

LOVE IS THE PRINCIPAL THING

(A short talk by Pastor Russell, Niagara Falls Convention, 1907, Part II, page 77.)

Brother Russell said: Dear Friends, it was the intention to have the various themes of Love considered first and love itself as the finality, but since there is a meeting downstairs, and one upstairs, it became necessary to divide the matter a little, and so I will have a word with you on love first, and then you will hear more about the various divisions of love afterward.

Our little talks are to be very brief, you know, and mine will be of the same order. I take as my text, "Love is the principal thing." We might ask why love should be considered the principal thing? Why not have justice the principal thing? Why not have wisdom the principal thing? Why not have knowledge the principal thing? Why not have divine power the principal thing? But the Lord tells us from His standpoint—and that is your standpoint, and my standpoint—love is the principal thing. I think it will do us all good to have in mind that, no matter how much knowledge we should have, no matter how much wisdom we might acquire, no matter how much power we may be able to exercise, all these things are secondary from God's standpoint, and the measure of love you and I can acquire will be our measure from God's standpoint. Therefore, how much you are in God's sight, how much you grow from day to day, and from year to year, in God's sight, in God's estimation, depends upon how much love you have incorporated into you, how much you are built up in love, how much you grow up in love, and in all the affairs of life as it will extend and affect all the interests of life.

I remind you, dear friends, the Scriptures tell us that "God is love." Nowhere do they say that God is justice; nowhere do they say that God is wisdom; nowhere do they say that God is power. It is true that God is powerful, it is true that God is wise, it is true that God is just, but He is not any of these things **per se**; but God is love. In other words, the word **love** represents the whole character of God, and all the wisdom of God is that kind which proceeds from and is in accord with love, and all the power of God is exercised in conformity with His love, His character of love, and all the justice of God is in full accord with this essential feature of his character, **love**. No wonder, then, if God Himself is love, that He tells us, "Love is the principal thing." God is the principal thing, and God is love. And then in proportion as you and I would come into harmony with God, and in proportion as you and I would become God-like, and in proportion as we would be pleasing in our Heavenly Father's sight, we must have this same element of love; and in becoming Godlike we are becoming loving and lovable.

We see, dear friends, how the loss of love came in. We see that through the fall, man who was made in God's image, and who therefore must have been a very loving being to begin with, as he came to struggle with the affairs of life, with the thorns and thistles, and

with everything that was around him, developed the lower organs of the mind, the selfish propensities, the tendency to take for self, and to look out for number one, and how this was all maintained at the expense of the higher organs of love, benevolence, sympathy, kindness and generosity. All of these suffered as he must battle for himself with thorns and thistles which the earth brought forth to him, and in order to gain his bread by the sweat of his brow. So we see that 6,000 years has reduced our race—the race that originally was in God’s image and therefore was in the image of love—to that place where, as we see today, selfishness is the prominent and dominant quality of the human family. And we see, in a word, God points out to us that during the great time of trouble which is coming, the very thing that will be the source of all the trouble, and the cause of all the trouble, will be selfishness. Every man’s hand will be for himself, and against every other man. All of this, you see, will eventuate, as the Scriptures show us, in the collapse of present institutions, when all the affairs of men will go down in the great maelstrom of trouble, when society will be entirely wrecked. Selfishness will be the cause, and God is allowing this illustration of selfishness as it began when man lost his harmony with God, and which has progressed and swept over the world all through these 6,000 years, to heap up in this great time of trouble which will be chiefly caused by knowledge and selfishness. While men were ignorant they could not all use their selfishness to any great extent. Some few could use their selfishness, and the others were powerless to understand and appreciate the operation of it; but now we come down to a place where everybody has knowledge, and everybody has selfishness, and when you get the whole human family into a great battle each to get the better of the other, you have the cause of the great trouble that is right upon us.

What should be our attitude, dear friends? Our attitude is to be in harmony with God. God has called us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Our minds, like those of the remainder of mankind, are selfish. We are sometimes ashamed of the selfish things we do now. We think there is no exception. You see something you have done after you have done it, and you see there was some selfishness in it; you were not aware of it at the moment. The reason is, you have a higher standard in your minds now; you are able to see these little mean things; you did not see them at one time, but the more you see of the glorious character of the Lord the more you realize that He is our pattern, and that we are to be God-like, and that love from God’s standpoint is the principal thing. The more we realize that, dear friends, and the more we seek to put down all selfishness and meanness, and to get rid of these, and get the nature built up, the more we are coming into the likeness of God and becoming copies of God’s dear Son. And then it is in that connection we are to remember the words of the Apostle in Rom. 8, that God has predestinated that all those who shall be joint-heirs with Christ shall be, and must be, copies of His Son, and that means that you and I must gain a victory over selfishness.

But you say, Brother Russell, can we hope ever to get where we are above selfishness? Could we ever hope to reach that point? If God is going to set that standard, that we are

to be copies of God's Son, we have no chance at all. I answer, dear friends, we have no hope at all of ever getting to that perfect standard at which our Lord was; we have no hope of getting rid of all the meanness as long as we have these mortal bodies. What we have hope for is this, that in the spirit of our minds we are to get in that place where we will hate iniquity, and hate selfishness, and where we will love God, and love benevolence and love that which is lovable, that which is loving. When we have reached that point in our minds, and are striving to bring our bodies as far as possible into conformity with that, we have reached a place in the spirit of our minds where God is measuring us, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. And therefore you see it is for us to have this right standard in our minds, and as we have that standard, and God recognizes our intentions, and our efforts, and our endeavors to perfect love in our hearts, in our lives, and in all that we do—in that proportion we are accepted in Christ Jesus. How blessed is God's arrangement, and how harmonious it is with everything that would be reasonable in our sight.

Now dear friends, I have had my ten minutes, and I am very glad to have had this opportunity of saying a parting word with you all. God bless you. I will shake hands with you all. Shake hands with me if you please.

(Brother Russell waving his hands and the audience responding by waving theirs. This was Bro. Russell's good-bye as he left the meeting to take the train for home. As Bro. Russell left the platform the audience sang, "God be with you till we meet again.")