

## Living the Love Commandments

Hello again. Last week I began sharing about the process through which we become more Christ like, in other words, how we begin to conform to the likeness of Jesus. I touched on the fact that a central aspect of conforming to his likeness is that we begin to have a love for others that we did not previously experience. Love is so much a part of the Christian walk that I feel it needs special attention, and that's the theme of this message. The title of this message makes it clear that for the Christian, love is not an option, it is a commandment and this fact is conveyed in Matthew 22 verse 36 to 40 (NIV) and this records Jesus speaking and answering one of the Pharisees:

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*

The commandments that Jesus is referring to, I have called the 'love commandments'. These commandments inform us that there should be a dual focus to our love; the first focus should be on God and the second on our fellow human beings. So, let's begin by looking at how we can demonstrate our love for God.

### Loving God

Now, at the centre of loving God is worship. In our natural lives, when we fall in love with someone deeply, we can make statements and actually feel that we are worshipping the ground that the object of our love is walking on. That's the intensity of worship that touches God's heart and that He seeks from us. Worship is not just something a music team carries out at the beginning of a church service. It's an all embracing concept; it's as Rick Warren says in a Purpose Driven Life<sup>1</sup>: "falling in love with Jesus".

It is also about trust. If we love someone, we generally feel able and willing to trust them, and this is how we should feel about God. If, however, we have doubts about God's ability to deliver on any of his promises; in other words, we have trouble trusting Him, it's really our problem and not His. We need to move from a position of believing in God as an 'out there' super being to actually believing God and totally trusting that He is true to His word even when we are going through difficult circumstances.

Why should we feel that way about God? Why should we love and trust him? Let's refer back to my point about loving someone in the natural world. In a husband and

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren (2002) A Purpose Driven Life. Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan.

wife situation, a major problem these days is adultery. There are even websites that promote adultery and are willing to facilitate adulterous connections. One of the major problems with adultery which, the Bible, especially in the book of Proverbs, warns against on many occasions is the loss of trust that follows. When this trust bond is broken, restoration is a difficult problem and much depends on the future behaviour of the guilty party. Now, I'm using this as an example because in our love bond with the Lord, He has, and will always be consistent, unchanging, forgiving and faithful to his promises. The history of the Jewish nation's walk with God described in the Old Testament confirms that God remained faithful to his chosen people, and it was they, the Jews, who were frequently guilty of adultery in the sense of giving their allegiance to other Gods, especially those of the surrounding nations.

In addition to His consistency and faithfulness, we have every reason to love a God who made such a sacrifice for us. The mighty, all powerful God took human form, was falsely accused, beaten and whipped and, faint through loss of blood, was made to carry his own instrument of execution until he could carry it no further. He then died an excruciating death while many of those He was dying for mocked Him and bayed for his blood. Despite this cruel and undeserved torture, He prayed for all those responsible. For those who have read the Bible, you may remember His dying words in Luke 23 verse 34 (NIV) *Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.* It's important to realize that this was a sacrifice not just for mankind in general but for you and for me as individuals.

Given the quality of God's love for us, we have every reason to love Him in return and again drawing on our human experience, when we love someone, we want to spend time with them. Therefore, we shouldn't be surprised to discover that God desires to spend time with us. This is why, for example, we are called to pray, worship and read His word amongst other things.

### Loving Others

The second love commandment is to love our fellow human beings. A useful mnemonic that captures a central aspect of love for others is the word 'TIME' and this is a particularly important commandment when it comes to our families. Time itself is a precious commodity, and there is a saying that no-one on their deathbed wishes they had spent more time in the office. Rather, they often wish they had spent more time with the people they love. This is an important message for many, many of us in this business world which is hectic. The mnemonic 'time' not only helps us to remember the key elements, but it also provides a useful insight into the essential qualities of the time we spend with our loved ones.

The letter 'T' indicates that we should be willing and happy to talk through issues with our loved ones, especially those that are troubling them. We should also practice active listening and not just go through the motions. The letter 'I' means that

we should show a genuine interest in the things that are important to those we love. 'M' means we should manage our time remembering the order of priority in the Christian life which is God first, family second then Church and finally job. Lastly, 'E' stands for encouragement and we should do everything we can to lift those we care about; we should speak life not death into the lives of those we love.

In this connection, we need to understand that our speech can bless or destroy our fellow human beings. It's a Biblical wisdom that we should think before we speak. This means we should tame the tongue. The book of James reveals to us the potential for evil of ill-considered talk. James 1 verse 26 (NIV) states this: *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*

James 3 verse 6 (NIV) has the following words: *The tongue ....is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

A little later in the same passage; namely, James 3 verses 9 to 10 (NIV), we learn that: *With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing.* We cannot love others if we use our tongue to destroy.

I recognise that there are times, however, when tough love is required; for example, Jesus was not slow in coming forward to condemn the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. However, this was not gratuitous but for a purpose; namely, to expose to them and others of the need to walk the talk. Obviously, this is a template for us too under circumstances where tough talk can serve the greater good.

One of the best ways to illustrate love for others is for me to recount a true story. It is a true story of John Harper<sup>2</sup>, a Baptist minister and widower who had a young daughter and this is the story:

"It was the night of April 14, 1912. The RMS Titanic sailed swiftly on the bitterly cold ocean waters heading unknowingly into the pages of history.....On board the ship that night was John Harper and his much-beloved six-year-old daughter Nana. According to documented reports, as soon as it was apparent that the ship was going to sink, John Harper immediately took his daughter to a lifeboat.

