



Bible Student's Notebook™

The Herald of His Grace

Presenting **every man** perfect in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:28

Volume XV
Issue 374

What Is Love?

by – Stephen Hill

Love is, without a doubt, the most powerful element of existence. Countless people have given their lives in the name of love, while countless others have taken their own lives in hopeless pursuit of it. The effects of love range from the darkest depths to the loftiest heights; but how many people fully grasp the true nature of love?



patience, kindness and a love for the truth, while rejecting jealousy, arrogance, rudeness, selfishness, irritability, resentfulness and wrongdoing.

We read in Romans 5:8 that God *shows* His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. In other words, Christ's death has special significance because we were not *deserving* of God's love. The proof of God's love for us lies in the glorious reality that Christ *did* something for us when He had no reason to *feel* anything for us in our wretched, undeserving state. He endured the most unimaginable pain for the most undeserving recipients. This is why Jesus told His Jewish brothers not to take credit for the simple task of loving only those who loved them in return (Matthew 5:46; Luke 6:32).

How can we begin to define the far-reaching facets of something as complex as love? For starters, we can consult the Word of the very One Who gave us love.

Paul gives us a vivid account of the attributes of love in I Corinthians 13. Here, we read that love is patient, kind, not envious or boastful, arrogant or rude. It is not selfish, irritable or resentful, and rejoices with truth while opposing wrongdoing. It bears, believes, hopes and endures all things.

In this passage, Paul personifies love. He gives actionable qualities to an intangible force. We can more easily grasp Paul's description by substituting the phrase "someone who is loving" for "love" in the passage. Thus, we read: "**Someone who is loving** is patient, kind, not envious or boastful, etc."

If you were to ask the majority of people to define love, they would inevitably define it first and foremost as a *feeling*; but Paul's insights from the very Word of our Creator shed a very different light on the matter. While strong feelings certainly play a role in love, they are not primarily what define it. As Paul points out, love is proven by *action*. One who shows love *acts* in a way that upholds the nature of love. To love is to *do* something – namely, to demonstrate

Jesus and His Father didn't prove their love by *feeling* something; they proved it by *doing* something – and that "something" happened to be the most selfless, kind and patient act in all of history.

The Bible's definition of love is clearly opposite that of the world's. It's no wonder that marriages end more often than not, and that countless families are torn apart throughout the world. When love is viewed primarily as a feeling, the inevitable result is always misery. Love as a feeling is rooted in selfish-

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- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
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The Fiction of a Second Chance

by — Alan Burns (? -1929)

Words are the weights and measures of exchanged thought. False weights and false words are “*an abomination to the Lord*” (Proverbs 11:1; 16:17). They should be an abomination to us as well, and should teach us to choose the words we use, as David chose the five smooth stones from the running waters of the brook. We are always saying more than we mean, or meaning more than we say. Consequently we kill no giants. David can teach us how to fight. As words are the weapons of our warfare, how necessary it is that we should be expert in their use. We use verbal crowbars to do the work of needles, and coarsely blunder in the delicate art of dissecting thought.

The doctrine of hope beyond the grave is almost invariably spoken of as being “the doctrine of a second chance.” It is presented as the tremulous nebula of better things. This phase represents correctly, perhaps, the sentimental *wishes* of such men as Dean Farrar, who scarcely dared to hope that even a second chance in the life to come would take the place of certain doom. Where orthodoxy, wearing the black goggles of medieval theology, saw nothing but certain damnation, these good men trembled in the optimism that saw even “the possibility of a maybe” in regard to at least some of the human race.

It is not to be wondered at, however, that those who believed in the ability of man, and who consequently thought that final responsibility hinged in some way on this ability, should have, and could only have at best but the shivering uncertainty of a forlorn hope. On the other hand, those who have perceived the absolute inability of the creature are shut up either to having no hope for any, or else having hope for all.

How then do we stand in respect to the “gospel of a second chance?” Let us be as clear as we can on this point. Let us be as emphatic as we may. Let us weigh these words and measure them by the rule of truth. *We believe there is no such thing.* Indeed, not only do we

not credit the doctrine, or gospel of a second chance, but we repudiate the idea of a first one.

If a “second” chance might possibly retrieve the ineffectiveness of a “first” one, is it not possible that a “third” chance might remedy any ineffectiveness in the second? If a second, and a third, why not a fourth and a fifth and even more if necessary? The fact that we only hear and read of a *second* chance, seems to indicate a limitation of hope and faith akin to Abraham’s in his petition for Sodom.

