

God's Commands Are Tests

The church at Corinth included a brother who was having an ongoing sexual relationship with his father's wife. For whatever reason, the rest of the brethren did nothing about it. When the Apostle Paul heard of the situation, he ordered bold action: "Remove the wicked man from among yourselves" (1 Corinthians 5:13).

Withdrawing from the ungodly brother was essential, both for his benefit and theirs. Hopefully it would impress upon him the seriousness of his wrong and lead him to repentance (v. 5). Regardless, it would check the spreading influence of sin within the congregation (vv. 6-8).

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul spoke of a brother whom the church had punished. Evidently this refers to the same case. If so, the disassociation had produced its desired result. The brother was now seeking forgiveness. Paul advised, ". . . forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. Wherefore, I urge you to reaffirm your love for him" (2:7-8). Then he added, "For to this end also I wrote that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things" (2 Corinthians 2:9).

How did the instruction to cut off association from this brother test the Corinthians' obedience? Perhaps in several ways:

- Since taking such action is anything but enjoyable, *it was a test of whether they would obey commands of God that are unpleasant.*
- Some in our day question whether withdrawing is an effective way of dealing with brethren in sin. If any of the Corinthians felt the same way, *it was a test of whether they would obey a divine command in which they saw little wisdom.*
- This brother may have been popular or influential. If so, *it was a test of whether they would put God's will above personal relationships.*

You may not often think of it this way, but every command God gives "puts you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." Anyone will obey requirements that are pleasant, seem wise, and demand no hard choices. That says nothing about us. The real test of our obedience, and therefore the real test of our faith, comes when God's commands are otherwise. How well do you score on this exam?

- by Frank Himmel

Why Is Love The Greatest Of The Three?

"But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love." 1 Cor. 13:13

We've all heard this passage quoted numerous times. We've even heard this phrase in a popular country music song. Why does the apostle Paul extol love higher than important things like faith and hope?

Faith Is Important

To say faith is important is to say the obvious. "And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). "...for unless you believe that I am *He*, you shall die in your sins" (Jn. 8:24). God has always required faith on the part of man to come to Him. At times, when the world doesn't seem to make sense, all one will have will be his faith in God that all will turn out right. However, there will be a time when faith is not needed. When Jesus returns, we'll no longer "walk by faith, but by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7) because we shall "see Him as He is" (cp. 1 Jn. 3:2).

Hope Is Important

People have hope in that which is important to them. God expects us to have hope in who He is and what He has promised. None of us have seen heaven, but we hope to get there. Even when hope doesn't seem rational, it is the right thing to do (cp. Rom. 4:18-21). Yet, one day hope will

no longer be needed. When we see heaven and the ultimate crowning of our faith, it will no longer be necessary to hope for what will then be a reality (**Rom. 8:24-25**).

Love Is Important

Love is the only thing that will ever last, even into eternity. Just because we'll finally be with God doesn't mean we'll stop loving Him. Why did Jesus say this was the first and greatest of the commandments (**Mt. 22:37**)? Because it is the only one that will last. In our text of **1 Cor. 13:13**, this was exactly the point the Corinthians were missing... they didn't love their brethren. It is by this badge of honor (love) that the world will ever know we are the Lord's people (**Jn. 13:35**).

That's why... "love never fails." (**1 Cor. 13:8a**).

- by Jeff Smith

Social Media Concerns

Many brethren enjoy being able to contact folks via Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc., but we are alarmed that some are not exercising a proper degree of caution. Consider these issues when engaged in 'social networking':

1. Inappropriate photos and text: Some are guilty of sending photos of themselves dressed immodestly or while participating in activities that are, at best, questionable. Likewise, texts are sent out that convey things that a Christian should never say or think. Several 'red flags' are obvious. Why are you doing such things? Why are you thinking and saying such things? And, why are you effectively destroying your influence and example by publishing such things? Many need to be reminded of: 1) their duty to God, and 2) their responsibility to "let your light shine" (Matthew 5:16).

2. Excessive loss of valuable time: Without putting a stopwatch on any specific individual, it is easy to conclude that some are wasting way too much time on these sites. Various studies have concluded that they have an addictive potential. Can we be blunt? **TURN OFF THE COMPUTER, SHUT DOWN THE SMARTPHONE, AND GET BUSY!!!** Your family, the Lord's church, your job, and many other important things need your attention. Some are neglecting their duties while spending excessive time on social networking sites. As a child of God you are responsible for "making the most of your time" (Ephesians 5:16 – NASV).

3. Fellowship implications: Think about the terminology that describes these websites --- they are called 'social networking' sites, and those who participate are identified as 'friends', etc. The problem, as we see it, is that some are interacting without regard to those who have been disciplined by local congregations. We are obligated to sever our social dealings with such brethren until they repent. We are told "not to keep company" with them (1 Corinthians 5:11), and to "have no company with him, that he may be ashamed" (2 Thessalonians 3:14). If we join with them – 'keep company' with them – on these social networking websites (as though there is no problem) how have we fulfilled our duty to "admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:15)?

We are sure that Satan is thrilled to have a whole new array of weapons to use against us. Beware of how he can use social media to our spiritual demise. Think!

- by Greg Gwin