

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“DO THEY KNOW BY OUR LOVE?”**  
First Thessalonians 5:12-15

☑ {“They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”}

**... And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love.**

**Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.**

Imagine that a total stranger has never heard our name, knows nothing of our theology, and is unaware that we gather for worship and to study Scripture. This person is entirely in the dark about Beverly Covenant Church.

🔍 The stranger is given a detailed checklist of words and deeds that constitute Christian love, and they are appointed to evaluate us solely on that basis. Would they **“know we are Christians by our love”**?

Love is not secondary, not “icing on the cake,” not a nice supplement. It is the main thing.

{Mt 22:36-40} When an expert asks, **“Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”** how does Jesus answer? **“Love the Lord your G-d with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

{Lk 10:29} **“And who is my neighbor?”** In the Parable of the Good Samaritan we discover that everyone is our neighbor, and that the better question to ask is how can I be a good neighbor?

{Mt 5:43-44} Elsewhere, Messiah goes further:

**“You have heard...it...said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**

There is no one whom we are authorized not to love.

★ However, universality does not imply uniformity: we are to love our spiritual family especially well. John 13:34-35: **“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By *this* everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another.”**

🔍 Do they **“know we are Christians”**?

☑ Please turn with me to First Thessalonians 5:12-15. This section is grounded in the Sermon on the Mount, in which the Lord sets the basic template for αγάπη [agapē] love, but Paul adds some details that are specific to relationships within the Church.

★ He unapologetically identifies different roles and varying degrees of authority in the Church, but he emphasizes a deeper truth: Christian love is mutual. The Lord of the Church calls each and every one of us to love our brothers and sisters as he has loved us.

↔<sup>1</sup>Verse 12a: **“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you.”**

Paul is talking about elders, the early equivalent of today’s congregational pastors. In First Timothy 5:17 he writes, **“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and**

**teaching.**” Reading these verses together, the pastor “[works] **hard**” as preacher, teacher, and director who loves G-d and G-d’s people.

⇔<sup>1</sup> Moving down to verse 14c we read: **“we urge you, brothers and sisters...help the weak.”**

📖 The parallel between **“work hard among you”** and **“help the weak”** is subtle, yet substantial. The verb translated **“work hard”** in verse 12 was derived from another that means *“to be weary, to feel fatigue.”* Love for the church can cause a pastor to preach, teach, and direct hard, to the point of exhaustion.

{II Co 12:9} There is no virtue in pointless fatigue; still, exhaustion is sometimes unavoidable. At any rate, my love for G-d and you requires me to humbly embrace my weakness so that **“Christ’s power may rest on me,”** for his **“power is made perfect in weakness.”**

📖 **“Help the weak”** in 14c literally means *“hold fast to, adhere to, cleave to”* those who are without strength and, by implication, *“support”* them.

Sometimes, I am **“weak.”** Sometimes, you are.

{Eph 6:10, 14-17} Sometimes we are **“weak”** because we have not relied upon G-d’s **“truth... righteousness... readiness... faith...salvation”** and **“word.”** Sometimes we have availed ourselves of his **“mighty power,”** but we are overwhelmed by staggering burdens of concern or hardship or loss.

Regardless of the cause, each of us needs the other to come alongside us with kind words, merciful silences, and helpful deeds. This is love.

? Do they **“know we are Christians”**?

⇔<sup>2</sup> Verse 12b: **“Now we ask you...to acknowledge those...who care for you in the Lord.”**

📖 Προϊστημι [proïstēmi] (**“care for”**) has dual definitions. It means *“to be at the head of, rule, direct,”* and also *“to be concerned about, care for, give aid.”*

{Mk 10:42-44} These denotations are not in conflict! **“Those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. ...whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.”**

My calling is to *direct* Beverly Covenant by *servicing* you. I lead by example as I minister *to* you with active, humble care.

