



## SAFE HARBOR

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### *Defining Love: A Christian Perspective*

To understand the concept of love and its relation to the Christian life is one that takes more than a cursory definition of a shallow definition that is far different from the truth of Scripture. We hear the term used in many ways. Is love physical; emotional; relational or something else?

Often Christians are hit with the words that if one was truly a child of Christ then they would accept anything or action without speaking out. In other words we are often “squeezed into a mold by the world that does not understand the requirements of God. These are very simple as stated by the prophet Micah 6:8,

Human being, you have already been told  
what is good, what *ADONAI* demands of you —  
no more than to act justly, love grace  
and walk in purity with your God. (Common Jewish Bible).

In using this translation I would point out that the three precepts given for one to meet God’s demands are far more involved. To act justly is to practice justice that mirrors the justice of God. This divine justice looks upon the actions of the people. It stands up to sin and pronounces that sin is the great separator from God. The Christian is called to step forward under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to “convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment” (Jn. 16:8). The Spirit does this through the people within whom He dwells.

To love grace is the requirement to respond to grace that is freely given by God. It is this grace which has the Church responding to sin by not only identifying it but also providing a way out of the mire as darkness. Paul writes in Romans 1:32-2:5 to refute the idea that Christians can accept the sinful practices of a world rushing into the jaws of Hell. It is the mission of the Church to be the witness of righteousness and point to the way that leads to repentance and new life. Jesus was in himself the witness of God’s hatred of sin even to the Cross.

If we are to walk in purity then we must have the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is what John Wesley referred to when he spoke of “perfect love”. The presence of the Holy Spirit cleanses us from all iniquities as well as strengthens our faith and allows the Christian to reflect the Living Savior and continue His work.

The problem that many believers have faced throughout the centuries is one of having to respond to those who would be unreceptive to this love. It becomes a huge moral dilemma when the need is such as to protect family, fellow believers and even the nation that one lives in. In essence is the need to formulate a Christian response when love is rejected even to the rejection of the Gospel message.

We know that thousands of believers has perished and suffered the fate of martyrdom. We understand also that persecution and the impending martyrdom have served to bolster faith, purify the Church and also lead to conversion among the persecutors. Are we then to “bare our throats” and wait for the knives to slice away? Or is it too hard to bear the scorn and criticisms of an unbelieving world that wishes to do away with all the strictures of faith and the conduct of holy lives?

The call of Christ is to take up his cross and follow.

## *Reflections*

The separation of church and state is an issue which seems to be an ongoing news story. It is true that the Constitution prohibits from passing any law towards the establishment of religion. The Supreme Court decided to extend this far beyond the intentions of the Founding Fathers. These wise men knew that there is a deeper truth about religion that resists efforts to eliminate it from public life.

True religion cannot be separated from life whether private or public.

Consider the following hymn:

Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!  
E'en though it be a cross that raiseth me;  
Still all my song shall be nearer, my God, to Thee,  
**Chorus:** Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!

Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;  
Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee,

There let the way appear steps unto heav'n;  
All that Thou sendest me in mercy giv'n;  
Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to Thee.

Then with my waking thoughts bright with Thy praise,  
Out of my stony griefs Bethel I'll raise;

So by my woes to be nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Or if on joyful wing, cleaving the sky,  
Sun, moon, and stars forgot, upwards I fly,  
Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to Thee,

There in my Father's home, safe and at rest,  
There in my Savior's love, perfectly blest;  
Age after age to be, nearer my God to Thee,

Many associate this hymn with death and funerals. If you consider the words you will note that it really touches upon the journey of the Christian through life. It is thought to be modeled on the Biblical story of Jacob and the transforming moment of his life when at night he dreamt of the stairway to heaven.

In the darkness of this world filled with sin the Christian is called to continually mount up those stairs that lead to complete fellowship with God. It is God's mercy that leads us and the gift of the Holy Spirit that cleanses from within. This brings about that peace which is beyond comprehension.

Whether you call it growth in grace, entire sanctification, perfect love, a pilgrim's journey; all who follow Jesus are expected to follow the cross and rise above the tainted world and progress ever onward growing in our fellowship with God.

While many participate in the forty days of Lent, Christ calls His followers to a life given to the precepts of Lent. We must draw near to the Cross to see the light of God's presence. If we see His light then we will continually strive to become more Christ like for that is our inheritance.

The inheritance is there but we must reach out ourselves in order to receive it. In so doing we find that this gift of salvation is the result of a restored relationship with God. We can now share in His presence without fear for perfect love removes that fear that comes from sin. So let us draw near to the One who calls us nearer and nearer to Himself.

## *Words of Promise*

### **Romans 6:12-14 English Standard Version (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. <sup>13</sup> Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. <sup>14</sup> For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

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