

John 13 v 34 & 35 A

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[0 : 0 0] So in John 15, we'll read a brief passage, which is from verse 9 through to verse 17. John in chapter 15, verse 9 to 17, this is Jesus, of course, speaking on the night before his death, before his betrayal, before his crucifixion, gathered with his very closest of friends and giving them not only great promises and encouragements, but also in this very striking command. So let's read then from John 15, verse 9. This is faithfully God's wonderful word. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I've told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I've called you friends. For everything that I learned from my Father, I've made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command, love each other. We thank God that his word is good.

So we're looking at John and chapter 15, and if you'd like to have that open in your Bibles, that will be a help. Just as you turn there, just a few pages earlier, just a chapter or so earlier, John 13, which the verse that we looked at briefly with the children, John 13, 34, a new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. People have always been obsessed with the new. The new is always the in thing. The new is always the great thing, the best thing. Whether it's governments, of course, which always are seeking to bring in new policies, new programs to tackle the problems of society or the situations.

Whether it's on TV, us being given advertisements to watch new drama series or new nature programs. Or we're tempted, of course, in the adverts to purchase new apps for our mobile phone.

[3 : 1 1] We learn of new breakthroughs in technology, in fighting illnesses and diseases. There's always new fashions, of course, to wear and new things for us to use. And so it goes on. New, new, new.

Everything is new. And really, of course, very soon, the old is really to be disparaged. It's looked down upon. It's really not that good because the new's replaced it. We need new all the time.

But Jesus gives to his disciples here a new commandment, John 13, 34. But like really everything else, it's not completely new. That new commandment to love one another is not totally new. Jesus, when he was teaching earlier on, spoke about the two greatest commandments from the Old Testament.

The one, of course, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. The second commandment, he said, is like it, to love your neighbor as yourself. That goes all the way back to Leviticus 19 and verse 18. Love one another. And even that command, really, to love your neighbor as yourself, is really only the bringing together of a large part of what we call the Ten Commandments. So, the sixth last part of the Ten Commandments, which are all about relationship to one another and can be summed up simply by saying, love one another. Because if we love one another, then children will honor their parents. If we love someone, we won't commit adultery with them. We won't steal from them or kill them or covet what they possess or lie to them or about them.

And so, the New Testament makes it very clear that the summation of the law, the whole of Christian living, that all that God wants us to do is love. In one sense, we could put that down as the very summation of what it means to be a Christian, what it is the gospel, what it means to know and love God is love. To live the life is love. And so, in one sense, that commandment of Jesus where he says, love one another, isn't new. It's what God has always commanded, what God has always wanted.

[5 : 30] People often get it in a very wrong way, think that the Old Testament is without love and the New Testament introduces love. That's not the case. This is one work. This is one reflection, one display of God, and from the start to the finish, it is love. But what makes Jesus' commandment new, and it is new, is the way in which Jesus personalizes this command and raises its standards as he does this by saying, as I have loved you, you must love one another. That's what makes it so much greater. The old commandment was, love your neighbor as yourself. In other words, love someone as you would want to be loved. Love that person and do for that person all the things that you would want done to you.

That's something of a general understanding, I think, in the world. Many people would say, yes, that's what love should be like, loving someone as you love yourself. Jesus takes it a whole way a lot higher when he says, as I have loved you, you are to love one another. Now, we've heard the new command, love one another, as I have loved you many times if we're Christians. We've heard it spoken about many times, but I think it's important for us regularly to take stock and ask ourselves afresh, what does it mean, this command? And how can I seek to keep this command as Jesus has commanded me to do so?

Well, in one sense, to understand the command, to understand and what it means, we need to ask ourselves, well, how does Jesus love? If the command is to love as he has loved us, the question is, how does he love? And therefore, how can I imitate the love that he has? It's clear, isn't it, whenever we read, and if we take the time, if we've never done that, to read the life of Jesus as it's faithfully and historically written for us in the Gospels, you can't help miss out, you can't help but notice that the life of Jesus is a life of love. In fact, many people who are not Christians, many people who have respect for Jesus and think highly of him because they think, yes, he was a wonderfully loving person in the way that he spoke and the way that he acted and the commands that he gave.

