

THE ONE THING YOU CAN'T LOVE WITHOUT

Philippians 1:9-11

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The title of this sermon is “The One Thing You Can’t Love Without.”

The Bible commands us to love God and to love others. In fact, Jesus said that of all the commandments, these are the most important.

But there is one thing you can’t love without, and many people don’t have it.

Many people in our country want to love, but they fail to love because they don’t have this one thing.

What is that one thing?

Turn with me to **Philippians 1:9-11** (CSB), and I’ll show you.

9 And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment,

The apostle Paul is praying that the Christians in Philippi would grow in love.

I like how the **Amplified Bible** (2015) puts it. “And this I pray, that your love may abound more and more [displaying itself in greater depth]....”

God wants your love to grow.

Why? Because the Christian life is all about love.

Again, Jesus said in that the greatest commandment of all is to love God and love others.

My definition of spiritual growth is this: **Become like Christ, loving God and others more and more.** That's spiritual growth. A spiritually mature Christian is one who is really advanced at loving God and others more and more.

But notice what Paul says next. "And I pray this: that your love will keep on growing in knowledge and every kind of discernment...."

Paul says that in order for you to love well, to excel at loving, to grow in love, you need knowledge and discernment.

You need knowledge – you need to know what love is.

And you need discernment – you need to know how to apply that knowledge in your daily life.

That's the one thing you can't love without – knowledge and discernment.

If you don't know what love is, and how to apply it in your daily life, then you can't love.

You might have good intentions; you might mean well; but you can't love.

Let's keep reading. So our love needs to grow in knowledge and discernment.

10 so that you may approve the things that are superior and may be pure and blameless in the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.

Paul gives us **five reasons why our love needs to grow in knowledge and discernment.**

First, “so that you may approve the things that are superior.”

In other words, so you can choose the best course of action; or so that you can choose the best way to live.

Once you know what love is and how to apply it in your daily life, then you are able to choose the best course of action.

Second, so you may be “pure” in the day of Christ.

The day of Christ is referring to the day of Christ’s second coming.

The word “pure” here doesn’t mean clean, but sincere, or genuine.

In other words, it is important to know what love is and how to apply it so that when Christ comes back, He will find you living an authentic Christian life.

There are many people who call themselves Christians, but they aren’t Christians. And there are many people who are genuinely saved, but they aren’t living genuine, authentic Christianity.

Their knowledge is so immature, or so incorrect, that they are missing the real deal.

But if you know what love is, and if you know how to apply it in your Christian life, then when Christ comes back He will find you living like a genuine, real Christian.

Third, so you may be “blameless” in the day of Christ.

The word blameless means that you aren’t leading others to sin, and you aren’t being led into sin. It means innocent.

If you know what love is, and how to apply it in your daily life, then you will be found blameless, or innocent when Christ returns.

Fourth, so you may be “filled with the fruit of righteousness.”

Righteousness means morally right, or obedient to God’s will.

In other words, the Christian life can be summed up with one word: love.

And if you know what love is, and how to apply it, then you will be obedient to God’s will; you will live a righteous life.

Fifth, so that you will glorify and praise God.

The purpose of life is to glorify God. To glorify Him is to show what He is really like through your life, and by doing so, attract others to Him.

What is God like? God is love.

So if your love has knowledge and discernment, if you know what it is and how to apply it, then you will glorify God with your life.

And so what’s the one thing you can’t love without? Knowledge and discernment.

You might think those are two things – but they are really two sides of the same coin.

If you know what love is, then you will know how to apply it; if you know how to apply it, then you know what it is.

I’m sure you’ve noticed that our country is divided.

This divide becomes most apparent in politics.

There are two sides in our country who passionately disagree with one another.

And most of this disagreement centers around the concept of love.

In America, we all agree that we should be loving.

We all agree that love is better than hate; we all want to be on the side of love.

But the problem is that we disagree about the meaning of love.

There's an entire side of the country that is making horrible decisions because it doesn't have knowledge and discernment about love.

For example...

- Many people don't want to build a wall to protect our borders, and they don't want to deport illegal aliens because they think that's unloving.
- Many people are pro-abortion, because they think they are loving women.
- Many people refuse to condemn homosexuality because they think that is unloving.
- Many people refuse to condemn transgenderism because they think that is unloving.
- Many people think it is okay for a transgender man to use the girl's bathroom because they think they are being loving.
- Many people in our country vote for socialist policies because they think that is the loving thing to do.
- Many parents refuse to spank their children, because they don't want to be unloving.

