

THE GREATEST IS LOVE

**“And now these three remain; faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”
(1 Cor. 13:13.)**

Many are astonished that God has established priorities. He has! Some things are more important to Him than others. When Jesus, for example, was asked which was the greatest commandment in the Law, He answered without equivocation that it was love. A proper love for God is priority # 1, and a proper love for our neighbour is priority # 2. Jesus said that all the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments (Matt. 22:36-40). God has established priorities. He wants mercy more than He wants sacrifice (Hos. 6:6). He wants judgement, mercy, and faith more than He wants tithing (Matt. 23:23), and He wants love more than He wants anything. It is God who inspired Paul to write that love is the greatest (1 Cor. 13:13).

All truths are equally true, but not all truths are equally important!

Once suggested the practicality of this principle is obvious. Let us say, for example, that your car has a scratch on the fender and no oil in the crankcase. Both may be equally true, but both are not equally important. Successful living involves establishing correct priorities.

Now let us apply this principle to Christianity. Tradition teaches that while Martin Luther was ascending the “holy stairs” in Rome it dawned on him that salvation was by faith. This is true! We are saved by faith and not by works of law. Faith is absolutely essential to our salvation. It is impossible to please God without faith (Heb. 11:6). Nevertheless, love is more important than faith and Christian history provides a powerful example of why.

In 1524 a militant group of peasants banded together and called themselves the “Evangelical Brotherhood.” Their fanatical leader, Munzer, urged the peasants to kill the rich in the same way that God commanded His people to destroy the Canaanites. The conflict which resulted is called “The Peasant’s War.”

Luther’s response was to order that the peasants be: *“crushed, strangled, and stabbed, privately and publicly, by whomsoever can do it, just as one would beat to death a mad dog. The magistracy that falters, commits sin; since it does not satisfy the peasants to belong to the devil themselves, but they constrain many pious people to their wickedness and damnation. Therefore, dear sirs, fire here, save here, stab, smite, strangle them, whoever can. If your death result, very well, you can never attain to a more blessed death.”* (P. 80) Leonard Fries, the secretary of the city of Wurzburg, compiled a documentary of the war and wrote that: *“one hundred thousand men were overwhelmed and perished in this deluge in less than ten weeks.”* (p. 70)

But this was only the beginning of sorrows. In 1527, 11,000 Lutherans joined an army from Spain and invaded Rome. They killed four to six thousand and turned churches, including St. Peters, into stables. From 1527-1529 another war broke out between the Emperor and the King of France. At the Diet of Speier the Catholic Church, reeling from the Reformation, decided to execute all adults who were re-baptized. On April 25, 1529 the “Reformers” formally protested this decree, and thus came to be known as “Protestants.” Time would fail to tell of the Cappel Wars of 1529 and 1531; the Schmalkald War which began in 1546; the Huguenot War (during which 70,000 Protestants were murdered on the night of Aug. 24, 1572.) Then came the War of Independence in the Netherlands that resulted in 18,000 executions by the infamous “Council of Blood.” Each of these wars was a “Christian” war. Just like Cain and Abel, both sides believed in the same God but forgot the priority of love. The last great conflict during this era was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648.) Millions died and civilization was threatened with extinction.

From the very beginning God has been trying to teach us to love one another and not be like Cain (1 John 3:11, 12). On the night before Calvary Jesus reminded His disciples that the one thing that would distinguish them from all others was their love for one another (John 13:34.) There are, of course, many important and essential doctrines in the Bible, but the Greatest is love!

(Historical references are from “A Manual of Church History” by Albert H. Newman - Vol. 2)

