

## The Body and Its Love

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

The normal state of the believer, contrary to irresponsible teaching from some quarters, is to pass their lives on the earth without visual or auditory experiences of Christ. It is commonly assumed that the “truly spiritual” will always be receiving revelations and having visions. Much of this thinking comes from a misunderstanding of the impact of Acts 2. It was based upon a prophecy to the Jews found in Joel 2 which would provide for them remarkable manifestations that would herald the coming of the new order. Up to this time their connection with God had all been on a caretaker basis. They did not have an inner experience of the presence of Christ in their spirits providing peace and grace for them according to His promise and His ultimate intention for His people. These manifestations, spoken of in Acts, had a specific purpose along with healings, as a sign that God was Himself behind it.

By the same token, the guarantee that Jesus was, indeed, the Messiah was given through “signs” (*semeion*). This word has been translated “miracle” and carried forward into the present era. Technically speaking, these “miracles” were primarily for the purpose of validating Jesus as the Messiah, as well as validating the ministry of the early disciples. Properly speaking, what God does by way of providential dealings today are not miracles in the same sense. They are not signs. They may be as remarkable, but do not validate the presence of Christ in the world. John says, *“And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name”* (John 20:30,31). The miracles that Jesus did were not to prove the existence of God—something the Jewish nation did not need—but to prove that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. We are accustomed to using the word “miracle” for all of God’s providential dealings, but unfortunately, this tends to give the impression that God must be continually working “miracles” simply to give the believers a better life on the earth. After the book of Acts, there was a considerable de-emphasis on this phase of the ministry of Christ to us as an evidence of His presence within. The primary evidence of the presence of Christ is not the “good things” He does for us, but rather the fact that we care about Him and want Him to be with us. If His Spirit were not in us, that would not be true.

The primary work of the Spirit of Christ within us is in the developing of our spirits rather than promoting fleshly religious manifestations. Outward manifestations always vary quite widely with the nature and personality of the individual. We cannot tie these personality variables to the function of the Spirit within. Else we are on a continual “roller coaster.” The Spirit of Christ is a constant and stable force within us, which does not vary with our moods. The brain and nervous system is part of the flesh and subject to the same human problems. Many personality traits are genetic and not subject to change. Some traits are acquired and can undergo some change. Shyness, for example, is largely genetic and probably will not change a good deal. Temper,

on the other hand, is often an acquired characteristic and can be altered. The important thing to realize is that there is quite a difference between fleshly characteristics and the spirit-process within. In the matter of love, for example, it is obvious that some people have a greater tendency toward the demonstrating of affection than others. One can never judge the spiritual condition of another by outward expressions of affection. Love is a fruit of the Spirit, but the big question is what is the meaning of the love we are talking about.

The text says that we love Christ, even though we have not seen Him. What kind of love is that? The Greek word here is *agapé*. As we have discussed in previous articles, the Greek language has three different words that it uses. The first one is *agapé*, which has to do with caring and considerateness, apart from emotional interaction. The second word is *philé*, which has to do with the emotional process of affection between family and friends. The third word is *eros*, which refers more to the physical facet of affection and is not used in the New Testament. *Agapé* is the word used everywhere for the love of God for mankind and the love for God. It has to do with caring. Thus, God cares for humans, but does not always like what they do. By the same token Jesus urged love for one's enemies which meant that one should care for them, but not necessarily like what they do. *Agapé* love is a fruit of the Spirit and is the reservoir out of which God loves others through us. Such love is not tainted by fleshly emotions. Thus we can care very much for people that we do not like at all, and, can pray for them very honestly. *Philé* is not a fruit of the Spirit but is a process of the flesh. That is not to say that it cannot accompany Christian relationships, but that it is not a necessary part of the love of God within us. In marriage, *agapé* love is commanded, but whether or not the couple like each other depends on the way that they behave toward each other. By the same token we may not like members of our own family, if they have behaved badly toward us. We express our *agapé* love toward them when we pray for them, and are concerned about their welfare.

*Agapé* is the word that is used in this text where the believers are said to love God, even though they have not seen Him. That is, of course, because love is a gift of the Spirit to our spirits and does not depend on any kind of fleshly interaction. Jesus said to Thomas, "*Because you have seen me you have believed, blessed are they who have not seen me and yet have believed.*" The experience of visions is often regarded in the Church as a high point of God's favor. It may, on the other hand, be a low point in the necessity of a fleshly encounter. Remember then that the *agapé* love for God does not necessarily involve emotions, although one is free, certainly, to experience some human gratitude and affection. Unfortunately, a great many of the hymns of the faith convey the idea that fleshly emotions are an essential part of a deep experience with God. Complete commitment to Christ is based upon the interaction of God with our spirits, transforming them into vessels capable of being partakers of His Divine nature. And thus, emotional experiences are certainly acceptable, but by no means a requirement of the life with Christ.

**Joy unutterable . . .** The Greek word for joy—*chara*—is a fruit of the Spirit. And once again, it does not necessarily involve the emotions. Unutterable means that we cannot speak of it. And yet we constantly try to put words to it. Such joy is experienced in the spirit, but is not transferable to the flesh. We can talk about it and feel good about it, but it is something the spirit

knows and the mind does not. And thus Jesus said to the disciples, on His way to the cross, “*These things have I spoken unto you that my joy might remain in you and that your joy might be fulfilled.*” The quality He was talking about cannot really be translated by the English word “joy.” Something was going on in His Spirit that led to his own fulfillment and He wanted the disciples to share in it. His statement in Gethsemane—“*The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak*”—indicates that He had great distress in His natural flesh, but was triumphant in His Spirit. The Greek word *chara* comes from the same root as the words for “grace” and “gift.” Something of the Spirit of God is implanted in our spirits which brings about their fulfillment, but cannot be described in fleshly terms. By the same token “to rejoice” does not mean to feel great happiness or bliss, but rather to be cognizant of the vitality and energy of the Spirit of God within us. And thus we can have great experiences of the presence of Christ in our spirits even while we are in suffering and sorrow. Paul speaks to the Philippians of the “gift of suffering.” The word is from the same root as the word for joy. It has to do with a Divine bestowal. Our spirits are energized by the Divine bestowal of God’s Spirit in us. Thus, joy is with us always as the Spirit of God is with us always. Whether or not there is an outward expression of bliss or happiness is secondary.

**Glorified . . .** Paul says to the Romans that “if we suffer together with Him we shall also be glorified together.” The Spirit of Christ within us makes us partakers of the Divine nature and assures us of the fulfillment of God’s eternal purposes. We are one with God. Our spirits know this in far deeper ways than our flesh can ever express. Thus, as partakers of the Divine nature we are nevertheless entitled to express our appreciation of Him in any way whatsoever that befits our personalities. We are vessels filled with His glory and free to react to that reality with all that is within us.

David Morsey

July 1993

[www.harvestermission.org](http://www.harvestermission.org)