

# The Church - One in Love

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] But we're going to turn now to our reading this morning and I'd like you to turn with me if you would to John's gospel and we're going to read together in two places in John chapter 13 and in John chapter 15. Josh is going to be preaching to us again this morning and focusing particularly on these verses in chapter 13 but ranging around this part of John's gospel which we know is the the upper room discourses where Jesus is speaking to and teaching his disciples just before his betrayal and his trial and his death and we're going to read first of all in John chapter 13 at verse 31 which follows on just after Jesus has spoken of the one who's going to betray him and just as Judas has gone out and left the other disciples to do his awful deed and in John 13 verse 31 we read this when he had gone out that is Judas Jesus said now is the son of man glorified and God is glorified in him if God is glorified in him God will also glorify him in himself and glorify him at once little children yet a little while I'm with you you'll seek me and just as I said to the Jews so now I also say to you where I'm going you cannot come a new commandment I give to you that you love one another just as I have loved you you also are to love one another by this all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another then look over to chapter 15 and verse 8

Jesus says by this my father is glorified that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples as the father has loved me so I have loved you abide in my love if you keep my commandments you will abide in my love just as I've kept my father's commandments and abide in his love these things I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full this is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you greater love has no one than this that someone lays down his life for his friends you are my friends if you do what I command you no longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing but I've called you friends for all that I've heard from my father I have made known to you you didn't choose me but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the father in my name he may give it to you these things I command you so that you will love one another amen and may God bless to us his word well Jesus there is speaking really of the foundation of his church isn't he and he is the one upon whom it's founded his way his command and indeed of course his love is its hallmark do open your bibles again to john chapter 13 and do be prepared to turn over to chapter 15 what proves that you belong to something how does one prove that they're british what is what is the mark of being british is it simply the love of queuing is it loving a cup of tea is it a passport or what makes one a glaswegian I have a relative who is a proud glaswegian and he always alludes to the fact that this is proved by his reluctance to spend money a fairly new film of the a-team came out a few years ago and it shows us the team forming they come together and two of the characters bond over a mark of belonging it didn't matter that one of them was trying to steal the other's vehicle and had shot him that went all that all went out the window once they realized that they both had a cherished thing they both had the same tattoo they were both army rangers proud members of an elite group only true members of that crack military unit have the tattoo well what is the mark of belonging to the church how will it be obvious that we are truly god's people last week we looked at something of the nature of the church ephesians gives us an eternal view of god's church paul brings us behind the curtain to see what is going on in the world and why he shows us that the church is front and center in god's purposes for the universe the church is the future god's grand plan decided in eternity past is to unite all things in the person of jesus christ even jews and gentiles hostile enemies could be made one in the person of jesus and having shown us that that has always been god's plan paul then tells us why

people from all manner of tribes and tongues and nations would be joined together in the church and the church then by its very existence would demonstrate to the world and to the heavens that god is glorious in his grace and so the unity of god's people is vital that union sees god's people joined inseparably to christ but also inseparably to one another and so relationships between christians are very important so what is the distinguishing mark of belonging to the true people of god and to the church it's love for one another born out of god's love we read together part of jesus upper room discourse this is the section of john's gospel that sees jesus preparing his followers for his imminent departure look at chapter 13 verse 33 he's just told them that he's soon to be glorified he's talking about his journey to the cross and his resurrection ascension and then he says little children yet a little while i am with you you will seek me and just as i said to the jews soon i say to you where i am going you cannot come the time of jesus departure was upon them and so he must prepare his disciples for what to do when his work on earth was finished he was imminently going to the cross and so from here at the end of chapter 13 all the way through to chapter 16 jesus is preparing his disciples for that departure both by explaining to them what it means and why he's leaving in order to comfort them but also preparing them for their key role on earth in the time ahead when god's spirit would be poured out when the church would be built verses 31 to 38 are kind of an introduction to the teaching that comes in these chapters and so jesus is introducing here some of the themes that he's going to teach one of those themes is love and as we read and as we saw he picks up on it again in chapter 15 there are four headings i want to look at love under this morning four ways in which we see the church's love the foundation of it the focus of it the force of it and the fruit of it we'll see them in chapter 13 but then also we'll look for some help to chapter 15 too so firstly the foundation of the church's love jesus says a new commandment i give to you that you love one another as i have loved you the church is marked by love because without the love of god himself there would be no church god's love poured out in the person of jesus god's love expressed fully in the cross and the resurrection and the ascension of christ is the very means of the church existing a christian is a christian because they've embraced god's love poured out in jesus look at verse 34 there's a command to love here but before we come to the command we must see that the commandment is built upon jesus love for his disciples the command is to love as they have been loved turn over to chapter 15 this is where jesus develops his teaching on love

