

# The Priority of Love

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**Bible Verse:** Philippians 1:9  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 19, 2019

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Well, you're with us on a very good day to be with us today as at the end of the service we are going to receive several men and women into our fellowship, into our membership of the church, and in the providence of God we have a perfect text to be able to do that to set the context for that added step in the life of our church. You know, God has given us so many things in his word for the church to practice and to follow that gives us pictures of the love of Christ, pictures of our salvation. In the ordinance of baptism, we see a picture of the death and new life. In Communion, we remember our Lord's death and shed blood on our behalf. In membership here later this morning, we'll see a symbol, an outward symbol of people coming together and committing to the doctrine of our church, committing to the life of our church, committing to one another in a spirit of love, and that commitment of love is at the heart of what true Christianity is all about.

You could call it "The Priority of Love," which is the title for today's message, and we have been studying through the letter that Paul wrote to the Philippians and I invite you to turn to Philippians 1 as we turn to God's word and we start our consideration today, it will take us a couple of three weeks to get through this, we start our consideration of Paul's prayer for the Philippians, his prayer for the Philippians in verse 9, and before I read the text that we're going to look at today, let me just remind you of the significance of this. Paul here was writing as an apostle of Jesus Christ. That means that he was an appointed representative of Christ with the authority to speak on Christ's behalf and he did that and his letters are an expression not simply of Paul's thoughts, but writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they are an expression of the very thoughts of God. This is God's word that we are reading and as we read this prayer from the Apostle Paul, we have an open window into the desire of God for his people. This is what God wants for his people as expressed through the words of the Christ-appointed apostle as recorded for us in the inspired and inerrant word of God, and so we have something that is very instructive for us, something that is life-shaping, life-changing, it is very challenging and convicting, and we see what the priority of God is for his people and what God has for his people is a priority of love.

Let's look at verses 9 through 11 together. Paul says,

9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that

are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Now I'll go into this more in just a moment but I want you to see that when Paul is expressing what his prayer is for the Philippians, the first word, the first noun out of his mouth is about love. He says, "This is what I pray, that your love may abound still more and more." It's like love is a priority. It's like love is of central importance and, in fact, it is.

Now coming back for just a moment to the earlier part of the beginning of this letter of Philippians, I just want to remind you of something that we've studied in the past. In verse 3, Paul as he opens up the body of his letter, he speaks to the Philippians and he expresses his love in his heart for them. He says in verse 3, look at it with me, he says, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all." And so Paul opens this up saying, "Brothers, I love you. I'm joyful over you and I am praying for you." Well, immediately that warms you and draws you in to the sympathy of what Paul is saying and you realize that these are words and this is instruction that is coming from a man who has our best interests at heart, right? If a man is so full of joy and is so full of love and thanking God for us, you realize that he is writing from a sense of seeking the best interest of those to whom he is writing, and by extension we see that this letter was preserved for us to read later as the instruction of God to his people even today. But as he speaks there in verses 3 and 4, he doesn't tell them what he is praying, and we do that all the time, don't we? "Oh, I'm praying for you," and we kind of leave it there and say, "I wonder what you're praying for me about," or you are wondering what I pray for you about. Paul doesn't leave them in the dark. It's not a generic kind of praying, you know, "God bless all the people and God bless all the animals and God bless all the missionaries." You know, I mean, it's good to pray for missionaries and all of that but it's not that generic boilerplate kind of praying that he is doing for them and that's what I want you to see here.

Paul goes on after some intermediate words that he has for them in verses 4 and 8, he comes back to the topic of prayer to tell them and to instruct them what it is that he prays for them as he intercedes for them before God. "What is it, Paul, when you are standing before God with outstretched hands and you pray for us, what is it that you are praying? Paul, when you are down on your knees and you're praying for us and laboring for us in prayer, what is it that you are praying for us about?" And just to make the passing reference there, Paul's prayer here in verses 9 to 11 would bear little resemblance to what you would find on most prayer lists, you know, that are dominated by medical issues and church kind of outward external concerns like that. Paul is going to a spiritual matter as he prays for them and in verse 9 he gives them the content of his prayer for them.

Look at it with that background in mind. He says, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment." Paul was a spiritual man offering a spiritual prayer for the spiritual development of people who knew Christ but had not yet reached perfection. He was writing to a congregation, as we've seen in the

past, that they were biting at each other, there was division in the church that he was concerned about, and division is answered by an increase in love, and so that's what he is praying for, he is praying and seeking their growth in love. While this church was an object of his affection, while this was a commendable church that had many excellent qualities and had been faithful to Paul for a decade or more in the course of his ministry, this was a church that had room to grow, this was a church that was stumbling on a most important point, and so he comes and he prays for them and asks God to increase the love that exists among them and in their hearts that they might be conformed more closely to the image of Jesus Christ.

