembered all the abundant provisions in his father's house!

He said, *"I'm starving here. But in my father's house there is bread enough and to spare!"* (see LK 15:17). He decided to go back and appropriate his father's bountiful provisions!

The heart of God love is found in the Father's invitation to come and enjoy a banquet of His provisions!

There is not one word in this parable that indicates the Prodigal came back because of love for his father. True, he was repentant - he fell on his knees, crying, "Father, I'm sorry! I've sinned against you and against God. I'm not even worthy to come into your house." But he never said, "Father, I came back because I love you!"

Rather, what is revealed here is that the love of God to us is without strings; it is not dependent upon our loving Him. The truth is, He loved us even when we were far away from Him in our hearts, still sinners. That is unconditional love!

When the Prodigal came back, his father didn't go over a list of his son's sins. He didn't say, "Where have you been? How many harlots did you lie with? How much money is in your bag? I want an accounting!"

No - instead, he fell on his son's neck and kissed him. He said to the servants, "Kill the fatted calf! Put a new robe on him, a ring on his finger and new shoes on his feet. Let's have a celebration - let us rejoice and be merry!"

Where is the revelation of the Father's love in this picture? Is it in his ready forgiveness? his affectionate kiss? the fatted calf? the robe, ring and new shoes?

Indeed, these are all expressions of His love - but none of these is the heart of it!

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 JH 4:10). "We love him, because he first loved us" (verse 19).

The full Revelation of love came when the Father could not have real joy until he knew His Son was with Him in the banqueting Hall!

"He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love" (SOS 2:4). The father's joy could not be complete until he was sitting in the banqueting hall with his son, and he had made sure the boy knew he was forgiven and his sin wiped out. They had to be sitting at the table - feasting on the Lamb!

If you were to look in the window at the moment, you would have seen a young man who had just come into a true revelation of God's love:

He was dancing! There was music, and he was laughing and happy. His father was glad over him, smiling at him!

He was not under a cloud of fear. He wasn't listening to the old lies: "You're going to go right back to that pigpen! You are unworthy of such love..." No, he had accepted his forgiveness - and he had obeyed his father's word to come in and take for himself all he needed

He heard his father whisper to him, "All I have is yours. There is no need ever to be hungry again. You need never be lonely, a pauper, cut off from My storehouse."

Beloved, here is the fullness of God's love, the very heart of it! It is that even in our darkest times, God not only embraces us and brings us back in - but He also says, "Bring forth the fatted calf, and let us eat and be merry! In My banqueting house, there is a feast of plenty for My loved one!"

Yet today we have an even better promise: *"To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us" (EPH 3:19-20).*

Here is God's love to us: "I offer you exceeding, abundant fullness - provision for every crisis, joy

throughout your entire life. You may go to the storehouse and claim it all!"

Now, the older son was out in the field, hard at work doing his father's business, when suddenly he heard music, laughter, dancing. When he came near the house, he discovered it was all a feast for his wayward brother - the one who had wasted his father's substance on harlots and riotous living!

As the older son looked through the window, he saw his father rejoicing over the younger brother, full of delight. He couldn't understand how his no - good brother could get so free, happy and blessed in such a short time! Scripture says of him, *"He was angry, and would not go in" (LK 15:28).*

Finally, the father came out and urged him to come in. But the older son said, *"Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends" (verse 29).* He was saying, "This is not right! All these many years I've served you well. I never disobeyed you at any time."

Oh, how many of us can relate to the older brother! We spend years trying so hard to please our Lord, living in dogged determination to always do right. That certainly describes me - for I have often been caught on the outside, looking in!

You see, I've known the Lord all my life. I never was in the world. I never smoked a cigarette, never touched a drug, never lived in adultery. I worked hard to live for the Lord.

Then, at times, I would see a convert come home to Jesus, one who had lived in sin. And when he came back, suddenly he was dancing, rejoicing - happy and carefree! He had come to Christ with simple faith, and he no longer had any guilt, condemnation or memory of the past. Everything was new to him! God seemed to be smiling on him.

Yet I sat back, thinking, "Sure, he's singing and praising now - but is he really holy? I paid a price for my place in God - I've served Him for years. And yet I have burdens, cares. At times I feel guilt, confusion. And here this one comes in, dancing! He walks in and passes me up with simple faith in God's Word. Lord, it's not right! He's so

free - and my life is so complicated!"

