

Introduction

We're going to be looking at John 13:34-35 today, but before we jump into the text I want to highlight a situation that is common to all of us. When you want to get into Costco, make a withdrawal from your bank, board a plane or even check into a hotel, you always have to do one thing: present proper I.D. The people in charge want to make sure you are who you say you are. Costco wants verification of membership. The bank isn't going to give you money unless you can provide identification. You're not getting past the security check point at the airport unless you show your ticket *and* I.D. You might have your credit card in hand, but the hotel staff wants to see your I.D. to finish checking you in. They want to make sure you are who you say you are.

Today's text drills down on this same idea. There's a unique identifying mark, a distinctive feature, that's present in every person who truly belongs to Jesus. If you say you're a disciple of Christ, an apprentice of Jesus, a follower, then this is how everyone knows that you are who you say you are. There is no way to counterfeit it or borrow someone else's.

Parting Thoughts

I'm reading from the NIV this morning. Let me give you a little context for the passage before I read it. Jesus is in the upper room with His closest friends. Just like we talked about last Sunday when we served one another communion and shared it together, Jesus was going to share the Last Supper with His disciples.

Chapter 13 is the beginning of a five-chapter goodbye, where Jesus is sharing His parting thoughts with His disciples because His crucifixion was just hours away. At the meal, Jesus took time to wash His disciples' feet—even Judas'—modeling for them a servant-hearted humility. And He told them to follow His example. Shortly after Judas left the gathering, Jesus spoke these words to His disciples.

Take a look at verses 34-35. [READ]

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Jesus used the word love a lot in these two verses! (4x) It's almost like He's trying to make a point. In English, the word love can be confusing. We love all kinds of things: pizza, family, pets, cars, tv shows. But the Greek language was more specific. They used four different words to describe different types of love. There's a word for brotherly love, romantic/sexual love, familial love and the highest form of love (agape love), which is selfless, sacrificial and unconditional. This type of love is steadfast and is given regardless of circumstance and is *not* rooted in the worthiness of the recipient. It continues to give even when it's not returned. That's how Jesus loves us and how He wants His disciples to love one another. *Agape* isn't about feelings or emotions but is an act of the will, a deliberate choice to seek the welfare of others. So, as we talk about love this morning, just remember that Jesus is commanding His followers to agape one another: to love selflessly, sacrificially and unconditionally.

One Anothering

You probably already noticed the distinction that Jesus made in His command. He's talking about how His disciples are to love *one another*. He's not talking about how we love the lost world but how we love other believers. Yes, the command to love your neighbor, even your enemies, is still in place. But the Lord's words are aimed at how we love other believers, other followers, other Christians. "Jesus is talking specifically about how we love one another within the church."¹

I've always been fascinated with how often 'one another' or 'each other' is used in the New Testament. It shows up about 100 times in more than 90

¹ Burge, Gary M. *The NIV Application Commentary: John* (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2000), 387.

verses.² These phrases help Jesus people know how to do life together. One third of the 'one another' phrases are about loving. Another third about unity in the body. A bunch are related to being humble toward each other. And the others are rooted in encouragement, hospitality, speaking honestly, and praying for one another. Here's my point: lots of instruction is given in the New Testament about how we, as Christ followers, His church, are to treat each other. And Jesus says that when we love each other like He loves us, a watching world will know that the Good News we preach is true. Everyone will know that we genuinely belong to Jesus. So, it's not just about our words, but how we live, love and serve. When people who don't yet know Jesus come to Foothills, our love for one another should be one of the first things they notice! They may not have the words to describe what they're sensing, but you can tell when people love each other. And hearts that long to be loved and known are drawn to people and places where they can experience that kind of love. Disciples love one another.

What's New

It's interesting that Jesus said He was giving them a new command because it sounds like Jesus is going to tell them something they hadn't heard before. But that's not what He means. The command to love goes all the way back to Leviticus 19:18 where the Israelites were told to "love your neighbor as yourself." And the disciples had heard Jesus talk about the greatest commandment to love God and love others; even enemies. So, what's 'new'? This command isn't 'new' in the sense of being recent but 'new' in the sense of being *fresh* or *vibrant*. Much like Jesus did in speaking something new into the Passover Meal, where He talked about the bread and cup representing His body and blood. Jesus was speaking newness into what it meant to love.