So this is very important and it occurs to me, it seems to me that if you're going to talk about something important, you should define your terms and know what we're talking about here. What is the meaning of love? That's our first point for this morning: the meaning of love. What is love? What is this for which Paul is praying? Now in our day and age, we are conditioned, aren't we, to think about love in sentimental terms or in sensual terms if we only took our cues from our culture, and I came across one quote that I wanted to share with you. In a remarkably incoherent article posted on eHarmony.com, this writer answers the question what is love in part by this, this is what eHarmony, you know, eHarmony, the dating website and I'll suppress my gag reflex as I read this to you. You're dying to hear this, aren't you? You're probably dying to know why I was on eHarmony. I'm very happily married. I was just looking to see what the world had to say about love, that's all. I quote, "Love is one of the most profound emotions we experience as humans. It's bigger than us, meaning though we can invite it into our lives, we do not have the control over the how, when and where love starts to express itself. Maybe that's why 72% of people believe in love at first sight; sometimes love truly does strike like a bolt of lightning to the chest and you aren't prepared for it." Well, what does that mean? What on earth are you saying? I have no idea what that means, that's why I said it's remarkably incoherent. This makes no sense at all.

Let's just use that as a springboard to consider biblical love by contrast, okay? Biblical love by contrast as opposed to this squishy, ill-defined, emotional love that you can't control and maybe it hits you like, you know, like a bolt of lightning to your chest, as if it's something random outside of you, biblical love is something completely different. The Greek verb "agapao" is defined by one authority in this way, it says "to have such an interest in another that one wishes to contribute to the other person's well-being." This is completely different. This is something completely different saying this is not about an emotion that you feel inside, this is about a desire and a commitment within yourself to seek the well-being of another. Another dictionary of biblical terms defines it this way, defines love in this way, "concern for and action to bring about the welfare of another." Biblical love is seeking what is good for someone else, and we'll go through this more, I'm just giving you all little bit of an overview to reorient your thinking about matters. Biblical love is not predominantly an emotion that you feel inside in sentimental terms, biblical love is a desire and a commitment and action to seek what is good for someone else. It has the other person's well-being and best interest at heart and move in that direction regardless of personal cost to the one who loves. This is much much different. This is much much different from this squishy, emotional, sentimental, ill-defined matter.

You see that biblical love is an expression of character, is an expression of godliness, is an expression of seeking the best interest of someone else that is not dependent on the way that you feel at any given time.

Now we can see that as we consider our second point here this morning very briefly, all too briefly probably, when we consider the love of God. The love of God. Let's move beyond a dictionary definition and look to Scripture. I invite you to turn to 1 John 4, a passage that we often go to. Actually, go to 1 John 3 as my eye fell on another passage that I want to add to this in the moment. 1 John 3, beginning in verse 1. 1 John 3:1 says, "See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are." God bestows a great love by bestowing on us a status as children in his family that we had no claim upon. This is a great love seeking our great personal interest and God does this at his own initiative.

Now keep your finger in 1 John and I want to remind you of something. Go back to Romans where we were reading earlier, Romans 5 now, Romans 5, to remember that the nature of the love of God and the objects upon whom he showered this great love to bring sinners into his family. We see the selfless nature, the sacrificial nature of love. We see the desire for the well-being of the object of the love. In Romans 5:6, Paul is speaking about those who have come to faith in Christ, those who have been born again, those who have repented from sin and put their faith in Christ. Where did this, where did this, what even made this possible that we could be redeemed? What made it possible for us to be reconciled to a holy God? Beloved, it is crucial for you never to forget that it wasn't anything of your own contribution that made that happen. You did not contribute anything to this wonderful status that you now enjoy as a child of God.

Look at Romans 5:6. The Apostle Paul says, "while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him." Now look at verse 10 here, "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." Now beloved, remember what we're doing here is we are getting an idea, we are getting a biblical picture of love. We are seeing what the love of God is like and the highest purest expression of the love of God was found in the Incarnation of Christ when Christ went to the cross and offered up his life as a sin sacrifice for sinners just like you.

