

Love One Another As I Have Loved You

John 15:12-17

PHBF 08.27.17

Scr. Reading: John 15:1-17

BELIEVE! The Gospel of John

If I were to suggest to you “What this church really needs is to be more like Jesus,” what would be the first change that comes to your mind? More wisdom? More holiness? More political? Less political? More prayer? More spiritual power for signs and miracles? More evangelism? What would life look like if all of us tried to pattern our lives after Jesus?

It’s an important question for us, because it’s quite possible to try to look like someone else and fail.

ILLUS: my Stonewall Jackson “costume” for Great American’s Day
No real likeness; similarity in name only.

According to our text for today, there is one key area Jesus most wants us to imitate Him:

v12 *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

Love. “As I have loved you.” That’s it.

How different would our churches, our homes, our towns, our workplaces be if we learned to love like Jesus? How many critics of the church would be silenced? How many hurting marriages/families would be helped? How many teens would stay in the faith, not because all their questions have been answered, but because they can’t possibly leave the love they experience in this community? What kind of difference would it make to you, to be loved by others like that?

Context: In this chapter, Jesus lays out His model for 3 specific relationships: first to God (vv 1-11); then to one another (vv 12-17); finally to the world (vv 18-25). Relationship with God = abiding. Relationship with one another = love. The point is obvious: A life of abiding in Christ is a life of love.

Jesus says it twice, like bookends framing the whole paragraph:

v12 *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

v17 *These things I command you, so that you will love one another.*

It’s the New Commandment He gave His disciples just moments ago:

13:34 *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.*

What’s new about being told to love one another? The OT says much about loving neighbors and being kind to enemies. How is this new? Here’s what’s new: “as I have loved you.”

It is critical that we understand this point! Christian love is a love of imitation, not initiation. We are distributors, not manufacturers. We receive the love of God in Christ, and we share what we’ve received with others. As we abide in love from Jesus (v9), we produce the fruit of love for others.

Practically, this means your daily, felt experience of the love of Christ is essential to your ability to love others. If your supply of love runs out too quickly, you need to tap into the source of love more deeply.

[APP: **Church Membership** – not called to a schedule of activities or Bible studies. Called to love one another & be involved in lives!]

Don’t you long to become more loving? Of course you do. Consider anew the love of Jesus for you. This is the primary application of this sermon for you—enter into the love of Jesus for you. This week you should be more loving—more like Jesus—than last week. Jesus commands it, and you must do it. Strive for it. Fight for it. Makes plans for it. But the first and primary strategy to grow in love is NOT “Just do it.” It is for you to consider more fully the love of Jesus for you.

Notice that’s exactly how our Lord does it in this text. He starts (v12) and ends (v17) this paragraph by urging the disciples to love one another; but the rest of it is all about His love for them. **What Jesus really wants is for us to believe and experience His own love**, which will then produce a life of love for others. It’s exactly what John says in His first letter:

1 John 4:10-11 *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.*

It’s precisely the same point Paul makes:

Ephesians 5:1-2 *Be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

As with everything in the gospel, we grow up into what we are given.

We become lovers as we experience His love. So how does Jesus love?

1. He died for you. (v13)
2. He befriended you. (vv14-15)
3. He chose you. (v16)

This is your model for love—love others this way. But it must also be your motive—love others because you are loved this way.

Jesus died for you.

v13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends.

“Greater love has no one.” There is literally no greater way to love than to do for someone what Jesus did. He could not love more or show it better.

“lays down his life.” Obviously, Jesus is alluding to the cross, where He died a brutal, humiliating death. But they didn’t drag Him there under force; He went there willingly. Roman soldiers who performed crucifixions were accustomed to working as a team—several men holding the criminal down while another soldier secured him to the cross. Not so with Jesus. You wonder what that soldier thought as this Man stretched His arms out voluntarily and held them there as the spikes were driven in, what they said to each other later, recalling how He crossed His own legs above the wooden post and yielded them to that nail for His feet.

