

## GENUINE LOVE

“Let love be genuine. Hate what is evil hold fast to what is good” (Romans 12:9). In calling for genuine love St. Paul is telling us that there is a counterfeit love. It goes by the name “love”, but in fact it is sentimentality, tender feelings gushing indiscriminately, swamping everything with false self-approval. It is characterized by a disastrous failure to hate evil and hold fast to what is good.

As Christians we need to be able to identify the real McCoy, especially when there is so much chatter about “compassion” and “caring” and “love” all around us. This bafflegab hides the truth, generates confusion, and eases the way for the predator of souls to seduce us.

One of the indicators of the decline of our society is the inability to discriminate between good and evil, to hold fast that which God wants and to turn away from what God doesn't want

In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet said that one of signs of the authentic Messiah, the Christ, would be his aptitude to refuse what is evil and choose what is good (Is.7: 15). But in so doing, the world would turn its back on him. In the 7th Chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus says, “[the world] hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil.”

Distinguishing between good and evil is by no means easy. Today evil is being embraced and called good, so much so that our freedom has become moral free fall.

Paradoxically, there is a wide streak of Puritanism running through the American soul. It's always been there, and it will always be there. Puritanism is the feather duster of morality. It sweeps away superficial vice, while deep evils go unchecked. We strain at gnats and swallow camels.

Let me give you an example. In the nineteen twenties, the so-called “flapper” era, there was a puritanical reaction against drinking booze. While it is true that alcohol can lead to grave evils in peoples lives, Jesus reminded us that it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, it's what comes out of his heart.

The puritanical revolt against alcohol in the twenties was, in fact, a moral cover-up of a profound evil, the sexual revolution. Yes, it began then, not in the sixties, and we have been living with the consequences of it ever since. Sexual morality, the bulwark for the protection of the family, was overthrown in favor of free sex, adultery, contraception, abortion, and divorce. But consciences were uneasy, so self-righteous indignation against drinking appeared as a moral veneer to hide the true evil. That such indignation was hypocritical is shown by how briefly it

survived—just long enough for the real evil to take root.

The same thing is going on again today. There is a great self-righteous challenge to tobacco. Having long ago abandoned any fear of the smoke of hell, we are hell-bent on fanning the fear of tobacco smoke (Matthew 10:28). Stamping out smoking has become today's moral crusade. Once again it's a self-congratulating puritanical outburst covering up a terrible evil that goes largely unchecked.

What is it, you may ask? We are choosing a culture of death.

In Deuteronomy, the book of commentary on God's law, the Lord tells His people: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live” (30:19). We, on the other hand, in our deepest moral choices are choosing death. We are choosing death for the unwanted, that is, the unborn. We are choosing death for the sick and the elderly. We proclaim suicide as the “therapy of choice” for those in pain. However, our consciences are uneasy. So we dredge up moral indignation against smoking, which may be harmful, but certainly not immoral.

When we can no longer discriminate between good and evil, we cannot truly love one another. That is what is happening to us. We are loosing our ability to really love.

We are becoming a loveless society, all because we will not choose between good and evil, life and death.

Discernment really does begin with us. As Christians who have received God's revelation, we have to be able to see where our choices are taking us as individuals. What do I choose? Do I choose to embrace good, or evil?

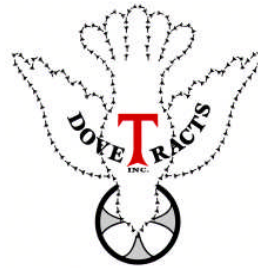
To embrace death is to turn our back upon the commandments of God. To embrace death is to turn our back upon the love of God. Jesus really did perfectly express the love of God. And he was hated for it because he did not allow the superficial Puritanism of his own time (it was called Pharisaism) to hide the truth. It's not what goes in a man's mouth that defiles him. It's what comes out of his mouth, out of his heart, out of the core of his life. And unless we can distinguish between good and evil, we cannot love each other with the authentic love St. Paul urges upon us.

Only when we choose to turn and embrace and hold fast to good can we begin to love one another genuinely, to accept that each human soul has an eternal destiny. It is our responsibility first, as Christians, to learn to always choose life, not just for ourselves, but also for everyone.

So we are met with mercy, and we are faced with becoming skilled at discriminating between good and evil. But we are not

without help for we have been told what they are. That's what our scriptures consist of, that's what the life of the church consists of, the discriminating choices that are the rock solid foundation of genuine love.

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