Those who looked at Jesus' life, who were on the ground, as it were, when Jesus walked amongst them, they couldn't help but notice this characteristic of Jesus. When he was at the graveside of Lazarus, his friend, people who didn't know Jesus all that much but saw him weeping over Lazarus, said, look how he loved him. And everything that Jesus did was born of love. Everybody he met, he dealt with in love. People who were the outcasts of society, people who were diseased, people who were the downtrodden, the poor, yes, the sinful, the people that the religious leaders of Jesus' day said, you want nothing to do with them. They're the rubbish of society. It was Jesus was found amongst them.

But he was also found amongst the rich and the tax collectors and the hated. Astonishingly, the love of Jesus even went out to those violently who killed him, those who nailed him to the cross, even those who put him to death in that most horrific and awful way from the cross.

[9 : 02] As they did that, the very first thing that came from his lips was a prayer, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they're doing. See, this Jesus wasn't a man who simply spoke about love. He lived love. He was love. He is love. And that prayer of Jesus from the cross really, I think, is the priority. It's where we must start when we ask ourselves, what is Jesus' love like in how are we to love one another? And I believe it must begin with forgiveness. If we are to love one another, then we are to forgive one another. Here's Paul, as he writes a little later in the New Testament, be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you. It's what Jesus taught us in the Lord's Prayer, as we call it. Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. See, the love of Christ is a timeless love. It's not a love for a period. It's not just a love for a moment or even for a lifetime. The love of Christ has a past, a present and a future aspect to his love, an eternal aspect to his love. And therefore, that love of Christ, if we are to love, must reach into the past, must deal with our past as well. And that must mean, of course, forgiveness of one another. Because without a shadow of a doubt, we have been injured by somebody. People have hurt us. People even in this church or in another church, Christians that we know have hurt us. They've said things to us that we took very painfully and personally. They have acted in a way with insensitivity and thoughtlessness. And therefore, if we are to take

Jesus' commandment seriously to love one another as he has loved us, we have to leave those injuries behind. We have to forgive those who injure us or we can never move on in love. We're always going to be stifled. We're always going to be carrying along, as it were, the dead weight of unforgiveness and pain. Who is it that still upsets you? What did somebody say perhaps months ago, even years ago?

And when you think about that incident, it still is painful. It still makes you upset. What is it that somebody did to you, another Christian, and when you think about that, you're angry with them for that?

And who is it that when you see them or think about them even, you can't help but not be easy with them? When you see them, you can't be friendly with them. There's something happened in the past and it's still there. I'm going to ask us to do something during this sermon and it's perhaps something that we've never done before, but I don't want us just to hear what God is saying to us in his word and simply just leave it. So I'm going to ask us to do something quite practical. I'm going to ask us to take a minute to, in the quietness, with our heads bowed, to ask the Holy Spirit to show us those grievances that we're still carrying from what other people have done to us and to ask for Jesus to help us to forgive them completely as he's forgiven us. Notice that, as he's forgiven us.

Love as I have loved you, because this is the core and central thing that we have as Christians, unlike everybody else in the world. We know that we are sinners. We know that we have broken God's commandments and caused him great grief. We know that we have failed to follow in his ways. We know that we have done and said things to others that we should never have done and said.

[13 : 08] We have that sense of conviction. We know those things that are there because our conscience reminds of them. But also we know as well that there are countless other things that we have done that we didn't realize we'd done. But God does realize, God does know, God is aware of, and yet he's forgiven them all. That's the wonderful thing, isn't it, as Christians? What I'm saying here this morning is, and what Jesus is saying here this morning in his word, is not that he might condemn us.

Yes, he may convict us, but it's so that we may enter into the fullness of the forgiveness that he's won for us in the cross. So what I want us to do is to pause for a moment.

If we know straight away the person that we're thinking of, persons that we're thinking of, then, dear friends, we need to resolve to forgive them. And that's an act of the will. It's not a feeling, firstly. It's a decision to forgive. God decided to forgive us. He didn't just feel like forgiving us. And then we need to ask for Christ's love to be poured into our heart for them.

