

# Faith Working Through Love

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These four words would make a great mission statement for every Christian and every church. It is difficult to imagine more truth and profundity packed within so concise a phrase. Here you have the three great principles of our salvation—faith, works, and love—placed side-by-side in their relationship to each other: Faith works through love. Before I talk about that, however, let's look at the context. The phrase comes from Gal 5.6, in which Paul contrasts it with circumcision and uncircumcision, which he says are nothing. The Judaizers looked on circumcision (or uncircumcision) as the badge of who you are in relation to God, the proof of your justification (or lack of) in God's sight. To them, being circumcised was the sign that you kept the law, which meant that you were in favor with God. But Paul states that either way, it means nothing. What is something, however, is "faith working through love." This is the true badge of justification, the true mark of being in favor with God. Jesus himself touched in part on this in Jn 13.34-35: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

So perhaps "faith working through love" is not so much a "mission statement" as it is an "identity statement." It isn't describing what we do, so much as it describes as to who we are. Christians are those whose faith works through love. But as I said, packed within this concise statement is a world of profound truth. So let's unpack it a little. First, there is faith. In the context of Gal 5, faith is opposed to justification by law—not simply the Law of Moses, but law in general (vs.4). Law, by its very nature, demands flawless perfection (vs.3), which is burden or yoke that is too much for us to bear (cf. vs.1). Faith, on the other hand, by its nature recognizes our utter failure, and looks to the merciful grace of God. It looks outside of one's self for justification, trusting in Another.

But justifying faith is not simply an inner attitude or belief. It is a faith that works ("faith working..."). In the very same breath, Paul speaks of "obeying the truth" (Gal 5.7). Thus we see the relationship between faith and works. Works is what faith does. James likewise spoke of this essential relationship when he said: "Was not Abraham justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the alter? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected" (Jas 2.22). Thus, it is "faith working."

But Paul's statement also reveals the means by which faith works: through love. Jesus spoke of this as well when he said, "If you love me you will keep my commandments" (Jn 14.15). Love is the motivator behind a working faith. For example, when Christ, through his apostles, commanded believers to be baptized, faith obeys not in self-righteousness, but in love for God. But the love Paul talks about in Gal 5 is not simply love for God or his son Jesus Christ, but love for one another (vs. 13-15). Faith works itself out in and through our love for each other. And that brings us back to our badge of identity, as well as our mission statement.