

“Love”

1 John 4:8,16: “...God is love....”

Matthew 22:36-40 (GNB): ³⁶ “Teacher,” he asked, “which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ Jesus answered, “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is the greatest and the most important commandment. ³⁹ The second most important commandment is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ ⁴⁰ The whole Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets depend on these two commandments.”

Compare Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 with Matthew 22:36-40.

It sounds so profound and yet so simple! *Love* is probably the word that has come to be associated with Christianity more than any other. But, is it really that simple? Follow me as we consider it for a few minutes.

What God wants most of all in His universe is loving, understanding friends. But, love is much more than just a warm, fuzzy emotional response. Think of the implications of this simple concept!

In order to be able to love, one must also be able to hate. Otherwise “love” has no meaning. God wants much more than mere robots. Suppose you took a tape recorder and after inserting a nice new tape, pressed the record button, and spoke clearly into the microphone the following words: “I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you,” etc. for as long as you wanted. If you then rewound the tape and pushed the play button, would you be delighted to know that the tape recorder was saying, “I love you”? Would you give the recorder a big hug for such a wonderful expression of appreciation and love? Of course not! You would think that the whole exercise was a bit silly because the tape recorder has no control over what it says. It only repeats what you tell it.

So, in order for God to have creatures who truly love Him, He had to create them with freedom of choice. That, in turn, implies a lot of other things. Let us consider the scenario.

If God wants real love and at the same time grants real freedom, then He must give us a basis on which to build that love. In essence, He must truly love us if He wants a love response in return. In effect, He will have to “win” our love. But, how does He do that if we are truly free?

To be *really free*, one must have *choices*. Choices are not the same as chances. Sometimes, a child plays a game where s/he puts something valuable or desirable in one hand and then puts both hands behind her/his back. After a moment or two, during which s/he may or may not have moved the object from one hand to the other, s/he then brings both hands out for you to choose which one you want. Now, if the item is large enough or irregularly shaped enough, you may get a clue by the appearance of the hands themselves. But, for the moment, let us assume that you have no idea which hand contains the item. When you choose one hand or the other, you are playing a game of chance. God does not play chance games. If salvation were based on chance, then we are truly dealing with an arbitrary, capricious God who enjoys entertaining Himself with our foolish activities.

In order for God to give us real freedom, He must give us *real choices*. That means that we not only must be able to see what we are choosing; but also, more than that, we must have some idea of the implications of that choice down the line. If you make a choice because something looks good or feels good but you have no idea whether you are getting a deadly weapon or a child’s toy, it is really nothing more than chance. In order to have a

real choice, you must know what the item is and have some idea about the future implications of choosing it. Furthermore, if we lived in a universe that was completely chaotic so that a choice that appeared good today would turn out to be deadly tomorrow, again, any real freedom would be gone.

So, in order to make real love possible, God had to create an *orderly* universe in which choices that are good today are still good tomorrow. We would have to be able to study reality at least long enough during one lifetime so that we could get a good idea what the results of each of our regular choices was going to be. But, think of the implications of this! We would need to have a universe that is orderly enough so that “science” would be possible. “Laws” would describe the way things work.

In allowing us freedom, God recognized that—sooner or later—someone might choose to work against His plan. Then, He would have to deal with the problems that arose. As we know historically, Lucifer, the leader of the angels, was the one who rebelled. (Revelation 12:4a,7-12) In turn, he convinced one-third of the angels and our first parents to join him in that rebellion. (Genesis 3:1-19) Thus, our world became the testing ground for the “great controversy.” No doubt, God wished that He could prevent any evil consequences from befalling any of His children. But, in order to have an atmosphere of love, God knew that He would have to stand back and allow things to take their course. God certainly has and had the power to step in at any moment and prevent anyone from sinning or even prevent the consequences of anyone’s sins. But, if He did that, He would have to overrule our freedom.

Instead, God chose to allow things to take their natural course with people mostly reaping the consequences of their own actions and those of their forefathers. God would only step into human history to exercise His power and force when it was absolutely necessary to preserve the human race or to prevent them from losing contact with Him.

And so, we read the record of the Old Testament. God had to allow things to go from bad to worse according to human choices until, finally, at the time of the flood, things had become so bad that God was about to completely lose contact with the human race. Many things still needed to be demonstrated. So, God Himself drowned all of His children except eight—and even those had major faults.

And so, the story went on for thousands of years. Now it is our turn to live on the earth. And God is preserving a complete record of everything that is being thought, said, and done here on planet earth as a permanent protection against such a thing ever happening again. (ST Dec. 30, 1889 par. 4; 5BC 1132.9)

A million or even a billion years into the future as we are living in complete harmony and peace together, someone may again decide to rebel. God will only need to pull out the “video” of the history of this world from the divine museum to remind everyone what the consequences of such a decision would be. God only needs to let “sin” happen once.

Our little planet is and will forever be the lesson book of the universe. God has declared that “love” is the best way, even the only way, to run a universe. The Devil and this earth are in the midst of an experiment to try to prove that God is wrong. We may choose which side of this whole “great controversy” we are going to be on. But, as we decide, let us remember that the consequences and implications of each choice are far from “simple”!

© 1999-2016, Kenneth Hart, MD, MA, MPH. Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution of all or of a portion of this material such as to a Bible study class is encouraged. Info@theox.org