

ST. MAXIMOS THE CONFESSOR 'ON LOVE' [SELECTED FROM THE PHILOKALIA]

by

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St. Maximos the Confessor (580 to 662) is assigned more space in The Philokalia than any other spiritual writer. The overwhelming proportion of the second volume is dedicated to his spiritual teachings¹. Here are just a few of the 400 Texts on Love from the seventh century as published in the second volume:

The person who loves God cannot help loving every man as himself, even though he is grieved by the passions of those who are not yet purified. But when they amend their lives, his delight is indescribable and knows no bounds.²

...

He who loves Me, says the Lord, will keep My commandments (cf. John 14: 15, 23); and 'this is My commandment, that you love one another' (John 15: 12). Thus he who does not love his neighbour fails to keep the commandment, and so cannot love the Lord.³

...

Do not say that you are the temple of the Lord, writes Jeremiah (cf. Jer. 7: 4); nor should you say that faith alone in our Lord Jesus Christ can save you, for this is impossible unless you also acquire love for Him through your works. As for faith by itself, 'the devils also believe, and tremble' (Jas. 2: 19)⁴

...

The person who fears the Lord has humility as his constant companion and, through the thoughts which humility inspires, reaches a state of divine love and thankfulness. For he recalls his former worldly way of life, the various sins he has committed and the temptations that have befallen him since his youth; and he recalls, too, how the Lord delivered him from all this, and how He led him away from a passion-dominated life to a life ruled by God. Then, together with fear, he also receives love, and in deep humility continually gives thanks to the Benefactor and Helmsman of our lives.⁵

...

‘But I say to you,’ says the Lord, ‘love your enemies... do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you’ (Matt. 5: 44). Why did He command this? To free you from hatred, irritation, anger and rancour, and to make you worthy of the supreme gift of perfect love. And you cannot attain such love if you do not imitate God and love all men equally. For God loves all men equally and wishes them ‘to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (I Tim. 2: 4).⁶

...

Humility and ascetic hardship free a man from all sin, for the one cuts out the passions of the soul, the other those of the body. This is what the blessed David indicates when he prays to God, saying, ‘Look on my humility and my toil, and forgive all my sins’ (Ps. 25: 18).⁷

...

All the discourses of our Lord contain these four elements: commandments, doctrines, threats and promises. With the help of these we patiently accept every kind of hardship, such as fasting, vigils, sleeping on the ground, toil and labour in acts of service, insults, dishonour, torture, death and so on. ‘Helped by the words of Thy lips,’ says the psalmist, ‘I have kept to difficult paths’ (Ps. 17: 4. LXX).⁸

...

No sinner can escape future judgment without experiencing in this life either voluntary hardships or afflictions he has not chosen.⁹

...

The principal vices – stupidity, cowardice, licentiousness, injustice – are the ‘image’ of the ‘earthy’ man. The principal virtues – intelligence, courage, self-restraint, justice – are the ‘image’ of the ‘heavenly’ man. As we have borne the image of the earthy, let us also bear the image of the heavenly (cf. I Cor. 15: 49).¹⁰

...

If you wish to find the way that leads to life, look for it in the Way who says, ‘I am the way, the door, the truth and the life (John 10: 7; 14: 6), and there you will find it. Only let your search be diligent and painstaking, for ‘few there are that find it’ (Matt. 7: 14) and if you are not among the few you will find yourself with the many.¹¹

...

Death in the true sense is separation from God, and ‘the sting of death is sin’ (I Cor. 15: 56). Adam, who received the sting, became at the same time an exile from the tree of life, from paradise and from God (cf. Gen. 3); and this was necessarily followed by the body’s death. Life, in the true sense, is He who said, ‘I am the life’ (John 11: 25), and who, having entered into death, led back to life him who had died.¹²

...

If you harbour rancour against anybody, pray for him and you will prevent the passion from being aroused; for by means of prayer you will separate your resentment from the thought of the wrong he has done you. When you have become loving and compassionate towards him, you will wipe the passion completely from your soul. If somebody regards you with rancour, be pleasant to him, be humble and agreeable in his company, and you will deliver him from his passion.¹³

...

