

Be Know For Love

Part One

John 13:34-35; Romans 5:8

1. Love is not an **option**; it is a **requirement**.
- 1 Corinthians 13:1; 2 John 1:6

2. Love is not an **idea**, it is an **action**.
- John 15:9; John 14:15

3. Love is not **invisible**; it is **revealing**.
- Romans 12:9; Ephesians 4:15

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If I were to ask you, “What’s wrong with the world?” You’d probably answer by saying, “Well, how much time do you have?” Right? There are so many things going wrong today. We’re coming up on a year since Covid-19 entered the world. According to our own CDC, while the normal flu in the US averages roughly 36,000¹ deaths per year, so far this year Covid-19 has killed 223,000² in the US (that’s over six times as many deaths in the US as the flu. And yes, I know that those numbers are disputed, depending on who you talk to). If that weren’t bad enough, cases of domestic abuse, depression, and addiction have sharply increased³ during the pandemic. We’re no longer a melting pot; the anger has turned an already divided society into a boiling pot. There is so much anger and hatred in everything anymore. From Twitter trolls to furiously factious Facebook-ers, social media is voluminous with vitriol. The hatred has spilled into the streets as the foment is fueled by main stream media and news outlets, seemingly intent on plunging our society into chaos.

“Thanks a lot Pastor. I was in a pretty good mood when I came in...Thanks for reminding me what’s wrong with the world!”

Well, that question – “What’s wrong with the world?” – was asked of readers of the *The London Times* about 100 years ago. Keep in mind, the world at that time had just experienced its first world war, killing 20 million people. Then a global pandemic of the Spanish Flu killed 50 million people worldwide. Next came the London Stock Exchange crash which was followed by the US Stock Market crash and then the Great Depression.

So, when *The Times* posed that question in their newspaper, they received a number of responses, many of them blaming the world shattering events I just listed. But one answer in particular – a simple four-word response – summarized it all perfectly. The English writer and philosopher, G.K. Chesterton, rather than pass the buck, wrote his response to the question, “What is wrong with the world?” He wrote: “Dear Sirs, I am.”

What a perfect answer! Because with everything going on in the world today, there is very little of it that I have any control over. But I can tell you this: what’s wrong

1

<https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/burden/index.html#:~:text=While%20the%20impact%20of%20flu,61%2C000%20deaths%20annually%20since%202010.>

2

<https://www.google.com/search?q=number+of+covid+deaths+in+us&oq=number+of+covid+&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0i433i457j0i433j0l2j0i433j0l2.6219j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

with *my* world is *me*. And there is something to be done about me. And you, about you. If we were to all wholeheartedly deal with ourselves before God, the world around us would change significantly for the better. I want to challenge us to consider ourselves. More specifically, I want us to consider what we are known for. What are you known for? Let's go past our appearances and deeper than our politics, even deeper than our family of origin or our immediate family. As one pastor has said, "What if at the core of who we are, and before we are known for anything else, we chose to be known for love? A love that helps us know our purpose for living. A love that gives us guidance in our decision making. A love that guides how we live and treat others. A love that helps us overcome painful pasts and gives us peace, even when faced with a chaotic future. A love that can change our lives and the lives of those around us.

(There) is a love that can lead us to a better future because it comes from the only One who can give it to us: (Jesus Christ).

Jesus has declared that the Kingdom of God is here. Those who claim the name of Jesus are citizens of a different kind of Kingdom before anything else in their lives."⁴ Ours is a Kingdom of love.

We are starting a new series for these four Sundays called "Be Known for Love." What if West Valley Church was known for love? What if instead of fences between liberals and conservatives, we loved the other side for the sake of our community? What if instead of assuming the opposing side is behind the latest conspiracy against your personal rights, instead of assuming the other side is ignorant or evil, what if you loved each person? *That* can begin right here in West Valley Church. Where else but the Church can people be known for love? Because if it isn't found in the Church, it won't exist in the world.

What if, instead of quitting your church because you don't want to wear a mask, you let yourself be inconvenienced just in case it will save the life of someone you love in your church family? That kind of selfless love can start right here.

What if instead of fear and distrust between Latinos and whites, what if there was mutual love and respect? *Folks, that MUST happen in West Valley Church or else we can't expect it to happen at all in West Valley or Yakima or Yakima County.* White and brown must be known for their love for each other as the people of God.

This series will take us through two Sundays before the national election, and then the two Sundays after. Things are only going to ramp up between now and November 3rd, and I'm concerned that the rhetoric and riots will increase. But why not be known for love, instead of being sucked into all that? I am also deeply concerned about what might happen *after* the election. I'm concerned, given the hatred in our society today, that regardless of who wins, the other side will reject it and turn violent. For us West Valley Church, not just before, but *after* the election, we *must* be known for love.

