

MISPLACED LOVE

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Colossians 3:2-3)

Love is indispensable to Christian living. The beloved disciple says, "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." (I John 4:8) While there are many things that we are to love, there are also many things that we are not permitted to love. There are many people who have love in their hearts, but that love is directed in wrong channels and centered upon wrong things. In this study I want to emphasize some of those things which many are prone to love today, which should not be loved by those who are Christians. I am calling our subject, "Misplaced Love".

I. Some are desperately in love with money.

Paul said to Timothy, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (I Timothy 6:9-10) The love of money leads to the sin of covetousness--one of the most deadly of all sins. It has power to blind its victim until he is unconscious of its presence. If a man is a murderer or a thief he knows it, but the person has not been found who was guilty of covetousness and knew it. Jesus spent about two thirds of His time warning us against this baneful sin. Many of His parables are directed against the sin of covetousness. Paul said to the Colossians, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupisence, and covetousness, which is idolatry." (Colossians 3:5) Here the apostle makes covetousness tantamount to idolatry. Churches are filled with these idolaters, and the pity of it is that they can pray the longest and and the loudest and shout "Amen" to all the preacher says. But let us remember these words: "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." (Ephesians 5:5)

II. Some are in love with self.

As Paul predicted of the "perilous times" that "shall come", he declared that "Men shall be lovers of their own selves..." (II Timothy 3:2) To the Romans Paul said, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)

To the Galatian churches Paul said, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself." (Galatians 6:3) The love for self begets self-righteousness; it causes one to minimize his own vices and maximize the vices of his brother. Could you imagine one any more afflicted with the love for self any more than the self-righteous Pharisee who "prayed thus with himself", "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess." (Luke 18:11-12) This was Simon's trouble, who was "giving out that himself was some great one". (Acts 8:9) He had a misplaced love.

III. Many troubles have been caused in the church by a love for preeminence.

Some are like Diotrophes, "who loveth to have the preeminence..." (III John 9) This is akin to the love for self. It is the love of self that promotes this desire for prominence. Jesus said to the self-righteous Pharisees, "Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets." (Luke 11:43) Some of the synagogue seats were more prominent than others. They were the seats usually occupied by the elders of the synagogue, near the pulpit. These religious hypocrites desired them. Jesus "put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." (Luke 14:7-11)

IV. Another closely related love is the love of praise.

John said, "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:42-43) This often prevents men and women from doing their duty to the Lord. The praise of men may be all right in its place, but if we are seeking praise of men more than the praise of God we have the wrong motive and the wrong objective. The preacher who seeks the praise of men more than the praise of God is not a true gospel preacher. Paul said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10)

A thousand mistakes in tact or psychology are not as bad as failing to preach the truth of God and condemn error. A mistake in "method of approach" can do no worse than offend man, but a failure to declare the whole counsel of God offends all heaven.

A Christian must regulate his conduct by the will of God, whether men are pleased with it or not. In fact the life and deportment of a sincere Christian will not please men; it will be a living rebuke to those of the world. Jesus said to His disciples, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:19) True Christians must differ from the world. Their aims, emotions and purposes must be unlike the world. They are a peculiar people; and they should be willing to be esteemed as such. "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you." (II Corinthians 6:17) Hence a Christian should be alarmed when the world flatters and caresses him. Jesus said to his disciples, "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!" (Luke 6:26) Certainly no Christian should endeavor to make himself obnoxious, but a faithful and devoted Christian life can never win the praise of all men.

V. The world is crowded with people who are lovers of pleasure.

Paul predicted that during the "last days" when "perilous times shall come", that men will be "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God". (II Timothy 3:4) Without question the apostle has in mind here in this passage sensual pleasures, or vain amusements. A great portion of the people of the world live for pleasure; they have no serious pursuits; they practice no restraints which might interfere with their amusements. If ever a period of time can mark the fulfillment of this prediction of Paul, that time is now. Men are living for pleasure and thrill. They want to make more money in order to have more pleasure. They are seeking new ways by which they can gratify their passion for pleasure. But the pleasure for which they seek is vain. The "pleasures of sin" are but "for a season" (Hebrews 11:25); but the joys and felicities to be found in Christ are lasting. While the Christian way of life has many trials, yet it offers many wholesome enjoyments. Over and over Jesus used the word "Blessed", which means "Happy". Even in the midst of trial and tribulation, Jesus said, "Rejoice, and be exceeding glad..." (Matthew 5:12) So let us not misplace our love for pleasure. Let us seek the happiness in Christ that comes to those who have their "affection" set "on things above".

VI. Another example of a misplaced love is love for the world.

Paul said, "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world..." (1 Timothy 4:10) John said, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15) The term "world" is used in the Scriptures in a number of senses. I mention here only three: (1) As denoting the physical eye. (2) The world as applied to the people that reside in it. (3) The world as regarding those separated from God. Considered with reference to the first sense of the world, it is not improper to love the world as the work of God, for God loves His own creation which He pronounced "was very good". (Genesis 1:31) Surely it is not wrong for me to love that which God loves. Considered with reference to the second sense of the word, it is not wrong to love the people of the world. It is only with reference to the word as used in the third sense that the command here can be understood to be applicable, or that the love of the world is forbidden. In this connection Paul said, "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed...." (Romans 12:2)

The love for the world will crowd out the love for God. In the parable of the Sower, Jesus said, "And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful." (Mark 4:18-19) Hence James said, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." (James 4:4)

VII. Many love darkness rather than light.

Jesus said, "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21) Here Jesus declares that "men love darkness rather than light." In the scriptures darkness is the emblem of iniquity, error and evil; while light is the symbol of righteousness, truth and good. Men love darkness more than light, iniquity more than righteousness, and error rather than truth. And why? "Because their deeds were evil." Men who commit crime, generally choose to do it in the night so as to escape detection. When Adam and Eve sinned they tried to hide from God. When Judas betrayed Christ he sought the cover of darkness."...and it was night", said John. (John 13:30) Evil men are afraid of the light. Hence most crimes are committed at night. So with the sinner, he hates the gospel; he does not want the searchlight of truth shined upon his sinful course.

But Jesus said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John 8:12) Therefore when we follow Christ, His light so shines through us that we will have no fear of darkness.

May the Lord help us that our love may be genuine and bountiful, prompted by the right motive and directed to the right end--namely to God, the Father, and to His Beloved Son.

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