10:17-18 I lay down my life that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again.

“for.” This little preposition contains the essence of the gospel. In Greek it means “on behalf of.” In other words, Jesus did this in the place of someone else.

How does salvation work? Three words: **satisfaction through substitution**. The Romans and Jews killed Jesus for their own reasons, but God took His death as the atoning sacrifice for sins. God did what we would have no right to do—He shifted blame for sin to Jesus. God pointed the finger. He laid all that guilt on Christ Himself.

The Bible does not teach that God will someday pour out wrath on certain deserving sinners and withhold it from other deserving sinners who are called “Christians.” He always vents His wrath fully and completely. The gospel says He did it on Jesus and not on you.

That’s what this word “for” means. Substitution. It was Jesus’ innocence for their guilt. His submission for their rebellion. His trust for their unbelief. His honor for their shame. He died FOR... well, for whom?

“his friends.” Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross had a very specific focus. Yes, there is a sense in which Jesus is the Savior of the world (Jn 1:29, 4:24). But in terms of whom His death actually saves—i.e., the certain effect and specific intent of the atonement—**Jesus laid down His life for His friends**. Those in hell are in hell because their sins are not atoned for. Their guilt before the law still consigns them to punishment. But for His friends, Jesus took the guilt for their sins upon Himself and paid that debt in full.

10:11 The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. (cf. 10:15)
Eph 5:25 Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

He wasn’t laying down His life with hopes that someone would respond in faith to the gospel so their sins would be forgiven by this. No, He had specific sinners in mind. Names. Faces, even. If you are His friend, He laid down His life – very specifically – for you.

So who are Jesus’ friends? Next verse...

Jesus befriended you.

vv14-15 You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Have you ever had someone in your life—particularly someone you perceived as “above you” like a teacher, coach, supervisor—surprise you by calling you a friend?

ILLUS: G. Conn’s sign-off in every note he wrote: “your friend.” How

meaningful it was to hear that he thought of himself as my friend.

What does it mean to be Jesus' friend? He lays out two qualities:

1. from our side = obedience (v14)
2. from God's side = sharing revelation (v15)

From our side, Friendship = Obedience (v14). The sequence of verse 13 and verse 14 is important. We do not become friends with Jesus by obeying His commands. Obedience is not the first step which initiates friendship between the two of us. Jesus makes the first move—He lays down His life for His friends. Obedience is the appropriately friendly response to what He has done. He shows friendship by laying down His life. We show friendship by obeying His commands. **Obedience doesn't make you Jesus' friend; obedience marks you as His friend.** There are many reasons to obey God—fear, guilt, pride; the Christian motivation is friendship.

APP: Think about this next time you are tempted with sin or afraid to identify with Jesus: "I am Jesus' friend. I will obey Him."

From God's side, Friendship = Revelation (v15).

v15 *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.*

Obedience is foreign to our notion of friendship—one friend having the authority to command the other. That relationship is master-servant. But Jesus says, "No, that line is drawn elsewhere. It's not obedience that separates servants from friends; it's revelation. Servants do not know what their master is doing; friends do."

Friendship with Jesus is not defined by how buddy-buddy you feel toward Him; it's defined by whether He has revealed the Father to you.

A king might have many subjects, and all his subjects must do as he commands. Slaves are simply told by the king what to do, and they obey out of sheer duty. But with his friends, the king shares his thoughts and reasons. He takes his friends into his confidence and tells them why this must be done and where he is leading, and they obey with a sense of privilege and understanding of the king's heart. That's how King Jesus

treats His friends.

