

THE CHRISTIAN'S TRIUNE LOVE

THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD . . . THY NEIGHBOR . . . THYSELF

(Preached, in part, over the radio, Murfreesboro, Tenn., Oct. 30, 1960)

This is the Christian's triune love, to God, to neighbor and to self. Love of God is commanded in Matt. 22:37; Mar. 12:30, 31; Lu. 10:27; Rom. 8:28; I Cor. 8:3; James 1:12; 2:5; I John 4:20, 21; 5:1, 2; Lu. 11:42; John 5:42; Rom. 5:5; I John 2:5; 3:17; 5:1-3; Jude 21; II Tim. 3:4 and many other Scriptures. There is far more about God's love for us than there is about our love for him. Love of Christ is commanded and taught in John 8:42; 14:15, 21, 23, 24, 28; 15:9; 21:15-20; I Cor. 2:9; Eph. 6:24; II Tim. 4:8; I Pet. 1:8; I Cor. 6:22; and other passages. The love of the Spirit is mentioned in Rom. 15:30 and his love for us far more. The special love of Christian to Christian is emphasized in John 13:34; 15:12, 17, 35. But that teaching comes mainly in later revelations, Rom. 13:8; Eph. 5:2; 6:24; I Thes. 4:9; I Pet. 1:22; 2:17; I John 2:10; 3:10, 11, 14, 18, 23; 4:7, 11, 12, 20, 21; II John 2, 5; III John 1; Rom. 12:9; I Cor. 13; 16:24; II Cor. 2:4, 8; 8:7, 8; Gal. 5:6, 13, 22; Eph. 1:15; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2; Phil. 1:17; 2:2; Col. 1:4, 8; 2:2; 3:14; I Thes. 1:3; 3:6, 12; 5:8, 13; II Thes. 1:3; Philem. 5, 7, 9; I Pet. 4:9; I John 3:17; 4:7 and elsewhere. For breadth of teaching, the doctrine of mutual love among Christians has Paul as its chief exponent; for depth of appeal, John. The very LOVE, which bespeaks **personal** attachment, is divested of that quality in the LOVE OF THINGS, "the uppermost seats," Luke 11:43; "darkness," John 3:19; the "praise of men," John 12:43; "this present world," II Tim. 4:10; "the wages of unrighteousness," II Pet. 2:15; "life and good days," I Pet. 3:10; "the world," I John 2:15. But there are holy objects and goals of Christian love — "righteousness," "the truth," etc.

Please note, deeply, that our love is not **quantitatively** the same toward all personal objects, but is **qualitatively** given to God, self and neighbor. A man is under no obligation to love the evil people in human society as he loves the good, or to love his enemy as he loves his wife, or to love the lost as he loves their Savior and his own. But love is to be our universal attitude, in all the reaches of personality, in this world.

Let us ask frankly, then: "What is love?" I have studied that as to the meaning of the words used by Jesus, our Lord, and have written a book, in both Portuguese and Spanish, on "The Fruit of the Spirit

is LOVE." The definition in which my mind rested is this. **Love is the disposition to give oneself.** It is a disposition, trait of the mind, heart and active will, and this disposition moves one on to self-giving in ways that correspond to the well-being of the one to whom the love is manifested. We are to give ourselves to God, to our neighbor and each to himself. Nothing less is this triune love. What that means and what it involves is the essence of Christianity manifested in life, outer life, from the inner life. Let us study, then, this triune love God commands.

I. CHRISTIAN LOVE TO SELF. We'll begin with ourselves. Self-love is the measure and pattern of our love to our neighbor. I want for myself health, prosperity, useful education, civil rights and responsibility, work of a congenial nature, social circles, eternal salvation, Christian fellowship, church life and love, the true gospel, the rewards God gives for good works, good reading matter, proper recreation and leisure, innocent fun, opportunity for Christian work, testimony and evangelism, social security for old age, honorable provision for my dead, and much else, that will occur to you, that goes naturally with these things. So I want these things also for my neighbor. God made human life to be rich and rewarding, and that is his goal for our love of self and of our neighbor. And I want, for myself and my neighbor, the certainty of heaven, my home, and all the eternal realities, now and eternally, as the supernatural halo that gives life its charm and glow and deeper meaning. You will think of many side-roads to kindred aims and achievements whither we may travel with pleasure and profit as occasion offers and friendship demands.

