

# The Table Of Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Our readings today are from the book of Romans, chapter 13, verses 8 to 14, and then the book of Matthew, chapter 18, verses 15 to 20.

Let no debt remain outstanding except the continuing debt to love one another. For whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, and whatever other command there may be are summed up in this one command.

Love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, understanding the present time.

The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over.

The day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] Rather, clothe yourselves in the Lord Jesus Christ and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh. And from Matthew, If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault just between the two of you.

If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church. And if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray together. Almighty and loving God, we thank you for the gift it is to be able to come together in praise and worship.

[ 2 : 3 1 ] To have lifted our voices in song, to have opened our hearts in prayer, and to have heard your word. And now, Lord, with our hearts open, plant that seed in each of us that you know we need.

That will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. So, I'm betting that I'm probably not the only one who feels this way.

But one of my very favorite places to be in the world is at my dining room table. Now, there's kind of the obvious reason.

But there's more to it than that, right? I mean, most of us love to be at the dining room table for what the dining room table is for. But when you add to that, one of the reasons why I said my dining room table specifically is that it's around the dining room table where the whole family would usually be together.

And so, when we would come to a space like this, that it was about more than just enjoying the food. It was really about enjoying each other. That we would have those conversations.

[ 3 : 45 ] That we would tell the stories over and over again. That we would talk about the new and silly thing that happened during the day. That we would talk through some of the things that were hard.

And sometimes somebody would have a question or there would be a problem we need to solve. But it was there, when all of us were around the table, that we did that in a way that we don't do it anywhere else.

And that's a pretty powerful thing. You know, it's different now because two of my daughters don't live at home anymore. So, even the three of us still get to enjoy those times.

But, whether it's the extended family at Christmas or whether it's the three of us. You still have those moments. You know, and the table is not just about family.

Because, as all of you know, I was away this weekend and spent a lot of time around tables then too. That we had our fantasy football draft around my friend Kevin's dining room table.

[ 4 : 47 ] That we spent Labor Day around table in the backyard of my friend Stevie's house. Doing the same types of things. Because the power of the table is pretty special.

And no matter where the table is in your life. No matter what tables they are. That we all understand that this is about more than just meals. Now, for those of you who may not have had those experiences.

Know that our heart goes out to you. Because you always have a place at our table. And you may be at a table right now that's not affirming you or filling your soul.

But, as I said, there is a place for you. At our table. And certainly, at his. Now, the reason why I wanted us to think about that.

The power of this table and how we build relationships. And the ways in which our bonds get strengthened around the table. Goes to the idea of another problem that we are all dealing with.

[ 5 : 58 ] I read something in preparation for today. That was not really a shock. But in some ways it was a shock. That there was a study done by the American Bar Association.

That said 85% of Americans. 85%. 9 out of 10. Believe that a society has become more angry and less civil.

How many of you agree with that? Think that society is just meaner and nastier. I think I've felt it myself. I mean, we've all had those moments.

And we think that it seems to be like there's this lack of connection. This lack of just being able to be nice to one another anymore. It seems to have just gone away. Now, I want us to spend some time with both of those things.

And this is not a simple just it would be nice if everybody went back and had dinner. And this is not a simple just a little bit. But I do want us to confront something very real about both of those realities.

[ 7 : 02 ] And here's what I mean by that. Is that if we all have experienced this sense of America, the world even, just being less nice.

That people being angrier and meaner than we kind of remember. The challenge for us as people who claim Jesus is are we part of the problem or part of the solution?

Because we just spent a pretty considerable amount of time talking about who we believe ourselves to be. Who we believe our Lord is.

What we believe God is about. And if we know those things to be true. And if we claim them and profess them with our mouths. When we go out into the world, are we the people who look like the world?

Or are we the people who look like him? That's where we need to spend a little time today. Because when we hear the scripture that we went through, we heard Liz read for us.

[ 8 : 14 ] There's the one that's kind of hard for us. Because Jesus gives this nice model for how to deal with problems. Right?

In the middle of this teaching in Matthew 18, Jesus says, okay, so here's what you do if your brother is sinning. Now first, he advises us to, well, go try and work it out between the two of you.

