

AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

Love one another, even as I have loved you.

John 13:34

We have seen that Christ’s new commandment of love is the central emphasis of the New Testament with regard to how we should live and conduct ourselves in this world. But at this point a question arises: How can we tell what real love is? Two college students living together in sin often justify their behavior by the fact that they “love” each other. Abortion advocates frequently claim “love” as their motivation, since they want to “help” those with unwanted pregnancies and “save” unborn children from the “life of misery” that supposedly lies ahead of them. Assisted suicides are performed by doctors in the name of compassion and “love,” since those whom they are “assisting” are suffering and want to die. In the name of “love” lusts are gratified, lies are told, murders are committed, and criminals are set free. It seems that the Lord Jesus has left us with a very flexible and nearly worthless standard of conduct!

The problem with such reasoning is that it does not quote the new commandment in its entirety. Jesus did not simply say, “Love one another”; He said, “Love one another, *even as I have loved you.*” *In other words, our definition of “love” must come from the very conduct and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself!* We are called upon to “walk as He walked”¹ and to get our concepts of “love” from His own words and actions, not from the misguided and selfish ideas of fallen humanity. “If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with *sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness*, he is conceited and understands nothing.”² When Paul says that the “goal of our instruction is *love*,”

¹ 1 John 2:6 ² 1 Timothy 6:3-4

he goes on to make it clear that unholiness, profanity, murder, immorality, homosexuality, lying, and a host of other sins are “contrary to *sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel* of the blessed God.”¹ And John reminds us that “this is the love of God, *that we keep His commandments.*”²

CHRIST OUR STANDARD

The Christian’s standard is thus not just *any sort* of “love,” but *Christlike love—love of the same quality and magnitude as Christ Himself demonstrated* in His incarnation and death on the cross! By rising to pray and commune with His Father, by walking through jostling crowds in perfect peace and tranquility of heart, by opening His mouth in wisdom and compassion, by washing His disciples’ feet, by forgiving His enemies—by *everything* He ever said and did, the Lord Jesus gave us the pattern for our conduct. As we indicated earlier, it is the highest, clearest, and brightest revelation of man’s duty that could ever be given to the human race. There *can be* nothing more *exacting*, or more *demanding*, or more *wonderful* than this—to love God and to love others in just the same way and to the same degree that Christ did! No one has ever fathomed the full import of these words, nor has anyone ever begun to fully live up to them.

In light of these facts, it is not surprising that the New Testament method of teaching ethics (principles of right conduct and moral judgment) is not primarily to appeal to any “law” or set of rules, but to appeal to the example of Christ Himself. The standard and rule of conduct for the Christian in every area of life is the Lord Jesus Christ! This truth is seen repeatedly in both the Gospels and the Epistles, as the following examples will show.

¹ 1 Timothy 1:5-11 ² 1 John 5:3

FOLLOWING CHRIST

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and *follow Me.*”
Matthew 16:24

One of the most comprehensive calls to Christlikeness that could ever be made is found in our Lord’s appeal to His disciples to “follow” Him. Again and again this call appears in the gospel records,¹ from the beginning² of the Christian life to its end.³ It is a call that takes on ever-deeper meaning as we progress in the walk of faith, encompassing all aspects of discipleship and obedience. Christ is our standard for Christian living.

SERVING

And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. *If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you.*”
John 13:12-15

Here the Lord Jesus specifically tells us that He is our pattern in serving others. What greater example of humble service could there ever be than the One who “knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God,” yet “laid aside His garments; and taking a towel . . . girded Himself about . . . and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded”?⁴

¹ Mark 1:17; John 1:43; Luke 5:27-28; 9:57-62; Mark 8:34; 10:21; John 10:4-5, 27; 12:26; 13:36-38; etc. ² Matthew 4:18-19 ³ John 21:19-22 ⁴ John 13:3-5

YIELDING OUR RIGHTS

Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves. Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. *For even Christ did not please Himself*; but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached You fell upon Me.” Romans 15:1-3 (NAS95)

What greater argument could Paul ever find for yielding up our “rights” and “not pleasing ourselves” than the fact that even the Lord of glory did not please Himself, but bore the reproaches of all those who hated and reproached God?