The trouble with us humans is that WE DON'T LOVE OURSELVES and so we have no inner standard of love to our neighbors, even if we have the social desire and impulse and goal. Watch the indulgent mother and spoiled child miss the early education of character and cultivation of good habits, till the little villain becomes a pest, abhorred by all decent people. She **hates** her child really and is educating him, at life's most impressionable age, to **hate himself** and make himself loathsome to human society, from the home circle to all its wider outlets. Teachers and preachers may later save from the ruins some values and meaning to his life, but it

may be eternally too late when they get their first chance. No demon could hate a child more than does this indulgent mother. Oh! that she loved herself and her son! The same is true of the jolly father who can never say "No!", but leaves wide open all gates to self-indulgence and sin. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth," Heb. 12:6. And the divine revelation tells us, right then and there, that a child who gets no chastening at home is being treated like a bastard, robbed of a father's or mother's love, as he is left to follow his own brand of human depravity, uncurbed and untamed.

The holiest love is thoroughly congenial with anger under love's control. Jesus, God the Son, is love. Yet the second mention of anger in the New Testament is Mark 3:5, "And when he had looked around about on them WITH ANGER, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts," then and there he wrought a miracle, contrary to their religious doctrines. In the same chapter where we are told that God loved the world, to the degree of giving his son for its redemption, we are told that "he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." We are told in the Psalmist's poetry: "God is angry with the wicked every day," Ps. 7:11. Anger and love dwell in the same heart when the loved one does wickedly. Love punishes redemptively, while there is yet time. Anger is to be governed by love: "Be ye angry and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil," Eph. 4:26, 27. The devil often takes control of the Christian tongue or frame when holy anger goes beyond the due limits and becomes devilish wrath. Love surges in anger, in due limits, intelligently and under constant control. Thus both anger and the lack of anger are possible sins. Shun the extremes.

The sin of not loving oneself is now and then seen in very devoted Christians, TOO DEVOTED. I have returned to a familiar scene, now and then, and asked: "Where is that fine young pastor who was leading you so wonderfully when I was here last?". The terrible reply comes: "Oh! Dr. Taylor, had you not heard? He just worked himself to death. He never had time to rest or even eat his meals properly. Soon he died of tuberculosis." That was self-hatred. And it was unconscious hatred and injury to the cause of Christ, for it robbed Christ and his churches of perhaps half a century of greatly useful service. That isn't a common case of self-hatred but it is inexcusable. Proper rest, proper recreation, proper leisure in moderation, proper home life are gifts one owes to SELF as well as to others. Devoted men and women shorten life, lessen usefulness, become allies of the devil, through lack of rightful self-love which preserves health, wholesomeness and usefulness. Jesus would have none of this. After the apostles returned from their first independent missionary

journey, "he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place and rest a while; for there were many coming and going and they had no leisure so much as to eat. And they departed into a desert place by ship privately," Mar. 6:31, 32. But some eager apostle might have said: "No, Jesus! If we keep on, many more souls will be saved. But if we go away, they may be lost." But Jesus knew to take the long look. To save more souls now and lose the soul-winner of riper usefulness, in years that might be cut off from his richer ministry, is short-sighted folly. Jesus demanded rest for them. That was his love for his twelve best beloved **neighbors**. But alas! Too much devotion to duty is not a very common ill!

II. LOVE OF NEIGHBOR, or the lack thereof. In all this we can only illustrate by an example or two. Details are numberless of other ways to love, or neglect to love, our neighbors. I am a Kentuckian, in love with my home State. Let me take its three most noteworthy social ills that are vast money-soaked enterprises: whisky, tobacco and gambling. I have just this minute read in the Louisville **Times**: "Kentucky ranks fifth in gambling." Louisville licenses 1,179 gambling establishments. Then there are the great Derby and other race track performances on which people spend millions, waste time and yield to the kindred temptations that go with such a life, in countless cases. How many young people have their lives wrecked by these temptations. Every person who is in any way a party to such vast evils, by legislation, by presence, by betting, by condoning the habit, by silence when we should bear witness against the sin, is guilty of the consequences, in varying degrees. And not a few gambling sprees end in bloodshed, part of the count against gambling. No man loves himself or his neighbor who gambles or promotes, supports or condones gambling. You know some who have been victims. Are your hands clean, your conscience clear?

