

CHAPTER TWO

LOVE

GOD'S REQUIREMENT

In the experience of a believer, perhaps the most difficult thing is to submit to the Lord in the matter of love. But the Lord pays attention to the believer's love more than anything else. The Lord requires him to fully hand over his love to Him that He may be Lord over it. The Lord wants to have the first place in his love. We often hear people talk about consecration. We know that consecration is the first step of a believer's spiritual living. It is not the destination of spirituality; rather, it is the beginning. It leads the believer to the position of being sanctified. If there is no consecration, there certainly cannot be a spiritual living. However, nothing is more important in a believer's consecration than his love. Whether his consecration is true or false depends upon whether or not there is a consecration of love. Love is the touchstone of consecration. It is easy to present our time, money, ability, and many other things to the Lord, but it is difficult to offer our love to Him. This is not to say that we do not love Christ. Perhaps we love the Lord very much; nevertheless, we may give the first place to someone else and give the Lord the second place; we may love someone else besides the Lord, or we may direct our own love. Loving the Lord in these ways should not be considered as consecration, because we have not yet consecrated our love. Every spiritual believer knows that love should be offered first. Unless love is offered, nothing is offered.

In the matter of a believer's love, God requires him to love Him fully. The Lord is not willing to share the heart of the believer with anyone or anything. Even if His share is the major portion, He still is not pleased. The Lord demands absoluteness. This is a deathblow to the believer's soul-life, which is totally for the self. The Lord wants us to part with what we love and not have a divided heart. He wants us to love Him fully and to love according to Him. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37). The word "all" means that every part of our being is for the Lord. The Lord does not want us to withhold any of our love so that we can love according to our wish. He wants absoluteness. He is a "jealous God" (Exo. 20:5) who will not allow anyone else to gain the love of His children.

But we have many loves other than God! Perhaps some are those who are most intimate to us, like an Isaac, a Jonathan, or a Rachel. God demands that we put those whom we love upon the altar. He cannot tolerate us withholding someone who would compete with Him. All that we have should be offered up. This is the way for a believer to obtain spiritual power. When the sacrifice, even the last sacrifice, is put upon the altar, fire will descend from heaven. Without the altar, there is no heavenly fire. Without bearing the cross and offering to the Lord all that we love, how can we have the power of the Holy Spirit? The altar should not be kept empty because fire will consume the sacrifice upon it. What will the fire burn if there are no sacrifices? O brothers, we cannot obtain the power of the Holy Spirit by understanding the cross in our mentality or by discussing the cross; rather, we can obtain it by offering up everything completely. If we have any secret ties that are not yet cut off, if in our hearts we still spare some sheep, oxen, or Agag for God, we will not be able to see the power of the Holy Spirit manifested through us.

Because believers do not allow the Lord to be Lord over their love, God's work is hindered. How many parents love their children so much that they hold back their children and cause God's kingdom to suffer loss! Many couples are so attached to each

other that there is a shortage of labor for the plenteous harvest! Many believers are reluctant to part with their friends, so they remain behind while their brother fights alone at the front. It is very pitiful that some believers think they can love their loved ones and the Lord at the same time. They do not realize that if they love their loved ones, they cannot love the Lord; and if they love the Lord, they cannot love their loved ones. If we cannot say with Asaph, "Whom do I have in heaven but You?/And besides You there is nothing I desire on earth," then we are still living in our soul (Psa. 73:25).

We cannot neglect the importance of the believer loving the Lord with all his heart. Nothing satisfies the Lord's heart as much as our love. The Lord does not look at how much we work for Him or how active we are for Him. It pleases Him when He sees us loving Him. The church in Ephesus labored for the Lord; nevertheless, they left their first love toward Him (Rev. 2). Therefore, the Lord was not pleased. The Lord is pleased only if we work out of our love for Him. If we have no heart for Christ, if we are not affectionate toward Him and do not love Him, even though we may accomplish a great deal for Him outwardly, what use is it? We should know that it is possible for us to labor for the Lord and not love Him. This was the case of the Ephesians. May we ask God to shine His light that we may see the reason for our activities and the intensity of our love towards Him. What is the use if we keep saying, "Lord," and labor for Him all day, yet do not love Him in our heart? Oh, may we have an absolute heart for our beloved Lord!

