

CHAPTER 1

More Than a Feeling

Summary:

The collapse of natural and divinely instituted bonds—family, community, and nation—has produced a generation unable to love in proper proportion. When these forms are neglected or redefined, affection becomes either self-centered or abstract, detached from real duties and persons. Love finds its harmony only when grace restores nature, directing every lesser loyalty under the supreme love of God.

Key Points:

- Love is not merely an emotion but a moral act of the will, directed toward what is good and true as God defines it.
- Modern sentimentalism has reduced love to feelings, detaching it from obedience, covenant, and objective moral order.
- The love of God demonstrated in Scripture is not only general, applying to all creation and all mankind, but gloriously particular—centering on His covenant people united to His beloved Son.

Key Scripture Passage(s):

1 Corinthians 13:4–7: Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

1 John 4:8, 19–21: Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ... We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, “I love God” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Questions for Personal Reflection:

Do you tend to think of love more as an uncontrollable emotion or a deliberate choice and concrete action toward real individuals within your personal reach?

Are you more eager to love sweeping, abstract causes or the particular, flesh-and-bone people God has placed near you, no matter how difficult to love they may be?

How does your understanding of God's particular, electing love for His people inform the way you demonstrate love?

Ordered to Love

What personal limits do you have in how you can express love, and how might those limitations actually help rather than hinder your obedience?

Questions for Group Discussion:

The story of Renée Bach is a reminder that good intentions do not always produce healthy ministries. Have you seen similar examples of well-intended but ill-conceived or poorly executed ministry programs or endeavors?

What does it mean that God's love is "particular"? What does that mean for us?

How might a conception of love that is rightly ordered help heal divisions within the church?

Reflection for Prayer:

God is love itself. He is faithful, steadfast, true, and perfectly consistent with His holy character. We are anything but. We are finite, fleeting, inconsistent, and unreliable in comparison to His perfections. Pray for a deeper awareness of both the breadth and depth of God's particular love for His people. Discern any areas in your life where your good intentions may be causing more harm than good. Ask God to gently make you aware of your human limitations so that you can expend your energies on what matters most.

Additional Notes:

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