

John Chapter 14 v 15 - 31 & John Chapter 13 v 34 & 35

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Preacher: Peter Robinson

[0 : 00] Let's come to this great God. Let us all pray. Truly you are the great God, the good God, the wonderful God.

We come to you again at the beginning of this new year, this first Sunday. And once more, Lord, we give you our thanks and our praise for all that is past and trust you for all that is to come.

Thank you, Lord, that we can see your hand upon our lives throughout the past year. For all of us, they will have been mixed years. For some, we may look back and say it was a good year, a blessed year, a year when we particularly had things to rejoice in and be encouraged by.

For some of us, Lord, it may have been a very difficult year, a sad year, a time of distress, a time of loss, a time of grief. Yet, oh Lord, we thank you that in both the good times and the bad, you have not changed.

You did not forsake us or leave us. You did not abandon us. The blessings that we knew were from your hand. The griefs and sorrows we experienced because of living in a fallen world did not separate us from your love.

[1 : 17] But you were with us even then as well. And we come, oh Lord, to you this evening. We come, oh Lord, to you at the outset of 2018. We come, oh Lord, and again declare, you are our refuge.

You are our strong tower. You are the one under whose wings we've taken our shelter. You are the one, oh Lord, who we know loves us with an everlasting and unbreakable love.

And oh Lord, we set out into this new year in faith, in trust, in hope. Lord, in you we go. In your strength we go.

Lord, we know that we cannot face what is ahead in our own strength. We cannot deal with the problems or the difficulties we know we must encounter with our own wisdom or power or understanding.

We know, oh Lord, that if we were to trust in our own resources, we would quickly fall. If we were to hope and trust in our own strength to meet the challenges of the year, then Lord, they would knock us off our feet.

[2 : 24] They would knock us flat. But oh Lord, we do not put our trust in these things. We put our trust in you. We renew our faith in you. And Lord, more than that, we renew our commitment to you, to follow you.

Oh Lord, help us to be indeed guided by you and led by you, guided by your word and by your Holy Spirit. We don't want to go our own way.

We don't want to follow our own plans. We don't want to bring about those things which we want. We actually want, Lord, what you want.

What is your will, Lord? What is it that you are saying to us? Where is it that you are leading us? Lord, we know that there will be times when it will be hard for us to obey you.

We know that there will be times when it will be costly for us to be faithful to you. When we will be scorned or mocked or rejected. When, Lord, we will go without certain blessings.

[3 : 27] Because, Lord, we want to be followers of you. We ask, Lord, that you give us courage. We ask, Lord, that you take away fear and unbelief from our hearts and minds.

We ask, Lord, that you would equip us. For we know, O Lord, that we have an enemy. A very real enemy. We have one who in this year will tempt us.

We have one who in this year will sow in our minds and hearts doubts. We have one who in this year will seek to condemn us and bring our sins before our face.

We have one, O Lord, who will do all that he can to undermine us and to prevent us from serving you wholeheartedly. We have an enemy, a spiritual enemy, the devil.

And so, Lord, again, we look to you. Clothe us with the armor that you've provided. Be our shield. Be our fortress and protect us. That, O Lord, we might not sin against you.

[4 : 24] That we might not dishonor your name or discredit your church. O Lord, keep us, we pray, walking in holiness, seeking righteousness, doing what is pleasing to you.

O Lord, we ask these things and pray even now as we come to your word in a few moments that you would speak to us and deal with us and work in our hearts. We're not making a New Year's resolution, Lord, but we are entrusting ourselves to you.

We are renewing our faith in you and our commitment to you. So send your spirit upon us, we pray, in this time. And bless this time.

And meet with us, we ask. For Jesus' sake, for his glory. And we know that will mean ultimately for our joy. Amen. Amen. Let's sit down.

If you do have a Bible to hand, then please would you turn to John in chapter 14. Just to remind you of that verse in chapter 13, first of all, the verse we looked at this morning.

[5 : 35] And I want us to elaborate on a little bit this evening as well. Verse 34, and we'll read through 34 and 35. A new command I give you, love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. New Year can bring out all sorts of strange actions in the lives of people, we thought this morning.

For New Year, people make all sorts of daft resolutions about things they will do this year or things that they will attempt. But other things as well happen around about the Christmas and New Year period.

And just by example, a few years ago, when Andrew, myself and the family were back home in Guernsey, we were walking along one of the beaches on New Year's Day.

