

Love Like Jesus Loves

John 13:34-36

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A group of guys went overseas and hired a local boy to cook and clean for them. Being a bunch of jokesters, they quickly took advantage of his seeming naiveté. They smeared Vaseline on the stove handles, put buckets of water over the door, and nailed his shoes to the floor during the night.

Day after day the young boy took the brunt of their practical jokes without saying anything. Finally, the men felt guilty about what they were doing, and said, *“Look, we know these pranks aren’t funny for you, and we’re sorry. We’re never going to take advantage of you again.”*

The boy smiled and asked, *“No more sticky on stove?”* The guys responded, *“Nope.”* *“No more water on door?”* They answered, *“No more water on door.”* *“No more nail shoes to floor?”* *“Nope, we’ll stop that, too.”* *“Okay”* the boy said with a wide grin, *“No more spit in soup!”*

Instead of choosing revenge or retaliation when we’ve been wronged, we’re called to love like Jesus loved.

Three weeks ago, we learned *if you want to grow, you have to let some things go*. Two weeks ago, we defined a disciple as *someone who lovingly follows Jesus and intentionally helps others follow Him*. Is there someone who can help you lovingly follow Jesus? Have you intentionally reached out to someone you can disciple? I did this week. Last weekend we discovered how *a disciple learns, loves, and lives God’s Word*.

Our focus today is on the premier and distinctive mark of a disciple from John 13:34-35: ***“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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”*** Here’s our main point: *A disciple is one who loves like Jesus loves.*

Let’s make three observations.

- The word **“love”** is used four times. This is the Greek word *agapao*, referring to a selfless, sacrificial, and unconditional love, resulting from a

decision of the will. It's in the present tense, meaning we're to "*keep on loving.*"

- The phrase "***one another***" is a reciprocal pronoun and is found three times. We're to commit *to* one another because we are in community *with* each other.
- The personal pronoun "***you***" is used six times and is emphatic. We can't slide out from under this because it means "me and you."

Jesus had just celebrated the last supper with His disciples and Judas had left to begin his betrayal. Because Jesus knew how difficult the coming days would be for them, He gave them a *mandate to love*, a *model of love*, and a *manifestation through love*.

While our circumstances are different from theirs, the difficulties we face are similar. Our world is less tolerant of our faith, our religious liberties seem to be vanishing, and it's easy for us to get sideways with other Christ-followers. Brothers and sisters, we need each other more than ever. As I mentioned at our annual meeting last Sunday, *a divided nation needs a united church!*

1. A mandate to love. Jesus could have told His disciples anything, but He chose to give them a mandate to love one another. Listen to the first part of verse 34: "***A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...***" The word "***new***" doesn't mean it was just invented but has the idea of being qualitatively new and fresh.

The word "***commandment***" refers to a "*charge or commission.*" This is not a suggestion; it's essential. It's not optional; it's something we're to obey. This is a charge from Christ Himself right before He dies in our place on the cross.

Let's pause and ponder why Jesus refers to this as a "***new commandment.***" After all, Leviticus 19:18, written hundreds of years earlier, says we are to "***love our neighbor as ourselves.***" In addition, in Matthew 5:14 Jesus said we are to "***love our enemies.***"

In what sense is "***loving one another***" something new? First, it is a command given by Jesus to the church, not to Israel. Second, it is the beginning of the "***one another***" teachings in the New Testament. The third reason leads to our next point.

2. A model of love. We don't have to wonder what this love is to look like because Jesus Himself is our example as we see in the second part of verse 34: ***"...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."***

The commandment is ***"new"*** because we're not only to love others as we love ourselves, but we're to go above by loving one another ***"as"*** Jesus loves us. Jesus is both our model and our motivation. We're to express love for one another to the extent Jesus loves each of us. Jesus repeats this for emphasis in John 15:12: ***"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."***

This chapter begins with Jesus doing the dirty work of a servant when He grabs a towel and a basin and washes the foul feet of His disciples. Notice this phrase from John 13:1: ***"...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end."*** Loving ***"to the end"*** means, ***"to the uttermost."*** Jesus could have quickly wiped their feet, but He modeled what love looks like by rising from the table, laying aside his outer garments, taking a towel, pouring water into a basin, washing 24 feet, and drying them with the towel.

