

Sunday, January 13, 2012

Distinct Characteristics of the Christian Faith (5) Love (Cont.)

Summary of the previous article

In the previous article, we talked about the short phrase “God is Love.” It articulates the Christian faith at large, both from a doctrinal stand point on one hand, and personal as well as conduct and way of life of the believers on the other. We addressed the relationship between love and the fundamental doctrines of Christianity: The three Hypostasis of Holy Trinity exchange love amongst Them. Incarnation, crucifixion, and redemption cannot be comprehended except through the love of God towards man who is sinful and in need of redemption and salvation. In this article, we will discuss the relationship between love and the conduct and way of life of the Christian believers.

Love and Christian Conduct

When we talk about the relationship between love and the conduct of a Christian person, we mean his relationship with God, his Creator, as well as his neighbors, other people around him.

Love, not ritual worship or fear, is the most distinct characteristic of the relationship between the believer and his Creator. Obviously we don't advocate that Christians shouldn't offer worship to, or fear, God. Rather, when a Christian offers worship to God and fears Him, he does so based on the love of God that was manifested in His salvation of mankind. Man, in return, expresses his love towards God in the form of worship which leads him to delve deep into the infinite love of God. As to fear, a Christian fears his weak nature that often leads him to sin. Sin is considered to be ingratitude from man towards God, the good and Lover of mankind. Thus, love leads to the fear of the Lord which is the *“Beginning of wisdom”* (Psalm 111:10, Sirakh 1:16). The more the love towards God grows within man, the more fear subsides. Thus, man advances towards the perfection of wisdom which is the love of God, *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us.”* (1 John 4:17-18). Therefore, we see that the foundation of the relationship between man and God from a Christian perspective is love which governs the conduct of a Christian person towards God.



Love is the only means of guidance and control of the relationship of Christians with other people around them. This love doesn't distinguish color, ethnicity, religion, or race. Love that is not defeated by the ill-conduct of others towards Christians even if they resist us, are in enmity with us, or persecute us up to death. Additionally, the love of man towards his brother, neighbor, or any human regardless of religion or race, can never be separated from the love of man towards God: *“If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.”* (1 John 4:20-21).

Not only that, but also love becomes evidence to the discipleship of Christ: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35), and it is the perfection of the law: *“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery,” “You shall not murder,” “You shall not steal,” “You shall not bear false witness,” “You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”* (Romans 13:8-10). Also, love is the fulfillment of the original form after which God created man. Finally, it is the living gospel that Christians preach to others.

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