

Love and the Cross

John 15:9-17

By [Dr. James M. Baird](#)

Let us continue our worship as we take God's holy and infallible Bible. Open to the Gospel of John, chapter 15 of the Gospel of John. As you open your Bibles, it is in this week, almost 2000 years ago, a week just like this one, that Christ on what we call "Good Friday" died on Calvary's cross. And so this congregation has been moving mentally towards the cross, as has the Church across the world. Now as we have moved towards the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to point out to you, as I have mentioned in some previous sermons, the centrality of the cross. The Apostle Paul did not say, 'God forbid that I should glory except in the Sermon on the Mount or except in faith.' The Apostle Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of Jesus Christ." That's how central to Christianity is the cross. The cross has been chosen by the Church as the emblem of our faith. When you approach this sanctuary, on top of that enormous steeple is a cross. The sanctuary is laid out, architecturally, in the form of a cross. The deacons have on their breast pocket a red badge with a yellow cross. The cross is the emblem of Christianity.

Now the chief message of the cross, called the gospel of Jesus Christ, is this: God made an atonement for our sins in His own body on Calvary's tree that our sins might be forgiven. You see, the Bible teaches that it is your sin that has separated you from your God. All of us in this place are sinners. Those who are seated and those who are standing, we are sinners. We came into this worship service and there was a prayer about the holiness of God. Now, how is sin going to be forgiven, because sin will separate you from God both now and forever, will bring you not His blessing but will bring you His curse? What do we do?

Not too long ago, in Chicago, there was a major meeting of the religions represented across the United States. And there was a presentation of what these religions offered the people of the United States. Then there was a minister who stood and he brought a woman forward and he says, "This woman, represents a woman that I am going to see tomorrow; she is in a federal prison." And he went through some of the crimes that this woman had committed. "Now you tell me with your religions, what do you say to this lady? Go ahead." Absolute silence. "What can you say?" And then the minister, Bill Cook was his name, raised his hand as though to listen from heaven. "Do you have something from heaven?" And he heard the voice of John and John said, "The blood of Jesus Christ my Son cleanses from all sin." That's the meaning of the cross. There is no

other way; there is no other religion that even offers forgiveness of sins in the sight of a holy God—only Christ. That's why the cross is central.

Now there might be one who leaves this congregation today and says, “Is that all that your religion offers? The forgiveness of my sin before the eyes of a holy God? I go back home to the same house or the same room’ I face the same problems, the same family conflict. Tomorrow I get up; I go to the same job or I go to no job. I have the same problems with people, and then I pick up the newspaper and I see what has gone on in the world today. Is all that you offer from the cross the forgiveness of sin?”

That's crucial but that's not all. That's not all. In the Upper Room on the night before He was taken and then crucified the next day, the Lord Jesus is dealing with His apostles. And as He deals with His apostles in this 15th chapter of John, He makes an emphasis, He who is going to the cross, and He's going to talk in this passage about His death on the cross, and then He's going to challenge His men. And may the Church of Christ today hear the voice of God as it is in our text in John chapter 15 beginning to read in verse 9.

John 15:9-15:

9 As the Father hath loved Me, so have I loved you: continue ye in My love. 10 If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in his love. 11 These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and *that* your joy might be full. 12 This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. 13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 Ye are My friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. 15 Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you. *God give us insight into His holy word.*

“Love one another as I have loved you.”

Step #1: Agape Love

Notice three times what the emphasis is as Christ is dealing with His disciples in that upper room. Three times He says, ‘I command you to love.’ “Love one another as I have loved you.” We are not a church that follows what is called the liturgical calendar, but there are many churches on this Thursday that will have what is called “Maundy Thursday.” And as I understand it, that word *maundy* comes from the Latin, and this is probably the idea, it comes from the Latin *mandate*. Christ is *mandating* on Thursday; He is *commanding* on Thursday in that upper room what? To love one another: that's what He mandates. As He

thinks about the cross, "You are to love one another."

Particularly in recent years, I have preached more and more about the love of Christ. The older I get the more I preach about the love of Christ. When I began, it was hell, fire, and brimstone. I have been in congregations and in churches and particularly in some churches as I have preached about the love of God; I have seen men in their eye look upon me as a wimp and I have sensed that they believe the message is a weak message. 'Don't be talking about the love of God. Talk about the judgment and the righteousness and the holiness of God in this day.'