So let's just bow our heads and close our eyes. It's between you and God, and me and him as well. Amen. Father in heaven, we thank you that you forgive us all our sins because Jesus has taken our guilt and blame at the cross. We ask that you would help us to be those who love as Jesus loved and forgive from the heart. Those that have hurt us. Forgive us where we have hurt one another.

Help us, oh Lord, to be free of that bitterness. Help us, Lord, to walk in love with each other. Amen. The love of Jesus, of course, is not just a love of forgiveness and feeling in that sense.

[15 : 26] It's not just a love that covers over the past. It's a love that is very practical, eminently practical. It's a love that shows itself and works itself out in the present. And again, when we read the Gospels, we look at them, we see that Jesus acted out of love. The things he did were motivated by love, but he didn't just look at people and say, I love you and do nothing. In all of his miraculous acts, we find that there is the outworking of a deep love. We mentioned Lazarus being raised from the dead and at the tombstone, Jesus weeping. But the reason that Jesus went to the tombstone, the reason that Jesus raised him from the dead was because of his love for Lazarus.

When Martha and Mary sent a message to Jesus to say that Lazarus was sick, they said to this, Lord, the one you love is sick. It was love that took him on that journey to the tomb and brought Lazarus from the dead. It was love that took him into the crowds to heal their sick and possessed.

We have over and over again, here's just one incident in Matthew 14. Jesus, we're told this, landed his boat on the other side of the shore where a large crowd had gathered. When he saw the large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

We think about the very cross itself, of course, the very center of Jesus' commandment. Remember, we read there in John 15, my command is this, love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this than he laid down his life for his friends. He's speaking of himself and his love being demonstrated ultimately in the cross. The greatest act of love the world shall ever witness was the love of God that took him to the cross to die in your place and mine. And we know it wasn't just because our sin was so awful and terrible that such a price had to be paid. It wasn't just that Jesus went there out of duty to accomplish a work that we couldn't do to bring forgiveness, but we know that he went to the cross because of his love for us. Romans chapter 5, God demonstrates his own love to us in this way. While we were sinners, Christ died for us. And so love, if it is love, it must be something which is active. It can't just be a feeling. It can't just be a fuzzy inside sort of thing.

It can't even be just a sense of duty to one another. It must be seen as in the example of the Lord Jesus with actions. It must be evidenced, mustn't it? If you are married, you love your wife or your husband, you show it. You need to say it, men. Okay, we need to say I love you, not like that very old joke which probably Colin wrote himself about the man whose wife said to him on their golden wedding anniversary. Do you love me? And he said, look, I told you I loved you on the day we were married.

[18 : 35] If anything changes, I'll let you know. No, sorry Colin. John's not here, see, so I've got to pick on somebody. Thank you. So it's got to be evidence, hasn't it? It's got to be seen. It's got to be real.

It's got to be actual. Here's John when he writes one of his letters. His whole letter, the first letter of John is all about love and about living out this commandment of love. But here's what he says. Listen, John 3, 16, 1 John 3, 16. This is how we know what love is like. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone sees, if anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. So love must be active. If we are to love one another as believers, if we are to have love in this church, it must be something that is seen. There must be the fruit of love. There must be the action of love, the deeds of love.

We are not saved by deeds, are we? We know that. We are saved by faith. We are in a relationship with God by faith in Jesus. But because we are in that relationship with Jesus, then we love him and we love those that are his. And because we love him, we do the things that show our love to one another. It's natural, isn't it? It's fruit. It's just something that comes out because of the Spirit of God that was in us. And so the question we've got to ask ourselves again is this, is there any fruit of my love seen in my relationships with others? It's no good me saying I love you but acting in an insensitive, thoughtless way. It's no good me saying that, yes, I love you but I'm not going to be, I'm showing any care for you. I'm not going to take an interest in you. I'm not going to do anything.