It was a bitterly cold day, even for Guernsey standards. And the wind was blowing in from the east across the sand. We were wrapped up with gloves and hats and so on to protect ourselves.

[6 : 44] And then we noticed that there were 12 people or so, men and women, who began to undress at the top of the beach. And then, with their swimming costumes on, they walked casually down to the sea and plunged their bodies into the sea and swam out around a boy, back in, and so on.

200 yards or so. I remember that Whitby has a similar thing on Boxing Day, doesn't it, where people do similar crazy things. He is not the place to ask why they should do such a strange thing and plunge their bodies into that water.

Or why others do other bizarre things or promise to do bizarre things or resolve to do strange things. But out of that, I want to ask us a question. If people will go to such lengths to inflict upon themselves discomfort and so on, for what is maybe a tradition, or maybe for charity, or maybe just for the sake of it, how far will you and I go to obey the command of Christ, which is given here in John 13?

Love one another as I have loved you. How far will I go? What lengths will I go to to keep this command, to live out this command, to be obedient to Jesus in this coming year?

This morning we considered what it means to love as Jesus loves, and we sought to apply it to ourselves. We saw particularly that the love of Jesus is a love which must include forgiveness.

[8 : 36] Forgiveness of the past. For from the cross, as he was being executed, Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them. And so important, essential, not only that we know our own sins are forgiven, but that we also forgive as Jesus has forgiven us.

We can't move on in the Christian life if we still carry the baggage of unforgiveness or resentment to others in the church. Then looked as well, didn't we, how Jesus' love was a practical love.

It was a love that was active. It wasn't simply word. It was a love that moved Jesus. So when he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, moved.

The AV, he was moved inwardly, moved in his bowels. But then he healed them. How much is our love simply about a feeling or an emotion?

How much of it is actually the rubber hitting the road? How much of it is practical love, real love that is seen in our actions? And are we motivated by that love to the things we do?

[9 : 43] Or do we do the things we do to one another as Christians? Do we do those acts of service simply because it's our duty? Or because we must? Or because we want to appear to be something that we're not?

And then we looked very briefly as well at 1 Corinthians 13, where we have this fantastic description of what love is. Love is patient. Love is kind. And we saw that Jesus Christ is love personified. When we want to know what love is, he is all those things. And then we asked ourselves those very searching questions. Am I patient? Am I kind? And so on.

And we went through those verses together. But I want us to come back to this command again this evening because I want us to ask and answer the question, I hope, does it really matter? Here's a commandment of Jesus. The Bible, we might say, has many commandments, many instructions, many laws as well that God gives to us.

[10 : 44] Does it really matter that we keep this one? Is it important? What should motivate us to do it? First and most obvious reason, and I've got a few.

The reason that we must take this command seriously and we must seek to obey it with the Lord's help and grace in 2018 is this. We love Jesus.

That's why we read, as we did from chapter 14, verse 15, where on several occasions in that passage, Jesus makes plain, if you love me, keep my commands.

Verse 15. Later on, he says as well, in answer to Judas' question, verse 23, anyone who loves me will obey my teaching.

Do you love Jesus? Do you love him as your saviour?

[11 : 43] Do you love him as your lord? Do you love him as the one who has won your heart? The one who you are enraptured with? Because if you do, then you will seek to keep his command.

And it's interesting, I think, for us, because this is the only place where Jesus speaks of a command in this way. We thought about this morning how Jesus was asked, what's the greatest commandment?

And he said, the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, the second is like it, to love your neighbour as yourself. But this is the only place where Jesus says, I give you a command.

Try to put it that way. He teaches and he instructs and he tells us to do, but it's the only place he uses those words, I'm giving you a command. Even when we look at what we call the Great Commission of Matthew 28, it's not so much that Jesus gives us commandment, rather he tells us that the outworking of his authority is that we are to take the gospel.

All authority has been given to me, therefore, go and make disciples. And when Jesus uses the word command, he does not command us to repent, though we know that he does elsewhere.

[13 : 06] He doesn't command us to have faith. He doesn't command us to worship him or honour him. He doesn't command us to give tithes. He doesn't command us to pray. But he commands us to love one another as he loved us.

So we've got to recognise that this is of primary importance. This is essential. And I think many of us would recognise as well that if we are Christ's, or one of the fruit, one of the evidences, one of the proofs that we truly are born again of the Spirit of God is this, that we will love our brothers and sisters in Christ.

