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THE TWELVE REFERENCES TO THE LOVE OF GOD

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INTRODUCTION

Christ chose 12 apostles, and in the KJV Bible we find 12 references to "the love of God" which I shall use as the framework for this article. We cannot properly say that these are "The Twelve Epistles of The Love of God," for these references are not entire letters, but the points emphasized with them could be formed into epistles of considerable length, well amplified and fortified with numerous scriptures. I shall not be so lengthy, but under my own subtitles, I will present the 12 references to "the love of God" in the order in which they appear in the Scriptures, followed by my comments.

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(1) THE LOVE OF GOD IS MORE WEIGHTY THAN A LEGALISTIC OBSERVANCE OF THE LAW:-- "But woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Luke 11:42). This is the month of December, 2001, and since September 11th of this year we have heard and read much about the Taliban Muslims, an extremely zealous Islamic group that has endeavored by force of arms to coerce everyone under their control in Afghanistan to adhere to "the letter of Islamic Laws." Though these codes are taken from the Koran, a book not inspired nor authorized by the True God, the legalistic spirit in which the Taliban regimented the conduct of their society is closely akin to that of the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned in Luke 11:42. Within any religion, including Christianity, the most striking characteristic of legalists is their overlooking of "the love of God"!

To have and to manifest the love of God is more important than insisting that everyone cross every (T) and dot every (i) in fulfilling the letter of the law! Jesus said as much when He also proclaimed: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and

anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone" (Matt. 23:23).

A Christian minister, who "lays down the Law" every Sunday Morning, Sunday Night, and once again at the Wednesday Prayer Meeting, will (or should) soon learn that "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6). I once read of one who was so legalistically narrow that "if a fly landed on the bridge of his nose it would scratch both of his eyes out"! It is a tragic mistake for any Christian group, or any Christian minister, to focus so entirely upon making folks "line up or leave" that they completely lose the more weighty possession and manifestation of the love of God.

I read of a prisoner who was to be shot, but who received a pardon from the Governor just in time to spare his life. The letter of pardon was given to the firing-squad signal-man. He was told to walk down to the man who was already secured to the post for execution, and there to present him the pardon. The signal-man made a huge blunder! He had in his pocket both the letter of pardon and the handkerchief he was to wave as the signal for the firing-squad to fire their rifles. When the signal-man reached the man to whom he was to present the pardon, he accidentally extracted from his pocket the handkerchief instead of the letter of pardon! -- and when the death-squad saw it, they fired! -- and the pardoned man slumped in death! The one sent to be the Messenger of Pardon became instead the Messenger of Death!

Thus it is, when a Christian minister become a legalist, spewing forth the venom of death in his messages instead of Christ's true message of Pardon and Life. Hundreds, if not thousands, of over-zealous preachers need to read again, and lay to heart the truth in 2 Corinthians 3:6 that Christ has made His true ministers to be "able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

Pity the flock who are made to feel that they must "get their preacher's permission" before doing the most minor things -- things about which neither God's Word nor their Church Manual says one thing, and things which the love of God demands to be left to the individual guidance of the Holy Spirit! Woe to the preacher, or group, who ignores the million-ton-heavy possession and manifestation of the love of God and who tips the scales in favor of the opposite side with the "feathers of legalistic notions"!

I once had a man in my congregation who would not shave on Sunday, but if he thought that was more important than having and showing the right spirit to those who did shave on the Lord's Day, HIS SPIRITUAL SCALES WERE GREATLY OUT OF BALANCE! -- and he would have been omitting the weightier matter of the Law -- the love of God -- and like thousands of religious zealots, it would have been well for him to read again, and lay to heart Roman 13:10 -- "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

One cannot have the love of God without fulfilling the law, but one can cross every (T) and dot every (i) in seeking to legalistically fulfill the Law without even coming close to doing so!

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(2) THE LOVE OF GOD IS NOT IN MANY RELIGIOUS PEOPLE:-- "But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you" (John 5:42). This perceptive remark by Jesus was made in His reply to some of the "Jews [who] sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God" (John 5:18). It is interesting that Jesus said to these legalistic Jews, "I KNOW YOU." Eight times in the Book of Revelation Jesus said in his messages to the 7 Churches, "I KNOW". To the legalistic Jews in John 5:42 above, He said, "I know... that ye have not the love of God in you" -- and to the Ephesian Church He said: "I know... thou hast left thy first love" (Rev. 2:2, 4). Once, after my mother's dramatic, spiritual reclamation she said something to me regarding some legalistic holiness folks that I have never forgotten: "Carnality is a bad heart, and a lot of very religious people have it." The Jews who sought to kill Jesus for his alleged breaking of the Sabbath, were very religious, but they had bad hearts, void of the love of God. And, no doubt there have been some holiness professors of the sort who would never dream of shaving on Sunday, but whose hearts were, nonetheless, void of the love of God.

