

# If You Really Loved Me

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So we pray, as Jesus taught us to pray. Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen. You may be seated.

In his commentary, Richard Phillips tells a story, a true story, about a man named Usher, Archbishop Usher, and he was shipwrecked on the coast of Ireland. And after he came to land, he went into a small town and he found the local pastor, and he asked this pastor for help. And the pastor was uncertain that he really was an archbishop and whether he should help or not. So he wanted to test him. He said, how many commandments are there?

And Usher, the archbishop answered, eleven. And the pastor said, nope, there's ten. If you can prove to me there's eleven, I'll help you. And so Archbishop Usher said, turn to John, chapter 13, verse 34, and read that. So he did.

And it says, a new commandment I give you that you love one another, just as I have loved you. You are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. And so that pastor helped Archbishop Usher in his time of need. If there is one trait that should characterize you and I as Christians above all others, it doesn't mean there's other issues that aren't important.

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The trait that should characterize us is love. Love for the Lord, love for our brothers and sisters in Christ, love for the lost God is love. And when he's in our life, that should be working in our life. Paul's focus in this letter of first Thessalonians and also second thessalonians has been the second coming of Jesus Christ. He is coming again.

We look forward to that. As a result of that, he closes each chapter with something about the coming of Christ in this book. And he ended chapter three with a prayer in verse eleven. Now may our God and father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

I've often said, when we stand before the Lord, when he comes back, or we die, to go to see him. He's not going to ask us, did you have a good time down there? Did you believe all the right doctrines, whatever they are? Did you believe all of them? That'll be important.

I believe he'll ask us, did you love my son Jesus Christ? That's what life is about. God loved us and sent his son in the world to save us. And as a result of that we should love him. So Paul says in verse nine now concerning brotherly love, we have no need for anyone to write to you.

No need to write about brotherly love. But he does. I don't need to, but I will. And we have to ask the question, why does he do that? That word brotherly love is in the Greek is the word Philadelphia.

And a love for friends. It's a mutual love that exists between christian brothers and sisters. It's a love that cares for others because of a relationship that you have with them. Might be the relationship of a family, it might be the relationship of friends. But it definitely is a relationship that we should have in a christian church, a love for one another.

And so if Paul doesn't need to write about this, why does he? And I think we see a clue to that down in verse ten because he encourages them do this more and more. And so

wherever we're at in our love for others, I guarantee you you have room to grow. You have room to love more than you do now. And that's what he's encouraging us to do.

We need to grow in our love for other christians. Having been a pastor for 45 years in different churches, I know that is true. It's easy to struggle in that area because we're people and we have problems and sometimes we don't get along. Sometimes we disagree. And yet we're still called to love each other because of our relationship with the father.

We're part of his family and we're to love each other like brothers and sisters. And whenever our love for others grows, you go back to what he says. At the beginning of chapter four, he talks about pleasing God. It pleases our father when he sees his children loving one another the way Christ loves us. So let's look at this.

He gives two reasons why he doesn't need to write to Thessalonians about brother love. First of all, he says, for you yourselves have been taught to by God to love one another. Loving one another is part of Jesus message. It's one of the things that he constantly proclaimed to his disciples that we are to love others the way he loved us. John tells us for this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

And if you go to a church that doesn't teach and doesn't practice this love, you might be wondering, am I in the right church or not? I've seen people over the years that have left churches because they did not feel loved, they did not feel cared for, and they were wondering, what's going on. Several years ago, Sandra and I went to a Bible conference in Gig harbor. Somebody invited us, and we were excited to go. And one of the speakers got up and he shared a story about a church he had pastored in eastern Oregon.

He said, I'd been there about a month, but I went to the post office. He was a baptist pastor. I went to the post office, and the local pentecostal pastor was in the church. And when he saw me, he greeted me, well, welcome to our town. We're glad you're here.

And then he said, you and I should get together to pray for our town. His response was, I'm not going to pray with you. And he walked out of the post office. Guess what we did? We walked out of the meeting.

And yeah, they had different theology, but they were both a child of the king. They both loved the people in that community and wanted to see them come to Christ. And it doesn't mean that they were going to worship together and agree on everything, but they could at least come together and pray with one another for the things that God cares about. In the same way. We've heard that message from the beginning.

You see it especially in the book of John, that we're to love one another. It's evidence that you belong to Jesus Christ. The second reason Paul doesn't need to write them concerning brotherly love, but he does, is in verse eleven. And we mentioned this already. He says, but we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.

Don't be content with where you're at in your love. Be crying out. More love, Father. More love for you, more love for your church, more love for the lost. I believe it's a prayer that God loves to hear and that he wants to answer, because when we pray that prayer, we are acting the way he acts, we're caring the way he cares.

And I've been involved in a lot of ministerial groups over the last 45 years and won't go into that. But there was one that I absolutely loved, and it was right here in the north beach. And there were five of us pastors here. Copeland crossing, hump, Tulis, Pacific beach and Tahola. We met together every week for ten years.

We rotated among the churches, so whatever church it was, that pastor was in charge. We shared memory verses with each other. And boy, that put the pressure on. You had to memorize that verse before you went to the meeting. We shared events that were happening in our church in case somebody wanted to be involved.