That sounds good. And that's what most of us do. We can go try and work it out. But here's the thing that's kind of awkward.

We got to take a real hard look at what we mean when we say, well, what does it mean to work it out? Because a lot of times work it out means you need to do what I said.

Because we love to be right. We all love to be right. I love to be right. But this is the real world, and I know that doesn't happen 100% of the time. The problem is, is that when we have these kinds of things happen, when we find ourselves in these moments of conflict, when we find ourselves really dealing with a tough issue, do we bring what Jesus brings to the table, or do we just bring what we want to the table?

[ 9 : 36 ] Because that's the rub. It's not hard to go into a disagreement knowing that I know what I want.

But will we bring the character of our Lord to the table? See, when Jesus enters into a conversation like that, Jesus has a couple things that we don't always bring.

One, Jesus comes with pure love to the table. And that makes this a little more challenging for us.

Because when we think of the folks that we share these kinds of moments with, we will disagree with them. As furious as the people whom we love the most can make us, that when we are disagreeing with them, we know that there's this foundation under it, though.

We know that there's this bond that's a part of it. We know that there is love that flavors everything that we're doing, even if we are angry with each other. And so we are committed to trying to work this out in a different kind of way, usually.

[ 10 : 55 ] The challenge for us is that the further we get away from the table, meaning that people we don't spend these kinds of moments with, it becomes pretty easy for us to decide that, well, maybe this isn't a conversation where I need to bring love to the table.

And that's why it's easier to just not care. It's easier to want to just impose our will.

It's easier to just want a pound of flesh. It's easier to want to make somebody hurt, as opposed to be the people of Jesus in the world.

And I want you to hear something very clearly. Y'all know me well enough now to know that I'm not someone who's going to sit here and tell you to not have your feelings. That's not what this is about.

If somebody's done something wrong, somebody's done something wrong. And we're not going to sit here and pretend that they didn't do something wrong. We're also not going to pretend that that didn't have a real impact in your life.

[ 12 : 13 ] If you're mad, you're mad. If you're hurt, you're hurt. And you have every legitimate right to experience that and own that. Our challenge is this.

is when those emotions start to become our driver. When those emotions become the fuel in our tank, it becomes really easy for us to rocket past what Jesus would want into some pretty unhealthy places.

And that's the challenge for us. Now the reason these two things are part of each other is that you can see it on your bulletin that today we're talking about what's called the table of love.

And we just sat here and felt all the warm fuzzies that come from thinking about the tables of love we're a part of. Can we start to think about how those who challenge us in life those who bring different points of view that we bring those who may stand on the different side of a conversation than we do.

can we invest the love it would take to be the people of Jesus in those conversations?

[ 13 : 56 ] Because we end up with the very problem we were talking about that a world that is meaner and angrier if we're not willing to bring that to the table.

See this is where being the disciple becomes a little rougher. Because remember what Jesus taught us we are to be in the world but not of the world.

We're not supposed to look at things the same way everybody else does. We're not supposed to respond to things the same way everybody else does. We're supposed to love beyond what is easy.

Go past what comes naturally. Be the difference makers not part of the problem. So how do we do that?

Well friends I would invite us to remember something that we just also heard read today. Because that passage in Romans calls us to something that reminds us that we're not supposed to have any debt outstanding except the debt to love one another.

[ 15 : 12 ] That loving our neighbor is what's important. That we have to be the people who will show love when love is not the easy thing to do.

Now that doesn't mean we just don't care about right and wrong. That's why Jesus gave us that manual. That's why he gave us those steps.

Of course we care about right and wrong. What I like to tell folks is this is that being a disciple of Jesus doesn't mean that you don't fight.

It changes how you fight. hear that again. It doesn't mean you don't fight. It changes how you fight. Because the way we go into those conversations is focused on what builds relationship.

What pours love into the space. How do we help someone who is wandering away make their way back? how do we build a bigger table?

[ 16 : 22 ] That's who we're called to be. Now some of you may have read ahead in the assignment and you realize that Jesus says well go try and work it out with folks.

