

Title: The Call to Love

Text: 1 Corinthians 16.22

Theme: Loving the Community of Christ

Series: 1 Corinthians #98

Prop Stmt God is good to command us to love Him even under the threat of curse.

I fully expected that the message this morning would be the last sermon in this series on 1 Corinthians. But early in the week my heart was pierced with v.22.

“If anyone does not love the Lord – a curse be on him. Come, O Lord!”

The language of this verse is not what we are used to, is it? Quite frankly, it sounds demanding, narcissistic, obsessed and unbalanced. If anyone does not love God, then he is cursed. Is this not the Word of God? Is this not what the Spirit of God directed Paul to write? What kind of a God is this who demands to be loved under threat of such a punishment? Does this not echo of a deranged lover who has been refused and has now become enraged at the thought of being rejected? Does this not sound like the celebrity stalking fanatic who sends love notes, then threats when his or her expressions of love are not returned? Except this is God, who commands us and demands us to love Him, or else we will be damned! What kind of love is that? What kind of egotistical, maniacal, tyrannical God is this?

This morning, I want us to consider the essence of this command to love Christ and the warning that is tied to it and then ask ourselves and examine ourselves to see whether or not we can honestly say that this is true for us.

Pray

This morning we declared in song, some very personal and powerful truths. “As the deer panteth for the water, so my soul longeth after thee.” Is that true? Did you seek God this week with the passion and intensity of a man so dry and so thirsty, so desperate for water that you knew that unless you had God that would die? Did your heart cry out to know God? Did you long for God, or did you settle for longing after food, or longing after sex, or a longing after approval, or a longing after attention, or longing after entertainment, or longing after a vacation, or longing after a starting position on the basketball team, or longing after a “1” in your solo and ensemble contest, or longing after spouse or child whom you can control, or a million other diversions that steal your affection and never satisfy your soul? The danger of music is that the familiarity of a tune can inoculate us to the text that we are saying and claiming to be true.

Sometimes I wonder, how can I dare invite people to come and worship God, when true worship is such a dangerous and awesome confrontation? I’ve said it before that if we really understood what true worship was, instead of just handing out bulletins at the door, our greeters would give out seatbelts and helmets. How do I call you and lead you to worship God and to love God when He says that if you don’t, you are cursed! When I put it that way, you can see that I must.

Know this: God is infinitely serious about your love for Him.

1. God is so infinitely serious about your love for Him that He commands it and demands it.

“Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.” Deut. 6.5

“Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements, his decrees, his laws and his commands always.” Deut. 11.1

“...carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow – to love the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him.” Deut. 11.22

“Jesus replied: 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.” Matthew 22.37

God does not settle for external obedience. His first and greatest command is to love Him, out of which will flow obedience to His other commands. He is not willing to tolerate outward conformity that is not driven by true love. His law is a law of the affections, of thoughts and of action. God commands that we prefer Him, that we savor Him, that we delight in Him, that we long for Him, that we desire Him, crave for Him, want Him and love Him above all, all the time. But, this command to love, this demand that is placed upon our lives does not come from a delusional loser who has nothing to offer the object of his infatuation or fantasy. This command does not come from a heartless king who knows that he will not be loved freely, so he orders it so, willing to accept feigned affection in place of honesty. The command to love comes from the throne of the One who is infinitely worthy, gloriously lovely and the sum total of the highest perfection. He has no deficiency, no insecurity or deep-seated need that he is looking to us to fill. This demand upon us to love does not come from a taker, but this demand comes from the cross, from the One who gave first, who gave the greatest, who gave the highest and longest and the widest and the deepest. Who gave so much that it can never be measured, but forever arrests our attention and our affection as we marvel with wonder at this amazing grace. Yes, you say, you acknowledge that his love for us is great and deep, but still, can anyone demand love? Can God truly command us to love Him and warn us of eternal consequences should we fail to do so? Yes, I say, a thousand times yes, for if God did not command us to love Him, then it would be a dead give away that God did not esteem Himself as being truly worthy of our love and affection. God is infinitely serious about your love for Him.

