

John Chapter 13 v 34 & 1 Corinthians 13

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Date: 07 January 2018

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[0 : 00] . Good morning. A very warm welcome to all of you, particularly those who are visitors amongst us.

We trust that together you will know the Lord's presence and help. I've got, most of you have not seen since last year. You don't look a year older. No, you're looking pretty good.

And we thank God that we start this new year, this first Sunday of 2018, in the presence of the Lord and coming to worship him.

Though we have changed in the last 12 months, all of us, in many different ways. We know that he is the God who has not changed and never does change.

Moses in his Psalm, Psalm 90, writes this. Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

[1 : 31] He is the one unchanging, dependable, faithful, reliable person in the whole of the universe. And because he is our God, and because we have put our faith and trust in him, we can, with confidence, enter into this new year, assured that his mercy, his love, his grace towards us does not change either.

Let's sing our first hymn, particularly appropriate for this time of year. Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come.

115, let's stand as we sing the praise of our everlasting God. Let us come to the Lord in prayer together.

Let us all pray. Our gracious and everlasting God, we come to you this morning.

We thank you that you are the God who does not change. We thank you that you are the God who has always been and who always will be.

[2 : 49] You have no beginning and you have no end. You are, from everlasting to everlasting, eternal. And though our minds cannot take that in, and though we cannot completely or even begin to understand what eternity means, we thank you, O Lord, that you are such a God like no other.

The God who indeed is worthy of our trust, our faith, and our hope. For, O Lord, our God, even if it wasn't for the, even if you hadn't done all the things you'd done in the past, Lord, you are still worthy of our faith and hope for the future.

For, O Lord, there is none like you. But, Lord, you have done so much for us. Even in this past 12 months, the very fact that we are here in this place of worship this morning is testimony to your goodness, your keeping, your faithfulness, your loving kindness.

For, O Lord, we have to confess that in this past year we have sinned. We have failed. We have fallen short. We have wandered and strayed like lost sheep. We've made so many mistakes.

We've got it wrong so many times. We've, Lord, broken your commandments again and again. But, Lord, here we are. Not because we are good enough, but because, again, you've constantly kept and sustained.

[4 : 09] You've brought us back. You've given us faith. You've given us repentance. You've given us hearts to turn to you. Lord, you've restored us. You've not let us go beyond your reach.

And, O Lord, we thank you that we are here because you are here and because you do not change. Lord, we've been through times of distress and sorrow and grief, times of loss and heartache and pain.

Yet, O Lord, again, you have been with us in them all and brought us through them all. And sustained us in them all. And there have been times, O Lord, in this past year of great joy and rejoicing, of happiness and blessing, of times when, O Lord, we have sensed your nearness in a wonderful way when you've spoken to us and met with us.

And, O Lord, again, we give you the praise and the thanks that you are a God who loves to give good gifts to your children, who delights to pour out his blessings upon those who are his. And so, O Lord, we're here. We're here, O Lord, and perhaps in our hearts there are trepidations and anxieties for the year ahead. But, O Lord, we ask that you would lift our eyes up to you to see, O Lord, that whatever we face is not to be feared.

[5 : 22] Whatever is to come is part of your sovereign purpose for us, that you are the good God who orders all things well. And though we cannot see one moment into the future, you see all the year ahead.

You see it laid out before you. For, O Lord, you are the God who does not dwell in time, but the God who dwells in eternity. You see the end from the beginning. You know all things.

And, O Lord, because you know all things and because you love us, we can trust you. We pray that this morning, particularly, as we meet together on this first Sunday of the new year, we pray that especially you would strengthen us in our faith, that you would encourage us in our hope, that you would ground us, O Lord, in that trust in you, that you would deliver us from all fear, and that, O Lord, you would send us into the year rejoicing in you, and, O Lord, walking in your ways.

And we trust by your grace, bringing glory to your name. So be with us even this morning now. Speak with us and meet with us afresh. And do us good, for we ask these things in and through your Son, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Amen. Scriptures then. We'll come to God's Word. And we're going to read from 1 Corinthians 13. 1 Corinthians 13.