According to verses 14-15, this is the model for the kind of love His followers must demonstrate to, and for, one another: ***"If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you."***

The newness of the command is not because it is novel but because of its very nature. We are to love as Jesus loves by serving one another.

3. Manifestation through love. When we love like Jesus, this becomes a strong witness to the world as seen in verse 35: ***"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*** It's not our preferences, our politics, or our principles which will convince people we are Christians. The love we manifest for one another is the strongest testimony of the truth we claim to believe. The 11 disciples would survive and thrive only as they obeyed His mandate to love, His model of love and His manifestation through love.

In order for us to truly love one another, we must recognize that love is not so much an emotion, but an active emulation of the One who first loved us. It has nothing to do with self-fulfillment and has everything to do with self-sacrifice.

The phrase ***"all people"*** refers to a totality. People will only perceive we are disciples of Jesus when they see us loving like Jesus loves. I'm reminded of the

song from the 60s (which I'm not going to sing for you), "*They'll know we are Christians by our love...we will work with one another, we will work side by side...yea, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*" The love we have for one another should lead others to immediately think of the love the Lord has for us. Do people know you are a Christian by your love? Can people tell you are a disciple by how devoted you are to fellow followers of Christ?

Is there a believer who really bothers you? Do you find it difficult to love those who are difficult? Me, too. Listen. We're commanded to love and not hate on one another. You don't necessarily need to like the person or even hang out with them, but you are commanded to love them. Ponder 1 John 2:11: "***But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes.***"

In the midst of all the conflict and confusion in our culture right now, I came across this helpful insight from James Merritt: "*When I think of the toxic atmosphere we are in today, I'm reminded that spit, spat and spite are close relatives. I am determined to not spit out...divisiveness, get in a spat over...disagreements, or exercise spite toward those who have...differences.*" Let's not let the donkey and the elephant divide what the Lamb did for us on the Cross.

Some of us can say "Amen" to the following statement: "*To live above with saints we love; oh, that will be glory. But to live below with saints we know; well, that's a different story!*"

My guess is there were differences and disagreements among the disciples. Peter's brash personality probably irritated those on the team. I wonder how his brother Andrew felt when Peter, James and John got extra time with Jesus? We know the other disciples got jealous when James and John angled for the top spots in Jesus' cabinet.

I can't imagine the tension between Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector. While Simon was part of a radical political party that used force to achieve its goal of liberating Israel from Roman rule, Matthew worked for Rome and collected taxes from the Israelites, lining his own pockets in the process. While they had natural conflict because of their politics, they had Christ in common, and they were learning how to love one another like Jesus loved each of them.

Tertullian lived in the third century when opposition to Christianity was intense. Listen to what he wrote about how pagans viewed Christians: *“It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us. ‘See,’ they say...how they love one another...how they are even ready to die for one another.”* One heathen said this about Christians: *“They love one another almost before they know one another.”*

George Whitefield and Charles Wesley had significant theological differences which led to major conflict and heated conversations. One day a friend of Whitefield’s asked, *“Do you think we, when we get to heaven, shall see John Wesley there?”* Whitefield quickly answered, *“No, I do not think we shall.”* His friend was delighted with the answer until Whitefield continued, *“I believe Mr. John Wesley will have a place so near the throne of God, that such poor creatures as you and I will be so far off as to be hardly able to see him.”* Whitefield loved Wesley even though he thought he was wrong. He lived this truth: *A disciple is one who loves like Jesus loves.*

I’m reminded of the famous line from Augustine, which Pastor Brown often quoted: *“In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things, charity.”*

Here’s a question. Is there enough evidence of your love for fellow believers for someone to conclude you are a follower of Jesus?

