

Alabama Baptist.

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LOVE AN ELEMENT OF MORAL POWER.

No force is so great as this. Faith is a mighty influence in every department of human action. In business, in science, in society, it is great. In religion it is great; so great as to "remove mountains"; so great as to be essential to eternal salvation. We have a record of some of its achievements in the eleventh chapter of the epistle to the Hebrews. And yet, mighty and all-important as it is, it is not so great as love.

Hope is a mighty force. It goes far to bear up the soul under the pressure of this world's cares and sorrows; as an anchor, it holds the soul on the surges of the present life, and carries it onward to the joys of the future. And yet love is a greater power than this. It is the essence of both faith and hope; without love the faith would be that of devils, and the hope that which perishes. "There abideth these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

There is no sustaining power so great as love. Our present state is one of trial, and that presupposes suffering. Every eye at times is filled with tears; every brow wrinkled with care; every heart convulsed with anxiety. The roll of record of humanity is written without and without, with lamentation, and mourning, and woe. Christianity promises support under, but not exemption from, trouble. Sooner or later it will come, and the power that supports us under it is love. The mother never wearies of watching by her infant's cradle, as she is borne up by her love for the child. The father's arm is nerved for the toil that wins his children's bread, by the love which he bears for them. It is this that fires the patriot's zeal and makes it "even sweet to die for one's country." This it is that kindles a soldier's courage and reconciles thousands to a life of trouble and struggle. But the love that is divine—not a mere sentiment or passion, but an inspiration of God—keeps the soul from despondency and secures under every form of heart-trial and sorrow.

And as a sustaining power, how great is love! We have not only burdens to bear along life's pilgrimage, but enemies to resist and subdue. Satan is the arch-enemy, the commander of the forces of hell, which are moving against "the sacramental hosts of God's elect." "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places." This is a fearful contest with a terrific power; a contest, not with mere humanity, man against man, but man against spirit, humanity engaged with a demonized archangel. And that which arms the soul for this is not the understanding merely, however clear; not faith only, however strong; but rather that which is above all and which gives strength to all—"charity, the bond of perfectness." It builds around the soul a rampart so strong and invulnerable, that the attacks of the enemy fall on it only to rebound.

And how mighty is its aggressive power! See it as developed in the lives of the earlier disciples. Everywhere throughout the hills and valleys of Judea, amid persecution and death, they bore aloft the banner of their Lord, and called upon all men to gather beneath its gracious folds. And the simple power which sustained them was love. And ever since, when men have gone to lands of darkness to win the nations back to God, they have been borne along by the power and grace of a holy love. In every conflict and trial, "the love of Christ was the constraining," the animating, the impelling force. And this will continue to be such until all nations shall accept Christ as the Author of salvation.

And then as a power of endurance, how great! It never tires. Its energy never fails. All other motives give way; they will not last as a force. Mere passion soon exhausts itself. Avarice disappoints us either in not getting what it sought, or in the possession itself. Mere ambition soon spends itself, as the fame which it aspires often disappoints and always bewilders. Sensualism soon wears itself out, and sours with disgust. Pride, vanity, vindictiveness, as moral forces for good or impulses in the work of benevolence, soon break down. But love, the divine inspiration of the soul, is a spring that never loses its force; a power that never weakens; it gives courage, strength and perseverance in all the duties and labors of life. All the energies of the soul grow under its genial influences, and all the graces of the Spirit warm and enliven under its life-giving power. Whatever else shall fail as a moral force, "charity never faileth."

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