[6 : 55] And if you've got the NIV, if you've got the Red Church Bible, that's page 1154. Page 1154 in the Church Bible.

And we're going to read from the end of chapter 12. There's the last verse of chapter 12, and into chapter 13. Paul has been speaking about the different parts of the body, of Christ, and spiritual gifts, and how God has enabled and equipped the Church to serve one another with different gifts and abilities.

But then he goes on to say, here at the end of chapter 12, and yet I'll show you the most excellent, the best way. This is, above all else, the most important thing, more important than those gifts of the Spirit.

So chapter 13, verse 1.

Love is patient. Love is kind. It does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It does not dishonor others. It is not self-seeking.

[8 : 28] It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease. Where there are tongues, they will be stilled. Where there is knowledge, it will pass away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child.

I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only reflection as in a mirror.

Then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part. Then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain. Faith, hope, and love.

[9 : 31] But the greatest of these is love. We're going to be turning to 1 Corinthians a little later on. But first of all, if you would turn with me to the Gospel of John and chapter 14.

Gospel of John and chapter 14. Gospel of John and chapter 14. Gospel of John and chapter 14. Gospel of John and chapter 14.

I'm sure over the week since New Year's Day, because it's nearly a week, isn't it? And New Year's seems to be so past, isn't it? And where was Christmas?

That's just gone. Time just goes so very quickly. But over the last week or so, no doubt probably people have come up to you and talked about the New Year and said something along like this. What New Year's resolution have you made? Or they've told you what their New Year's resolution is for the year ahead. And if you did make a New Year's resolution, it was almost certainly probably very similar to the one you made the year before.

[10 : 42] Almost, maybe exactly the same as the one you made before. Perhaps it was one of these. These are the top four most popular New Year's resolutions that are nearly made every year.

Number four is to give up smoking. And the third one is to lose weight. And the second one is to get fit. And the first one, the top one, the major New Year's resolution is to spend more time with loved ones or family.

So I wonder if any of those apply to you. I think probably about three of them apply to me. I'm not going to tell you which three, but I can tell you one of them's not smoking. Okay. I wonder if you thought that top resolution was going to be the top resolution.

To spend more time with those that we love. Perhaps we thought it might be something else. But that's very fitting, I think, with what the theme that I want to bring to you this morning, at the beginning of this New Year for us as a local church.

And it's verse 34 of John chapter 13. Verse 34 of John 13. A new command. This is Jesus speaking to his disciples night before his death.

[12:03] A new command I give you. Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. In one sense, this commandment of Jesus, it is new, and we'll look at that in a moment.

But in one sense, it's also old, like those New Year's resolutions are often repeated from before. So Jesus is really, to begin with, repeating things that are the theme of the Bible.

Earlier on in his ministry, he'd been asked about the greatest commandment that God has given us. And of course, the greatest commandment, he said, is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength.

And the second, he said, is like it to love your neighbor as yourself. And there, he's quoting from Leviticus and chapter 19. So, loving is part of God's commandment for all people.

And that command to love your neighbor as yourself sums up a great part of the Ten Commandments, which we know are God's will for all people. Those Ten Commandments just speak about our relationship with others.

[13:07] Parents, sorry, children are to honor their father and mother. That's an act of love. We're not to steal from others or murder and so on.

All of those commandments really are an expression of our love towards others. If you love someone, then you don't steal from them. If you love your wife or your husband, then you don't commit adultery.

If you love your parents, then you honor them and so on and so forth. But this commandment, Jesus says, is a new commandment. And the reason it's a new commandment is because of the way Jesus personalizes it and the way that Jesus raises the standards of love to a level which is beyond any other level previously known.

But Jesus says that, as I have loved you, so you must love one another. Now as we come to this new year, as we recognize the beginning of 2018, in lots of ways nothing has changed.

It's just the same. It's a mark on the calendar. But at the same time, it's an important moment in the life of us as a local church. And I want, therefore, to take this morning and this evening to look at this commandment afresh and to call us to reaffirm our commitment to it and our obedience to it.

