

Imperatives for the Christian Life – Be Loving

1 Corinthians

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Bible Text: 1 Corinthians 16:14

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Good evening, everyone. It's good to see you. If you would, please turn to the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 16. And verse 13 says this:

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.¹

Again, it says this:

Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.²

Let's pray together.

Lord, we thank you that you have given us your Word. Tonight we will hear from you because we hear you as your Word speaks. Lord, I pray that we would understand that and that we would grasp that, that when we read the Scriptures and when we rightly proclaim them, we are hearing your voice because your Word is right here before us. Lord, we ask that your Spirit would apply this Word to us in a way that allows us to see how it must plug in to our everyday thinking and speech and behavior that, Lord, we would, in the power of your Spirit, live lives that are worthy of the calling that we have received in Christ, that we would live lives that are glorifying to you and satisfying to your people. We pray for anyone with us tonight who doesn't know you. Our desire and our prayer is for their conversion, that that supernatural work of your Spirit would be accomplished in their soul, that new birth would take place, that there would be repentance and faith in Jesus. We ask for this tonight in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well in verses 13 and 14 we are looking at five commandments, five imperatives. He is closing this letter to the Corinthians and these are some rapid fire imperatives. He doesn't want them to forget these things. He wants them, it is a must that they live out these things.

¹ 1 Corinthians 16:13-14.

² Ibid.

So far we have looked at the first commandment which is to be alert, spiritually alert, be watchful. We have seen that we are commanded to stand firm in the faith. Now that is the faith, objective truth, right? It is the faith that has been given to us, passed down to us, the Word of God. Stand firm in the truth, we could say. We are told that we are to be courageous. We are to act like men. And then last time we saw that we are to be strong and we recognize that this means that we are to be strengthened.

Tonight we come to the last one, verse 14:

“Let all that you do be done in love.”³

And I want us to recognize that we should not think of this as adding love to the others. It is not like this just stands alone by itself. No, the last imperative really is the atmosphere that makes all of the others what they are. You are not really being watchful unless you are doing so in love. You are not really standing firm in the faith unless you are doing that in love. You are not acting like men are being strong unless you are doing that in love. That is why he puts it to us the way that he does in verse 14. He says:

“Let all that you do...”⁴

You see? The watchfulness would be included in that. All that you do, standing firm in the faith would be included in that, acting like men would be included in that. Being strong would be including in that. All that you do, let it be done in love. So that we can say this is the supreme imperative. This is what makes everything else what it is.

John MacArthur said it well when he said this. “Love complements and balances everything else. It is the beautiful softening principle. It keeps our firmness from becoming hardness and our strength from becoming domineering. It keeps our maturity gentle and considerate. It keeps our right doctrine from becoming obstinate dogmatism and our right living from becoming smug self righteousness.”

We understand it is a priority when we listen to what God says through the apostle Peter in 1 Peter chapter four verses eight when the Bible says:

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.”⁵

So tonight as we have done with the others, let us meditate on this last imperative. Let’s think about, right, I mean, if we are reading along in our Bibles and we come to this commandment and we ask, “What does it mean and how do I live it out?” that is what we are going to do tonight. We are just going to walk around it, meditate upon it and think about it.

³ 1 Corinthians 16:14.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ 1 Peter 4:8.

Now the first thing I would point out about would be this. We, first, as we said even with the other imperatives, we first need to just stop and let it sink in that this is, indeed, an imperative. We are commanded to be loving. It is an imperative that we be loving. This commandment is as binding upon us as all the others. It is as necessary as all the others. In fact, according to Scripture, it is the chief commandment.

Matthew 22:36.

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?”

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”⁶

You can sum up the totality of the teaching of the Word of God in this. Love God and love others. You would obey every other commandment of Scripture if you loved God with all your heart and loved others as yourself.

In fact, I know we know it well, but just turn to the left there to 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and let’s be reminded. Notice the preeminence of this quality, this commandment. It is this important.