It's reasonable to assume that this widowed preacher could have easily gotten on board this boat to safety; however, it never seems to have crossed his mind. He bent down and kissed his precious little girl; looking into her eyes he told her that she

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.heavensinspirations.com/titanic.html>

would see him again someday. The flares going off in the dark sky above reflected the tears on his face as he turned and headed towards the crowd of desperate humanity on the sinking ocean liner. As the rear of the huge ship began to lurch upwards, it was reported that Harper was seen making his way up the deck yelling 'Women, children and unsaved into the lifeboats!' It was only minutes later that the Titanic began to rumble deep within. Most thought it was an explosion; actually the gargantuan ship was literally breaking in half. At this point, many people jumped off the decks and into the icy, dark waters below. John Harper was one of these people.

That night 1,528 people went into the frigid waters. John Harper was seen swimming frantically to people in the water leading them to Jesus before the hypothermia became fatal. Mr. Harper swam up to one young man who had climbed up on a piece of debris. Rev. Harper asked him between breaths, "Are you saved?" The young man replied that he was not.

Harper then tried to lead him to Christ only to have the young man who was near shock, reply no. John Harper then took off his life jacket and threw it to the man and said 'Here then, you need this more than I do...' and swam away to other people. A few minutes later, Harper swam back to the young man and succeeded in leading him to salvation. Of the 1,528 people that went into the water that night, six were rescued by the lifeboats. One of them was this young man on the debris. Four years later, at a survivors meeting, this young man stood up and in tears recounted how John Harper had led him to Christ. Mr. Harper had tried to swim back to help other people, yet because of the intense cold, had grown too weak to swim. His last words before going under the frigid waters were 'Believe on the Name of the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.' Does Hollywood remember this man? No. Oh well, no matter. This servant of God did what he had to do. While other people were trying to buy their way onto the lifeboats and selfishly trying to save their own lives, John Harper gave up his life so that others could be saved. 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends...' John Harper was truly the hero of the Titanic!"

So far we have discussed loving others who are either our personal loved ones or, as in the case of John Harper, fellow human beings who needed the Lord. However, in both these cases, there is no reference to those whom we consider to be our enemies, yet the Lord tells us in Matthew 5 verse 44 to love our enemies. How can we do this? I think C.S. Lewis in his book, *Mere Christianity*, offers the best answer and I quote:

"...we Christians think man lives forever. Therefore, what really matters is those little marks or twists on the central, inside part of the soul which are going to turn it, in the long run, into a heavenly or a hellish creature. We may kill if necessary, but we must not hate or enjoy hating. We may punish if necessary, but we must not enjoy it... Even while we kill and punish we must try to feel about the enemy as we feel about

ourselves – to wish that he were not so bad, to hope that he may, in this world or another, be cured: in fact, to wish his good. This is what is meant in the Bible by loving him: wishing his good, not feeling fond of him nor saying he is nice when he is not. pg 119-120”

In other words, loving one’s enemies does not mean that we will not be a party to justice being done. Neither does it mean that we spend time in the company of those who have wronged us. What it does mean is that we pray for the salvation of our enemies and sincerely desire that they give their lives to the Lord. Knowing that Satan is behind all the evil in this world, helps us both to forgive and pray for those who have come against us in some way.

### Summary

Let me summarise. Christian love is two-fold; it involves love for God and love for others. The character, faithfulness and sacrifice of the Lord for us as individuals certainly merits our love. We also are mandated to love others and that includes those we would consider to be our enemies. Without this love, no matter how pious we appear, we are nothing but a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 13 verse 1(NIV). This is the standard of love for Christ followers, and for those who are not yet Christians, just a taste of the type of love that is possible when the leap of faith is taken. I invite you now to take this leap and want you to know that there is someone in TLC World ready and waiting to help you give your life to the God of love in the person of Jesus Christ and to help you to go on to greater understanding and relationship with Him. If your heart is beating just a little harder or a little faster right now, know that this is one of the ways in which God calls to those He loves, so be encouraged to email [admin@thelittlechurchworld.org](mailto:admin@thelittlechurchworld.org) and we’ll connect you with someone who will be happy to help you move to the next stage.

Well, that ends the message for today. I really hope that God has used it to speak directly into your heart in one way or another. I'll say good bye and God bless for now and be with you again next week.

### Discussion Questions

1. The message states that worship is not just ‘something a music team carries out at the beginning of a church service’. Given this statement, what do you think worship is all about and how do you actually worship God?
2. The history of God's interaction with his people indicates that He keeps His promises. If you are already a Christian, do you feel he has kept his promises to you, and are there any promises you are still waiting for Him to keep? If you are not a Christian, what would you like God to promise to deliver to you?

3. What part of the TIME mnemonic in relation to loving those who are close to you, is the most difficult for you to comply with?
4. In relation to 'taming the tongue', have you ever suffered verbal abuse from someone? If so, how did it make you feel and what did you do about it?
5. Assuming at some point in your life, you have had to exercise tough love in the sense it is discussed in the message, what was the result and how would you do things differently (or not) if you were faced with a similar situation in the future?

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