

KNOWN BY LOVE

John 13:35
December 30, 2023

As we look forward to the start of a New Year, our minds naturally turn to the ever popular idea of the New Year's Resolution:

- I'm going to lose 10 lbs.
- I'm going to pay off my credit cards.
- I'm going to eat fewer donuts --- Right!! Like that is ever going to happen!!

You get the idea..... We like to view the New Year as a time to start over – start fresh – start again – reset.

So today, as we say good-bye to the old year and say hello to the new, we will turn our attention to one of Jesus' final instructions to his disciples:

- **John 13:34-35** – 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.

This is quite an important statement for Christians to reflect on. Our identity as followers of God is not found in what denomination we belong to, our biblical knowledge, what news station we prefer, or our political leanings – It is found in one thing.... Loving people the way Jesus loves people.

This command by Jesus is not actually “new.”

- **Leviticus 19:18** – Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.
- **Leviticus 19:34** – The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

And along with:

- **Deuteronomy 6:5** – Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

Are to be the hallmarks of all those who claim to follow God:

- **Matthew 22:37-40** – Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Why do you think Jesus took the time to remind his disciples to love each other?

Because they weren't doing it.

In just a few hours, Jesus would be dead, but instead of rallying around Him they were arguing amongst themselves, throwing each other under the bus and feeling sorry.... for themselves!

These were the men Jesus had chosen to represent him after he was gone. These men would set the tone for the new church.

If they could not figure out how to love people – God's plan was dead in the water.

These words of Jesus are not just a warm-fuzzy expression, like something you needlepoint on a pillow.

“Love one another” is a non-negotiable directive.

Jesus’ kind of love isn’t based on feelings or emotions but on a deliberate choice that includes the difficult to love. It includes those who have hurt us. It includes our enemies:

- **Luke 6:27-35** – But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. ²⁹ If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. ³⁰ Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. ³¹ Do to others as you would have them do to you. ³² “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ do that. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even ‘sinners’ lend to ‘sinners,’ expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.
- **Romans 5:8** – But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
- **1 John 4:10** – This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

So, what does this kind of love look like in real life?

Jesus said, “As I have loved you, so you must love one another,” and because he was a walk the walk and talk the talk sort of guy, he left us examples:

- He healed the sick.
- He fed the hungry.
- He comforted the broken-hearted.
- He loved the unlovable.
- He touched the untouchable.
- He forgave the unforgivable.

His love is sacrificial:

- He left the glory of heaven to come HERE.
- He chose to die for US.

His love serves:

- He served willingly, without coercion or reluctance.
- He served joyfully, without grumbling or complaining.
- He served selflessly, without expecting anything in return.

His love is transformational:

- Zacchaeus
- The Woman caught in adultery
- Peter
- The Thief on the cross
- You and me

Hearts are changed. Relationships are mended. Walls come down and bridges are built. Enemies becomes friends. Despair turns to hope and sorrow turns to joy.... That is what Jesus’ kind of love does.

It is a radical, counter-cultural kind of love that goes against the self-centered, what's in it for me, kind of love the world promotes.

We say, *"Thank you Jesus for loving me like that."*

He says, *"You're welcome, now go do the same thing."*

- **Ephesians 5:1-2** – Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

But how do we love like Jesus? Well, 1st, we need to understand that we cannot create or manufacture this kind of love on our own.

It won't happen just because we sit in a pew.

It won't happen just because we pay tithes.

It won't happen just because we can quote John 3:16.

It won't happen by osmosis.

Jesus' kind of love occurs in the life of a believer ONLY as they walk with him day by day. It is the result of a personal and transformational relationship with Jesus. Period. Full stop.

- **John Stott (The Message of Galatians)** – "The Christian should resemble a fruit tree, not a Christmas tree! For the gaudy decorations of a Christmas tree are only artificial and external. The fruit of a fruit tree is produced by the life of the tree itself."

The Love of Jesus is not merely an abstract concept or a theological doctrine; it is a living, breathing reality that has the power to transform lives and change the world.

Now go and do likewise.....