

Chapter Four: Faith in Jesus that Works by Love

In the last chapter we saw that the purpose of our Christian life is summed up in 1 John 3:23: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” After we come into the realization of this, it is like a heavy weight is taken off of our shoulders. God's commandments are not grievous, but rather easy to bear and full of goodness and consolation. (Matthew 11:28-30 and 1 John 5:3) Knowing this should, therefore, clear the path for believers in Jesus Christ to bear fruit unto their Savior.

As we already established, all the fruits of love are borne out of faith toward Jesus Christ as Jesus lives and works within us. This is the meaning of Galatians 5:6: “For in Jesus Christ, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” In the New Testament, receiving circumcision is often representative of putting oneself under the law of Moses as a way of life. In this verse in Galatians, however, Paul is saying that it is worthless to receive circumcision, for “circumcision avails nothing.” In other words, trying to keep the law of Moses will profit you nothing. Likewise, not receiving circumcision will also profit you nothing. “Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision.” Thus, systems that stress the need to live freely without law are also worthless. So, how can this be? The reason for this is that the only thing that really matters in Jesus Christ is faith in him which works by love. I have often noticed a tendency among Christians to either stress some concept of law or grace. In other words, some stress the necessity to keep God's laws while others stress the necessity to live in the fullness of freedom through grace. Paul, however, in this verse in Galatians is saying that neither matter. It doesn't matter how well you follow after the law of God, for the only thing that matters in Jesus is faith that works by love. Likewise, it doesn't matter how well you are established in your freedom through the doctrine of grace, for

the only thing that matters in Jesus is faith that works by love. (As a side note, the only grace that really matters is the grace of God of sending Jesus into the world to redeem worthless sinners. We are saved by grace. Salvation is a complete act of mercy on the part of God).

Love in Jesus Christ our God is the only thing that matters for Christians. As I mentioned above and in the proceeding chapter, the realization of this is a real relief to our souls. There is no longer any necessity to keep pondering what the will of the Lord is for our lives. His heart is really simple. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” (John 13:35) In this chapter, I intend to show that faith which works by love is the branch in Jesus Christ that bears much fruit. Faith that works by love is the way of the Christian life.

As we proceed in this chapter, it is my hope to draw a distinction between that which pleases God, namely, love in Jesus Christ, and that which doesn't please God, namely, everything else. It is my hope that through looking at a few key passages of scripture, the superiority of love will become evident to every eye.

To start, I would like us to briefly look at two of the more shocking passages in the New Testament. Through these passages, I intend to show that religious activities, zeal, and success are not the things that please Jesus.

The first passage I would like to look at is found in Matthew 7:21-23. In this passage we hear some very fearful words from the Lord Jesus. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.” I say that this is a very fearful portion of Scripture simply for the fact that Jesus says that “many”

supposed “disciples of Jesus Christ” will be cast away as reprobate sinners. How can these things be? The people in these verses are to all appearance the perfect disciples. They prophesied, cast out devils, and did many wonderful works all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Who would dare to say that these men were not Christian? To the eyes of men they showed themselves to be great servants of the Lord in word and deed. These people probably held high positions in leadership. They probably instructed many and were probably held in esteem by all who saw and heard them. However, the Lord Jesus Christ didn't know them. To the Lord Jesus Christ, they were just workers of iniquity.

The second passage of scripture is Matthew 5:20. In this verse, we read that Jesus tells his disciples “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 5:20) The scribes and the Pharisees were very religious people who were zealous for the law of God and followed hard after good works, the knowledge of God, evangelism, and many other religious observances. In their own eyes they followed after that which was true and tried their best to live righteously. In their own eyes and probably in the eyes of most of the common people, they were the perfect disciples of God. Jesus, however, declared them to be hypocrites and warns us that if our righteousness doesn't exceed theirs, we won't in any way enter into the kingdom of heaven.

So again, just what exactly does Jesus want? In other words, if prophecy, exorcisms, wonderful works, sacrifices, prayers, Bible study, law-keeping, and evangelism are not the things he desires from us, what more can we do? The people named in these verses are the elite of the elite when it comes to “being spiritual.” If their fruit wasn't accepted unto the Lord, what fruit is acceptable? Well, I know that I don't even have to ask these questions, for we already know the answers to them. I just ask them because repetition is often a good way to help us remember and see the

importance of things. So, just what is the will of the Lord for us? “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.” (1 John 3:23) Jesus Christ is not interested in you becoming a great Christian. He isn't interested in whether you succeed or fail in your dreams and goals and visions. The only thing that matters to Jesus Christ is your heart. All those who believe in Jesus Christ shall be saved and shall bear the fruit of mutual love for one another. As Christians, Jesus is mainly interested in us loving the people who are closest to us, namely, those who sit in the same church pews with us. Yes, Jesus is more interested in us loving and receiving the love of the people who sit next to us in church than he is in us feeding the poor or preaching the gospel to the lost. Personally, I was shocked when I came to the realization of this. However, this should be the most obvious thing in the world, for it is written in the New Testament over and over again that the disciples of Jesus Christ are to love and care and minister unto one another. (Luke 22:24-26, John 13:13-17 and John 13:34-35)

I would now like us to take a look at one of Jesus' familiar parables. It is found in Matthew 25:31-46. I believe that this parable does much to show us very clearly the heart of Jesus Christ. The glorious thing is that for us believers, Jesus lives in our hearts to bear the good fruit of the good people found in this parable.

