

A Passion to Proclaim

I have, for some time now, become aware of how little the *hearts* of many Christians seem to be involved in the things of God and I should say from the outset that I include myself in this. We have become experts, perhaps, in theological precision, church growth and organisational techniques and our moral sensitivities may be acute, that is, we can pick sin in others from a mile off. But what of our hearts, our affections? Jesus' question to Simon Peter bears asking again: 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' And I have to ask myself, do I love Jesus? This is no light matter, as if merely an accurate theological reply will satisfy. No, 'Let anyone be accursed who has no love for the Lord' (1 Cor. 16:22).

Jesus' subsequent instruction to Peter, 'Feed my sheep – feed my lambs', sometimes may seem strange, but it shouldn't. If Peter loves the Shepherd then he will love the flock and he will do all in his power to ensure that they are cared for. Later, Peter wrote

Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart (1 Pet. 1:22).

And John put it bluntly:

²⁰Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also. (1 Jn 4:20-21).

So the question bears asking again, 'Do I love the people for whom Christ died?' Is my heart aching for them, do I long to see them grow, to be blessed, to be reconciled where there is division, and do I want those things without them giving *me* any credit for it? Or am I simply using others to gain some sort of *kudos* for myself?

Then there is the fact that 'God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life (John 3:16)'. If God loved and he gave his Son, do I love them enough even to give them the news of his love? There is much talk today, in some circles at least, of being 'filled with the Spirit', but Andrew Murray put it plainly, 'No one may expect to be filled with the Spirit if he is not willing to be used for missions'.¹ Matters of personal comfort and of rights, so important in the world around us, are evidently no less important to believers. We seem to believe it is our 'right' to contribute to the life of the church and we are offended if we do not receive our due prominence. We believe that the church exists to make us feel secure and to stroke our so easily bruised egos and so we are more ready to move from one church to another for our own sakes than we are to move to another location for the sake of those who are lost without Christ. The attitude of the Apostle Paul is in striking contrast.

To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. ²³I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:22-23)

Could it be that 'love' does not mean today what it meant in the New Testament? Perhaps it was only a calculated course of action, established by a predetermined set

¹ Andrew Murray, *The Spirit of Christ*, Nisbet, London, *n.d.*, p. 160.

of values? That way love would only be what you do and would remain quite unrelated to a person's affections, or even to their emotions.

Some have drawn our attention to the two different words used for love in Jesus' conversation with Peter. They are correct: Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, using the verb *agapaō*, whereas Peter responded with another word, *phileō*. But it would not be correct to assume that one was a lesser love than the other.² When Jesus spoke earlier about the Father loving him, he said 'The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands' (John 3:35), using the verb *agapaō*, but then said 'The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing' (John 5:20), this time using *phileō*. Whatever the difference between the two words, both are more than adequate to affirm the love of the Father for the Son.

A similar picture appears when we understand the love which the Father has for men and women. 'For God so loved (*agapaō*) the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life' (John 3:16); 'the Father himself loves (*phileō*) you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came from God' (John 16:27). Likewise, when describing the deep need to love 'the Lord', Paul wrote 'Let anyone be accursed who does not love (*phileō*) the Lord' (1 Cor. 16:22), and Jesus told 'the Jews' that 'I know that you do not have the love (*agapaō*) of God in you' (John 5:42). It is obvious that the words are synonymous, though precisely why John (and others) chose to use them this way is not explained.

What is also obvious is that what is contained in the words is very potent. To speak of love is to speak of a reality which overwhelms and transforms. All too often today the love of which the Scriptures speak is presented as a mere 'ideal', a moral realm of duty unrelated to the deep things of life where men and women are moved to the heart of their being, where tears flow and where nothing can ever be the same.

