

# Crosswalk: How To Live As Followers Of Jesus Christ

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*  
(Romans 12:1 ESV)

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*  
(Ephesians 4:1-3 ESV)

## As I Have Loved You

July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018

John 13:34-35

1 John 3:17

Assistant Pastor Levi denBok

### **Introduction:**

Good morning. Please turn with me in your Bibles to the gospel of John, chapter 13.

The passage we're looking at today comes at the beginning of what Bible scholars call: The Farewell Discourse. The disciples are gathered in the upper room, Judas has just left the building to put his murderous plan into motion, and Jesus is teaching his followers how to live on the other side of the cross.

That's the same question we're seeking to answer in this series: How do we live on the other side of the cross?

Here, in today's text, Jesus begins his instructions to the disciples with a command that is absolutely central to the Christian faith. Look with me in your Bibles at John 13:34-35. Hear now God's holy, inspired and infallible word:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."  
(John 13:34-35 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, most of your Bibles likely have a heading over this section. Mine says right here: “A New Command.” That’s an interesting heading because our Jewish friends could argue that there’s nothing new about this command at all. In fact, it looks an awful lot like the command we find in Leviticus 19:18. There we read:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19:18 ESV)

Jesus’ command doesn’t seem to be all that different from the command given to Moses, does it?

Except that Jesus added this brief, yet GAME-CHANGING phrase to his command: “Just as I have loved you.”

That’s likely what prompted my Bible translator to add the heading: A New Command. The Old Testament taught us to love one another – sure – but it never taught us to die on a cross for each other. That’s a new development. Now, of course, I don’t anticipate that I will be put in a position to physically die on a cross for you, but what Jesus is presenting here is a love that is utterly self-sacrificing. A radical love. In his commentary on this passage, D. A. Carson says:

The *new command* is simple enough for a toddler to memorize and appreciate, profound enough that the most mature believers are repeatedly embarrassed at how poorly they comprehend it and put it into practice<sup>1</sup>

There’s a simplicity here. We love because God first loved us. Loved people love. And yet, as we will see, to actually love others this way is a daunting task. So, let’s wrestle through the text and ask the question: How?

## How Do We Love?

Thankfully, the Apostle John wrote three more letters. In them he gives some practical instructions on how to live this out. What does “Love one another as I have loved you” look like in Christian community? John

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<sup>1</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 484.

answers that question in his first letter. Flip ahead in your Bibles to 1 John. We're going to be looking at chapter 3.

What you're going to see in this text is that love is not optional for believers. As Pastor Paul and I were talking about this sermon on Tuesday, he said that love is like a family birthmark for Christians. I think that's a great analogy.

This isn't to say that non-Christians are incapable of love. They're made in the image of God so it's not surprising to see acts of love all around us. We should celebrate those, but what we're saying here is that Christians must be marked by a *deeper* love. Our love should be different and distinct from the world. This deeper love is part and parcel of being a follower of Jesus Christ. That's what John says in our text this morning.

So, look with me at 1 John chapter 3, and let's put feet to this command. Beginning in verse 11:

<sup>11</sup>For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. <sup>12</sup>We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. <sup>13</sup>Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you. <sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. <sup>15</sup>Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

<sup>16</sup>By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. <sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:11-18 ESV)

The first thing we see here is that Christians are to love sacrificially.

## 1. **Sacrificially**

Look again at verse 16:

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. (1 John 3:16 ESV)

The greatest display of love in human history is the love that Jesus showed to us on the cross. That's where

we learned finally and completely what true love really looks like.

You see, every single Christian you know came into the family of God the same way. This is why we can say that love is like the Christian birthmark. The minor details of my story are unique, but there is one door into the Kingdom of Heaven – there is only one way by which man can be saved: The cross of Jesus Christ.

Christian, you were living for yourself. You were chasing after earthly pleasures. You didn't even know that there was a problem until one day, by God's grace, he opened up your eyes to see His holiness and to see your sin. He softened your heart and caused you to turn away from your sin and to cling to Christ. He helped you to finally see that Jesus died on the cross FOR YOU. He took your death. He took your punishment. Now you are forgiven and free, and it's all because of Jesus' sacrificial love.

Now, as I mentioned, the minor details in each of our stories will vary, but we all passed through the same door. We are alive because Jesus died in our place. And that's why we all bear this same birthmark of love. That's what John is saying in today's text. We have experienced love in a way that is unique, and our family is therefore a family that loves differently.

I was recently speaking with a young man who was in the process of trying to reclaim his child from CAS. This was the second child that had been taken from his home. He went on to explain to me that he had been in and out of CAS himself for his entire childhood.

Is it surprising to see a young man who never had the benefit of a stable home struggling to provide a stable home for his two kids? He's modelling the love that he was shown.

As the family of God, we have been shown a love that is worth modelling, amen?

The second thing we see here is that Christians should love practically.

## **2. Practically**

Look with me at verses 17-18:

<sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? <sup>18</sup>Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed

and in truth.