But I remind you that the central theme of the Scriptures deals with the cross, and from the cross and in that Upper Room the Lord Jesus Christ emphasizes love. "Love one another." It is commanded. You don't have it as an option, Christian. You are commanded to love one another. It is so strong that when the Old Testament is summed up by Jesus Christ, when the question was asked, 'What is the law all about?' Jesus said, 'The law is summed up in two commandments: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind; number two is like unto it: love your neighbor as yourself.' We are to love God and we are to love one another. That sums up all of the statutes and the law that God has for His people in the Old Testament, the moral law. The same is said in the New Testament, in the book of Romans it says that the law is fulfilled in the love that we have for each other.

I would not say this but God is so blunt in 1 John chapter 4. God says to those who say, "I love you, God," those of us who know the language of Zion who are able to talk about doctrine, who pray, and who come to church and we speak about "I love you, God"—and God says, "If a man sayeth that he love God and hates his brother," God says "he is a liar." I didn't say that: God said it. How blunt! We are commanded to love one another.

I am going to make a suggestion to you that most of us believe that we are lovers, not fighters but lovers. And so when we hear a sermon that says we are to love one another and we are to love the people of this world, we say, "Well, that's me. I do. I do love people and I want the love of God. I love people." The problem is that there's a great confusion. We are not only commanded to love...there is a confusion about the love of God, "What does that mean to love God?" There is such confusion that many people won't even approach it. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* has four full pages on the word *atom* and it defines what an atom is. When it comes to *love*, the *Encyclopedia Britannica* has no pages and not a single word. They won't even touch the subject because there is such confusion.

Now almost everybody who has heard preaching a lot these days has understood that the Greek language in which the New Testament was written knows that there are numerous words for love. We in the English language,

we've got one word; that leads to a whole lot of the confusion. In the Greek language there is the word *eros* which translates into "erotic love." There is *phileo* and there is *storge*. But the Christians came and they took a remote word, and they coined it of God and it is *agape*. And that kind of love, agape love, can be described in our text in a very simple way. Jesus Christ said, "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." "Love one another as I have loved you." Christ says, 'I set the example. Do you want to know what love is? Look at Me, in my relationship to you and in the relationship that God has with Me, the Father.' "As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you." "Love one another as I have loved you."

Step #2: Love sacrificially

Now how did God the Father love you through Jesus Christ, and how did Jesus Christ love? What is the example? The example goes like this: you give your best for the object of your love. You give your best sacrificially. God so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son. He didn't give some fourth-rate. When Jesus Christ came, here is the love of God: He gives His life. He says, 'I lay down my life for you, my friends.' That's what the love of God is.

Beloved, folks who have come and want to get married, and they've got stars in their eyes—which is good; you better have stars. There's no relationship on this earth as difficult as husband and wife. None. And I begin by saying, "Love each other"? "Oh yea, oh yea. Maybe nobody has ever loved like we have loved." And so then I begin to tell them what love is like. God tells them in Genesis chapter 2, where it says that they will leave all others and cleave unto each other and the two shall become one. And I talk about leaving and I talk about cleaving and then I say, "You also leave the single life." And here's what I mean by that. You see, until we get married we rise up everyday and we say, "Well, here's what I want to do today. I want to go to school, or I want to go to my work, or I want to go and do this, and I want..." That's how you do. "And I work out my day. That's what I want to do. As I get up everyday, that's what I am going to do." But when you get married, that all changes. If you get up everyday, and two people in married life get up and say, "Here's what I'm gonna do," you've got a war on your hands. I say, "The pronoun changes; it goes like this: From now on when you get up every morning you say, 'Here is what we are going to do.'" There's a big difference. Some people never make that loving transition. They are always out for themselves, in every situation. And they are not out for love. And they are out by power to manipulate and control and get people. But when you rise up in married life and you say to yourself, "Here's what we are going to do," then immediately there is another person.

I was off this week and I saw *The Phil Donahue Show*. I can only take so much of that everyday. Every time I see it, it looks like it's aimed just at me. And the idea was, don't let anybody else get the best of you in marriage. Brother, that's from the pit. That's how you're gonna go through life...with the single mentality? These

folks could not come to an agreement on everything and so the woman was told especially, "Don't let that guy have his way."