⇔<sup>2</sup> Verse 14b: **“And we urge you, brothers and sisters...encourage the disheartened.”**

📖 The parallel between leaders who **“care”** and members who **“encourage”** is not blatant. Nevertheless, it is significant. The Greek verb for **“encourage”** combines παρα [para], *“near,”* with μῦθος [muthos], *“to relate.”* It evokes the image of one person drawing near to another to refresh them and bring them comfort.

Encouragement is a hallmark of loving fellowship and loving leadership. In his letter to Titus, who was in charge of the mission to Crete, Paul writes: **“Encourage and rebuke with all authority.”**

? Do they **“know we are Christians”**?

⇔<sup>3</sup> Verse 12c: **“Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those... who admonish you.”**

📖 The pastor is called to **“admonish”** the local church. I am *“to impart understanding, stir hearts, and change minds”* – not in a spirit of judgmental pride, but in humility and compassion.

⇔<sup>3</sup> Compare this to 14a: **“And we urge you... warn those who are idle and disruptive.”**

The verb **“warn”** is νουθετεω [nouthetēō]. It is the same exact word that Paul uses in verse 12 for pastoral admonition.

{II Ti 3:16} Every **“teaching, rebuking, correcting and training”** that is prompted by the H.S., grounded in Holy Scripture, spoken to equip us **“for every good work,”** and delivered in a manner that is consistent with G-d’s goodness, fulfills this call and is an act of ἀγάπη love, whether it is a sermon, a Confirmation presentation, a TGIS lesson, a Bible Study outline, or part of an informal conversation.

❓ Do they **“know we are Christians”**?

■ In verses 12, 13a, and much of 14 Paul urges mutual love as he acknowledges different roles and capacities. He speaks of leaders and laypeople, of active members and idle ones, of encouragers and **“the disheartened,”** and of the strong and the weak.

Interwoven with this thread is a second one, in which these distinctions are nonexistent.

⇔<sup>4</sup> Verse 13b: **“Live in peace with each other.”**

New Testament Ειρήνη is an extension of Old Testament Shālôm. It is the presence of harmony, not

merely the absence of conflict. It occurs in corporate relationships in addition to private ones. It is founded on external conditions of righteous justice, as well as internal attitudes of concord.

{II Co 13:11; Gal 5:19-23; Jn 14:27} This is beyond us. It is not beyond Christ in us! **“Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the G-d of love and peace will be with you.”** **“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, self ambition, dissensions, factions...envy.... But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness ...self-control.”** Messiah declares: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.”**

{Ro 12:18} Absolute peace will be ushered in at Christ’s return. Till then G-d is calling us to **“live at peace as far as it depends on”** us, especially within the Church, even at extreme cost to ourselves.

Αγάπη consistently inspires sincere efforts to make peace. The two cannot be separated.

❓ Do they **“know we are Christians”**?

⇔<sup>4</sup> This thread continues in verse 14: **“And we urge you... be patient with everyone.”**

{Eph 4:2; Col 3:13} **“Be completely humble and gentle;”** persistently **“bear with each another and forgive one another”** – not once or twice but repeatedly, with eternity in view.

A spirit of harmony means nothing without patience. A commitment to peacemaking is wasted apart from actual longsuffering.

{1 Co 13:4} What is Paul's first positive statement about love in the Love Chapter? **“Αγαπη is patient.”**

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⇄<sup>4</sup> The thread reaches its conclusion in verse 15:

**“Make sure... nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.”**

{Mt 5:38, 44} The apostle sounds a lot like Jesus, does he not? **“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.... Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”**

{Ro 12:14, 17-19, 21} In Romans Paul teaches: **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse,” “Do not repay evil for evil,” “Do not take revenge.”**

Αγαπη motivates us to **“overcome evil with good.”**

? Do they **“know we are Christians”**?

We have gone deep, yet we have barely scratched the surface. There is so much more to love than this!

Αγαπη is the Old Testament Law and Prophets in a nutshell. It is the New Testament Gospel boiled down to its essence. It is the substance and sign of authentic Church life.

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