



November 2010 - *Loving Others*

In a culture that largely conceives of love in terms of feeling and sentiment, we can never remind ourselves enough of what the Bible means by the word *love* - especially as it relates to loving our enemies. C.S. Lewis says it well in a letter of spiritual direction to a friend:

Your other question about loving our enemies has been very much in my mind lately, and it must be faced, every time we say the Lord's Prayer. No exemption seems to be allowed--see Johnson's *Rambler* 185 (for Xmas Eve 1751) which ends thus: 'Of him that hopes to be forgiven, it is indispensably required that he forgive. On this great duty eternity is suspended: and to him that refuses to practise it, the throne of mercy is inaccessible, and the Saviour of the world has been born in vain.' It sounds impossible. I pray every night for the people I am most tempted to hate or despise (the present list is Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, Mackenzie, Austin and Opie) and in the effort to make this real I have had to do a good deal of thinking.

There were three words in Gk. which covered most kinds of love (*Eros* = sexual love, *Storge* = family affection, *Philia* = friendship) but the New Testament word for 'love' or 'charity' is *Agape*, which has hardly any use in classical Gk--i.e., it is a new word for a new thing. It is obvious that it cannot mean 'an involuntary sentiment.' We all *say* that God is wise, and habitually argue as if He were a fool! How could He be commanding the involuntary? *Agape* is best seen, I think, in the words 'love your neighbour as yourself, i.e., by an act of will, aim at your neighbour's good in the same way as you aim at your own.

Now you don't 'love' yourself because of your own 'lovable qualities.' You may, in moments of vanity, attribute lovable qualities to yourself, but that is not the *cause* of your self-love but one of the *results* of it. At other moments, when you dislike yourself, you still wish for your own happiness. This attitude to one's own self is dictated by nature: towards other selves it has to be acquired.

I take it, it has nothing in the world to do with trying to pretend that the enemy is 'not so bad after all' or that his sins 'don't matter,' or that he is really lovable. Not a bit. It's the old business about 'loving the sinner and hating the sin' which becomes alive to me when I realize that this is what I do to myself all the time.¹

Don't worry about your feelings, Lewis tells us, just start treating your neighbor as you would wish to be treated if you were in his shoes. This is how God calls us to love. Feelings will follow.

¹ Ed. Paul F. Ford, *Yours, Jack: Spiritual Direction from C.S. Lewis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 76-77