

“But covet earnestly the best gifts; and yet I show unto you a more excellent way.”
I Corinthians 12:31

WALKING IN LOVE

by Craig Marlatt

It's wonderful being a born-again Christian. I love waking up every day knowing that God has given me another opportunity to serve Him. A day filled with glorious possibilities and challenges to experience the grace and power of God in everyday life. There's nothing like serving the risen Lord Jesus and being a part of God's glorious Church in a time when He is moving so greatly in the world.

There's something else that I love about my life: I thank the Lord that He has allowed me to be relatively free from dogmatic denominational entrapments in my mind and heart. I can receive just as much from listening to a sermon by Oliver B. Green, the great fundamentalist evangelist, as I can from watching Pat Robertson or R.W. Shambach praying in the Spirit or operating in a word of knowledge (one of the Spiritual gifts found in I Cor.12:8). I have close relationships with Christians who speak in tongues (and wouldn't have it any other way), and yet some of my dearest friends believe the experience is completely invalid for this day and age.

It's wonderful being who I am and allowing others to be who they are in Christ. Being joint heirs in Jesus doesn't mean we will all agree on Biblical interpretations. Most believe in accordance with the spiritual leadership and environment to which they allow themselves the most exposure.

I know many Charismatics and Pentecostals who wouldn't think that God could use someone like Rev. Jerry Falwell or Dr. D. James Kennedy, but He does anyway, even though they don't speak in tongues. Who would deny that the fundamentalist movement has a much larger sphere of influence in the world than the charismatic or Pentecostal churches when it comes to education, political influence, and moral issues? And yet in the areas of media evangelism the largest Christian television networks both have a definite charismatic/Pentecostal message. Even in the more traditional churches (Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, etc.) there is a tremendous recognition of charismatic teachings and “renewal” is taking place as God's Spirit finds believers who are open and yielded.

There are many Christians who think it is impossible for God to use rock and roll music, and yet if you've ever attended the 'Creation Festival' in Pennsylvania or Washington State you will see God move mightily to save young people through the medium to which they are most exposed.

It all comes down to this: God will use you, but He is going to use others too. Even if they're not like you! Isn't that exciting? You don't have to carry the responsibility of being exactly right all of the time. If others don't agree with you don't be so upset! You don't agree with them either!

The more we demand those around us to be like ourselves the smaller our world will become. The great Christian theologian, Arthur Pink, spent the last few years of his life in relative isolation. Because of his dogmatic views on scripture, he could not fellowship or break bread with anyone who disagreed with his own views. Eventually he

couldn't find anyone who was holy enough to have unity with him, so he had no fellowship at all. What a horrible life!

The greatest goal of God in all of our lives is to teach us to love. Love must give and have a recipient upon which to bestow itself. Love broadens our sphere of influence, thus fulfilling our greatest potential of service to God. We may have knowledge about God and yet never love, but we cannot know God without love. He that does not love does not know God (I John 4:8). We may never achieve great knowledge in God's word but, if we love, He will use us in the lives of those around us.

I will never understand all that there is to know about God and I will probably often disagree with others around me who are themselves seeking to be faithful in that which God has given to them. Yet if I have love in my heart He can use me. In spite of my many failings and human frailties, His love working through me will always promote the Kingdom of His Son and bring glory to the Father.

It's wonderful to have knowledge, and spiritual gifts are to be coveted with great earnestness. Being doctrinally sound and fundamentally correct will always be a thing of honor to any child of God. But the Kingdom of God is not based upon right and wrong, but rather beckons us to a higher calling altogether. The Spirit within us is calling us, wooing us to follow Him in the "more excellent way". The surpassing excellence of God's first begotten Son who looked down upon a world that despised Him and said, "Father forgive them, they don't know what they are doing." And it is this love that has overthrown the enemies of God and will usher in the Kingdom of Light and Truth. It is this great love that reaches out through men and women around the world, touching those who have little or nothing to give in return.

We must not build our world only out of those people who think like us or we will find out that our world is made up of our own self and nothing more. We must strive to reach into the lives of those around us that are hurting, broken and lonely and allow God's love to heal their lives, giving of ourselves freely and receiving that which we lack from God Himself. Experiencing that dimension of God which calls us to love our neighbors even as we love ourselves. In so doing we will be set free from the fears that bind us to our own little world.

There is a "more excellent way" which surpasses the way of 'right and wrong', or 'good and bad'. It is the way of love. It is the straight gate of which Jesus spoke. It is God's way of bringing about His Kingdom in a world that knows only the limitations of humanity; only the tarnished beauty of an imperfect people fallen from the glory of their Creator. It is God's gift to His restored children given freely, and perfectly expressed in the life, love and sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ. As the words of John 1:14 find their ultimate meaning in the yielded life of a believer, the Word becomes flesh in us (the Body of Christ). Then, and only then, shall the world around us behold His glory.