

Daily Life with Christ. Love-35: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of proper love: The distinction between acquired human love and God's gift of supernatural love.

Differences between human loves and God's love

(Pdf copy at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/041418.pdf>; for background and complete series, see <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).

George: It is a shame that unbelievers don't know anything about love.

Stephen: What makes you think that?

George: Since they are not saved, they are spiritually dead and therefore they can't truly love. They do not know what love is.

Stephen: Are you saying that no unbeliever has any love? What about unbeliever mothers for children, lovers for each other, love for country, and the many acts of love that unbelievers do for the weak and helpless?

George: That is just a bunch of human good . . . just filthy rags before God as per Isaiah 64:6. And God hates it!

Stephen: Let me see if I got this. Are you saying, for example, that decorated American war heroes who are unbelievers, who demonstrated a great deal of sacrifice for this country and for fellow soldiers on the battlefield do not love their country? And that God is sickened and hates all their filthy acts of righteousness? Are you saying we should have the same attitude—reject any notion that an unbeliever does anything out of love? That it is all fake? Are they to be hated as God hates them for those filthy rags because they have no spiritual reference, no reference to God? Aren't we to honor the brave men and women for their sacrifices regardless of their spiritual status or attitude to God? You don't despise military parades, do you? You don't restrict them to Christians, do you?

George: Do you think God counts those works of sacrifice for righteousness? Do you think that the unbeliever veteran can be saved by all his works, his self-sacrifice, for his country? Do you think God will honor the sacrifice of the unbelievers for their country? Do you think God is going to save them because of their patriotism?

Stephen: No, I don't. No man is saved by his works, salvation is by faith alone, Eph 2:8-10. Salvation is a matter of God's matchless grace. However, I do not believe that the unbeliever has no love because he is not saved, born again. And I do not think God hates his sacrifices for his country. It is important to make a distinction between the acquired human virtue of love and the supernatural divine virtue of love.

George: Acquired human love and supernatural divine?

Stephen: Yes, all men, all unbelievers, can acquire the natural virtue of love. This is good and noble—it is indeed a virtue and commendable. The supernatural virtue, on the other hand, is a gift from God—it cannot be humanly acquired.

George: What is the difference between acquired human love and the supernatural gift of love?

Stephen: Acquired human love is a natural love that is good and honorable—the love of a mother for child, the love that lovers have for each other, a citizen's love for his country—in the human realm, even if not acceptable to God for salvation. Supernatural love is the very love of God that is a gift from God to the believer and consists in the believer sharing in God's very own love—it cannot be acquired by any human effort.

George: So, there are two kinds of love?

Stephen: Yes, all beings love in that they seek a perceived good. Each love is proportional to the type being—my dog loves to run, bark, eat meat scraps, I don't. The point is that it is right and good for humans to acquire the natural virtue of love according to human nature. The proper development of a human being is gain proper human love for the “perfection of human nature,” but this is limited to the natural realm. Human love is intrinsic to human nature. Supernatural virtue of love is much different: it is not inherent to human nature—it is God's own trinitarian love.

George: What is the difference as far as overall attitude?

Stephen: Human love that is acquired by human virtue cannot go beyond the natural realm. This is love for others that is limited to the human realm. There is no reference to God. There are unbelievers who are very loving, but that love has no reference to God as a final end. It is all limited to the temporal realm. The supernatural virtue of love is much different in that its focus and life is in loving God. In sum, in acquired human virtue there is little to no thought of God whereas in supernatural virtue is about God and partaking of His love. In human love, it is about our inherent human efforts to love others. In supernatural love, we live in and share in a love that is inherently God's. In sum, natural love is merely natural and related to only to man's ends whereas supernatural love is supernatural and lifts man up to supernatural ends. However, they both have their respective areas—we should never disparage any human natural love, even if it can never measure up to God's perfect standards. And we should never mistake our own human natural love for the higher divine love available for all believers to enjoy and share with others—because without supernatural love, no other supernatural virtue is possible.