

June 11, 2017
Christian: It's Not What You Think
Working It Out
Matthew 22:37-40

Today is the last message in this series. If you haven't been here for all of the messages you have come on a good day because today we are going to review: in the first week we said that Christianity has a branding problem. Andy Stanley has summed up how society thinks of Christians, they define us as: "Judgmental, homophobic, moralists who think they are the only ones going to heaven and secretly relish the fact that everyone else is going to hell."

The second week we quoted Anne Rice a famous author who summed up Christians as a: "quarrelsome, hostile, disputatious, and deservedly infamous group." (*Tending to argue or disagree without adequate cause). For most Christians that's our reputation. This is how many in society view Christians.

Part of our reputation problem and branding problem is terminology. It's the word Christian or Christianity itself. We call ourselves Christians, we ask others if they are Christian or if they want to become a Christian. Yet the term Christian is not even defined in the Bible. Actually the word Christian or Christians only appears 3 times in the whole Bible. And the term was actually a derogatory term that non-Jesus followers used to describe Jesus followers. Christian is not defined in the Bible, which means you can call yourself Christian and do just about anything. You can be a Christian and believe just about anything.

There are Christians on each side of just about every political issue, every social issue, Christians have gone to war with each other, Christians vote against each other; it's unbelievable. So it's no wonder we have a branding problem. The term is not even defined for us so consequently we can define it any way we want.

But as we open the pages of the gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and look at the accounts of Jesus' life, we find that Jesus didn't refer to His followers as Christians. That came much, much, much later. He referred to His followers as **Disciples**. And unfortunately this is very narrowly defined. Unfortunately, if you decide to go with this term over Christians there is no doubt about how you are to live your life – what you are to believe, what you are to do, how you are to specifically treat other people.

When Jesus gathered His followers at the very end, after He had taught, told parables, preached sermons, performed miracles after He did all these things He gather His followers for one last time before His death, for a last meal, a Passover meal and He began to say, okay this is it. This is the last opportunity I will have to say anything to you. And He boiled His whole ministry down to this:
By *this* all men will know that you are my **disciples** (there's our word, followers, learners, those who have signed on with me) if you love one another. - **John 13:35**

In other words, I want people to say, Oh they must be Jesus followers, not, look at what they believe, not look at their Sunday morning attendance patterns, I want people to know you follow Me by one thing only, the way you treat each other, and ultimately, by the way you treat other people.

One time some people came to ask Jesus a question. People usually asked Jesus a question to try and trick Jesus, or trap Jesus. Jesus was smart He knew what they were trying to do when they asked these questions. Sometimes He wouldn't answer their question, or He'd ask His own question. But this time He answered them. They asked of all the commandments, Jesus, which is the greatest commandment. They already had an answer in their head. But what would Jesus say. They had over 600 laws. And they ask, "Jesus, what is the most important law?"

Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' - Matthew 22:37 NIV

This is the first and greatest commandment. (and before they could raise their hand and ask another question He said) And the second is like it: (and they said, wait, wait we just asked for one. And Jesus said, yeah, but I can't give you one, I have to give you two and the second is just like it, which means the second is as important as the first one. Or the second goes with the first one. Or don't try pulling off the first one without pulling of the second one. And the second is like it) 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' - Matthew 22:38-39 NIV

And before they could raise their hand and ask another question Jesus said something of such extraordinary significance I don't know how we've missed it. In fact about 25 years later Paul would write specifically about what Jesus said next, and about 30 or 40 years later John would write specifically about what Jesus said next. And somewhere along the way Jesus followers, all of us included have lost sight of what Jesus said next. Listen to this:

All the Law and the Prophets (all the law, all 600+ laws, and the 10 commandments, thou shall not steal, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shall not do all those things thou shall not do. All those things from the Old Testament. Then all those things that are added in the New Testament, do all you do as unto the Lord, Husbands love your wives as Christ love the church, wives respect your husbands; all the teachings of the prophets, all the teachings of the law, all the instructions that would follow) hang on these two commandments." - Matthew 22:40 NIV