John, in his first epistle, makes a great deal of this, and he says, no one can say I love God and not love their brother and sister in Christ. It just doesn't work that way. It's an impossibility. If you're born of the Spirit of God by which you have been given the love of God within your heart to love him, then there will must be, has to be, will be, love for brothers and sisters in Christ as well.

And therefore, if we do repent, and believe, and pray, and worship, and give our tithes, and I'm sure all of us would agree these things are important, they're an outworking of the work of Christ in our lives, they are something that matters.

But if we fail to love one another, then all those other things don't matter. All those other things become of no importance whatsoever.

[14 : 36] We fall short of loving Jesus, we fall short of following Jesus, we fall short of obeying Jesus. Surely that's exactly what Paul is saying here in 1 Corinthians 13.

Turn back there for a moment if you would. Because we said that the second four verses are about demonstrating, revealing the character, the nature of love, but the first three verses make it very plain that without love, everything else is pointless.

In one sense, actually, without love, we are not saved. We are not saved. Remember, when we look at this passage, Paul is talking about love for one another in Christ.

He's been talking about the body, he's been talking about the relationship with the parts of the body. Let's not misunderstand. Let's not misapply this and say, well, Paul is just talking about loving Jesus. That's all he's talking about.

He's not talking about loving one another. No, that's completely out of context. He's talking about loving one another. So if we put that in the place, it reads like this. If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love for my brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

[15 : 56] If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love for my brothers and sisters in Christ, I'm nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love for my brothers and sisters in Christ, I gain nothing.

That makes it much more pointed, doesn't it? To me, anyway, at least. And that's a challenge to us. It's a challenge to us as a church.

It's a challenge to us as individuals. It's a challenge to all those who claim the name of Christian. If they have great spiritual gifts or we have great spiritual gifts or great faith, if we suffer persecution for the name of Christ and go through all sorts of difficulties, but we have not love for Christ's people, then we are not Christ's.

I think that's a fair assumption to make. Therefore, dear friends, we cannot ignore the fact that Jesus, who gives this commandment to us and to all his disciples, all those who love him, Jesus counts it as being extremely, vitally important.

And therefore, we cannot ignore it. And we must make it our great desire to obey his commandment.

[17 : 21] It's not a secondary thing. It's not something that we can just push to one side and use the excuse, well, of course, we believe the Bible as the inerrant word of God and we believe in the atoning sacrifice of Christ and appreciation for our sins and we believe in the necessity of new birth of the Holy Spirit and we believe and we believe and we believe and believe.

that's just a bit too far. Can't do that. We can't do that. Do you love Christ?

And dear friends, love his children. Love his brothers and sisters in Christ. Take this command to heart. Make it part of your worship of him and your love for him to love those he's given you to love. It's no accident that you're in this church. It's no accident you're in the local fellowship where you are. You may feel it is at times or you may even think, well, I wish I wasn't.

But the reality is that's where you are and where God has placed you amongst those people. It'd be so easy, wouldn't it? We could say, oh Lord, if only I had a church like Grace Community Church in Loftus and a pastor like Robin and a pastor's wife like Caroline.

[18 : 46] Well, that'd be easy to keep this commandment. They're chuckling because they know, of course, it wouldn't be any easier there either. Lovely though they are.

It'd be easier if we didn't have so-and-so in our church or him or her. Dear friends, everybody in every church has got a so-and-so and a him and her. Primary motivation, primary motivation is, Lord Jesus, I love you.

And I want to love your people because I love you. But then, I think as well, it's right to say that Jesus gives us this command and we're to keep this commandment because he's given it because of his love for us.

This commandment flows out of the very heart of love of Christ. We know that. We know that every word of Jesus, as it were, drips with the honey of love. Doesn't it? Every word of Christ is saturated with grace and mercy and loving kindness and compassion.

We know that every commandment, every instruction that God gives us in his word is for our good. That's one of the great paradoxes that the world just cannot get its head around.

[20 : 02] That to obey the word of God is to actually do the best for ourselves. That God gives us his word because he loves us, because he wants good for us, not because he wants to straightjacket us or impede us in any way.

All that God ever calls his people to do, he calls them to do because he loves them. All his commandments, all his law, all his word. It's for our good and blessing.

We mustn't see this commandment, dear friends, as a burden. Oh, I've got to love them. I've got to do it.

After all, they're in my church. No. We're to see that this commandment is when obeyed, when lived out, when followed, will bring us great blessing and good.

Jesus has given it because he loves us and he knows what will satisfy us. He knows what will do us good. He knows what will fulfill us. He knows what will make us complete.