We do not believe in a *first* chance, not to mention a second or a third. Indeed, we look on the phrase “gospel of a second chance” as a lying one. It displays but a meager knowledge of man, and one still more scant where God is concerned. It hardly needs to be pointed out that it is self-contradictory in its construction, for when it rests on chance it ceases to be gospel.

Is the gospel a gamble that we should group it with “chance?” *If we know anything of Scripture, we shall already have learned that even in gambling there is no such thing as chance.*

The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD (Proverbs 16:33).

The whole disposition of the lot is from the Lord. So close and all-reaching is the government of God that even the tumble of the dice is not beyond His control.

The false doctrine of man’s divinity makes him the autocrat (absolute ruler) of his choices. Ignorant of the fact that the fountainhead of his saving impulse (impulse) finds its origin above, that the impetus Christ-ward comes from the Spirit of God, he contrives a system of thought which leaves him an anarchist in a world of law.

The vision of God has become more glorious to us as the years have rolled by. According to the measure

1. A trembling, shaky hope of something hazy.

(see *Fiction*, next page)

Fiction (continued from previous page)

in which we have learned of God will we view such a Scripture as this:

Who will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (I Timothy 2:4).

Is this His *wish* or His *will*? Is this the gospel of chance, or *certainty*? The gospel of a second chance (and how much better that is than a gospel of only *one*!) is nevertheless the gospel of a *chance*. It subordinates the problem of destiny to the fluctuations of human caprice.

The gospel with which we are entrusted is the gospel of *God* – first, last and only. It is not the gospel of God and me. I am in it, it is true, but only as the

absolutely passive recipient of its favor and power. There is nothing uncertain about it. It contains no elements of chance within it.

What goes by the name of evangelical thought today is remarkable for its determined opposition to the Darwinian doctrine of creation by chance, but little aware of the fact that its doctrine of salvation can be as truly called Darwinian as the other.

The universe is too small to contain two deities, God and Chance.

*To us there is but one God (I Corinthians 8:6)
... Who works all things after the counsel of His Own will (Ephesians 1:11).*



Love (continued from front page)

ness, while love as a committed action is rooted in self-less-ness. Is it any wonder that marriage vows consist of commitments to love, honor, cherish and support one another in good times *and* bad, in sickness *and* health, for richer *or* poorer?

What, then, can we learn from the truth about love? When we understand that love is an *action* more than a *feeling*, we realize the importance of taking action to keep our relationships strong *regardless of how we may feel*. When we follow Christ's example by *doing* the things that define love, even when our recipient seems undeserving, the rewards will be greater than we could possibly imagine.

Christ's death as the greatest expression of love demonstrates to us that, the more undeserving someone is of love, the more remarkable our love is when we grant it. If your husband wrongs or annoys you, commit to *acting* in a way that demonstrates your love. While other wives withhold love-making as a form of punishment, make love to your husband with intense passion. If your wife harms you, *show* your love by acting graciously and with forgiveness. When other husbands may leave the house, buy your wife flowers and praise her qualities that you cherish most. If a coworker offends you, *demonstrate* your love by responding with selflessness and kindness. Where others may insult him in defense, buy him lunch and tell him how valuable an asset you think

he is to your team.

In I John 4, we read that "*God is love*" (:8, 16). He is not lov-*ing*; He *is love*. Period. Love defines Him; it is His very essence. The qualities that Paul lays out in I Corinthians 13 define Him. God not only feels these attributes, He *acts* on them in dealing with His entire creation. Imagine our fate if God was to act on His feelings toward the unending sins of mankind.

Paul goes on in I Corinthians 13 to uphold love as the greatest force, even compared to faith and hope. Why? Because without love, faith and hope are meaningless. When we hope, it is for something we long to have. When we are faithful, it is because we find something worth believing. Love is the very thing we hope for and believe in, because it is ultimately the *only* thing worth hoping for and believing. It is the culmination of everything holy, perfect and righteous. Even the entire Law is "summed up" in the commandments of love (Galatians 5:14). Without love, there can be no goodness or happiness. Since God is love, lovelessness equals godlessness.

Above all else, by the examples of our Lord Jesus Christ and our great apostle, Paul, remember that, contrary to popular belief, love is best exemplified through *action*, not *reactions* to fleeting, deceitful feelings. Commit to living a life of love through action above feeling.



Adam's Sin

by — Arthur P. Adams (1845-1925)

I have received the following from one of my correspondents.

