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Faith and Love

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Faith and Love

Day 23

The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. (1 Timothy 2:14)

Throughout the New Testament *faith* and *love* are repeatedly spoken of together. Both are vitally important and inseparable.

In his letters, Paul thanks God for these two “exceedingly abundant” expressions of the grace he sees in others. “We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ... since we heard of your *faith* in Christ Jesus and of your *love* for all the saints” (Colossians 1:3-4). “Therefore I also, after I heard of your *faith* in the Lord Jesus and your *love* for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you” (Ephesians 1:15-16). “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren ... because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other” (2 Thessalonians 1:3).

Why is Paul so thankful for the *faith* and *love* he sees in others?

Paul is thankful because faith and love are evidence that God is at work in us. God is the source of our faith and our love. Jesus is “the author and finisher of our faith” (Hebrews 12:2). “God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). And God gives us the love that makes our loving possible. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

If we think of faith or love as something we are responsible for generating, then we put ourselves back under the law and its impossibility. Faith and love are not a result of our independent efforts; they come from receiving what God freely gives. Faith doesn’t earn us life in Christ; it connects us to that life which Jesus has already earned for us. Our part is not to try to earn God’s love; our part is simply to accept that we are loved.

Receiving faith or love is like unwrapping a gift. Someone can give us a present, but unless we choose to open the present, we can’t enjoy it. Although it has been bought and paid for, we can’t enjoy its amazing benefits until we unwrap it.

Faith comes first because belief is what connects us to God so that what He has already done for us becomes real in experience. The Christian life is meant to be lived by faith—by being led by the Spirit (not by the soul). Without faith, we can do our own religious (or non-religious) things, but we completely miss the mark of living in life-giving relationship with God.

Love comes second because it is the essence of God who we come to know by faith. Believing that we are always welcomed by God gives us the freedom to stop pretending to be somebody we hope will be acceptable and live in the freedom of knowing His acceptance. Knowing we are valued and treasured allows us to treat others as the valued and treasured people they are.

In this way, through actions based in love, our faith comes alive in expression. Scripture tells us, “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:20). Our belief in God doesn’t just stay silent within us. It works itself out in love. The works that faith does are done in love. Faith reaches up to God; then love reaches out to others.

God designed our lives to be lived in faith and love. We take a step of faith—of looking to Jesus—with one foot. Then we take a step of love—of compassionate works prompted by faith— with the other. “Faith [works] through love” (Galatians 5:6).

My brother, my sister, God’s joy in you rises with your acceptance of all He gives. He is so pleased when you accept His “exceedingly abundant” grace. It fills Him with delight when you receive the “faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”

Ponder for a Moment

Have you ever tried to work up faith in yourself? What has been the result of that effort?

Have you ever tried to work up love in yourself? What has been the result of that effort?

Think of someone (or several people) you can be thankful for today ... because of their faith and love.