We prayed for each other. We actually exchanged pulpits where another pastor would come and preach here and I would go and preach in his church. We shared some Easter sunrise services and Christmas Eve services together combined. We even took our wives out together with us to have dinner several times. And I can confidently say

that there was a love between us.

We weren't threatened by each other. And what if one of your guys wants to go to my church or whatever? And the fact was, two of those pastors were pentecostal, one was anti pentecostal, and two of us were kind of somewhere in between. But, you know, it didn't matter. And we weren't there to promote ourselves.

And no one was the superstar. We were just demonstrating love to each other. And I believe that God was pleased. And I mentioned that lasted for ten years before some of them moved away. Well, since loving our brothers and sisters in Christ, such an important topic, and what should define a church, Paul shares four ways to express that love in verse ten through twelve.

And they're kind of strange ways. Kind of like, really, is this what love is? So let's look at them. And it seems like Paul is saying, well, you're doing good, but there may be some ways that you can do it even better. And of course, the ultimate example of love was our savior, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came into the world to lay down his life for his friends so that we could have salvation. And I don't think any of us have come to that place yet where we're exactly like Jesus Christ, where we lay down our lives, so we all have room to grow in our love for Jesus Christ. I already mentioned, he said to do it more and more. And it seems that Paul is saying, you know, you're doing good. I appreciate the effort that you're making.

You're reaching out not just to people in your church in town, but even people in other towns. And it's an example of Christ's love when you do that. And so they had modeled that, but they had a ways to go to grow in that love. A second, he tells them, aspire to live quietly. Want to know how to love more?

Aspire to live quietly. Now, what does that mean? What does that mean? Well, I think Paul's saying, make it your goal not to be annoying. Okay.

And we went out to dinner Friday night. We had to get something in town, so we went out to dinner. We went to a chinese restaurant. And the lady, one of the waitresses, she didn't wait on our table, but she waited on the one next to it. She had the loudest, most obnoxious voice and just carried through the whole restaurant.

And we were going, almost cringing when she was. And had this kind of hackle kind of laugh that she did. And it was annoying. And the fact is, if people talk too much and especially about other people, it becomes annoying. That's not loving that person.

Sometimes the best thing you could do to express love is just to be quiet and maybe listen a little bit. Okay, just be quiet. And so he's saying, that's one way you can express love to other people. And instead of talking all the time, maybe use those two ears to listen a little bit, to care about what that person's going through, to be concerned about them. And he's saying, that's a way that we can demonstrate christian love.

The third thing he says is to mind your own affairs. And so I looked that up in the greek and it says, mind your own business. Mind your own business. And again, in a lot of ways that would be expressing love, wouldn't it? I got to take care of my problems.

I don't have enough time to take care of your problems or even to point them out. And I know Paul expands on this over in two Thessalonians, chapter three, verse eleven. And he says quite a bit, but I'm just going to mention verse eleven, he says, for we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies, but busybodies. Always getting involved in other people's affairs and bringing up this or that. And really it's not showing love for that person by sharing things that don't need to be shared.

And again, over 45 years of ministry, I've just been amazed at the nitpicking that often happens in churches. Did you see what so and so was wearing today? You know, did you hear how they were singing? You know, did you know that? And on and on and on and on.

And it reminds me of chickens. Jeremy mentioned chickens last week in his and service. If you happen to have a chicken that has a little sore, you know what the other chickens do? They start picking at it and you get enough time, they'll kill the other chicken. One little peck at a time.

And that often happens to people's souls, that people not minding their own business, nitpicking over every little thing. And they are not demonstrating love. We're supposed to be healing others, not harming them. So that's a third way of expressing love. The last way he mentions, he says, and to work with your hands as we instructed you.

I don't think Paul is saying you should be manual laborers. Many of the people in the early church were slaves, and that's what they were. They worked at manual labor. But what he's saying is, you need to take care of yourself. You need to do the best you can at providing for your needs instead of depending on someone else to do it for you.

And when you read through the lines, through the rest of the this chapter, they thought Jesus had either come back already or he was going to come back real soon. Therefore, why am I working so hard? I'll just sit and wait. Well, after a while of sitting and waiting, you still need to eat, don't you? And you haven't been working, so you're going to ask somebody else, hey, will you feed me?

And he talks about this again in two Thessalonians. If a man will not work, he will not eat. Now, obviously, there's times when people can't work. He's not talking about that. And we are to care for others.

In first Timothy, it talks about caring for widows that have needs, and our church has done that. We're helping three or four widows with their needs, but they're working. They're working in the church, and they're not trying to take advantage of the rest of us. And essentially, that's a way that you can love someone else. You don't take advantage of their charity.

And so those are four ways we can love each other. And Paul gives us two reasons why we should do this. In verse twelve, he says, so that. Love one another in these four ways. So that.

And we see the first sonet that says that you may walk properly before outsiders. And the fact is, is outsiders, they watch you and they make evaluations based on the way you live. I didn't realize this, but early in my ministry, I found out that a lot of pastors in small towns especially, had brought reproach upon the church. And people were watching them. They wouldn't mow their yard or they'd be out washing their car on Sunday.