Verse one.

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels...”⁷

That is, if I have wonderful eloquence, but I don’t have love, what am I?

“I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”⁸

That is, you are just making noise.

“And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith...”⁹

You notice the hyperbolic nature of these statements? I mean, he stretches out to as far as you can imagine. If you possessed all these things...

“...so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned...”¹⁰

⁶ Matthew 22:36-40.

⁷ 1 Corinthians 13:1.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 13:2.

I mean, if I were to engage in the greatest most unimaginable acts of self sacrifice, but I don't have love, I gain nothing. This is indispensable.

So, verse four. What is it? Well:

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.¹¹

Look back at chapter 16 and our verses of Scripture. So this is non negotiable. This is an imperative. It is a must.

I think that is especially important for us to be reminded of when we rightly focus on the importance of sound doctrine. It is right. I want to underscore that. It is right that we insist on sound doctrine. But I really believe that sometimes what we do is we take the commandment to stand firm in the faith, we take the commandment to be strong and to act like men, we take those kinds of commandments seriously and then we just sort of, you know, push to the side this commandment to be loving.

Now we can't even stand firm in the faith if we are not being loving.

This is also important to be reminded of when we rightly understand and rightly recognize that there is a lot of false love in the world. Those of us who are mindful of the fact that there is a lot going on in the name of Jesus and in the name of love that isn't really love, we are right to recognize that, but at the same time realize something. All of the false love in the world will never be an excuse for the absence of real love. I mean, we can stand together and condemn all of the false kind of love as I heard a preacher years ago refer to it as sloppy agape, right? I mean, all this sloppy agape, all this false kind of love. We are right to recognize there is a false kind of love. But listen. Just to be able to identify what is false, doesn't excuse you from walking in what is real.

It is right that we stand for true doctrine, but not without love. It is right that we recognize all the empty pseudo kind of love in the world that is right, but not without walking in true love.

So the first thing we can say about it is it is an imperative. It is imperative. We are commanded tonight by our God to do everything in love.

Second thing we will say about it is this. It is imperative that we be truly loving, that what we walk in is genuine love.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:2-3.

¹¹ 1 Corinthians 13:4-7.

Now just remember what I have just said. But having said what I just said, it is still right, it is still important that we recognize that a lot of what is being done today in the name of love is, in fact, a great blight on the true Christian faith. There is a lot of pseudo love in the world, people violating Scripture in the name of love, people playing the coward in the name of love. Well, I just want to love them.

Well, in some cases I think the truth is you are just afraid to confront them. People affirming sin in the name of love, leaving people with the impression that what they are doing is not really that wrong, when, in fact, it is offensive to God.

As a result, people keeping others from accountability in the name of love or if you were to sum it all up you could say people refusing to love in the name of love, because it is loving to point people to the truth of God's Word. It is loving to be bold enough, courageous enough to point them to their sin. It is loving to not affirm them when they are in sin. It is loving to hold them accountable. All that is love.

If we think about false Christianity, many things going on today in our world in the name of love. What is so sad about it is, God is being dishonored in the name of a virtue that is actually defined by him. If we ask what is love, the answer is it is defined by God. God is love.

1 John 4:8.

“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”¹²

1 John 4:16.

“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”¹³

What we are after is true love. And know this, that if what we have is true love, it is going to be like God, because God is love.

Remembering that God is love, then, we also need to constantly bear in mind God is light. The love of God will never be at odds with the holiness of God. True love will never be at odds with truth. True love is truthful. True love is holy.

1 John 1:5.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have

¹² 1 John 4:8.

¹³ 1 John 4:16.

fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.¹⁴

You see, the same apostle who is used by God to tell us that God is love also tells us that God is light. And the same apostle who is used, John, who is used by God to tell us that if we don't walk in love, we don't know God, that same apostle is used by God to tell us if we don't walk in light, we don't know God, because God is love and God is light. God is love and God is holy. True love will be holy. True holiness will be loving. These things always go together. True always walks hand in hand with truth. It always walks in step with the truth. The moment you leave truth behind, you have left love behind. But it is also true to say the moment you leave love behind, you have left truth behind, because truth is never by itself. If it is really the truth, exists in the context of the love of God.

