

LOVE

Lesson Number Eight

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John 13:34 & 35 says, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

And I Peter 2:17 says, "Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor."

I John 4:21 says, "And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also."

And I John 3:17 says, "But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" Turn with me now to I Corinthians 13:11 on Page 1000 in the Bible.

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I Corinthians 13:11, "When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways."

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The change from childhood to adulthood is one that often seems hard to define. We usually reach a point where we can say, "I am now an adult." And, at that point, we can also look back to other times and say, "Then I was a child." But it is very difficult to point to the exact moment where the change occurred. We can try to beg the issue by saying that maturation is a process that takes place over time and that the line between child and adult is fuzzy. And that statement is essentially correct but it really doesn't tell us much except that we don't understand where the change actually takes place. We already knew that so we haven't learned anything new. ~~WE CAN BEG THE ISSUE AGAIN BY SAYING~~

We have to admit that two states exist, child and adult, and that one is either one or the other and not both. This DOESN'T mean that adults can't exhibit childish traits or act childishly at times and it doesn't mean that children can't act wise beyond their years. Nor can we further beg the issue by saying that adolescence comes between childhood and adulthood. Technically, an adolescent is still a child and, even if that were not true, we would only have succeeded in bringing up the new problem of the dividing line between adolescence and adulthood.

We can attempt to try to define the point between childhood and adulthood as that where the child finally takes control of and responsibility for his or her own life. But that line is fuzzy too. Certainly the college student whose tuition is being paid by his parents would still be a child under such a definition. But such a student may actually be much more mature than another who is living in his own apartment, has his own job, and would technically be classified as an adult under the definition but makes a shambles of his life because he has never learned how to manage either his finances or his emotions.

But, even though we may not be able to define the point of passage, we CAN affirm that it exists and that generally one passes it at some time in their life, most often after twenty and before thirty.

This passage in the physical realm, involving changes in our physical, mental, and emotional makeup, is echoed by a similar passage in the spiritual realm. I John 3:2 says, "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet

18 IS THE AGE WHEN ONE USUALLY BECOMES AN ADULT. BUT Maturity AND REASON ARE OFTEN TWO DIFFERENT THINGS.

appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We will achieve complete spiritual maturity when we see Jesus. Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit is about the task of conforming us closer and closer to his image as we approach that Point. We are in the fuzzy area now. We have been reborn as children of God but we are not yet mature. Many of us have come a long way and are certainly not babes in Christ anymore but we also are not yet mature Sons and will not be until we see Him. It is one aspect of the growth process that we are going to discuss in more detail today.

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Today, we are going to talk about Pain. Pain is NOT a fun subject! But Pain is something everyone experiences in one form or another at some Point or Points in their lives. We can't just ignore it. C.S. Lewis states the major Problem that Pain Presents in his book on the subject. If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what he wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or Power, or both. This is the Problem of Pain in its simplest form and the argument seems eminently logical. But, like any logical argument, it is only as valid as the assumptions that it is based on and begins from. If we were to begin with the assumption that all people over six feet six inches tall are ballet dancers, then it would be a valid logical conclusion that, since I am six feet eight inches tall, I am therefore a ballet dancer. But, of course, I am not a ballet dancer. The logical argument is correct but the conclusion is false because the whole argument starts from an assumption which is false. In the Problem of Pain, finding the answer depends upon showing that it begins with false assumptions about the nature of the terms "good", "almighty", and "happy".

But, first, we had better define what pain actually is and how we will be looking at it. The word "Pain" actually has two meanings which we have to distinguish between. The first is that of a clearly physical event which is recognized as being the sensation of pain whether we dislike it or not. The slight ache in our bodies after a game of tennis or softball would fit this category nicely. We don't dislike it; in fact we usually appreciate it as part of our pleasure in the sport. The second definition of pain is any experience, whether physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual, which we dislike. All pains of the first kind become pains of the second kind if they are raised above a very low level of intensity but pains of the second kind do not have to grow out of pains of the first kind. I will be talking here about pains of the second kind only. Minor aches are not what I will mean when I say pain; I will mean suffering, anguish, tribulation, adversity, trouble; the kind of pain that can lead us to doubt God's goodness or Power.