And says well if they don't hear you when you talk to them in private bring along two or three others so that everything may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

now let's be clear. Thing is if you're going to do that make sure you bring people who are in the same headspace as you because you know you can bring some folks to the party who will mess up your whole program because if they ain't thinking the same things you're thinking then you didn't ruin the whole enterprise.

Okay. But then it says bring it to the entire church. We're going to save that one. Okay. I mean it's there and it's part of it.

But here's the thing about bringing stuff before the church and I want us to be clear on this. Is that if we're really talking about doing something of that nature then this better be a Jesus focused issue. As opposed to something that is just between two people.

[ 17 : 33 ] But there's the piece that everybody likes when you skip to the end. Because it says well if they still won't listen then treat them like a pagan or a tax collector. And everybody says oh good. Because now somebody got up under my skin and I can treat them the way I feel like treating them.

I can do what comes naturally. Because if they ain't gonna listen then we can kick those fools through the curb. I like that part. But let me remind you of something.

Anybody hear of a guy named Matthew? Anybody hear of a guy named Zacchaeus? Anybody remember what they did for a living?

So when we start thinking about how we treat tax collectors what does that tell you? See Jesus always brought love and the hope of relationship to the table.

That even these folks who had done some pretty clear and despicable things Jesus still reached out to them in love. And if that's not enough to push you remember this.

[ 18 : 51 ] There was a time probably not too long ago when you yourself was the one who had done the wrong thing. when you were the one who had committed the sin.

When you were the one who stood outside of the relationship and having stood in that space yourself how does it feel to still be welcome at the table?

so when we've been the ones who have experienced this ourselves when we know the value of love over anger and we know what it means to have someone who is willing to go the extra to make sure that we are not simply thrown away cast aside and put on the shelf somewhere to know that to have received it to positively celebrate it because we know what it did to us will we go out into this world and be the people who honor the one who did that for us or will we act like everybody else?

see having a table of love building a table of love the foundation it represents is transformational it makes all the difference in the world to know that there are those places where even in our flawed sinning broken selves we have this kind of moment we have that kind of place imagine the power of that for the one who feels irredeemable imagine the value of that for the one who stands outside imagine for those who've always felt unwelcome and unloved how powerful that can be because when we were in that same place

Jesus showed us that we were welcome at his table that we were welcome to receive what he had to give that we could partake of all that he was his very broken body his very life poured out for every single one of us so let us be his people let us go into the world as part of the solution as the difference makers in the wave of this anger and nastiness as opposed to the ones who create the problem there's a meme a couple of friends of mine started sharing on social media recently and I thought it was interesting and I want to close with it that meme says I want to be the reason that people decide to come to Jesus not the reason they turn away let that be your challenge build a bigger table amen and amen loving God we do want to be the reasons that people come to the table that we want to welcome people in love that those who have been feeling outside know that there is a place they can have a seat let our love be real let even when we challenge each other and the world challenges us let us love like you loved let us bring the heart that seeks relationship let us bring the desire to extend the table in the kingdom as opposed to close the door and shut people out

[ 23 : 23 ] Lord God we do know what it means to have been welcomed when we felt unlovable let us hear your call and let us do the same to those who need it amen it's powerful message is it not that's how the world will know so that being said as we go into the world to live our faith this week you've already seen that we have signups beginning for our October fish fries if you did not see that make sure you stop by the table on the way out we also have a signup sheet for the helping team the one that's going to go around in our neighborhood and respond to needs as we are made aware of them people serve as they are able and so please if you have more questions about that you can see me or Pastor Jennifer for more information and of course there is still a signup to help with the rummage sale as there are different roles that still need to be played our bible studies are unfolding this week too so use your bulletin as a resource so many opportunities to walk in faith please put your faith into action over the course of the next coming days now let's receive our benediction this table of love requires much from us it insists that we love one another as we love ourselves and that we love ourselves as we love others love asks that we raise one another up by saying yes you are worthy you are welcome at this table when we surrender to the mysterious ways of love we may be surprised to find just how much there is to go around the grace of God abounds the invitation of Christ is wide the power of the transformational spirit will surprise us every time may the blessings of love you find here go with you and move through you to others wherever you go this week in all

God's people said amen you you