

February 16, 2014

HOW DO I LOVE THEE?

This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command.

John 15:8-14



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We all have our love language. . .it can be time, tasks, treasures, touch or talk. These are the things that fill our love tank. God too has His love language, and for Him it is OBEDIENCE.

Often times we wonder what it is that we can do that will please God? The answer is simple — we need to obey His commandments. Jesus Christ Himself said this in verse 10 *"If you keep my commands, you will remain in His love"*. . . Obedience. Jesus Christ Himself obeyed the will of the Father, and He therefore expects us to do the same. If there is any way by which we would like to express our love for God and our desire to please Him — it is only through OBEDIENCE.

Verse 11 tells us the reason why God gave us His commands — it says *"these things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full."* Have we ever thought about God's commandments that way? He gave us those commandments so that His joy may be in us and our joy will be made complete. But do we see this? Unfortunately we do not. Instead we look at God's commandments as burdens and end up complaining and grumbling. We miss out on the fact that God gave us these commands for our own protection and for our own joy.

One of these commandments is in verse 12 *"this is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."* God's love for us has been unconditional, and this is the same kind of love He expects us to give one another. Jesus Christ Himself modeled this kind of love for us. Verse 13 tells us that *"greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."* and then tells us in verse 14 that we are His friends IF we do what He commands us to do. This emphasizes the point — there is only one way that we can please God and that is to obey. Not out of condition or obligation, not as a requirement but rather as an expression of our love for God.

If we claim to love God and yet are not willing to obey His commandments — there is some disconnection in that. Because Jesus Himself pointed out that IF we are His friends, we will obey. Even though we are undeserving, but because of God's great love for us He sent His son to die for our salvation . . . And all He asks in return is for us to obey Him.

Many think that as long as one has faith that is sufficient to please God. *James 2:17 says "even so faith if it has not works is dead being by itself."* If we claim to be born again, then faith by itself is lacking. Verse 26 furthers says *"for just as the body without spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead."*

God requires of us obedience, and we now know that faith alone is not enough as an evidence of our relationship with God. . . This is the evidence of the new-ness of life. If we claim to have faith and yet there is no evidence, no change in our lives . . . There is a great need to stop and reassess our lives.

In the same way, if we say we love God but refuse to obey His commandments . . . Again we should stop and reassess our lives.

Faith and Works go hand in hand in the same way that Love and Obedience go hand in hand.

We are all beneficiaries of God's grace because God's grace is undeserved, unmerited favor. And it is through the grace of God that he has allowed salvation to come to us. Paul says in 1 Cor 15:10 *"but by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace towards me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."* this tells us that there is a partnership. Once we receive the grace of God, we can do the work by the grace of God.

We are saved by grace. But it does not stop there. . . We are compelled to work for the kingdom of God not by our own efforts but through the power and grace of God working in us and through us. This is why He gave us the Holy Spirit — to guide us, to teach us, to lead us, to give us the power to have victory over sin. Like Paul, we too should labor the fields confident that the grace of God will see us to completion.

Often times this is an area of miscommunication, when we believe that we are loved for something that we do or have done. Like when children perform well in school, or behave well. Human love is conditional. God's love is unconditional. Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* God's love is unconditional. It is not performance based. So our thinking should be — God loves me, therefore I must obey. We should not think — I obey in order to receive God's love.

So when we claim to be Christians, these things must be evident in our lives: Faith and the evidence of faith in our lives, which is good works. There should be evidence of grace and effort. This is not to prove to God that we are worthy of salvation, but rather as an evidence of the relationship that you have established with God through Christ.

Unfortunately today, society has marginalized Christianity, more distressing to know is that Christians themselves have marginalized Christianity. We think that only sexual immorality, idolatry, debauchery, hatred, drunkenness, witchcraft, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, orgies, lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, unholy, unloving, gossips, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited and murderers are sins but the bible tells us that other than these anxiety, discontent, frustration, envy, lack of self-control, impatience, irritability, anger, unforgiveness, bitterness, thanklessness, pride, worldliness, uncontrolled words and judgmentalism are sins as well. In God's eyes they are all the same thin SIN. Why then do we tolerate some and despise the others?

Proverbs 6:16-19 *there are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood. A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spread strife among brothers.* We as Christians should hate what God hates. And because we are Christians we should also love what God loves. It is easier to hate what God hates, but hard to love those we consider unlovable but God compels us to love. That is why often society sees us as judgmental, as people who look down at others. If this is the case, how do the people who need to know about the love of God learn about His love when the people who claim to love God are condemning them?

Have we not been tasked by God in the Great Commission? Were we not ordered to make God's story of redemption known to all? Why then do we not share His love to those who we consider unlovable? Why have we become picky and prejudiced to whom we should share God's grace? Were we not like them not long ago, blind to our sins and lost? God calls us to love them unconditionally in the same way He loves us.

Revelation 2:2-4 *'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.'* When we first came to faith, we were on fire for God... willing to do anything and everything to serve Him but as time passed our passion, our fire has diminished. That in the time that had lapsed, we have "left our first love". We have forgotten why we were on fire in the first place.

Do you remember who your first love should be?

Matthew 22:36-40 ³⁶“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”³⁷And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ ³⁸This is the great and foremost commandment.³⁹“The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ ⁴⁰“On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”

LOVE. But not just love unconditional love. Love that has no boundaries. When we learn to love God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. . . And are able to translate that into our relationship with others. People will begin to see the difference in our lives. And it is by their own witnessing of our changed and transformed lives in Christ that we can draw them to God.

Works: Journaling task

1. On John 15: 8-14: now knowing that God’s love language is OBEDIENCE. Are we able to do this in our life? What are the hindrances and difficulties we have in obeying God’s commandments?
2. On James 2:7: is my faith evident in my life? Since I started my Christian walk, has there been changes in my life? Have I allowed myself to be transformed and molded by the Holy Spirit?
3. On Matthew 22: 36-40: Is God number 1 in my life? Am I able to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind? Am I able to surrender everything to Him?
Am I able to love others as I love myself? Not just the lovable but those who are unlovable as well?
Today, Is God still my first love? Or have I lost track of Him?