Here lies a man dying with cancer of the lungs, resulting from the use of tobacco. Who got that man, when young, into the social habit of smoking? Look at him suffer, you who tempted him in earlier days. Think of the agony cancer causes, one of nature's worst ways of knowing pain. Think to yourself: "I led him into this. I am responsible for this awful pain. I am a party to the widowhood of that weeping wife, the sorrows and poverty of these fatherless children." You can't lead men, in social groups, into evil habits without being responsible for the physical, social and civic consequences of the habit you become a party to. The man who raised that tobacco as his "money" crop, is a party to all the social, physical and moral ills caused by tobacco. What a calamity that a lot of Kentucky Baptists don't love their neighbors, their youth, their State, well enough to forego that "blood money" crop. I was in a farmer's home some time ago who had just come to the decision that it was a sin for him to raise tobacco

and make money out of other men's vices. He quit. God blessed him, and the moral stamina in his home was itself a reward. These rooms full of smoke that you read about so much, are rooms full of sinners who love both self and neighbor wickedly less than they should. Yet there is a contempt for the facts. When scientists and doctors announced the effects of tobacco in cancer of the lungs, a great upsurge in the tobacco business followed. It was an insane contempt for the warnings of nature itself, and of nature's God. But nature imposes sternly its own penalties.

Far worse is the cruel responsibility of the people whose cocktail hours drag youth downward. Habits you help get people into, condone, or give the example of, are part of your reckoning as to whether you love or loathe yourself, love or loathe your neighbor. The major voices of moral and social and financial responsibility in the nation tell you the awful consequences of drinking. They run on to coming generations. To take any part, have money invested in any way in this man-hating enterprise, lend social standing to the customs of temptation, rent property to those who seduce to drunkenness and its awful consequences, for money gained thereby, is neighbor hatred, self-loathing, in effect. How blessed our churches are in their great youth programs over the land, that show our young people a better way and make them far happier, in the clean life. Southern Baptists have a vast program for youth. Our churches show the alternative. It is Christ and the social blessedness of love, the love of self and neighbor, in mutual responsibility, in group cooperation and joys. Throw your every influence that way, too.

You are at the heart of American life, in these vital social issues. I have just this minute read the summary of "U.S. Spending (Personal Consumption) for 1959. Here it is. Religious and welfare activities, \$4,281,000,000 whereas the nation spent for tobacco \$7,034,000,000 and for alcoholic beverages \$9,600,000,000." And now we learn that for 1960 the sum spent for whiskey and other intoxicants grew \$500,000,000 more. And statistics showed that, in our hatred of our neighbor, we create another alcoholic every few minutes. As a people, the hatred of self and neighbor is four times as strong, spends four times as much, to wreck and ruin self and our neighbor, as is spent by the nation's giving for the benevolent love of self and neighbor. And beside the countless alluring saloons, we see our drugstores set to damn with liquors the very people they may seek to help with remedies for ills that are sometimes lesser in gravity. Of course, I know, and rejoice in the fact, that there are millions of Christian men, women and youths who never touch either tobacco or whiskey, nor in any way tempt, or condone temptations, socially seducing others to such self-hatred and wreckage of one's neighbor. God's blessings upon

them. May their tribe increase till not a child of God has any part in the vast ills that are wrought against our fellow-men by whiskey and tobacco.

Certainly no view of loveless attitudes toward our neighbor is symmetrical without the Bible's stress being given as to the woes caused to ourselves and our neighbor by the tongue. Look at the "works of the flesh" (the unrenewed elements in our nature, as Christians), "adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like," Gal. 5:19. Just think of the part the tongue plays in causing so many of these sins. What a calamity it is that many loveless tongues bring shame upon the good name of Christians and cause young people to look upon them, and their religion, as loveless, meddlesome and Pharisaical. Here, too, however, justice must be done to men who follow their Savior in saying the stern word that love may make vital in a crucial hour. Read Math. 23. But read also James 3, about the tongue. Let us read and be humble.

III. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind," Luke 10:27. Here is the most urgent disposition to give ourselves, the Christian love that gives oneself to God. How infinitely different from mere religion of formalism, ritual, creed-repeating, priestcraft, sacramentalism, self-righteousness and theorizing! This is a relation between, an attitude toward, persons, the holy persons of the Trinity, coming from our own soul.

Thou shalt love the Lord with thy heart. Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life. The heart, in Bible terminology, is not this organ within the breast that pumps blood. I have actually met people who thought that "heartfelt religion" was located there! "THE HEART," in the Bible, means the affection and emotions at the center of our personality. You are to put emotions and affection into your relations to God, an affectionate and emotional self-giving to the Father of our spirits. That is Christian morals at the highest level. It is God's right, our duty. We are incapable of it in the "flesh," for the carnal mind is enmity — enmity personified — against God. Only the Holy Spirit causes to grow the fruit of love, out of the soil of the regenerate and sanctified heart.

