

HOW TO BE SURE YOU'RE IN LOVE

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I Cor.13; John 14:15; Rev.2:4

It has often been said that *Love makes the World Go 'Round.* I don't know about the world, but I do know it's kept the male of the species on the go! I read somewhere that marriage is like a cafeteria: you pick out what you want, and pay for it later. The article said making love is like making a pie: all you need is a little crust and a lot of apple sauce.

Maybe you've heard the story about the husband who was complaining of the mounting number of unpaid bills. *Ruth,* he said to his wife, *You promised me you wouldn't buy a new dress. Why did you do it?* *Dear,* she said, *The devil tempted me.* *Well,* he retorted, *You should have said: "Get thee behind me, Satan."* *Oh, I did,* she replied sweetly, *and then he whispered over my shoulder: "My dear, it fits you beautifully in the back."*

And then there's the story about the wife who said to her husband, *You deceived me! Before we were married, you said you were well off.* To which the man replied, *I was! I just didn't know it!*

Well, with all our kidding, we men are truly grateful for the life partner He has graciously given us. I think most of us would agree that whatever achievements we have made are due, in large part, to the inspiration and encouragement given to us by our wives.

However, my subject this morning is not marriage, but the much broader field of love. To many people, love is an emotion. It is, as someone has put it, *the feeling you feel when you feel a feeling you've never felt before.* And, in a psychological sense, *love is an emotion.* But, as C. S. Lewis points out in his book Christian Behavior, *In the Christian sense, love is not a matter of the feelings. It is a matter of the will.*

Our Lord made that quite clear when He said to His disciples, *If you love me...keep my commandments.* You see, if we are truly in love with Christ, we will make every effort to please Him, to do His will rather than our own. And if we try to do His will, we will keep His commandments. It's just that simple.

If you love me...keep my commandments.

Maybe I can draw an analogy which will help you lay hold of this truth and take it home with you. There is a remarkable and satisfying comparison between the way two people act when they are in love and the way we will act if we are really in love with Christ. And, since today is both the start of Youth Week and Valentine's Day, I thought it would be in order to explore the side-streets of that beautiful relationship between a man and a maiden to see if, in the light of that experience, we are truly in love with our Lord.

The Glow on Your Face

The glow on your face is perhaps one of the very first ways to tell if you're in love. Oh, you won't be aware of it. People in love seldom are. But other folks will notice. As someone has observed,

Love may be blind, but the neighbors aren't!

And so it is with the Christian. There is nothing quite like the radiance which floods the countenance of one who has come into that intimate relationship of a sinner and his savior. There is a holy glow which cannot be extinguished.

I can't explain it. It is too much like trying to *define* love. Who can adequately put into words the rainbow of emotions, expressions and experiences which combine to make up this thing we call love. Yet, while love may be hard to define with words, it is easy to recognize in action. As someone has observed: *Love is not blind. Love is dear-sighted!*

The same is true of a genuinely born-again Christian. When it finally dawns upon the child of God that God is love, and the love of God is expressed in the person of Jesus Christ who is able to save unto the utter most; when the wonder of it all really strikes home, the joy in the

Christian=s heart cannot help but cry out for a means of expression. Across her face sweeps that tell-tale radiance which cannot and will not be denied. Indeed, the glow on your face is an unmistakable proof that you=re in love. Is it there?

The Focus of Your Thoughts

Another way of being sure you=re in love is when the one you love is constantly in your thoughts and dreams. Men, do you remember when you first fell in love? Do you remember how that little girl had the audacity to walk your thoughts and stalk your dreams? There was hardly a moment when you weren=t aware that she had completely stolen your heart and you were powerless to resist. Women, can you remember how you merely existed between the time you said AGood Bye@ until the next time you said AHello@? You simply couldn=t be with him enough. Every minute you were apart seemed like an hour and every hour you were together seemed like a minute.

You see, people in love are anxious to be together. Their every waking moment is dominated by a consciousness of their beloved. And so it is with the Christian. She doesn=t only think of God in times of life=s emergencies. There is a constant awareness that someone, whose newness never wears off, has come into her life. There is the sense that in a particular way, Christ has stolen his heart and he has no desire to resist. Like a person who is truly in love, a Christian is anxious to be with the object of that love. Going to church is not a burden. It is a delight because, in church, he=s able to give himself completely to thoughts of his redeemer. In church, there are moments when she can dwell upon the blessings that this marriage relationship between sinner and savior has brought into her heart.