If you love your spouse, man and wife, you get up everyday and you love them by saying, "Here is what I can do sacrificially for you." That's *agape* love and that *agape* love will never fail you.

You know why we're having such sexual problems in the United States? It's because in the erotic situation, even in marriage, we are out to say, "Here's what I want you to do for me." This never works. You're going to have problems in marriage. But when there's *agape* love and you are sexually involved with your mate you say, "What can I do for you that will please you?" it makes all the difference in the world.

Then there is *phileo* love, from which we get the city of Philadelphia, brotherly love. How can we love each other when I am going to use you for my sake and for what I think is good and right? *Agape* love says, "For the community, for the community, how may I help you at my sacrifice?" That's what this world needs.

Storge is "family love," primarily family love. How can you live together in a family if children and husband and wife, everybody is out for his own? "What can I do for you?" makes all the difference in the world. Then add personal sacrifice. God gave His best. Christ said to His disciples, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

Step #3: Commitment of Love

This leads to the last step and that is commitment. We are commanded to love. There should be no confusion about what love is. Bertrand Russell—brilliant, agnostic, an opponent of Christianity—said, "Whatever else you say, what this weary world needs is what these Christians call 'love.'" The love of God.

Let no man be here today and say, "It'll never work in my business." You go back to your business tomorrow and you keep other people in mind and how you may serve them, and you'll see the difference. Now there is a commitment of love, commitment of love. When we speak about the commitment of our love, it is impossible without committing ourselves to love to come to the cross of Jesus Christ. That's what I'm asking this whole congregation to do. Come to the foot of the cross. Come to the Christ of the cross who is enthroned in Heaven. How can I look at Him and not realize that He has commanded me to love from the cross? I commit myself. I commit myself, first of all, in the church, in my home, and out in the world. In the church...I have come from church after church in which it seems like the commandment is, 'See how much trouble you can stir up, one among another.'

It pleases me when I come from other churches and come back to this church to

see such a high degree of care and concern from each other—not perfect, far from it. But I want to tell you, I'm absolutely amazed at the way that the devil just has his way in church after church in which he has people snarling at each other, rather than saying, "What can I do that would benefit you at my expense?" in the church.

The Bible says, "The Lord Jesus Christ loved the church and died for the Church." Beloved, I want to tell you it is amazing what the church can do if they love each other and if they are in unity together. It is amazing what this church 'can,' 'has,' and 'can and will' do together for the kingdom of God and for the blessing; and it has to do with loving each other. You won't have to get out of the parking lot when you'll be given an opportunity to love one another sacrificially.

And then we are to love one another in our homes. All Presbyterian preachers have read the memoirs of Robert Murray McCheyne. He died in year 1843. He was the most popular Presbyterian preacher in Scotland. When he was in his mid-twenties he was pastor of the largest church in Edinburgh with over 4,000 members, and he died at the age of 30, having totally expended his life in love for the brethren. But what so often is not known is that when he grew up he was not like that, but he had an older brother...the family had a problem; they called it in that day "consumption." The older brother whose name was David had consumption, and David was a godly young man. He also had gifts, but he was sick and he turned his life and his prayers to his younger brother and prayed. And Robert Murray McCheyne said he came in one night and remembered saying to his brother, who he heard call his name in prayer, "Am I that bad?" And brother David said, "We're all sinners and in need of the Lord." Robert Murray went off to the university, in a sense at the expense of the older brother David, who just didn't have the physical strength, but David remained home and prayed and McCheyne was converted at the University of Edinburgh. David died when Robert was in the university. And then McCheyne burst upon the spiritual scene as a young pastor, flaming for Christ and for the love of Christ. How did it come about? He had a brother who loved him in Christ. You got a brother? You got family members?

I have a Presbyterian minister in Pennsylvania who tells the story of a grandfather with his little boy, years ago. His little grandson, on vacation, was taken down by this stream. It rained; the little boy (as they will do) put his foot on the rock. He slipped. He was into the stream; grandfather jumped in after him; they were swept along; they were both killed. But when they found that grandfather the next day, he had both hands around that little 5-year-old grandson. No attempt to save himself. He never let that little boy go, even when he drowned. That's the love of God. Not just in the moment of terror, but day after day.