And even the non Christian realized, that's not right. You know, you should be taking care of things. And you and I have a responsibility to demonstrate love because people are watching and we need to make Christ attractive, the changes that he's doing in our life. And so he mentions that first, if we're a good worker and we see this in the workplace, if you are a good worker, people are going to know if you're a Christian or not. I remember when I was working for Lamb Weston and I was a foreman and been there maybe a week or two, and the supervisor that I was working under said, are you a Christian?

And I go, yeah. How'd you know? Because I hadn't said anything. He said, well, I could just tell by the way you live their life, I wasn't hearing any swear words. And you were positive.

And those things they watched. The second reason, he says, so we won't be dependent on others. And as much as possible, we need to take care of our needs and not take advantage of other people. In that sense, we're making every effort. And there's another place where it talks about when we work.

It's the idea that we can be givers, not takers. We have something to be able to contribute to others. Well, loving each other is so important that Paul, as well as Peter and John, he mentions loving your brother and sister in every one of his letters. And that shows us how important that is in a church, that we are a loving church. And that's important because that's where the rubber meets the road, isn't it?

Yeah, we're a loving church. Okay, how are you demonstrating that? How are you working that out? How can I see that? Listen to what John says over in one.



John, chapter four, verse seven through twelve. And the apostle of love, and he says there in verse seven, beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God. And whoever loves is then born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this, the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only son in the world so that we might live through him.

In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God. If we love one another.

God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. And it's a work of the Holy Spirit that he wants to do in each one of our lives. Now, this is where many of us are like the Pharisee. When Jesus, he asked Jesus what are the two greatest commandments? And of course, what did he say?

Love the Lord your God as yourself. And what was the second one? Love your neighbor as yourself. He tried to get off the hook on that. Well, who's my neighbor?

And of course, Jesus went into the good Samaritan and all of that. He's the one that demonstrated true love. And the truth is, it's easy to love the neighbor you like. Okay. Even in church, it's hard to love the one you don't like, you don't agree with.

I've shared this story before, but God taught me this lesson a long time ago. And my first wife's dad was in the apostolic faith church in Portland. It was an old time pentecostal church, came right out of Azusa street. And they had not changed in all those years. They were still trying to do it the way Azusa did.

And we would go to their summer conference to see him, and they graciously gave us a cabin. I don't know if Jeremy remembers running around at this camp meeting, and they would have three, 4000 people at this camp meeting. And we'd been there several years. And I was listening to what they were teaching and, oh, Lord, you know, oh, man, you know, this is, this is so wrong, you know. And so I was sitting there in my mind being critical of this church.

In the midst of that, I felt like God just slapped me up alongside the face and says, there are people here who love me. And I thought, yeah, I know that I'd met enough people in that church through my wife's dad to realize there were people that not only loved the Lord, but even loved us, who were a different persuasion. And then I felt like God said to me, I don't appreciate you being critical of my children.

Now, we had a lot of differences, and I'd never been able to worship there because of those differences. But I can say that those people loved Jesus Christ. They would go out on the street corners and preach Christ. And in the thirties, people threw rocks at him because they were sharing the message. They had a big sign downtown Portland.

It's not there anymore, but the big sign says, Jesus saves. And they were reaching out to people that came off the ships and leading people to the Lord. And many people gave testimonies how God had saved them and changed their lives. And the truth is, who was I to be critical of God's children? Now, there's times that we have to point out issues if they're so far off that it's going to take away from the gospel.

But we need to be careful because they too are God's children. They're brothers and sisters, and we're to find ways to love them. One of the beautiful things about the ministerial group in Aberdeen, it's made up of people from different churches. And before I came to this church, and Ann would have been here, they were having problems, and Newt had shared that there had been a church split here, and they were having problems at this ministerial group. And so the pastor says, we want to come out on Saturday morning at 08:00 to pray for you and your church.

And they're great. They came out four Saturdays in a row. And guess who came?

Four pastors from charismatic churches. And this was not a charismatic church. And it touched Newt's heart to see people that he'd been critical of, that he didn't agree with, were the ones that loved him enough to take a Saturday morning to come out and pray for his church. And then when they had the first prayer summit, they would match you up with a pastor in your room. And he got Bob Rester from the neighborhood church out in Central park who was charismatic, and they became

wonderful friends.

They didn't agree with each other, but they became friends because of their love for Christ. And so God is encouraging you and I, and we have differences, and there are problems, but by the spirit, we're called to love one another. Sometimes that means overlooking some faults. Sometimes it may mean correcting someone out of love. But we do it in the name of Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for the glory of God.

Let's pray.

Father, we thank you first of all for your great love for each of us. That love isn't based on how good we are or how likable we are or any of those things. It's based on your character, that you are love, that you want the best for each one of us, that you're working in our life to produce that good. And we pray as your children, God, that we would have that same trait, that we would care for one another, we'd love one another. We'd be building each other up, and you'd be glorified through that.

In Christ's name, amen.