If your theory concerning the fall of man is correct, namely that it was in accordance with God's will that evil should exist, and that likewise sin and evil were according to His purpose and plan, then it necessarily follows:

1. That it will prove in the end to be far better that our first parents entered upon an experience of sin, guilt and shame, sorrow, pain and death; than it would have been had they continued in a state of innocence, unrighteousness, purity and peace.
2. That, if man had always obeyed God, He (God) would have been unable, with all His store of infinite wisdom and power, to devise and carry out a plan which should secure the perfect welfare and happiness of the race.
3. That God, Who cannot lie, did not really mean what He said when He forbade Adam and Eve [to partake] of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; while Satan who is a liar and the Father of it, told them the truth.

Now in reply to the foregoing I would say, first, that the proper way, as it seems to me, for our brother to have done in his criticism, was *not* to consider if the theory was true what the results would be, *but* whether the theory was true or not; let the results be what they may.

If he was able to show the teaching false on Bible evidence, then he could have gone on to have strengthened that conclusion by endeavoring to show that the consequent doctrines flowing from such a teaching were also false. This, the brother does not do; he leaves the main position unanswered, thus virtually acknowledging its impregnability. Still clinging to the creed in which he has been educated; he will not accept these views because the conclusions flowing forth do not harmonize with the teachings of his creed. The great mass of evidence that so firmly establishes this grand truth is left untouched, but it is nevertheless rejected because its issues cannot be harmonized with the nominal church theology. However, suppose that church theology is all wrong (which it most certainly is), then of course the truth, whatever it is and whoever may have it, would be entirely out of joint



with the false church theology. The only standard of truth is the Bible:

To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this Word it is because there is no light in them (Isaiah 8:20).

We need not fear conclusions so long as we have the solid bedrock of truth under our feet at each step of our reasoning.

Now let us look at the consequences that seem to be so objectionable to our brother.

To number 1, I would reply at once and without reserve, "Yes."

I have not a shadow of doubt but that it will be "far better" for man that he fell into evil than it would have been had he remained innocent in Eden; and I have taught plainly my reasons for this belief several times.

My belief in God that He is supreme and all-wise compels me to this view: I cannot think that God would have allowed sin to enter the world (and of course He might have prevented it!) had He not foreseen that it would have been for man's good in the end.

To number 2, I would simply say that we have nothing to do with what God could have done, or could not have done, if circumstances had been different.

It is enough for us that we know what God has done under existing circumstances; and since "*all things are of God*" (II Corinthians 5:18) and "*He works all things after the council of His Own will*" (Ephesians 1:11), it must be that He has done the right thing and the best thing, and that the outcome will be for His glory and the good of all. This we should know if we had no more Scripture than the two quoted above; but when we have abundance of Scripture to show how God uses *all things*, evil and sin included, to further on and carry out His Own purposes and plans, how He causes the very wrath of man to praise Him (Psalms 76:10), and that in the end "*God shall be All in all*" (I Corinthians 15:28), then we can accept things *just as they are*, with the assurance that God will bring it all out right in the end.



In answer to number 3, I would say that God's purpose lies not on the surface; we must dig deeper if we would understand God's true meaning. He who would understand even "*parts of His ways*" (Job 26:14) must "*search as for hid treasures*" (Proverbs 2:4).

In regard to Satan, I would add that he also is God's servant (cf. Psalm 119:91), and must do God's will, in a sense, like other servants, as I have shown in *The Purpose of Evil*.

The great trouble with this brother is the same as with all of those who are in sympathy with the popular theology: they start out wrong. They do not understand God's plan of creation; they do not know that "*all things are of God*," etc. Hence all of their reasoning is wrong, and all of their conclusions are wrong; and nothing looks so much like falsehood as truth, and nothing looks so much like truth as falsehood. Thus, unwittingly, they "*call evil good, and good evil, and put darkness for light, and light for darkness*" (Isaiah 5:20).

Now I will notice another extract from this brother's letter; he says,

God's plan concerning man will not fail; God's plan was to create a beautiful world and people it with a race of holy, happy beings, who should rejoice forever in the goodness and glory of God their Father. If all men from the beginning had obeyed God perfectly, the great plan would have progressed uninterruptedly and harmoniously to grand and glorious success without a stain of sin or a shade of evil. Sin and evil are not a part of God's plan, or by any means in harmony with it, but the direct results of nonconformity to it. Man, to be an intelligent subject of God's government, must have an independent will; when God gave man the power to choose for himself, He no longer retained the power to choose for him. So the creature alone is responsible for evil and not the Creator. Man must be tried in some way, for God will have a tried people, therefore as long as sin and evil are in the world, He makes use of them to try and test His children. God's work is temporarily marred and its progress delayed by evil, but when the earth is renewed, and the saints are all immortal, and the tabernacle of God is with men, and the whole earth filled with His glory, then will His beneficent designs be fully accomplished.