Matthew 25:31-46 is a very long portion of scripture, but I want to quote it at length just to make sure that everyone has the chance to read it. I know that this parable is familiar to most people, and thus, I know that many people will probably just skim it over. That is fine. I do, however, request that special attention be given to verses 31-32, 37, 40, 44-45.

“31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32

And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: 33 And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: 36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? 38 When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? 39 Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”

To ask the question again, what is the will of the Lord? Many ponder this for hours and hours and spend a great deal of time in prayer trying to discern the will of the Lord for them. Should I do this or that? Should I turn to the right or to the left? Maybe the Lord’s will is that I pray more. Maybe it’s that I should read the

Bible more. Maybe I should join the choir or start attending a small group. Perhaps I need to pray and wait and receive a special anointing from the Lord. Or perhaps I should tithe more. Maybe the Lord's will is that I get into the ministry. Maybe I should get involved in outreach and evangelism. Maybe I just need to love people more. The shocking truth is, however, that the will of the Lord is none of the above. So, just what is he thinking about and what is his standard of judgment when he comes back as King and Judge of the world? (verses 31-32) Well, Jesus tells us plainly what the will of the Lord is in verse 40: "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me." Jesus' heart is solely toward the least of his brethren. The least of Jesus' brethren are, namely, the weak among us in our churches. They are people who believe in Jesus, but are powerless, poor, lost, naked, sick, and outcast. (verses 35-36) Take the time to read these verses carefully, for there is no other standard of judgment. Jesus only wants to know if you loved the least of his brethren. In proof of this view, I'd like us to take a look at one more passage. We read in Luke 9:46-48: "Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, and said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me; and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great." In other words, whoever receives the least of Jesus' brethren is the greatest in the eyes of Jesus. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Jesus is interested in us loving one another, and who needs love and compassion more than the least of Jesus' brethren? This is exactly what is meant when Paul says "And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant

comeliness...That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another...Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (1 Corinthians 14:24-27) As the body of Jesus Christ, we are to love one another, and in particular, the strong in the body are to take care of the weak. (Romans 15:1 and Galatians 6:2)

Jesus’ heart is completely toward Christians loving other Christians. His heart is that we become one in him. (John 17:21) It should be obvious to us that if we Christians can’t love one another, then we can’t love anyone else. If we can’t love those who are closest to us, how can we love those who are far away? How can we even begin to think about world missions, when there is so much pain right where we are? First, let the body be healed and everything else will follow naturally. Jesus himself said in John 17:9, “I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine.” In other words, Jesus’ desire is toward his people. Jesus favors believers over unbelievers. Jesus favors the least before the greatest. He favors the weak Christian over the strong. The job of us Christians is to be focused on the perfection of the body of Christ, and if there be any strong among us, let the strong take care of the weak.

Jesus said in another familiar passage, “This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:12-13) Let me just that in order to lay one’s life down for someone there has to be a really good reason to do it. In other words, people don’t lay their lives down for someone else unless it is a life or death scenario. There has to be a need in order to fulfill this commandment. The need is found in needy Christians. These are the people right among us where we live. They are in our church pews and they are in our families. Jesus says that we are to lay our lives down for our friends. Friends are people that are close to us. They are not strangers and people we never met before. We really have to realize these things,

and we will realize them as we grow in the knowledge of our Savior. Our Savior gave each of us a personal promise: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” (John 6:47) As we grow in the knowledge of this man who has laid down his life us, we will naturally and automatically grow his love. We will naturally grow in the love that is willing to throw away everything for a friend in need. This is our confidence because this is what he promised us when he promised us everlasting life.

The interesting thing about the parable told in Matthew 25:31-46 is that the righteous seem to be just normal people who weren't even aware of their righteousness. “Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?” In other words, their good works were natural. They didn't set out with big plans or big dreams. They did that which was right, namely, love those who were closest to them. Let me just say again, if there be any who seem to be strong among us, let them take a look around the pews in their own churches. I am sure they will find some in need. They will find those who are weak and suffering. Maybe there are some who are struggling in their faith and need some encouragement. Some may just need a friend. Others might need some money or some other help. (With this said, however, the even greater truth may be that many of us who are reading this book are the ones who need help. It is my heart's prayer that the Lord Jesus our Savior would look upon us with his great heart of mercy and send us some help.)

On the other hand, just as the righteous were unaware of their righteousness, the unrighteous were equally unaware of their unrighteousness. The unrighteous answer and say to Jesus in verse 44 “Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?” In

other words, they didn't realize they did anything wrong. The one thing that all of the unrighteous have in common is that they have no interest in the least of Jesus' brethren. It doesn't matter how well they might have lived or what they might have accomplished. Jesus' standard is plain and clear. "What did you do for the least of my brethren?"

In closing, I would just like us to look again at God's purpose for our Christian lives. "And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment." (1 John 3:23) That is all that God desires from us and it surpasses everything else. Yes, this purpose of God for us, his church, surpasses all other purposes, dreams, and visions regardless of how big and grand they may be. Believe in Jesus and you are perfect. Believe in Jesus and you will bear the fruit of love. The purpose of God for us in Jesus Christ is bigger and greater than we can ever imagine. To most people it might be boring and foolishness to "just believe and love one another," but this is the heart of Jesus. Though we be surrounded by men who seek after better methods, visions, dreams, and many other things, let's not compromise the heart of Jesus Christ. His gospel is simple: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me hath everlasting life." (John 6:47) And his heart is simple: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:35)