God's children do not realize what a hindrance their loved ones can be to the growth of their spiritual life. When a believer has other loves besides God, he will find out that God gradually becomes less important to him. Although his loved ones may also love God, he will perhaps love God for the sake of his loved ones more than for the sake of God Himself. His relationship with God is lowered from being spiritual to being fleshly. We surely cannot love God for the sake of some persons, matters, or things. We can only love God for His sake. If a believer loves God for the sake of his loved ones, his heart is directed by those whom he loves. God can gain his love only as a beneficiary of his loved ones. If his loved ones can influence him to love God today, they can also influence him to lose his love for God in the future.

Moreover, when we incline our heart toward a certain person, it is very difficult for us to keep our heart calm. Rather, we are under the influence of our emotions, trying ardently to please this person. At this time, we probably have less of an interest in drawing near to God than we do of drawing near to the loved one. Our interest in spiritual things, things relating to the intuition, will be greatly reduced. Perhaps there is no outward change, but our heart lingers beside the one we love. In this kind of condition, our interest in spiritual things, if not completely gone, is greatly diminished. Then we will not be able to keep our heart from loving the vanities of the world because we can please our loved ones with them. Worldly things, beauty, glory, and many other things unworthy of mention will gradually become the object of our seeking so that we might please our loved ones. God and His requirements will then be forgotten and ignored. We should realize that we can love only one person and serve one master. If we love man, we cannot love God. Therefore, any secret relationship that we may have with a person must be severed.

Only God can satisfy a believer's heart. Human beings cannot satisfy the believer's heart. Many believers fail simply because they seek in man that which can only be found in God. Human love is nothing but vanity; only God's love can satisfy the desires of a believer. If he seeks affection outside of God, his spiritual condition will immediately deteriorate. He can only live by God's love.

In view of this, do we not need to love anyone? If we look at the Bible's repeated charge to love our brothers and our enemies, we know it is not God's intention that we not love others; rather, He wants to direct our love. He wants us to love others not for ourselves, but for Him and also in Him. Our natural goodness and wickedness have no place here. Natural affection also loses its power. God wants us to be directed by Him because we love Him. When He wants us to love a certain person, we can obey; when He wants us to terminate our relationship with a certain person, we can also obey.

This is the life of the cross. Only when we have the Holy Spirit deeply applying the work of the cross in us and causing us to experience the putting to death of the soul-life can we lose the self in our affections. When we have really passed through death, we will not be attached to anyone; we will be guided only by God's commands. When our soul-life goes through this step, it loses its power as if it has died in the matter of affection. Then God can instruct us on how to begin anew to love others in Him. God wants us to have new relationships in Him with those whom we loved in the past. Every natural relationship should be terminated. We should pass through death so that we may begin the relationships anew in the realm of resurrection.

What a difficult life this seems to be to the believer! Only those who really live this way know what a blessing this is! God often "strips" the believer of his loved ones because of the believer's consecration or for the benefit of the believer. God will either work to make our heart submissive, or He will strip us of what we love. When He uses the latter method, He causes our loved ones to change in their love toward us, or He causes the environment to hinder us from loving them. Perhaps our loved one has gone on a far journey, perhaps he has deceased, or perhaps there are other circumstances. If our consecrated heart is honest before God, God will strip us of everything until we have only Him left. If the believer wants to obtain a real spiritual living, he must willingly abandon all that is dear to him. God requires anything that conflicts with a heart that loves Him to be abandoned. The spiritual life does not allow our affection to be scattered and wandering. In God's eyes, our love, whether wrong in its motive, excessiveness, or goal, is just as wrong as our hatred. In the sight of God, the love that comes out of our self is just as dirty as hatred.

When a believer goes through such a time, he will see how pure his heart is in loving others. There is nothing of the self mixed in it. All of his heart is for God and also in God. Although he loved others in the past, he loved himself even more, considering himself more important than others. Now he can share in other's happiness and sorrow, bearing their burdens and serving them with love. He will not love what he loves but what God wants him to love. He will not love himself more than others but others as himself. Since he loves himself in God and for God, he also loves others in God and for God. Therefore, he can love others as himself.

Believers should know that letting God direct their affection is an essential prerequisite to their spiritual growth. How uncontrollable our affection is! If it is not subdued under God's purpose, there is a possibility of endangering our spiritual life at any time. It is easy to correct wrong thinking, but it is hard to handle wrong affection. We should love the Lord with all our heart, allowing Him to direct our love.

