

## Knowledgeable, Discerning Love

By John R. Gibson

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent....” Philippians 1:9-10a

Paul had a special bond with the saints at Philippi and this was reflected in the fact that he was always making request for them in his prayers (Phil. 1:3-4). While there were certainly other elements to his prayers on their behalf, let’s think seriously about the details of the prayer given in 1:9-10. The apostle desired that the Philippians, a people who had shown much love to him through the years, have a love that abounded in knowledge and discernment. That he would express this desire should tell us that what we think to be love is not always what God wants it to be; i.e. it is not always in accord with His will and does not always reflect “senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:14). Let’s look at a few areas in which our love needs to reflect a knowledge of God’s word and the discernment to make good choices.

There’s nothing loving about sexual immorality. While our culture would apply the words “making love” to any and every act of sexual expression between consenting adults (or even older teens), the word of God is clear in contradicting this usage of the term love.

“Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge” (Hebrews 13:4). In the English Standard Version this is found as an exhortation: “Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.” No matter how strong the attraction, sexual relations outside a lawful marriage are not the expression of a knowledgeable, discerning love, but are instead that which will bring God’s judgment upon us.

If we ever think we are in love with one who is not our lawful spouse, we need to stop and apply God’s word to this relationship. Are we allowed to love this person in any physical way beyond the love we are to have for all mankind? In Matthew 19:9 the Lord says that remarriage after most divorces is sinful, but most of the divorced choose to follow their feelings and not the discernment that comes from a knowledge of God’s teachings. Our culture continually cries out that we must be free to love whomever we will, but the Scriptures haven’t changed when it comes to premarital sex, adultery, remarriage after divorce, and homosexuality.

“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Parents who “love them too much” to discipline them, do not have a knowledgeable, discerning love. “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Proverbs 13:24). There are those who abuse children and we need to exercise caution in our discipline lest we “provoke [our] children to wrath” (Ephesians 6:4) and “they become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21), but to fail to properly discipline our children is to fail them. Parents who have come to see the importance of the soul (Matthew 16:26) appreciate the importance of restraint and discipline. They have the knowledge and discernment to realize that “no chastening

seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Hebrews 12:11). In a society that grows more and more permissive each year it is difficult to be the parent that says no and enforces it when necessary, but that parent is the one demonstrating a knowledgeable, discerning love—the love God wants us to have.

From the "I am nothing" of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3 to John's declaration that one who loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:21), the New Testament places tremendous emphasis upon love for our neighbor, and especially demands a fervent love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Along with the commandments to love one another, we have numerous exhortations to be longsuffering, gentle, forbearing, etc. to the point that some have come to believe the Lord wants us to overlook sin in the lives of others. But like John the Baptist and then Jesus, we must identify sin and call men to repentance (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17). A love that will allow one's neighbor to remain lost in soul-condemning sin without any warning is so completely devoid of discernment that it cannot really be called love.

In our dealings with our spiritual family, let's be patient, not rush to judgment, or seek to impose our own judgments on others, but when we see a brother fall into sin we cannot ignore that, instead, we must "restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1-2). Churches that are too "loving" to practice discipline are actually deficient in their love for both the apostate and the church as a whole because they are not doing what God said was needed to save the rebellious and protect the body from the leaven of sin (1 Corinthians 5:4-7). As with parents, the brotherly love of a disciple must sometimes be a "tough love."

How is our love? Without a love for others we cannot please God (1 John 4:8), but is our love based on the knowledge of God's will?

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