

The Body as the Instrument of Love and Joy

“Whom not having seen you love, in whom though now not seeing, but believing, you rejoice with joy unutterable and glorified, attaining the consummation of your faith—the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:8,9).

Believers are forever trying to experience in the flesh what can only be experienced in the spirit. The result is that all the limitations of the human psyche become a “prison house of praise;” whereas the spirit, indwelt by the Spirit of God, evokes a limitless expression of the energies of God, in returning to Him the ultimate love and joy that only His Spirit can provide. Jesus said that the true worship of God could only be in the spirit. In Samaria He had talked to a woman at the well. She asked about the proper place of worship. Jesus responded that true worship was not in a place—either here or there—but in the spirit. These are the worshippers who are pleasing to God.

In Galatians 5:22, Paul says that love and joy are part of the fruit of the Spirit. Peter says that we love whom we have not seen and rejoice with joy unutterable. When we judge our love of Christ by human affections and our joy with human feelings, we not only limit the extent of that love and joy, but also misjudge the reality of our own inner experience of Christ. It is not that we do not have liberty to express ourselves in human ways, but the inadequacy and vacillation of the human mental process makes it an extremely unreliable gage of the realities of Christ within our spirits.

The word for love used in this passage is *agapé*—“caring,” “consideration,” “respect.” It does not embody the human feelings of affection, which is expressed by another word—*philé*. *Philé* is a word used of human relationships—of family and friends—which are the transitory feelings of the flesh. In the very nature of *philé*, these feelings are fluctuating, often based on moods and performance. *Agapé* is the very love of Christ instilled in our spirits and is as steady as Christ Himself. This is the kind of love which He enjoins upon believers for one another and even for enemies. Thus, the love of Christ prevails within our spirits regardless of the moods and vacillations of the human psyche. And that is the love which compelled Paul to reach out beyond himself to touch the world around him. He said, *“The love of Christ compels me”* (II Corinthians 5:14). He did not mean here love for Christ as a motivating factor, but the very love of Christ within his spirit, which reached out beyond his human love to the world around him. This is a love of “caring.” It is the spirit within us that causes us to identify with Christ and continue to want Him with us, even though we do not always like what we do, or even what He does. Like children, disappointed in parents, we may be tempted to turn away from Christ, but we never do. And our feelings toward Him may vacillate with our human condition, as with the persons around us. Fluctuating moods are the hallmark of human love. As the popular song goes—“We always hurt the ones we love, the ones we should not hurt at all.” And so it is with Christ. Our consolation in this is that *“He knows our frame, He remembers that we are dust.”* He does not take these moods more seriously than parents regard the fluctuating moods of their children. So, feel what you will, but remember that the love of Christ goes quite beyond our human feelings.

In the same respect, the joy that Peter expresses here—*χαρά* (*chara*)—is something that goes quite beyond human feelings of elation. This is the word Jesus uses in His final words to the Disciples—“*These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be full*” (John 15:11). Jesus spoke these words on the way to the cross—the most tragic hour of His earthly existence. He was certainly not urging elation or exhilaration. The word is rather one of the Spirit and is from the same root as the word for “grace” or “gift” or “forgiveness.” It has to do with a flow of Divine benevolence—a river of His energy flowing through us. Such a river of energy can be ours in the midst of sorrow or elation. It is not dependent on vacillating human moods, but on the sustained presence of Christ within our spirits. It is a word of the Spirit and not the flesh. And thus, of course, it is indeed unutterable. Unfortunately we try always to use utterances in the flesh as gages of the unutterable in the spirit. Unutterable does not simply mean an ultimate human expression, but that which is beyond the ultimate of human expression. Often when we tell people that words cannot express our appreciation, we go on and try to express it in words. It is assumed everywhere in Christendom that if one is filled with the Spirit of Christ, one will find the words to express that joy. That is a great fallacy. Once again, the limits of the human psyche prevent us from giving to Christ expressions of joy that are adequate, or even expressing that joy to others—it is inexpressible.

So how then do we give vent to our feelings? How can we rely on our feelings?

The answer is that it is quite all right to give human expression to these feelings, but it must be understood that they are unreliable; they vary with our human moods; they cannot be the basis of evaluating the reality of one’s own experience or of others; and they are at best only a paltry and limited human expression of the inexpressible. They will never be adequate to give to God the worship and praise that He is worthy of.

But was not Israel urged to give vent to these expressions of worship and praise?

In the first place, that was all they had—they did not have the Spirit within them. In the second place, much of their worship was expressed in symbolism only for the sake of human understanding—as in the tabernacle and the offerings. In the third place, their worship was constantly vacillating and often unacceptable to God.

So, in conclusion, we must understand that the true worshipper worships in “spirit and in truth.” Secondly we must recognize the spirit nature of these expressions—that they come with the coming of Christ into our spirits. Thirdly, we must recognize that the human psyche is completely inadequate to express the love and joy of Christ. Finally, we must never judge either our relationship to Christ or that of others by the external expressions of the flesh.

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