

Real Love – You and Church, John 13:31-35

If you take a moment and think back over the messages you've heard this year, you'll find a couple of themes, but an overarching focus has been placed on re-discovering "who we are" here at Mt Freedom. It's no secret I believe in an outward approach to ministry. We are commanded to go out into the world around us and seek those who are in need, those who are hurting, those who are sick, those who are orphaned, those who are widowed, and those, most importantly, who are lost. To do this, and do it well, I also believe it's important for us to be well prepared, unified, and strong on the inside of these walls. When our outward ministries are supported by a healthy, strong, and unified body inside here, then not only will we see growth at Mt Freedom, but we will have a small part in helping our community and grow the Kingdom. So, this morning I want us to spend our time looking at what I feel is the biggest key for getting stronger and growing more unified.

Like last week, I want us to look again at the words of Jesus found in John 13. **Let's read John 13:31-35 together.**

I mentioned last week that these verses carried two points of instruction for us to consider, and we looked first at the universal command for all believers to seek to love others in the same manner as Christ does. This morning we need to consider the second point. Who was it Jesus was addressing? That's right, the disciples in the room, minus Judas. Let's think about that for a minute. Jesus was giving them instructions about what to expect and subsequently how to react and handle the events which were about to take place. And of course, we know, Jesus was referring to His arrest, His trials, His beatings, His death, His resurrection and His eventual ascension. We also know that these men were just ordinary men; fishermen, farmers, craftsmen, money handlers, each selected by Jesus to be His original followers. Jesus set out to shepherd these men and teach them how to continue His ministry once He was gone. In essence, the disciples were the original flock of the first true church. Jesus loved them and knew their individual hearts. He knew what it was that made them tick. He knew the things they struggled with. He knew their strengths. He knew that Judas had gone to sell Him out to the Romans. He knew all about Peter's true heart.

Explain what Jesus was doing for them in this moment. Jesus was attempting to encourage and strengthen them.

What does this mean for us? What is it going to take for us to become unified and inwardly strong? What is it going to take for us, inside this room, to authentically, love one another in the manner that Christ does?

Speaking of "love one another". Twelve times in the New Testament you'll find this phrase, and, in every instance, it is either a record of the words of Christ or it's a reminder from one of the other authors about these words from Christ. When you drop the word "love" off the phrase and search for "one another", you'll discover that the number swells to 89 times. Of these 89, eighteen speak about how we already have treated others, or how will treat one another in the future. Let me give you a few examples so you can follow my line of thought here.

In **Matthew 24:10** speaking of the end of the church age, we read, “*And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.*” These are professing believers we’re talking about here. What will they do to one another? Fall away and betray.

Mark 9:34 says, “*But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.*” These are the Disciples. What are they doing to one another? That’s right arguing. They are fighting amongst themselves.

God knows the hearts of men. He knows your heart. You cannot hide it from Him. Unfortunately, many a church is filled with pious people who strive more to be recognized by what is seen by others on the outside as opposed to what truly exists on the inside. Jesus often challenged the hypocritical leaders of His day concerning this same matter, and the reason behind those challenges should cause each of us to carefully consider whether our hearts are in tune with our Savior’s. **Proverbs 21:2** says, “*Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart.*” If we are to be genuinely known as a loving church, then we must first make sure our love for each other is authentic and driven by our love for Jesus. We must focus on cleaning up our spiritual houses. We must learn to loving deal with misguided actions, improper attitudes, and world led desires. This is what Jesus was teaches us when He spoke about good vs evil in Luke 6:43-45. **Read Luke 6:43-45.** Jesus knows exactly who you are!

Now, let’s get back to the “one another” statements and focus in on some of the ones which teach us what it looks like to “*love one another, just as I have loved you.*”

Let’s begin with Romans because it contains seven verses which instruct us on how we are to treat one another. Listen carefully to these words. **Read Romans 12:10 and 16, Romans 14:13, Romans 15:5-7, and 14, Romans 16:16.** From these verses we learn that we are too be affectionate to one another, honoring to one another, live in harmony, not pass judgement, not be a hinderance, be welcoming, instruct one another, and greet one another with a holy kiss.

Colossian 3 is a great place to look also. **Read Colossians 3:9,13, and 16.** Here we see that we shouldn’t lie to one another. We should bear one another’s burdens and forgive one another. We should also teach one another and sing psalms and praise songs together. Here’s the kicker to this. We are supposed to enjoy it.

Also, the fifth chapter of 1 Thessalonians. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:11 and 15.** Here we are supposed to encourage, build up, and do good for one another, not be evil towards one another.

And finally, how about Ephesians 4 and 5. By the way, this is a wonderful study passage on unity in the church so there should be no surprise that we find four “one another” statements here. **Read Ephesians 4:2 and 32, and Ephesians 5:19 and 21** The instruction in these few verses give us a recipe for becoming and remaining unified in Christ. We are to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving, and when necessary submissive to one another. All out of reverence for Christ and love for one another.

Jesus taught, and it’s backed up throughout all the Scriptures, that the greatest two things man can do is love God, and love others. Paul taught us about three eternal virtues: “*faith, hope, and love, but the greatest, he says, is love.*”

Francis Shaffer was a preacher during the mid-1900's who believed the non-Christian world had every right to judge Christianity by the way fellow Christians treat each other. He wrote, "Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful."

Mt Freedom Baptist Church, we have a challenge ahead. Until our love inside the walls of this church rises above our emotions, above our sensitive feelings, above our petty differences, above our likes and dislikes, we will never experience the full power of God working in our lives, and we will struggle to make any impact in our community or for the Kingdom. God desires for His people to remain unified and His perfect love fully demonstrated through believers is the only catalyst for ensuring it happens.

My prayer for the remainder of this year is that we commit personally and corporately to do whatever it takes to fulfill these instructions to genuinely "love one another". We need to look around the room and recognize who is hurting, or struggling, or lacking, or lonely. We need to recognize who is excited about something, or healthy, or received a blessing. And then, we need use our gifts, our knowledge, and our blessings to grow stronger and more unified. One of the greatest ways we can glorify God is for us to become a church known as body of believers who are in love with Jesus and love one another in the manner which He has taught us.