

Lesson # 8 -- The Context of Faith

Introduction

- A. Faith, love, and hope, the three virtues of the New Testament, are interdependent. One cannot exist without the other two.
- B. The truth of this interdependency may introduce an element of mystery and frustration into the Christian life of the believer. If we do not understand the relationship of faith, love, and hope, we are likely to attempt to exercise one of them apart from the other two. This will not meet with much success.
- C. The theme of this lesson has to do with the divinely ordained relationship of faith and love.

I. The Biblical Instruction

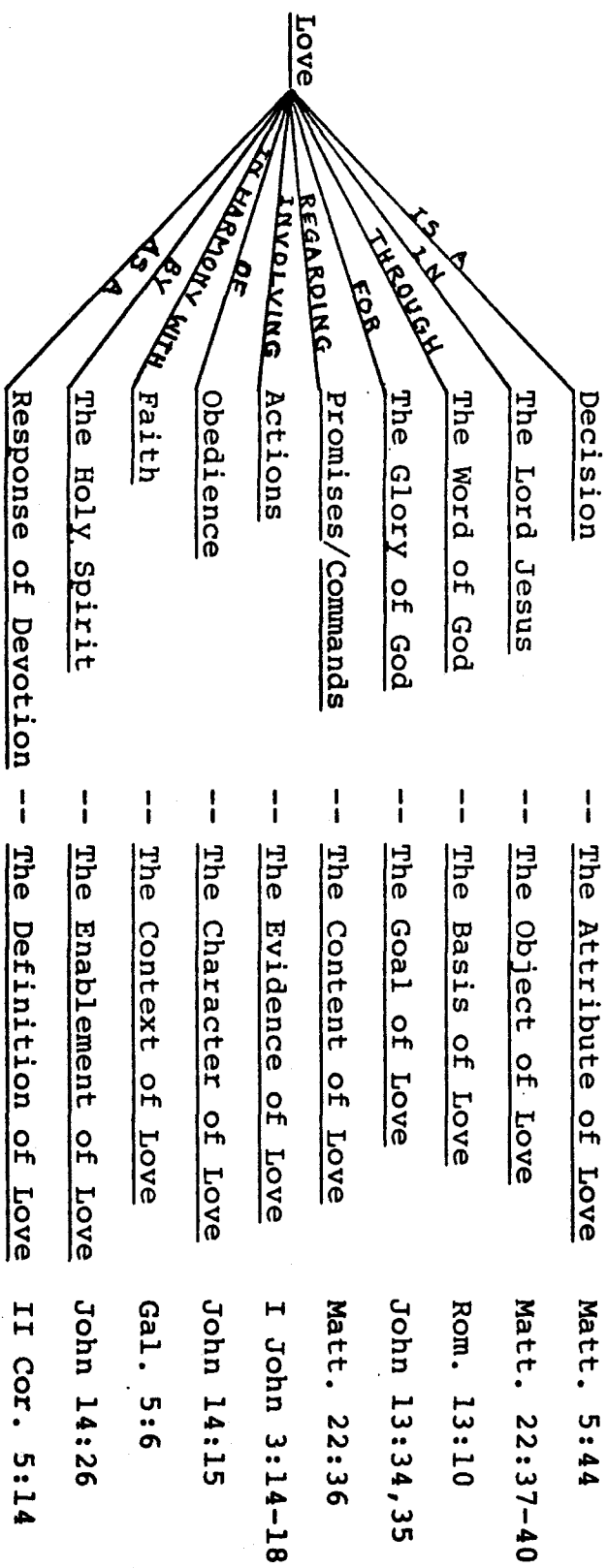
A. A clarifying text.

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love. Galatians 5:6

B. Comments on the relationship of faith and love.

1. Paul, in this book, is pointing out the false teaching that was being taught throughout the region of Galatia. It was a form of Jewish legalism, i.e., to be saved a person had to do more than believe on Jesus Christ as Savior -- it was also necessary to obey certain commands as well as Jewish rules.
2. In the above text the apostle summarizes his answer: That which "avails" (characterizes a saved person) -- is "faith which works by love."
3. As we study this principle from the viewpoint of faith we are led to the realization that love is inseparably related to faith as the flower is related to the plant.
 - a. The Greek word for "worketh" is translated in other places as "energy" or "energized." The Amplified New Testament utilizes the words "activated," "energized," "expressed," and "working" to indicate how faith is related to love.
 - b. Now we understand that love motivates and structures the activity of faith in the life of the believer.
 - c. With the insight we gain from this verse we now see why it is so difficult to exercise faith -- when we are out of fellowship with God! Without being able to express our love to God -- we are seriously hampered in any attempt to trust Him. We have all tried to make decisions of faith during such a time and found it to be nearly impossible.