- Let’s live out the mandate to love.
- Let’s follow the model of love.
- Let’s demonstrate a manifestation through love.

Loving the Little, the Least and the Lost

The Bible makes it clear we are to love like Jesus loves, which means we’re to love the little, the least, and the lost. Listen to what Jesus says in Matthew 19:14: ***“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.”*** And Matthew 25:40: ***“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.”***

Recently, *The Guardian* newspaper from the UK ran a story exploring the greatest photo of the 20th Century. Think of the wide choice before them. Perhaps it would be a picture of something from politics or sports? An action shot from one of our world wars? Maybe man walking on the moon? According to them, the greatest picture in 100 years is of a preborn baby moving in the womb!

The Guardian chose a stunning photo from a 1965 edition of *Life* magazine, which featured an 18-week fetus on its cover. This caused a world-wide sensation. That issue became a spectacular success, becoming the fastest-selling copy in *Life*'s entire history.

In full color and crystal-clear detail, the picture showed an unborn child in its amniotic sac, vulnerable yet serene. Its eyes are closed, and its tiny, perfectly formed fists are clutched to its chest. I like the subtitle in white on the bottom left: "*Drama of Life Before Birth.*"

On this Sanctity of Human Life weekend, we affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every person from conception on, is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of love that leads to life.

Since the landmark Supreme Court decision was handed down on January 22, 1973, an estimated 62 million children in America have lost their lives through abortion – that's the combined population of 26 states! According to LifeNews, just weeks into the new year over 1 million babies have already been aborted across the globe, making abortion the number one cause of death, outranking heart disease and cancer.

Let me quickly say three things.

1. We will not cave on biblical truth. Our aim is not to be politically correct, but to be biblically correct. Because we stand on the Bible, we strive to communicate what the Bible says on all topics – the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, God as the Creator, the definition of marriage as one man and one woman for life, and life begins at conception. It's time for churches to speak out...and to reach out to those who are confused and ensnared.

2. We will not clobber sinners. We must always remember the gospel is for sinners, which means it's for each one of us. It's ok to be incensed about evil, but we're to always extend love to people.

3. We're committed to follow Jesus Christ so we won't cave on sin or clobber sinners. John 1:14 says Jesus is "*full of grace and truth.*" When a woman was caught in adultery in John 8:11, Jesus ministered grace to her: "*Neither do I condemn you...*" and He told her truth: "*...go and sin no more.*" Likewise, we're called to minister *the* truth and to do so *with* grace.

As we learned last week, truth spoken in love actually leads to forgiveness and freedom. Jesus said in John 8:32: “***And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.***” He followed that up in verse 36: “***So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***” Proverbs 14:25 says: “***A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.***”

Let’s briefly look at Jeremiah 1:4-5: “***Now the Word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’***”

This passage, along with many others, establishes the sanctity of human life. This is God’s Word about the wonder of life in the womb. Individuals will have their opinions, organizations will offer their expertise, politicians will differ about the preborn, but this is what God says.

Let’s make a few observations.

- The word “***before***” is used twice, moving us back in time from the point of conception to sometime in eternity past.
- The word “***I***” is used four times, not only indicating God is the one speaking, but He is the one at work in the womb.
- The word “***you***” is used five times. This shows what is in the womb is a person, not a blob or a bunch of cells.

This leads us right into the first truth of Jeremiah 1:4-5.

1. The preborn are people. To borrow a line from Dr. Seuss, “*a person’s a person no matter how small.*” Verse 5 begins: “***Before I formed you in the womb...***” Before Jeremiah was even conceived, God knew him as a person. The word “***formed***” is the Hebrew word used to describe the creative work of a potter as he molds and shapes a piece of clay. It means to squeeze into a predetermined shape. It’s also the same word found in Genesis 2:7 where we read the “***Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground...***”

The fact the preborn are people is no small point. Scott Cox points out the first thing any society does if it is going to mistreat a particular class of people is “*to dehumanize them.*” Some theologians in the 19th Century espoused the idea that blacks had no souls in order to justify slavery. How much easier it is for our society today to do this “*when the voice and even the form of those who are being*

dehumanized and mistreated cannot be heard or seen because their cries are silent.”

