

# Love one another

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*“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

**John 13:34-35**

Love is an overarching theme of the scriptures. When asked, what is the greatest commandment, Jesus responded, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”* (Matthew 22:37-40)

1 John 4:8 tells us that, *“God is love”*. 1 Corinthians 13:7-8 teaches that, *“Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”* We are no longer enslaved to the law but we are now compelled to good works by the love we have received through Christ. Love between Christians testifies to the world that we are His.

Christ commands us to love one another. The question is, what is love? In our world today, we use the word “love” in many different ways. We love chocolate. We love a movie. We love football. We love summer. Some doctors use “love” as their supposed motivation for helping with assisted suicides as they end the earthly suffering of those who want to die. Others support abortion because of their “love” for the woman who has an unwanted pregnancy and for the unborn child who supposedly will have a “miserable life”. Others use the word “love” in place of lust to justify immoral behavior that they would like to pursue. For others love is the reason that lies are told, adultery is committed, wars are fought, or children are abused. So, what is love? Why would Jesus leave us with such a vague command?

He did not. The key is the next part of the verse. We are to love one another *“as He has loved us”*. We are to love each other with a Jesus type of love. Our love is to be based on Jesus’ teachings and examples of love. He submitted to the will of the Father. He submitted to the Word of God. He

blessed children. He gave grace to the woman caught in adultery. He healed the widow's only son. He healed the leper by touching him. He defended the holiness of God's house. He spoke truth, even when it was difficult. He washed feet. He forgave His enemies. He gave His life so that we could be saved.

God has given us so much more than rules or laws. He has put the law of love on our hearts and the Spirit of Christ in us so that we can carry out His command. To love is demanding, grueling and wonderful. It is the pursuit of Christ and life as it was intended to be. It is a dying to self and taking up your cross daily. It is the greatest expression of Christ-likeness. None will surely take hold of it perfectly this side of heaven, but it is to be our goal, our obedience.

1 John 5:2 describes love with these words, ***"By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments."***

We can be guided to a loving obedience as we follow the commanded "one another's" that we find throughout scripture:

- ◆ John 15:12 – ***"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."***
- ◆ Romans 12:10 – ***"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."***
- ◆ Galatians 6:2 – ***"Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ."***
- ◆ 1 Peter 4:9-10 – ***"Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."***
- ◆ Romans 14:19 – ***"So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another."***
- ◆ Romans 15:14 – ***"And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another."***
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 4:18 – ***"Therefore comfort one another with these words."***
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:11 – ***"Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing."***
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:15 – ***"See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men."***
- ◆ Hebrews 10:24-25 – ***"And let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near."***
- ◆ Romans 12:10 – ***"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor."***

- ◆ Romans 12:16 – *“Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”*
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 11:33 – *“So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, **wait for one another.**”*
- ◆ Ephesians 5:21 – *“And **be subject to one another** in the fear of Christ.”*
- ◆ Philippians 2:3 – *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you **regard one another as more important than himself.**”*
- ◆ James 5:16 – *“Therefore, **confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another**, so that you may be healed.”*
- ◆ 1 Peter 5:5 – *“You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, **clothe yourselves with humility toward one another**, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*
- ◆ Ephesians 4:2 – *“... with all humility and gentleness, with patience, **showing forbearance to one another in love.**”*
- ◆ Ephesians 4:32 – *“And **be kind to one another**, tender-hearted, **forgiving each other**, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”*
- ◆ Romans 14:13 – *“Therefore **let us not judge one another** anymore, but rather determine this— not to put an obstacle or a stumbling block in a brother’s way.”*
- ◆ Romans 15:7 – *“Wherefore, **accept one another**, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God.”*
- ◆ James 4:11 – *“**Do not speak against one another**, brethren.”*
- ◆ James 5:9 – *“**Do not complain, brethren, against one another**, that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.”*
- ◆ Colossians 3:9 – *“**Do not lie to one another**, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.”*
- ◆ Romans 15:5 – *“Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to **be of the same mind with one another** according to Christ Jesus ...”*
- ◆ 1 Corinthians 12:25 – *“That there should be no division in the body, but that the members should have the same **care for one another.**”*
- ◆ Romans 14:19 – *“So then let us pursue the things which **make for peace and the building up of one another.**”*
- ◆ 1 Thessalonians 5:13 – *“And that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. **Live in peace with one another.**”*

Our love for one another is evidence of those who truly belong to the family of God. I know that after reading through that list of “one anothers” it sounds impossible to love this way, but throughout scripture we see how love drastically changes people and even groups of people. How the Holy Spirit imbeds in one’s heart a love for others that they never had before.