[21 : 16] It's obeying this commandment along with all of his words. Just look at the context in which Jesus gives the commandment.

It's quite odd in one sense, isn't it? Here Jesus has just announced his disciples the night before his betrayal, the night before his death, his crucifixion, his suffering.

He tells them, I'm going. Verse 33 of John 13. My children, I'll be with you only a little longer. You'll look for me just as I told the Jews so I tell you now where I'm going you cannot come.

And then he says, I give you a new command, love one another. It's almost a leap, isn't it, in a completely different direction. Has Jesus sort of lost track? No, of course he's not. He's telling them that he's leaving them which to them is the saddest news they've ever heard.

They don't want to lose Jesus. They've been with him for three years. They've clung up and hung upon every word of his. They don't want him to be without them. That's why later on Simon Peter says, Lord, where are you going?

[22 : 23] I want to go with you. I want to be with you. Jesus tells them he's going. They can't come with him. He's going to the cross.

He's going to lay down his life. He's going to die. He's going to rise. He's going to return to the Father. And it's only just now that he's told them this before. He's told them before of his death. He's told them before of his suffering. He's told them before what's going to happen. But now, in this very difficult time, he tells them, I'm giving you a new commandment to love one another.

Why does he do that? Well, clearly, this new commandment he gives them is to bring them comfort in the midst of their sadness. We know that the other words he speaks are comfort, don't we?

We often read them at a funeral. John 14, don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in me. My Father's house, so many mansions. It's wonderful comfort. So right here as well, there are words of comfort.

[23 : 20] This instruction is one of blessing. And the great sadness is they don't even recognize it as such.

They fail to see what Jesus is doing. They completely ignore the words he said about loving one another and some and Peter and others go straight back to where are you going, Lord? We don't want to be without you.

He's given them the remedy to their loneliness and their sorrow and they couldn't see it. Dear friends, we're launching out into a new year.

And yes, we know it's just another day. It's just a date on the calendar. But in our minds, in our psyches, it feels like an adventure. It feels like a scary sort of thing, doesn't it?

Selling off into another year, into a world which is an opposition to Christ, just as the disciples were, into a world which walks and teaches and lives contrary to him and his word.

[24 : 25] We're stepping out in faith. We don't know what this year will bring. We can't see what's coming. We have no idea of what we shall face. So what comfort, what encouragement does Jesus give us to strengthen us, to sustain us, to help us in the coming months?

Well, I put it to you, dear friends, that the chief means by which Christ assures us of his presence and comforts us in our difficulties is the love that we share with our brothers and sisters in Christ in our local church.

The local fellowship of believers is to be, to us, a joy, an assurance, an encouragement, and a help. Like all the commands that Jesus gives us in his word, this new command is a command to be free, to be free from anxiety and fear.

It's a command to bring us joy and happiness, to bless us and do us good. Verse 17, the world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him, but you know him for he lives with you and will be in you.

The way that we love one another and the way that we love one another as Christ has loved us is to be to us a help.

[25 : 48] And we don't appreciate that often, do we? We often fail to appreciate how much difference our love can make to somebody else until we're the recipients of that love.

doesn't a loving word of encouragement at the right time make us feel like we're walking on air as we go home after church?

Hasn't an opportunity of fellowship, of sharing and talking together about the things of Christ with a brother or sister in Christ lift up our souls, strengthen us in our faith, build us up?

We may have come heavy laden into church, we may have come worried about the week ahead and many things, as we've been in worship with one another and as we've talked afterwards and shared afterwards as God's word's been explained to us there's been a sense in which that burden's been lifted.

And I know that it's true of many of you here you feel as if you've got nothing to give. You feel as if you've got no gifts to share, you've got no, you aren't as young as you were.

[26 : 54] So you can't run the children's work and you can't do the Sunday school and you can't do the food bank and you can't do and all these things and yet dear friends you forget that the gift that God has given you which is most vital to the life of this church is the love he's poured into your heart by his Holy Spirit.

And with a simple word, an expression or a deed of love, we can, each of us, make such a difference to one another, can be such a help to one another, such a comfort to one another.

Just as we thought even this morning, the words that we say and the things that we do can be so very harmful to one another when they're unthoughtful, unloving, insensitive.

So in the opposite extreme, those words that are thoughtful and loving and sensitive can make the greatest difference for good. That's why I'm sure of it where Jesus gives this commandment here, where he does.

