

Holiday Spirit

This time of year, people's thoughts turn to what they call the meaning of the season. The holiday spirit, if you will. The holiday seasons seem to get people thinking about other people, about helping, being a good neighbor, being a Good Samaritan. All of these are good things, but that isn't the point, the point is whether or not these things are consistent behaviors, or are they attitudes that only emerge rarely.

There is an old country western song called the "Christmas Guest," that I want to use as an illustration. An old man, who lived alone, depressed because of his perceived lot in life, kneels to pray one evening, and he asks God for help. He gets a response, that the next day, the Lord would visit him. You can imagine the anticipation and excitement in the old gentleman, expecting to have the Lord come visit him. He gets his place all cleaned up, makes his specialty, a stew like soup, and puts on his best clothes, when he looks out the window, he sees a homeless and destitute beggar walking by in the snowy cold. As he looks at this man he sees that his shoes don't fit and his coat is torn and threadbare, being moved by compassion, the old man goes out and gets the beggar, brings him into his home, feeds him with his specialty, finds a warm pair of socks, a good pair of shoes, and a warm coat for him. As the beggar is leaving, the old man is searching the roads and skylines for a sign of the Lord who is supposed to come by. He goes back in and continues to putter around picking things up when there is a knock at the door. The old man knocks over a table in his excitement to get to the door, but to his disappointment, when he opens the door, there stands an old woman he has seen that lives down the block, shivering. Her power has gone out and she is looking for some wood for the fire place until her power comes back on. He brings her in and sets her down and serves her his specialty soup with warm bread and a hot cup of coffee. After she is warmed and he has given her some wood, he sees her to the door, and as she is leaving he searches again for any sign of the Lord. He is becoming increasingly worried that maybe the Lord isn't going to make it, but He said He would. That evening, while the old man is worrying, he hears a whimpering at the door. He opens it to find a small child that chased her puppy out into the cold and got lost. She has been wondering around trying to find her home. She is scared, cold, wet, and hungry and he doesn't know what to do. He has only enough of his soup left for one more meal, and he really wants to save that for when the Lord comes to visit, but as he looks at this small scared child, his heart bursts with compassion for her and he gets her a warm blanket, puts her in front of the fire and feeds her the last of his specialty, the best that he has to offer. After he has calmed her down, fed her, gotten her warm, he takes her home. Midnight is upon him and as he is heading home, realizing that the Lord isn't going to make it, his emotions are running rampant; disappointment, a sense of abandonment, even anger. How could the Lord have not kept His promise? That night in his prayer, the old man accusingly asks the Lord why He didn't come? Then he hears a small quiet voice saying, what are you talking about? I came by three times. I was the beggar you clothed and fed. I was the old woman you warmed and fed. I was the child you fed and showed the way home to. I was the opportunity for you to show Christian Love, what some today might call the holiday spirit, or maybe better said, a Godly Spirit. **1**

Now admittedly, I have taken a lot of liberty and poetic license in embellishing the song, but you get the idea. In...

Luke 10:30-36

2

30 Jesus replied and said, "A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went off leaving him half dead. **31** "And by chance a certain priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. **32** "And likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. **33** "But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, **34** and came to him,

and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. **35** "And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.' **36** "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?"

There is an important point in all this that the song brings out. In...

Matt 25:34-36

3

34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. **35** 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; **36** naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.'

Do you see what Christ says? "I" was hungry, "I" was thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick, in prison. "I", this is Christ speaking and He is identifying himself as the one who is in need. That is what the writer of the song was expressing when he wrote, "I came to see you three times; in the beggar, the old woman, and the child." Christ describes Himself as being seen not only in our response to the opportunities, but also in the opportunity itself. Christ isn't saying that He is thirsty, or hungry, etc., He is saying that we need to treat the world as if it is Christ Himself that we are helping. He is speaking to our attitude. Is it one of love and compassion, or disdain and haughtiness? Do we seek to do what we can, or do we ignore?

This idea of attitude and what compels us to be faithful in our obedience is absolutely critical to our understanding of what man needs to do in his relationship with his creator. All too often, the world today misses this point, they look to the deeds that we do as the example of Christ, and, mind you, there can be no denying that, our actions need to be the manifestation of the love of God in our lives, but people get so wrapped up in the deeds being done that they lose sight of the attitude that should be the motivation behind the deeds.

Why does the Christian do what they do?

1 John 4:16

4

16 And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

Do we serve, just because we are told to, or do we serve because the love and compassion in our hearts put there by the Love that is God, compels us to? This concept is the same in keeping God's commandments. Do we obey because of some motivation seeking man's approval, or do we obey because our faith is such that we can do nothing else but obey and seek God's approval?

Let's take a moment and look at this concept of motivating faith and how to develop it, since it is so vital to our relationship with God. In...

Heb 2:2-4

5

2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, **3** how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, **4** God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

God's Word cannot be changed. It was confirmed with power from God and is established as the governing standard for any who would come to Him through Christ.

