

Daily Life with Christ. Love-37: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of proper love: human love/joy and divine love/joy.



George: When you claim that there is no such thing as a pseudo-love or pseudo-happiness and that unbelievers can be happy aren't you undermining the love and joy that Christianity offers?

Stephen: No! Besides, as a Realist, it is important to start with reality as such rather than words and concepts that we then clothe with words. To put it another way, either a person is an Idealist because he starts with concepts and language which he then encompasses with beings or he is a Realist who starts with reality which he then encompasses with concepts and words. Unfortunately, due to rejection of classical metaphysics, virtually everyone today, including many Christians, are Idealists. Where one begins with respect to knowledge makes all of the difference in all that follows. We either begin with beings (as per Aristotle, Aquinas) or we begin with thought (as per Descartes, Kant, Ferdinand de Saussure). History has demonstrated that once a person begins with thought rather than beings, he never gets out of the mind.

George: I don't see what this has to do with our discussion on the existence of human love and joy among unbelievers . . . among non-Christians.

Stephen: Well . . . think about it. How many times have you heard Christians describe activity of unbelievers who seem to display love and joy in terms of pseudo-love and pseudo-joy? For example, "They just think they are happy . . . they are not happy without Christ . . . that is pseudo-happiness . . . it is not real happiness."

George: You don't think that unbelievers only experience pseudo-happiness, fake happiness—and pseudo-love—fake love?

Stephen: No! There may be a pseudo-love TOWARD someone . . . it may be fake TOWARD someone. But that is not the same thing as claiming that non-Christians can only have pseudo-love and pseudo-joy. This is not real, not reality! I think it is better to describe love in terms of human love/joy or divine love/joy. It is absolute true that no unbeliever ever enjoys divine love and divine joy. But the unbeliever can enjoy love and joy according to human nature—even if that love and joy is always in flux, limited, and corruptible because it is only according to human nature.

George: Where in the Bible does it teach that an unbeliever can experience true love and joy?

Stephen: Several places . . . as we noted in our previous discussion of the unbeliever's licit and illicit loves (Matt. 6:24; John 3:36; 1 John 2:15-16). As far as both love and joy, consider Luke 17:26 *"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it shall be also in the days of the Son of Man: ²⁷ they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."* I am sure that these unbelievers were had a great time partying and enjoying marriage celebration.

George: But that is not true happiness and joy because they were wicked unbelievers. No wicked person can truly be happy.

Stephen: Sure they can . . . even if the happiness is limited to the human realm and illicit. There exists in the human realm evil love and evil joy, but it is still love and joy nonetheless. Just because love and joy are improper does not mean that its basic metaphysic do not exist. When we describe love only in terms of divine love or proper love, we deny its universal nature also deny the biblical testimony that certain men do love evil. As I have noted, everyone loves, everyone seeks that he perceives as his good—the issue is if it is a proper or improper love. The same is true of joy. Human beings experience joy when they obtain a good that they seek. This can be proper or improper. There is evil love and evil joy, but they are love and joy nonetheless. I think when our LORD was hanging on the Cross many of the religious leaders did experience joy as they taunted Him and achieved what they perceived as a good: getting rid of Him. Herod was thoroughly enjoying himself during his birthday party as daughter of Herodias was dancing before him (Matt. 14:16). When one thinks of love and joy in metaphysical terms then one does not fall into the idealistic categories of pseudo-love vs. divine love. Rather, there is proper and improper human love and joy that is according to human nature just as there is divine love that is intrinsic to divine nature and available only for Christians to enjoy. This divine love is not intrinsic to human nature. It belongs to God alone, but Christians can partake of it by participating in the divine nature, 2 Pet 1:4.

George: What are the characteristics of this divine love?

Stephen: Well, the love is for God for His own sake. It is seeing God as the Greatest Good in Himself—not just for what He does for us. From loving God and resting in Him, one enters the joy of the LORD. In divine love, God is the primary source of happiness in life. This is radically different than human happiness which is always in flux according to a person's attainment or non-attainment of some perceived good. The love and joy of and in the LORD is transcendent,

stable, and transformative. By loving God directly for who and what He is, we abide in Him and He abides in us (1 Jn 4:16). This love of and joy in the LORD is unchanging and incompatible with any admixture of evil. In divine love, God alone is the source of ultimate joy, only in union with Him do we find rest for the restless searching of our hearts. This rest is not indifference or passivity. It is rather rest in ultimate fulfillment, where we desire nothing more, simply because our every desire has been attained. This supernatural love and joy revolves around the goodness of God—it is life in response to God’s unfathomable love that was supremely demonstrated on the Cross. Life in God’s love transcends all suffering. Living in the unfailing love and unchanging goodness of God gives the believer supernatural power to overcome any and all evil and suffering in life as he lives in the hope of one day sharing completely and eternally the infinite joy of God Himself. While the believer can enjoy the love and joy of God in this life, it will always be incomplete until he is face-to-face with the LORD.

George: Yes, divine love is true love.

Stephen: Yes, divine love is true love, but it is true according to divine nature. Human love is also true love but only according to human nature, which is subject to being both limited and corruptible. The key difference between human love/joy and divine love/joy is that divine love truly is transcendent with God Himself as the focal point of love and happiness. In divine love/joy it really is about God rather than the stuff of this world.

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