It is crucial, it is indispensable for you to recognize your condition when Christ did that and look at that passage in Romans 5 again with me, and I would encourage you to do what I've done, just put a little mark by these key words that I'm going to point out to you. When did Christ do this on your behalf? When was this love displayed? When did Christ act like that toward you, toward his people? Verse 6, it was while we were still helpless. He died for the ungodly, it says there in verse 6. Verse 8, God's love was demonstrated that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Verse 10, while we were

enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son. Beloved, pick out those key words because we are so prone to think that we are naturally so lovable, we think we are lovable because we love ourselves so much and how could anybody else not love us, but the truth of the matter is something different. In the presence of God, look at verse 6, you were helpless, you were ungodly, you were a sinner, verse 8, verse 10, you were an enemy of God. There was nothing in you to attract the love of God like a magnet to steel. Quite the opposite, there was every reason for God to judge you, to condemn you, to cast you away from his presence and what did he do when you had nothing to offer? When you had nothing to give? When there was nothing intrinsically worthy about you at all, to the contrary, that was everything anti-worthy in you? What did Christ do? He sought your well-being. When you were estranged and alienated from God, he sought your well-being at the cost of his own life, at the cost of Incarnation, at the cost of the cross, at the cost of that derelict cry, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" And you ask the question, "Why is He doing that? Why is He in during that for people that as He's doing it are His enemies?"

Here we get an expression, an idea, we get the supreme manifestation of the love of Christ for his people. He was seeking your best interest. He was seeking your eternal well-being going to the cross at great sacrifice when you were offering nothing but rebellion in return. When the Gospel was being preached to you, Christ was reaching out through that human voice, that human written page, that friend, that family member, that pastor, and he was pleading directly with you, "Come to Christ. Come to Christ and be saved," when you were dead and wanted nothing to do with him. Why? Why? Why? Why? Why? Why is Christ doing that? To ask that question in that context is to get an introduction into what biblical love looks like. Christ was seeking your eternal well-being when you were not seeking him. Christ loved you when you hated him. Christ loved you while you were a sinner, an enemy, ungodly and un-reconcilable in your own heart. That's the measure of love. That's the love of God.

Go back to 1 John 4. We see this in a different manner, in a different picture in 1 John 4:9. How do we measure the love of God? What does the love of God look like? 1 John 4:9, "By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him." It reminds you of John 3:16, doesn't it, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," he gave, he loved and so he gave, "that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." Have you believed in Christ for eternal life? I ask you, have you responded in faith to this manifest love of God in Christ? Now is the time. A full salvation was purchased at the cross by Christ. He offers it to everyone who will come to him in repentant faith. All of Christ can be all of yours if you'll come to him, and his offer of that is sincere, it is well-meaning, it is well intended, it is free and available to everyone who will believe. Look at 1 John 4:10, "In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." The love of God is seen in the fact that he planned and initiated and carried out at personal cost what was necessary for your salvation.

Now I ask you, does that not evoke a response of love to you in return to him? Does it not overwhelm your senses? Does it not fill your mind with wonder that a holy God who benefits, in one sense who benefits nothing from us, we don't add anything to the perfections of the glory of his essence when we come to him, but there is this overflowing love of a holy righteous God toward unworthy sinners and Christ is the human manifestation of that love, and in love he bore our sins at the cross, he bore the penalty of our sin on our behalf at the cross, in love he became a curse for us, Galatians 3:13 says. He underwent a curse, he underwent condemnation on our behalf. That's who he is. That's what love looks like. That gives us a sense of how far Christ goes when he sets his concern on someone for their welfare, for their well-being, and in Christ you are on the receiving end of someone who has sought your eternal well-being, and not only sought it, secured it, purchased it, made it yours, and sent his Spirit to draw you to himself so that it would be certainly applied to your soul and that there would be no possibility of you ever being lost. That's what love looks like. Love's pretty great, isn't it? That's the love of God.

So going back to Philippians now, let's go back there for just a moment, back to Philippians 1. Philippians 1 as we go back there, here's what I want you to see, beloved. When Paul prays in verse 9, "And this I pray, that your love may abound," when he goes straight to the issue of love, he's going straight to that fountain that defines the very nature of God and defines what he has done for us. "I pray that your love, that your love would abound." In light of the great love that God has shown us, he says, "I'm praying that your love would abound still more and more." And this, beloved, is not a legalistic call to try harder, this love of which Scripture speaks and which it calls us as believers, this love is a love that is in response to a prior greater love that has been shown and showered upon us. We love because he first loved us.

