



P.O. Box 66540

Albuquerque, NM 87193

505.890.6806

E-mail: irm@liferesource.org

Website: www.liferesource.org

Presentation Transcript
The Faithful Christian, Part 7 – Faith & Love
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Paul said that faith, hope and love, “these three abide, but the greatest of these is love.” He said that in 1 Corinthians 13:13. Perhaps the connection between the three begins with what God offers us. God offered Abraham eternal life – the same promise that He offers to us, really. So it’s what we hope for, and it’s what Abraham hoped for. So maybe this whole thing, as God works with us, begins with that – though I don’t think it has to for every person. But, I think, for most of us, it does. And I think Paul also said that to please God, we have believe that He is a rewarder of those who diligently Him – that He’s going to give us our hope – the reward that He promises – that we hope for. And I think that that, then, is the beginning of faith. As we seek Him, we gradually develop more faith that God will deliver on His word. Because Abraham was willing to get up and move upon God’s instruction – in other words, in faith – believing God would deliver – it was counted to him as righteousness, even though he was *not* a perfect observer of the law. And Genesis certainly records lots of his mistakes. We’re also told that, if we have faith in God’s promise, it’s accounted to us for righteousness, even though we are *not* perfect either.

So let’s get a bit more specific. What is righteousness? Faith is counted for it, so what’s it counted for? There are some important things to know here. The first one is that the violation of God’s law is called sin. “Sin is the transgression of the law,” John said. So, to enter the eternal family of God, a person must not have committed any sins.

There’s a death penalty for that. And, we’re not going to be resurrected if we still have those sins on our record. However, since no one has ever lived a human life without violating God’s laws, all men are doomed to death, except there be someone to pay the penalty – the death penalty – for them. So that’s the second big thing – Jesus did this for us. If we believe in forgiveness of sins through the death of Jesus Christ, then it’s counted to us for righteousness, just as it was counted to Abraham for righteousness when he believed that God would deliver on His promise of eternal life.

So the third thing here is, that the law of God is an expression of His kind of love. Jesus told us that the whole law hangs on two principles – the love for God and the love for others. He also said, “Greater love has no man than this – than to lay down his life for his friends,” which is what *He* did. And He set the example for that. And in that, He shows us what kind of love God has for us, and what kind of love that *we* should have toward God and others.

And fourthly, when we are following the law, we are learning to love God’s way. The exercise of that causes us to gradually become more godly. That’s the point of the exercise. It all points to God keeping His promise to give us eternal life.

So that’s roughly the progression of it. Let’s ask this: What is love? We’ve already seen what faith is. We know that faith is the evidence of things we hope for, but don’t have yet. So faith is what *motivates* us to live as though we are certain God will us what He’s promised, but has not yet provided. Since we’re thinking, today, about the relationship between faith and love, it would be good to ask, “What is love?” So that’s what we’re doing.

Now most people, it seems to me, think that love is an emotion. And it is, but there’s more to it than that. In psychology, it’s been noted that some emotions motivate us to action, while others stifle that action. Discouragement, sadness, fear, depression tend to hold us back, while anger, jealousy and happiness tend to propel us toward action – sometimes helpful, sometimes not.

Love is one of the emotions that stirs us to action. Sometimes the action can be foolish or wise. It just depends. It’s been noted that love motivates people. And whether it’s good or bad depends.

I was talking to a couple recently who were fed up with their kids’ misbehavior. They were angry about it. So you’d think that, maybe, that would turn them into child abusers. Well, it *does* with some people. But when I offered this couple a plan to get a handle on it, they jumped at the opportunity. Because they were so angry about the way things were going in their house, they just couldn’t stand it any longer. So that was an example of anger motivating somebody to do something good.

When we look at the Bible, we see that the action part of love is often the biblical focus, not just the feeling. So it’s important to think about both – the emotion and the action that comes from it. Look in 1 John 4:8:

1 John 4:8 – *Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.*

God is love. Who said that? Well, John, the brother of James – the sons of Zebedee. Right? It was pointed out to me once that most of the time, the best athletes do *not* make the best coaches. Why is that? Well, the best athletes are usually naturals. The sport that they’re good at just came naturally to them. You can read the life story of Michael Jordan, and you can see that he excelled at all sports, but he became really proficient at basketball in a way that other people have been –

generally considered the best basketball player that ever lived. People that are naturals, they do practice, but when they practice, it pays off way more than for those who are not naturals, because it just comes easily to them. Now athletes who are good, but not naturals, have had to think their way through every move of their sport, while naturals just do it. You know that term, “Just do it?” Do you know who came up with that? Michael Jordan is famous for that because when he was on the court with a basketball, he didn’t have to think much about what he was going to do. He just did it! That’s why those who are *not* naturals tend to make better coaches. They had to think about it. And because they had to think their way through things, that makes it easier for them to teach other people how to do it. I mean, you can say, “Just do it,” to ten people and maybe only one of them can just do it, because he’s a natural and the rest don’t have a clue what you mean. Sure enough, Michael Jordan, while he does *own* a professional basketball team, he does *not* coach it. He probably could coach it, but he probably wouldn’t do as good a job as some others that were not naturals.