Often we hear people say, AFolks don=t need to go to church to be good Christians.@ That may be true. But it is equally true to say that if they are good Christians, they will be in church. In fact, they will find it difficult to stay away. The longing to spend time with the one they love will be too great.

Just the other day, one of our members came up to me and said,

APastor, I must have a strange kind of sickness. All week long I am plagued with aches and pains. But on Sunday they seem to leave me and I am able to go to church. That one hour we spend together, my Lord and I, somehow makes it easier for me to endure my suffering throughout the other six days.®

As she turned away, completely unaware of the tremendous thing she had said, I couldn't help but think about many others who use every little excuse imaginable to rationalize away their absenteeism on Sunday mornings. I couldn't help but wonder if, maybe, it wasn't because they had never really been in love with Jesus!

A Constant Source of Delight

Still another way to be sure you're in love is when giving is a constant source of delight. The young man who has fallen in love does not have many problems about the kind of engagement ring he is going to give his sweetheart. Whether it will be costly or cheap. He doesn't try to see how little he can spend, but rather, how far he can stretch his pocket book. He loves the girl! That's all that matters.

A young mother does not nurse her baby because she must, but because she loves the baby.

Indian mothers have a Proverb:

AChildren tie a Mother's feet.®

That's true. But the interesting thing is that mothers seem to like having their feet tied. They literally make themselves willing slaves to their little ones. Love dictates the terms. And when we carry this third sign of love over to the Christian's experience, we realize, as someone has suggested, AGiving is never a problem for a genuine Christian. At home, when he picks up the grocery bill, light bill, gas bill, cleaning bill, phone bill, he never growls and says, >Always asking for money=. Neither does he look upon his tithe as another burden inflicted upon him by his church. Rather, he sees it as a privilege. An opportunity to say, I love you, Lord= in a concrete, tangible way.®

There's a charming tradition that has to do with the site upon which the beautiful temple of Solomon was erected. It is said to be located in the center of a wheat field once owned by two brothers. One of them had a family, the other was single. One night, after the harvest, the wheat having been divided into two equal parts and placed at opposite sides of the field, the elder brother said to his wife, "My younger brother does not have a family. Surely he must be lonely without the companionship of a good woman and the laughter of happy children. I think I'll take some of my wheat and put it with his. I am so much better off than he."

At the same time, in his house at the other side of the field, the younger brother was saying to himself, "My elder brother is married. He has the added responsibility of a wife and children. His expenses are so much greater than mine. I think I'll take some of my wheat and put it with his. I am so much better off than he."

In a spirit of giving, not out of a sense of duty but out of a sense of love, the brothers arose and started out on their respective missions of brotherliness. In mid-field they met, each with his arms loaded with wheat for the other. According to the tradition, it was upon that piece of ground, hallowed by the spirit of love, that the magnificent temple of Solomon was built.

The important thing to remember in all of this is that when you're in love, whether it be with your brother, your spouse, or your Lord, the motive for your giving is never a sense of duty, but always a sense of love. Right now I am thinking of my sainted Mother. Suppose, when she was still alive, I took her a present and said, "Mom, you've been so very kind to me in the past. Now that I have a little money of my own, I feel it's my duty to give you a present."

What kind of satisfaction would there be in that for her? How much more pleased she would be if, whatever gift I gave her, came out of a sense of love. How much more she would value it. Even so, with our love gifts to God: The tithes and offering we bring...the bits of service we do...these must be brought and done, not in a sense of duty, but rather, out of a sense of love. For this is the measuring stick: you are in love when giving is not a chore, but a source of constant

delight.

Based Upon Faith and Trust

A fourth proof that you're in love is when your relationship to your beloved is based upon faith and trust, not suspicion and doubt. Forgive me for repeating it, but I just love the story about Adam and Eve who were having a discussion shortly after the creation. Adam came home quite late one night and it was very evident he had been imbibing in wine that had been red too long. Eve, of course, questioned him about his activity and finally she asked him if there was another woman. Adam was safe there! And he answered, "Why Eve, you're the only woman in the world." Well, they say a woman convinced against her will is of the same opinion still. After they went to bed that night, Adam was awakened by a tapping. It was Eve, counting his ribs!