and chapter 15 verse 9 as the father has loved me so have i loved you abide in my love before anything else a christian is someone who is loved by jesus i'm not just loved by jesus in a casual way or a generic way loved by jesus in the same way as god the father loves jesus the son one of the things that separates christianity from all other religions is that the true god has always existed and has never lacked anything because the god of the bible is triune because he is three persons he has always had within himself perfect relationship so when he created the world it wasn't because he needed people to worship him it wasn't because he needed to be loved and adored it wasn't because he was lonely he already had perfect relationship within himself he created the whole world and everything in it as an overflow of his love a love that's always existed a love that is perfect god has always been love and that has been the case because within the trinity he's always had perfect relationship so verse 9 in chapter 15 as the father has loved me in the perfection of the godhead

Jesus says so have i loved you perfect love has spilled over onto jesus disciples that's what jesus says here and so as jesus goes on to spell out the commandment to his people that they're to love that commandment is rooted first and foremost in jesus loving them so he says verse 9 abide in my love enjoy it stay in it be rooted in jesus love before anything else because that is the foundation of the church's love at home we have an apple tree in our garden and a year ago a storm broke one of the branches off and as it lay on the ground severed from the tree it no longer could produce apples it was good for nothing so it went to the brown bin but other branches produced lots of apples some of them bending under the weight of the apples because there was so much fruit more than we could even use to make apple crumbles for the rest of the year now i'm pretty confident that i'm a contender to be the person in the church that knows least about gardening but even i know that only branches that the only branches that will produce fruit are the ones that are joined to the tree the ones that have broken off will wither and die and produce nothing well at the start of chapter 15 jesus proclaims that he is the true vine and his father is the vine dresser and then he says to his disciples that they are the branches and then he says in chapter 15 verse 4 abide in me and i in you as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine neither can you unless you abide in me jesus is saying that no church and no christian can produce fruit for in this case they cannot love as they ought to unless they are joined to jesus and know his love first and foremost as long as a tree is tended to by a gardener as long as it's watered and cared for then it will grow and as it grows it will grow more branches and in turn they will blossom that's how it is for christians verse 9 as the father has loved me that's the gardener tending to the vine so have i loved you the vine sprouting forth from the branches sprouting forth the branches so any love that we do display is a direct result of the love that christ has lavished upon us the church is marked by love because the foundation of the church is god's love poured out in jesus christ but to understand this a bit further we need to look at the commandment so secondly the focus of the church's love love one another jesus commands his people to be a loving community with their love having a particular focus toward one another jesus tells his disciples that they must love one another and he is talking particularly to his disciples here if you turn back to chapter 15 verse 12 we see the same thing love one another as i have loved you again verse 17 there you'll see so that you will love one another now maybe that's a relief to you