⁴ Aaron Horton, Pineville Church (of the Nazarene), Charlotte, NC

If we say we are Christians, then our primary, main, major, and ultimate allegiance is to Jesus Christ our King, not our positions or our politics, not our conspiracies and not even our Constitution.

C.S. Lewis is a well-known Christian scholar and writer of the last century. He wrote about the danger of what he called “Christianity and...” What he meant was that we can get so caught up in peripheral issues that we forget what’s primarily important. There are so many in Christ’s church who preach Christianity *and* capitalism, Christianity *and* the Constitution, Christianity *and* their party, Christianity *and* liberalism, Christianity *and* prosperity, Christianity *and* comfort, Christianity *and* gun control, Christianity *and* conservatism, Christianity *and* anti-_____... a whole bunch of stuff. I’m not saying that all those things are bad on their own, but when any “cause” becomes so important that we forget the essential of the Gospel and our allegiance to Christ alone, or when they become *as important* as our faith, then we are ineffective in this world and ineffective in carrying out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The world watches us and finds us *un-believable* because the essential is drown out by “Christianity *and*...”

So what is the essential of the Gospel? We talked the last three weeks about our mission statement, but the essential we’re talking about is the *motive behind* our mission. According to Jesus, our motive is not political, it is not sociological, it is not philosophical or theological, although it will have major impact on all those things. Our motive is simply: love. Jesus said in 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 everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:34-35, niv)

This is what makes Christianity unique. Think about it; what other world religion is based on its founder’s infinite love for his followers – a love so extreme that he would give his very life for them? Can that be said for any other religion? And Jesus didn’t even die just for his followers; he died for every person in the whole world, including those who never heard of him, those who have ignored him, those who are apathetic, those who have rejected him, who despised him, even for those who tortured and crucified him. In fact:

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8, niv)

Love is the foundation of the Christian faith. In that passage in John 13 that we read, Jesus told us emphatically that we are to love one another. The “problem” with passages like that one is that they require no interpretation – only application. Mark Twain once said, “Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture that they cannot understand; but as for me, I have always noticed that the passages in Scripture that trouble me most are those which I *do* understand.” You cannot philosophize or theologize your way around Jesus’ command. Denominations can differ about a lot of things; when and how to do baptisms and when and how to do communion or whether or not church members should do this or that, but there is

no disagreeing or debating about love. Jesus gives us no room to do anything else. He tells us in plain, simple language that we are to love.

Let me point out three things about this love for which we must be known, according to what Jesus said. First...

1. Love is not an *option*; it is a *requirement*.

Jesus said, "A new *command* I give you; love one another."

I went to college with a guy who was heading for a bright future in business. His degree was to be in accounting. During his senior year he interviewed with a big accounting firm and was offered a great job which he would begin in June after graduation. But one of the required courses that every freshman was supposed to take was something called "Music and Art in the Western World." My friend put off enrolling in that course until fall semester of his senior year, but he found out the class was full and he would have to wait until spring of his senior year – the last semester. Then he found out that it wasn't the easy "A" that he thought it would be. In fact, he was in danger of failing it. His comment to me was, "I can't believe I might wreck my career before it even starts because I can't pass 'art class'!"

Just like you can't graduate from college without passing the basics, you cannot live the Christian life without loving other people. Some Christians place an emphasis on spiritual gifts, or social issues, or prophecy, or spiritual warfare, or whatever, but the core curriculum of the Christian life is, to be known for love. It doesn't matter how much of the Bible we know or how much good stuff we do if we can't pass this test. That's why the Apostle Paul said:

"If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." (1 Corinthians 13:1, niv)

John also wrote three letters to Christians in Scripture, besides his gospel about Jesus, and in one of those letters he said:

"Love means doing what God has commanded us, and he has commanded us to love one another, just as you heard from the beginning." (2 John 1:6, nlt)

That is kind of a circular command: love means doing what he commands, and he commands us to love, so we'll obey his command, which means we will love, which is obeying his command....His command is to love and to love means we obey his command.

If we are to be faithful and true Christians, we don't get to pick and choose who we're going to love and we can't let love become a secondary issue. Love is not an option; it is an entry-level requirement to being a Christian. Be known for love. Because if you are, you'll see that...

2. Love is not an *idea*, it is an *action*.

It is obedience, and we are to follow Jesus' example. He said, "As I have loved you, so you love one another." Jesus didn't talk vague or idealistic or pie-in-the-sky nonsense. He taught practical Christian living. And he didn't just tell us; he *showed* us, and he commanded us to follow the example of his love for us.