First, let's think about the Power of God. Turn with me to Matthew 19:26 on page 854 in your Bibles. This verse is found in the passage where Jesus has told his disciples that it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than it is for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

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Matthew 19:26, "But Jesus looked at them and said to them, 'With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.'"

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Jesus has here stated the omnipotence of God; the fact that he is all-powerful and can do anything. In the original Greek, the word is DUNATOS which is from the same root as the word which is elsewhere translated as "miracle". But then is anything really impossible at all.

The secret to answering this question lies in the word "thing". In ordinary usage, the word "impossible" implies the word "unless". From where I am standing, it is "impossible" for me to see the trees outside "unless" I walk over to the window and look out or "unless" I am suddenly endowed with X-Ray vision. Thus, to see the trees from here is a CONDITIONAL impossibility.

But there are also ABSOLUTE impossibilities. Absolute impossibilities include self-contradictory events. For example, I say that I am standing here. To say that my statement is both true and false at the same time is self-contradictory and thus an absolute impossibility. It is not possible for a statement to be perfectly true and perfectly false simultaneously. It is absolutely impossible. It is intrinsically impossible. There is no "unless" that applies to it. An intrinsic impossibility is impossible under all conditions and in all worlds and for all agents.

"All agents" here includes God himself. His omnipotence means Power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to him, but not nonsense. This is NOT a limit on God's Power. Listen to this sentence, "God can give a creature free-will and at the same time withhold free-will from it." This sentence hasn't said ANYTHING about God! Meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words, "God can." It remains true that all THINGS are possible with God; the intrinsic impossibilities are NOT things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His Power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we say it about God.

And, it would be nonsense to suppose that even God could create a society of free souls without also creating some sort of background "nature" for them to exist within. Such a nature would also have to be independent because the freedom of choice implies at least two independent things to choose between. And Pain becomes unavoidable the moment a free soul exists in such an independent environment. This is because not all states of matter will be equally agreeable to the soul interacting with it. If fire comforts the body at a certain distance, it will destroy the body if it gets too close. The Process is necessary. Nobody really objects to the Progression of "warmly beautifully hot, too hot!, YEDW!!!" that warns you to step back from the fire before you are consumed. Without it, we would be in real trouble. And different free souls will have different experiences of the same environment depending on the choices they make. If I choose to ride a bicycle south and

find myself coasting downhill, then it follows that if you decide to ride a bicycle north, you are going to find yourself laboring uphill.

And, as soon as two separate free souls exist in an independent and inexorable environment, the possibility of conflict exists. When one free soul makes a choice that conflicts with the choice of another, a conflict exists. If one bicycle exists and I choose to ride it south and you choose to ride it north, a conflict exists. And, if we choose to compete rather than yield, we can exploit the fixed nature of matter to create pain. The permanent nature of wood allows me to use a stick to give you a smack and drive you away from the bicycle that we both want to use. Add a little technology and we soon have bows and arrows, guns, and hydrogen bombs.

Now, we could conceive of a world in which our omnipotent God instantly corrected these abuses of free-will by His creatures at every moment: so that the wooden stick I am about to smack you with becomes as soft as a feather when I try to use it as a weapon or so that the air refuses to obey me when I try to set up the sound waves that carry lies or insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible, and in which, therefore, freedom of the will would be void. In fact, if carried to its logical conclusion, even evil thoughts would be impossible and free will would not exist. The moment free will exists, the possibility of pain cannot be avoided.

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So "almighty" is not quite as simple a term as it first appears to be. And God's goodness is not such a simple thing either. If God is wiser than we are then His judgement must differ from ours on many things, not the least of which will be the difference between good and evil. What seems good to us may not be good in his eyes and what seems evil to us may not be evil at all. We think of pain as an evil to be avoided but God may consider it a good that we really need. Now this doesn't mean that God's judgement is so different than ours that we can't comprehend it. He gives us a conscience that helps us perceive the difference between good and evil as he sees it so long as we don't ignore that conscience. His judgement differs from ours not in the way white differs from black but rather in the way that a perfect circle differs from a child's first attempt to draw one. But when the child learns to draw, then the circle that is drawn will be readily recognized by the child as what he or she was trying to make from the start. This doctrine is presupposed in scripture. We are called upon to repent. The call would be meaningless if God's standards were so inherently different from our own as to be totally unrecognizable.