In other words, there are many people in our country who want to be loving, but they are clueless about the meaning of love, and therefore they are making really bad political decisions.

If we want to love well, then we need knowledge and discernment.

We need to know what love is, and how to apply it in our daily lives.

Then we'll be able to choose the best way to live, and be pure, and blameless, and righteous, all to the glory and praise of God.

So let's take some time grow our love in knowledge and discernment. Let's look at some Biblical principles about love.

10 Biblical Principles About Love

1. We learn how to love from God.

1 John 4:8 says that "God is love."

God is the perfect example of love. He only loves. He does everything with love. His actions define love.

If we want to learn how to love, we need to study God. We do that by studying His word.

2. Love is not a merely a feeling, but an action based on a decision, regardless of how you feel.

The Greek word for "love" in Philippians 1:9 is *agape*.

Agape love is not merely an emotion, or a feeling, but an action.

In other words, when God commands us to love our neighbor, He is not commanding us to feel good about them; He is commanding us to act good toward them.

For example, **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** is one of the best descriptions of love in the Bible. And I want you to notice that love is not a way of feeling, but a way of acting. “4 Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, is not boastful, is not arrogant, 5 is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not irritable, and does not keep a record of wrongs. 6 Love finds no joy in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. 7 It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

And notice that I said that is **an action based on a decision.** In other words, love is not dependent upon our feelings and emotions. Emotions come and go. But are called to decide to act in a loving way regardless of how we feel.

God calls me to love my wife, and one of the ways I am called to do that is with sexual faithfulness.

But I’m not just sexually faithful to her when I feel like it, or when I feel attracted to her, or as long as I’m not attracted to anyone else.

I decide to act in a way that is sexually faithful to my wife regardless of how I feel. That’s *agape* love.

3. The best demonstration of God’s love is the cross of Jesus Christ, in which Jesus sacrificially gave and served His enemies so that they could be saved from sin.

The way we learn to love is by studying God.

And God’s best and clearest demonstration of love was the cross of Christ.

1 John 3:16 (HCSB) says, “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers.”

Christ gave to those in need. That’s what love does.

Christ served those in need (He met our needs).

Christ gave and served sacrificially.

Love goes beyond what is comfortable and easy and safe.

Christ gave and served sacrificially to His enemies.

Love gives and serves those who are undeserving.

And Christ did all this to save us from sin and bring us closer to God.

Ultimately love seeks to bring others closer to God.

4. The way to love is to give and serve sacrificially to the underserving with the ultimate aim of moving people closer to God.

Go back to **1 John 3:16**. “This is how we have come to know love: He laid down His life for us. We should also lay down our lives for our brothers.”

In the same way that God demonstrated His love on the cross, we are to love others.

So love means giving to those in need. Love means serving those in need. Love means giving and serving sacrificially.

We need to be willing to get out of our safety bubbles, or our comfort zones.

We need to be willing to lose so that others can win.

As well, love means giving and serving **the undeserving.**

This includes our enemies (Lk 6:27).

This includes those who persecute us.

This includes those people that don't believe the way we do.

This includes people we don't like.

5. Love does what is best for people, not what makes them feel good.

One of the primary ways that our culture misunderstand love is that it believes that love means making someone feel good.

I like how John Piper put it. In our culture love means holding up a mirror to someone and convincing them to like what they see. But love is not making someone feel good.

Love is doing what is best for people.

For example, love is telling people the truth – the truth about God and His word His will and salvation.

This truth might hurt people's feelings.

It might make people feel really bad at first.

But it's what is best. Love does what is best for people.

It didn't make Peter feel good when Christ rebuked him and said, "Get behind me Satan." But that was what Peter needed to hear, because he was opposing God's plan to redeem the whole world through the suffering of Christ (Mk 8:33).

6. Loves gives people what they need, not what they want.

Love is not a permissive parent who refuses to tell a child no, or to spank a child.

Love is not the enabling spouse who refuses to leave her addicted, unfaithful spouse.

Love does not necessarily give people what they want. Instead love gives people what they need.