There was a new focus. We are still to love our neighbor, but there is now a more intentional love toward *one another* (other disciples, other Christ-followers). There was also a new standard. We aren't supposed to love

² Logos Bible Software, Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, 27th Edition.

one another like we love ourselves, but to love one another *like Jesus loves us*. Jesus' selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love is the new measure of how we are to love one another. How Jesus loves is the new standard—not how I love! There was even a new result. As the community of Christ is filled with the love of Christ, people who are far from Jesus begin to recognize the truth of who Jesus really is and that we belong to Him.³ They see that we really are who we say we are. When we love like Jesus commands us, the lost world is able to clearly see that the Good News of Jesus really is good news and that those who claim to be His disciples really know and follow Him.

Changed

So how does all this 'loving' happen? This isn't a call from Jesus to love others like you love yourself, but to love others like *He loves you*. Being able to love like that is rooted in one critical reality: that you have profoundly experienced being loved by Jesus yourself. You cannot give what you don't have. The religious leaders of Jesus' day, the scribes and Pharisees, knew all the rules and how to keep them. They knew which lines to never cross and every nuance of the Law so they could be 'right' with God. But they wanted nothing to do with the people Jesus loved. It's entirely possible for you to have grown up in the church, to know the Bible and its teachings inside and out, to participate in small groups and even teach a Sunday school class, but *not* have personally encountered Jesus and received His love and forgiveness. The only way you will love *like Jesus* is if you've experienced the love of Jesus.

Why we love one another

We love one another because we've experienced and been changed by His love. So the love you give isn't fueled by your own best effort. You know what it's like trying to love someone difficult out of your own strength and ability: it's exhausting and frustrating. And the love you give isn't based on other people who attend, or on one of the pastors, or the facility or great programs; it's rooted in Christ's love for you. That's what 1

³ Richards, L. O. (1991). *The Bible Reader's Companion* (electronic ed., p. 690). Victor Books.

John 4:19 is saying, "We love because He first loved us." We love because we've experienced and been changed by the love of Jesus. Without that, we're not equipped to love anyone else like Jesus wants us to.

We also love out of obedience to Christ's command. Now this is a tricky one because, quite honestly, you cannot *make* someone love another person. You cannot demand or force it. Every junior higher knows this to be true. The good news is the Holy Spirit can do that work in you. You don't have it on your own to love someone who is trying. Your patience runs thin with the *extra grace required* brother or sister in Christ. But, as a child of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit who is transforming you into someone who looks more and more like Jesus, you *can* love one another as Jesus commands. Paul said it well, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."⁴ With Christ in you, you can do anything He wants you to. And He wants you to love each other. Even that brother that tends to drive you crazy. Even that sister who consistently grates on you. In 1 John, John tells the church that they need to love one another because love has been generously lavished upon them through Jesus. And when they love one another they demonstrate that they truly are children of God. Listen to verse 8 in 1 John 4, "Whoever does not love [*selflessly, sacrificially, unconditionally*] does not know God, because God is love."

Again, if you've been showered by the love of God, He will enable you to pour out His love on others—even the difficult ones. So here's an image I want you to get in your head and heart. I use this when I talk to couples preparing to be married. The only way you will love others like they deserve to be loved, like He's commanded, is if you will let Him love them through you. That means you're staying intimately connected with Jesus. And you're cooperating with the Holy Spirit who wants to produce His fruit in you—like love, patience, kindness, and gentleness among others. You cannot love selflessly, sacrificially and unconditionally in your own

⁴ Galatians 2:20

strength. It cannot be done. But the Spirit can do it in you. So, let Him love them through you. Let the love of Jesus so fill you that it overflows onto those around you. Some of you are trying to weasel out of this in your head right now and you're thinking, 'But I'm not a naturally loving person.' But Jesus isn't asking you to be naturally loving. He's commanding you to be supernaturally loving. Since God is love, everyone who experiences His love *can* become a loving person.

Remember, Jesus is saying this kind of love should truly shine amongst His followers; within the Church. And Church doesn't mean the building, but the people, the Body of Christ.⁵ So, your love for one another isn't limited to when you're here at Foothills. It's to be aimed at every believer. And if you're married to a believer, you need to make sure that you're lavishing this unconditional, sacrificial, selfless love on your spouse. Don't give them the leftovers; the dregs. Give them the best. Let Him love your spouse through you.

