

Love: The Test of Faith

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This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Probably everyone reading this has experienced a measure of disappointment in the area of love. Perhaps when you were in grade school or in high school, you had a “thing” for someone, and you called that thing “love.” But then, you found out that the person really had a thing for someone else, and what you called love turned into a form of hatred. The one you wanted to be with so much, now you could not even stand to be around.

Now we are older. Still, these childish types of disappointments crop up from time to time. A person will let us down and our whole perception of him is altered. We may think that we have left childish things behind (1 Corinthians 13:11), when really we have not.

First Corinthians 13 is the Bible’s great discourse on love. Love never fails, it suffers long, it thinks no evil, and it rejoices in the truth. That last statement carries great significance for us as

Christians. “Rejoice”—sugchairō in the original Greek text—refers to entering in to a joy that comes from God’s grace. The same word has been used to describe the skipping trot of a frisky lamb. What an awesome picture that is of a believer who loves!

As you will see in these pages, true love springs from truth and is the real measure of our faith in Christ and His Word. It is God’s test of faith.

Chapter One

MEASURES OF FAITH AND LOVE

“Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again.

“And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

“For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

“And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

“And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

“But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven:

“Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again” (Luke 6:30-38).

Here we read of a great promise. Our quality of love and our quality of truth brings to us a reward, something that is “pressed down, shaken together, and running over.”

Romans 12:3 tell us that every person has been given a measure of faith. What we do with that faith is the issue. It determines destinies and regulates attitudes and actions. For years, I used my measure of faith to embrace a false concept of God. This concept contained no understanding of sin, no Satan, and no hell. I continued in that belief system until I came to receive Christ. I recognized that His blood was shed for me to cleanse me from my sin. When I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection, I activated the gift of faith in the Son.

That is when I became born again.

People who are unsaved have a measure of faith to believe that there is a God. They can see Him in nature and creation if they look at things in a certain way. Yet, when presented with the truth of the Gospel, they reject it. Still, even as they reject the truth of redemption and resurrection that God puts before them with the sunrise that comes each morning of every day, God still loves them.

God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever would believe on Him would not perish but have everlasting life. That is the message of John 3:16. God is good to those who remain unthankful in their measures of faith. He allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust (see Psalm 73).

Overcoming the Limits of Human Love

If you are like me (and because you are human, you are), you have wondered why wicked people seem to prosper while you struggle along, loving Jesus with all of your heart. You have wondered why you go through tremendous trials while others seem to sail through life. Times like that represent real tests of faith. Do we love God in these moments of

difficulty? Do we recognize that God's love is steady and unchanging? He still "so" loves every single person in the world. He loves them and He blesses them and He doesn't need to have them return His love. The Lord doesn't need to receive anything in return for His love. He is love and always will be love.

Human love isn't this way. People love people who are good to them. But if I love only those who love me back, then I am really no different than an unsaved person. Over the years of my ministry, God has led me to send out gifts and cards to people who have wronged me. In those times, I use my measure of faith to give what God has given me.

As believers, we give to those who seemingly do not deserve to be given anything. We give so that they might receive something they do not deserve, just as we receive things from God that we do not deserve. We love those who do not deserve to be loved because we desire that they would experience God's love.

In Luke 7:47, Jesus loved the prostitute who was washing His feet with her tears. She was forgiven much, and she loved much. What joy that brings in heaven! There is rejoicing above when we give love for love's sake.

Chapter Two

BLESS AND BE BLESSED

Everything a Christian does when he is filled with the Holy Spirit is based upon a desire to bless others. Sadly, not many appreciate the love of God. He so loved the world that He suffered, bled, and died without any guarantee that anyone would respond to that love.

It really is a beautiful thing to love and not receive a single thing in return. There are folks who cannot love unless they receive some gesture in answer to that love. The real test of our faith in Christ could be summed up in this question: Do I love others as God loves me?

If my answer to this question is “Yes,” then I will choose to lay down my life for the brethren. I will not be possessive. I will not manipulate. As Christ laid down His life, so we are to lay down our lives for one another. That’s the test. If I am not operating in love in this way, then I am walking in a form of darkness.

Loving in the power of the Holy Spirit means that I love even those who do not like me. It represents the evidence of my salvation. It is not my theology that comes first; it is my love for others.

Possession and Dependence

Many people are very possessive in their relationships. They get a friend or two, and they cannot function unless they are around those people. They are building their lives around relationships that are stuck in dependency. They always want something.

Their exchanges go something like this:

“Hey, I called you,” one will say, “and you never called me back.”

“I was busy.”

“You just don’t care enough to call me back.”

Shouldn’t our love run deep enough to cover someone who simply cannot return a phone call?