The older Son, in all his years of service, had never known true gladness - because he had never taken advantage of his Father's invitation to appropriate all he needed!

I believe the older boy went right back to his lowly shepherd's shack, thinking of the day when he would have his inheritance: "Just wait. One day, after death does its work. I'll come into great blessings. I'll have a great storehouse!" This is the one who is waiting to get to heaven before appropriating all the good things of God.

His father must have been heart-broken. I believe he had told his son over and over: "*Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine*" (verse 31). In other words, "You have been with me all these years, and all I've owned has been yours for the asking. You know I would have given you anything - and yet you did not come in to lay hold of it!"

I ask you - how many years have you been on the outside? You have a Father who has been laying up a great treasure of provisions for you. And yet you have left it unclaimed!

This parable shows us that by going in and enjoying his father's treasures, the Prodigal Son had it both ways. He could live his earthly life with the abundant forgiveness, joy, peace and rest that were his. And when death brought him into his inheritance, he would fully enjoy what he had already known on earth.

Indeed, the greater sin was committed by the older brother - the one who stayed home, walked obediently and never failed His father. Yes, it is a sin to waste our Father's substance on sensual living and a runaway spirit; but it is an even greater sin to rebuff God's great love - to leave unclaimed the bountiful resources He gave to us at such a great price!

3. God's love insists we stop focusing on our failures and

sins, and instead focus on the riches offered to us in Christ!

The runaway son was not chastised, rebuked or reminded of his sin - because God would not allow sin to be the focus of restoration!

There had been true repentance and godly sorrow. And it was time to move on the banquet hall of love - to feast! The father said to the older son, "He was lost, but now he is in the house again. He is forgiven - and it's time to rejoice and be happy!"

Are you tired of living like a pauper when you have been provided everything you need? Perhaps your focus is wrong. You tend to dwell on your weaknesses, temptations and past failures. And when you look inside your own heart, what you see discourages you. You allow guilt to seep in.

Beloved, you are to be looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of your faith! When Satan comes and points at some weakness in your heart, you have every right to answer: "My God already knows it all - and He still loves me! He has given me everything I need to get victory and keep it."

"For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things" (1.JH 3:20).

He knows all about you - and He still loves you enough to say, "Come on in and get all you need. The storehouse is open!"

Instead, the doors to His storehouse are wide open, and His riches are full to overflowing. God is urging you: "*Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that (you) may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need*" (HEB 4:16).

Here is how you go into the storehouse and get what you need:

1. Come boldly to His throne and ask largely for all the grace and mercy you need to see you through every temptation and trial. The devil has a million ways to make you feel guilty, fearful, condemned and confused. And he'll tell you, "You feel this way because you've got junk in your

heart!" But I stopped looking in my heart a long time ago, because it is always black. Yet it's white to my Father - because it's covered with the blood of the Lamb!

It doesn't matter how you feel. Simply look to God's Word for what Jesus has done. He has wiped your slate clean!

2. Remind God that it was His idea for you to come in. You didn't go to the Lord saying, "Father, I want everything You have!" No - it was He who invited you in, saying, "All I have is yours. Come and get it!"

3. Take God at His Word! The Bible says that everything He has for us is obtained by faith. You need only say in faith, "Lord Jesus, flood me with Your peace - because You've said it is mine! I claim rest for my soul."

You can't work this up. You can't sing or praise down. No - it comes from being rooted and grounded in a revelation of God's love to you. This comes not in a feeling but rather in the Word that He Himself has spoken: "In My house is bread and enough to spare!"

4. Take God's Word, and hammer all your fear, guilt and condemnation to pieces! Reject it all - it is not of God! You can say, "Let the devil come at me with his lies. My Father knows it all already, and He's forgiven and cleansed me. There is no guilt or condemnation toward me. I'm free!"

Dear saint, I believe that if you ask the Spirit right now to help you seize this truth - to get rooted and grounded in it - the coming days will be the greatest you have ever had. You can say, "Lord Jesus, I know I'm going to make mistakes. But nothing is going to shake me - because You have everything I need to get the victory and to live in it."

Come into His storehouse - and claim all that is yours from your loving Father.

Hallelujah!