Can you stifle this? Absolutely. You can ignore the leading of the Holy Spirit. You can be disobedient. But why would you want to do that after receiving such extravagant love from Jesus? Love one another as Jesus has loved you.

How to Love One Another

We know what Jesus is calling us to but how do we do it? Learning to live and love like Jesus isn't something we just wake up possessing one morning. It takes intentional cooperation with the Spirit in our lives as He seeks to cultivate the character and priorities of Jesus in us. Your willingness to say 'Yes' moment by moment to the Spirit's leading is crucial for cultivating a lifestyle of love for one another. You may wonder if you have what it takes to do some of the things I'm going to recommend. But since you know it's what Jesus wants you to do, you can trust that He will empower you to do it. So, here are some basic, practical ways we can demonstrate love other Christians.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 12:27

Build friendships and community with other believers.⁶ In the early church the believers spent time together, praying, studying the teachings of the Apostles and sharing meals—including communion. If you're not yet part of a small group, let me encourage you to start one. It could be as simple as inviting people over to just read a chapter or two from the bible together, discuss it, then pray with and for each other. If you're already part of an established small group and you've been together for years, figure out a way to multiply your group and make room for others. Take half your group and relaunch for the sake of your brothers and sisters in Christ. Is that easy? Nope! But it is sacrificial and selfless.

Pray for one another.⁷ This happens in small group for sure. But it also happens spontaneously. You may run into someone at the grocery store or gas station. You may see them in a restaurant or while you're waiting in line or at an event. I know that not every environment is conducive to going deep in conversation but if you learn in your short talk that something's going on, take the opportunity to love them and ask, "Can I take a moment and pray for you?" I've never had anyone say, 'No.' Then pray for them right on the spot. Right in the grocery store, at the pump or as you chat after church. Your willingness to go to Jesus on their behalf could make the difference in their day.

Here's a simple, but remarkably meaningful way to love one another: Remember names. I don't have chapter and verse for this, and I know that some of us aren't very good at remembering names. I'm terrible at it. But I keep trying because we've all experienced someone calling us by name, who we didn't think knew us or who we'd just recently met, and we felt cared for and like we belong just because they remembered our name. When I meet people I often tell them that I'll ask their name a thousand times, but that's because of me, not them. Practice will make us better at it. By the way, when I invite you during our greeting time to pretend like you don't know anyone's name and introduce yourself, I'm giving you

⁶ Acts 2:42

⁷ James 5:16

another chance to get to know names and help people feel loved. And, for the love, please don't embarrass someone by saying, 'What's my name?' Instead, reintroduce yourself. 'Hi, Brian. I'm Phil. We met a few weeks ago.'

We love one another well when we seek humility.⁸ In 2021 we did a series on humility and in the opening message, Brian gave us a great definition. He said, "Humility is authentic dependence on God that generates confidence and power that is used in service to others." When we get connected with Jesus, He changes us. And as we continue to depend on Him, we become healthier. And out of that health comes power and confidence, enabled by the Spirit, that moves us to serve, lift and benefit others. Philippians talks about how we're to do nothing out of selfishness or conceit. In fact, we're to consider others as more important than ourselves—just like Jesus. Let that sink in. The world says self-promotion is key. Jesus says, 'Nah!' Humility reveals genuine love and guards *against* self-promotion. There's no room for selfish pride if we're going to love like Jesus.

From this posture of humility we are better able to serve one another.⁹ You serve by looking for practical ways to help someone even before they ask. This means that you're paying attention to people as they share what's happening in their lives. I still remember how a brother, that we know and love from this church, served my family back in 2002. I haven't forgotten because that's how much it touched me. I was on a 2-week mission trip with Foothills Church in Paraguay. While I was gone, that brother showed up at our house to mow my lawns. We didn't ask. He just knew I was gone and Nancy had three little kids to keep alive and there was no way she could get to it. So he came over and took care of it so she wouldn't stress about it and so I could come home and just be with my family. Super practical and super meaningful.

