

Loving God's Way

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For nearly two-thousand years, the apostle Peter has been rebuked and ridiculed by many students of Scripture. His various short-comings as a disciple of Jesus are well-documented in the Gospels. We often look at Simon Peter and ask, "How could he have done that?" Take, for example, this scene recorded for us by Matthew. It follows Peter's great confession of Jesus (Matt. 16:16).

21 From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

22 Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

23 But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's." (Matthew 16:21-23)

When Jesus told Peter what would happen to Him in Jerusalem, Peter protested. He was not about to let his good friend, the One he just acknowledged as being the Christ, and the Son of God, be arrested and die.

In fairness to Peter, he was only doing what any good friend would do. How many of us would let a good friend die? At this point, Peter did not fully understand the plan of God. He was merely demonstrating his love for Jesus.

Still, even though Peter was acting as a friend, and in love, Jesus rebuked him. In fact, he calls it the work of the devil. Further, Jesus tells Peter he was not setting his mind upon God's interests, but man's.

Believe it or not, we today can be guilty of the same mistake as Peter. We too may act in love, but be setting our mind on man's interests and not God's. This happens when our acts of love are in opposition to the will of God. It happens when we do not love as God would have us love. Let's consider a few examples:

Might it have been love that found the Corinthians ignoring the sin of a man who was involved in a great act of immorality? (1 Cor. 5:1-3). It is said they were boasting about this situation. Were they boasting about the novelty of it, or boasting about their love in spite of it? Whichever, the apostle Paul rebuked them, demonstrating that real love would deliver the man to Satan, so his soul would be saved (1 Cor. 5:4-5). In this case, loving as God would love, as harsh and unloving as it may seem from a human perspective, would have removed the man from the congregation. Love does not ignore sin.

When a congregation of God's people acts in love to respond to their fellow man's needs, but uses the Lord's contribution in ways for which there is no New Testament authority, have they loved according to the will of God? No! They may see their actions as a good work of love. However, how good can a work be if it violates New Testament authority? The examples we have in the Scriptures reveal the collection was for the benevolent needs of the brethren (cf. Acts 11:27-30; 1 Tim. 5:16). As individuals, separate and apart from the weekly collection, we can act in love, from our heart and own personal wallets and purses, in contributing to the needs of our fellow man and be fully consistent with God's will (cf. Gal. 6:10). This is the pattern we find in the New Testament.

When a congregation changes the worship and work of the church as described in the New Testament, in efforts to attract more people, thinking this is love, they have actually failed in their love for God! Their intentions may be good, but if those intentions cause them to violate the Scriptures, they have failed in their love for God. In spite of Peter's loving intentions, Jesus called it the work of the devil. Despite a congregation's loving intentions, if they violate the Word of God, this too would be called the work of the devil. We are to worship in spirit and in truth. Our sole source of authority is the Word of

God. Love does not give us the freedom to change or add to what God has revealed in His Word.

Love is a wonderful thing. However, love is not the secret formula for doing whatever we want as Christians. The apostle John said it well:

And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, that you should walk in it (2 John 6 Emphasis Mine).

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