LOVING THE LORD SOULISHLY

However, let us issue a warning here. Do not think that we can love the Lord by our self. The Lord rejects all that comes out of our self. Even our love for Him is useless. On the

one hand, if a believer does not have a deep love for the Lord, He is grieved; on the other hand, even those who love the Lord can grieve Him because they love Him in their souls. If a believer exercises his soulish power to love the Lord, this love is not pleasing to the Lord. The believer's love, even for the purpose of loving the Lord, should be completely under the control of the spirit. Today there are too many who love the Lord with a worldly love; it is rare to see a love that is of God. What does this actually mean?

Believers primarily receive the things of God with their human hearts. They speak about their Father God; they call the Lord their "dear Lord"; and they remember the sufferings of the Lord. When they do this, their hearts are filled with joy and the sensation of love for the Lord. They think that this feeling is from God. Perhaps when they think of the cross of the Lord, they cannot help but shed some tears, as if they have an unspeakable, burning love toward the Lord Jesus. But these things pass through their life like a ship that sails through the sea without leaving any trace. Such is the love of many believers. But what kind of love is this? This is the kind of love which only causes one's self to feel happy. This is not loving God but loving the feeling of happiness. The outward appearance of the Lord's sufferings moves their heart, but the truth contained therein does not influence their lives.

How powerless have the sufferings of the Lord Jesus become in the hearts of today's believers! When they think about these things, they become proud of how they love the Lord and of how others cannot compare with them! When they talk about these things, they are like heavenly people. But, actually, they have not yet left their pitiful self one bit. When you listen to their talk, you think that they love the Lord very much. You praise and admire them. But actually they love themselves completely. The reason they remember the Lord, talk about the Lord, and long for the Lord is just because this makes them feel happy. When they do this, they feel happy. They do these things because their goal is to obtain happiness. It is not for the Lord. Such remembrance causes their "spirituality" to feel comfortable. Therefore, they continue to remember the Lord in this way. This is soulish and earthly. It is not from God. Therefore, it is not spiritual.

What is the difference between spiritual love and soulish love? It is very difficult to tell the difference outwardly. However, every believer can distinguish the source of his own love. The soul is our self. Therefore, all that is soulish cannot be separated from the self. A soulish love towards the Lord is one that is from the self. Loving God for the sake of obtaining a happy feeling for the self is loving God soulishly. If the love for God is spiritual, then there is nothing for the self mixed in with it. This is loving God for His sake, for the sake of loving Him. Any love for God that is for self-happiness or any other reason, totally or partially, is from the soul. Moreover, if we look at the fruit of this love, we can also tell its source. If it is soulish, this kind of love does not have the power to help a believer to be permanently delivered from the world. He has to labor and struggle to stay away from the attractiveness of the world. However, if the love is spiritual, worldly things and matters are naturally abandoned because of this love. The believer looks down upon them and reckons them as something to be hated. He no longer has his eyes on the world because the glorious light of God has blinded his fleshly eyes. After having this experience of loving God, he does not esteem himself highly because of it; rather, he humbles himself, as if he has diminished before men.

The nature of God's love is forever changeless. Our love is very changeable. If we love God with our own love, our love toward God grows cold when we feel unhappy. After a long period of trial, it surely fails because the believer loves God with his own love; he

loves God for his own sake, for his own happiness, etc. Therefore, when he cannot obtain the expected happiness, he shrinks back. If it is the love of God, no matter what situation or position he is in, he still loves God without any change. "Love is strong as death;/jealousy is cruel as the grave/...Many waters cannot quench love,/neither can the floods drown it" (S.S. 8:6-7). If a believer truly loves God, regardless of his circumstances and feelings, he still loves God. Soulsh love ceases when the effect of the emotion ceases; spiritual love is strong, cruel, and does not let go.

The Lord often causes a believer to experience what he considers to be painful in order that the believer would not love God for himself. When the believer loves the Lord with his own love for himself, he has to sense the Lord's love in order to love Him. But when the believer loves God with God's love and for God, God does not let him sense His love. Instead, God wants the believer to believe in His love. In the beginning of one's Christian life, the Lord always attracts the believer to feel His love in many ways. After the believer experiences this, He leads him to take a much deeper journey. God does not let him feel His love, but He causes him to believe in His love. We should pay attention to the fact that deeply tasting the Lord's love is a step which must be experienced by every believer who desires to go on in a deeper way. Only by the attraction of the Lord's love can the believer leave all for the Lord and come forward to the Lord. In the initial stage of the believer's spiritual life, it is necessary and helpful to have the sense of the Lord's love. This is something the believer should pursue. After the experience of feeling the Lord's love and after a suitable period of time, the believer should not "hold on" to this kind of feeling. Otherwise, his spiritual life will suffer damage. There are different kinds of experiences for different stations on the journey of the spiritual life. It is appropriate and profitable to have a certain kind of experience at a certain station. But if a believer desires to maintain the experiences of the previous stations up to the last station, he would have to go backwards or remain at a certain place. After the believer feels the Lord's love, the Lord wants him to believe in His love; therefore, shortly, but not immediately, after he experiences the feeling of His love, God no longer causes him to sense His love. Then He wants him to believe that His love is still unchanging. If, after an experience of feeling the Lord's love, a believer suddenly does not have the same feeling, he should realize that this is the time for him to believe. He should not be alarmed.