Sentimental love is of no help to anyone, is it? How can we tell people that we love them, while turning a blind eye to their need? We read something similar in James:

If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (James 2:15-16 ESV)

Jesus modelled this for us perfectly. He looked on us in love, and he saw that we had a very practical need: He saw that we were completely incapable of living the way that we were made to live. He saw that our hearts were distorted and that we were chasing after all the wrong things. He saw that we were marching headlong to destruction.

And then, he did the unthinkable. He came down from his heavenly throne and he humbled himself to become a human being. He entered right into our mess. We had God’s instructions, but we were incapable of following those instructions, so he came down to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. He obeyed the law perfectly, he took our penalty upon himself, and then he even left us the Holy Spirit as a helper to enable us to live the way that we were meant to live.

He could have stayed in Heaven and sent us another prophet. He could have sent someone to us who would scream and shout to try and force us to obey. But he saw that the problem went deeper than that. He saw that the only solution for our need was to enter into the mess. And that’s exactly what he did in order to bring us home.

Therefore, Christian love doesn’t turn a blind eye to people’s need. We don’t simply throw empty words of encouragement to people who are struggling. If we want to love like Jesus, then we need to be willing to selflessly and generously meet the practical needs of others. I love the way the Apostle Paul puts it to the church in Galatia. He writes to them:

Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2 ESV)

Do you know what it means to bear someone’s burden? It means that you actually take some of the weight

onto your shoulders. Have you ever carried something heavy with a group of guys? Isn't there always one guy who positions himself so that none of the weight is actually on his shoulders? He thinks he's helping, but he's not actually taking any of the burden onto himself.

Very practically, if you want to help someone to bear a financial burden you will likely feel it in your own savings account. If you want to lighten the load of someone who is going through an extremely busy season, it's going to mean added stress in your own life. But – and here's the thing – all of the burden that you take onto your own shoulders is a burden that you're taking off of the other person's shoulders. You're going to feel it. That's the point! When you love someone the way that you're supposed to love, and you see them trying to carry something that is too heavy for them to carry, you get your shoulder under it and you feel the weight with them.

That's the love that Jesus modelled for us. He took all of the weight onto his shoulders. That's what he meant when he said:

Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. <sup>30</sup> For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:29-30 ESV)

A yoke was a farming tool that bound two plowing animals together. It allowed them to share the weight of the plow as they pulled. But Jesus says: "When you're yoked with me, I do the heavy lifting." Now he calls us to show that same practical, burden-bearing love to others.

Finally, Christians are called to love honestly.

### **3. Honestly**

To see this, we need to reflect back on the whole scope of Jesus' ministry with his disciples.

If you were with us in the Mark series, then you likely remember all of the times that the disciples fell short. That was something of a recurring theme, wasn't it? For example, in Mark 8, Jesus had just miraculously fed 4,000 people and directly afterwards the Pharisees approached him and asked him for another sign from heaven because the feeding of 4,000 with seven loaves and a few fish wasn't enough for them. Jesus then climbed into the boat and had this discussion with his disciples:

“Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” <sup>16</sup> And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. <sup>17</sup> And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? (Mark 8:15-17 ESV)

“I’m not talking about bread! How could you possibly think that I’m worried about bread after you just watched me feed 4,000 people??!!” Yet, Jesus did not throw them out of the boat. Instead, he began to teach them, and to help them to see what they had failed to see.

That’s characteristic of Jesus’ ministry with his disciples. He was patient and loving with them, but he wasn’t content to leave them where they were. His love was a truth-telling love. His love for them meant that he was going to teach them, correct them and rebuke them when necessary in order to help them to live the life that they were made to live. And Jesus called us to model this in our relationships with one another. He said:

Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him (Luke 17:3 ESV)

The Apostle Paul understood this. He understood that Christian love meant being honest with one another about sin. He wrote to the Galatians:

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. (Galatians 6:1a ESV)

This is where Christian love takes a sharp turn away from Canadian love. Canadian love says: “Live and let live. You do whatever works for you. Listen to your heart.” Christian love says: “That road you’re going down is going to end in destruction. God loves you and He’s given us His word to teach us how to live. Your heart should not be listened to right now.”

You see, Jesus didn’t simply set us free from the penalty of sin. He did that, of course, but he went on to do so much more! He showed us the blessed life that we were made to live! He loved God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength and he loved his neighbour as himself, and he did this perfectly. Now he says: “Go, and do likewise!”

“You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16 ESV)

That’s the target. A life that looks like Jesus’ life. A life marked by holiness. That’s the life that we were made to live, and the closer we are to that calling, the more joy we will have. I don’t know about you, but if I’m going to have any chance of getting anywhere near that target then I am going to need all the help I can get. I’m going to need Christian brothers and sisters pulling me aside and saying: “Hey, I noticed that you’ve been doing “x” and you really need to stop that.”

That’s Christian love. It’s love because God knows what’s best for me better than I know what’s best for myself. Therefore, if my plan starts shifting away from God’s plan I need some people to love me enough to confront me with the truth. Christian love is honest.

