

This Is My Command: Love Each Other

⁹“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love.

¹¹“I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.

¹²“This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn’t know what his master^[a] is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you.

¹⁷“This is what I command you: Love one another.

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In 1906, the second Sunday of May, the mother of Miss Anna Jarvis died in Philadelphia. A year later, Miss Jarvis along with some friends observed the anniversary of her mother’s death. Then she came up with an idea. Let’s have a special day dedicated to mothers. In 1908 many local groups became interested in Miss Jarvis’ idea and dedicated a day to mothers and declared May 10th, the second Sunday of May, as Mothers’ Day in Philadelphia. But it didn’t stop there. In 1912 the state of Texas picked on this idea and observed Mothers’ Day by pardoning a number of prisoners for the sakes of their mothers. State after state, and then country after country, joined in all the way up to today when we celebrate Mothers’ Day on the second Sunday in May.

It is a good holiday, isn’t it. It is good to honor the unsung heroes of every home. But for us Christians, this should come naturally whether we have a holiday for it or not. You see, the Lord wants us to love one another, yes mothers, but really everyone. Let’s sit again at the feet of Jesus and listen to him, and may the Holy Spirit move us to obey him as we love one another.

Love is kind of a squishy word. There are so many kinds of love out there and we can form and shape it into almost any shape we want. In the 70’s they used love mainly for sex. How would you define it? The Greeks had several words that can be translated as love, but there are three main ones. There is a romantic kind of love which is “eros” where we get erotic. Then there is the close bond between friends which is “phileo.” And then they had the highest form of love, “agape.” This is love in its purest sense. It means love, period, no “ands,” no “buts,” nothing attached to it. So, when God inspired these humans writers to put down on paper exactly what he wanted them to say, which word do you think he wanted them to use to describe his love for us? He told them to use “agape.”

How deep is this love? ***⁹“As the Father has loved me, I have also loved you. Remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹“I have told you these things so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.*** Jesus wants us to love as much as he has loved us. And how much does he love us? As much as the Father loves him. How much is that? We have no reason to doubt that the universe goes on and on. Ask someone how far you have to go before you reach the edge of the universe. Ask him for an exact measurement in miles and feet and inches. He can’t answer you. He will have to say he can’t measure it because it has no limit or end. Good. That is how much God loves Jesus and how much Jesus loves us.

God’s love has no limits, no boundaries. As soon as you think you found its limit, it keeps going. We can’t fathom that. All of the love we find in the world has limits. You can measure our love. Jesus’ disciples are living examples of this. James and John wanted Jesus to rain fire and brimstone down on a village because they rejected him. Peter wanted to know if forgiving another seven times is generous. That’s measurable. I’ll forgive seven times, but not the eighth. When women brought their children to Jesus, the disciple wanted to chase them away. When the Syro-Phoenician woman came pleading for her demon possessed daughter, his disciples found her annoying. Have you come to a point you wish someone should be destroyed by God? Have you gotten to a point you don’t want to forgive someone again? Are certain people, kids, outsiders, non-members annoying? If you put all the times you truly loved someone and when you didn’t on scales, which side weighs more?

If God loved us that way, well, there is no forgiveness after today. He has given us how many chances? What should happen if we blow it again this week? But that is not God. The Father loves Jesus and in turn Jesus loves us with a love that cannot be limited or measured. That is the only way we can have forgiveness for all of our sins. That is why the Father commanded Jesus to love people like you and me. What we couldn’t do, live a perfect, holy life he lived for us like someone running to the bank because we can’t. Only the deposit Jesus makes is not the few dollars we have. He deposits his righteousness which is then deposited in our heavenly bank accounts. But he didn’t stop loving us there. He then offered his innocent life on the altar of the cross to pay for our sins. You know, if you were the only person in the whole wide world who sinned, Jesus would still give up his life just for you.

Jesus loves us with that limitless love. But he continues to love us when he commands us to remain in his love and to love like he loves us. ***¹²“This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this: to lay***

down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants anymore, because a servant doesn't know what his master^[a] is doing. I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce fruit and that your fruit should remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give you. ¹⁷"This is what I command you: Love one another."

We are not some clueless servant who does what he is ordered to do. God has made us his children. He invites us to the table and explains everything to us. He has revealed great things and mysteries to us like how the world came into being to hell to the devil to sin and grace to Jesus and forgiveness and resurrection. He does so because he chose us. We didn't choose him, he chose us. We didn't even go to him to make an interview. He simply plucked us out of this world to be his own.

But he also knows we still have weak sinful natures. He knows the devil is still prowling like a lion looking to devour us. He knows we can throw this all away. Therefore he commands us to remain in his love. He commands us to do what he says like a parent telling a child not to go into a car with a total stranger. We know what he is up to, as a Shepherd leading us to heaven. We are already there. We believe and are saved. Now he is saying remain in my love, keep on believing and be saved. This command is still gospel. His Word and his commands and all he says are intended to keep us close to him as well as to produce living fruits here on earth.

This command to love one another means what it says. Love one another, everyone. But it has some very special application on a day like today, Mothers' Day. God could have found other ways to bring people into this world like in eggs like chickens, or floating them down from heaven. But he chose to bring people into this world through a natural bond between a mother and a child. In pregnancy the child becomes a part of mom, who after only eight weeks in the womb can recognize and be comforted by mom's voice.

And what a chance for a mom to love that child. I have to go back to the mid 1980's. I remember it well. A plane crashed outside of Detroit. All on board were killed except one little girl. They puzzled for days and weeks how this one girl lived. Then they discovered the answer as they investigated the wreckage. Her mother saw the crash coming. She unbuckled her safety belt and flung her body over her little girl. ¹³***No one has greater love than this: to lay down his life for his friends.*** There is a natural, loving bond God gives between mother and child.

But Christian mothers have it one better. It says in Psalm 127, ***"Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him."*** To the believing mother, a child is more than a lump of flesh and bone that cries a lot and gets in the way. Children are blessings from the Lord. Yes, Christian mothers still have sinful natures. They still feel the same frustrations and headaches that come from children. They still must experience the terrible twos, they still have to clean up countless messes, and the laundry never gets done. But the Christian sees through all of that and realizes that this child is a gift and blessing from God.

And Christians mothers also see their children as souls who need to hear of their Savior. Timothy was a young pastor. We don't know much about his father, whether he was alive or not or whether he was a believer or not. But Paul praised Lois, Timothy's grandmother, and Eunice, his mother who taught Timothy about God and Christ from the time he was still an infant.

And God shows us that the door opens both ways. Mothers love and care of their children, but children have equal opportunity to love their mothers back. In the Fourth Commandment God wants children to obey their parents. In Proverbs we read, ***"Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old."*** In 1 Timothy God even wants children to provide for their parents saying it is a sin to neglect them. What a wonder arrangement God has set up. God blesses fathers and mothers with children giving them a chance to obey Jesus and love them and in turn children get parents from God and opportunities to obey Jesus and love them.

As sinful human beings, we will not follow Jesus' command perfectly. We will not always love God and others as God loves us. And mothers will not be perfect, nor are children perfect. But God still calls us his friends. He still loves us. He does because his love is limitless. Take your sins to your friend, Jesus. See what he did for you. Now, show how much you love him by loving back, not only him but all people. And on a special day like today, thank God for the bond between mother and child. Amen.