[14:35] Now, of course, we've heard this commandment preached before. We know about this commandment. We've thought about it. But what I want us to do is just to take time aside to take stock for ourselves afresh as to our attitude to it.

What does it really mean to love one another as Christ loves us? And how can we keep this commandment that Jesus has given us in the year ahead?

Well, of course, to be able to answer those questions, we need to answer that question, well, what is the love of Jesus like? How does Jesus love us so that we might imitate his love, so that our love may reflect and be like his love?

Well, if we read the Gospels, if we read the life of Jesus, the record of the life of Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the four eyewitness accounts, we cannot help but fail to see that Jesus' life was a life of love.

Everything about him was loving. His words, his attitudes, even though people who were not his disciples, people who were just lookers-on, as it were, from the sidelines, noticed and recognized that he was a man of love.

[15:50] At the graveside of Lazarus, as he weeps, those who are looking by said, see how he loved him. Look at his love. There was love in the life of Christ.

Everybody that Jesus met with was received with love. Whether they were the outcasts of society, whether they were the lepers or the sinners, the immoral, whether they were the downtrodden or

the poor, even the wealthy, even the greedy, even the rich, tax collectors, were met with love. And of course, most amazingly, most astonishingly, those people who put Jesus to death, those who nailed him up to the cross, those who were his worst persecutors and carried out his execution, they're on the cross when Jesus looks upon them and his prayer for them is a prayer of love. Father, forgive them. So, that's a good place to start, isn't it? When we think about the love of Christ and we are called to love one another as he loves us, then we see that the love of Christ is a love which contains forgiveness and our love, therefore, must begin with forgiveness too. Forgiveness of one another because he has forgiven us. Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians in chapter 4. He says, Be kind and compassionate to one another just as in Christ God forgave you. [17:32] The way we show kindness and compassion and love, therefore, to one another is forgiving one another just as God has forgiven us. We know that's part of the Lord's prayer, isn't it? that we have been taught where Jesus teaches us to pray. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who've trespassed against us. Forgive us our sins just as we forgive those who forgive us who've sinned against us. The love of the Lord Jesus Christ is a timeless love. It's a love which spans through the past, the present, and the future. It has aspects of that. And particularly as a love that reaches into the past, it must include forgiveness. And therefore, our love for one another must include forgiveness of one another. It is absolutely certain that we have been hurt by one another in the past 12 months. [18:40] It's absolutely certain. There's no doubt about it. People, somebody has said something to us, somebody has said something about us, somebody has acted towards us in a way which has been hurtful, painful, unpleasant, probably sinful as well. We have sinned against one another. That's just going to happen, I'm afraid, dear friends, because we are sinners still. And that does not change from one year to the next. And therefore, if we are to take seriously Jesus' commandment here to love one another in the coming year, then those injuries of the past year, and maybe perhaps injuries from years past, which haven't been dealt with, must be dealt with. Those past hurts, those past sins have to be forgiven, they have to be left behind, they have to be got riden of, or else there is no way that we can continue. How can we step out into fulfilling this commandment and loving one another and we still bear a grudge? We still carry a wrong attitude towards others? [19:52] who said something that even now when you see them, it's still there, it's the first thing that comes to your mind. Yeah, but they said this to me in March. I still carry, in one sense, a limp because of the way they treated me in that particular situation. what is it that prevents me from being friendly and easy with that particular person when I see them, even at church or in another situation? I just find it so hard. In a few moments, what I'd like us to do is to take a minute with our heads bowed to ask God's Holy Spirit to show us those grievances that we're still carrying and to ask Jesus to help us to forgive them as he's forgiven us. And you may say, well, that's easier said than done. Yes, I'm sure it is. But in the past 12 months, I don't need to remind you that you yourself have sinned against others in this fellowship. [21:11] You yourself have failed. You yourself have had wicked thoughts and attitudes towards others in this church. You know that. Your conscience knows that. You're aware of these things. But, dear friends, there's so many more of them that you don't know, that I don't know, that we fail to recall, that we have not recognized as sinful. Actions, words, and deeds that God knows about and yet in his love and grace has forgiven us because of Christ. Whatever many sins we may feel that we've had sinned against us, they are very, very, very, very few in comparison to the way that we have sinned against others and ultimately against the Lord. And so I want us just to bow our heads. And when we ask the Holy Spirit, maybe we don't even need the Holy Spirit's help in that sense because we know immediately who I'm talking about, we know immediately who it is, who is that difficult person that we find hard to forgive.

