

Four Fruits of Love

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When Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them,” He was talking about true and false prophets (Mat. 7:15–20). The principle is one that we commonly apply to our varied experiences. I want to apply it to the quality called “love.” The New Testament is a manual of sorts on what constitutes true and pure love. The centrality of love to the Gospel and all of Christ’s teaching is not better expressed anywhere than in Jesus’ words recorded in Matthew 22:37–39. Love of God with one’s whole being is the first commandment, and the second is love of neighbor as of self. The Scriptures often teach us the type of behavior to be seen in one who loves. These remarks will be limited to the fruits of love for God and His Son.

The first fruit is negative: if we love the Lord, **we cannot love the world**. John cautions: “Love not the world... if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John. 2:15). James likewise teaches that “...friendship of the world is enmity with God” (Jam. 4:4). What does it mean to “love the world”? Paul brings, this into focus in the warning of Romans 12:2: “Be not fashioned according to this world....” One who loves God will not allow the world to determine his conduct; only the Christ Who died for us has the right to do so. To love even the innocent interests and causes of the world to the neglect of God and his purpose for us is to “love the world.” Many who at one time loved the Lord have wrecked their ship of life on the shoals of greed for material and temporary things. Christ makes it plain: “No man can serve two masters... Ye cannot serve God and Mammon” (Mat. 6:24).

If we love the Lord, **we will love one another**. No lesson is more certainly taught by Jesus than that of love that overrides all questions of worthiness, social level, race, or any other qualifier among all men. He not only taught it, He also practiced it: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8b). One of the most difficult tasks Jesus ever gave his disciples, ancient or modern, is the one found in Matthew 5:44, 46:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you... For if ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same?

Jesus also teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves (22:39). Jesus illustrated who one’s neighbor is by telling the tender story of “The Good Samaritan” (Luke 10:27–37). He was a neighbor to the man in need, although they were strangers. Where our fellowman has a need, we have a chance to be a neighbor. Remember John’s plain statement:

If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, cannot love God whom he hath not seen" (1 John 4:20).

Love for the Lord will cause us to **love the things He loved**. Jesus loved the lost more than He loved Himself (1 Tim. 2:6). One's love for Christ is suspect if he shows no concern for the soul of his lost fellowmen. The Lord also loved the sick, crippled, poor, unfortunate, and downtrodden of His day. He was constantly trying to help such people. As already noted, He taught us to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mat. 22:39) and declared that our final Judgment would be based at least partially on how we have reacted to the cries for help from the helpless (Mat. 25:31-46). Christ loved the church supremely. He gave himself up for it (Eph. 5:25); He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). None can truly love the Lord and not love His church, all claims to the contrary, notwithstanding. It is nothing short of ridiculous to claim to love the Lord while totally ignoring or even neglecting the church, which is His spiritual body on the earth (Eph. 1:22-23). It is in His church that we are to glorify God and express our love for Him (3:21). Truly, we may gauge our love for Christ by our attitude toward the things He loved.

Jesus said, "If ye love me, **ye will keep my commandments**" John 14:15). This simple statement is the final and infallibly true test of our love for Christ. By this principle, the lip-servants, pretenders, and hypocrites are easily distinguished from true lovers of the Lord. There is really no way to express our love for God and His Son apart from doing His Will. "This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and His commandments are not grievous" (1 John 5:3). One may keep some minimal level of the commandments of Christ out of sheer duty and have little love. But one who really loves God is one who, without complaint, goes about His Father's business; it is a joy to serve God when we love Him, but drudgery when we don't. A person who loves God does not have to be begged to obey Him. He may have to be convinced that the matter in question is a command of God, but when convinced, he will not hesitate to obey. To balk at a command of God is to publish how little one loves Him.

What do the fruits of your life say about your love for God? I challenge you to love Him supremely and bear these glorious fruits of love in your life. Let His love break down every barrier that might be keeping you from Him.

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