ACCEPTING ONE ANOTHER

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another *according to Christ Jesus*, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. *Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God*. For I say that Christ has become a servant to the *circumcision* on behalf of the truth of God to confirm the promises given to the fathers, and for the *Gentiles* to glorify God for His mercy; as it is written, “Therefore I will give praise to You among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Your name.” Romans 15:5-9 (NAS95)

Who in all of history has ever “accepted” people of diverse backgrounds with greater warmth and less disdain than Christ Himself? His example of open-armed welcome to men and women of every race, culture, education, and defect is the highest *standard* that we could ever have. Likewise, His love and acceptance of *us* is the highest *motivation* we could ever have to love and accept others.

FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; *just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.*

Colossians 3:12-13

Who has ever manifested greater forbearance and forgiveness toward anyone than Christ Himself has manifested toward us? In light of the unspeakable mercy shown to us by Christ in the forgiveness of *our* vast indebtedness, how could we ever refuse to forgive the trifles owed to us by others?¹

GIVING

But just as you abound in everything, in faith and utterance and knowledge and in all earnestness and in the *love* we inspired in you, see that you abound in this gracious work also. *I am not speaking this as a command, but as proving through the earnestness of others the sincerity of your love also. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.* 2 Corinthians 8:7-9

Here Paul urges the Corinthians in the matter of giving, not by pressing on them the duty of the Old Covenant “tithe,” but by holding up to them the example of Christ Himself. Never could any depth of sacrifice compare with what Christ did for us in laying aside His infinite “riches” and becoming “poor” for our sakes, that we “through His poverty might be rich”! Paul knows that those with “sincere love” for the brethren will cheerfully² want to follow Christ’s example.

¹Matthew 18:21-35 ²2 Corinthians 9:7

LOVING OUR WIVES

Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her*; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word
Ephesians 5:25-26

In calling husbands to love their wives sacrificially, what battery of commandments from the Law of Moses or what list of exemplary husbands from the Old Testament could begin to compare with the compelling sweetness of the example of Christ as our Heavenly Bridegroom? Just to mention the love and conduct of Christ toward His bride is to set the highest standard imaginable for Christian husbands. Notice again the echo of the “law of Christ” that is contained in these verses: “Love ... *just as Christ also loved.*”

WALKING IN LOVE

Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; *and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you*, and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.
Ephesians 4:31-5:2

What example of kindness and tender-heartedness and walking in love could possibly compare with the example of Christ Himself? Again, we see the “law of Christ” in action: “Walk in love, *just as Christ also loved.*”

LAYING DOWN OUR LIVES

We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God

abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth. 1 John 3:16-18

Here John tells us that “we know love by this, that He laid down His life for us.” In other words, the nature of true love is known and demonstrated by the actions of Christ. By His example, He defines what real love is and sets the standard for us to follow. In light of His great love for us, we *ought* to lay down our lives for the brethren.

NOT STRIKING BACK

For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, *leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps*, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously 1 Peter 2:20-23

Has there ever been anyone in human history more innocent than Christ? Has there ever been anyone who suffered more for doing what is right or anyone who more perfectly entrusted himself to the One “who judges righteously”? Once again, there is no standard of conduct that can even compare with the example of Christ Himself! He left us this example that we should follow in His steps!

ENDURANCE

Let us run with *endurance* the race that is set before us, *fixing our eyes on Jesus*, the author and perfecter of faith, *who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners*

against Himself, so that you may not grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin... Hebrews 12:1-4

Who among men has ever endured what Christ endured? Has anyone else ever been such an object of Satan's enmity and contempt? Has anyone else ever sweat great drops of blood in anticipation of what lay ahead of him or endured such darkness as that which fell upon Calvary, when the wrath of God was poured out in full strength upon the One who suffered there? Clearly, Christ is the greatest example of endurance that could ever be set before us!

HUMILITY

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. *Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus*, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Philippians 2:3-8

Paul wants to exhort the Philippians to have humility of mind and to regard others as more important than themselves. What example does he hold before them? Not the example of Moses, who in his time was more humble than any man on the face of the earth.¹ Why not? Because the humility of Moses is not worthy to be compared with the humility of Christ. Never could *any* humility compare with the humility of the One who laid aside *equality with God* and came down from infinite heights of glory—not in order to

¹Numbers 12:3

be served, but in order to “take the form of a bond-servant” and die as a condemned criminal at the hands of His own sinful creatures!

Christ Himself is our “law”—our highest example and standard. No one has ever fathomed the full import of Christ’s words, “as I have loved you,” nor has anyone ever begun to fully live up to them!