When the rich young Jewish ruler came to Jesus seeking to learn "what good thing he could do" to enter heaven, perhaps the Lord could just as truthfully told him: "I KNOW YOU; you have been quite precise in keeping the letter of the Law, but you have not the love of God in you, for in spite of all of your careful observations, you really love money and possessions!"

The Lord knows -- all things, and all men. After the resurrected Christ queried the reclaimed Peter the third time, asking, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). (Note: Christ did not say, "Shear My sheep, nor Slaughter My sheep!") Perhaps one of the main reasons Christ repeatedly asked Peter if he loved Him was to fix in Peter's mind the fact that, rather than wield a bloody sword in His defense, Jesus wanted Peter to have and manifest to all -- the love of God -- and thus "feed His sheep" and "find those who were astray." It was later, at Pentecost, that Peter received the fullness of the love of God that would make him the loving pastor of the flock that Christ wanted him to be. Sans that baptism of Divine love, Peter might have wielded a spiritual sword as bloody as the one that severed Malchus' ear.

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(3) THE LOVE OF GOD IS IMPLANTED IN THE HEART ONLY BY THE HOLY GHOST:-- "And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us" (Romans 5:5). Note who it is that wrote this verse -- the beloved apostle Paul, formerly the bloody persecutor Saul. None of his theological studies of God's Word at the feet of Gamaliel had instilled one ounce of the true love of God into his heart! One can become the most erudite Bible scholar on earth, obtain the highest degree in theology possible, develop into the most polished pulpit orator over long decades of preaching, sway people's emotions with hurricane-like force, and become a renown evangelist known around the globe -- all to no avail, unless "the love of God has been shed abroad in his heart BY THE HOLY GHOST."

From personal experience, Saul of Tarsus transformed into Paul the Apostle, learned this, and thus it was that he could also write so profoundly and convincingly these words: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Concerning all that he possessed and learned before "the love of God was shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost," Paul said: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." (Philip. 3:7-9) Previously, he had a ton-load of theological learning shed abroad in his mind by Gamaliel and by his studies; now he had "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost," and it was the latter that he determined to keep at all costs.

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(4) THE LOVE OF GOD IS INSEPARABLE AND IMMEASURABLE:-- As a victorious Christian, St. Paul wrote: "As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:36-39). The reason why no one or no thing can separate God's love from those who presently love and serve Him is because "GOD IS LOVE" (1 John 4:8, 16). In order to be powerful enough to separate the love of God from a genuine Christian, that force would have to be powerful enough to separate God Himself from that soul! Obviously, no such force exists.

However, the Bible does not teach that it is impossible for one to separate himself or herself from the love of God. In order to honor the free will that He Himself created in mankind, God does allow a person to choose not to love Him and to finally divorce himself, or herself, from the love of God in eternity. None who inhabit the regions of the damned will be the objects of the love of God.

Still, many humans have been too ready in their minds to preclude from the love of God those whom they deem to be reprobates, and -- the magnitude of God's love is too often dwarfed by false limitations placed upon it by mistaken, human perceptions. In the song, "There's A Wideness," F. W. Faber wrote:

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice
Which is more than liberty.

There's a welcome for the sinner,
And more graces for the good.
There is mercy with the Saviour;
There is healing in His blood.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind...

The love of God "is more wonderfully kind" than some Christians may think, and no doubt many sinners who have been "long since written off" by men as hopelessly lost have continued to be the objects of Christ's immeasurable love -- some of whom have been marvelously and gloriously saved at late ages and late stages of life. After repeatedly reading in Jeremiah 31:3, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love," Frederick M. Lehman was also moved by the magnitude of the love of God, and wrote:

The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell,
It goes beyond the highest star
And reaches to the lowest hell.
O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall for evermore endure
The saints and angels song!

The story about the third verse of this song is even more remarkable -- and seems to expand even further the concept of just how immeasurable the love of God is. It was not written by Frederick M. Lehman, but was written some time later by Ben Isaac Nahorai. For years, Nahorai had suffered from mental depression and was at last committed to an asylum. Nevertheless, it seems that the radiance and magnitude of the love of God penetrated the dark clouds of his mind, for after his death these words were found written on Nahorai's asylum wall:

Could we with ink the ocean fill
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were ever stalk on earth a quill
And every man a scribe by trade,
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry,
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Tho' stretched from sky to sky.

