

# Love: because Jesus first loved us.

1 John 4:19

**MPS: Christians love all people because we've been perfectly loved by Jesus.**

**OBJ:** Jesus has loved us perfectly in the gospel. Therefore, every Christian can love others in four ways.

**INTRO** What's the greatest expression of love you've ever experienced? How did you respond to that love?

The gospel of Jesus Christ reveals and explains God's love for us. Through the Gospel God's love saves us, sanctifies us, sends us and sustains us. But one difficulty we often face, as Christians, is "how do we love like God has loved us?"

**Q?** How do Christians love others like Jesus loves?

If we are His ambassadors in the world given the message and the mission of reconciliation, what we have received, then we can only do His work in the way He has done it, in love. Many misconceptions, perversions and deceptions about love exist in our day and time. The one point I want to make today is the Christian's motivation to love.

*We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19*

First John 4:19 provides the defining motivation for Christians to love others. The only way Christians can love is the way in which we've been loved; the love of God that we know through the gospel of Jesus Christ. I will use a number of scripture references today to demonstrate God's love to us. But all our love as Christians comes from the One who is love, Jesus Christ.

**I have three AIMS in this sermon:**

1. Motivation - clarify HOW God has loved us; to encourage, strengthen and unite us.
2. Model - show the relationship between HOW God has loved us IN the gospel and HOW Christians love with the gospel.
3. Call LifePoint to a season of reckless love. This sermon is an introduction of a theme that will carry us forward.

We did not print Worship Guides today for sermon notes because I want you to listen. You can get a copy of my full sermon manuscript tomorrow from my blog if you want notes. Today, listen.

**MPS: Christians love all people because we've been perfectly loved by Jesus.**

**OBJ:** Because Jesus perfectly loved us, Christians love others through the gospel in four ways.

1. Through the Gospel, Jesus comes to us to **save us**. Therefore, Christians love first.

*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son,  
that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

John first writes of God first loving us in his gospel account, in what is likely the most famous verse in all of scripture. (Thanks to a rainbow wig-wearing guy at sporting events over the last generation.) What a powerful verse, words spoken to a leading, religious leader in that day, Nicodemus, who came to Jesus under the cover of darkness. *Love compels us, even to face and oppose our deepest fears, to seek out that which we most desire and long for in life.*

**TRANS** And here is what we find when we see God's love. **READ Romans 5:8**

*but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8*

Even before we knew God or His love, while we were "sinners", God loved us. "Sinners" means two things in Romans 5. We are "weak", powerless to do anything about our sinful condemnation and separation from God. And, we are God's "enemies". You may not feel weak, but we are because we are helpless to do anything about sin's shame and condemnation upon us. We may not feel like an enemy, but we are because by our nature, and subsequently our actions, we oppose God's sovereign rule in all things. And if God claims otherwise, we are hostile toward Him. We may not live with open hostility every moment, but every time something happens that we don't like, or we don't get what we want, hostility flares and God gets blamed. *Sin separates us from God, and sets us in direct, hostile opposition to God.*

When God showed His *first* love for us, He justified by His blood all who trust in Jesus. **ILLUS** The "Love logo" represents

God's **first** love for us by the **drop** of Jesus's blood.] Our justification in Jesus' blood means we've been forgiven for sin and reconciled to God. **When we trust in Jesus' sacrifice, by death we are made alive unto God.**

**TRANS** Then, in his letter John states what God has done in loving us, when we believe in Him. **READ 1 John 4:14-16, 19** *And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:14-16, 19*

**TRANS** **God loved us first.** These passages show us that WHAT God did and WHEN God did for us were first, before we ever loved or cared or even knew about Him. **God's first love in Jesus defines our understanding of how Christians love others.**

**Christians strive to love first.** We initiate love to others. And, we begin learning to love by loving one another. "Ideally, however, the church itself is not made up of natural "friends". It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have all been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance. In the light of this common allegiance, in the light of the fact that they have all been love by Jesus himself, they commit themselves to doing what he says—and he commands them to love one another. In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake."<sup>1</sup>

Loving first means Christians hold a "redemptive urgency". God is worthy of all worship. Every second God is not worshiped is a travesty against His perfect righteousness where unbelief steals His glory. We live in a time of divine mercy that will not always remain. And, the time of its end draws near. Time is fleeting and short. Sin's consequence is real and eternal. This redemption window of opportunity from God will not last forever. (2 Peter 3:8-10) People are hurting and seeking, no matter what their life may look like on the outside. God did not wait on us to get ready, to know our need or prepare for His love. Salvation was never for those who got cleaned up enough to get it. Jesus died for the whole world. All who call on His name will be saved. When we forget that we were first loved by God, we will always forsake loving others first. **Christians live with redemptive urgency to pursue others, initiate opportunities and love first.**

Religion fails. Success through achieving and earning falls short. People disappoint. But Jesus always saves.