A perfect intellect is one which by true faith and in a manner beyond all unknowing supremely knows the supremely Unknowable; and which, in surveying the entirety of God’s creation, has received from God an all-embracing knowledge of the providence and judgment which governs it – in so far, of course, as all this is possible to man.¹⁴

...

Watch yourself, lest the vice which separates you from your brother lies not in him but in yourself. Be reconciled with him without delay, so that you do not lapse from the commandment of love.¹⁵

...

The commandments, the doctrines, the faith: these are the three objects of the Christian’s philosophy. The commandments separate the intellect from the passions; the doctrines lead it to the spiritual knowledge of created beings; and faith to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity.¹⁶

...

He who loves Christ is bound to imitate Him to the best of his ability. Christ, for example, was always conferring blessings on people; He was long-suffering when they were ungrateful and blasphemed Him; and when they beat Him and put Him to death, He endured it, imputing no evil at all to anyone. These are the three acts which

manifest love for one's neighbour. If he is incapable of them, the person who says that he loves Christ or has attained the kingdom deceives himself. For 'not everyone who says to Me: "Lord, Lord" shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father' (Matt. 7: 21); and again, 'He who loves Me will keep My commandments (cf. John 14: 15, 23).¹⁷

...

Scripture does not forbid anything which God has given us for our use; but it condemns immoderation and thoughtless behaviour. For instance, it does not forbid us to eat, or to beget children, or to possess material things and to administer them properly. But it does forbid us to be gluttonous, to fornicate and so on. It does not forbid us to think of these things – they were made to be thought of – but it forbids us to think of them with passion.¹⁸

...

In Scripture the virtues are called 'ways'. The greatest of all the virtues is love. That is why St. Paul said, 'Now I will show you the best way of all' (I Cor. 12: 31), one that persuades us to scorn material things and value nothing transitory more than what is eternal.¹⁹

...

Has someone vilified you? Do not hate him; hate the vilification and the demon which induced him to utter it. If you hate the vilifier, you have hated a man and so broken the commandment. What he has done in word you do in action. To keep the commandment, show the qualities of love and help him in any way you can, so that you may deliver him from evil.²⁰

...

The friends of Christ love all truly but are themselves loved by all; the friends of the world neither love all nor are loved by all. The friends of Christ persevere in love to the end; the friends of the world persevere only until they fall out with each other over some worldly thing.²¹

...

Many have said much about love, but you will find love itself only if you seek it among the disciples of Christ. For only they have true Love as love's teacher. 'Though I have the gift of prophecy', says St. Paul, 'and know all mysteries and knowledge... and have no love, it profits me nothing' (I Cor. 13: 2-3). He who possesses love possesses

God Himself, for ‘God is love’ (I John 4: 8). To Him be glory throughout the ages. Amen.²²

St. Maximos the Confessor convincingly paints a canvass of true love in Christ and His disciples. If we love Christ, we must love our neighbours. Love is reciprocal and is the chief virtue. We are to imitate Christ and by our actions manifest love for our neighbours. In these ways, we demonstrate our love of Christ. For if we love Him, we will keep His commandments!

+In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ See St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth (compilers), *The Philokalia, Volume Two* (tr. From the Greek and edited by G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, first published in 1981 by Faber and Faber Limited, London, paperback edition published in 1990).

² *ibid.*, p. 54.

³ *id.*

⁴ *id.*, p. 56.

⁵ *id.*, p. 57.

⁶ *id.*, p. 59.

⁷ *id.*, p. 61.

⁸ *id.*, p. 69.

⁹ *id.*, p. 76.

¹⁰ *id.*, p. 78.

¹¹ *id.*

¹² *id.*, p. 81.

¹³ *id.*, p. 97.

¹⁴ *id.*, p. 99.

¹⁵ *id.*, p. 102.

¹⁶ *id.*, pp. 105-106.

¹⁷ *id.*, p. 107.

¹⁸ *id.*, p. 108.

¹⁹ *id.*, p. 109.

²⁰ *id.*, p. 111.

²¹ *id.*, p. 113.

²² *id.*