2. God is infinitely serious about your love because to settle for anything less would be idolatry.

Failure to love God is only part of the story. The rest must be told and understood. When you do not love God as you are commanded and called, it is because you love something or someone else in His place.

God told the prophet Jeremiah that his people had committed to evils. 1) They have rejected me and 2) They have attempted to replace me.

“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.” (Jeremiah 2.13)

To love God is to enjoy Him as a life-giving spring of water. To love God is to take what He offers and swim and splash in what He provides. Praise the spring of living water. Point others to the spring of living water and bring them with you so their dry and thirsty souls are finally quenched by this cool and satisfying and ceaseless spring. Come back, day after day after day to this water and never accept an imitation. Never let anything take its place. If you reject the water of life, and try to create your own source of drink, it will be woefully inferior.

But that is exactly what Israel did and will do. The lover of her soul came to her, and she scorned his advances and despised his love and had him executed on a cross. To add insult to injury, she will fornicate herself with the antichrist, and attempt to settle for the substitute Messiah. No one, not even the antichrist with all of his power and charm can measure up to the true Son of Man and King of glory.

There is only One God. For you to love any other is idolatry. That is the truth. God governs on the basis of the truth. God knows that there is only one God and He knows that He is it. Therefore, He commands you to not commit idolatry by giving your affection to something that is not worth it. For God to command you to love Him is for God to command you not to waste your life and love on something that is not true. God is true. God is God alone. The command to love God and obey Him is therefore eternally consistent with who God is. He cannot deny Himself and pretend that there are other gods and that each person has to sort of find their own way in life and feel their way along and discover for themselves, and come up with whatever works for you, blah, blah, blah. He is God, he is true, and He alone is God and therefore, He does not tolerate lies and therefore he does not tolerate idolatry. God is infinitely serious about your love for Him.

3. God is infinitely serious about your love because your soul depends upon it.

Jesus said, “If God were your Father, you would love me.” (John 8.42)

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of men; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” (Matt 10.37)

When you love someone, you prefer that person. You esteem them and consider them valuable and treasured. You savor them and enjoy them. Their protection and happiness

and security and good is your aim. You delight in them and rejoice when they are pleased because you consider them so precious to you. If we don't prefer God, or savor Him or enjoy Him, it means that we have tasted Him, the spring of water and spit it out because we prefer something else. Spitting out the water of life leaves us attempting to drink at other fountains. I know people who have tried to make their children their Savior. Their happiness and security is totally hinged on the success of their children and they drive their kids crazy with rage or depression because the kid can't handle being God. Your child cannot save your soul. Love your child, but love Jesus more. All other fountains are poison and to drink them is to commit suicide.

God is so infinitely serious about your soul that He has placed a do not drink sign above the poisonous suicidal fountains of this world and has placed a sign of "Drink Here" above Himself. If you do not love Him, you are rejecting the only One who can save your soul and He only saves the souls of those who love Him.

When my son Bobby was in Cambodia a few weeks ago, he did a good bit of testing of the ground water in some of the villages for arsenic levels. Arsenic tainted water is a serious problem in that region of the world. Mickey Sampson is a missionary engineer who has developed a rustic and effective water purification system that can be constructed in these villages, so when they find a water source that is not compromised by arsenic, they can purify this water and provide the villages with safe, clean water. This practical ministry opens up opportunities for the gospel. Well, Bobby was telling me that clean water is so important to these villages that they are willing to pay for it, which of course means they will appreciate it and take care of it in the long run. In one of the villages, where they had constructed a water purification system, there was a sign made by the village elders and was placed over the pump that in essence said, "if you mess with this pump we will kill you." Is that an extreme reaction? No, not when you know that your life and the life of your village depends on this.

That is what God is saying. "Love me because your soul depends on it." God is serious about your love because He knows that if you do not love Him, you will lose your soul. If you do not love Him it is because you are esteeming something else as being more valuable than He, and there is nothing that is more valuable than He. God is infinitely serious about your love for Him.