Proverbs 13:24 shows how this plays out in the parent/child relationship. “The one who will not use the rod hates his son, but the one who loves him disciplines him diligently.”

Does a child want the rod? No. But the child needs the rod. And so a loving parent uses the rod, even though the child does not want it.

7. Love discriminates.

To discriminate simply means to recognize a distinction; differentiate (Google).

Some people have turned it in to a bad thing, but it's not.

There's unjust discrimination, but there's also the good kind of discrimination, such as when discriminate between two different daycares in order to choose the right one for your child, or when you discriminate between two cars in order to choose the best one for your money.

In the same way, love discriminates. Loves recognizes a distinction; it differentiates. Love is intelligent.

In other words, we are not called to love everything. Everyone, yes. Everything, no.

We're not to love the world or the things of the world.

1 John 2:15 says, “Do not love the world or the things that belong to the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him.”

We’re not to live as if this world is our eternal home, and as if our mission is to enjoy this world to the max.

Our eternal home is the new heaven and earth; our mission is to serve God and store up eternal treasures.

We’re not to love money.

1 Timothy 6:10 says, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

We’re not to treat money as more important than God and people.

We’re to use money to love God and people.

As well, we’re not to love sin; instead we are to hate it. So not only does love discriminate, but it hates.

Romans 12:9 (AMP) says, “Love is to be sincere and active [the real thing—without guile and hypocrisy]. Hate what is evil [detest all ungodliness, do not tolerate wickedness]; hold on tightly to what is good.”

Why would God want us to hate evil, or sin?

Because love does what is best for people.

And what is best for people is righteousness, not sin.

Sin keeps people from what is best. Love gives people what they need.

What people need is a healthy relationship with God, and sin keeps people from Him.

So to truly love people, you must hate evil.

8. Love protects.

Pastors are called to guard the church from false teachers and divisive church members by calling them to repent, and then kicking them out of the church if necessary (Titus 1:10-13; Titus 3:10).

The church is called to guard its purity from unrepentant church members by warning them, and then kicking them out if necessary (Mt 18:15-17; 1 Cor 5)).

The government is called to protect its citizens by using the sword against evildoers (Rom 13:1-7).

What this means is that love is not passive. Love is active, and aggressive.

And sometimes love must inflict harm on the evildoer in order to protect the innocent.

9. Our love for others must never cause us to compromise our love for God.

Every time Jesus stated the Great Commandment, He always put love for God before and above love for neighbor (see Mt 22:37-38).

We are to love our neighbor as ourselves, but we are to love God with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, and all our strength.

Our love for God takes priority before our love for others.

As well, the way to love God is to obey Him. Jesus said in **John 14:15**, “If you love Me, you will keep My commands.”

So if loving God takes priority before loving others, and the way to love God is to obey Him, then **we must never allow our love for others to interfere with our obedience to God.**

For example, in Luke 14:26 Jesus said that our love for him is to be infinitely greater than our love for our family members. In other words, you must never allow your family to cause you to disobey God.

In Acts 5:29 the apostles disobeyed the civil authorities because the Jewish leaders ordered them to disobey God. And they made it clear they would never disobey God. In other words, love for God trumps patriotism.

So in our efforts to love people, we must never do anything that would violate God's will or dishonor God.

10. We can determine how to love someone by considering how we would want to be treated.

Matthew 22:39 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Luke 6:31 says, "Just as you want others to do for you, do the same for them."

This goes all the way back to the Old Testament.

Leviticus 19:18 says, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

This is called the **Golden Rule.**

The **NLT Study Bible** (Tyndale) notes that this idea is "the cornerstone of Biblical ethics in both the OT and NT."

In other words, Jesus was teaching us how to discern how to love someone.

How do you know how to love someone in each situation? Treat them the way you want to be treated.

CONCLUSION

So God calls us to love God and love others.

But this is not as easy as it sounds.

There's one thing you can't love without: Knowledge and discernment. You need to know what love is, and you need to know how to apply it in your daily life.

Without knowledge and discernment, you end up doing all kinds of foolish and immoral things, all in the name of love.

When the world criticizes you for being unloving, that doesn't mean you are unloving. It simply means you don't measure up to their definition of love.

But that's okay. Our goal is to love in a way that pleases God, not in a way that pleases the world.