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(5) THE LOVE OF GOD IS ALSO INSEPARABLE FROM HIS GRACE AND HIS COMMUNION:-- "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen" (2 Corinthians 13:14). In this verse we can see The Divine Trinity: Jesus Christ the Son, God the Father, and the Holy Ghost. All three are but One God -- eternal and inseparable. But there are 3 other trinities in this verse, namely: The Grace of Christ, The Love of God, and The Communion of the Holy Ghost. Thus, this verse not only "speaks volumes" about the Triune Persons constituting the One God, but it also reveals that "The Love of God" is inseparable from "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" and from "The Communion of the Holy Ghost."

With no desire to reflect on the sovereign Dignity of the Trinity, I offer the following: It has been written and sung that "Love and Marriage go together like a horse and carriage... ya can't have one, my brother, ya can't have one without the other."

The Divine Trinity is eternally inseparable. Likewise "The Love of God" is eternally inseparable from "The Grace of the Lord Jesus Christ" and from "The Communion of the Holy Ghost" -- you can't have one without the other. Away with this current notion that Islam and other false religions are "good religions". There is no true love of God without Christ, without His grace, and without the indwelling presence of the Holy Ghost. Selah.

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(6) THE LOVE OF GOD IS ALSO INSEPARABLE FROM CONTINUED PERSEVERANCE:-- "And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ" (2 Thessalonians 3:5). My thought here is better seen in the NIV translation of this verse: "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance."

Second Thessalonians 1:9 should make it clear to all that many "who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power," shall by their own choice separate themselves forever from the love of God.

Second Thessalonians 3:5 speaks of "The Love of God" in conjunction with "Christ's Perseverance". The fact is, and none should doubt it:-- while no created thing can by and of itself separate the Christian from love of God, willful sin can and does make that separation, and the Christian's perseverance in obedience to Christ is absolutely necessary to retain eternally the love of God.

If the love of God extended into Hell, IT WOULD NOT BE HELL! If the love of God reached into the Lake of Fire, its pangs and pains would be nonexistent and its waves would be as sweet and soothing as the rivulets in the River of Life. It is equally absurd to say that the love of God is so great and so enduring that He will never banish any from His presence. Such a concept is as false as to assert that the Holy God loves filth and will provide a moral pigsty on the outskirts of the New Jerusalem in which those can forever wallow who hate His Holiness!

The Conclusion: Eternal Security notions are fearfully false! Continuance in the love of God is dependent upon perseverance in obedience to Him.

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(7) THE LOVE OF GOD IS PERFECTED IN THIS LIFE:-- "But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him" (1 John 2:5). The love of God is first shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost when one is genuinely born of the Spirit. But this initial instilling of the love of God into the heart of one newly born again is not perfect, not without alloy. It is when the Christian seeker receives the second work of grace, the mighty baptism of the Holy Ghost, that the Christian's love is made perfect: "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). This purifying baptism not only purges the heart from all sin and fills it with perfect love, but it also removes all fear of the great coming Judgment. St. John wrote: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:18). But the perseverance aspect of retaining the love of God is brought out in 1 John 2:5, quoted above, and the clear inference is that it is only those who obediently keep God's word who continue to possess the experience of perfect love.

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(8) THE LOVE OF GOD IS PERCEPTIBLE IN DEED AND IN TRUTH:-- "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). The love of God was perceived in Christ more by what He did than by what He said. His entire earthly life was a perfect manifestation of the love of God. Thus it is that the Scriptures exhort Christians to prove that they have the love of God in their hearts by their deeds as well as in their words. Again, the apostle John wrote: "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (1 John 3:18).

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(9) THE LOVE OF GOD IS NOT RESIDING IN STINGY HEARTS:-- "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John 3:17). One of the indictments against the Laodicean Church is its proud boast: "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing..." (Revelation 3:17). The reason why many professed Christians in the Laodicean Church today HAVE SO MUCH IS BECAUSE THEY GIVE SO LITTLE! -- and by this I mean they give so little in proportion to what they have. Jesus taught that the widows mite, being a tiny fraction of the gifts of others, was actually greater -- in proportion -- than all other gifts -- because she "cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Matt. 12:44). When one gives to God and to the needy, remember: God measures the size of the gift, not by how much you gave, but by how much you had left retained for yourself after you gave your gift.

