
Words of Truth

Good Works, Without Love, Are Unprofitable

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We know that faith, without works, is dead (James 2:14-26). We know that grace does not work without faith (Romans 5:2). We know that faith, grace, and works all work together so that our salvation is not by just one of the three (Ephesians 2:1-10). Faithful students of the Scriptures know that faith, grace, and works are not the only things we need to focus on. In a context about spiritual gifts (I Corinthians 12:1-14:40), we find this statement: *“And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity”* (I Corinthians 13:13).

The word translated “charity” [ἀγάπη] means: “love, i.e. affection or benevolence; specially (plural) a love-feast: — (feast of) charity(-ably), dear, love” (Strong’s # 26). That term is most often translated “love” in the King James Version (eighty-six times). So, as we proceed through this study I am going to use the word love. Understand that by that usage I am meaning the same word that Paul used in I Corinthians 13:13.

In the same context wherein we see that love is the greatest over faith and hope, we also find this statement: *“And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing”* (I Corinthians 13:3). Now, think about that. There was a rich ruler that was told by Jesus to go and sell all that he had, distribute unto the poor, and then go and follow Jesus (Luke 18:18-30). What Paul wrote qualifies that. If the rich ruler would have taken the action Jesus instructed, but did not have love, his distribution of all that he had to the poor would have been unprofitable for him.

The congregation in Ephesus worked, endured, fought against false apostles, labored without fainting, etc. However, they were not faithful because they had left their first love (Revelation 2:1-7). On the surface, anyone looking at the congregation in Ephesus would have thought for sure they were faithful. They were uncompromising soldiers for Christ. However, they were missing that key component of love. Their many good works were therefore unprofitable for them. Would you want to find yourself in their situation?

Obedience to the will of our Lord has to be fueled by love (John 14:15-24 and I John 5:2-3). Take some time to think about that in connection to all that we have discussed thus far in our study. From those thoughts, let us now move on to consider some applications to these points for us today. Let’s start with the fact that love is the fuel that move us.

Faith Works By Love

Some have erred in times past by thinking that going through certain religious actions that they were wholly pleasing God. The congregations in the area of Galatia were guilty of this. They erringly thought that if they taught and practiced circumcision based upon the then dead Law of Moses, that they were pleasing God. To answer this, Paul wrote something that we are going to use in application going forward in our study: *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love”* (Galatians 5:1-6).

This brings about the question of motives. When we worship God, is our motive love or something else? When we help a brother or sister in Christ, is our motive love or something else? When we correct the erring, is our motive love or something else? When we have brethren into our homes, is our motive love or something else? When we open the Scriptures and study for our own spiritual growth, is our motive love or something else? You name it, then ask the question: is my motive love or something else?

We obtain faith that moves us to do what we need to do through the word of God (Romans 10:14-17). Once we hear something that moves us to action, we need to make sure that our works of faith are being motivated by love. For example, we read: *“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another... Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”* (Romans 12:9-10; 15). After knowing that, we hear that a brother or sister in Christ is facing something in life that is causing he or she sorrow. Do you do something because the word of God tells you to, or do you do something because you love them? At what point does the word of God dwell in you (Colossians 3:16) wherein you know what you should do, but love moves you to do it even more than obligation? That is a question we all need to ask ourselves and answer for ourselves.

Conclusion

We often discuss being doers of the word and not hearers only (James 1:21-27). What we need to be sure we are growing in is that our righteous actions are carried out by more than just the fact that God expects us to do something. Love is something that we do grow in as we mature in Christ (II Peter 1:3-11). Where are you in that growth process? We must all grow to the point wherein love, rather than just obligation, is what moves our works of faith.