Love expands the measure of our faith. This expansion brings glorious results in our lives. I give mercy, then God returns it to me without measure. I don’t measure out how much I should give. I simply give it, and I receive mercy without measure. It is pressed into my life,

shaken together, and my capacity runs over as mercy goes out through me to others. When mercy flows from me without measure, scores of people will return mercy to me. It represents the spiritual law of love.

Suppose I were to forgive a thousand people. Several thousand people will in turn forgive me. Boy, that's a great principle isn't it? I don't deserve any of it. But God is behind this activity. He presses it all down and concentrates it upon me. He takes it all and mixes it all together so that they all work for good. Eventually, all of this becomes such a rush of mercy, such a flow of joy, that I cannot contain it. I have to give it out and let it spill over to those around me.

Chapter Three

FAITH EXPANSION

“For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

“And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

“Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents.

“And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two.

“But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money.

“After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them.

“And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: be-

hold, I have gained beside them five talents more.

“His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

“He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them.

“His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.

“Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed:

“And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine.

“His lord answered and said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed:

“Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with

usury.

“Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents” (Matthew 25:14-28).

In the parable of the talents, God outlines the process whereby more is given to those who use what they already have. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Then my faith acts in love. This is how my faith grows. I have a measure—everyone has that as a gift from God—but then that measure expands.

Mark 4:40 speaks of those with “no” faith, meaning that their measure of faith is inactive. Negative choices have kept it dormant. Then we see that some have “little” faith, according to Matthew 6:30. Some have a measure of faith that develops into what Matthew 8:10 calls “great” faith. Then you have Stephen, in Acts 6:8, who was “full” of faith. And, according to James 2:5, the poor of this world can be “rich” in faith.

Maybe you are married to someone who is not treating you properly. We will just leave it at that statement, which covers a realm of situations. Faith has given you the key to open the cupboards of God’s blessing, and that key is unconditional love. You love and you pray and you serve. This spouse certainly deserves none

of it, yet you give that love—God’s love. You are operating in a faith that serves by love (Galatians 5:6).

Perhaps you are a parent and your child takes the car without permission and gets into an accident. You love and you forgive. You exercise discipline because a parent who spares discipline from his child hates his child, according to Proverbs 13:24. But you love and give your child something he doesn’t deserve. You use the situation to develop your relationship.

What does God do for you in that situation? He leads you from little faith to great faith and then to the fullness of faith. The riches of faith are there, too, for love’s key opens up the treasures of God’s provision.

The exceeding growth of your faith comes every time you use mercy, forgiveness, kindness, and joy. God’s plan is to give you much more than you ever gave away. Mercy comes back upon you. Forgiveness and love and kindness are shaken together so that the cup of blessing overflows more and more.

Initial Reactions

God understands the reality of how we are made. He made us and He knows that we are

dust. When God told Abraham that he and Sarah would have a child (even though he was 99 and she was 90), Sarah laughed. Some would call that doubt. I don't think so. I think that was just a realistic reaction.

Certainly, you would laugh if such a thing were said to you at such an age. Our feelings and emotions react. This is part of being human. We may laugh, but our measure of faith, if it is built on love from God and for God, will believe. If we believe, we can move mountains.

Peter was in jail, and the angel led him out. He went to the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where many were praying for him. Peter knocked on the door and a girl answered, but she did not open the door. Instead, she ran to tell the news to everyone at the prayer meeting.

"Peter's here!" she told them.

"You are mad," the people said.

But Peter kept on knocking, and they were all astonished when the door opened and there he was.

Those people believed, but they needed help for their unbelief. God heard their prayers and brought Peter to them. They received an answer that took their faith to a new level. They had

never considered what the power of God could do. That was the answer of love.

In any big faith adventure I have started, my emotions always tried to tell me, “No.” But my faith, rooted in God’s love and validated by the testimonies from the Word of God, always said, “Yes.” Love lifts me above myself, carrying me beyond my emotions.

This is the faith—the faith of the Son of God, the faith that works by love.

CONCLUSION

Faith is something that pleases God. Faith acts because of its love for Jesus Christ. Faith blesses others because of love. Love wants nothing in return. It simply enjoys blessing someone because it wants to share the faith.

God wants us to go beyond loving those who love us back. He wants us to see the hurting, the abused, the wounded. Our faith responds in love, and we go toward them. We expect nothing from them—we expect nothing because we really know so little about how much they have been hurt and wounded and disturbed.

We love them for the privilege of loving them and then we see their joy as they are being loved by us.

God loves to see people receive His love when they simply don't deserve it. There is such a distinction between possessive love, conditional love, and unconditional love. The world

has plenty of the first two, but so many are crying for a love that carries no conditions.

Oh, people need love. In faith, let's give God's love. Just watch what Jesus can do when we love with His love. We may not get a single thing in return from the ones we love. But God will do something. He will expand the measures of our faith. We will have such a fullness and richness in the love of God that our faith will move mountains.