

1 Corinthians 13:7 "Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance."

As we enter this Advent season, I have been asked to write on the topic of love. In our world today, love takes on many different connotations, from a changing emotion to a deeper agape love, love at the highest level. When I enter my own reflection on love and its meaning, I thought of a song from the old Songs of the Church hymnal, a constant staple of mine growing up. The song, "None of Self and All of Thee" depicts the story of what it's like to be on the transformational journey of living a Christian life. The words begin with a self-centered life based in pride.

*"Oh, the bitter pain and sorrow
That a time could ever be,
When I proudly said to Jesus,
All of self, and none of Thee."*

Humanity has a self-centered nature, looking for our own need for self-appreciation. In a climate of political tension, we have become a society whose mantra is, "Because you do not agree with me, it is okay for me to be unkind in proving my point." Even in our churches, our prideful nature can bring such dissention between our balancing acts of pro-grace versus pro-faith thinking. The pendulum of life teeters between the two, and we must be cautious to understand the two must constantly work together to experience the true love of Christ.

The second and third verses vividly depict the transition of a Christian, as we proceed down the struggle of "Some of self, and some of Thee" and "Less of self, and more of Thee", respectively. Love, to me, is an action; waking up each morning with a mindset of "Less of self, and more of Thee." It is learning self-denial of my own wants, to promote growth and healthy behavior in my Christian sister or brother. It is learning that many times, my voice doesn't need to be heard while in disagreement with someone, but my voice needs to be heard in prayer on my knees, asking that God grant me unconditional love through my actions in addressing that disagreement. Love is a journey; it is something we must choose every day. It is in this thinking that we strive for the final verse.

*"Higher than the highest heaven,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered:
None of self, and ALL of Thee."*

1 John 4:16-17 "God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them. And as we live in God, our love grows more perfect."

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