

Known By Our Love

The world knows the Church more for what we are against than what we are for. We should be known by our love for one another.

Introduction

I was reminded this week of a conversation I had with someone many years ago. I had invited this person to church with me a few times and he always politely declined. One day he finally said, "Do you want to know why I will never go to church? Churches are like chicken farms. When a chicken gets injured or has a problem the rest attack it and peck it to death." I had not experienced anything like that in my time in the church, but I have since.

There is a lot of love that is missing in the Church today. We are known by many things other than our love for one another. Many in the Church seem to have forgotten the second greatest commandment, to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus tells us we are to be known by our love for one another.

Jesus Commands Us To Love

The gospel of John is different than the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke in many ways. It tells the same story of Jesus as the others, yet it comes from a completely different perspective. In fact, each of the gospels is written to speak to a different group of people. Matthew's gospel is geared toward the Jewish believer and Luke's gospel is geared toward the thinker or scientific-minded believer. All tell the story of Jesus but from different perspectives.

John's gospel is focused on love. God's love for us, our love for God, love for one another, and love for the world. Love is a central theme throughout Jesus' ministry and teaching. It has been said that the Bible, taken as a whole, is God's love letter to mankind.

Jesus gives us a new command to love one another in John 13:34-35.

John 13:34-35

(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 had just sent Judas away to betray him and was about to predict Peter's denial. Jesus knew his time on earth was coming to an end and he needed to give his disciples some final instructions and teaching before he left them to go be with God in Heaven.

Jesus told his gathered disciples that he was giving them a new command. He commanded them to love one another. He then clarified this new command. He said to love one another as he had loved them.

When you read earlier in John chapter 13 you will read about Jesus washing the feet of the disciples. This was a very humble thing for a master or teacher to lower themselves and wash the feet of their disciples. Jesus did this willingly and humbly to teach them that no one is more important than another. He also teaches that a large part of loving someone is serving them.

Love is often just portrayed as an emotion. There is so much more to love. Love is an action. Love is filled with sacrifice and service.



Last week we spoke about husbands and wives and read in Ephesians that husbands are to love their wives as Christ loves the Church. This starts with serving in humility, just as Jesus served and sacrificed humbly.

The Church should be known by the love we have for one another. We should not be seen as a group that attacks someone when they are down or have made a mistake. We all make mistakes. We all fall to the temptation of sin and must repent. Our reaction to one another needs to be one of love. This is what the world should see.

Originally Commanded to Love

This is not the first time we are commanded to love one another though. We can go back into the Old Testament into the Law of Moses and read Leviticus 19:18 which says:

Leviticus 19:18

(18) "Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

This has been part of God's commands and laws for us since the time of Moses. God commanded his people to love one another as they loved themselves. When we understand that love is more than a feeling or emotion and is comprised of service and humility as well, our lives change and further align with the ways of God. This in turn shows the world what it means to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ and a follower of God.

The concept of loving and serving one another comes from God thousands of years before Jesus came to redeem us. The question is why did Jesus say he was giving us a new commandment when the command to love one another as we love ourselves is found in the Law of Moses in Leviticus.

Jesus' new command is to love one another as he has loved them. In other words, he is not truly giving them a new commandment. Jesus' command to love one another as he has loved them is an example and a further clarification. Much of Jesus' teaching brought clarification and depth to the rules and laws of the Old Testament.

It has been said that the New Testament is the best commentary written on the Old Testament. Even when some Old Testament things seem to be nullified by teachings in the New Testament, they are often clarifications or deeper teachings on the laws. Sometimes they are fulfillments of the law.

In either case, Jesus' new command to love one another was to love one another as he has loved us. He loves us with great passion and sacrificed his own life for us. We are to love others humbly, with passion, and to make sacrifices for others. In doing this, the world will know we belong to Jesus.

The Greatest Commandments

Jesus was once asked what the greatest commandment is. We've shared this many times before, but it is a central theme with Jesus and with the Church. We read in Matthew 22:36-40:

Matthew 22:36-40

(36) "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" (37) Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." (38) This is the



first and greatest commandment. (39) And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (40) All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

This is how we should be known. We should be known by our love. This is love for one another and love for our neighbor. It is also love for everyone in the world, just as God loves everyone in the whole world. God loves the world so much that he sent Jesus to earth to pay the sacrifice for all our sins once and for all. God sacrificed his own Son for us.

Jesus tells us that everything written in the Law of Moses and spoken by the prophets hangs on the commands of us loving God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, and loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.

The Old Testament is very relative to life today. We must read it and apply it through the perspective of Jesus. It's not about the legalistic following of rules and regulations. It is entirely about loving God with all that is in us and loving others sacrificially. That is our motivation for all we say and do.

Conclusion

Recently I had someone who is not a Christian telling me a story about someone who says they are a Christian. This person was pointing out all the ways that the Christian did not seem very nice or helpful. They were mean-spirited and looking to work some deals to their advantage, not being fair. I don't know the real story, but this non-Christian viewed this Christian as someone who doesn't live up to the ideals that people of the Church are supposed to.

The Apostle Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6:3

2 Corinthians 6:3

(3) We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited.

We must be sure that all we say and do glorifies God and edifies everyone around us. We cannot be the cause of people turning from God or seeing Jesus poorly. We can only do this by loving one another.

Jesus tells us that the world will know we are Christians by our love for one another. We cannot keep that secret. We need to let our love shine like the light of a lampstand or like a shining city on a hill. Our mouths need to be filled with the praises of God for all to hear and we need to serve others, even non-Christians in a way that is a testimony of the love of Jesus for all people.

The Church should be known for its love. We should be known for our love. Let's spend more time discussing and proclaiming the great things of God in Jesus instead of pointing out what's wrong in the world and in people. Let's be known more for what we are for and less for what we are against.