[ 15 : 35 ] oh good i can spend all my time just loving my precious church family maybe that's what comes naturally to you and you think it's a relief that you don't have to bother too much with the rest of the world or perhaps more likely focusing our love on other christians is something that mightn't sit that well with you i know some christians we find that idea very hard maybe you want to spend all your time with the world and perhaps through evangelistic zeal you think the priority is to love those who aren't christians or perhaps just because christians you know are hard work you'd rather invest with relationships out with the church but jesus is clear here he says to love one another as he has loved them it's not just that jesus is talking to the disciples it tells us this but he commands a love that mimics his love for them so it's clear that he is speaking in a narrow sense when he says about who they are to love but of course that doesn't mean we can ignore everything else that the bible says about loving our neighbors paul puts it well in galatians he says do good to everyone but especially to the household of faith love everyone love your neighbor but especially your christian brothers and sisters well from verse 18 of chapter 15 on we see jesus preparing his disciples to be hated the world is against them perhaps that's a clear indication as to why it's so important that we do love one another because what binds us together is also what sets the world against us it wasn't long ago that towards the end of hebrews we were reminded that the church is a place of hospitality even to strangers when other christians show up to our church then of course we want them to have a warm welcome but for us the primary place and the primary people that we will practice the love that jesus is talking about here is with other members of this church we are bound together we talk freely about being a church family and that's a helpful way to talk about it of course we put our family first someone said to me just recently that he doesn't have to think twice when confronted with charity collectors when money is tight though i won't give to your cause because i want to feed my kids we are a church family and it's true sometimes the people who can most wind us up most press our buttons are our families and so that's the case in the church too but just as we still love our human family so we're to still love our church family we don't get to choose our mothers and fathers we don't choose our brothers and sisters and neither do we get to choose our christian brothers and sisters but belonging to jesus means belonging to his church and so we can't think that we can ever truly belong to a church if we're only on the periphery if we're half in just dipping a toe in the water why would you want to be look back at chapter 15 verse 9 it tells us how to enjoy christ's love he has loved us and he tells us to abide in it how do we abide in christ's love verse 10 by keeping his commandments

look at verse 12 the particular commandment that Jesus emphasizes is love one another that's no surprise that he emphasizes that one for he says that the sum of the whole law the heart of the ten commandments is love for God and love for others now it's easy for us to begin to think that commands restrict us that they limit us that they give us less joy than we could otherwise have but look at verse 11 Jesus says these things I've spoken to you that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full do you want to find church a frustrating experience do you want to drift to the edges of church life and feel deflated as a Christian do you want to find the Christian life joyless and wonder why you bother well here's what to do if you want to experience those things keep your distance from your church family or better still don't have a church family have only mere acquaintances that you pass quickly as you arrive as the service begins and brush past as you leave during the last hymn look away when someone turns to speak to you never countenance being involved outside of a Sunday morning don't serve your church family and definitely don't join a group where relationships are formed and require work sometimes hard work and when anyone ever asks you why you're detached respond without grace then you will not have Christ's joy in you and your joy will be empty it is in the church that the love of God for Christians becomes the love of God between Christians and as we embrace this we will know the fullest experience of Christ's love for us and the fullest experience of joy so what does love for one another look like well look again at verses 34 and 35 of chapter 13 the force of the church's love love one another as I have loved you in Jesus love the church doesn't just have a motivation for our love but a model of how to love Jesus says that this is a new commandment that he's giving to his disciples and we might ask what is new about that commandment after all Jesus sums up the whole of the law as love God and love others we're told the same thing in Leviticus to love your neighbor as yourself so we can see in the law what love looks like we can see a picture of God's kingdom and all of its glory with God's values being valued by his people we'll see in there how to love but none of that is new so what is new about this commandment Jesus says to love one another as he has loved them Jesus love isn't just what drives our love his love is a demonstration of the kind of love that marks his people love is to be sacrificial it's costly at the start of chapter 13 before saying these words Jesus has displayed astonishing service to his disciples knowing that he's soon to depart knowing that his agonizing experience