How does Jesus love us? Well, for sure his love is *sacrificial*. Jesus willingly laid down his life for us. That means that our love for others won't always feel good, but we do it anyway. Here's a thought: how about, instead of re-posting that nasty meme about your political enemies, why not pray for the presidential candidate you are voting against? Why not pray for the members of the other political party before posting your smart-aleck comment? Because Jesus' love is also *merciful*. Even though he is perfect, he knows we are not. When we fail, he is faithful to forgive us of our sins even though we don't deserve his mercy. So we must forgive others even if they don't deserve it. C.S. Lewis also said, "He loved us not because we were lovable, but because He is love." If you feel angrily offended because of rioters in Seattle or Portland, or because someone votes against your pet platform, that anger you have is a cue that you probably need to forgive them – even if you don't know them or will never meet them.

Jesus' love is also *unconditional*. Jesus never put conditions on his love for us. He said unequivocally:

"As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." (John 15:9, niv)

There is nothing we will do to make him love us less, and there is nothing we can do that can make him love us more. And he commands us to love others *in the very same way*. If you can't say you love Trump like that, or Biden, or anyone else, we've got some repenting to do my friend.

Not only that, but Jesus' love is *full of positive expectations for us*. Because he loves us, he wants the best for us. The only way we can experience God's best is to love and follow Jesus Christ. So through the 13th, 14th, and 15th chapters of John, when Jesus reminds us of his great love for us, he also challenged us to show our love for him through obedience. Can you say you genuinely want the best for your political opponent?

This week there is a political ad that has turned viral – for *good* reasons. The commercial involves the two candidates who are running for Governor of Utah – one a Democrat, the other a Republican. If you haven't seen it, you need to watch this, because it is an incredible example of wanting the best for your opponent.

video

Almost makes you want to move to Utah! Jesus said:

"If you love me, you will obey what I have commanded you." (John 14:15, niv)

This will be true of us. *Others will know God's love not in our telling, but by our showing.*

The third thing that Jesus tells us about love is...

3. Love is not *invisible*; it is *revealing*.

Love for others – or the absence of it – will reveal who we really are – and *whose* we really are: either our own or Christ's. Remember Jesus said that by our love for others ALL people will know we are his disciples. It's been said of the early Christians that their impact on society was due to their profound love for each other and others. Jesus said that this is the tell-tale mark, the litmus test, of who his followers are: if we love others. I've heard someone say to me one time, "I love people, I'm just not good at showing it." According to what Jesus said, if you can't show love then you don't know love. Worse yet, if you can't show love you don't know *his* love. Love is not an emotion or feeling; it is an action. It doesn't matter how much we "feel" that we love others if we don't follow through with action. Do you remember that movie "Forrest Gump"? Remember that line when he said, "Momma says, 'Stupid is as stupid does.'"? Well, *love is as love does*. West Valley and the world will have no way of knowing about the love of God if they can't see his love in the lives of his people. There's an old saying that's true: "The world will not care how much we know until they know how much we care." They've got to be able to see his love revealed in our actions. Know it and show it; believe it and believe it!

Let me speak to something, just in case you are thinking it. You might think that I'm saying that we shouldn't stand up for the truth or speak truth to power or speak truth against wrong or evil political platforms or agendas or systems. Don't put words in my mouth, friend. There *are* issues in politics that we need to take a stand on, but *never* are we to stand against *people*. Remember, the Bible says:

"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good." (Romans 12:9, nlt).

We *should* speak the truth, but the motive behind it must be love:

"God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and *tell it in love—like Christ in everything*. We take our lead from Christ, who is the source of everything we do." (Ephesians 4:15, tmt)

The motive of our truth-telling must be love.

Let me illustrate it this way: in the natural world, sodium is an extremely active element found naturally in combined form; it always links itself to another element. Chlorine, on the other hand, is the poisonous gas that gives bleach its offensive odor. But when sodium and chlorine are combined, the result is sodium chloride – common table salt – the substance we use to preserve meat and bring out its flavor.

Love and truth can be like sodium and chloride. Love without truth is flighty, sometimes blind, willing to combine with various ideas and doctrines. On the other hand, truth by itself can be offensive, sometimes even poisonous. Spoken without love, it can turn people away from the Gospel.

When our truth is known for love in our individual lives or in our church, then we are what Jesus called “the salt of the earth,” and we’re able to preserve and bring out the beauty of our faith in our community.

The world will know we are Christians by our love. The love that Jesus commands us to have for each other is not an option, not an abstract idea, and it’s not invisible. It is a requirement that is an action that will reveal if we are believers or not.

The world may not like where we stand on certain issues, but they must *never* be able to deny our love, and they won’t – IF love is what we are known for.

Friend, family, believer in Jesus: BE KNOWN FOR LOVE.

pray

Benediction:

“Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus ... make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” (1 Thessalonians 3:11-13, niv)