

April 14, 2017 - "If You Love Me"

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Have you ever heard the phrase "if you love me ..."? I have heard this quite often and whenever someone uses it, it is followed by a demand.

"If you love me...

You will do this for me.

You will let me have that.

You will get this for me.

What this person has done is taken all of your love and quantified it to this specific instance, no matter the history or the fact that you love them or not, but if you follow through with this demand. It is very selfish all this phrase does is to get their way.

If you love me then you will stop lying.

If you love me then you will not cheat on me.

If you love me then you will marry me.

If you love me then you would spend more time with me.

The pressure is put on the person that in this instance if they mess up or step out of line even in with the smallest infraction then they must not love the person.

If we base this off ourselves, we know that these are demands to be perfect. Another person is demanding perfection from us. Here is the problem with this, we are not perfect. In fact, I will say with boldness that we know we are not perfect. As Christians that is easy for us to say, but I will say with surety that any sane person would easily admit to that. We are not perfect.

Therefore, when this perfection is demanded of us it is unfair. "If you love me..." becomes a prison in which there is no escape. You have now been locked in a cell that only leads to damnation.

Let me give you an example, please know that this is not true at all, but I am only using this for the sake of an example.

If my wife were to say to me "If you love me then you will take out the trash." She now has put this condition on love. Love will only be there if I take out the trash. So, I may do it that day, but now fear has been put in me. If one day I forget to take out the trash my love is gone. Does she have the right to say I don't love her? That sounds preposterous, but would she be right? The answer according to the condition would be no. I would have failed her condition. On the other hand, if I continued to take out the trash I would be okay and my love for her would still be

there, this equally sounds ridiculous. The fear I now face is based solely on whether I take out the trash.

This phrase “If you love me ...” comes with conditions. Conditions as fallen humans we cannot keep. The true fact is that none of us can love anyone else. We cannot love of our own accord. We are sinful people who only want our demands met.

Have we not heard that love is unconditional. Meaning love has no conditions. Moreover, there is nothing we can do or not do to lose that love. Is this true? Is love unconditional?

When Jesus was talking with His disciples was He really putting conditions on His disciples. I thought God’s love was unconditional.

Romans 8:35-39

35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;

we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Psalm 136

It sounds like its on repeat “For His steadfast love endures forever” In this Psalm we here that phrase 26 times. If you don’t remember it, it is quite beautiful.

God’s love is unconditional, but it is only because of what Christ did. Christ’s death on the cross made it so.

It is through Christ’s crucifixion, it was through His terrible and gruesome death that God can love us even though we sin.

So why in the world would Christ say this phrase “If you love me...” if He is the one that instituted unconditional love? He knows we are sinners. He knows we are not perfect. Does He want us to do works?

The answer is No!

Unfortunately, many other denominations and cults use this verse inappropriately. They take it as a condition. They take it like I have just talked about. They must follow God’s law in order

for them to “love God” But, as I recall doesn’t say in Galatians 2:21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness[e] were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Our faith and our salvation is not based on us following the law. Christ got rid of that when He died on the cross. Remember His love is unconditional.

So, I didn’t answer the other question “Why would Christ say it? Why would He say in our opening gospel verse “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”?

This is not the conditional phrase we think it is. Let me give you another scenario to explain. It is contrived, but bear with me.

Let’s take my sons. They go through clothes ridiculously fast. Either Eleanor or I have to wash them repeatedly. So, I see they have a bunch of dirty clothes and I wash all of them, and now they are all clean. Now I say to my sons “If you love me, you would wash your clothes.” Their response to me most likely would be, “but dad you washed them already!” and I would respond “Then you must love me!”

Do you see the beauty in that. I did the dirty work, and my sons only get the benefit. I have done something for them and now am giving them the credit for it. Since I showed my sons love through my action they now see what I did and love me back.

Christ is the only one who kept the commandments. He is the only one who has loved the Lord with all His heart, soul, and mind. He is the only one who has loved His neighbors as Himself. He kept those commandments to the cross. He fulfilled everything the Lord required in His death and resurrection. Christ did the dirty work for us.

So, when we hear in the gospel “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” What we really hear is If you love me as is the case because I have accomplished all, including keeping Lord’s commandments. Therefore, you will keep my commandments because I have, and I cover you.

We love because He first loved us. We now can love unconditionally because He lives within us. From the Acts reading we hear “In him we live and move and have our being. For we are indeed his offspring.” He resides within us Rom 8:10-11 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life[d] because of righteousness. **11** And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of[e] his Spirit who lives in you. and Gal 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

He has made us children, He has adopted us and given us His name in baptism, and from 1 Peter 3:21 we know that baptism is what saves us. Like Jesus says in the gospel He has not left us orphans, but made us children and heirs of the kingdom of heaven even though we are sinners. Our salvation is in the flood waters of baptism and He has given us Himself, the Holy Spirit our helper. We can seek Him because He sought us out first. We are faithful because He was faithful to us. We can honor Christ because He first honored the Father by Golgotha.

He has radically changed us. He has made, us who are dead, us who are dry bones, into living flesh by our baptism and He has breathed His Spirit into us so that we would be alive. We are not orphans. We are His most precious children! The promise of the Holy Spirit is such an amazing gift. He has given Himself to us so that He could always be with us. Jesus Christ our Savior lives within us by the Spirit. His perfection has been given to us. When the Father looks at us He sees His First Child, the Suffering Servant, Jesus Christ. He sees the one who has kept the commandments and has loved Him perfectly.

We are adopted. We are no longer without a home, we are no longer without food, we are no longer without a Father. Christ's sacrifice paid our adoption fee. We are no longer orphans, but children of the Most High. He has suffered so that He would be rewarded. He has made the outcast family. He has made the poor rich, the dead alive. He has given us His Love! The verses from 1 John 4:7-12 help us sum up that Gospel text.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because **God is love.** **9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, **not that we have loved God but that he loved us** and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. **12** No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

That "If you love me" really stands out now from our Gospel because God is love. We quite clearly know from that verse and what I have discussed that the true meaning as it was meant in the Greek is "If you love me as I know you do because I have loved you first."

Our Gospel reading ends with this verse:

21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

It is He our risen Lord, Jesus Christ, Love, who allows us to say that we have kept His commandments by His Holy covering and adoption. We do love Him by His body and His

blood, He has given Himself to us. Therefore, we know and are assured that we are loved by the Father, and we are loved by Christ, and He has manifested Himself to us by the Helper, the Holy Spirit. -SDG