So, did God inspire John to write the definitive work on love because he was a natural? No! He was *Boanerges*. He and his brother were called The Sons of Thunder – that’s what *Boanerges* means – by Jesus. They were the ones who wanted Jesus to bring down fire on people who were contrary to them. You know, “Let’s just solve the problem. Just burn ‘em!” There were all about control and superiority – *Boanerges* were. They knew very little about love. So when John says, “God is love,” he had to come that the hard way. He had to watch Jesus do everything in opposite fashion to his own inclinations the whole time he was with Jesus. And he had to be told, “No, we’re not going to do that,” when he wanted Jesus to call down fire. He had to stand at the foot of the stake and watch Jesus die a terrible death, though all the other disciples fled, to understand what love is. He had to be told by Jesus, while He was on the stake, to take care of Mary, Jesus’ mother, as He was dying. And he had to think his way through all of that. So every word of what he said he got by watching and thinking and learning, for John was not a natural about it. What that means to us is, that John is a *teacher* – an expert teacher – about love. And he can explain it to us because he had to learn it bit by bit, understand how it works, all the connections and consequences of each aspect of love. And we know that he learned it from the Master. So let’s see what he had to say about it in 1 John 4:9:

V-9-10 – *In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.* The love that God has for us propels God to action, not the love that we had for Him. And we all better be glad for that, knowing how inconsistent we all are about loving God.

Here’s another thing that John said in verse 16 – 1 John 3:16:

1 John 3:16-18 – *By this we know love – this is how we understand what it is – that he laid down his life for us – he probably wrote that thinking about what he saw when he was at Jesus’ crucifixion – and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world’s*

goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.

So God's kind of love in us is to propel us take care of others as well. That would be "love your neighbor as yourself." Right? So, action motivated by the emotion love. And what action are we motivated to do? Well, we're motivated to obey God's law, which is to love your neighbor as yourself.

In 1 Corinthians 13 – to support John's point – Paul, in defining what godly love is, listed a number of behaviors, as well as attitudes. Love is kind, it's not arrogant, it believes the best, and so on.

Jesus also said, "Greater love has no man than this: to lay his life for his friends." So there's the emotion that drove Him to be willing to sacrifice His life. There's the emotion and then there's the behavior that comes out of it. So love motivates us to action – and to *positive* action. Any time the Bible talks about right actions, then, there is *always* love behind them. Okay? That's something we need to know. That's important.

So let's practice thinking this way for a little bit. James – the apostle James – was a man who was plain spoken. He could speak plainly because he was clear thinking. Because of his clarity of thought, he could say a lot in a few words. Here are some of them in James 2:14:

James 2:14 – *What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?*

Now, let's unpack that word *works* a bit. What's he talking about there? Well, he's talking about obeying the law of God, which is about loving God and loving our fellow man – the works of the law, which is done out of love. So you see, there it is. When we talk about obeying the law, we're talking about, in the same breath, loving God and our fellow humans. It's all connected. Okay, now on to James' point – the relationship between love and faith.

You know, I'm suddenly reminded of a hilarious event from the past. Elaine and I were about to take one of these very small planes – I think it was from Coos Bay, Oregon, to Seattle, or maybe San Francisco – I just can't remember, but everyone was packed into this tiny little plane. Maybe there might have been ten rows to it, with two seats on one side and one seat on the other. And some people were still trying to get in their seats, which was no small feat, when a pudgy little man elbowed his way from the door up to the front. As he got to the pilot's cabin, he turned around and he said, "Attention, everyone! I'm your flight attendant for this flight and also your pilot. Please pay close attention to the federally mandated safety regulations, which I'm going to deliver to you now. If you do *not* pay attention, that will make me anxious and necessitate that I increase my anxiety medication before taking the pilot's seat." Everybody laughed. He then held up a short seat belt by the two metal connections over his head and said, "For those who have not

been in a car since 1955, the metal parts go together.” Why did that come to my mind? And it got funnier from there, by the way. But the point was, the metal parts coming together. And why did they come to my mind? Because love and faith go together like seat belt connectors, like peas and carrots, or in New Mexico, like sopapillas and honey. Where one is, the other is there also. So, they can’t be separated.