Affection and emotion! What vital elements in the love of God. Affection seeks to spend time with the one loved, do what pleases him or her, talks unhurriedly, shows tenderness. That is God's right. And let **him** talk. Listen. It is two lane traffic. Favorite Scriptures, added to by growing Bible knowledge and love of the Word, awaken this devotion. I think singing is a wonderful stimulus and help to emotions in our religious life. Sing as you work, even if noiselessly, with the mind, in silence. It is

not love of your neighbor to disturb his study or rest if you have a raucous or ugly voice. But the song, unsung but meditated, has the deepest emotions in its meaning. And regular church habits add to that the joy and beauty of our congregational singing and the special music, this day and time, of spiritual leaders trained in our Seminaries for this very ideal.

Thou shalt love the Lord with ALL THY SOUL. That is your inner self, your immortal being, the permanent in your personality, the immaterial YOU. This is the real SELF-giving and the deed is never done, except as the disposition to give controls the life, thought and all fundamental attitudes of the soul. It is well to take stock. Who am I? For how long? How do my attitudes of the passing hour or day agree with the permanent decisions of my soul? How can I promote the essential by limiting the non-essential to its proper place in my rest, recreation or neighborly and family relationships? It is easy simply to let God be crowded out. Your SOUL is the commander-in-chief. Let your disposition of love to God keep that uppermost, and minor things in their places.

Thou shalt love the Lord with THY STRENGTH. Let these be the strong decisions, backed by the strong purposes. Let the strength be in the DISPOSITION, controlling action, habits, being. The DISPOSITION to give self is love. There are a lot of conflicting loves, as even the Bible indicates in the Scriptures cited in the beginning. How much strength you perhaps put into your love of athletics, recreation, social hours: how much weakness, casualness, absent-mindedness in your relations to God. Strength of personality, put into the love of God, brings power from on high. God meets you half way.

AND WITH ALL THY MIND! Give it thought. The mind is a rich arsenal. Use its resources in the supreme love. God is the Master and Friend of the thought life. Have no study away from him. Don't dismiss him at the door of a library, like you would a faithful dog, or a child to whom you said: "Now you go play. I'll see you when I get home!" If he is your fellow-student, as well as Teacher, it will save you waste of life on fruitless tangents, and hallow your mental endeavors in channels that abide, till death and beyond. All the accumulations of many a mind stay with the corpse. There is no future for them beyond the grave. Eternity repudiates them. Such employments of the mind, in fundamental studies, is the supreme folly. You spend your time turning into dead-end alleys and maybe trying to go through impassable walls. Mind and God unite in love, the supreme love, so beautifully and mutually profitably.

Loving God with your mind will make all who pray in public give more **thought** to their public prayers. A preacher ought to study his praying, in the

leadership of his people, as deeply and thoughtfully as he studies his sermons. And it is absolute folly and triviality for a layman to have the same old prayer, even though not deliberately memorized, every time he stands up to pray. Love God with your mind, in public and private prayer. That does not mean show-off phrasing or planned eloquence. It probes deeper than phrases. Just as truly does this purpose remake all our doctrinal attitudes. The supreme doctrine is not "Soul-winning," in spite of all you hear. The supreme doctrine is about the Supreme Being and all the vast truth he has proclaimed about his Triune Self. Doctrine of our SELF comes secondarily and in relation to his SELF.

All doctrine is for everybody. I knew as much doctrine, from my mother's teaching, when I was a small child, as I do now, the same doctrines, though I trust I have deepened my grasp of them and their grasp of me and their inter-relations and applications to life far more. But I knew them in memorized Scriptures, still their only source, and in my dead father's books, especially Hiscox's "**Analysis of the Holy Bible**," in which every doctrine is given, with all the Bible says on it, all together in one place. Blessed book! That challenges and enriches a child's mind, and a preacher's. Dr. Carver used to insist that we do not divide the Epistles into "doctrinal" and "practical" parts. All is doctrinal, all practical. The doctrine of good works is just as much doctrine as the doctrine of the Trinity, including those three words "NOT OF WORKS," which would, if this instant universally believed, blot out of existence all Catholicisms and most of Protestantism. All is to be believed, and bear fruit as the mind rules life. We ought to memorize Scripture, from the time we learn to talk. Then we can love God with our minds, that know his Word, his will, his truth and his work among and through men. God help me to love him more — emotionally, affectionately, strongly, soulfully, and with every aspect of my mind's reach, powers and purposes.

"For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind:
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind."

WILLIAM CAREY TAYLOR
41 Years Southern Baptist Missionary

W.C.T.