Do you know what that means? It means that every time we pick up our Bible, every time we teach a lesson, every time we are scrambling as we search the Bible for what we should do in a situation – what does it have to say about my relationship with my spouse, what does it say about raising my children, what does it say about this group or that group, what does it say about my morals or ethics, what does it say about sex, what does it say about anything; every time we pick up the scripture to find a law, every time we pick up the scripture to fine a command, an instruction ... Jesus says make sure you look at all that through the filter of love God with all your heart, soul, and mind,

and love your neighbor as yourself. And never use my law to hate or mistreat people because all the law hangs, is filtered through this command, Love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.

So all this brought us last week to this big idea, this big question and the question is this: What does love require of me? In other words if people are going to know I'm a Jesus follower by my love for others, especially those within the faith, if every decision has to go through the filter of treating others the way I want to be treated, then I have to ask this question every single day as I deal with my husband, my wife, my children, my parents, the people I work for, the people I work with – What does love require of me?

You see our inclination is to look at the commands and not the intent of the Commander. Our inclination is to take out the Bible and say, "see it says right here you have to do this or be that." And Jesus is telling us that before you get there you have to ask this question: What does it look like to love your neighbor as yourself? That is primary, What does love require of you? And even if you are not ready to step into this, if you are a Jesus follower, if you are someone who has accepted Jesus as your Savior, if you are someone who says by the best of my ability I want to take the commands of scripture seriously, then you owe it to yourself in every single relationship, in every single conversation, in every single conflict to pause and at least ask the question. If I was to step in to this realm that Jesus has asked me to step into what would love require of me?

In the time we have left I want to try to explain to the best of my ability how brilliant this is. How brilliant Jesus, who had only a handful of followers, in the worst part of the Roman empire, no one seems to be listening, no one seems to care; He could have said anything He wanted to say, yet this is the message the Father gave to Him as He began a Jesus movement which eventually became the church. He could have said anything, by this all people will know you are my followers ... you fill in the blank, there are hundreds of wonderful things He could have said. But the brilliance of this statement is actually found in our own personal experience. Look at it this way; there are two categories of people that have influenced your life profoundly. In other words there are two categories of people who have made you the father you are today. There are two categories of people who have made you the wife you are today. There are two categories of people who set you up to be successful or not successful in your relationships. And the interesting thing is this, these two categories of people did not influence you because of what they believed, they may not have been a Christian. They may not have been religious or attended a church. They influenced you not because of what they believed, but because of what they did. The two categories of people who made you what you are today are: Those who've hurt you and those who've love you. Those who hurt you deeply or those who love you profoundly.

When you are continually bouncing up against something you can't get through, go here. If you are counseling someone who is bouncing up against something they can't get through a good counselor will bring them right here. And you know what is so profoundly confusing about this? Many of you, many in our society, many in our country

were hurt deeply by people who had accurate theology; who were hurt deeply by people who believed all the right things; Who were hurt deeply by people who never missed a Sunday in church. You were hurt by people who on the outside looked like fine upstanding citizens. But behind the scenes they just took the life out of you, destroyed your soul. And they set you up for an adult experience that has been so painful you feel like you just limp through life... because you were hurt so deeply.

On the flip side some of you entered adulthood with extraordinary self esteem, with an extraordinary outlook on life. It's because someone loved you deeply. And you know they may not have had their theology down, they may not have been able to find all the chapters and verses, they may not have been consistent in church. But they gave you something that goes far beyond theology and religion – they loved you! It might have been a parent, coach, teacher, maybe even a pastor, or Sunday School teacher but they set you up for success because they just poured into you and for the first time in your life you experienced unconditional love and when you tell your story you tell a story of hurt and you tell a story of love and you tell a story of an individual who spoke directly to your soul.

You husband, you wife, you parent you lead from the doses you received of these two things – hurt and love.