That’s why ultrasounds and pictures of the preborn in the womb are so powerful.

2. The preborn are pre-known. Look at the next phrase: *“I knew you...”* The word *“know”* in Hebrew speaks of a personal intimate knowledge. It was used of Adam “knowing” Eve. The idea is God has a close personal commitment and intimate relationship with every person He creates, even before He creates him or her. If we are known to God even before He began His creative work, how much more are we known after conception?

3. The preborn are prized. Check out the next clause: *“and before you were born I consecrated you.”* This verb was used of setting something or someone apart for a specific and special use. Even before Jeremiah was born, he was set apart for a special task.

4. The preborn have a purpose. The last part of verse 5 tells us about Jeremiah’s purpose: *“I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”* Jeremiah had a job to do and so do you! Notice God’s Word is not just for one group of people; it is for all the *“nations.”* BTW, the deacons just approved Blake and Anna Patterson as our newest Go Team partners. Anna is the daughter of Edgewood members Matt and Laura Baker. They will be serving the nations in SE Asia.

In Psalm 139:16 David recounts how God created him with purpose: *“All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”* God has the length of our days all figured out. When God creates, He does so with purpose. He has plans and purposes for the preborn as well.

I wrote down three additional thoughts:

- The exalted lordship of Christ leads to expressions of love and to an ethic of life.
- We’re to love our neighbors nestled in their mother’s wombs so they can live.
- There’s no difference between a preborn baby and a newborn except location. When you think about it, we are all just grown-up embryos!

One of our Go Team partners is Pregnancy Resources. Here’s some of what God did through this ministry of love and life in 2020...

- 4071 unique visits (5% more than 2019)
- 80% of clients were abortion minded or abortion vulnerable → *84% ended up choosing life for their child!*
- 780 free pregnancy tests
- 530 free ultrasounds (14% more than 2019)
- 503 men were served (85% more than 2019; only 79 men in 2018)
- 50% of clients had no spiritual beliefs
- 989 spiritual discussions (18% more than 2019)
- 1,084 class sessions offered
- 729 visits to Bella's Boutique
- 1,546 packages of diapers given away

Let's watch this video featuring Edgewood members Tyler and Courtney Richards. They both serve at Pregnancy Resources.

→ **Play Video.**

Action Steps

1. Manifest love by standing up for life. As you have opportunity, share God's view of life in the womb with people, post pro-life status updates, and provide counsel to people who are in crisis. Related to this, if more men would stand up and choose life, there would be a lot fewer abortions. If you've gotten someone pregnant, it's time to man up and make sure your son or daughter lives and is loved.

2. Stop by the Pregnancy Resources Table in the lobby. Interestingly, Courtney in the video, signed up for the Pregnancy Resources volunteer training after hearing EBC member Kathy Nagle share her testimony at Edgewood a year ago.

3. Partner with Safe Families. One way to love like Jesus loves is to consider serving with Safe Families for Children. While placements have been slow due to COVID, you could begin applying now because they're looking for Family Coaches. Also, you could help provide needed items for host families. If you serve in law enforcement, health care, social work, or in our schools, you could help by referring families in need to Safe Families. You can learn more by talking

to the Safe Families Ministry Lead, Pam Cullor, or by sending an email to quadcities@safefamilies.net.

4. If you've had an abortion and are in need of love, grace and healing, consider joining a post-abortion Bible Study. Studies show the majority of women who've had abortions have significant emotional, physical and spiritual scars. Feel free to stop by and talk to one of the women from Pregnancy Resources or you can call (309) 797-3636. There's also information in the women's restrooms.

I close with 1 John 3:23: ***“And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us.”*** He commands us to believe in His finished work on the cross and He commands us to love one another.

Let's not retaliate when we're wronged but instead love like Jesus loves by obeying His mandate to love, by living out His model of love, and by showing the manifestation of love.