of the cross is upon him Jesus fills a basin of water and goes around his disciples and washes their feet and then he says as he has done to them they are to do to each other lowly service of one another but more than that Jesus foot washing points to his death the disciples would come to understand this in a matter of days Jesus standard of love is not just lowly service but it is his life sacrificed and he echoes it in chapter 15 verse 13 greater love has no one than this that someone lay down his life for his friends so as a church family when we commit to one another as members we're embracing each other and undertaking to love each other in costly ways many of the costs won't come close to giving up our lives maybe there is a day coming when that will be the cost but for now that isn't the level of cost we face but there is still a cost and the cost isn't to be scorned for a young family I'm sure that it can be costly to have a parent out on a Sunday evening at bedtime or out during the week but embracing that cost allows us to foster relationships with others to encourage them to invest in them to love them it's costly to prepare well and lead a growth group week by week it can feel costly at times to persevere in your group when it's hard work it can be costly to be part of a team with someone who isn't shy with a sharp word towards you it can be costly to keep showing up in good time to serve even though others in the team forget or are late it can be costly to be honest and share your struggles with others it can be costly to be the first person on the end of the phone when someone needs help but embracing the cost accepting it is abiding in Christ's love the love of God for Christians becomes the love of God between Christians and that is the way to a joy that's full

I'm tremendously encouraged by all the acts of love that have been happening in our church over lockdown all those who've volunteered to help all those who've persevered in looking after people thoughtful time consuming tangible acts of love happening all over the place it makes me rejoice to be part of this church family Jesus tells us that we are to keep going with loving one another even when it's hard even when it's costly but he doesn't stop there he adds a final slant to this command to love fourthly the fruit of the church's love the fruit of the church's love the church's love for one another has a keen evangelistic edge to it the church's love for one another displays to the world something of Jesus himself we began this morning by asking what is the mark of belonging those two members of the A team were able to embrace each other because they both had the tattoo but marks of belonging aren't just for those who belong the marks tell outsiders that those who have the tattoo are bound together it isn't our distinctive doctrine that communicates to the world that we belong to Jesus it isn't being in the right camp that tells the world that we're true

Christians it isn't that we wear a cross or have a fish on our car look at chapter 13 verse 35 by this by your love for one another all people will know that you're my disciples turn over to chapter 15 verse 8 Jesus says Christians who bear fruit that is Christians who have branches connected to Jesus who bear fruit prove to be Jesus' disciples turn over to chapter 17 the very end of this section as Jesus prays for his disciples look at verse 21 at the end of 1721 the unity of the disciples will let the world know that the father sent the son and that the father loves the world just as he loves the son

[ 28 : 56 ] Jesus tells us that the world will judge whether we belong to him or not by how we love one another the world may be wrong in their conclusion just because we're seen to feel from time to time and how we love our church family it doesn't mean we're not Christians so they may be wrong in their conclusions but as it is here Jesus says that the world will know we belong to him by looking at our love the world will make conclusions about who Jesus is and why he came by looking at whether we have real unity and love for one another again their conclusions may be wrong but as it is Jesus says the world will make conclusions on God's love and Jesus mission by looking at the church so as well as giving you a plan to live a joyless

Christian life here's a plan to ruin the witness of our church to render it useless fall out with each other over trivial things be slow to forgive when someone needs help be unavailable when the leader of the team you serve on has a vision to improve the ministry disagree with them every time without fail when there's someone in your growth group you find hard try to cut them out turn others against them gossip about them when something you don't like happens spread your descent as far across the church as possible get everyone fighting with each other decide not to give to your church family or to serve them it's an ugly picture isn't it we saw last week that the church's existence is a demonstration to the world of God's glorious grace well the church's love for each other only strengthens our witness when we delight to sacrifice for our Christian brothers that testifies to the world about the love of Christ that is in us by this all people will know that you are my disciples and to be a disciple of

Jesus is to be a branch on the vine recipients of Christ's love and receptacles for Christ's love we live in a world that loves to cancel people there's no forgiveness people can go from flavor of the month to national villain in the time it takes to send a tweet one action done years ago can be enough to end a career and threaten your life there's no forgiveness these days instead we live in a world full of self-assertion so now more than ever when the world looks at the church it will be an incredibly powerful thing to see a community marked by sacrifice for one another grace and forgiveness towards one another or to put it in a word to see love

Jesus says by this all people will know that you're my disciples if you have love for one another let's pray father we are amazed that you would love us so that at great cost to yourself you've lavished love upon us love upon love would you work your love deeply within us and then send it pouring out of us to our church family and to the world amen that for them to forgive