



The Reflector

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A CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIPS

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Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8; *Italics mine - eob*)

Christians are parties to two basic kinds of “walks” or relationships – “by sight” and “by faith.”

“By sight” relationships are with those in whose physical presence we are and with whom we develop relationships based on immediate, personal, and physical interaction. We relate to them through our five senses.

“By faith” relationships are those we have with beings in the unseen spiritual realm – the Godhead, angels, etc. We do not, nor can we, relate to those in the same way we do to our “by sight” relationships. The failure to recognize this can cause a great deal of anxiety among Christians. Especially among those who are told by overly emotional and imaginative teachers that they should be able to relate to Deity much in the same way that they do a spouse, parent, friend, or acquaintance. One being taught that he should relate in such a fashion becomes frustrated and discouraged when he cannot psych himself up into *feeling* the exact same kind of closeness as he does toward his earthly father or best friend.

The fact is, God has chosen that our relationship with him and his Son should be “by faith” and

not “by sight.” No person today has seen any person in the Godhead (1 John 4:2; 3:2), nor touched him, nor heard his voice. We, as Paul, are absent from the Lord, looking for the day when we will be in his literal presence, so we can relate to him “by sight.”

The kind of relationship that Christians have with Jesus is described vividly by the apostle in Romans 10. He describes “the righteousness which is of faith” by saying it is neither necessary to bring Christ back into our immediate presence by either bringing him down from above nor up from below for a “by sight” relationship. Instead we have a “by faith” relationship with him by having the “word of faith” near us in our mouth and in our heart (mind). That word of faith is the gospel preached by the apostles by which our faith comes and is maintained (Romans 10:6-17). Thus, we have to be content to enjoy a “by faith” relationship with Christ/God until we can be present with him.

Because this is not a “by sight” relationship does not mean that one’s love for God (either Father or Son) should be any less real, deep, or meaningful than it would be if he were “present” with him (cf. Matthew 22:37). But, these are different kinds of love. Different kinds of love differ both in feeling and expression. Some tend to lump them all together and expect all of their love relationships to affect them in the same way.

Our English word, “love,” covers all kinds of love and has to be governed by the context. We

understand that well. If I tell another man that “I love your wife,” I had better make sure that it is in a context that he can understand it is not the same “love” with which he loves her. Nowadays, if I tell another man “I love you,” I had better be even more sure that he, and anyone who hears, understands the context of the love I am talking about.

The New Testament was written in a language (Koine Greek) that had different words for different kinds of love – all of which are expressed in English as just “love.” There is “agape” love, “phileo” love, “eros” love and “storge” love. The last two (eros and storge) are not in the New Testament.

“Eros” is natural romantic or sexual love.

“Storge” is natural love of family members. Though the word itself is not in the New Testament, it is combined with the negative “a” (not) to form “astorgos” and translated twice “without natural affection” (Romans 1:31; 2 Tim. 3:3).

“Phileo” is to “have affection for denoting personal attachment, as a sentiment or feeling.” (Strong). It is the love of friendship and companionship.

“Agape” is a calculated active good will toward another that is known and shown by its action toward its object. Of “agape,” Strong says it embraces “especially the judgment and the deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty and propriety.”

He further says that phileo is “chiefly of the heart” while agape is “of the head.”

One unknown author on a website sums up what I have been able to glean about “agape love” from researching many sources.

“Agape love is God's kind of love. It is seeking the welfare and betterment of another regardless of how we feel. Agape does not have the primary meaning of feelings or affection. Jesus displayed it when he went to the cross and died for you and me regardless of how He felt. In the gospels Jesus prayed, ‘Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt’ (Mt. 26:39; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 22:41-

43; Jn. 18:11). Jesus sought the betterment of you and me, regardless of His feelings. Matthew 7:12 states it this way, ‘So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets’

We can agape our enemies regardless of how we feel. If they are hungry, we can feed them; if they thirst we can give them a drink (Rom. 12:20-21). We can choose to seek the betterment and welfare of others regardless of how we feel.

Jesus was the greatest expression of love that ever came into the world, but it is never recorded that he ever said the words, ‘I love you!’ Why? because 95 percent of all love is non-verbal. Jesus did not love with just words but in deed and truth (1 Jn. 3:18). If your actions contradict your words, what are people going to believe, your words or your actions? Your actions of course. Vine's Expository Dictionary states, ‘Love can be known only from the actions it prompts’ (p. 21)”

<http://paxvobisca.tripod.com/literature/fourLoves.html>

While we may combine more than one kind of love toward someone, each kind is still distinct. I may love my wife with all four kinds of love at the same time. I may love her as my wife romantically (eros), as a family member (storge), as a friend (phileo) and as a matter of principle by an active good will (agape). Toward a good friend, I may have a tender feeling of affection only generated by personal physical association and interaction with him/her (phileo) and also express active good will toward him/her by certain actions out of a sense of duty and principle (agape).

In view of all this, it is a mistake to try to forge a relationship with Deity that generates the same feelings you have toward a friend or a family member. One's “love” for friends and family incorporates more than one of these loves, involving both the “head” and “heart,” or the emotions and the will. The love commanded toward God is “agape” or love of the head or will. While feelings like gratitude are involved, love for God is primarily one of will and commitment.

