

When we're talking about Christian love, and the Biblical commands to love, are we talking about love between fellow Christians, or is it a command to love everyone???? Well actually, it's both.

Today's the **second** week, that we're spending on this one passage: Last week, we concentrated on Vs9-13, which very much talked about the special relationship of love that should be evident within the church. And the title I gave last week's message, was "Your Kingdom come in the Church".

But today, we're talking about the command to love our neighbour. And so we're including here, a command to love those who are **not** Christians. And so I've given **today's** message the title, "Kingdom living – Light, in a world of darkness".

Let's Pray,

Lord Jesus, we pray that you would open up the Scriptures to us today. Lord, fill our hearts with Your love, and teach us today, what this love means for us, in very practical terms of living, both in the church, and in the World.

Amen.

Righto, let's have a bit of a re-cap. This whole passage, is painting the picture of the Kingdom of God.... As the Kingdom of God breaks into this world, it is demonstrated by an immense love, that binds Christians together. But it's also demonstrated, by Christians loving their neighbour. (still love, but different)

And the ways of God’s Kingdom, go very much against our natural inclination. We all know what comes naturally, hey?:

- Get ‘em back
- Love my friends; hate my enemies
- Give to those who might be nice to me

That’s what comes naturally.

What **doesn’t** come so naturally, is:

- Loving our enemy
- Blessing those who persecute us
- Repaying good, instead of evil

None of **that** comes naturally... And if what we’re hearing about today, is a picture of the church in action, it’s not because we’re naturally good – it’s very much a miracle of God.

And last week, I said “All of what we’re reading about here – this picture of the Kingdom of God – all hinges on the very first command that we read in v9 **Let love be genuine....**

“Whether our love is genuine or not, determines whether what we read today, is a difficult / almost impossible command, or whether it’s a natural, expression of the love that we have for one another.”. And the same is true for the way we relate to those outside of the church. Whether our love for our **neighbour** is genuine or not, determines whether Kingdom living is difficult / almost impossible, or whether it’s a natural expression of the love that we have for others.”

When they asked Jesus what is the greatest commandment, He said, **love the Lord your God with all your heart and**

with all your soul and with all your mind. And then he said “And the second one is like it. – love your neighbour as yourself...”ⁱ

It’s all summed up with those 2 commands – loving God; and loving others. And if our love is genuine, then everything else won’t be quite so hard.

So today, we’re looking at 5 areas of loving others.

1. The first is **Loving the Persecutor.**

There was once a Baptist pastor, during the American Revolution, named Peter Miller. He, lived in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, and he was a friend of George Washington.

Also in that town, lived Michael Wittman, an evil minded sort of a bloke, who did all he could to oppose and humiliate the pastor.

One day Michael Wittman was arrested for treason and sentenced to death. And when he heard the news of the impending execution, the pastor (Peter Miller) travelled seventy miles on foot to Philadelphia to plead for the life of the traitor.

And when he met with his old acquaintance, George Washington, Washington said, “Peter, I cannot grant you the life of your friend.”

"My friend!" exclaimed the old preacher. "He's the bitterest enemy I have."

"What? You've walked seventy miles to save the life of an enemy? That puts the matter in a different light. I will grant your pardon." And he did.

Peter Miller took Michael Wittman back home to Ephrata - no longer an enemy but a friend.ⁱⁱ

When Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God, He taught us to love our enemy – he taught us to pray for those who persecute us...

Why???

Because that's what **God** does. Part of this being a disciple of Jesus business, is God transforming us, to become more and more like He is. And loving one's enemies, is what God does. He did it for us. While **we** were still enemies, He gave His son to die for us.

I am so glad that God loves **His** enemies – otherwise He never would have saved me. He never would have saved you either, because at one time **we** were enemies of God...

And I can promise you, we're going to have plenty of opportunity to love those who persecute us. As a Christian, you will be belittled because of your faith. You will be mocked. You will be ridiculed. If it hasn't started already, well maybe you're not overt enough in your Christianity. And we shouldn't be surprised by this – Jesus told us that it would happen.

And what happens to us, is nothing compared to how many Christians are persecuted.

- *All over the world, Christians are being murdered by Muslims, every day.*
- *In North Korea, they are jailed and executed.*
- *In china, over 1500 crosses have been removed from church buildings in the last year.*
- *In the last week, we've seen Muslims in Jakarta riot, demanding the arrest of their Christian Governor, over allegations of blasphemous comments about the Quran.*

Persecution **will** happen. Guaranteed. And I have every expectation that persecution in Australia, will increase. But if we love like God loves, we'll bless our persecutors, and we will pray for them, rather than curse them.

2. The 2nd way of loving others, is to love them enough to **engage on an emotional level.**

V15 says: **Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.**

Do you know what that means?

- Don't hold people at arm's length.
- When they're sad, ask them why their sad. And share their pain. Share their grief. And help them to know how Jesus can comfort them in their grief, and offer them hope outside of their current circumstances.
- When they're happy, share their happiness. And help them to praise God for the good that has happened.

You know, sometimes we don't want to get too close to people because we don't want to get hurt... Or maybe we just feel we don't have the answers for people to make them feel "All better"... We don't need to have the answers. Genuine love, is the answer, and it engages on an emotional level. When Jesus encountered the grief of the family of Lazarus, John 11:35 **Jesus wept.**

3. A 3rd way of loving others, is with **harmonious and honourable living.**

And this is true for relationships in the church, and for relationships out in the world. What it means is, "Don't antagonise each other".

Something that I've found to be true, is **most** of the time, provided I don't feel I have to stand up for my rights – if I'm willing to be a little bit humble, and don't always insist on getting my own way, generally one **can** live pretty harmoniously.