4. **God is infinitely serious about your love because your true joy can only be known in Him.**

Psalm 16.11, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

God commands us to love Christ and warns us of the eternal consequences of not loving Christ because true joy can only be found and experienced in knowing and loving Christ. God made you with the capacity for incredible joy, but that capacity for joy will be wasted if you attempt to fill it with anything less than God Himself. You prefer darkness, you prefer self-centeredness, you prefer sin and rebellion if you think that in the

attainment of those things you will find joy. God knows better. He made you with an incredible capacity for joy that can only be filled by Him. If in the pursuit of your joy, you spit out the real joy-giver then you are left with lesser things to fill your desire for joy. And we try, oh we try. We try sports, or careers, or image, or cars, or travel, or physical beauty, or the approval of others. But every drink we take from any fountain other than Christ is like drinking salt water. It never satisfies. Any temporary thrill gives way to emptiness, regret or bondage. Little by little, our life is taken from us.

In 1947 ago, a Bedouin shepherd boy lost a lamb in the arid and rocky area near the Dead Sea. That mountainous terrain is dotted with hundreds of caves that would take a life time to search. So, as the little boy would run by a cave, he would throw a rock into it, hoping to scare out the lamb he was looking for. After throwing his stone into one particular cave, he heard the sound of pottery breaking. His curiosity was peaked and he investigated the cave, finding jars embedded in the walls of the cave with large scrolls sealed in the jars. Four of those scrolls were sold for \$250. A few years later, those same were scrolls were sold for \$250,000. Today, there is no price that can be set on them. The little boy had discovered what we know as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The kid had no idea what he had – did he? That’s just like us. We listen to the promises of our world that tell us that if you live the American dream then you will find happiness, if you have this look, this ipod, this cellphone, this – whatever – then you will have made it.

A few weeks before the Super Bowl, Tom Brady was interviewed for 60 minutes. Part of the conversation focused on the incredible amount of success that he has had on the football field and if all of the fame and glory has translated into having it all. His response was, “god, there’s got to be more to it than this.” There is.

“You will fill me with ...eternal pleasures at your right hand.”

Preferring anything over Christ is the essence of sin and makes us accomplices in the thieving of our own joy. We go to God and we cry and complain and in bitterness we wail that we are so depressed, so hopeless, and so confused and question whether or not God cares at all about the searing pain in our hearts. God is gracious and wise to point out that the pain in our hearts is caused by the knife that is held by our own hands. We attempt to use God to get what we instead of esteeming Him, preferring Him, valuing Him and loving Him above all. When we love Him more than father, mother, son or daughter, more than power, pleasure, possessions, position and image, He fills us with joy in his presence, with eternal pleasures at his right hand. God is infinitely serious about your love for Him.

5. **God is infinitely serious about your love because He is infinitely serious about His glory.**

Only God is truly glorious. Only God is the highest good. God’s commitment to His own glory is driven by God’s internal consistency. God can not make the pursuit of His glory anything less than the ultimate goal because He is the most glorious, and if He acted as if He was not the most glorious, then He would be guilty of falsehood. God is

infinitely serious about your love because He wants you to love supremely that which is truly Supreme. God is so right and so loving to command us and to demand from us that we love Him supremely because He is supremely lovely. He is altogether lovely. He is the highest value and the greatest treasure. If you had to make a choice between giving up your life or giving up Him, give up your life, because He is worth it.

So, why does Paul say this here at the end of this book? This is the fight that Paul is waging for these people. He is fighting for their love for God? He is fighting for them to esteem Jesus as being more precious than anything or anyone else. And that is exactly what I seek to do Sunday after Sunday from this pulpit. I seek to preach to your hearts and go to battle in order to see you value Christ supremely over and against all of the other things, even good things that compete for your affections but will never, ever replace Christ. So many of you are good, respectable, decent people in the eyes of this world, but I will not settle for a church that is good, respectable, decent, boring and complacent. When we love Christ supremely, and passionately and obediently and consider His promises more precious than anything else, then good will be replaced with holy, respectable with radical, and decent with dangerous. Christ died for this church and He demands my love, my life, my soul, my all.

If you love anything more than Him, spit it out before it takes your life and esteem Him more than anything else.