

Love is Motive

*He will bring to light the hidden things
of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts.
Then each will receive recognition from God.
- 1 Corinthians 4:5 b*

Love cannot be overstated. It is one of the two virtues absolutely necessary for us to have a “good work” before God (faith is the other). There are many Christians, unfortunately, who believe that love is merely our actions. Many wish it were that simple; it isn't. The precise point Paul made in 1 Corinthians 13 is that love cannot be only our actions. Paul's focus was on communicating to the church that our lives' events (thoughts, words, actions, and faith) must consist of something more than the existence of those specific events. Paul's biggest illustrative idea in what is commonly called the “love chapter” is this: without love one could give up all of one's possessions and be willing to be martyred and get *zero benefit* (i.e., no corresponding reward in Heaven). *One cannot take more action than willed poverty and martyrdom.* “Are the motives there?” is the point of the chapter. Actions only count when driven by proper motives. Without love everything is counterfeit.

Look at these truth statements of 1 Corinthians 13:

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- If I speak words better than anyone, I talk about nothing of value without love. **Our words** are useless without love.
- If I understand all mysteries and all knowledge in the world, I am nothing without love. **Our thoughts** don't benefit us without love.
- If I have faith that produces miracles, I am nothing without love. Even the second most important Christian virtue—**our faith**—adds no value to our lives apart from love.
- If I willfully give away everything I own—even my own body to be martyred, I receive no benefit without love. **Our actions** will not be rewarded apart from love.

Love is the proper motive with motivated actions. Love is genuine concern for others *coupled with* genuine care for them. Love desires the best for others. That is what “love your neighbor as yourself” is.

Judge Not the Quality of Actions nor the Motive of the Heart

We are not the final authority and judge regarding our motives either. Take a look at Proverbs 16:2, “All a person’s ways seem right in his own opinion, but the Lord evaluates the motives.” Notice that a person’s ways “seem right.” We often believe that our actions rise above the crowd’s. We frequently think that the decisions we have made are the best that could have been made. But we have built-in biases regarding the decisions we make *and the motivations that go with them*. It is God who will be the quality checker. We will not be the final evaluator of why we do what we do. God decides the quality and genuineness of our words, thoughts, and deeds. That is why we must stay close to Him in a purposeful relationship. Our flesh will tell us lies, tell us we are doing ministry the right way, tell us our motives are pure. Paul understood Proverbs 16:2 when he cautioned himself and the Church at Corinth regarding being their own witnesses,

“Now what is sought in stewards is that one be found faithful. So for me, it is a minor matter that I am judged by you or by any human court. In

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fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not acquitted because of this. The one who judges me is the Lord. So then, do not judge anything before the time. Wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the motives of hearts. Then each will receive recognition from God” (1 Corinthians 4:2-5).

Paul knew that it is only after Christ will critically look at each individual’s motives does one receive recognition from God.

Recognition from the Lord is worth living for, so we must have a proper motive in our actions to be judged worthy of recognition. So we would do well to remember this sobering reality: every moment, of our born-again lives, is headed to a motive trial. At that trial, the Lord will judge and cut through all of our pretending and self-deception and get to the root of what drove our lives’ actions and purposes.

We Must be in Love to Love

Books could be written commenting on the numerous Bible verses that explain our dependence on God. Humankind’s desire to live apart from God started in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve’s fall happened in part due to their suspended reliance on God and what He said.

While our future is secure in regard to Heaven by faith in Christ, we would do well to learn from Adam and Eve’s mistakes. One must be disciplined to stay in close relationship with God to be useful to God. God is a person, and as with any other person there must be quality time spent for that relationship to flourish. Paul taught, “If we live by the Spirit, let us also behave in accordance with the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25). “Behave” is *stoicheō* in the Greek. It means “to proceed in a row as the march of a soldier.”¹ An old expression of this idea in English would charge us with, “we need to be in lockstep with the Spirit,”

¹ “STRONGS NT 4748: ΣΤΟΙΧΕΩ,” Blue Letter Bible, accessed Sept. 9, 2019, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=G4748&t=KJV>.