⁸ Philippians 2:3-4

⁹ Galatians 5:13, 1 Peter 4:10

There are *tons* of ways to serve each other than mowing lawns. Sometimes people just need help around the house. You may be handy with basic maintenance. You might know your way around an oil change on a car. You could watch kids for a couple so they can have a date. You can bring a meal to someone recovering from illness or childbirth or grief. Single parents, widows/widowers struggle to get it all done by themselves. There are all kinds of opportunities. The list of possibilities is about as broad as your imagination—so go for it. Can you do it all? No. And you shouldn't. But you can definitely serve in specific, strategic, concrete ways when the opportunity arises.

Also tied to humility is the willingness to forgive one another.¹⁰ Put two people in a room, there's potential for conflict. Put hundreds or thousands of people in the body of Christ and the chances to wound one another is off the charts. We all fail. We all fall short. That's not an excuse, just a reality. Sometimes we say stupid things or behave poorly. Occasionally we get our feelings hurt because we've misunderstood the situation or the look we got. Forgiveness doesn't mean overlooking sin. Sometimes we need to lovingly confront a person who's sinned so they can be gently restored.¹¹ Again, all done in humility. Forgiveness is essential because in forgiving others we're extending to them the forgiveness Jesus gave us. Colossians 3 says, "Forgive as the Lord forgave you." You can see how much we need the Holy Spirit to work in us if we're going to love one another well.

There are tons of "one anothers" that help us demonstrate unconditional love. But I'm only going to highlight one more. Encourage one another.¹² You don't need to ask many questions or be very discerning to realize that people go through tough stuff all the time. Some may be self-inflicted. Some is out of left field and totally beyond the control of the

¹⁰ Colossians 3:13

¹¹ Galatians 6:1

¹² 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13

sufferer. Regardless, when life gets rough, we can get discouraged. When you encourage someone you're reminding them of God's promises and of His good work in them. You're being attentive and present, offering assistance, prayer and compassion. At its core, encouragement is giving someone courage or hope. If you've ever been discouraged, you know how precious the company of someone who loves you can be. You've felt the deep sense, even though the situation was awful, that you were going to make it. That friend encouraged you. Be that friend.

A word of warning for you in all this: you can't fake this kind of love. You can do all the right things, but if love isn't there, it's empty. That's the Pharisees and scribes, right? If you've experienced the perfect love of Jesus, then you know what He's calling you to. And you also know that you're not capable of generating this kind of selfless, sacrificial, unconditional love on your own. You must stay close to Jesus. You must continue to cooperate with His Spirit in your daily life. And you must let Him love others through you. It's all based on your intimate, dynamic, maturing relationship with Jesus. If you don't yet have a relationship with Jesus and haven't yet experienced His love for you, start there! Come talk to me or, even better, talk to someone near you and tell them that you want to get connected with Jesus. We'll help you. From there, He will grow you and help you to love out of an overflow of the love He has for you.

If you already know Jesus, but loving others is a struggle—welcome to humanity. People are hard to love sometimes—even me. Just ask Nancy. Continue to lean on Jesus. Invite the Holy Spirit to work in you, to grow you. If you're struggling to love, exercise humility and find someone near you, before you leave today, and ask them to pray for you. Tell them you want to love like Jesus. And if you're asked to pray, don't be shy. There are no magic words. Just love your brother or sister enough to go to Jesus on their behalf. Then watch what God does as you both respond to Him in obedience.

Everyone Will Know

When Jesus told His disciples to love one another as He loved them, He was clear about what would happen: everyone would know that they were His. Selfless, servant-hearted, unconditional love toward one another reflects Jesus to a lost and hurting world. When you choose to connect with other believers, to humbly serve, pray, forgive and encourage one another, you are putting the truth of the Gospel on display for everyone to see. People who are longing to be known and loved witness that kind of over-the-top love and wonder how that's possible. They don't see or experience that kind of love in the world and they wonder if that kind of love is available to them, too. And, by God's grace, we can tell them 'Yes!' and introduce them to Jesus: the Source and perfect demonstration of that love.

Your kids are listening and watching. So are your colleagues, your classmates, and neighbors. "Our love for one another will be the distinguishing mark of authenticity that we truly follow Christ."¹³ And your selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love for the Jesus followers around you will make it undeniably clear to everyone that you don't belong to the world; you belong to Jesus.

Pray

¹³ White, J. E. (1998). John. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman concise Bible commentary* (p. 483). Broadman & Holman Publishers.