I suspect that a little of the proper type of jealousy is a good thing. The Bible says our Lord is jealous of His position in our lives. He makes it perfectly clear that He must have first place. That He must be Lord of all or He will not be Lord at all.

This is as it should be. It is simply a reciprocal agreement. He gave Himself completely for our sakes and therefore, there can be no doubt about His love for us. Neither can there be any doubt of His complete faith and trust in us. He has left us the tremendous task of being His personal emissaries on earth. Can we do anything less than give ourselves completely to Him in return?

Can we nullify His trust in us by refusing to exercise trust in Him? By refusing to recognize the sacredness of the vow we made when we took Christ into our hearts? The vow to enthrone Him as Lord? To obey Him with complete faith and trust? To live in the confident belief that His will for us is best? Not if we really love Him! It's a simple fact, you see, that when you are in love your relationship to your beloved is based upon faith and trust, not suspicion and doubt.

Actions Speak Louder than Words

Another positive way to be sure you're in love is when actions speak louder than words. One

night a boy called up his girl and said, ADarling, I love you with all my heart. I'd cross the burning Sahara desert to be with you. I'd climb the highest mountains to be with you. I'd conquer the deepest seas to be with you. And I'll come over in a little while if it stops raining.@

Well, that's about the concept some people have of love. It is all of the lips and none of the heart. But that's not a biblical view of love. In the New Testament, we read that when Jesus was born, wise men came and laid their gifts in the manger. There was no record of their uttering a word. Several years later, a woman came to Christ and she anointed His head with precious oils and spices. Again, there is no record of her saying a word, yet Jesus blessed her for the things she had done.

What a beautiful witness to the fact that deeds of love are just as important to our Savior as are words of love. And so it is that each time you are present in God's house, each time you place your envelope in the offering plate, each time you do a deed of kindness, seen or unseen, by that simple act you, too, are proving to Christ that you love Him.

AFor as much as ye have done it unto the least of these, you have done it to Me@ (John 14:15).

Never Take the Other Person for Granted

Finally, true love never takes the other person for granted. Someone has said quite cynically that you can always tell how long folks have been married by whether they say, AShit that door@ or AHoney, would you mind closing the door?@

More than one woman in this congregation would have a fatal attack of thrombosis if her husband brought home a bouquet of flowers some evening when it was not a special day. And, to the wives may I say with admitted husband-like trepidation, how do your expressions of affection compare with those of, say, the week after you were married? Do you see what I'm getting at? More divorces have had their beginning by couples taking each other for granted than any other thing.

The true Christian never takes his Lord for granted. Calvary and all that it stands for is always in

the foreground of her thinking. Communion with Christ through prayer is a daily must. A better understanding of Christ-s will through faithful Bible study is essential. Church attendance is never a matter of convenience, but rather a privilege that is never questioned.

Just as the love bands which hold a husband and wife together grow stronger with the passing years, so too, the Christians find their love for Christ growing deeper and more intimate as time goes by. It is true, of course, that Christian experience, like marriage, can get in a rut. Glowing coals cool quickly if not fanned and added to. How important then becomes the knowledge that true love never takes the other person for granted. How important that we be alive to the necessity of constantly renewing our vows so that through our lives, as well as through our lips, we give proof of our love to Christ.

When all is said and done there are only three kinds of people in this auditorium this morning. First, there are those who are true to their first love of Christ. Second, there are those who have lost their first love. And third, there are those who have never loved Him at all. You alone can decide which group you belong to. But as you judge yourself, remember that when you are truly in love with Christ: He will know. You will know. Your friends will know. Yes, even your Pastor will know. You just can't hide it. For it will shine through on your face.

This brings us back to our point of beginning:

ALove is a matter of the will, not a matter of the emotions. @

Love is something more than the sort of silly sentimentality we often see paraded around today. In the Christian sense, love is a determined act of the will when, wishing only the best for our beloved, we decide to prove our love to Him, to others, and to ourselves, not by saying what He did, but by doing what He said!

AIf you love me...you will keep my commandments. @