By the goodness of God we usually mean his lovingness when we talk about it today. And, by love in this context, most of us mean kindness - the desire to see others happy. But this means that what we really seem to want is a God who will look at what we like to do and say, "What does it matter as long as they are contented?" What we want is not so much a Father in Heaven as a Grandfather in Heaven - a senile benevolence whose only goal is to see that everybody has a good time. We might not be so foolish as to try to

formulate a formal theology on this basis but we certainly hold the desire in the backs of our minds. I'm no different; I would like to live in a universe like that. But since it is abundantly clear that I don't, and since I still hold tightly to my belief that God is Love, I have to conclude that there is something wrong with the conception of love that I have just voiced.

In fact, any form of definition which tries to make love and kindness exactly equal to each other is going to fall flat on its face. Agape Love is something more stern and splendid than mere kindness. There is kindness in Love but Love is bigger than kindness alone. Kindness by itself doesn't really care very much about its object; it even has a certain measure of contempt for it. Kindness really doesn't care whether its object becomes good or bad, just so long as it escapes suffering. Turn with me to Hebrews chapter twelve on page 1052 in your Bibles. We're going to look at verses 5 through 11. These verses tell us point blank that it's really only unloved bastards that are spoiled; the legitimate children who are the heirs of their father get spanked when they misbehave.

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Hebrews 12:5-11. "And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons? - 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.' It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers to discipline us and we respected them; shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time at their pleasure, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."

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In this day and age we have become so conditioned by modern psychology that we soften the meaning of verses such as these almost automatically. We read the word "discipline" and think of grounding our kids for a week or sending them to their rooms. But the word is PAIDEIA in the original greek and it means "spanking" not restrictions. It is translated as "chastening" and "chastisement" in the King James Version of this passage. The first edition of the Good News Bible, at Hebrews 12:6, reads, "Because the Lord Punishes everyone he loves, and whips everyone he accepts as a son." And the Living Bible's Paraphrase of Hebrews 12:11 is, "Being punished isn't enjoyable while it is happening - it hurts! But afterwards we can see the result, a quiet growth in grace and character." God is NOT talking about gentle warnings and rebukes here; he is talking about a good, old-fashioned trip to the woodshed; the kind that really stings, the kind that we struggle and kick against and try to escape from:

Just so there won't be any mistake; I am not one of those zealots who says children should be mercilessly

whipped for every infraction. But, I am also not on the side of the modern Psychologists who only allow spanking in extreme life-threatening situations. I consider a spanking to be what God Presents it to be in the Bible. It is neither child abuse nor the Perfect way to raise children all by itself. Spanking is a tool. It can be used Properly and it can also be used Improperly. Spanking is a tool just like a hammer is a tool. You can use a hammer to build a house for a family to live in - this is a Proper use of the tool. You can also use a hammer to bash in a man's skull in order to rob and kill him. This is NOT a Proper use of the tool. Spanking is also a tool: when used as a vent for a Parent's hostile emotions, it is a horribly abusive misuse of the tool. To "spank in cold blood" is also a misuse. But, if used the way God designed it, in the context of loving and Prayerful instruction in righteousness, as a warning to avoid Improper behavior in the future, and as a reminder that stubbornness, rebellion, and disobedience carry heavy and unpleasant Penalties in this world and the next, then a spanking is God's Prescription for the Proper upbringing of the children He has entrusted to our care. And God affirms this by telling us that, since we are His children, He is going to spank us when we misbehave.

We human beings were not made Primarily so that we might love God. That IS an important part of our reason for existence but it is not the Primary reason. The Primary reason for our existence is not that we might love God but rather that God might love us. To ask that God's love should be content with us as we are is to ask that God should cease to be God. Because He IS God, His love must be Impeded and repelled by certain stains in our Present character, and because He already loves us He must labor to make us lovable. We are fallen creatures who, even after our rebirth, must be reformed and brought up to God's standard for us. We must be cured of our disease of rebellion and disobedience. Just becoming a child of God by rebirth does not make us obedient children. We still want our own way even in the face of our Father's will. We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved: we are rebels who must lay down our arms and submit to God. Our cure is Painful because to render back the will which we have so long claimed for our own is in itself a grievous Pain. We do not do this easily. Very much as we did under the control of our earthly fathers, it is only when the Pain of the spanking becomes worse than the Pain of surrendering that we finally give in and obey.

