

10/7/19

by Lawrence Hervey Smith

1

The Birth of Real Love

"May the Lord direct your hearts into [realizing and showing] the love of God and into the steadfastness and patience of Christ" II Thess. 3:5

My birthday is here once again. I am 49 years old, and this is my seventh birthday in prison. It is difficult to describe all the emotions. In some ways, it is just an ordinary day, like all the others in here - nothing special. That is what makes the day especially painful, because my birthday once was very special. I was special to people I loved and who loved me; people who celebrated and valued my life. Now, I feel the sting of being largely, if not entirely, forgotten.

I envy fellow inmates who have someone precious to call on their birthday, someone who visits or remembers them with a card or a letter. Something, anything that communicates, "You are important to me and I value you." I called my father, now 84 himself, but he did not realize it was my birthday, and I did not mention it. I longed for a letter from my wife or my children, but when I returned to my cell after mail call, all I found was a monthly magazine from one of the free church ministries; I threw it against the wall in angry disappointment. I sat alone listening to sad songs and reflecting on past birthdays surrounded by my family and their love.

It was a grand pity-party for one, until God interrupted and showed me something: though my family did indeed show love to me on my birthday, I was astonished to realize that I did not appreciate it. In fact, I often ^{expressed} criticized my disappointment openly: their presents were not good enough, the celebration should have been more grand, I should be more extravagantly fawned over. I had the prideful audacity to judge them as inadequate in how they expressed love for me! Such rubbish. Such absolute foolishness. I tearfully repented to God, and I thanked Him for giving me a family that loved me, no matter what the level of expression.

I am learning that real love, God's kind of love, is not conceited or rude. Love does not insist on its own rights or its own way, because it is not self-seeking. Love is ever-ready to believe the best of every person. Most importantly, real love keeps loving even when that love is not reciprocated. Real love never gives up.

So, if you are blessed to have someone who God has entrusted you to love, then go to the only true Source of all love - God the Father Himself. Learn from Him and copy what He does and you will truly and extravagantly love. You will love as He does: without reservation or expectation, even if you are not loved in return.

If, during this season of life, you feel all alone and unloved, I offer the words of comfort that my Father in heaven spoke to me:

"I created you and you are special. I am happy you were born. Never forget that. You are not alone. I am with you. Though all forsake you, I never will. I am the Restorer. I give back. I overcome. I make all things new. I redeem. I heal. I cleanse. I bring back together. Refuse to lay down in self-pity. Get up! I am with you. Always."

[I Corinthians 13:4-8, Psalms 68:5,6]