Can my love be seen in what I do? Is there something that I can look at and point at, not that I might feel good about myself, but that shows that there is love? And the question is this, the things that I do as a Christian, are those things actually motivated by love? Or do I do those things, and we've all got to question ourselves on this and me as well, do we do those things because, well, people expect us to do them? Well, I want to look good in people's eyes.

[21 : 06] I want them to think well of me. I want their approval. Or even I want to sort of approve myself or somehow maybe earn God's favor or look clever or whatever it may be.

is everything that I do done with love? Now, let me say this to you, because I'm sure that there will be some of you even here this morning who'll say, I just can't, I don't do anything in the church.

I'm not able to because of my age or infirmity or whatever else, and I feel really bad. Please don't. Let me assure you of this. The greatest act of love that we can do for one another is to pray for one another. And if you say, I can do nothing for the church, then you can pray. And in one sense, one of the best things that we can do for one another is pray for one another. One of the best ways that we can see love increase for one another is by praying for one another. And going back to the whole matter of forgiveness, if you are struggling with this matter of forgiveness because of what somebody has said and done, the best way that you can forgive them is to love, is to pray for them.

And that you'll find a change takes place. Not because, not pray the sort of prayer that you'd like to pray, and I don't mean this, well, I do in one sense. You know, that sort of prayer that says, Lord, sort them out. You know, change their hearts, Lord, and make them nicer people, Lord. Not that sort of prayer. The prayer that says, Lord, so bless them and cause them to know that you love them.

Lord, help them to grow in that wonderful grace. Bless them in their homes, in their families. You see, when you start praying those sort of prayers, no matter how much inside, you may feel hurt by them. You can't help but find that there's a love that's growing. Prayer. What do you do, dear friends? And again, I want us just to stop for a moment. I want us just to take a few minutes to ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and to say, to show us, are there things in my life that I'm doing that are showing my love for the fellowship, for God's people? And is that, is my real motivation love, Lord? It may not be, it may be that it's not. Well, even if it's not, then let's pray that God would fill us with that love that it might be born of love. If my motivations have been wrong, then Lord put them right. And if I don't see any actual evidence of love in the way that I act or behave or speak, then let's pray again that Christ would cause his love to grow in our hearts, that he would give us the desire to serve one another, to be active in love, and that love would fill all our actions. Let's just take a few, a moment again in prayer as we bow our heads before the Lord.

[24 : 28] Father God, we thank you for your great love to us that moved you to act for our rescue and salvation.

And we ask, O Lord, that you would pour out into our hearts greater love for one another, that we may act in love, in the way we speak, in the way we share, in the way we serve.

We pray, O Lord, where we have got ourselves caught up into doing things out of duty or legalism or because we want people's approval, we pray that you'd set us free from that and give to us love, that all that we do may be out of love, whether it be making tea and coffee, whether it be cleaning, whether it be preaching, whether it be Sunday school or youth club, whether it be, Lord, praying.

May everything we do be motivated by your love. Fill us with greater love then, we pray. Amen. So there's one last thing that I want us to think about as we bring our time to a close this morning.

One last aspect of that love of Jesus and this commandment, love one another as I have loved you. And that's to do with future love, growing in love, deepening in love. We know that that is the way love works, isn't it?

[25 : 47] Love is not a commodity or a static thing. It's not like you pick up a book of love and that's it. That's the book of love and that's what you've got. When you enter into a relationship with somebody in marriage, you think you love one another when you first get married, don't you?

But actually you find out as you grow that your love just keeps on growing. It's something that just keeps on pushing out the boundaries. It's something that's always being challenged and deepened.

And that's how it is with us as believers, as Christians. We find that our love for God grows, doesn't it? As we go on in the Christian life, we find that we love him more. We thought that when we receive that joy of sins forgiven and life, we thought, wow, our hearts are going to burst.

But actually we found that that love was very, very small, wasn't it? And shallow and our love for God has deepened and grown. So it must be also in our love for one another as Christians in a local church.

And so we find again and again in the New Testament, in the letters, really every letter Paul is writing or Peter or John is writing to encourage the believers to love each other more.

[26 : 58] Here's Hebrews, sorry, 1 Peter in chapter 1, Paul says this, now that you've been purified by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply from the heart.

