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CHAPTER 7

Strength to Love

Jesus did not become a man to help us say and do religion better. He came to connect us permanently with His passionate love. Our primary purpose in life is not task oriented; it is love oriented. Jesus redeemed us to participate in a divine romance, celebrating strong affections with everlasting parameters.

Loving God requires All our Strength

Properly understood, the love of God evokes an endearing response. His passion inspires us to reciprocate with ardent fascination. Instead of pandering to our weakness, Jesus brings the best out of us. His love focuses all our strength with favor, respect, and anticipation.

Experiencing God's love awakens an all-out response, beyond singing a song, saying a prayer, or reciting a liturgy. It resurrects abundant life.

So he [Jesus] answered and said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind," and 'your neighbor as yourself.' ...do this and you will live." (Luke 10:27-28 NKJ)¹

Emphasizing love as the greatest commandment, the Bible reinforces this complete commitment. Twelve additional references affirm love as our priority (see Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Joshua 23:11, and 9 time's in Deuteronomy).

By demonstrating true love on a Roman cross, Jesus did not hold back His sentiments. Tenth-Century theologians introduced the phrase, "the Passion of Christ" to describes His physical sufferings. By the end of the 14th Century, the meaning of the word 'passion' shifted from "suffering" to "strong emotions or desire". Jesus does more than assess our situation, adjust our religion, or dispense tickets to

¹ Repeated in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, Joshua 23:11, and 9 time's in Deuteronomy

heaven. He suffered incomprehensible anguish and pain on our behalf. With affectionate devotion, the passion of Christ reflects a calculated priority for an intimate union.

Loving beyond Skin-Deep Attraction

Normally, our natural eyes cannot see Jesus. Yet, He maintains an ever-present profile. Silence fills our ears while He communicates with supernatural genius. Loving such an invisible and inaudible person requires sincere faith, authentic hope, and deliberate effort; it requires all of our strength.

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9 NIV)

Like faith, love relies on responsive engagements to sustain its spark. James put it this way, *“As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead”*.² Loving Jesus requires dedicated moments invested with attentive awareness. Casual religion has no place in this everlastingly relationship. Without the right fuel the fire goes out. It needs oxygen to burn intensely; so too, our relationship needs fresh encounters to maintain its vitality. Our love smolders without careful consideration and conscientious interest.

Whether spontaneous or premeditated, devoted moments of affection are essential for ongoing intimacy. Our love abounds when we invest our passion toward Jesus.

“God is Love” (1 John 4:8)

Apart from Jesus, other love falls short. Substitutes fail to satisfy our yearning for divine endearment. Jesus adds substance to our faith by extending impassioned sentiments toward us. With our facts straight and experience sure, God’s love transforms our heart; it renews our mind and energizes our body. His amiable pursuit for us converts random God-thoughts into stimulating revelation.

Thinking the truth about Jesus engages our heart with feelings of admiration. Affable thoughts arouse intimate words and thoughtful deeds. As long-term lovers, we regard one another with transparent honesty. We cultivate trust and nurture warm expectations. Thinking fond thoughts leads to affectionate conversation. Loving God involves a proactive exchange of giving and receiving in a climate

² James 2:26 NIV

of enlightened gratitude. Our Heavenly Father designed us to spend focused time together; to consciously interact, doing life with one another and living for one another.

Love and Power

Jesus is not like any other person. He possesses more interest, desire, and passion than anyone else. While similarities exist, our relationship with Him is not the same as any other relationship. Experiencing His love awakens powerful feelings with dynamic impulses. Cemented by a permanent commitment, God's love evokes radical devotion and extreme loyalty.

Offering an appropriate response requires spiritually fortified emotions enriched with spiritual wisdom and revelation. With this in mind, Paul prayed for strength to love God.

*I pray that out of his glorious riches he [God] may **strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being**, [strength for a purpose] **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith**. And I pray that you, being **rooted and established in love**, may have power, together with all the saints, [for a purpose] **to grasp** how wide and long and high and deep is **the love of Christ**, and **to know this love** that surpasses knowledge [for a purpose]— **that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God**. (Ephesian 3:16-19 NIV)*

Jesus sent His Spirit to assist our impaired mind. He aids our compromised will and relieves our wounded emotions. We need strong support for grasping the scope of God's love. Consciously accommodating His presence requires strength beyond our humanity. The Holy Spirit strengthens us with power so we can both comprehend and experience God's love.

"... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith..." (Ephesians 3:17)

Loving God on a personal level requires faith with substance. It is hard to love someone if we do not truly believe they exist. God's love provides evidence that He is more than an concept. His affection for us and our affection for Him reinforces the fact that Jesus is more than a theological construct.

"... earnestly contend for the faith ..." (Jude 1:3)

We need God's Strength to Continue in Love

Fear, hatred, terror, betrayal, lawlessness, and wickedness are powerful forces. They collaborate with demonic cunning to destroy our sensitive love-connections. Contention, strife, and discord distort reality with vexing force as

they attack our mind, will, and emotions. The fallout from Satan's divisive assaults brings confusion; it makes assigning an accurate meaning to conflicted feelings and events more challenging. Jesus stated that

- One day human hearts will fail (literally, they will “breathe out life or expire”) due to unprecedented **fear** and **terror** (Luke 21:26)
- Our allegiance to Christ will prompt international **hatred** from “*all nations*” culminating in capital punishment (Matthew 24:9-10)
- Some who turn from the faith will **betray** true worshipers (Matthew 24:9-10)
- The love of most people will eventually grow cold because of an increase in **wickedness** (Matthew 24:12 NIV) or **lawlessness** (NAS, NKJ)

Fear (Gr, *phobos*) involves a strong feeling of dread, anxiety, or apprehension. The presence of danger or anticipation of a perceived threat causes this frightening emotion.

