

Do You Love The Lord?

Jesus commanded us to love the Lord: "*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 22:37-38). The question, "Do you love the Lord?" is one that perhaps we take too lightly. Anyone who is asked this question will immediately respond "Yes!" However, it is easy to respond to a question, but it is much harder to prove your answer. I am persuaded that the Lord meant for us to prove our answer to the above question every day. A good example of this is the love I have for my wife. It is simple for me to say that I love her, but love is not proven until it is demonstrated. If I sacrificed and cared for her in the best way I know how, no one would deny that I loved her.

The same holds true for God. Our love for God is no mere externality. Anyone's pledge of love for God demands commitment. This commitment exists because of God's mercy which He exhibited for mankind (Romans 5:8). The beautiful expression of God's mercy is redemption in Christ. Peter wrote that we are not redeemed with what is perishable, but with the precious blood of the Lamb, which is Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19).

God's new relationship with us as recipients of His grace puts us in a new relationship with Him as servants. Every Christian who has made a commitment to God through obedience to the gospel has made himself a servant (Romans 6:16-18). We serve the Lord because we choose to do so. But the question goes far deeper than the general inquiry, "Do you love the Lord?" The real question to be answered is how you demonstrate that love for the Lord when it comes to specific questions. As you read through this article, think about your answers to these questions based on your service to God in the last several months. Do you really love the Lord?

Do you love the Lord enough to use your talents as you should? Jesus taught a parable of using talents in Matthew 25:14-30. The five and two talent slaves were rewarded because they used their talents wisely to gain even more, while the one talent slave was punished because he did not use his talent to gain his master any profit. The slave tried to excuse himself by saying that his master exploited the labor of others in v. 24. The slave completely misunderstood his master. He thought him to be hard and exacting, but his master was one who rewarded the smallest performance of service. The slave knew if he took the risk of trying to increase the one talent entrusted to him, he would see little profit. He also knew if he failed and lost everything, he would incur the master's wrath. Therefore, he returned to his master what belonged to him, no more and no less (v. 25).

The slave overlooked his responsibility to his master and his obligation to discharge his duties. His failure displayed a lack of knowledge, service, and love for his master. Too often Christians do the same in their service. Instead of doing their duty, they try to sneak out of the work by offering inadequate excuses like, "I am afraid I will not be any good" or "I just do not have the time to do that now." Every dedicated Christian in a local congregation has heard these excuses (and more) from member's mouths when they are asked to contribute to the congregational work.

There is a great urgency in the work of the Lord (John 9:4). What the Lord referred to is the limited amount of time He had to do God's will. In Glasgow, Scotland there is a sundial with the motto, "Take thought of time before time is ended." We constantly want to play the "wait and see" game when it comes to areas of service in the church such as teaching Bible classes, privately teaching the lost, preaching, or many other methods of service. The Christian's duty is to fill the time he or she has — and no one knows how much that will be — with service to God. There is no time to rest upon meager excuses; those who love the Lord accomplish something truly worthy.

Do you love the Lord enough to give as you should? Giving is not just a matter of requirement (2 Corinthians 9:6-7). Giving is the outward revelation of the inner devotion of a life given to the service of Christ. In a sense, giving is the fruit, not the plant. We are careful to emphasize that liberality of our giving must be within the realm of love rather than law. Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites were required to pay a tithe or tenth of their income (Leviticus 27:30; Numbers 18:24; Malachi 3:8; Luke 18:12). But it must be remembered that the Israelites gave in addition to the tithe their firstfruits, various sacrificial offerings, and even freewill offerings. The Israelites gave far more than just ten percent!

Our thinking must not be, "How much must I give?" but "How much can and should I give?" It is not, "I want to do my part," but rather, "I want to do all I can." Paul spoke of our giving as proof of our love (2 Corinthians 8:8, 24). If you want to understand more about the cheerful unselfishness of giving in love, think about how you feel toward Christ who has given all for you (2 Corinthians 8:9). You will not be condemned because you do not give as large a percentage as you should; but you will be condemned because you do not love enough to be liberal in your giving.

Do you love the Lord enough to assemble as you should? Lovers of God are lovers of worship (Psalm 42:1-2, 4; 84:1-2, 10; 122:1). Here is a Christian who finds great joy and satisfaction in worship. He realizes his need for God and his heart and soul cries out for the privilege of worshiping God. He can

hardly wait to get to the worship assembly. He would rather spend one day there than a 1,000 elsewhere. What a contrast this is with the attitude of some today! Worship for some is a matter of offering a mere token of respect to God and heaving a sigh of relief that their "duty" is done for another week. Rather than looking for an opportunity to worship they are looking an opportunity to get out of worship.

From all indications these Christians propose to love and honor God at one service while they completely ignore Him at another. If we receive blessings, strength, and help from one service, will we regard with complete disdain the same blessings in another period of worship? I know it is not always possible for every member to attend every worship assembly. But I also fully understand that some members of the church deliberately miss assemblies when it is possible for them to attend. The majority of congregations are continually being discouraged and weakened because the membership does not support and encourage other Christians when they assemble. For a person to attend one assembly and then deliberately forsake another casts doubt on whether they have the proper attitude toward the service that they do attend.

Do you love the Lord enough to grow and develop as you should? Sadly, some congregations do nothing but produce strife and division. Upon entering the building and observing these people, you may think, "These brethren act like babies," and you would have hit the nail on the head! Some brethren never mature to the point of being able to discern between issues which must be fought for and issues which must be left to the realm of judgment or opinion. Petty squabbling over indifferent issues will never produce mature, full-grown brethren.

We become mature by opening the Bible and applying ourselves to diligent study (2 Timothy 2:15; 2 Peter 3:17-18). Devoted Christians go beyond unstudied listening of sermons and Bible classes while dedicated preachers and teachers go beyond the rudimentary aspects of the gospel and challenge brethren with the "meat of the word" regarding doctrinal issues and godly living.

Paul castigated the Hebrews because they had not grown up in Christ (Hebrews 5:11-14). They had not reached a proper level of maturity. To be a teacher meant to the ancient mind that one was able to think and act maturely. They had gone backward rather than forward, even though they had sufficient time. Some brethren have been members for 40 years or more, but still lack maturity in their thinking and actions. This immaturity then becomes a seedbed from which all sorts of problems can grow. If we

love the Lord, we will go beyond the light perusal of the word of God so popular today.

Answer with care the question, "Do you love the Lord?" It is easy to answer in the affirmative with our mouths, but negate the question with our lives, which is reminiscent of the words of Jesus: "*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me*" (Matthew 15:8). We can proclaim to love the Lord, but our talents, giving, attendance, and spiritual growth may paint a very different picture. Christians live through each day by God's grace (1 Corinthians 15:10), but that grace comes at a high price. Because of Jesus' death on the cross, every Christian faces a life of deep commitment to the God who blessed us with that gift.

Kyle Campbell