The Passion of God

To the Athenians, Paul said that God is not 'served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things' (Acts 17:25). We understand that God does not 'need' anything. This is not because we have some abstract idea of what God is, some sort of 'unmoved mover' or 'ground of all being' or whatever; such language owes far more to Greek philosophy than to Christian faith.³ So does the idea that God is 'without body, parts or *passions*'.⁴ The

² Some older commentaries suggest this, not always consistently. For example, J. C. Ryle, (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels, John Volume III*, James Clarke & Co, Cambridge, 1873, reprinted 1969) p. 508: 'Two different words are used to express our one word "love." One of these two words means a higher, calmer, nobler kind of love than the other. This is the word which our Lord uses in the fifteenth and sixteenth verses, where He asks the question, "Lovest thou Me?"—The other of the two words means a more passionate and lower kind of love. This is the word which Peter always uses when he says, "I love thee!" and our Lord once uses it in the seventeenth verse.' R.C.H. Lenski, (*The Interpretation of John*, Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1942) p. 1418, while agreeing with the position defined by Ryle, adds: 'To this day, despite the information long available regarding these two words, some reverse the meaning of these two verbs and let ἀγαπᾶν refer to the lower form of love (the English "like") and φιλεῖν to the higher form. And they confuse the true ideas, for they think of ἀγαπᾶν only as love for a benefactor and of φιλεῖν as love for the person himself.'

³ See, for instance, Millard J. Erickson *Christian Theology*, Baker, Grand Rapids, 1984, 1984, 1985, p. 713, 737.

⁴ *The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter II, 'Of God, and of the Holy Trinity'*. 'There is but only, living, and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions...'

Puritan writer Thomas Watson put it, God ‘is impassible; he is not capable of being hurt’,⁵ which is, of course, true, but Watson’s reason for saying this was not that God is sovereign, reigning over all he has made but that he is ‘spirit’, that is, totally different from what we see.

The word ‘passion’ does indeed come from the Greek word for ‘suffer’.⁶ The notion that God is ‘impassable’, however, derives from the idea that suffering is a purely human experience and that God, being totally different from, totally other than, humanity could not experience the weaknesses we associate with fallen human beings. Suffering is equated with helplessness. To suffer seems to imply being at the mercy of circumstances, to be vulnerable. *We* are embarrassed by our tears, by our loss of control, and we could not understand God having such needs as we have. Nor we would want a God so weak as to be subject to forces outside himself.

But why should we read back our experience of ‘passion’ into God? Supposing our fears really relate to the fear of death, the ultimate vulnerability. And what if God could ‘suffer’ without being forced? Jürgen Moltmann writes:

The logical limitation of this line of argument is that it only perceives a single alternative: either essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful subjection to suffering. But there is a third form of suffering: active suffering — the voluntary laying oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by him; that is to say, the suffering of passionate love.⁷

This would imply that Paul’s statement that ‘God does not need anything but that he gives’ means that, far from being manipulated by the circumstances, he freely gives himself, even if it means participation in the deep agony of men and women. In the early Church, Origen writing on Romans 8:32, ‘He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us’, said:

In his mercy God suffers with us (συμπάσχει); for he is not heartless.

He (the Redeemer) descended to earth out of sympathy for the human race. He took our sufferings upon Himself before He endured the cross — indeed before He even deigned to take our flesh upon Himself; for if He had not felt these sufferings [beforehand] He would not have come to partake of our human life. First of all He suffered, then He descended and became visible to us. What is this passion which He suffered for us? It is the passion of love (*Caritas est passio*). And the Father Himself, the God of the universe, ‘slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy’ (Ps. 103:8), does He not also suffer in a certain way? Or know you not that He, when He condescends to men, suffers human suffering? For the Lord thy God has taken thy ways upon Him ‘as a man doth bear his son’ (Deut. 1:31). So God suffers our ways as the Son of God bears our sufferings. Even the Father is not incapable of suffering (*Ipse pater non est impassibilis*). When we call upon him, He is merciful and feels our pain with us. He suffers a suffering of love, becoming something which because of the greatness of his nature He cannot be, and endures human suffering for our sakes.⁸

It is one thing to quote the text, ‘For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son’ but it is quite another thing to recognise that this giving flowed out of the fulness of love which is within the unity of the Godhead. The Father, Son and Spirit are one in love, quite apart from the creation. Jesus prayed, ‘Father, I desire that those also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory, which you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world’

⁵ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity: Contained in Sermons upon the Westminster Assembly’s Catechism*, Banner of Truth, London, (1692) 1965, p. 47.