What I want you to see about the love of God is this, just to wrap up this point, is that Christ's love for us, his concern for us, led him to sacrifice himself for us in the pursuit of our well-being. That's what the love of God looks like. I never tire of telling you this, every time the thought of the love of God comes into your mind, your mind should make a beeline to the cross, your mind should go straight to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, recognizing that a holy, the holy eternal Son of God who was under no obligation, voluntarily gave his life for you. That's what God's love for his people looks like and it's humbling. You say, "Lord, I didn't deserve that." That's right, you didn't. It's humbling. It provokes gratitude, "God, I'm so thankful. Christ, if You had not done that, I would have been lost eternally." That's right. "That means I'm utterly a debtor to Your love." That's right. "That means that You have a complete claim on all of my love and affection and there is no one more important in the universe to me than Christ." That's right. That's what the love of God is like and that is the captivating response that it brings out of the believing heart is the surpassing love for Jesus Christ that is given to no one else.

Now let's go to point 3. We've seen love from a vertical God-centered dimension, let's consider it in terms of what it means in our own lives as we look at point 3: the love of Christians. The love of Christians, and remember what we're doing here is we're wanting to consider the priority of love. All we're doing today, all we're doing today is just

establishing with clarity in our minds as a groundwork for exposition for the next week or two, is that this love of which Paul speaks and prays is the great priority. It is the great priority. How are we to understand the priority of love in Scripture? What is the obligation, what is the call of God on his people?

Well, turn over to the book of Matthew. How are we to understand the place of love, the centrality of love, the priority of love? Look at Matthew 22 beginning in verse 36. A lawyer of the day asked Jesus a question, testing him and said in verse 36, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" What is the commandment that has priority over them all? What is the greatest in comparison to them all? What does the law point us to as our first focus of attention? Jesus said to him in verse 37, "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 foremost commandment."

Let me offend some people here, okay? I might as well since we're talking about love, and maybe not offending anybody in the room, not trying specifically to offend but, look, you could nail down your perspective on end times and get it exactly right and study out all of the end times prophecies and get your doctrine exactly like you want it to be on end times, but if you have overlooked the priority of love, you're missing the whole point of matters. You can be all wrapped up in political matters and everything that's happening and what the Christian view of our social crisis is, but if you miss the priority of love, you've missed it all. As important as all biblical doctrines are, you can become an apologetic genius and defend everything about the nature of creation and everything about the nature of the philosophical arguments for God and evidentialism or presuppositionalism, you could master all of that and be a king of argument but if you're not somehow a king of love, you've missed the entire point. You cannot bypass the centrality and the priority of love in light of what Scripture says here.

Look at it again with me, Matthew 22:37. 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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." So this love is crucial to understanding what revealed truth is. This love is central to understanding who God is and what he requires from us. You can't bypass it. It is the door of entrance into everything else. I'm not downplaying the importance of a good eschatology or the importance of a good apologetic or anything like that, I'm just pointing out to you that Christ makes love the priority here in a way that cannot be overlooked.

The Apostle Paul does the same thing, look back at 1 Corinthians 13 with me, that great love chapter. That great love chapter. 1 Corinthians 13:1, Paul in the context of talking about the exercise of spiritual gifts within the church, this is a church oriented chapter here in its context, verse 1 says, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." Zero. You do not even matter without love. Verse 3, a great verse for social liberals in the social Gospel to take to heart.

"If I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing." You see, beloved, Scripture points us in so many different places to this great priority of love. That's the priority and love that is directed toward God, love that is directed toward Christ has a very specific outworking, you might say, that Christ explains.

What does love, you could say this, "Okay, I'm with you. I embrace the priority of love. I see that. I can't deny it. It's stamped throughout the pages of Scripture." You say, "Well, what does that look like toward Christ and toward God, then? What does love of Christians look like toward Christ?" Look at the Gospel of John, chapter 14. What does it look like, then? How is this love in a born again heart lived out? How is it manifested? John 14, beginning in verse 21. John 14:21, "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Look at verse 23, "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone,'" if anyone, "'loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.'" Saving faith, saving love, if you will, love for Christ manifests itself in responding to Christ by faith, responding to him in love, embracing him as the highest affection of your heart, and that manifests itself in obedience to his word. There is no love for Christ apart from a spirit of obedience to the revealed word of God contained in the 66 books of the Bible. This is what Christ himself said. True love for Christ displays itself in obedience to the word of God. The word of God is obeyed in part by believing it and respecting its authority. Reading it. Hearing it taught as you're doing here this morning. Seeking to practice its principles in day to day life. You see, there is a centrality of the word of God in love for God that cannot be evaded or avoided.