But that's not always possible. Sometimes, for you to be obedient to God, will put you in direct conflict with others.... Sometimes it happens in the church, where you know that you're being obedient to God, and yet others in the church are very **unhappy** with what you've done. And sometimes it'll happen in the world.

Now, if that happens to you, don't jump to the conclusion, "Well, everything's not all peaceful and harmonious, therefore I must've taken a wrong turn". Even in the New

Testament church, we can see some very strong disagreements, as various people acted in obedience to God. It wasn't **always** peaceful and harmonious.

And here is a very painful truth: Sometimes, obedience to God, means that sometimes we won't live peaceably with all. V18 says: ¹⁸ **If possible** (you see, it's not always possible) **If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.**

Love God first. Love others second. And sometimes, loving God (and being obedient to God) **will** put us at odds with others. But the honourable thing to do, is to always put God first. Always be obedient to God first.

I heard a story once, of a Christian man who was appointed as an executive assistant to a very powerful and prominent businessman. And on his first day, he took a phone call for the businessman, and the businessman said "Tell him I'm not here". And he handed him the phone and he said "You tell him."

*Well, his boss was absolutely furious and when he got off that phone, he tore strips off that young man, and he was about to fire him on the spot, when the young Christian man said, "If I can lie **for** you, I can lie **to** you." ...*

And over the years, that man's honour and integrity, elevated him to become the most trusted employee and confidant to that businessman...

Doing the honourable thing, put him at odds with his boss, and things weren't very peaceful for a little while, but being obedient to God, was the right thing to do.

4. A 4th way of loving others, is with **humble living**.

V16 says: Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

I pondered for a while, how to say this. And I think I'm going to say it like this:

In various times, and in various churches, my greatest sadnesses have come, when someone has said to me, "No one in that church will talk to me."... Or when they've told me that they don't fit in, because

- they're not from the right class;
- Or they don't hold the right sort of job;
- Or they can't afford to send their kids to the right school;
- or they don't drive the right car;
- Or they don't have the right sort of body;
- Or they're not sporty enough;
- Or they wear the wrong sort of clothes;
- Or they just don't fit in to the circle...

Sometimes in a church, you end up with the "in crowd", and those who are **not** the "in crowd". And generally, those who **are** the "in crowd", may not know that they're the "in crowd"... But let me tell you, those who haven't made it to the "in crowd", are very aware of it... And many of them have cried bitter tears, because they feel, "Unloved; unneeded; unwanted

And I know that if I was to tell that to those who were being accused of ignoring this person and shutting them out, they would be so sad... Why? Because they either don't know that they're doing it, or they just don't know how to engage with people who are not the same as they are:

- They just don't know how to engage with those who have less than they do; or
- with those who come from broken families; or
- with those who struggle with depression; or
- with those who are just a bit shy and it takes them just a little bit longer, to make friends...

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.
Don't think too highly of yourself, but associate with the lowly.

And I want to ask you today:

- Are you **aware** of the other?
- Are you **aware** of the person who is all on their own?...
- Are you **aware**, of the person who desperately feels a need to be included, but is not???
- When you invite friends over for dinner, do you ever invite **them**?
- And if **they** were to ask you to **their** place, would you jump at the opportunity?; or might you be busy that day?
- Are you willing to drop a conversation you're having with a good friend, to bring the loner over into the group?
- And are you willing to risk a moment of awkwardness, by deliberately including the outsider???

And what about engaging with people in the world?

- Do you mainly associate with people who are just like you?
- Are you engaging with the lowly?

Have you ever thought about this? Jesus is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He's the Creator. He's the Redeemer. He's the Judge. He is all powerful. He is completely holy.... And if He (The Lord God almighty) could step down to associate with me... If He could touch the leper, and feel the tears of the prostitute – if He can do that, then surely **we** can associate with anyone... What it costs us, is nothing like what it cost Jesus.

I mentioned before, some people just don't know **how** to associate with the lowly... Do you know how Jesus did it? He **became** the lowly. He gave up what He had. He gave up highest heaven, to come to earth. He went from God upon His throne, to a baby in a manger, to a wretch upon a cross...

What will you give up, to help you associate with the lowly?

So, in humility, make the lowly feel right at home.

And never be wise in your own sight... Nobody likes a 'know-it-all'... Be interested in others, and listen; and love.

5. And the 5th way of loving others, is by **reversing revenge**.

The world operates on 'pay-back'. But we don't **need** to get 'pay-back'. Judgment day is coming, and the Lord will judge

on that day. What we do, is love others by reversing revenge. If somebody does something bad to you, pay them back, by doing good.

V20 says "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Alright, now I've got to clarify this motivation: We don't love our enemies so that we get back at them by heaping burning coals on their head...

When somebody does something nasty to us, we just love them. And we do good for them. And **when** we do good, they will probably be ashamed of what they've done. And shame is the first step to repentance.

Somebody once said:

- *To repay evil for evil is man-like.*
- *To repay evil for good is devil-like.*
- *To repay good for evil is God-like.*

V21 says: **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

You know, we have a constant temptation before us, and that temptation is simply to do what comes naturally. But Kingdom living, is about loving God, and about loving our neighbour. And when our love is genuine, evil is overcome with good. Kingdom living – light, in a world of darkness.

Let's pray:

Lord, make us that light. Help us to love each other, and to love our neighbour. Do not let us be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with Your good love. Give us a genuine love for each other, and a genuine love for our neighbour.

Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 22:36-40 (ESV)

³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷ And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

ⁱⁱ www.holwick.com