II. The Biblical Illustration



III. The Biblical Explanation

A. Textual examples of the relationship of faith and love.

1. And now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three, but the greatest of these is charity (love).
I Cor. 13:13

Comment: In this passage the apostle Paul not only indicated the importance of love, taught its association with faith and hope, but instructed the Church at Corinth on its permanence. The significance of this chapter, when viewed from the perspective of the Corinthian problems, is quite overwhelming. What "abides" (remains, wins out, triumphs, endures), in contrast to the temporary nature of sign gifts, is faith, love, and hope.

2. We give thanks to God . . . Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, (and) for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel. Col. 1:3-5

Comment: The association of these three virtues indicates the way God designed their interdependence. One does not stand alone. It would seem that maturity in Christ would be measured, at least to some degree, by how well a person was characterized by the faith that works by love and expresses itself in hope.

3. Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father. I Thess. 1:3

Comment: This passage reminds us that faith, love, and hope produces a product -- good works. Their faith could be seen in their work, their love in their labour, and their hope in their patience. How clearly the grace of God is seen in such believers. What joy it must have brought to the apostle to work with such individuals. Each of us must make sure we fit such a New Testament pattern. (See also 3:6)

4. We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity (love) of every one of you toward each other aboundeth. II Thess. 1:3

Comment: When Paul wrote this second Epistle to the Church at Thessalonica, he again spoke of how their faith and love had grown. From these numerous occasions, which indicate the relationship of these virtues, we are taught a pattern of life which will enable us to make progress as Christians. When we have some question about our behavior or some decision regarding our walk with God, we can gain clarity by asking the question: "Will this enable me to express faith and love -- or will it hinder me?" Too often we find ourselves responding to situations and people in unbelief, criticism, bitterness, and some form of self-centeredness. God's provision, through the indwelling Holy Spirit, is faith and love. When we choose to live in harmony with this divinely ordained pattern -- we open the door to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

B. The teaching on the importance of love.

1. It is the first commandment.

Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. Matthew 22:36,37

Comment: These startling words of our Savior shock us into the realization that love is a commandment and the very first. When we take these words at face value we must confess our failure to obey. Instead of loving God in all of life we are prone to love ourselves. From now on we may not live that way -- nor ever treat love as though it were unimportant.

2. It is the virtue to be sought above all.

And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love. I Cor. 13:13

And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfectness. Col. 3:14

Comment: We are reminded by these passages that love is the most profitable of all the virtues. In fact, the Bible is clear that we cannot live a normal Christian life without an understanding and practice of love. We must choose, therefore, to seek a knowledge of this virtue and how to live a life characterized by love.

3. It is a necessary requirement for exercising faith.

For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but faith which worketh by love. Gal. 5:6

Comment: We have seen that we cannot have one of these virtues without the other. When we try to live this way we are greatly hampered. For many Christians a major problem in their daily life is found right here -- they are attempting to trust God (exercise faith) while living out of fellowship (without love) with God.

4. It is an evidence of genuine sonship.

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. John 13:34,35

Comment: When we realize that love is the basic characteristic of what it means to be a Christian -- then we easily understand why such love will be used of God to prove Himself to non-Christians. While we can be a believer, and be disobedient regarding love, we thereby dilute our witness, and often raise questions even within our own heart concerning sonship.

5. It is inseparably related to obedience.

If you love me you will do what I command. John 14:15 (NIV)

For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments, and his commandments are not grievous. I John 5:3

Comment: While it is not the entire truth, it is truthful to say that love is the motivation for obedience. It is also that which gives structure and form to our life of faith. We must accept the indictment of these verses. They force us to accept the truth -- our disobedience to God is an evidence that we lack not only Biblical faith, but also love.

Summary: Once again I must refer to faith and love as a pattern for the Christian life. It is helpful, when reading the Bible to ask, "How can I put this into practice by faith and love today?" And then make a plan which will do so. When we are faced with a difficult situation we must also ask, "How can I exercise faith and love?" Too often we go through day after day without even a thought about the importance of faith and love. This is one reason for weakness and in the Christian life. God has given us a pattern and He expects us to follow it.

IV. The Biblical Application

A. We must learn to love and trust God in regard to His promises.

And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work. II Cor. 9:8

Comment: This verse is a promise very believer can claim. How can I learn to express my love and faith? Try writing out the following.

1. What does the verse promise? _____

2. What is the will of God (good work) for my life today? _____

3. Prayer: Dear Father, On the basis of Your promise to me I trust You to enable me to do Your will in regard to _____
so I may express my love to You in _____

B. We must learn to love and trust God in regard to His commandments.

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you John 13:34

Comment: This is a commandment which all of us must obey. In order to learn how to do this it may help us to write out the following.

1. What does the command specify? _____

2. What must I do to obey the command today? _____

3. Prayer: Dear Father, On the basis of this command I am trusting You to teach me and to enable me so I can love _____
as You love me. In this day before me I want to love and trust You.

Conclusion: Nothing is more important than living in faith and love.