

Love Others Like Jesus Does!  
Jan Shrader



When the call came through my heart sank. I had gone to a University of Arizona basketball game with my husband, and in my excitement over a nail-biting win, I accidentally left my cell phone in a restroom at McKale Center. Following the game, a police detective found my phone and called my friend Kay Hunter because he noticed how often we text. Kay asked the policeman to call my son, Elliott.

Gary and I had an hour commute from the arena and while we were still driving home, Gary's cell died. After we arrived at the house, a call from Elliott finally came through with the detective's phone number. I left him a message that night, but I feared Gary's phone had proven it was now unreliable. The next day, when I came to work, I called the policeman again and left a message with the cactus nursery's landline phone number. Late in the morning, he returned my call and then actually brought my cell phone by the nursery. Wasn't that sweet? I thought his kindness toward me was far beyond the call of duty.

Since he was a policeman and a detective, I wondered what he discovered about me from my cell and consequently what he thought of me. Could he tell I was a gardener by looking at my pictures? I love taking pictures of blooming cactus with my phone. Could he tell I pray for others by reading my texts? Several people text me their prayer requests. Did he think that I was a person who cares about others? Have you ever pondered what someone would learn about you if they found your phone?

In John 13:34-35, Jesus said,

**"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."**

Jesus commanded Christians to love one another, and the standard by which our love will be measured is the way Jesus loved his disciples.

How did Jesus love the disciples? Jesus's love was sacrificial, unconditional, and prophetic. Remember in this very chapter Jesus told Peter he would deny him three times? Jesus's love for his disciples was demonstrated when he washed their feet. He taught them, encouraged them, prayed for them, trained them, warned them, forgave them, and exposed the truth to them. Jesus's love for his disciples was always consistent. He spent quality time with them and never gave up on them. He was gentle, kind, good, and persevering and the part we often forget is his love was supernatural. He was sent from God the Holy Father to show us God is love.

When we struggle to love other Christians, we will need to remember that in John 13:34, Jesus is teaching love is a command. Jesus did not make very many outright commands during his ministry. In fact, he seemed to do just the opposite. If you will remember in Matthew 12:1-14, when Jesus and his disciples were eating grain they hand picked in a field on the Sabbath, Jesus argues with the Pharisees that the Sabbath regulations were not to keep man from doing good on the Sabbath. The Sabbath laws were given so that man could enjoy rest on the Sabbath, fellowship with God, and were not to be an unnecessary burden.

It is highly unusual for Jesus to use the word "command" in his teaching. In this passage he is not talking about our love for every person. This command to love Christians was new because Christianity was brand new.

How is it possible to obey this law of love? For example, when the church has hurt us, how do we continue to love? When we struggle to love other Christians, we need to remember that love in these verses is expressed as a verb. We often see love primarily as an emotion that we must feel, but the Greek word translated love here, "agape", is an unconditional love, an action verb.

Sometimes when God wants to changes us, he will do it from the inside out. He first changes our heart and consequently our behavior follows our heart change. But, often when God wants to change us, he does it from the outside in. When we choose to behave lovingly and imitate Jesus, positive emotions will follow. A new mother needing more sleep awakes at two a.m. to feed her baby as an act of her will, not her emotions. And yet, as she rocks and feeds her baby, her heart is flooded with feelings of love. Therefore, we shouldn't overthink this command. It is possible to "fake it, till we make it."

In Luke 23:34, Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." One of my seminary professors often reminded us that this is still one of the most relevant prayers we need today. Praying for those who have hurt us is a loving and Christ-like practice. I use the word practice, because it doesn't feel natural.

Conflict is a normal part of life. For example, when we study the early church, Peter and Paul had a conflict over whether the Gentile converts needed to be circumcised before they could become true Christians. Paul and Barnabas had a strong disagreement over a young missionary named John Mark who had deserted them on their first missionary journey. Time will show that the Apostle Paul was wrong about John Mark. I believe God was in the struggle between Paul and Barnabas, because two missionary journeys were planned after they disagreed and more people were reached with the gospel.

Conflict does not preclude love. Godly people can disagree on an issue. We can have a civil discourse without becoming mean. We can act lovingly when we don't agree. If we agreed on every subject, one of us would be unnecessary. The scriptures teach, "Iron sharpens iron". At all times, we need to behave in a loving manner. Being right on an issue will not give us the right to be cruel, or to see our brother or sister in Christ as an adversary.

Instinctively, we want to feel love before we act lovingly. God is commanding us to imitate Christ's love and then we will feel. In a slippery attempt to wiggle out of the necessity to obey this command, we can find ourselves questioning a Christian's authenticity. We can have a mistaken expectation that Christians will always behave in a loveable way. We can think we can only share our love with them if they are kind, deserving of our love, or share the exact same doctrine as we do. Nothing could be further from the truth. We can also mistakenly believe that our behavior has been completely loveable. Every one of us have sinned and fallen short of God's glory.

God's love is unconditional. He doesn't love anyone because they behave in a loveable way. God is love. It is God's nature to love, not our performance, which causes God to love us.

Lastly, when we struggle to love other Christians, we will need to remember God designed our love to work as a beacon. Notice in verse 35, Jesus did not say we would be known by our sound doctrine, by our faith, or by our spiritual purity. He said, "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Love between believers is a powerful force in evangelism...a force we can fail to comprehend.

### **Three things are at play in these verses.**

*Firstly, we have a command to love other Christians from Jesus's own mouth. This is a command, not a suggestion, and anyone not holding to this law is in disobedience. Secondly, the love between believers is to be of the same quality Jesus gave to the disciples. It is to demonstratively reflect his unconditional love for us. Thirdly, when properly given, this love will be a beacon to the world that we are Christ's disciples.*

## QUESTIONS:

What might change if you believed the love shared between Christians was an evangelistic beacon?

When you are hurt in church, how can you, “fake it, till you make it?”

In today’s passage in verse 35, Jesus says, “By this all people will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” When Christians love each other, people know they are Christ’s disciples. Unconditional love expressed between brothers and sisters in Christ is a God-planted sign so unbelievers will know who the real Christians are.

Consequently, the opposite is also true. When Christians fight over doctrine, policy, or the color of the carpet, this is also a signal to an unbelieving world to beware of those who call themselves Christians but don’t love. He did not say, “All people will know you are my disciples by your doctrine, or your belief system, by your faith, or purity.” He said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have *love for one another.*”