**Through the Gospel, Jesus came to us to save us. Therefore, Christians love first.**

**APPL** **WHO is God leading you to love first?**

**2. Through the Gospel, Jesus sanctifies. Therefore, Christians love true.**

Two defining realities are immediately true of the Christian life the moment God saves by faith in Jesus. We are forgiven and made perfectly blameless before God. By Jesus' blood we have peace with God. (Romans 5:1) We wage a war against sin and the flesh to destroy its immediate stronghold on us as we are transformed more and more into Jesus' likeness. The Bible addresses Christians as "saints", holy ones. The day-to-day walk in all our life aims at the eternal reality God places upon us in salvation. **Sanctification defines the process of being transformed into Jesus' image; bringing the "eternal truth" of justification before God more and more to a "daily, here-and-now" reality.** (2 Cor 3:18)

**The Bible gives a picture of God's nature demonstrated through His love.** God's love, mercy and grace always align perfectly with his holiness, righteousness and justice. **God is perfect in all his attributes, and holds them in perfect unity.**

*The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, Ex 34:6*

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<sup>1</sup> D.A.Carson, Love in Hard Places, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2002), p61.

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before you. Psa 89:14*

God's people have always been commanded to remain faithful to God in how they live; love justice and righteousness (Deut 16:19-20), hate evil and love what is good (Amos 5:15), and love others (Lev 19:18). God's not angry and vindictive in the Old Testament, then all of a sudden loving, merciful and gracious in the New Testament. [Jesus's death on the cross shows that God is righteousness, holy and just, as much as He is loving, merciful and gracious.](#)

*So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us.*

*God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 1 John 4:16*

**TRANS** Abiding in love never includes anything that might get called love. Rather, abiding in love means living true to God's definition of love because we "*believe the love that God has for us*". [Christians love as God has loved, to show God's saving love in Jesus Christ and lead others to this saving knowledge by faith.](#)

**Christians strive to love true.** [ILLUS The "[Love logo](#)" represents God's *true* love by the **refiner's fire** that sanctifies.] Love that is *true* means directing love toward others that is ultimately oriented around God, His truth and what He says about people. The gospel is NOT only about what Jesus saves you FROM, but WHO and WHAT He saves you TO, righteousness and holiness. Loving in a *true* manner means declaring the life-transforming power of the gospel. The gospel removes sin from us AND puts Christ's righteousness on us. This is what it means to love true. God loved people according to His truth. [Christians strive to reflect God's perfect love to point people to Him.](#)

**Love that is true is much more than emotion or feeling.** It surely includes feeling and emotion, but it does much more than just address feeling or emotion. Not all that is love feels good at first. ILLUS When my father said, "I love you, and this is going to hurt me more than you", I never presumed that I was about to receive my Christmas presents. Not everything that feels good is love. Not all that claims to be love actually is loving. When we reduce love to only a feeling or emotion, we create more wounds and deeper damage. Love that is *true* always aids healing, even when and especially when it addresses old wounds. Love that is *true* always labors to point to hope and faith in Jesus. [Loving in ways that are true will be confusing, at times, because we will dare to love in hard situations.](#)

**True love aligns with God's truth.** When we forsake or deny God's word to love others, we're not only not loving, but even more, we deny love for God. In the end, we love self most by doing toward God and others what is comfortable and convenient for "me". When we claim to love but do so absent of truth, we only offer another empty expression of the world's love. When we dare to love in ways that are *true*, we can be sure we will win no popularity contests. The world that champions "tolerance" will have little of its mantra to offer you. Love never wins when we 'add to' or 'take from' the gospel. Nothing is more unloving than to disregard God's word in trying to love people. [Loving true means we make sure our love, in attitude and actions, align with to encourage obedience to God's word.](#)

[Through the Gospel, Jesus sanctifies. Therefore, Christians love true.](#)

### **3. Through the Gospel, Jesus sends. Therefore, Christians love most.**

When God loved us in Jesus, he didn't bring partial provision, but complete salvation. Jesus died once for all to bring us to God. (1 Peter 3:18) God loved people through Jesus to the uttermost. And that's what He calls Christians to do in the world. Through Jesus, we are forgiven for sin to have peace with God. [Christians are sent as peacemakers in the world, proclaiming forgiveness from God, and laboring for it among people.](#)

Consider some passages that help us understand what it means to love most.

*Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses. Prov 10:12*

Christians love *most* because it offers the greatest response to bring peace.

*But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you Matt 5:44*

Christians love most in the most extreme circumstances, because it holds the power to overcome.

Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. **John 15:13**

Love is the greatest of all. And the greatest love is one that gives most for the other person.

