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True Religion Is Not Feeling but Willing

One of the puzzling questions likely to turn up sooner or later to vex the seeking Christian is how he can fulfill the scriptural command to love God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. The earnest Christian, as he meditates on his sacred obligation to love God and mankind, may experience a sense of frustration gendered by the knowledge that he just cannot seem to work up any emotional thrill over his Lord or his brothers. He wants to, but he cannot. The delightful wells of feeling simply will not flow. Many honest persons have become discouraged by the absence of religious emotion and concluded that they are not really Christian after all. They conclude that they must have missed the way somewhere back there and their religion is little more than an empty profession. So for a while they belabor themselves for their

coldness and finally settle into a state of dull discouragement, hardly knowing what to think. They do believe in God; they do indeed trust Christ as their Savior, but the love they hoped to feel consistently eludes them. What is the trouble? The problem is not a light one. A real difficulty is involved, one that may be stated in the form of a question: How can I love by command? Of all the emotions of which the soul is capable, love is by far the freest, the most unreasoning, the one least likely to spring up at the call of duty or obligation and surely the one that will not come at the command of another. No law has ever been passed that can compel one moral being to love another, for by the very nature of it love must be voluntary. No one can be coerced or frightened into loving anyone. Love just does not come that way. So what are we to do with our Lord's command to love God and our neighbor? To find our way out of the shadows and into the cheerful sunlight we

need only to know that there are two kinds of love: the love of *feeling* and the love of *willing*. The one lies in the emotions, the other in the will. Over the one we may have little control. It comes and goes, rises and falls, flares up and disappears as it chooses, and changes from hot to warm to cool and back to warm again very much as does the weather. Such love was not in the mind of Christ when He told His people to love God and each other. As well command a butterfly to light on our shoulder as to attempt to command this whimsical kind of affection to visit our hearts. The love the Bible enjoins is not the love of feeling; it is *the love of willing, the willed tendency of the heart*. (For these two happy phrases I am indebted to another, a master of the inner life whose pen was only a short time ago stilled by death.) God never intended that such a being as man should be the plaything of his feelings. The