Then in...

Eph 2:8-10

6

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; **9** not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

God creates His children in Christ Jesus to do good works. Now note what we are told in...

2 Tim 3:16-17

7

16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; **17** so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

God has given us His Word to enable His faithful followers to accomplish everything He has them to do, if we will but follow His Word in faith. Now when we compare that thought to what we see in...

John 14:15

8

15 "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Christ says that the believers love will manifest itself in faithful obedience to His commandments. This progression then leads us to ask why should anyone love God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Word.

1 John 4:19

9

19 We love, because He first loved us.

While the Love of God is seen in His creation, in all that we have and do, it is most especially seen in the gift of Himself that we might have eternal life with Him.

John 3:16

10

16 "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Coming back now to our discussion on the idea of the Christian attitude we should have...

Matt 7:15-23

READ

15 "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. **16** "You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they? **17** "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. **18** "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. **19** "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. **20** "So then, you will know them by their fruits. **21** "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. **22** "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' **23** "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

Ultimately, the Lord condemned these people, not for the deeds they had done or not done, but for the motivations behind them doing them. They prophesied, performed miracles, cast out demons, yet the deeds they had done were outside law, they were deeds of lawlessness, because of their lawless attitude. Christianity isn't just about keeping the commandments or the letter of the

Law, and please don't misunderstand, the letter of the Law is vital in the faithful Christian's actions. But the proper attitude concerning God's commandments is just as vital.

1 Cor 13:1-3

11

1 If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. **2** And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. **3** And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.

Paul, here, is illustrating the very point that the passage in Matthew is talking about. Paul is saying that if someone has spiritual gifts, does great benevolence to others, even to the point of giving his body for sacrifice, but does not have Love, the kind of love commanded in the scriptures, then it is all for nothing. If we approach the duties and responsibilities of being a child of God without Love, we fall short of doing what God desires from us. That is what condemned those in Matthew. In the example of the song, the Lord wanted to see the manifestation of the old man's love and commitment, those things that faith and the Word produce in the sincere heart, and so presented Himself in the opportunities for the old man to love and to show love in giving of himself to others. When we fail to have love and compassion as the motivation of our attitude, we fail in our efforts as children of God, even in obeying the letter of the law.

In **1 Corinthians**, after his discussion of what love is and isn't, Paul says that Godly Love will never fail. He illustrates that in the fact that the manifestation of God's love is seen in His Eternal Word.

1 Cor 13:8-11

12

8 Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. **9** For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; **10** but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away. **11** When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, think as a child, reason as a child; when I became a man, I did away with childish things.

Godly Love is what the old man in the song showed, Godly Love is the difference between being justified by faithful obedience through God's grace, and having the deeds we do be seen as lawlessness.

1 John 4:7-9

13

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **8** The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. **9** By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

When we have the love of God within us, when it abides in us as we abide in it and Him, then the world sees the power of God through Christ as a living breathing thing, and not just words. When we look into the mirror of God's word, what reflection is looking back at us? Hypocrisy, disingenuousness, or Godly Love, as seen in our attitudes and actions? Paul describes this for us in...

1 Cor 13:12-13

14

12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known. **13** But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

God tells us through Paul that of the three...

- 15** Faith - the commitment we make to His word, His being, His sacrifice, His very existence
- 16** Hope - the motivation for the actions we take, the desire to be with God
- 17** Love - the over riding attitude, the emotion of the heart, the manifestation of our very being.

Of these three, LOVE is the greatest. Why? Because I can train an animal to do tricks on command, even when the animal does not want to, but when I win over the love and loyalty of that animal, then I have a companion that obeys because it wants to. God does not want obedience for obedience sake, that is what Christ called lawlessness in Matthew, God wants our love for Him and what He has done for us to be so overwhelming that it compels us to obedience, since anything other than that would be to deny our love and ourselves.

2 Peter 1:3-4

18

3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. **4** For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

Peter talks about this idea as becoming partakers of the divine nature. As we saw in **1 John**, one of the foremost divine natures of God is that, He is Love. He is the epitome of it and all His actions are the manifestation of it. That is our goal, to escape this world and its lusts and in so doing, to be given the promise of God. Peter tells us that to be able to accomplish our goal we need to be partakers of the divine nature.

Do you see it?

- 19** A) Faith
- 20** B) Hope
- 21** C) Love

It is Love that is the power of God within us that will enable us to overcome the world and bask in His promises. We show our love for God by doing what God has done. That is the example of the old man, who having such a great desire to be with God, showed the Love of God in giving to others, even that very special soup that he made specifically for the Lord, using the last of it as he gave to others.

Why is love greater? Faith is our response to God and what He has done for us. Hope is what our faith in God and His promises that motivates us to look forward to receiving the promise of eternal life. But love is greater, because when we show love to the world, we show the world God.

22

Brethren the need of the world is our opportunity to let God live within us, the need of the world is also, according to Christ, God needing us to help when we can. "I" was thirsty, have we given Him to drink?