It is a marvel to me that the brother could not see that in this passage, (1) he contradicts himself; (2) he makes God out to be less than supreme; (3) he involves the outcome of God's plan in uncertainty and doubt, so that we know not whether good or evil will ultimately triumph.

He tells us that "God's plan will not fail;" then he goes on to say that "God's plan was to create a beautiful world and people it with a race of holy and happy beings who should rejoice forever in the goodness and glory of God their Father;" and he further tells us that if there had been no sin this plan would have been carried out "uninterruptedly to grand and glorious success."

Thus the brother contradicts himself; he tells us first that "God's plan will not fail," then he goes right on to tell us how it has failed; He might say perhaps that it has only partially failed, and that it will ultimately be carried on to a partial success; and this indeed is what he does say, *viz.*, that "God's work was temporarily marred and its progress delayed by evil," which he still further tells us is "no part of God's plan."

Here, surely, is a partial failure of God's plan: instead of the world being "peopled with a race of holy, happy beings, rejoicing forever in the goodness and glory of God," it has been peopled with a race of sinful, wretched creatures who know not God, nor care for His glory. This was "no part of God's plan," God's work is thereby "marred" and "delayed," but this damage will ultimately be partially repaired and the original plan carried out.

How contradictory and inconsistent is all of this! How it belittles God's power and wisdom. Evil which is "no part of God's plan" comes in, in spite of God and contrary to His plan. Evil disarranged and delayed His work and partially destroys it, though after a long struggle and much loss, God will "triumph," and a remnant of the race share in the benefits of the original plan.

According to this view God cannot be supreme or infinite, for if He was, no power would be able to mar His work in the least degree, or delay His plan for one single moment; and His success would not be partial but complete and absolute.

Furthermore, if this view of our brother was correct, the future would be shrouded in uncertainty and gloom; if events have taken place to mar and delay God's work in the past, contrary to His will and plan, then such events may occur in the future.

Our brother says that "evil and sin is no part of God's plan," and yet evil and sin got into God's world and disarranged His plan and postponed His triumph, putting God to great trouble, so to speak, to repair damages, and causing the destruction of a portion of God's works in spite of all that He can do. If this has happened once, may it not occur again?

If God could not have prevented it then, how can we tell that He will be able to prevent a similar disastrous occurrence at some future time, and so His work be still more marred and the final success still further delayed? If you say that God could have prevented it, but that He chose to allow evil and sin to enter the world, then you yield the whole point and come at once on the ground that I advocate.

If God allowed sin to enter the world when He might have prevented it, then He is certainly responsible for it. Since He is good and wise, it must be that it was allowed for some good and wise purpose. Since He can see the end from the beginning, it must be that evil and sin are a part of His plan – foreseen, provided for and working together – like all other things, for good. We cannot escape these conclusions by bringing in the orthodox doctrine of man's free will.

In order to show the reader that I have not exaggerated this brother's position I will quote one more extract that clearly shows how far out of the way one may get, and yet apparently be unconscious of it, when they undertake to oppose the truth and to support error; the extract is as follows:

Although God is supreme, He cannot control the will of an intelligent creature and at the same time leave him free to make his own choice. Because God permitted the fall and made provisions accordingly, is no proof that it was the best way; but it was best under the circumstances that is after the introduction of sin. God always does the best He can for everybody under the circumstances. It was much better that the world be peopled with a race of holy, happy immortals, even at the expense of much sorrow and suffering, than to give up the plan and let all go back to nothing, infinitely better. But it were still better by far had God's plan been followed from the beginning.

O dear! What an imperfect weak God this brother has! "He always does the best He can under the circumstances!" Why, you might say that of any well-meaning, conscientious Christian: they do the best they can under the circumstances. A being of that kind will not satisfy me for a God; nor does it measure up to the Bible presentation of the Most High.

Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and His Redeemer the Lord of Hosts, "I am the first and I am the last; and beside Me there is no God: and who, as I, shall call and shall declare and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people, and the things that are coming and shall come, let them show unto them" (Isaiah 44:6-7).

Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else, I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, "My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." Yea ... I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it (Isaiah 46:9-11).