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step-for-step. We are to march through this life alongside God. He then guides us in our circumstances, leads us in our specific actions, and guards our consciences against false motives.

Paul explained this to the Corinth church in 2 Corinthians 1:12, “For our reason for confidence is this: the testimony of our conscience, that *with pure motives and sincerity which are from God*—not by human wisdom but by the grace of God—we conducted ourselves in the world, and all the more toward you” (emphasis mine). Pure motives are from the grace of God.

Be very cautious and watchful against shortcuts and substitutes to cultivating a deeper relationship with God. Some Christians believe that all they must do to act like God is know the Scriptures. The Pharisees and the scribes thought that. Learning the Bible is important, but it is *only a part* of what is necessary to have our hearts changed toward people. Love demands application of truth. The key to application is relationship with God and people. To have and act in love, one must be in love.

Trials Test Love

Jesus told us that we would have many trials (cf., John 16:33). To that truth, we say “Amen!” We know God’s greatest will is not making our life events easy, but instead, He empowers us to respond like Christ *during the trials* of our lives. It is during our trials that we struggle the most with motives and godly responses. Trials test the quality of our life with the Lord; each is an opportunity for our sin nature to win or for us to overcome. When the former wins, we must be willing to “take a brutally honest look in the mirror and see who we truly are”² apart from Christ and confess where we did not hit the mark. This must be a continuous practice of our lives as we remind ourselves that the only way to succeed in the moments and accomplish the work of God is to “remain” in Jesus. The Lord said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me—and I in him—bears much fruit, because apart

² Torrey Bingham, comment in a Fellowship of Huntsville Church Sunday school class, Sept. 15, 2019.

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from me you can accomplish nothing” (John 15:5). God does the work *for us* as we remain in Him (or live closely and in love with Him). Our actions will produce spiritual fruit if we remain in Him; rotten fruit is harvested when we work alone. We never look like God apart from God. For the “fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22b). Whose fruit is it? The Spirit’s. When God is producing fruit, our life and motives are perfect in those moments, events, days, and therefore those parts of our lives. Holy actions are part of God’s work in us; this work of God is called sanctification (God saving our love actions). But amazingly we will receive rewards for His work! So humbling ourselves to God’s will, word, authority, and power, and believing that God is the One who is saving our moments is our only hope to live for Him. He does the work; we rest in and rely on Him.

These sentences are easy to write and understand, but in practice, we all know it is harder than it sounds. It takes a daily humbling and denying of our old natures—our selfish nature—our “flesh”— and our egos. This type of humbling is drastic and can only happen with daily, repeated “executions.” Paul’s letter to the Colossians put it this way: “When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him. *So put to death* whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:4,5 emphasis mine). Every day we wake up something is dying. It’s either our spiritual life or our earthly natures. We must make daily choices.

Scripture Passages

Mark 7:17-23

1 Corinthians 13

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Questions

1) Circle the fruits of love that are most missing from your life. Love is ...

patient

kind

bears all things

believes all things

hopes all things

rejoices in the truth

endures all things

2) Circle the indicators that show that you are not displaying love:

I am envious.

I brag about what I do or what I have.

I am puffed up.

I am rude.

I am self-serving.

I am easily angered.

I am resentful.

I rejoice in injustice.

3) What motivates you instead of love?

4) Knowing that God will show us the motives of our hearts, what would He say are the motives of your life right now?

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Aim Point

- 1) Love needs to be the *main thought* that dominates our lives. Write a prayer each day for the next seven days in a notebook. These prayers should strive to confess your shortcomings in loving your neighbor as yourself (keeping in mind specific people) and asking for God's help in raising the standard of love back to its rightful place.

- 2) Ask God to bring you back to a heart set towards renewing your love for people. We must be proactive in starting—and often restarting—every day with renewed trust in God to rein in our corrupted lives.

- 3) Continually ask yourself this week, “Am I loving people as Christ loves me?”