When we look at the story of the early church, we see how God worked in multiple cases to bring about love and community amongst people who were very different. When you look at the 12 disciples of Jesus it seems like an impossible crowd to work with. On various occasions they argued amongst themselves about who would become the greatest. One would eventually betray Jesus. One was a tax collector who worked for the Romans and stole money from his own people. Another was a zealot. Zealots were known for their hatred for the Romans, at times even to the point of murder if it was necessary. A tax collector and a zealot in the same room could have been disastrous. They must have been a difficult group to deal with, but somehow the love of Jesus took them from their selfishness and brought unity that was willing to suffer and to even die for the name of Christ.

In the book of Acts we see another example. The group of 12 had now grown to 120. This group had known Jesus while he was here on earth. Many had likely seen the crucifixion. They had been with Jesus after His resurrection. They had witnessed his ascension and now they had gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem as Jesus had instructed them to do. They prayed and waited for the Holy Spirit for 50 days. They shared the fear of persecution. They likely shared many stories and memories of their days with Jesus. Regardless of their background, they had become unified by their faith in Christ.

In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit came. God reversed the separation of language and peoples that the Tower of Babel had brought forth, and now was replacing it with the unity that Christ brings. The 120 believers miraculously spoke the languages of the people from many nations that were visiting Jerusalem, Peter preached, and 3,000 people put their faith in Jesus. That was great for the kingdom of God, but the intimate friendships that the 120 had built were now diluted by 3,000 people who did not know all of Jesus’ teachings. Most of them had not known Jesus at all. Although they were Jewish, they were from different countries, spoke different languages and had very little in common with the 120 who had walked with Jesus. It was likely that disunity would soon follow. But then we read, in Acts 2:42-46, about the miraculous unity that the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts in a very short period of time.

***“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” (Acts 2:42–46)***

How was this type of unity even possible, and in such a short amount of time? It had everything to do with the people having the same heart, same mind and same Spirit living within them. Now that they had been adopted into the family of God, they no longer were identified by race, money, education or language. In Christ those differences no longer matter. They had died to self and their old identity. Their needs were now met in Christ. They no longer had to fight for their own agendas, rights or needs. As they joined together in their new identity they were one.

This idea of loving community, to many, sounds too good to be true. That is because most of us are more familiar with the betrayal of the world than the safety of being amongst the true people of God. That is unfortunate. To share life with others does have its risks, but they are far outweighed by the benefits.

Maybe you are a Christian who is saying, “But I would rather live my Christian life alone . . . I don’t need to live my life in community with other Christians.”

Maybe you disagree with the idea of needing one another, but that is not what our Creator God says about the human life. If we want to be made like Christ, we must live in community. If we want to have a greater understanding of God, then we must live in community. If we want to further the kingdom of God in this world, we must live in community. We experience the character of Christ as we share life with the body of Christ. We were meant to live on both sides of the “one anothers”, both giving and receiving as God leads. He has given His Spirit and His Word to make it possible.

Being part of a community is scary. It means that people know more about the details of your life. They know about your faults and the blemishes in your character. They see how you treat your spouse, how you raise your children, how you live your private life. It demands being authentic, caring for each other, being available, becoming vulnerable. Who wants all of that? In our individualized lives, where we don’t know our neighbors, and have no desire to, we would much rather get home in the evening, close the door, turn on the television or computer and pass our evening being entertained or surfing the web. No commitment to others. Enjoying living the pleasure, adventure and joy of life vicariously through the actors on the television. Nothing against television, but we were created to live life, not just watch it.

This is the life of choice for many. We have built walls around ourselves where others are held at a safe distance and where we can maneuver and manipulate life in a comfortable manner. Predictable, safe, secure, but not as God intended. God’s plan includes imperfect, risky relationships with people. And God has given what we need to not only survive in relationships, but to thrive.

God has called us to love others as Christ has loved us. Ask God to give you a bigger vision for the relationships in your life. That you would see your coworkers as more than just people that you pass time with every day as you make money to pay the bills. That you would see them as your mission field. The people whom God has sovereignly put you with so that you could bring light to their darkness. See your purpose with your children as something larger than just making them learn how to obey, or getting them to a good school so they can get a good job. See that God has entrusted your children to you, so that you could raise them up in the ways of God, so that they could be prepared to be and to do everything that God has created them to be and to do. See your spouse as the most intimate of relationships that God has given us as humans. It is the picture of Christ and His church. It has the potential of refining us and sanctifying us like none other. See it as your first responsibility, as you usher each other towards a greater love for Christ and a greater intimacy with one another.

As we enter into authentic relationships with each other, remember that God is the potter and that we are the clay. Present yourselves as moldable vessels in God’s hands and allow Him to change you and refine you as you dare to live life alongside other believers. It will be difficult at times, but the

rewards will be many as God uses our relationships to make us into the masterpiece that He wants us to be.

Fix your eyes on Jesus. Surrender those obstacles that keep you from loving others. Pray for faith to live in community. Always remain aware of the safety net of Christ's unconditional love. Learn from His teachings. Learn from His example. Learn from the word of God. Love as He loved.

***"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup>My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*** (John 15:9-17)