If that answers the question of how we should love, then another important question logically follows:

## Who Do We Love?

Now, we could simply answer: “everyone”, and we would be right. But, there’s more to it than that. In fact, when we read the Bible honestly, we come to see that:

### 1. **Christian love prioritizes believers, then overflows to the world**

“But that doesn’t seem right!” Is that objection rising up in your heart right now?

Hear me out. I’m not saying that we’re not called to love the world. We are! Jesus said:

The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” (Mark 12:31 ESV)

We understand the Bible’s definition of our neighbour to be anyone who is in our sphere of influence. The Bible calls us to extend our umbrella of self-preserving care to the people who are around us. If you are aware of people who are in need and you have the power to do something about it, then you should! That person is your neighbour.



Jesus then pushes that boundary even further. He says:

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Matthew 5:44-45 ESV)

The Bible is clear: Christian love extends to everyone. You are called to love your neighbour and you are called even to love your enemy. This, by the way, is why we run the Family Carnival. It's a tangible way that we can show our neighbours that we love them.

Why then would I say that Christian love prioritizes fellow believers? I appreciate the way that D. A. Carson handles this. He says:

At the risk of confounding logic, it is not so much that Christians are to love the world less, as that they are to love one another more.<sup>2</sup>

We're supposed to have a deeper love for our fellow believers. Look again at our text. Who is John telling us to love in this particular passage?

<sup>14</sup>We know that we have passed out of death into life, because **we love the brothers**...<sup>15</sup>Everyone who hates **his brother** is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

<sup>16</sup>By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for **the brothers**. <sup>17</sup>But if anyone has the world's goods and sees **his brother** in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?

Are you seeing a recurring theme here?

As believers, the Bible tells us that we have been adopted into God's family. He is our Father and we have all become brothers and sisters. And each of us has this distinct family birthmark: Love. We're called to love one another so well that the world takes notice. Isn't that exactly what Jesus said in the text we started in today?

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<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 485.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love **one another**: just as I have loved you, you also are to love **one another**. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have **love for one another.**” (John 13:34-35 ESV)

The disciples – the followers of Jesus – are supposed to love one another in such a way that the world will see it and want in! In that way, prioritizing fellow believers in your love is actually a *mercy* for unbelievers because it paints a compelling picture of the community of God and it draws them in. Jesus tells us if we love our fellow believers well, then it will be like a neon sign pointing people towards the kingdom of God.

The Bible says that, if you’re a loving and giving person *out there*, then you should be an amplified version of that *in here*. The Apostle Paul says that very thing to the Galatians:

So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and **especially to those who are of the household of faith.** (Galatians 6:10 ESV)

There’s the balance. Love everyone, even your enemies, but give the best of your love to your brothers and sisters in Christ. Love each other so well that the world will look at the church and say: “I know that what they believe is weird, but I wish I had people around me that loved me like that.”

Our love should be a reflection of God’s love for us in Christ. It should be a sacrificial, practical, truth-telling love. We’re called to extend that love to the world, but especially to our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus tells us that doing that – simply loving one another well – will cause our light to shine brighter in a dark world.

## Conclusion

As we conclude this morning, I want to do something a little different. This is the point in the sermon where we typically turn our attention to application. Every once in a while, it’s my job as your pastor and your brother to give us a firm kick in the pants. There are times when we see something in the text and it is obvious to everyone that we have been failing miserably.

That’s not the case today.

This morning, I have the privilege of telling you with all sincerity that I have watched you live this out in extraordinary ways. There's room for improvement of course, because you're not Jesus and neither am I. I'm not saying that we've loved one another perfectly, but I'm saying that I've seen things over this last month that lead me to believe that we're on the right track.

I watched as people from this church rallied around a bride who lost her caterer an hour before dinner. I had the privilege of seeing you huddle around that new couple in prayer. I watched you sprint through Costco, and I watched you open your wallets, and I watched you pull off a wedding feast for 110 people in a little over an hour-and-a-half. The world saw that too, and I can tell you that they noticed.

I had the honor of watching you come alongside a family that was blindsided by cancer. I watched you pray for a shell-shocked husband and wife. I saw the meals fly in, and I saw the babysitters line up and I've heard you talk about the best ways to help shoulder this load. I watched as bags full of dirty clothes were distributed through the church family so that washing and folding laundry could be one less thing for a grieving wife to think about.

I had an elder pastor from another church approach me at that funeral and he said: "I have never seen a church love a family like this." His wife was quick to agree. She said: "This is what the church is supposed to look like."

I have never felt for our church what I felt in that moment.

I don't want us to leave this place taking any kind of credit for that. After all, we love because he first loved us. Anything good in us is because of God's grace and mercy. But, today I am particularly thankful for His grace. I am thankful for the way that His mercy is transforming us. And my hope and prayer is that He will continue to make us into a church that is known for our love for him and our love for one another.

Worship team, would you come up now and lead us. Church, would you join me in thanking the Lord?

Let's pray together.