**Love most means that we forgive to labor for peace.** God, in love, came to us to forgive us. God's forgiveness is complete. D.A. Carson writes, "When he (God) does forgive his people, he makes a thorough job of it: 'as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. (Ps. 103:12)'"<sup>2</sup> **God doesn't make our sin a thing of our past. When God forgives, He removes our sin, blots it out and forgets it. God makes our sin a thing that never was.**

**TRANS** Imagine the power of a people who labor in the world for THIS kind of new reality!

**Love most means Christians stand ready to forgive.** Jesus forgave. Therefore, Christians must forgive. The reason forgiveness is called loving *most* is best explained in this quote, "The love that is demanded in many of the hardest cases,...inevitably demands some form of forgiveness."<sup>3</sup> Forgiveness is not only helpful in the hardest of cases. It IS the hardest in every case. A lot of people learn how to "move on" to avoid the difficulty that forgiveness demands. But "moving on" is just another moral effort to justify oneself. Forgiveness requires a whole other kind of power and strength. Again, Dr. Carson helps describes forgiveness when he writes, "The person who forgives refuses to demonize the wrongdoer and recognizes the wrongdoer's common humanity; the person who forgives quietly surrenders vengeance, the right to get even."<sup>4</sup> Forgiveness isn't just "letting go" so you can "move on". Forgiveness is the refusal to demand control, replaced by the intentional trust that God is in control. You can release others for their peace and yours, because you've been released by God.

**ILLUS** The "**Love logo**" represents God's **most** love with a heart, because we aim for the **heart** in forgiveness that brings **peace**.

Learning to love most through forgiveness, and laboring for it, is critical. Forgiving other people is so important that our forgiveness is directly tied to our readiness and willingness to forgive.<sup>5</sup> Our forgiveness from God is linked with our forgiveness of others, even if it is only demonstrated through. (Matt 6:14-15; 18:21-35; Luke 11:4) "People disqualify themselves from being forgiven if they are so hardened in their own bitterness that they cannot or will not forgive others."<sup>6</sup> **When Christians labor for peace by loving most, we demonstrate our heart for God.<sup>7</sup> And, we love most in any situation by aiming for the heart of a person through forgiveness.**

Loving in ways that are most will always present the greatest challenge to us, because it calls us to most emulate Jesus' sacrifice as we reflect His love. More than winning an argument, being right in our discussions, or even remaining quiet so as not to disrupt the friendship, loving *most* means we labor for peace through forgiveness, both with God and man. The Gospel message IS our mission! We have peace with God through Jesus atonement and the forgiveness of our sin. **Jesus fills, sources, authorizes and commissions (sends) us to love most so all can know God's peace.**

**APPL** **Is there someone you need to forgive? Is there a situation or relationship where you need to labor for forgiveness?**

**Through the Gospel, Jesus sends. Therefore, Christians love most.**

#### **4. Through the Gospel, Jesus sustains. Therefore, Christians love last.**

Finally, God's love is a strength for our life that sustains us in obedience to Him. God's love is everlasting. And He never

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<sup>2</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, p75.

<sup>3</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, p71.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, p80.

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Carson provides a helpful balance on how to understand the relationship between our being forgiven and its dependence upon our forgiving others. D.A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2002), pg79.

<sup>6</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, p79.

<sup>7</sup> Carson, *Love in Hard Places*, p80. "One of the marks of growing spirituality in a Christian, Whitney argues, is that he or she is becoming a 'quicker forgiver'". (Don Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), p111-120.

fails in loving us.

*for his steadfast love endures forever.* **Psalm 136**

Psalm 136 provides a great model for us to understand what it means to 'love last'. Every verse begins with a phrase of remembrance about God and His mighty deeds, then resounds this simple phrase, "*for his steadfast love endures forever*". **God's love is an everlasting love. And we want people to know that God's love lasts forever.**

*I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.* **Jer 31:3**

God's love is everlasting, and that means He always remains faithful to those who live in His love.

Loving in ways that *last* requires that we put down our own demands to be first, or always win. It demands that we consider other people in love the way God considered us. It means we strive more through love to point people to Jesus than just pull people close to us to feel loved. **Christians love in lasting ways to show God's everlasting love.**

**ILLUS** The "**Love logo**" represents God's **lasting** love with **leaves**, because the more we love, the more it grows and we grow.

**Through the Gospel, Jesus sustains. Therefore, Christians love last.**

**APPL** Is there anyone you are about to give up on? Has someone given up on you?

## **CLOSE**

As I close today, I want to remind us, "Love always does its most impressive work in the hard places."<sup>8</sup> **Christian, God wants you to be the instrument through which His love comes.**

**Q? Is there a hard place in or around your life that needs God's love today?**

When we walk with Jesus by faith, He empowers us to love as He has loved us. When we forget or refuse to look to Jesus in the gospel, we will neglect to love. How we love other people demonstrates to us, and to others, how we are trusting and receiving God's love to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray today's sermon is a catalyst for LP, a continuation in many regards, of loving every person we can possible get to before Jesus comes again.

**Q? Have you received God's love in Jesus by believing in Him to receive the salvation on He can give?**

**Q? Who has God placed in your life that He's leading you to share His love with, show His love to?**

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<sup>8</sup> Carson, Love in Hard Places, p69.