Let me put it this way: The way you've have been treated has more to do with who you are than what you believe.

This is why what Jesus said is so extraordinarily profound. And this is why it is so extraordinarily important that we who say we are His followers get this. This is our best play, this is our best, this is our greatest opportunity. But somewhere along the way there was a shift from Behave - Believe

When Jesus started His movement and when the church started it was all about how you loved. But over time it became all about what you believe. If we would simply do what Jesus did instead of arguing about what He said the world would change. The reputation of Christ followers would change. The influence of the church would change. Believe is easy, it requires almost nothing. But behave... this requires in some cases a whole new world view. Here is what Jesus DID NOT SAY:

A new command I give you: believe correctly.

By this all men will know you are my disciples, if you believe correctly.

Do you know how much time and energy is spent by people arguing and writing about what Jesus meant by what Jesus said. In the beginning it was not about that , it was simple, it was love one another. It was constantly going back to the question: What does love require of me?

You see Jesus knew the heart of men and this is so powerful to me, every time Jesus Interacted with people He interacted with them based on their story. Come on we've all

had this experience. You don't like someone, they get on your nerves, they're irritating and then you hear their story and your heart changes, doesn't it? You know, why does she do that, why does he act that way, then one day you hear their story and your entire attitude changes, doesn't it? Imagine Jesus, every time He interacted with people He did so with their story in mind. And He answered the question in every conversation **What does love require of me?**

Do you know why Jesus seems so inconsistent? Do you know why with some groups He was so fierce, while being so compassionate to another group? One time He told a young rich guy you are going to have to sell everything to get this right and follow Me. To another rich guy He said your close, wait why didn't you tell him to sell everything? Because they are two different people, with two different stories, and two different hearts. And I don't have a list of verses I throw at every person, I listen to the story. And I ask the question: **What does love require of me?**

Can you imagine what would happen in our families, in our communities, in our nation if all of us who've decided that we are Jesus followers would put down our weapons, our theological distinctive, and just ask the question: **What does love require of me?** Because if you would like to see someone change, if you would like to influence their future, you basically have two options: You can hurt them deeply, or you can love them profoundly. It is not what you believe; it is how you treat them. For Jesus said, "by this all will know you are my follower, by how you treat one another."

I want to give you three statements to take it from "what does love require of me" to the next level. How do we live this out? And there is some much more than this, but I have three statements to help us get a handle on this. I want us to get better at not just believing the right things, but treating people in a way that heals their hurt and loves them toward our Savior who loves them so much He died for them. Three statements:

1. Don't do anything that will hurt you.
2. Don't do anything that will hurt someone else.
3. Don't be mastered by anything.

What does love require of you? It requires that you **Don't do anything that will hurt you.** Do you know why? Because your heavenly Father loves you and you can't do anything to hurt you that doesn't hurt Him. Any more than your children can do anything to hurt them that would hurt you. Why? Because you love them. Do you know what love requires of you? Love requires that you never make a moral decision, a sexual decision, an ethical decision, a relational decision, a professional decision, that hurts you. Because when you hurt you, you hurt the One and the ones who love you the most. You say well that is between me and me, no, no it does not only effect you, because you are loved. It is not just your reputation, because you have a heavenly Father, and what hurts you hurts Him because He loves you.

What does love require of you? It requires that you **Don't do anything that will hurt someone else.** I'm talking about your interpersonal relationships. Love requires that

you don't hurt others and here's why. Because everyone you are ever eyeball to eyeball with is someone your heavenly Father sent His Son to die for. Everyone you ever see, everyone you are ever in contact with, everyone you interact with is some that God loves as much as He loves you. Everyone you ever speak to, even your worse enemies, the people who just can't stand you, the people who have hurt you the most are people for whom Christ died. It's tricky because this involves confrontation, this involves confession and confrontation and confession hurt, but sometimes loving the way you need to love is like taking out a scalpel, but it is never like taking out a knife (Andy Staley). Do you know what love requires of you? That you decided once and for all that the filter through which my words will come, the filter through which my actions will come – I am not going to do anything to hurt, betray, deceive, tempt, abuse, another person.