Ask the Lord's help, ask his help to forgive them, resolve, determine to forgive them with his help and ask him to pour out into your heart a real love for them that may be manifest in the year ahead. [22 : 40] Let's just bow our heads and quietly in prayer before the Lord. So the love of Jesus is a love which forgives completely, fully, totally, absolutely.

But the love of Christ is not only a love which deals with our past, the love of Christ is something which is very practical, something very here and now, something of today, something which is working and showing itself out in present relationships too.

We know that the Lord Jesus Christ didn't just love us, we know that he does still love us and continues to manifest that love to us in the way that he deals with us.

And so, when we love one another, it must be more than simply a feeling. We know that Jesus was moved with compassion and love for the people he met with, but he did something for them, didn't he?

The life of Christ is not simply him going around giving people a hug and saying, yeah, it'll be okay, or, yeah, I love you and care about you. It wasn't just in word, it was in deed.

[24 : 00] When we look at the miracles of Jesus, the things that he did in people's lives, they were often the outworking of a very deep and real love for them. Matthew tells us in chapter 14, when Jesus saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them.

In other words, he's moved and he healed those who were ill. And if we were to think about the center of this commandment, of Jesus' loving us, sorry, and of our loving as he loved, then, of course, the greatest act of his love is the cross.

We can't get away from that. That is the highest manifestation. That is the peak of the love of Christ for us. The love that lays down his life.

As he goes on to say in John 15, a little later, my command is this, love each other as I have loved you. And then he goes on to tell us what that love is like.

Greater love has no one than this to lay down one's life for his friends. He's talking about himself laying down his life, giving up his life, suffering, the shame, the scorn, the pain, the awfulness of the cross, where, as we know, he didn't just bear the physical pain and suffering, but he bore the very wrath of God upon his soul, where he was punished for our sins and our transgressions.

[25 : 33] So when Jesus says, love one another as I have loved you, then we are brought face to face with painful love, costly love, suffering love.

How can I simply love somebody in word? How can I simply love somebody when it doesn't cost me anything? How can it be just an emotion or a feeling? And how can it surely be just a sense of duty? Well, I've got to love these people. I've got to love them because Jesus says so. To love one another as Christ loves us is to love though it hurts.

The Apostle John, in his very first letter, 1 John, devotes really almost the whole of that letter to this one commandment, to this one theme of love and loving one another.

And in the middle of it, in chapter 3, 16, he says this, Dear children, let us not love with words or speech, but with actions and in truth. Now, he's not saying it doesn't matter what you say, you don't have to be loving in your speech, what he's saying is this, let's love with words and speech, but also with actions and truth, let's not just try to get away with just some nice sounding words from time to time.

[26 : 50] And so the question that we're brought with is this, if I'm obeying this commandment, if the commandment of Jesus means something to me and I need to love others as he has loved me, then the question is where's the fruit of this love, where's the evidence of my love for the people of this church, for God's people?

Where is there a visible manifestation of love? What am I doing that is showing that I love one another? Is there something that I can point to?

Is there something that really shows that out of love for others my actions follow? And if I am doing something, if I am acting and doing things for others, is it out of love?

Is it out of genuine concern and care? Or is it motivated that I might appear loving? Is it motivated by me looking good in the sight of others?

or appearing clever to them? What's behind the things that I do? So I want us again, just for a moment, to stop, to think, to pray, to ask ourselves, again, with the Holy Spirit's help, what do I do for my brothers and sisters in Christ, in this church, that shows that I love them?

