

**Articles and Sermons :: Love for Christ Is the Real Test of Any Man's Spirituality by Zac Poonen**

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Before the crucifixion Peter had denied the Lord three times. This was the culmination of three and a half disappointing years that he had been with the Lord, during which he had proved himself proud, self-assertive and, prayerless. Yet the Lord, when about to entrust Peter with the feeding of His sheep, made no reference to any of these weaknesses. He did not even challenge him to be humble and prayerful in the future and to witness boldly, facing persecution if need be for the sake of his Lord. No, He did not ask any such questions, although these are indeed the qualifications we should look for in a spiritual man, and especially in one who is to be a leader among God's people.

The Lord Jesus knew that one simple question would be sufficient. If that question found a true response, everything else would automatically follow. "Lovest thou Me more than everything and everyone else?" (John 21:15-17). Love for Christ is the real test of any man's spirituality. If a man has attained to high rank in the Church, even maybe that of a bishop we naturally assume that he must be a spiritual man. It need not necessarily be so. It is the New Birth and a consequent love for Christ that makes a man spiritual. It is possible today that a bishop of the Church may not even have been born again. Possession of a theological degree - or several - is no guarantee of this either. No, not even passage through a sound evangelical seminary will make a man spiritual! You may be a full-time Christian worker or the pastor of a congregation, but that does not make you a man of God. All too readily you and I can mistake regular attendance at meetings, or profound Bible-knowledge, or unabated zeal in the Gospel as the marks of spirituality. Distinctive dress and a pious look can deceive us too. But none of them is of any account. The test of genuine spirituality in God's sight is one thing and one only: the extent of your love for Him. Ultimately that is something between you and your Lord alone. He puts the question: "Lovest thou me?" and it is for you to find the answer.

When Isaac loved Rebekah, what he looked for in return was not her service but her love. In just the same way, what the Lord is expecting from us primarily is not our service but our love. Where there is true love, service will flow spontaneously. In company with Abraham's servant Rebekah made a 600 mile journey from Mesopotamia to Canaan. What do you suppose they talked about together during that journey? If she really loved Isaac, surely Rebekah would have been enquiring about him all along the way. She would have put endless questions concerning Isaac to her companion and guide. With just such a hunger a believer who really loves the Lord Jesus will read the Bible. Day by day he will invite the Holy Spirit to reveal to him more and yet more of the beauty of his Lord.

May the Lord show us afresh that the measure of our love for Him is the real measure of our spirituality. And lest we deceive ourselves, let us remember the yardstick that He Himself provided. The proof of our love is simply our obedience (John 14:15, 21, 23, 24).

In the last book of the Bible this solemn truth is confirmed. There the Lord rebukes the church at Ephesus because it had lost sight of the first things (Rev. 2:1-5). In other respects it was a remarkable church. The Christians there had laboured with patience, they had hated evil, they had exposed false apostles, and they had persevered and endured for the sake of the Name. With heart and soul they were in the Lord's work and nothing could make them give up. Yet, in spite of all this the Lord had something against them. It constituted so serious a lack as to threaten their very existence as a testimony for Him. They had fallen, He told them, and if they did not repent, He would withdraw from them His anointing, the sign of His approval of their testimony. What was this serious lack? It was just this, that they had grown cold in their love for their Lord. They had not lost their first love for Him, they had just left it and moved elsewhere. They had become so busy with their meetings and retreats and conventions (if we may so speak) and in their other forms of Christian activity that they had lost sight of the One for whom all these other things existed. Clearly this shows that the Lord cares more for the devotion of our hearts towards Him than for all our activity. The Devil, knowing this, will do his utmost to get us so involved in Christian engagement of one kind and another that we find no time to spend with our blessed Lord and thus let slip our personal devotedness to Him.

Jesus warned us that in the last days sin would so abound in the world that many would become cold in their love to Him (Matt. 24:12). We are living in those days now. Among the vast majority of the professed followers of the Lord the spiritual temperature is below freezing point. Unless we ourselves are constantly watchful, we shall find that frigid atmosphere penetrating inside us as well. My brothers and sisters in Christ, even if you lose everything else, do not let go of this one thing-your love for your Lord. Preserve it as the thing that you desire with all your hearts and that you will seek all the days of your life.

"The greatest...is love. Follow after love." (1 Cor. 13:13, 14:1).