You know what's happening to our families? Do you understand that as the family goes, the church goes, the nation goes? Do you understand what's

happening to the family? And do you understand what the real need is, to bring the families of the United States of America to the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ and to have forgiveness of sin and to hear the Master say, "Love one another, as I have loved you," instead of tearing each other apart?

Here is a beautiful little story. Years ago, a little boy was carrying a younger boy on his back to school for there was no public transportation in those days, and a stranger said, "That's quite a burden you have there on your back." "He's no burden; he's my brother." "He's no burden; he's my brother." And we are to love in the world, not only in our homes, not only in our church, the love of the cross of Jesus Christ to this world. DaVinci when he painting the great *Lord's Supper*, daVinci had a public argument with a fellow artist. And daVinci said (to himself apparently), 'Don't get angry. Get even.' Ever heard that one? That's what the world says and how it turns viciousness loose on this world. When people are angry they seek to get even—no love of God in their hearts. We'll tear each other apart in this United States and that's exactly what is being done, even in our own city. So daVinci said, 'I'll get even.' And he took the *Lord's Supper*, and the first of the apostles that he painted was Judas and he painted this man's face in unmistakably, and that man became the butt of everybody's jokes. And so daVinci, painted and he left Christ to last. And he started to paint and Christ would not come. He couldn't paint Christ, until finally as the Lord dealt with him. he went back and he drew another face for Judas, totally different; then Christ came. You can't hate and be close to Christ. You just can't do it.

It pleases me to see that our world missions offering for the last week or two is up to \$430,000. There are folk out here who have yet to make their faith promise for the year. For people who live on the other side of the world, you don't know them but do you love them? As Christ died for the Church and as Christ died for the people of this world, do you love them? Then we will give.

We had a missionary stand here a Sunday or two ago and say he was going back to Zaire. He'd been there thirteen years and out in the boondocks, in the heart of Africa. When asked, "What shall we pray for?" he said, "That when we go back this summer, my eight-year-old daughter we will send off to another country so that she will be able to go to school for the first time, she'd be able to go to school in a missionary school." You send your eight-year-old daughter off. Why? Because you love these people through Jesus Christ. That's the love of Christ for this world. When Christ was nailed to the cross, He looked down and said to those who were crucifying in prayer, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." That is the Lord Jesus Christ.

We come to that cross. Come with me now. Is there anybody here who is alienated from God, who doesn't know if his sins are forgiven, who has never placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ? I don't know. If God is dealing with you today, right where you are at the end of this service just bow your head when I bow my head and you pray, "Lord, forgive me. Forgive me, and I'll follow you."

Mind you Christ's love is not something that He commands of you unless He gives to you. Do you know how this chapter begins? It is about the vine and the branches. Christ said, "I am the vine; you are the branches." Vine and the branches go together. Grace as a result of the vine and the branches. Christ said, "Abide in Me and you will produce much fruit." Just come to Christ and this ole' heart of mine that is not a lover's heart, something happens when I am with Him, when I pray, when I read my Scripture, when I come and worship together, and when I go out. Christ said, "Abide in me." And then He commands, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

Let's pray together. *Beloved heavenly Father, as we are here in the beauty, not only of this sanctuary but in the beauty of our own sanctuary of heart, and as we come with Thee we remember asking of You at the beginning of this worship service, come among us and deal with us. Draw honor to Yourself. Glorify Yourself in this worship service and bless Your people. We thank You for the love of God and may the love of God be transmitted through me, through others, and across this congregation to the glory of God. And may Thy benediction, the benediction of Jesus Christ, the risen Savior who was crucified—may His benediction come from Heaven and may His blessing and His benediction rest upon believing and loving hearts. For it is now unto the Lord Jesus Christ who is able to keep you from falling, falling into unloving attitudes; it is now unto the Lord Jesus Christ who is able at your death to present you sinless, forgiven before His throne of grace in Heaven with exceeding great joy. To the only wise God who is our Savior: unto Him in our hearts, let there be glory, majesty. May He have dominion and power both now and forevermore. Amen.*

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