Let’s read more and it will become even more apparent – James 2:15:

V-15-17 – *If a brother or sister is poorly clothed – this almost sounds like what John said, right? It is. . . and lacking in daily food, and one of you to them, “Go in peace. Be warm and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.*

We’re talking about the faithful Christian – a Christian who is full of faith – over the long haul. Right? So what does this scripture tell us? Well, it’s not just about having faith – believing – but also by *doing* things. We might say, “I’m so thankful Jesus died for my sins,” and then we can say, “Thank you, Jesus” about ten times, and then we can start catterwalling and start blowing our noses. But something else *has* to happen besides crocodile tears. What was Abraham doing while he was feeling God’s love and having faith in God’s promise? He was *walking*. He was going where God told him to go, with the hope that he would receive the promise, which was, among other things, eternal life.

So faith, without loving action with it...well, James called it dead faith, which is really no faith at all. James and John agree. Besides believing and having an emotion, we also need to *do* something. Now James went on with his clear speaking:

V-18 – *But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Do you know people who say that? Most of Christianity believes that’s the right biblical stance today – not necessary to obey God because we now have forgiveness through Christ’s sacrifice. If we have faith in that, it doesn’t matter what we do. Well, here’s what James said about that: *Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.* You know, we wouldn’t have believed that Abraham had faith in God if he weren’t walking. You just can’t have one without the other. James continues:*

V-19 - *You believe that God is one. You do well. But don’t feel too good about it, because even the demons believe – and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person that faith apart from works is useless? See, he considers people, who think that all you need is faith and you don’t need works, foolish. I didn’t say it. He did. Don’t shoot the messenger.*

So here it comes then. He’s going to show us that faith apart from works is useless.

V-21 – *Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son, Isaac, on the*

altar? See, that's even a more important point than walking, isn't it? He took his own son, and built an altar out of wood, and put him on it, and was going to sacrifice him, because God told him to do it. We know it was a test, and God provided a ram in the last minute, and all of that, but Abraham didn't know that. So in verse 22, it says:

V-22-24 – *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works, and the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness” – and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. They have to be together.*

Paul also sheds more light on this for us – Romans 12:1:

Romans 12:1 – *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.* So the margin says that that term, *spiritual worship*, could be translated *rational worship* – in other words, *logical worship* – the direct outcome of that worship. So, in other words, it makes sense when we realize that what Jesus has done for us, that we would want to do the same for Him out of appreciation – to sacrifice ourselves, to live our lives the way He lived – not the way we want to – that is, by obeying the law of God, the end result of which is to love God and love others the way God does.

John also commented on this, as well, in 1 John 3:1:

1 John 3:1-3 – *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God.* So there's something about knowing that we're going to be God's children that explains what kind of love He has for us. *The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.* And then he says this all important sentence: *And everyone who thus hopes in Him* – now that would be all the people who claim that they have faith in Jesus' sacrifice – *everyone who thus hopes in Him, purifies himself as he is pure.* How did He get pure? Well, He obeyed the law.

So that's the mechanism of it – the way it works – the logic of it. Somebody who has God's Holy Spirit, who is called of God, wants to be pure like Jesus is. They *want* to obey the law. That isn't what saves them. What saves them is faith in Jesus Christ, but they, as a byproduct, also want to obey the law. You can't have one without the other – all manifestations of the same thing.

So, in a rather disjointed way – at least it seems that way to me – what I've been moving forward today on is the realization that all these qualities – faith, love, hope and works – are all qualities of God. It's not just that love and faith have a connection. It's that all of them – faith, hope, works and love – are connected. God is love. He's also good works. He's also hope. He's also faith. We can't imagine a God without all these qualities after we read what He's like in the

Bible. They're all a part of God. And that said, when one is at work, so are all the others in our lives.

So why bring this up? What's the point? What can we learn that's *useful* about this? Well, here's the point. We are *not* God. And we are not all of these things at once. We're working on all of it. And it helps us with our weak perception of what it means to be a spirit being to break down the fullness of God into His fundamental elements so that we can work on them one at a time. Because we, like athletes, need step by step fundamental training, because none of us is a natural at it. The idea "I'm going to try to be like God today," is pretty much impossible to grasp, if that's all you think about. While if we think, "I'm going to try to do five loving things for my family today," that's much more specific and doable, isn't it? But while we're doing those five things – loving things – we always need to remember that that's going to build up our hope, our faith, and our love as well. And all of it is God's end goal for us now, becoming like Him. We're His children as we become ever more faithful Christians.

As I said earlier, as this is the seventh and final presentation in this series, *The Faithful Christian*, if you want to look at any of our other series, you can go to our Website, liferesource.org, click on the *Presentations* button, and you can find everything we've done since 2004 – literally hundreds of presentations on parenting, family, Christian living, mental health and the Bible, the festivals and their meaning, and so on. We don't talk too much about doctrine, except as it pertains to what God wants us to do. So, if you're interested in living your life God's way, we have a lot of help for you. Don't forget to comment on the Website.