12-9-18

2 Corinthians 8:9

As we read the Bible, especially the New Testament, it shouldn’t take us very long to see how important love is. I say especially the New Testament because the word is used a lot and it is the obvious theme of numerous passages. Love is also prevalent in the Old Testament; sometimes we just have to read between the lines to see it. Time and again in the Old Testament, we see God pleading with His people to follow Him so that He can bless them; over and over God takes back His wayward Israel. Mercy and love are even extended to those outside of Israel to foretell His ultimate plan to bring all nations to Himself.

I also say that it “shouldn’t” take us long to understand the importance of love in God’s word because sometimes it does. We are fallen human-beings and we tend to miss that point. Often, we tend toward judgement instead of love. We are called to love by Jesus Himself. We are without excuse if we don’t follow through and the Bible doesn’t mince words when it comes to love. From 1 John 4:20*; If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar*.

The Christian is called to love in several directions. Most importantly, we are called to love God.

Mark 12:28-30

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, “What commandment is the foremost of all?” Jesus answered, “The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’

How important it is to love God. He is to be first, before anything or anyone else. We must get to know Him through His word and through prayer. The Holy Spirit will lead us to love God, and it must be our desire to love God. Really, it becomes something we decide to do; it is not simply some emotion we feel, it is action. We choose to put God before all things.

As Christians we are certainly called to love Jesus.

Matthew 10:37

“He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Again, Jesus, who is God, must come before any family tie. When Jesus says these things, He is not saying that family love is not important; He is not diminishing love between family members or even between any people. Several times, Jesus called out people for not following the command of God to honor their father and mother. Jesus admonished His disciples to allow children to come to Him. We are even called to lay down our lives for others. Jesus simply means that He must come first. If we are called to a ministry by Christ and our family objects, we must attend to the ministry. If obeying some command of Jesus offends our family, we must obey the command.

We are called to love other Christians.

John 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.”

Notice that this is a commandment. We are to show our love for Jesus by following His commandments. It is very important to not miss how Jesus modifies this command: *even as I have loved you*. Consider all that Jesus has done for us in love and that is how we are to treat His people. Remember all the things Jesus did for His disciples (and that He does for us) and we are to do the same for other Christians. That applies to brothers and sisters that are in every part of the world; that applies to Christians we come in contact with in the community; and with each person here today. The last can be the most difficult; in close proximity, we can rub each other the wrong way. But the body of Christ will not stand if we don’t love each other.

Christ also commands this love amongst us so that others can see. We are on display, as followers of Christ. Jesus calls us to be a good example to the rest of the world; by our love, others can be drawn to salvation. Simply by living this command, we are participating in the great commission: Christian love can make disciples of all the nations.

Jesus also calls us to a love that was very contrary to the Jewish way of looking at things. We who are a new creation in Christ are to love those who are outside of Christ.

Matthew 5:44

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

This may be the most difficult of all. How do we love someone who is out to get us? How do we pray for someone who causes us problems for no reason other than evil? That is what we are to do. Consider, that is what Jesus did for each of us. Once we become Christians, we really have it made. It doesn’t matter what difficulties we face in this life, they will be forgotten the moment we look upon our Saviour’s face. We have been crucified with Jesus, we no longer live for this world. Our hope is in the future.

Those who are outside of Christ have no such hope, they have no such future to look forward to. This miserable life is the best one they will ever have. The reason for Jesus’ command is that perhaps our love will turn our enemies to Jesus; perhaps our prayers will bring about change in their hearts and lead them to salvation. Jonah is a life lesson for us. We are to spread the good news of the Gospel and desire people to accept. It is up to God to choose vengeance, and He will do so righteously where we cannot.

We are called to love; we are called to love in a way that is beyond our capability. Jesus knows that and that is why we have the Holy Spirit. Jesus commands us to do the impossible so that we must depend on Him. Once we become Christian, the desire to please God and follow the commands of Jesus are placed in our hearts. So, we must ask for that ability to be given us. We do our best to work with the Holy Spirit, but all the while we depend on Him.

Now, this advent season is a time for us to think about Jesus. It is a special time to remember Him and dwell on His coming to earth. We talked last time about our sure hope that is based solidly on Him. Today we are looking at love and have given some consideration of the love that the Christian life calls us to. But how about the love that Jesus has for us? Let’s look back at our beginning verse:

2 Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.

Although the word “love” isn’t specifically mentioned, there is no doubt about it being shown here. Certainly, Jesus went though everything that He did in obedience to His Father; but the Bible is clear that it was willing obedience due to His great love for us. Occasionally, in your prayer time, think on all the ways Jesus has shown His love for you. Just from our passage, look at what He left to become one of us. For one thing, He left the presence of His Father.

Each of us has some idea in our minds and hearts what it will be like to be in the presence of God; what it will be like to be engulfed in His love. We can imagine how hard it would be to leave that, even for a brief time. Think how it would feel to leave the person you love the most in the world for over thirty years; but you would have to multiply that by infinity to have the love between the Father and the Son.

Jesus also left heaven. Would you want to leave the West Virginia mountains to go live in the Bronx? Again, multiply by infinity. And Jesus did this so that we could experience what He was leaving. Because of what He has given up, we can experience the love of God; we can experience heaven. We are so rich; the inheritance we have waiting through Christ is so great that it even seeps into our lives now.

Also, in great demonstration of Christ’s love stands the cross.

Hebrews 12:2

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

What joy was set before Jesus that He was willing to endure the cross? While I am sure that there are many points of joy for His work, one is certainly salvation for those whom He loves. Jesus wants us to be with Him for eternity so much that He was willing to suffer more than anyone will ever go through on this earth. He not only endured the mocking and cursing, the beatings and the thorns, the thirst and the nails, but the man Jesus suffered separation from His Father. This was more than a 30-year physical absence, this was a removal of His love and fellowship; We can only imagine Jesus’ heart breaking, all due to His love for us.

Look at the change Jesus had to make. He now has a physical body. He was Spirit only; of the essence of His Father and the Holy Spirit. And while He maintains that complete oneness with them, He is also now still a human-being and will remain so forever. Yes, He has a glorified body now, just as we are promised as His followers, but He is still a man. Furthermore, we read in John 20:27, after Jesus had been resurrected and had His glorified body, He appears to the disciples and speaks to Thomas.

Then He \*said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

The scars of Jesus’ crucifixion remain, even in His new eternal body. He will carry those scars forever, a constant reminder of what He did for us. Currently, to think on those scars brings a sense of shame. I feel as if any time I see His hands, I will hang my head, knowing those eternal scars are there on my account. But the Bible tells me something else.

Revelation 21:3-4

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

Because of this reassurance, I know that we will feel no shame when we see the nail prints. They will instead impress upon us even more how much we are loved.

Prayer

LORD, You have demonstrated Your love for us by sending Your only begotten Son to bear the punishment that we deserve. He has demonstrated His love for us by doing that work on the cross. Jesus, You came to this earth as a child to save us; You will come again as a King to rule us. We joyfully await Your arrival.

Thank You for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We are called to love; You, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and all those who have been made in Your image. By the strength of the Holy Spirit, may we answer this call and fulfill Your command. Help us to love, as You have loved us.

Jesus, Your love for us is comforting. It is beyond us; how can it be that You have chosen to love us as You have? We are so far below You, and yet, You were willing to sacrifice Yourself for us; and even now, You sit at the right hand of the Father and intercede for us. Your love is unending and we look forward to eternity with You.

Lord Jesus, it is in Your name we pray

Amen