I was reading a book last night that was two views on the Bible and homosexuality, and the view, the permissive view on homosexuality compared to the biblical view was just such a grief to my heart. The author, who is now deceased, of that particular section of the book, paid minor lipservice to the authority of Scripture but he went on to say that if Scripture suddenly is not speaking to the condition of man as man exists today, I'm paraphrasing, if science is contradicting Scripture, and if a general sense of our concern for our fellow man overrides the direct commands of Scripture, then we set Scripture aside in order to embrace something new. We move forward out of Egypt into the Promised Land. He actually said that. He said the picture of this is leaving Egypt behind and going to the Promised Land, his point was leave the literal word of God behind and embrace the change that culture demands from us. Well, I want to tell you there is no love for Christ in that. There is no love for Christ in that because it's too easy a dismissal of the word of God itself of which Christ said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."

So my only point here is I'm surprised I went there just now. That's alright. Went there, meaning the book on homosexuality. My point is that one of the ways that you ask yourself, "Do I have a love for Christ or not," is not by asking yourself, "Do I have sentimental feelings that are fit for eHarmony toward Christ?" The issue is do you love

and treasure his revealed word? That's his gift to his people. Do you seek it? Is it alive to you? Does it matter to you? Do you seek to obey it even if very imperfectly? That's the love of Christians toward God that is manifested. What I want you to see again, beloved, just keeping in mind the very narrow purpose that we are trying to achieve today is to establish the priority of love, Jesus says, "The one who loves Me, if anyone loves Me, he will keep My word."

So there's this submission to God's word. How does it play out in practical life in marriage, in family, in work, in school? Well, in marriage and family love and all those other areas, love is somehow seeking the good of others even at the price of self-sacrifice. The Bible places that kind of supreme priority on love. In fact, Jesus said in John 13:35, he said, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples if you have love for one another." It's evident before God. It's evident within the church. It's evident before men. This animating principle of love is central to it all without which you're clinging to a figment of your imagination, you're clinging to a façade, you're clinging to an impostor kind of experience of Christianity that if somehow this love doesn't manifest itself and doesn't come to express itself vertically through a love for God's word, an obedience to his word, and outwardly toward love toward his people.

Look at 1 John 3 again, I believe it's 1 John 3. We're just identifying this as a priority in a way that cannot be evaded. 1 John 3:10, "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious." It's obvious. It's obvious. It's manifest. "Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." Feelings of love can come and go but biblical love, it lasts. It lasts because it is born out of an energy that is implanted by the Spirit of God in changing our natures. It's produced in our lives as a fruit of the Holy Spirit. It is produced in a human outward perspective by the fact that there is a commitment to the well-being of someone else. So where is love in your life, beloved? We can't avoid that question, can we? It's not unkind to ask the question.

Let's look at one final point here, the love of the church. The love of the church and this will bring us back into Philippians. We've kind of done a little bit of a tour around the New Testament to bring us back to Philippians 1 here, and always wanting to keep in mind the context and the flow of thought of the letter itself. It helps us understand why Paul would say this in verse 9, chapter 1 of Philippians. Look at it with me, "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more." I pray that your love may abound still more and more. After today, after the past 30 or 40 minutes of looking at Scriptures, we can see why love would become such a priority in the prayers of Paul. It's a priority to God. It's a priority to Christ. Without the love of Christ, there would be no Christianity even. It's what he requires from his people that he says would be manifest. So it's central, it's a great priority, and so Paul is praying about a matter of central priority as he prays here, and he's asking God, it's interesting when you think about it, remember he's praying to God here, he's asking God to do something, he's asking God to do a work knowing that love is what God requires, there's a sense in which he's praying that God would produce in the lives of this church what God himself requires that church to do. He's praying that God would bring supernatural help, the supernatural energy and motivating and

equipping power of the Holy Spirit to bear on their lives that they would grow in that which they are presently deficient.

"I pray that your love would grow still more and more." Why would he pray that? We've already seen he's writing to true Christians. He's commended them as being partners of the Gospel with him. "Why do you even need to pray that, Paul? Pray for Lydia, she hurt her foot in an accident and she's got a little red scar on it that needs healing. Paul, why don't you pray for that?" Well, because it's not the priority. The priority of Paul's prayer is reflecting the priority of love and the reality is that these dear Christians were deficient in that important area.

