

Preparing for Christ's Death

Matthew 26:1-16

Pastor Ron Prorise

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Shepherd's Community Church

Love or Die

Because it is so easy to talk the language of love without living the reality of love, the apostles had to continually remind and exhort believers to practice the love they professed. We must do the same today. We must practice Christlike love ourselves and exhort one another to practice love.

Divine love bears practical fruit (Gal. 5:22). It prompts sacrificial service (Gal. 5:13), acts of kindness (1 Cor. 13:4), and strenuous labor on the behalf of the needs of others (1 Thess. 1:3). "A true love for people," says John Stott, "leads to labour for them; otherwise it degenerates into mere sentimentality." To refuse to practice love "in deed and in truth" would be to disobey Christ's commands to love God, our neighbor, our fellow believers, our enemies, and all people. We must remember that the biblical commands to love require obedience and practical action on our part. They are not heavenly suggestions, but direct commands from the King.

In Scripture, love and obedience are inseparable companions. Obedience to Christ's commands to love lead to real growth in love. Disobedience leads to an erosion of love. Thus cultivating an atmosphere of love in the church is inescapably connected to cultivating an atmosphere of obedience to God's Word and Spirit. "Love is not," as one biblical commentator explains, "an emotion to which we may give expression now and then, as we feel inclined; it is a duty required of us at all times by God, and the children of God ought surely to obey their Heavenly Father."

Since love "is a duty required of us at all times by God," we need to commit ourselves afresh to the obedient practice of Christ's principles of love. Just as marriage is a commitment to love one another in good times and in bad, so love for God and neighbor is a commitment to love God and neighbor despite changing feelings or difficult circumstances. If you want to love as Christ loved, commit yourself to love as he loved (Eph. 5:2; 1 John 3:16). If you want to pursue love, commit yourself to the pursuit of biblical love (1 Cor. 14:1). If you want to do all things in love, commit yourself to doing everything in love (1 Cor. 16:14). If you want to stir up love in the church, commit yourself to thinking and acting in ways that inspire love in others (Heb. 10:24).

Although Christ commands us to love as he loved, he doesn't leave us powerless to accomplish the task. He graciously gives his life-empowering Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit - who is God and is love - produces within every believer a supernatural capacity to love as Christ loves. In the words of biblical commentator R. S. Candlish, "We have now a divine faculty of loving; we love with the love which is of God; which is God's very nature." The first fruit the Holy Spirit produces in the believer's life is "love" (Gal. 5:22).

The love of God that has been "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 5:5) motivates us to love and obey with joy the commands of love. Indeed, we obey his commandments because we love him. "If you love me," Jesus says, "you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Jesus is speaking of loving, willing obedience from the heart, not a forced or joyless obedience. We also delight in obedience because of our gratitude for his love and sacrifice for us. He has rescued us "from the domain of darkness" (Col. 1:13), from sin and death, and given us eternal life. What can we do in response to such love, but to love and obey?

Design (1-2)

(John 10:18; Acts 2:23; Isaiah 53:10; Hebrews 12:2)

Destruction (3-5)

(John 11:47-53)

Devotion (6-13)

(John 12:2-3; Mark 14:5; Deuteronomy 15:11;)

Defection (14-16)

(John 17:12; Luke 22:3; Exodus 21:32)