[28 : 20] I want to put a little caveat on that because I know for many of you, particularly those of you who are older, you'll say, well, I can't do anything, I'm now unable to practically do things in the life of the church, I just don't have the strength I once did.

Let me say this, just as we're thinking about this week of prayer, prayer is the essence of love. If we love one another, then we'll be praying for one another. And you can say, well, all I can do is pray. No, no, you've got it wrong. The best thing you can do is pray. The best thing you can do is pray for one another. And so my question is this, putting aside other practicalities for a moment, am I praying for my brothers and sisters in Christ?

Are they people who are on my list on a Monday morning or a Tuesday evening? Are they the people who I am bringing to God in prayer?

or is my prayer only about my own needs, my own concerns, my own problems? So what evidence is there? And the question is this, if I can think of something that I am doing, am I doing it out of love?

[29 : 34] Or is it because it's duty? Or is it because it's expected of me? Or is it so that it will keep the pastor off my back from asking me to do other things? Let's ask Christ to make our love abound for one another and to abound for one another practically, to abound to one another in reality, in day to day living.

Let's ask for love that will fill our actions so that all that we do may be motivated in that way. So let's spend a moment again in prayer.

Lord, show us our hearts, show us our lives, show us where we are, show us our motivations and give us greater love. We still haven't really fully answered that question, what does it mean to love as Christ loves us?

Because ultimately as we look to the future and to this year ahead, our desire is that we might keep this commandment, that we might live it out, that we might fulfill it, that we might obey it. We're going to look at this a little later on this evening as well and again can I encourage you if at all possible to be here with us this evening as we take this a little step further and look at reasons and other motivations why we should keep this commandment to love one another.

If you're not able to come for some reason or another then can I encourage you to download it, get it off the website if you can and listen to it at the later stage.

[31 : 11] what is this love of Jesus like that we're to imitate? What does this love of Jesus really appear as that we should love one another in this church?

Because ultimately if we don't know what love is then how can we love? If we don't understand love, if we don't grasp love and for some of us perhaps because of our upbringing, because of our past relationships, we haven't seen love as it should be manifest, we haven't been loved as we should have been loved, we haven't been taught love.

It's very difficult for us to love when we don't know what love looks like. But even for all of us, we've all had poor examples of love, even the best parents, even the best relationships.

So how can we understand love? How can we understand Jesus' love? To do that, I'm going to ask you to turn back to 1 Corinthians 13. Now 1 Corinthians 13, by everybody's understanding, is the premier description of love.

And the love that's being spoken of here in 1 Corinthians 13 is love for one another. It's practical, real love. But I'm going to borrow an idea from a pastor who's now with the Lord.

[32 : 38] And it's to do this, to see and recognize that first of all, verses 4 to 8, demonstrate for us and speak to us of the very love of Christ.

Now we know that God is love. John tells us that God is love. And our Lord Jesus Christ is God manifest, God made visible. Jesus is love personified. As I said, if you read through the Gospels, read through the life of Jesus, you cannot help but see here is a man who walked this earth, who loved in the most amazing, glorious, deep, life-changing way.

If you were to cut Jesus, love came out of him. We see that on the cross when he's pierced for our transgressions. But this description then of love is a description of Jesus' love and of Jesus himself. And to make that point, just listen as I read through those verses 4 to 8, replacing the word love with Jesus. So Jesus is patient.

That's true, isn't it? Jesus is kind. Jesus does not envy. Jesus does not boast. Jesus is not proud. Jesus does not dishonor others. Jesus is not self-seeking.

[33 : 56] We know that. When he came into the world, he said, I've come to seek and to save the lost, not seeking his own glory, but others. Jesus is not easily angered. How he dealt with those disciples for three years and their ignorance and their unbelief.

Jesus keeps no record of wrongs. Praise God, our sins are forgiven completely. The Bible tells us that. Jesus does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Jesus always protects.

Hallelujah. Jesus always trusts. Jesus always hopes. Jesus always perseveres. Jesus never fails. It's him, isn't it? It's him leaping off the page.