Look at chapter 2, verse 1, which we'll get to probably in like 18 years or something at the rate I'm going. In Philippians 2:1, Paul having expressed many things in the first chapter, having prayed for them with love, now exhorts them to do their part, to exercise their will toward growth in what he himself has been praying for them about. Chapter 2, verse 1, now he's not praying, now he is writing directly to them and he commands them. Chapter 2, verse 1, he commands them in love but he commands them nonetheless, "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind," here's our definition of love that we've been talking about all along, "but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." And it is a consideration of the love of Christ that builds that kind of love in us as we've been speaking about here today. Paul turns immediately to Christ to enforce by the example of Christ what it is that he is calling upon the Philippians to show to one another. You see, the love of Christ vertically toward his people has a direct impact on the way a local church relates to one another, the way they relate to each other. There is no separation. They are directly connected. They follow as B follows A. As day follows night, so love for one another in the church follows on the love of God in expressing the love of Christ at the cross for his people.

Look at verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus." When a church is lacking in love, it's taken its eyes off of Christ. Verse 6, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men." Verse 8, "Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." Do you see what I told you? Do you want to know about love? You go straight to the cross. You don't think about love apart from the cross of Christ, and the Philippians needed this. They needed to hear that and so Paul, having laid out Christ before them, says in verse 12, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." Work out your salvation, meaning take everything that we've been saying and all that I prayed about love, and work it out and apply it, exercise it with each other within the body of Christ. Verse 13,

"for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." Verse 14, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing," is one of the ways that this applied.

Now, beloved, let's step back and just kind of take all this in, shall we? Here we are, you and I in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we are on the receiving end of such amazing wonderful love from our Lord Jesus, a perfect love, a perfect sacrifice that achieved a perfect salvation for us. Our existence has been defined by the love of Christ for us. Our eternal future is defined by the love of Christ for us. Now think with me: isn't it humbling, isn't it humbling to realize that we as Christians falter on the point and the manifestation of love for one another? Isn't it humbling that we fail on such a basic point as that? That's amazing. The very thing that we owe our life to is one of the ways in which we most frequently stumble and fall. Don't we all do so in our home, in our jobs, in our relationships almost every day with our angry words? I'm pointing at myself. With our selfish demeanors, selfish actions? Some even leaving their families, leaving their first love for something or someone else. Isn't it humbling to realize that we name the name of Christ and we falter at the point of love?

Friends, let me ask you this, we're no different than the Philippian church, do you see why the Apostle Paul turns to prayer for the Philippians on this fundamental point? If Aunt Lydia is full of love for Christ and for the believers around her, the little red scar on her foot doesn't amount to much, and so Paul directs his energy and his prayers that the Philippians would grow in this very basic fundamental Christian virtue and, beloved, it's a prayer that you and I need for ourselves and for each other. As you pray for each other, you need to be praying somewhere along lines like that, praying for their spiritual growth, praying that they would grow in love, praying that our church would grow in love and that we would grow in love for one another because that's the priority.

So as we pray, as we think about life, we prayerfully thank Christ for his infinite love for us and we're grateful and we're filled to overflowing knowing that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus for us who know him by faith. We are grateful beyond measure knowing that he has cast an eternal love upon us from which we can never be separated. We are grateful that in Christ God sees us as filled with the righteousness of Christ rather than with the sin that is ours, that we are covered in blood. We are thankful for all of that and then from gratitude we go and we humbly ask Christ to produce that same love in us in our families and amongst his people. That's why Paul prays that way. If you come back next week, we can see how love grows. We've seen the priority, now we need to see how it grows. That's where the text will take us next time.

Bow with me in prayer.

*O great Christ, we thank You for Your profound love for us, love displayed as You became the propitiation that turned away the wrath of God from our sins, that while we were enemies, while we were sinners, while we were ungodly, while we were helpless, You loved us and gave Yourself up for us. We magnify Your name above everything else in the universe, O Christ, and we're grateful. We realize and we embrace the implications*

*that that has for us as Your followers, that Your followers are known by love for one another, that we are known by love and obedience to Your word. We desire to express that but, Christ, we fall short so often. We pray in mercy that You would forgive and cleanse us based on that once for all work of yours at Calvary, that You would cleanse us, forgive us, wash us, renew us, and then from that position of a cleansed restoration of fellowship with You, we pray that You would so work in our lives that our love would abound still more and more and more in real knowledge and all discernment so that we would approve the things that are excellent, so that we would be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ, so that we would be filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through You that our lives and everything about us might be to the glory and praise of God. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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