He wants us to practically love one another. Again, remember the context. What's happened earlier in chapter 13? That momentous event where Jesus has washed the disciples' feet one by one.

[28 : 13] What has he done? He's shown them his love for them in a sacrificial, in a servant way, in an easy way really because it was no great cost or pain.

That was going to come on the cross. But in a loving way, he has shown them what to do. That's why he says to them, doesn't he? Even there, you call me teacher and Lord and rightly so.

That is what I am. Verse 13, now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I've set you an example that you should do as I have done. Love one another as I have loved you.

Do as I have done. Of course Jesus isn't saying every time we come to church we should have a foot washing ceremony. Wouldn't be a bad thing from time to time. Without being rude, some of us could do with having our feet washed more regularly.

But that's not the point. It's physical, practical, simple love.

[29 : 15] Keeping this commandment can be very costly, isn't easy. But actually, in reality, 99% of the time, it's very simple.

Loving one another. Why should we keep this commandment? Because Jesus has given it for our, out of love for us. To do us good. To do you and me good.

If we keep this commandment, we'll be blessed. And be a blessing too. Thirdly, Jesus has given us this commandment because of his love for the men and women of this world.

Notice verse 35. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Jesus himself is the very physical manifestation of the love of God.

That's why it's so important that we have the four gospels. Not just one record of the life of Jesus, not just two, not just even three, but four records of the life of Jesus because in each and every one of them we see and are made to see more of the very nature and character of God in Christ, a loving saviour.

[30 : 28] Paul, when he writes to Titus, he speaks about the coming of Jesus when the kindness and love of God appeared. When he was seen, what's the love and kindness of God?

It's Jesus. He's God with us, isn't he? Emmanuel. We've been celebrating just these past weeks.

Hebrews 1.3, the sun is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being.

So when Jesus walked this earth, he was showing to the world, to those who saw, and this is love, this is what God is like, this is how he loves you, how I love you.

But now Jesus is leaving, not just his disciples, but he's leaving the world, physically at least. He's going to return to his rightful place at the Father's right hand in glory.

And so the only true example of love that the world has ever seen is going to be taken away. How will the world ever know what love is like?

[31 : 28] How will the world ever know what the love of God is like? The answer, of course, is this. The love of God now can be seen and must be seen in the disciples of Jesus.

And once as Jesus is saying to them, I'm going, therefore you must be as I've been in the world. As I've been love in the world, so now you must be love in the world.

That's why, dear friends, your love and mine, this commandment to love one another as Christ loved us must be a very radical love, a love which is different from the love the world knows, sees, and experiences.

We know that many people are genuinely loving and have a great love. We celebrate every year, or remember every year, those men and women who for love of their country lay down their lives.

But that's patriotism. It's not Christ-like love. People can show love to those who are in need, in poverty. That's a wonderful thing.

[32 : 38] It's pity and it's mercy, but it's not Christ-like love. Some will show love to those who are suffering and in great distress. That's empathy and it's sympathy, but it's not Christ-like love.

The love, dear friends, between Christian and Christian, which is to be an example of and a reflection of the love of Christ for us, is a love that can only be explained in that way, as a supernatural love, a love of divine origin, a love that comes from God.

It can't be a love that can be explained in any other way. guess what the church is and must always be? Radically, totally different from anything else in this world.

It cannot be like the Lions Club or the Rotary, who do good deeds, and God bless them if I can put it that way, but what unites them together is their desire to do charity or to do goods.

It cannot be like the bowls club or the cricket club or the tennis club where those people do things together because they enjoy the sport, because they enjoy being together. That's why, dear friends, it's so important that we do have a so-and-so in the church and a him and a her.

[34 : 03] And let me say this in all love. Every one of us is a so-and-so and a him and a her to somebody else, aren't we? Because we don't naturally come together.

We are not naturally one with one another, are we? We're different ages, different backgrounds, different parts of the country, different habits, different tastes. We are altogether a licorice all sorts put in one box by God to love one another, to love one another in spite of who we are.

Christ-like love that can only be explained by the fact that we are disciples of Jesus is the love the world needs to see. That's the love that Jesus has for us, isn't it?

Why did Jesus love you and me? Do you love us because we share the same taste in music? Does he love us because we have the same goals and motivations to do good to others?

Does he love us for anything of ourselves? Of course not. His love is all of grace. He loves us in spite of ourselves and therefore our love for one another is to be a love in spite of one another because it's a Holy Spirit-born love.