A god that "always did the best he could under the circumstances" might command some of our respect and some degree of love, but we could not put much confidence in him – not much more than in a well-meaning man, for we should never know what circumstance might arise to hamper his operations, disarrange and delay his plans, and cripple his strength.

No, *no!* Such a god as that would not do for the head of this universe; and I am thankful that our God is not such being as that. He is a God Who makes and controls circumstances; He is never "under" any circumstances, but always above them all, and He "*works all things after the council of his own will,*" saying "*My council shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure.*"

I cannot admit for a moment that God was compelled by circumstances to choose a second rate method to carry out His plan. *All things* are part and parcel of His plan; and that plan is being carried out without the least disarrangement or a moment of delay by the originally appointed and very best of means; and "*none can stay his hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou*" (Daniel 4:35).

Let it be noticed also how this brother contradicts himself again by implying that God's original plan was not carried out. He says,

It was much better that the world be peopled with a race of holy, happy immortals, even at the expense of much sorrow and suffering, than to give up the plan and let all go back to nothing, infinitely better. But it were better by far had God's plan been followed from the beginning.

Note here, first, that it is implied that after sin entered the world, the best way to carry out God's plan was lost, and now God had two alternatives presented to Him; He must either "give up His plan and let all go back again to nothing," or he must carry out that plan (partially) "at the expense of much sorrow and suffering." The latter was the lesser of the two evils and so God chose that.

"But it were better by far," our brother says, "had God's plan been followed from the beginning." Then he is ►



saying that God's plan was not followed from the beginning, that some other plan was followed which took into account evil and sin, which was no part of God's plan. Yet he also declares that "God's plan cannot fail."

Either evil and sin were as much a part of the plan of God, or else God must have changed His original plan for another plan entirely different, for surely evil and sin have a very intimate relation to the plan of God as now revealed in the Bible; the whole plan of redemption is the means whereby man is delivered from the bondage of corruption, and Christ's special mission is to "save His people from their sin" (Matthew 1:21) and to "destroy the works of the Adversary" (I John 3:8).

We will not pursue this line of thought any further. I have introduced these extracts and remarks in order to show how crooked and inconsistent are the ways of error. The writer I have been reviewing is, I have no doubt,

an earnest, intelligent Christian; and yet in his reasoning he contradicts himself, as we have seen. He takes positions that are inconsistent and unreasonable, and unconsciously belittles and degrades the wisdom and power of God to the level of mere expediency – "He does the best He can under the circumstances" – about the same as a good-natured, well-disposed mortal might do.

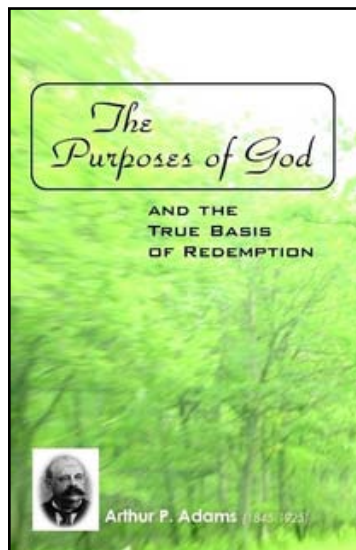
How strikingly in contrast with all of this snarl and tangle are the simple grand truths of God's Word as set forth in His "*purpose of the ages*" (Ephesians 3:11)!

These truths are harmonious one with another, and with the entire Word; they are reasonable and consistent throughout, and they magnify the wisdom and love of God so as to fill our hearts with joy and praise, putting us under no necessity to defend His character or to apologize for His dealings with the children of men. ■

PREPARATION OF THE TOOLS

Every wise workman takes his tools away from the work from time to time that they may be ground and sharpened; so does the only-wise Jehovah take His servants oftentimes away into darkness and loneliness and trouble, that He may sharpen and prepare them for harder work in His service.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne
(1813-1843)



This is a compilation of some of Arthur P. Adams' smaller works that first appeared in his periodical *The Spirit of the Word* in 1885. Adams suffered greatly for the truths presented here. The riches found within these pages deserve to be preserved for future generations. Even though Adams wrote over one hundred years ago, in many ways his writings are just as fresh as if they had been written today.

This is THE TRUE BASIS OF REDEMPTION – God our Creator, responsible for His Own creation, and every attribute of His being pledged to its successful completion. God is able, and He will. The creature may rest secure on that basis – the all sufficient ground and full assurance of his deliverance and final triumph in the redemption of Jesus Christ. – A.P. Adams

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