Our “by sight” relationships naturally involve our affections generated by our physical senses. The strength of those relationship are mostly determined by the closeness of the personal physical interaction with

that person. Agape love can and should be a part of our “by sight” relationships. Both romantic love and fraternal love, because they are primarily of the feeling, may eb and flo during the course of a relationship, but agape love is more likely to remain stable because it is primarily a conscientious commitment of the will.

The love commanded toward God (Father or Son) is agape love. It is even called by some writers as “Christian love” to distinguish it for other kinds of love.

Thus, “by faith” relationships involve our decision or commitment to do for that one what is the right thing to do toward him as a matter of principle no matter how we “feel” about him. It is neither expressed nor received with the syrupy affection of romance or the “touchy feely” affection of close friendships. It is expressed by our actions toward God. It is felt by our thankfulness for God’s actions toward us. One does not measure his love toward the one with whom he has never physically interacted by the intensity of his feelings, but by the strength of his commitment to doing what is right and best toward him.

In the following passages God’s love (agape) toward us and our love to him are expressed and known by what we do.

“But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.” (1 John 2:5)

“Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.” (1 John 3:16)

“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous” (1 John 5:3).

“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.” (John 14:21).

“If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father’s commandments, and abide in his love.” (John 15:10).

“By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.” (1 John 5:2).

Not only do we know that we love God by keeping his commandments, we also know that we know him in the same way. “And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. (1 John 3:2).

In view of what God says about the nature of the love he expects from us, I should spend my time learning what he has commanded of me and doing my best to do it in order to be well pleasing unto him, instead of trying to develop some kind of “touchy feely” relationship that makes me feel toward God much the same way that I feel toward my best friend, or brother in Christ, or golfing buddy whom I know by immediate contact and association.

God is my Father and I am his child. That is a spiritual relationship and not physical. Thus our relationship is not the same as the relationship I had with my earthly father in many respects. While my earthly father and I had a “agape” relationship, we also had a “storge” and “phileo” relationship. When I equate my relations to God with my relationship to my father, and my relationship to Christ as my relationship to my earthly brothers, it must be only in the “agape” part of the relationship. In fact, the “agape” part of my relationship to all my “by sight” relationships is patterned after my relationship to God – his committed and sacrificial love for me. It is neither possible or expected of us to have the same emotional feelings toward God that we do with friends and family. These involve more emotional kinds of love in addition to agape love.

Our relationship to God is not only that of a child to his Father, it is more complex than that. It is a servant to his Master, a creature to his Creator, a subject to his King and Judge. So, it is not to be approached with the same familiarity as most earthly relationships. It is not only approached with love, it is also out of awe, fear, and reverence. “Hi, Dad” is hardly appropriate to address the Creator and Ruler of the universe, as I heard that one young man did when asked to lead prayer.

So, when one tries to separate love for God/Christ from obedience and commandment keeping he shows a misunderstanding of the nature of our “by faith” loving relationship with God. When one tries to

convince folks that they should have the same kind of emotions or even more intense passion toward God as they do their various “by sight” relationships, like parent-child, friend-friend, husband-wife relations, he shows his ignorance of the what love of and for God is all about.

I do not want to be presumptuous enough to presume what kind of love that the Father or the Son wants me to have with him beyond what I read in the Bible. I have to just accept at it at face value what he says through the “gospel of faith” which the apostles preached, where they quote Jesus as saying, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me...” (John 14:21).

From the first century on, there have been those in the church who fancy themselves to have a deeper knowledge, love, and understanding of God than what has actually been revealed. The Gnostics are a prime example. John wrote his three epistles mostly to counter their influence in the early church. Hence, his emphasis on how one can know he knows and loves God. He knows by whether or not he is keeping God’s commandments.

“Agape” love is no less intense, fervent, or sincere than the other kinds of love. It is just that it is a different kind of love known and expressed in a different way. To “love God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” is done by sincerely obeying him.

If you are worried about whether are not you really love God and His son, just pause a minute and ask yourself if you are dedicated to obeying from the heart his commandments. If you are, then you love him because he said you do – no matter what anyone else says. (1 John 5:2, 3; 2 John 6). If you find you are not obeying him, start again obeying his commands by repenting, confessing, and praying for forgiveness (Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:7). ■

THE THREE LAWS OF ROMANS 8:1-4

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“There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free

from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:1-4 KJV)

There are three laws mentioned in this text:

1. “The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.”
2. “The law of sin and death.”
3. “The law.”

The first law is the same as “The law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25; 2:12); “The law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:21). We are indeed under law to Christ in this age. It is the law that we are expected do and by which we will be judged.

The second law is the law that Paul had to struggle with while is under “the law” and without Christ (Rom. 7:22-24) from which the third law (the law) could not give him relief.

The third law (“the law”) is the law of Moses, which Paul simply called “the law” most of the time.

So, what “the law” (of Moses) could not do, the law of the Spirit life/Liberty/Christ did. That is it freed him from “law of sin” in his members that produced spiritual death in him. “The law” could not take away that sin and its dominion over him. That was done when he submitted himself to the law of Christ. ■

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly

shall perish. (Psalms 1:1-6 KJV)