In effect, St. John proclaimed that stingy souls have not the love of God dwelling in them, and St. James declared that such have a dead faith: "If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; Notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:15-17). Thus we see that stingy souls are at once void of both the love of God and the life of God within them.

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(10) THE LOVE OF GOD IS MANIFESTED THROUGH WHAT HE DID:-- "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (1 John 4:9). God the Father set the example. He does not demand that his children manifest the love of God by what they do without having first demonstrated His love by His own action.

Take this "with a grain of salt," but it illustrates the point:-- I once heard of a preacher who had apparently had been used to making altar calls and who got a job as a life-saver at a swimming place. One day he saw a man out in the water frantically waving his hand, but instead of swimming out to save him, the preacher-turned-life-guard simply said, "...I see that hand".

He acknowledged that the man had a need -- BUT DID NOTHING ABOUT IT! Of course the story is probably quite fictional, but it does illustrate how that simply acknowledging that someone has a need does no good, unless it is backed up with the deeds necessary to help extract that person from their plight.

When God saw a lost world about to plunge under the raging waves of eternal damnation, He did more than say, "I see that hand"! -- "I see that need"! -- He gave the best and most that He could by sending His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through him. His Son saved us, but was Himself drowned in the billows of the Lake of Fire, suffering all of its pangs in our stead.

As I see it, the fact that Jesus was cast into the Lake of Fire in behalf of a lost world is typified in the experience of Jonah, who said: "Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me" (Jonah 2:3).

Was it not this unimaginably painful baptism into the Lake of Fire in our behalf that Jesus anticipated in the Garden of Gethsemane, and which made Him "sweat was as it were great drops of blood" (Luke 22:44). Yes, as a man He no doubt shuddered at the prospect of the physical agony awaiting him on Golgatha, but I suspect it was the prospect of enduring the immeasurable agonies of the Lake of Fire that cause Him to pray: "O my Father, if it be possible, let THIS CUP pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39).

Further, when the writer to the Hebrews says that "Jesus.. was made.. the suffering of death... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man," (Heb. 2:9), I believe that this "tasting of death" probably meant that Jesus was destined of God to "taste the Second Death" of the Lake of Fire -- for every man!

In using the figure of Christ's baptism into the Lake of Fire being the fulfillment of Jonah's being cast into the sea to save those on-board his ship, as I see it, this is the baptism to which

Christ referred when He said prior to His suffering: "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). He saw that only after He was baptized into that awful suffering could the fullness of his salvation be accomplished in all men throughout the entire world.

When Jesus said to the sons of Zebedee, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Mat 20:22), was He partly alluding to the fact that when it came to the suffering beyond physical death -- when it came to suffering the Second Death for a lost world -- only HE could do this. Only the Son of God could suffer the whole of Man's Eternal punishment -- endure all of its awful billows -- drink all of its immeasurable dregs -- and return therefrom. Only He could do this, because He was God Incarnate. I assert that THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT HE DID when "He by the grace of God tasted death for every man -- and it was by this deed greater than any mere man could do that the love of God was manifested in the Person of His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ!

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(11) THE LOVE OF GOD IS NOT PRODUCTIVE OF GREIF:-- "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). The love of sin, and the love of the world, sometimes produce momentary hilarity and transient pleasure, but in the end they always produce grief. The love of God in the keeping of His commandments is never grievous -- ever! One who loves God and keeps his commandments may suffer grief, but it can never be said that what God allows into his life is "grievous" in the sense of producing that which will bring him lasting and eternal remorse.

It is true that the writer to the Hebrews said that "no chastening [of God] for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12:11), but I think that one should look at the words here "seemeth to be... grievous." Often, what now "seems" to be "grievous" in the Christian's life is actually designed of God to bring great and eternal joy in Heaven, if not later on earth. The author of the old hymn, "Your Roses May Have Thorns," wrote: "The trials that may often seem most bitter, may bring to you the joys that make you sing."

The devil declares that loving God and keeping his commandments is a grievous thing, while the things he offers will bring happiness and joy. The exact opposite is true. The love of God and the keeping of His commandments are not grievous, and produce at last, eternal joy and bliss, "though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations" (1 Pet 1:6).

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(12) THE LOVE OF GOD IS KEPT BY PRAYER:-- "But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude verses 20-21). I shall let this verse serve as its own commentary. It is part of the benediction at the close of Jude's epistle, and

with it I conclude this article, having presented in their Biblical order with my comments, "The Twelve References To The Love Of God."

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THE END