Ephesians 4:15 says this:

“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.”¹⁵

You see, true love is like Jesus. It is truthful and loving at the same time. That is what we are to walk in.

So the first thing we say is, it is an imperative. We are commanded to love. The second thing we say about it is, it is imperative that we what we have is true love, genuine love, which means it is going to be like our God. It is going to be full of love and full of light at the same time.

The third thing I want you to notice about this imperative in verse 14 is that it is imperative that we do everything in love.

“Let all that you do be done in love.”¹⁶

Now let that sink in. When are we ever excused to be unloving? What is the answer? Never. I mean, take note of that. We are not commanded to be loving in just, you know, sort of general terms and kind of vague way. We are not commanded to be loving occasionally. We are not commanded to be loving in some areas of our life and then in other areas we are excused not to be loving because circumstances dictate it or we are really aggravated or we have really been mistreated or we are really frustrated. No, we are commanded to be loving in everything at all times, in every circumstance with every person and situation.

One hundred percent of the time the commandment of God stands before us: be loving.

¹⁴ 1 John 1:5-7.

¹⁵ Ephesians 4:15.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 16:14.

Now to practice that is going to require self awareness and self examination. To walk in that commandment, true love in everything, to walk in that commandment, how would it affect us? What aspects of our life would be affected if we embraced this commandment and walk in it?

Well, a commitment to love is going to affect your motives. You see, this needs to be the answer to the why question. Why are you doing what you are doing. If you are being loving in everything, the answer to the why question is love, love for God, which is the starting place, the chief commandment, love for others. There is the whole law and the prophets. Why are you doing what you are doing? The answer needs to be love. What you are about to say, can you say the reason for it, the motive that stands behind it is love for God and love for them? The way you are behaving. Can you say that the motive behind it is love for God and love for them? The course you are choosing for your life, the goals or the ambitions that you have in your life, can you say the reason for your living is love for God and love for the world, the world of humanity, others?

A commitment to love will not only affect you motives, it is going to affect your manner. It is going to affect what you actually do. I mean, loving God and loving others will affect your speech.

Well, we are commanded that our speech is to be edifying, seasoned, salty in the sense of helpful, preserving, blessing, benefiting others with God's truth. If we are living our lives in life it is going to change what we say. It is going to change how we think.

Sometimes the most unloving thing we do is just the way we think about others, hard thoughts, suspicious thoughts, ungenerous thoughts, believing the worst, reading into their motives, thinking that we know their hearts when we don't. It is not loving. It is going to affect your behavior, your choices.

If I am committed to walking in this commandment it is going to affect me in terms of my motives and my manner. It is also going to affect my measurement of things.

We have to have a standard, don't we? You say, "Ok, I am to do everything in love."

Well, how do I know what that looks like? What kind of words are loving words? What kind of thoughts are loving thoughts? What kind of deeds are loving deeds? How do I find that out? We know the answer, don't we? What is the standard for love? Scripture. This book is the embodiment of God's standard of love. Now that is going to shake the world of some people, isn't it, because this book is in many ways a demanding book. The standard is high. God's standard for us is high. He commands us to be holy even as he is holy and that is love. That is God's love for us. God's love doesn't set us free to live in sin. God's love commands us to walk in his ways.

And so if you really love another human being, what are you going to do? You are going to point them to the truth of the Word of God. It is loving them.

There is much compromise that goes on in the name of loving people and it is not love and we have to be convinced of that. If I do not point people to the standard of God's Word, I am not loving them.

Now, if I do that in a proud, arrogant attitude that doesn't recognize my own proneness to sin and all of that, well, then that is not love either. Love is humble. But it is always truthful. We saw that in 1 Corinthians, didn't we? Love does not rejoice in iniquity or sin, but rejoices with the truth. That is love.