Notice the opening words of v15: "No longer do I call you servants." This is a change of relationship between God and His people. In the past, God's people were not fully informed of His purposes in full measure. Only two men in the OT were ever called "friends of God"—Abraham and Moses. This same definition of friendship applies then: God invited both of them into His secret counsel and shared His plans with them. But now, here, Jesus extends that privilege to all believers:

I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Friends, your Bible, God's revealed word, is an expression of His friendship toward you. Every time you hear an expositional sermon expounding on, not some man's thoughts, but God's thoughts, Jesus is loving you as His friend. I hope you view it and feel it that way.

Jesus chose you.

v16 *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.*

Lest Jesus' disciples become puffed up over their new status as friends (v15), Jesus reminds them they are not wiser or better or more virtuous. They are simply chosen. It's a point that would have resonated with the disciples because it was so obviously true in their case. Typically in this culture, disciples would choose their teacher. It was up to the individuals themselves to decide which rabbi to follow, but Jesus broke with that custom and He chose them and called them to Himself.

Friends, this is also true of you, if you are trusting in Christ for your salvation. Jesus says to you, "You didn't choose me." You say, "It sure feels like I did! At one point I wasn't a Christian, and then I chose Jesus and became one." Of course you did. No one becomes a Christian without choosing Jesus. The real question is, who initiated that relationship? We think it was us because that's how it feels in our inner experience of it:

1:43,45 *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and*

said to him, "Follow me."⁴⁵ Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

If you are trusting Jesus today, if you know Him as your friend, know this: You didn't initiate that relationship. He chose you. He wanted you. He selected you and drew you to Himself with cords of love.

What security comes from being loved this way! Do you feel that? I remember the first time I heard the doctrine of election, I thought, "That's not true! I don't believe God would choose some and not others!" But deep down I very clearly remember thinking, "But I wish it were true. What a comfort to know He loved me specifically and chose me to be His child."

Friends, this is why I always insist on teaching this doctrine of God choosing you first: ***I want you to feel deeply and personally loved by God.*** If you are God's friend, it is because He freely chose to save you. He didn't just extend the offer and hope you would respond. He "chose you and appointed you to be a branch in the Vine that bears much fruit and that your fruit should remain." Why? Because He loves you.

Isn't this the love we all want anyway, utterly independent of anything in us? A few months ago, I asked you to picture this kind of love between a man and his wife. As a newlywed couple, she asks: "Why do you love me?" He: "You are so beautiful. Irresistible." 15 years and 3 kids later: "I'm not as pretty. Why do you love me?" He: "You are such a fun mom. Captivating." 15 more years pass: "I'm not as energetic as I was. Why do you love me?" He: "Your mind, sense of humor, wit. Alluring." 20 years later, 70s: "My mind is slipping, doctor says it's not getting better. Why do you love me?" He: "It's not your beauty, your energy, your mind. It's never really been any of that. I love you just because I love you."

That kind of love will change you, friends. ...which is the point!
Husbands... Teens... Wives... Church members...

ILLUS: *Johnny Lingo and the Eight-Cow Wife*, by Patricia McGerr, *Women's Day* (1965), *Reader's Digest* (1988)

"Do you ever think what it does to a woman when she knows that the price her husband has paid is the lowest price for which she can be bought? And then later, when all the women talk, as women do, they boast of what their husbands paid for them. One says four cows, another maybe six. How does she feel--the woman who was sold for one or two? This could not happen to my Sarita."

"Then you paid that unprecedented number of cows just to make your wife happy?"

"Happy?" He seemed to turn the word over on his tongue, as if to test its meaning. "I wanted Sarita to be happy, yes, but I wanted more than that. You say she's different from the way they remember her. This is true. Many things can change a woman. Things that happen inside, things that happen outside. But the thing that matters most is what she thinks about herself. Before Sarita believed she was worth nothing. Now she knows that she is worth more than any other woman on the islands."

"Then you wanted..."

"I wanted to marry Sarita. I loved her and no other woman."

"But--" I was close to understanding.

"But," he finished softly, "I wanted an eight-cow wife."

Nothing has the power to change us like lavish, free, undeserved love.
v12 *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*

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