⁶ pavscw.

⁷ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, SCM, London, 1981, p. 23.

⁸ Quoted in Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 24.

(John 17:24). He also said, 'The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing' (John 5:20), and 'For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again' (John 10:17). And the incarnate Son responded by crying, 'I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father' (John 14:31). Psalm 40:8, 'I *delight* to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart' (cf. Heb. 10:5-7) is the true nature of love. So is, '[m]y *food* is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work' (John 4:34). And why should the warning of Mark 3:28-29,

Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin

not be understood as a strong jealousy for the honour of the Holy Spirit, who has empowered the incarnate Son to do the work of the Father?

Given that the goal of God is our 'participation in the divine nature' (2 Pet. 1:4), we should understand that the love of the Father, Son and Spirit, is not fearful of anything outside of itself. On the contrary, this love is *full*, so full that it can and does overflow to all that God has made, without in any way being diminished. God *loves* the world.

With this as a base, statements such as 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God' (Eph. 4:30), and warnings against those who 'outrage the Spirit of grace' (Heb. 10:29), must not be reduced to mere theory. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb. 10:31) is no less a reflection of the passion of God. So also are statements about God's anger and jealousy: 'You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me' (Ex. 20:5); 'When you have had children and children's children, and become complacent in the land, if you act corruptly by making an idol in the form of anything, thus doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, and provoking him to anger' (Deut. 4:25); 'A jealous and avenging God is the LORD, the LORD is avenging and wrathful; the LORD takes vengeance on his adversaries and rages against his enemies' (Nah. 1:2).

We may well be suspicious of anger and jealousy in others, but if we are we should remember that human sinfulness makes love turn from giving into using, turns pure jealousy into a vicious self-protection and makes righteous anger become a matter of personal reaction. Hence the instruction, 'Be angry *but do not sin*' (Eph. 4:26). There is a great distinction between the anger of God and the anger of a human being. The anger of men and women does not produce God's righteousness (James 1:20; cf. Gen. 4:6; Jonah 4:1-4). In strong contrast, God's anger has been expressed in such a way that his righteousness was firmly established (Rom. 3:25-26).

I want to suggest, then, that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is not in any way 'without passions'. The reason for such a conclusion is not that we have reasoned it out, it has nothing to do with logic. The conclusion is forced upon us by our being confronted by God, in particular by God at his most passionate. This was the point made by Origen (above).

For a long time the Cross of Christ has been presented in cold legal terms, in accounting terms, and even in terms which tend to reinforce our guilt rather than declare its removal. For instance, the legal approach says that there is a broken law for which there is a due penalty which Christ bore. The accounting approach argues that there was a debt to be paid and that Christ paid it, so that his credit cancelled our

debit. Of course these are quite true, as far as they go. The moral guilt approach, on the other hand, says things like, ‘Christ suffered for you and now you are in his debt; how will you repay that? Answer, by a life of service.’ That approach is frankly a hideous distortion, especially since we are constantly reminded of our inability to offer due service. Our noses are constantly rubbed in our debt and our failure to meet it.

The truth, however, is far greater. All that was done on the Cross was done because God *loves* us. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son to endure the unimaginable horror and shame of actually becoming evil and bearing the judgment of holiness upon it. ‘And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life’ (John 3:14-15); ‘For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor. 5:21). Hebrews 12:2-4 puts it strongly: Jesus is

the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

He *endured* the Cross. This was no placid scene. The language about blood is not symbolic but horribly real. The *shame* was awful. He was despised and rejected by men, hanging naked and humiliated before the world. The *hostility* of sinners is well described in the Gospel accounts. This *struggle against sin* meant the shedding of *his* blood. But what makes this so amazing is the fact that ‘*God* put [him] forward as a propitiation by his blood’ (Rom. 3:25), ‘He ... did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for us all’ (Rom. 8:32). This death of Christ was God doing in history what he had determined before the foundation of the world, namely he had purposed to have a redeemed, pure bride for his Son, a bride drawn into the extraordinary love of the divine family.

...Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind — yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.(Eph. 5:25-27)

We could add such references as Jeremiah 31:3; Galatians 2:19-20; 1 John 4:9-10 and Revelation 1:5b-6, but sooner or later we will have to speak out our response. Moltmann has the following to say:

... the First Epistle of John (4.16) defines God by saying ‘God is love’. It is not just that God loves, in the same way that he is sometimes angry. He *is* love. His very existence is love. He constitutes himself as love. That is what happens on the cross. This definition only acquires its full force when we continually make the way that leads to the definition clear to ourselves: Jesus’ forsakenness on the cross, the surrender of the Son by the Father and the love which does everything — gives everything — suffers everything — for lost men and women. God is love. That means that God is self-giving. It means he exists for us: on the cross. To put it in trinitarian terms — The Father lets his Son sacrifice himself through the Spirit. The Father is crucifying love, the Son is crucified love, and the Holy Spirit is the unvanquishable power of the cross. The cross is at the centre of the Trinity. This is brought out by tradition, when it takes up the Book of the Revelation’s image of ‘the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world’ (Rev.5.12). Before the world was, the sacrifice was already in God. No Trinity is

conceivable without the Lamb, without the sacrifice of love, without the crucified Son. For he is the slaughtered Lamb glorified in eternity.⁹

The Passion of the Preacher

What brings this passion to its goal is equally staggering. In 1 Timothy 1:11 Paul spoke of ‘the gospel of the glory (or, ‘the glorious gospel’) of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me’. Then, in 2 Timothy 1:8-10, speaking of the suffering he endures for the gospel, he urged:

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, ⁹who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

The gospel he preached related to the grace given in Christ Jesus ‘before the ages began, but ... now ... revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus’. But Paul knew that *when he preached* the abolition of death and the breaking in of life and immortality was powerfully experienced. To the Thessalonians he said,

...we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵because our gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. (1 Thess. 1:4-5)

Paul knows that his gospel is far more than good information to be digested and hopefully applied by his hearers. In fact he knew all too well that his hearers were quite incapable of digesting the information. He knew that they were men and women living under the wrath of God, who were futile in their thinking with their senseless minds darkened, their minds debased (Rom. 1:21, 28). He knew that his hearers were ‘hostile in mind’ (Col. 1:21), ultimately incapable and thoroughly unwilling simply to digest or apply what was said.

If the gospel is powerful it is because in the proclamation there is a revelation of the righteousness of God (Rom. 1:16-17). This is a revelation which *breaks into* the life of the hearer. If there is a response of repentance and faith it is because God himself *gives* repentance and faith (cf. Eph. 2:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:25, also Acts 5:31 and 11:18). So what happens when the gospel is preached?

...hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person — though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Rom. 5:5-8)

The love which took Christ to the cross (vs. 8) is actually, that is, really and effectively, poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. The passion of God for the world breaks into the lives of men and women. They are loved into life. They don’t just know *about* God because he knows *about* them, they know God because he knows them (Gal. 4:9), he has become personally intimate with them. The revelation

⁹ Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, p. 82f.

in the gospel is certainly in words which can be understood, but that is because it is God himself personally speaking his word¹⁰ and work into us.

How could we possibly preach 'cold information' when there is such power in the proclamation? How can we be satisfied with keeping our traditions intact when God is in such passionate action?

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. ¹⁸For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ...²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:17-18, 21-24)

Of course it is possible to be cold in our preaching (and this is by no means a reference to ordained 'clergy' alone). There could be a number of reasons why this could be so. One reason might be that this mere imparting of information is what we were told was correct. In other words, we have never been taught anything different. Another, related, cause might be that the gospel which came to us was couched in such terms that we ourselves have never been given the slightest idea of the magnitude of the work of God in us. As a result we expect little because we have experienced little.¹¹

But there is a reason which, I suspect, stands out above all the rest. It is simply that we will not live in the fulness of what God has done. We have left our first love (Rev. 2:4). We prefer the apparent safety of correctness and established tradition to the hard slog of living in the truth in the midst of a hostile world and of fighting against the constant attacks of Satan and his powers. Given 'the increase in lawlessness, the love of many [has grown] cold' (Matt. 24:12). The word has been preached to us, and we have heard it, but 'when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, [we ...] fall away' or 'the cares of the world, and the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, and it yields nothing' (Mark 4:19).

