

How do we show God that we love God?

I got a haircut. My hair was long, into the middle of my back. So, I got it cut off. I tidied myself up. I got rid of the checked swandri shirts, the jeans went by the way, as did the motorbike boots, along with the motorbike. I brought myself some new clothes, mind you I might have gone a bit far with the safari jacket, walk shorts and long socks.

Someone I knew in Whangarei saw me just after all this occurred and they almost dropped their shopping.

I was a big unit at 19 stone or 120 kilos and I started running.

Out came the ear ring, I stopped smoking cigarettes, selling and taking drugs, and drinking. I stopped swearing. I stopped going to the pub with my mates on a Friday and Saturday night. I got rid of my record collection after hearing some enthusiast from the US say that the devil was using the back masking on them to influence my thinking. I had 100's and 100's of them.

Janet and I stopped sleeping together and started thinking about getting married. We went to Bible study, home group, church, church camps, and I went all over the countryside seeking the Holy Spirit.

I started studying, listening to tapes, enrolling in courses, reading Christian books.

I became a terror around the neighbourhood, talk about Jesus, I literally couldn't talk about anything else. My Mum got sick of me turning up at all hours of the day and night telling her to stop smoking, stop drinking and start coming to church. Poor woman, I must have made her life a misery ... not that she took a heck of a lot of notice mind you.

I started thinking about what I believed, about what was right and what was wrong, about being holy, separate and righteous. I started thinking about sin and its infection. Who to associate with, and who not? What not to do and who not to be around?

How do we show God that we love God?

By seeking to be holy and rejecting the world?

There is a lot of truth in the idea that this was a very good for me for a bit, as I got myself sorted out. But over time, this became a problem. I found that it led me to a certain way of living which I realised wasn't helpful. Nor was it what I understood the gospels, especially Matthew, Mark and Luke were saying. It's what we spoke of last week, what Jesus seems to be calling the Pharisees from. Pride in their own righteousness. I was proud that I was trying so hard; reading and studying, coming to church, seeking to be holy. There is nothing wrong with these things, it is the pride I was taking in them that was the problem, I simply got puffed up in all my effort and hard work and then, it was all about me. Look at me loving God.

I realised that the stress, the strain, the effort and the worry about **"How do I show God that I love God?"** was having the exact opposite effect than I'd hoped.

I became so proud of the rules I was keeping ... loving the Lord with all my heart and soul and mind ... I thought ... that I forgot the most important bit ... the bit that it's all for ...

How do we show God that we love God?

Jesus doesn't die for a set of rules, for a series of do's, don'ts and should nots. Jesus doesn't die so that we can feel superior to our brothers and sisters because we pray more than they do, give more than they do, come to church more often than they do, swear less, smoke less, drink less than they do. Don't eat meat, dairy or fish, wear leather, drive a petrol car, or use glad wrap.

Jesus doesn't die so we could look down on our whanau because they vote New Zealand First, the Maori Party, Green, Act, National or Labour, New Conservative, Advance New Zealand, or even Donald Trump.

Jesus doesn't die for any of the ism's, as important as they may be, any political ideas, as important as they may be, Jesus doesn't die for ideas, for holiness, for feeling superior and full of pride. Jesus doesn't die so people can be for excluded, so the privileged few can go through.

Jesus dies for people. All people. Everywhere.

Even people like me. Even people like you.

And that's when I realised ...

How do we show God that I love God? ...

By loving our neighbour as we love ourself.

All our neighbours

Not that I'm any good at it

But at least I've worked out ... that's what I'm supposed to be doing.

Thanks be to God.