The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. God whispers to us in our Pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our Pains - it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. When things are going well, we often find God to be an interruption. We think of God the same way a Pilot thinks of his Parachute: it's there for emergencies but he hopes he'll never have to use it. Now God, who has made us, knows what we are and He knows that our only Possible real happiness lies in Him. Yet we do not seek our happiness in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can even Plausibly be looked for. While what we call "our OWN life" remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interests

but make "our own life" less agreeable to us, and take away the Plausible sources of false happiness. Turn back with me now to Proverbs 13:24 on Page 557 in your Bibles.

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Proverbs 13:24, "He who spares the rod hates his son; but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him."

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To forestall any thought of male chauvanism here, the word "son" is from the hebrew BEN which is not strictly male in nature. It is also translated as "daughter" in other locations. It is often used generically just as "man" is used to mean mankind, male or female. So the verse is NOT saying spank your sons and let your daughters go their own way. It would be essentially just as legitimate to translate this verse as "He who spares ~~the~~ rod hates his daughter, but he who loves her is diligent to discipline her." The male gender is specific, however, in referring to the owner of the rod, thus reflecting the responsibility of the father as the head of the household for the proper raising of the children.

But the main point here is that God has adopted us: we are His children and He is our Father. He loves us. And Proverbs 13:24 tells us that He is therefore NOT going to spare the rod but will rather be diligent to discipline us. Turn with me now to Psalm 39:11 on Page 486 in your Bibles. If there is no other verse in the Bible which would convince us to turn away from the Pronouncements of modern Psychology and back to God's Prescription for dealing with our children when they misbehave, this one ought to.

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Psalm 39:11, "When thou dost chasten man with rebukes for sin, thou dost consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely every man is mere breath! SELAH".

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The Good News Bible puts it, "...like a moth you destroy what he loves...". the King James Version says, "...thou makest his beauty to consume away...". and the Living Bible says, "When you Punish a man for his sins, he is destroyed, for he is as fragile as a moth infested cloth..." Think about that for a moment. When God spansks, it is truly awful. Everything you hold dear becomes dust in your hand. Your body may be stricken. Or, like Ananias and Saphira who lied to the Holy Spirit, God may kill your physical body in order to save your soul. Now, let's turn that around and apply it to our own children. Do we want to see those sort of things happen to the little ones we hold so dear. Even if they're not so little anymore, even if they're pre-teens or teenagers we would still be devastated if anything like that happened to them.

If you put your son or daughter over your lap and give them a spanking it's going to sting for a few minutes and it's going to sting bad! But the sting doesn't last long and if they change their behavior as a result, you may have just saved them from the necessity of a spanking from God which is much, much worse. Think about it!

And for yourself, when you are suffering pain, DON'T take it like a man, take it like a child; cry out to your Father God in Prayer and tell Him you want to get out of it. Ask Him what you're doing wrong and what you have to do to get him to stop. Yes, it's true that there are other

reasons for Pain than just current misbehavior: We all face Pain and Physical death as a result of the fall; there is no escaping that and we simply have to rely on God to sustain us in the midst of it. And some People God has ordained will suffer Pain all their lives because it is through such suffering that they are destined to glorify him. We cannot know all of God's mind on the question of Pain but many, many times the cause of our Pain IS our own misbehavior. We should go to our Father and ask him if that's what it is because, if it is, we can repent and obey and, not only will the Pain be lifted, but we will also reap all the other wonderful things that our Father has in store for those who determine to obey him.

He DOES want us to be happy! But He also knows that we can never really be happy unless it is in the way he has planned for us. If we pay attention when He chastens us and turn away from ourselves and to His will, he will fill us with joy beyond our ability to describe! Why should we continue to cheat ourselves out of this joy by our own continued stubborn rebellion. It just seems so stupid!

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Let's take some time to pray together before we go on to discussing the case study for this morning.