He says you've already got sincere love, but you need to have deeper love. And again, all through the Scriptures we find these things, that we are to love one another more and more.

Here's Paul, Ephesians 5, Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children, and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.

It's a problem. Why is it a problem? Well, we know our own hearts, don't we? Our hearts are selfish, and they're proud, and they're greedy, and we want our own way, and we don't like people telling us what to do, and so on, don't we?

That's why we need more love. Love. Because we're not perfect yet. Hands up if you're perfect. Sorry, because of course I could be wrong. It could be people here who are perfect.

[28 : 02] They may, no, there's not. Of course there's not. So we need to grow in love, and so there's a future aspect to this love of Christ, a love which is yet to develop, a love which is yet to be seen, a love which is yet to come about.

And the key to this future growth of love is answering finally this question, what is the love of Jesus like? Now if you've got a Bible, I want you to turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

You'll know exactly what that's about, because everybody knows it, even people who are not Christians, because it's one of those parts of the Bible, read at weddings and other places like that. Because it's that great and glorious description of love.

And in verses 4 and following, Paul describes perfect love, doesn't he? He says, Love is patient, love is kind, does not envy, does not boast, does not proud, does not rude, does not self-seeking, does not easily angered, 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.

[29 : 19] Love never fails. Now the question is, what is Jesus' love like? We've already seen that Jesus lived a life of love. He died a death from love.

And in reality, we know that Jesus is love. The Bible makes it very clear, God is love. We know that Jesus Christ is God, therefore Jesus Christ is love.

And what we read here in these verses in 1 Corinthians, really describe Jesus. And just to make that point, I want you to substitute the word love, for the name of Jesus.

So when we read, Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind, Jesus does not envy, Jesus does not boast, he is not proud, he is not rude, he is not self-seeking, he is not easily angered, he keeps no record of wrongs.

Do you see? That's true, isn't it? Everything about love is true of Jesus. Jesus. And so this is what Jesus is like. This is what love looks like.

[30 : 28] When we say to ourselves, well how should I love my fellow brother and sister in Christ? Well here it is, laid out for us, plain and simple, this is how we love. Because this is how Jesus loved, and he is the personification of love.

Now, is my love like the love of Jesus? Jesus. Love one another as I have loved you. So we have to do something else, don't we?

And this is our last quiet moment in one sense. If you've got your Bible there, I want you to substitute the word love with your name.

Or the word I. And then read through it. I'm just going to do that quietly for those who haven't got a Bible. But just bow your heads for a moment while I do that.

I am patient. I am kind. I do not envy. I do not boast. I am not proud. I am not rude.

[31 : 35] I am not self-seeking. I am not easily angered. I keep no record of wrongs. I do not delight in evil. I rejoice with the truth.

I always protect. I always trust. I always hope. I always persevere. I never fail. Now, when we read it like that, something happens.

And we say, no, no, no, no, no, no. It's just not true of me. And we're humble, don't we?

Because we know that even at our best, it's not true of us. And therefore, we're brought to exactly the place where we have to be brought by the commandments of God and by the new command of Jesus to love one another as I have loved you.

We're brought to the place of saying, Lord, I cannot do it, but I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength. And we're brought to that place of crying out to Lord, Lord, teach me to love others as you love me.

[32 : 47] Enable me to love others as you have loved me. Make me to love others as you've loved me. And then, we're beginning to grow in love.

So let's just respond to God's word quietly in our hearts. Respond in prayer as we feel God has spoken to us and then we'll come to sing.

You have given us this new commandment, not that we should be downcast, but that we should lift our eyes to you and look to you to give to us the love that we cannot generate in ourselves and to make us a people, O Lord, who display not our own love, power, wisdom, or strength, but Lord, display your love, power, wisdom, and strength.

Work in our hearts, Lord. Deal with those sinful habits and those loveless attitudes and make us more like Jesus, we pray, so that men and women may see that we are your disciples and that they might be drawn to engage and experience and delight in the love which you've poured into our hearts through Jesus Christ, your Son.

Amen. Amen. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

[34 : 41] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.