In Luke's account of the parable of the sower, he records Jesus warning as: 'Then pay attention to *how* you listen; for to those who have, more will be given; and from those who do not have, even what they seem to have will be taken away' (Luke 8:18). So how do we hear? With simple faith, or with filters working at full power, protecting our security, our comforts and our rights? Does the great transforming work of the gospel confront our refusal to be done with sin? If it does we need to hear again what our passionate God has done for us.

¹⁰ While I am totally committed to the authority of the Scriptures as the word of God, I am also bewildered by those who want to argue that the word of God only means 'the Bible'. In *Acts*, for example, the 'hero' of the story is 'the word'. On almost forty occasions Luke describes the responses to the 'word': 'the word of God increased' (6:7), and when announcing the response of the Ephesians he concluded, 'So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed' (Acts 19:20). What ought to be plain is that this *cannot* be a reference to the Bible! The Bible as we know it did not exist for almost 150 plus years after this, even if a small number of the New Testament documents had already been written. 'The word of God' must be that which 'proceeds from the mouth of the Lord' (see Deut. 4:8; Matt. 4:4).

¹¹ I suspect that this is the reason why the Pentecostal and Charismatic message of a subsequent 'baptism in the Spirit' has found such a ready response. Men and women were never recreated for a deficient experience and so when a rich experience is offered they will quite properly respond. The theological explanation may be debatable, but surely the main fault lies with those who provided half a gospel in the first place.

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. ⁷For whoever has died is freed from sin. ⁸But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. ¹¹So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. (Rom. 6:1-12)

Small wonder that Paul wrote that it was on the basis of ‘the mercies of God’ that he urged the Romans to ‘present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God’, that they should ‘not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of [their] minds’ (Rom. 12:1-2). In words which sound quaint to us, he told the Philippians that ‘I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ’ (Phil 1:8, AV), translated elsewhere as ‘the compassion of Jesus Christ’ and so on. But if nothing else, he meant that he *ached* for them. He told the Ephesians that ‘for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone *with tears*’ (Acts 20:31).

Paul knew the mercy of God. He understood that sin was not that we have done wrong things, as we are repeatedly told Sunday by Sunday, but that humanity is deeply evil, horribly polluted by sin and fallen far short of the created glory. He knew, as did the other writers in the New Testament, that nothing less than a radical action of God could rescue us from our miserable estate. That is the mercy of God. What is more, he knew it because he had experienced mercy.

I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 1:13-14)

Paul had received mercy — and so have we! In his passionate fullness, God has come to us and taken us into himself. We are ‘in God the Father’ (1 Thess. 1:1), ‘in Christ’ (Eph. 1:4 etc) and ‘in the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:9; Col. 1:8). So if we have left our first love, we need to remember from whence we have fallen.

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

For anyone who lacks these things is nearsighted and blind, and is forgetful of the cleansing of past sins. (2 Pet. 1:9).

We need simply to return to the reality of what God has done, to the reality of his great love with which he loves us.

But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-7).

We need to accept the fact that

Although you have not seen him, *you love him*; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy (1 Pet. 1:8).

and that 'we love because he first loved us'. 'Ian Pennicook, do you love me? Yes Lord, you know that I love you.' So, 'keep yourself in the love of God' (Jude 21).

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. (John 15:9-11).

Nothing less than a continuous living in the reality of sins forgiven can give us the joy of Christ, the 'joy of the Lord' which energises us for the great work which God is doing. Nothing less than being in living communion with him will make communion with the world repugnant to us. Good information, without doubt a vital necessity, cannot, of itself, make one iota of difference. But the refreshment of the everlasting love of God will make us cry out with joy, 'Lord here am I, send me'.

This is 'a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and hold fast to the faith of Jesus' (Rev. 14:12).

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