[35 : 24] A love that isn't loving because we want praise or adoration or recognition or acknowledgement. A love that gives to those who do nothing to deserve that love or be rewarded with our love.

Unconditional love. grace, love. By this, by what? By this love that you have for one another which is like my love, everyone will know you're my disciples.

I've got nothing against a cross or a fish or a dove or some other sign or badge that may be on a car or on a coat. But surely the most distinguishing emblem of the Christian is to be loved.

The most distinguishing sign that we are followers and disciples of Jesus is that we love one another and Jesus says when we love one another in that way, the world will know that we're his disciples.

The world will take notice. The world will sit up and say, what is this love that these people have for one another? It's something I've never met before or experienced before. It's a love which is not fickle and moving and changing.

[36 : 45] It's not a love for reward. It's not a love because these people are all so lovely. There's something else about this love. Therefore, dear friends, we need to pray.

We need to ask that God would give us greater love for one another. You know, it's like when you fall out with somebody.

What's the prayer that you pray? Lord, sort them out. Isn't it? You've had a bust up or an argument or something's happened and you say, Lord, give them a greater love for me.

Lord, Lord, sort out their hearts. Is that the answer? Am I saying, dear friends, pray for everybody else apart from yourself. Pray for all these awkward people in this church.

Pray for them that Lord would give them greater love. No, I'm saying this. Pray for yourself. Lord, give me a greater love. Give me a greater love for the people of this fellowship.

[37 : 48] Give me a greater love for this church. Ah, so I know what you're saying, Peter. You're telling us we're all loveless and horrible, aren't you? You're saying that there's no love in this church, that we're an unloving church.

Or you're really condemning us. No, I'm not. Far from it. There is no church which is so overflowing with love that it does not have room for more love.

Just read the epistles, not just the gospels. Read the letters that Paul and Peter and John and others write. And again and again you'll see in every single one of their letters there is the call for greater love.

Here's Peter as he writes to the Christians in 1 Peter 1.22. You have sincere love for one another he says but love one another deeply from the heart.

You already do love and we are by God's grace. I thank him for it. A church that has a love for one another but we need more don't we? We need a deeper love from the heart. We need an increase in love.

[39 : 01] As I have loved you so you must love one another. It's a commandment to us that we shall never ever fully obey. Not this side of eternity because sin will always get in the way.

But it's a goal. goal. It's something to work towards. It's something to pray towards. It's something to seek. To love one another as Christ has loved us.

We'll always fall slightly short of that but there's a target. People do crazy things for love.

Jump out of airplanes. Go feeding sharks in the sea. They do all sorts of things for love. What will you and I do for love?

What lens will we go to? To love one another as he has loved us. Will we shut up and not say what thought immediately comes into our minds?

[40 : 19] Will we listen more? Two ears, one mouth. Will we give? Will we encourage? Will we seek the others?

greater good before our own? Will we be like Jesus? Will we be different? Tradition has it that when the Apostle John who we know lived to a great age, but when he was so very old and so very feeble that he couldn't even stand or walk, he used to be carried into the fellowship.

And as he was carried into the church, he couldn't talk very loudly, he could only whisper. But he whispered these words repeatedly, little children, love one another.

Little children, love one another. Amen. Let's pray together now. You have loved us with an unending, undying love, and you continue to love us, O Lord.

Not because we've become more lovely, not because we've become better people, not because we deserve your love more than we did last year or the year before or the year before.

[41 : 50] We thank you that you love us with an unconditional, undeserved, gracious love. And you have called us, O Lord, to reflect, to imitate, and to love in that same way, to love one another as you've loved us.

Lord, we know that we cannot do this without the help of your Holy Spirit. We know that within our hearts there still remains that sinful germ which makes us selfish and proud and greedy and rude and insensitive and thoughtless.

It's just there, isn't it, Lord, under the surface and from time to time it pops its ugly head up. But, O Lord, we ask, please, please, O Lord, give us love.

Give us love for one another which is like your love. Give us love for one another when we are unlovely to one another. Give us love for one another when we do not feel love.

Give us love for one another that indeed, O Lord, all the glory and the honour and the praise may be yours. Give us love for one another that the world, the community in which you've placed us may see that we are your disciples and may seek you, the greatest lover of them all.

[43 : 15] Hear us as we ask these things and continue to bring this to our minds in prayer in this coming week and in the days ahead. O Lord, give us love for Jesus' sake and praise.

Amen.