And then if I am going to walk in love, not only my motives and my manner and my measurements, my standards, but if I am going to walk in love in everything, it is going to affect my ministry to other people. It is going to change my relationships. It is going to change my relationships.

Think about... let's make this practical. Think about the church that is being addressed with this commandment, the Corinthian church. Think about the problems you know about from this letter that were going on in this church and think about if they were to receive, as they must, as they should, if they receive God's Word here and they begin to walk in it, think about how it would absolutely transform this fellowship in Corinth. You remember they were guilty of having a party spirit. Some said, "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas."

And it wasn't really about those men. It was about themselves. The people organized themselves according to party. It is about them. It is about exalting them.

Well, I am a Paul kind of guy myself.

That is not really about Paul. It is about you. So if you really walk in love it is not you first, it is God first and others, you last. If you are living that way what you really are after is the glory of God and the good of others. Do you know what happens? It destroys that party spirit. It destroys it. It eliminates it.

How about lawsuits? We are going to take each other to court. We are going to make sport of the legal system. We are going to sue each other. We are going to take disputes between brother and instead of dealing with them according to Scripture in the life of the Church we are going to go into the public arena and sue one another.

Well, if we really love the Lord and love each other, we won't do that, will we?

What about abuses around the Lord's supper table? What about coming early for the love feast and the rich people eating all their food and the poor showing up later and they have nothing to eat? That won't go on in Corinth anymore, will it, if they really love each other? Or how about getting drunk at the Lord's table which was going on there with some. How about that? That won't happen where love is being practiced.

What about the marital problems in Corinth? What about people divorcing each other? What about in marriage people withholding themselves from their spouse sexually? If we really love each other, that won't go on, will it?

And we won't be abusive toward each other in those matters. Love will change that, won't it?

What about the abuse of spiritual gifts? Look at me. Look at how gifted I am. Look at what I can do. Listen to me speak in languages. Watch me while I do this and all of the rest. If we are really walking in love, what happens to that? It changes.

What about the criticism of Paul? All the ways they were reading into his motives and into his actions and criticizing him unmercifully. If they really love the Lord and love him, that will change.

Why does Paul end with this set of imperatives and why is the crowing one of them all, "Do everything in love"? Because he knows that this will absolutely honor God, bless them and transform their church. In fact, he puts this quality as the badge that marks the true believer. This is how saved people are recognized. Look at how he ends this letter. Look at verse 21.

I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!¹⁷

Let anyone who doesn't love the Lord...

I mean, there are many ways you could describe a believer. But he chose to describe us that way. If you don't love the Lord, you are under God's curse, because saved people love.

So finally it is imperative that we love. It is imperative that what we practice is true love. It is imperative that we do everything in love, everything, which will affect our motives and our manner and our measurement and our ministry and not just at the church, at home, friendships, in the world.

Finally, what commitments should flow from this commandment? If we receive it tonight, if we begin to be more mindful of it and we strive to walk in it, what kind of commitments will flow out of an understanding of this? I want to leave you with four, four things that should change in us.

First I should get up every day and live every day understanding that everything has a purpose. And love is that purpose. Why should I go to work today? Well, love for God and love for others. To glorify God, to enjoy him and to make him known. That is my purpose.

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 16:21-22.

What is my purpose for my marriage? To love the Lord and to exercise the greatest privilege I could ever be given to share the love of Jesus with others.

And, you see, that begins right there in the most important relationship I have outside of Jesus, the relationship I have with my wife. I get to experience his love and to share his love with this precious person, a gift from God, my wife.

What is my purpose as a father? To love the Lord and to demonstrate his love to my children.

What is my purpose as a friend? To love the Lord and to demonstrate his love to my friends.

What is my purpose in the church? To love the Lord and to demonstrate his love in the midst of his people.