BEWARE OF ONE THING

If we want to walk according to the spirit, we should keep our love calm; otherwise, we cannot hear the voice of the intuition directly. If our affection is not entirely subject to God's purpose, our heart is often disturbed. This hinders the leading of the spirit. The believer should continually pay attention in the spirit to the people and things that stimulate his affection. If Satan cannot win in other matters, he will surely tempt you in this area. I do not know how many believers have failed because of this. Therefore, we should be cautious.

Friends can stir our love more than anything else. Among friends, the opposite sex stirs us the most because males and females need to be adjusted not only physiologically but also psychologically. Since there are many differences in their natural make-up, they have the power to attract each other. This is soulsh and natural and, therefore, should be rejected by the believer.

It is a fact that the opposite sex can very easily arouse love. The stimulation one receives from the same sex is much less compared to that from the opposite sex. Since there is a

mutual psychological demand, this leads one to believe that people of the opposite sex are more approachable than those of the same sex. This kind of inclination is common, natural, and inherent. Therefore, love toward the opposite sex is easily kindled by just a little stirring.

All these matters refer to the natural side. Factually, this is the case. Therefore, if a believer wants to walk according to the spirit, he must pay attention to this. In our dealings with other people, especially in the matter of love, if we treat the same sex in one way and the opposite sex in another way, we should realize that we are under the working of the soul. If we treat people differently for no other reason than that they are of the opposite sex, then our affection is still natural. If the believer feels some kind of mysterious strength attracting him to someone of the opposite sex just because that person is of the opposite sex, he should know that his natural affection has been activated. Sometimes this kind of stimulation is mixed in with a purpose that is very proper. However, if there is a fraction of thought about the opposite sex mixed in with his other thoughts, the believer should realize that the relationship is not entirely spiritual.

In his work and while working, a worker should be cautious that his work is not penetrated by any thought about the opposite sex. Every desire to obtain glory among those of the opposite sex must be absolutely rejected. All the speaking and attitudes that are influenced by the opposite sex are enough to nullify true spiritual power. Everything should be done quietly and with a pure motive. Remember that not only are sins filthy, but everything of the soul is also filthy.

If so, should believers not have friends of the opposite sex? This is not the teaching of the Bible. While the Lord was on earth, He associated with Martha, Mary, and other women. The important point is whether the affection is entirely under God's governing or whether it has the effect of the soul in it. It is normal for brothers and sisters to associate with each other. But there should not be any working of the soul or of sin. Before a believer experiences the thorough working of the cross, it is best not to have friends of the opposite sex. However, no matter what stage of growth that a believer reaches, if he seeks or longs for friends of the opposite sex, he is surely being controlled by the soul. In everything, we should submit to God's arrangement.

In short, the believer's love must be completely consecrated to God. Any time we feel that it is difficult for us to give up someone, we should realize that our soul-life is in control. If our love cannot submit to God's purpose in any area, then there must be a great many unspiritual things mixed in with that area. Soulsh love only leads us to the world and sins. If our affection is not of the Lord, sooner or later it will become lust. From the past to the present, Samson is not the only one who failed in this matter. Delilah continues to shave people's hair everywhere!

We have previously said that it is very difficult for believers to consecrate in the matter of love. Therefore, the consecration of this one thing is a sign of true spirituality. The extent to which a believer dies to his affections and his seeking for love is the extent to which he is spiritual. This is the biggest test. Without dying to the affections of the world, we are not yet dead to anything. Being dead to affection is being dead to the world. Desiring friendship and a lover's love indicates that we are not dead to the self-life. Real death to the soul- life can be seen in the giving up of our love, except the love for God. How transcendent is the spiritual man, walking above the love of man!