And love requires that you not be mastered by anything. Do you know why? Because whenever you are mastered by something it will keep you from loving someone else. No one should have to compete with your alcohol; No one should have to compete with your porn; No one should have to compete with your prescription drug addiction; No one should have to compete with your anger; No one should have to compete with your temper; No one should have to compete with anything that masters you. Refuse to be mastered by anything because GOD IS YOUR MASTER!

Do you know what love requires of you? Love requires that you get rid of anything in your life that competes with His lordship in your life. Anything! Because you cannot love as long as you are mastered.

So...

Don't do anything that will hurt you.

Don't do anything that will hurt someone else.

Don't be mastered by anything.

And you know what some of you have done as I went through that list? You thought of other people. I wish my husband was here to listen to this message; I'm calling my son to ask him to listen to this on our website... a couple of times. What if we decided to let God take care of them? And we decided, I'm not going to hurt me, and whatever it takes to get to a place where I'm not hurting me any longer, I'm going to go there. I'm going to get counseling, I'm going to get help, I'm going to confess, I'm breaking these habits.

What if we decided: I'm not going to do anything that will hurt someone else any longer. And where I have I'm going to confess and where I'm hurting them and they don't even know it I'm going to confess, it will be a bit painful, but it will lead to healing. And I'm going to confront some people because I have let them get away with things and I haven't confronted them and I haven't loved them because it's difficult to confront, but I am not going to continue so I will confront in order to heal and I will no longer hurt them by remaining silent.

And I'm not going to be mastered by anything.

See here's the deal, this is what Jesus was getting at that we lost sight of, that when His followers, when the church: When we leverage anything other than love, we lose our leverage. And we have lost our leverage in our culture, and we have lost or are losing our leverage in the world. And it's not because of politics, it's not because of republicans, and it's not because of democrats, it's not because of denominations, it's not because of any of that. Many decades ago when the church got into power and the church had control, and the church had the money, and the church had the influence, and the church the ability to persuade politics, and the church had the power to influence legislation, we abandoned love and we began to leverage something else.

But it wasn't always that way, once upon a time there was a handful of Jesus followers and all they had, all they had was love one another. They certainly didn't have all that Christians have today: books, music, radio, television. They had nothing, but they kept backing up into love one another. What if we never lose sight of the intent of the Commander? What if love one another was the filter through which we made our decisions. That is all the early believers had and people did not (feel) coerced (but drawn). Come, come and see - they were drawn. No one is going to push you in and no one is going to push you away. Come and see. Come and see, come and watch us love.

And we know during the early church that people felt guilty not condemned. Guilty because they looked at marriages that were profoundly different; they looked at relationships that were profoundly different; they discovered a work ethic that was profoundly different; and an incredible generosity that was profoundly different. And the pagans at the time felt guilty because they were not living that way, and yet these early believers never made them feel condemned. And if that ever characterizes my life, and if that ever characterizes your life, and if that ever again characterizes the local church, and if it ever characterizes the church in America again we will have leverage. But whenever we abandon love we lose leverage. You cannot preach people into loving Jesus, you cannot preach people into loving each other. You can't preach people out of habits, you cannot preach people out of addictions. You can't legislate people out of habits, you can't legislate people out of addictions, you can't legislate a husband to love his wife like Christ loved the church. None of that happens through preaching or legislation. It only happens when it is seen, and it is so attractive that it is almost irresistible. So, maybe we can be the beginning of a generation that will ask the question in every interaction: What does love require of me. And maybe it will be said of us as it was in the first century: By this everyone will know that we are His disciples, if we love one another and we love the people in this world. And maybe, just maybe, maybe, maybe, maybe we will be a part of the re-branding of Christianity.