And there are many, many ways that can be demonstrated, but that is the purpose. So everything has a purpose. We have got to stop just sort of drifting through our lives. We have got to recognize and wake up to the fact that every day has a reason and the reason is love. Love for God and love for others.

This also, second, what commitment flows from this? A commitment to the idea that everything requires thoughtfulness. Love must be intentional. You have got to aim at it. You have got to think about it.

I just ask you tonight. Have you thought about being loving today? I mean, have you really? Have you thought about it in the terms we are talking about tonight? Have you thought?

You know what? Lord, today's purpose for my life is to love you and to make your love known.

Folks, we are called to think. You can't live the Christian life in a mindless fashion so that I need to be committed to living my life in a thoughtful fashion. I have got to keep myself aware of the Word of God. Meditate on it. Think about it. Think about this commandment.

Third, another commitment would be this. Everything is about someone else.

Here is a bottom line commitment for your life and my life. My life is about someone else. It is not about me. Love is sacrificial. That is the very essence of it. You want to know what love is? Look at the cross.

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Romans 5:8.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.”¹⁹

If you walk in love, you don’t come first. Even, I wonder even tonight. As we walk through God’s Word together tonight, I wonder how much of your thoughts have been centered on someone else. They need to be loving.

I may have mentioned one thing or another thing and you go, “Oh, yeah, I hope you are listening,” elbow, elbow. I hope you are paying attention.

And as you do that, well, who are you putting first? Who are you really focused on? What is the answer? You. And that is not love.

Have you instead sat here tonight and said, “Am I practicing this toward my wife?” Am I practicing this toward my children? Am I practicing this toward my church family, toward my friends, toward the lost person that I work with each day? Am I loving the Lord and demonstrating his love toward others? Am I sacrificing myself? Am I living a life of dying? Am I taking up my cross and following Jesus?

Everything has a purpose. The purpose is love. That all requires thoughtfulness and it has got to all be about someone else. And finally the last thought is that means that everything in my life must be done in faith, because the reason why you would live a life like this is you believe that God is an that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him.

In other words, you do this for God’s sake. You do this for God’s glory. You do this as someone who has experienced the love of Jesus and therefore you find it supernaturally natural and desirous to express the love of Jesus. That this what you want to do. That is who you want to be. The world will listen to what we have talked about tonight. The world would consider a life lived like we are talking about tonight and think you are the greatest fool in the whole world. Why would you live your whole life for anybody but you? And we hear this kind of thing, don’t we?

“Well, it was just time for me to take care of me. Well, I have spent my whole life, you know, taking care of children, taking care of my husband. And now it is just time for me to take care of me.”

No, my friend, you won’t know what life is until you stop living for you and you live for him and you live for everyone else but you. That is love. The commandment is this.

“Let all that you do be done in love.”²⁰

Let’s bow together for prayer.

¹⁹ John 15:13.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 16:14.

Father in heaven, we confess together that we don't... we wouldn't even know what love is apart from our Savior. We didn't know what love was until we knew Jesus. And you have poured out, according to the book of Romans, Father, you tell us you have poured out your love within our hearts by your Spirit whom you have given to be with us so that now we have been convinced of your love for us. We understand it in our Savior. It is centered in him and you have given us the desire to live it out and to express it toward others. I pray that we would strive each day to know what it is to love you, Lord, with all our hearts and all our minds, with all our soul, with all our strength. Let us, Lord, be consumed with the desire to love you with all that we are. Forgive us where there has been apathy. Forgive us where there has been lukewarmness. Forgive us where we have not loved you intensely. And then let us know the joy of seeing ourselves as living sacrifices, wholly devoted to you, offering ourselves every day on an altar for the souls of others. Teach us, Lord, how to live a life where we come last and we do it joyfully, esteeming others better than ourselves and in that way walking in the footsteps of our Savior. Let this begin in our homes. Let this begin in our families and then, Lord, let it shine forth from your people in every walk of our lives. We ask you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.