This is all true of him. And so here we have description of the love of Christ that we are to imitate. So let's do something different then.

And instead of putting the word Jesus in place of love, put I or am I?

[35 : 03] Let's put it that way. Let's ask the question, am I patient? Am I kind? Do I envy? Do I boast?

Am I proud? Do I dishonor others in the way I speak about them or the way I act towards them or my attitude to them? Am I self-seeking, looking for people to give to me?

Am I easily angered when somebody upsets me or says something? Do I lose my patience? do I keep a record of wrongs?

Well, they said that in 1978 or they did that to me in 2002 or do I delight in evil?

In other words, finding out faults in others. Do I rejoice with the truth when I see God blessing and encouraging?

[36 : 07] do I always protect the name, the honour of my brothers and sisters in Christ when others speak against them or do I jump on the bandwagon with the gossip?

Do I always trust them or because they've let me down I won't trust them ever again? Do I always hope for the best in them and look for the best?

will I always persevere with them and not give up on them or have I washed my hands of them and said they'll never amount to anything? Will I let them down?

Will I fail? The reality is dear friends when we read it through in that way when we look at it in that way two things happen one we acknowledge that this is not true of us we aren't always patient we aren't always kind I am not I am envious and I do boast and I am proud the word of God is a mirror that reflects the reality of who we are and it shows us that we are not this person that we should be we are not like Jesus in our love for him but dear friends the word of God is not there to condemn us and to place upon us a weight and says well yes you're none of these things so you're a failure and you're useless and you can never keep this commandment in any way and God is displeased with you etc etc that's the lie of the devil because God's word says there is therefore no condemnation for those that are in

Christ the word of God is not that it might humble us ourselves to look to him this is why it's so essential dear friends that when we look at what a Christian is a Christian is someone who is utterly aware of their sin but totally dependent upon the grace of God who is greater than their sin this is why we must be born again of the Holy Spirit this is why we must depend upon him to work in us and through us in every single aspect of our lives Lord teach me to love Lord give me that love Lord enlarge my love may that be our prayer for this new year Lord cause love however small it may be to grow for these people that you have placed me among we are part of the body of

[38 : 55] Christ we are brothers and sisters in Christ and we are called to love one another as he has loved us let's respond just a minute now in prayer ourselves to the Lord and his word let's sing sing together of the great love of Christ as we sing from the screen behind me oh to see the dawn of the darkest day we remind ourselves the love of Christ that took him to the cross we are going to come together now to sharing in the

Lord's Supper or the Lord's table communion communion but what is it that we're doing in the New Testament times like this were referred to as love feasts times when God's people came together to express and to share and to show their love for one another because in this remembrance meal in this bread and this wine we're not only looking to the Lord Jesus remembering him as the one who bore our sins the one who suffered in our place we're not only sharing in his body and blood though this bread and this cup remain exactly the same they're just ordinary bread and grape juice but we're doing something very important we are declaring our unity our oneness in

Christ that's why we're doing it together that's why we're not doing it just individually off in our own homes we're doing it together it's a corporate thing it's a body expression that's why it's so important

dear friends that if you're not a Christian this morning if you aren't one with Christ and one with his body that you don't take the bread or the wine it has no benefit to you that's why it's so important that if we are Christians that when we come to take this bread and this wine we are coming with a right attitude to one another as well as to Christ we cannot take of the bread or the wine if there is unforgiveness in our hearts to other believers we cannot take of the bread or the wine if in our hearts there's an attitude which is ungodly towards brothers and sisters we need to be walking together committed to one another and particularly in the light of God's word that we've just been thinking of

I would urge us to make this part of what we are about to do as we take of the bread and wine may it not only be our thanksgiving to God for Christ our renewing of our faith in him as our atoning sacrifice the one who's taken all our sins away but may also be as we take the bread and wine a commitment to him and to one another Lord as I take of this bread and wine I'm declaring myself one with you and one with each and every member of this local church I'm taking this bread and this wine to declare Lord I love you and I love your people and I want to love you more and I want to love them more too so could I ask those who are going to serve to come to the front please now