Terror (Gr, *phobos*) involves intense fear, shock, or an overwhelming sense of dismay. Terrorism employs the threat or commission of violence to create an emotional response in the furtherance of an evil agenda.

Hatred (Gr, *miseo*) involves feelings of intense enmity. Something detested or regarded as harmful, evil, or unpleasant stimulates strong hostility.

Betrayal (Gr, *paradidomi*) violates trust. It may involve treachery, deception, or fraud. It means to deliver into the power of another to be judged, condemned, punished, scourged, tormented, or put to death.³ According to Wiktionary, it also means to mislead into error or sin or expose to an inconvenience not foreseen; to lead astray, to seduce a maiden (as under promise of marriage) and then abandon.⁴

Lawlessness (Gr, *anomia*) involves iniquity and wickedness. It means conditions without law or a contempt and violation of law. Translated **wickedness** (in the NIV), it also means evil or mischievous by nature. “Wiktionary” describes the etymology of wickedness:

From Middle English, an alteration of *wicke*, ultimately from the Old English word *wicca* or sorcerer. In the age that the Bible was written, the British candle makers used to twist their wicks before they dipped them into the

³ <http://bible.crosswalk.com/Lexicons/Greek/> (10-6-07)

⁴ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/betray> (10-6-07)

candle wax so the wax would adhere to the wick. Thus the term 'wicked' came to mean 'twisted' and in the King James Bible that was written in the Old English times, being 'wicked' meant twisting what was righteous.⁵

Despite insidious assaults, God's perfect love imposes its own reality. Based on irrevocable truth, love disregards the bogus parameters of terror, fear, hatred, betrayal, lawlessness, and wickedness. An authentic faith-love union provides spiritual authority to oppose conflicting foes. Contending with evil however, requires more than a warm and fuzzy feeling. While strong emotions may accompany a divine connection, God's love provides more than sensations. Establishing a permanent bond with holy passion activates spiritual power. The love of Christ overcomes the most treacherous assault, which these forces pose. Knowing about and understanding this love is important. However to be efficacious [with power to produce a desired result, especially an improvement], love must be experienced. Experiencing the impact of perfect love releases prevailing strength.

*There is no fear in love; but **perfect love casts out fear**, because fear involves **torment**. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. (1 John 4:18 NKJ)*

No matter how things appear, the veracity of God's love dominates over fear. Compromising circumstances cannot separate us in a climate of divine affection. Experiencing passion from Christ reinforces our resolve to respond.

Ephesian believers were strong in works but weak in love. They:

- Worked hard, laboring to accomplish good deeds
- Patiently upheld a consistent moral stand against evil
- Maintained a sound discriminating mind to distinguish the truth from lies
- Persevered in service with offensive strength
- Endured hardships patiently with defensive strength
- Did not grow weary in their loyalty

These attributes are commendable but insufficient since they lacked a functional resolve to remain connected with Jesus. They left Him as their first love. They did not run out of strength due to weariness and fatigue. He did not gradually slip away. They made a decision to disengage. No one tore them away from His perfect passion. They took the initiative to disconnect. They forsook Him. They gave up. They left Him. They chose to let go and distance themselves. They pulled

⁵ <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/wicked> (10-6-07)

themselves away from His embrace, separating from perfect love for someone or something inferior. They deserted the perfect Lover whom they once loved.

*I know your [Ephesian church] **works**, your **labor**, your **patience**, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have **persevered** and have **patience**, and have **labored** for My name's sake and have **not become weary**. Nevertheless I have this against you, that **you have left your first love**. (Revelation 2:2-4 NKJ)*

Maintaining an enduring love relationship requires more than effort. It takes an uncompromising grip to never let go. Loving Jesus demands full engagement of heart, mind, soul, and strength. Investing our love with fidelity also means avoiding particular perils.

- Spiritual deception compels us to forsake our union with Jesus as our first love
- Drifting into careless boredom compromises relational intimacy
- Settling for lifeless religious activity replaces dynamic encounters
- Gravitating toward spiritual apathy replaces God with tangible but inferior substitutes

Strength for Loving Others

As God's wrath converges with Satan's rage, great tribulation will spawn a vortex of chaotic circumstances. Persecution will not make loving family, friends, and enemies any easier. Blessing those who curse us will not become any more comfortable. Praying for those who hate us will not become any more convenient. Jesus commanded His disciples to:

love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and **pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you*. (Matthew 5:44 NKJ)*

Responding to extreme adversity, Paul reiterated this strategy. He said, "**Bless those who persecute you**; bless and do not curse".⁶

Loving enemies takes supernatural strength. Blessing adversaries takes supernatural courage. Praying for those who spitefully use and persecute us requires supernatural mercy. God offers perfect strength so we can love others as Jesus loves us.

⁶ Romabs 12:14 NKJ

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