

Text: John 13:21-38

Title: "Believe because He taught us to love one another"

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Introduction: Can you remember your great teachers? I have been blessed from an early age to learn from many great teachers. Two that come to mind are my fourth-and-seventh-grade teacher, Margaret Spurrier, and my tenth-grade teacher, Connie Wack. I think I learned the most from these precious sisters in the Lord because they were tougher on their students than other teachers.

I can remember sitting as a fourth-grader in Mrs. Spurrier's class suffering from the hiccups. As I tried unsuccessfully to control my condition, my classmates were beginning to become distracted and to giggle. Mrs. Spurrier did not seem to notice as she continued to write on the board with her back to the class. I raised my hand to be dismissed for some time at the water fountain, but my teacher kept on ignoring what no one else could. Then all at once, Mrs. Spurrier turned around and shouted at me to put my hand down and to wait until she was finished to ask a question. She intended to scare the hiccups out of me and keep me in class, and her plan worked.

Mrs. Wack was the first to try to teach me public speaking. Little did I know at the time how much public speaking the Lord would ask me to do later on. Mrs. Wack entered me into a sermon preaching contest hosted by Bob Jones University, where I later trained for ministry. Then she arranged for me to practice my message in front of my Christian high school during the chapel service.

I was blessed and relieved when I completed that task, but during our postmortem interview, Mrs. Wack sat me down and said to me first: “You were a complete zombie up there!” Evidently, the Lord did not want any “complete zombies” preaching His Word, so Mrs. Wack knew she had more work to do.

The disciples, of course, would have said Jesus was their Great Teacher. John reflects back on a special class time in our passage that happened on the Passover night of the crucifixion. The instruction begins here in John 13 during the Passover meal, it will continue in John 14-17 on the Mount of Olives, where the Lord ends this session with His High Priestly prayer for them, prior to taking them to Gethsemane and asking them to pray for Him.

What topic did Jesus choose to begin this last session with His disciples before His crucifixion? He chose to instruct them (and so also us) on the need for His disciples to love one another. In John’s estimation, the way Jesus taught His disciples to love one another is yet another reason we must believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing have life in His name.

The passage begins with a focus on the Teacher, and then it concludes with a focus on the teaching.

I. The Teacher of love for one another (vv. 21-30).

Illustration: Another great teacher I had is David Beale. He was one of my Church History teachers in seminary. He has written a number of good books on the History of Fundamentalism, on the History of Doctrine, on Baptist History in England and America, and on the Mayflower Pilgrims. He

taught my History of Doctrine and American Church History classes.

I always knew Dr. Beale to be a godly example around campus and in the classroom. But as I have watched his life since those classroom days, I have come to admire his godly example even more. A few years ago, David's wife Mary was taken ill in a debilitating way. Ever since, Dr. Beale has taken up the care of his wife 24/7, making him unable to travel or to continue to teach. The Bible tells husbands to love their wives as Christ loved the church, and Dr. Beale has committed himself to doing that for Mary.

Application: In our passage, Jesus instructs us to love one another the way He has loved us (v. 34). Jesus's love for the church is the example for a husband's love of his wife, and also of a Christian's love for a brother or sister in the Lord. John gives us some details of this last Passover meal that display for us what Jesus's love for us is like so that our love for one another can be like that too.

1. The Teacher of love for one another loved with a troubled spirit (vv. 21-22).

At the beginning of the next chapter, Jesus is going to encourage His disciples, "Let not your heart be troubled." That same word tells us here in verse 21 that Jesus was *troubled* in spirit. True love is always willing to risk a troubled spirit. What causes the troubled spirit of Jesus, of course, is the betrayal of His love by Judas Iscariot. So when Jesus tells us that we are to follow His example of love, He is telling us that we need to be willing to risk the betrayal of those we must love. We need to be willing to endure a troubled spirit when necessary, or we shall not be able to follow the Lord's example of love for one another.

2. The Teacher of love for one another loved as truly human in spirit and in body (vv. 23-25).

In the New Testament, the Apostle John is the author that shows a special concern about the first great heresy of the early church, called *Docetism*. Early forms of Gnosticism were beginning to teach that everything physical, along with the human body, is evil. For this reason, they were beginning to deny that Jesus had truly come in human flesh, asserting rather that Jesus only seemed to be human.

Combating this error, John begins his First Epistle: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life" (1:1). And in his Second Epistle he will warn against false teachers of incipient Docetism: "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist" (2 John 7). John is very clear: to say false things about Jesus Christ is to be a deceiver and an antichrist.

In our passage, John mentions his position at the table in front of the chest of Jesus. They would be lying on their left side, John in front of Jesus but turned away from Him. To ask Jesus Peter's question, John leaned back on Jesus's chest. John gives us these details about his contact with Jesus's human body, because He wants us to know that what He says about Jesus is about a real Jesus who lived in human flesh, not some figment of the imaginations of men. We must put our faith in the real Jesus, revealed to us by authors like John, and reject those false teachers and antichrists who seek to make Him less than He truly was and is.

3. The Teacher of love for one another loved sinners as God's Passover Lamb (v. 26).

At this point of the Passover meal, the head of the table wrapped together the flesh of the Lamb, some unleavened bread, and some bitter herbs, put or dipped them in a dish, and then distributed these morsels of the meal to each of the participants. Jesus did this for all the disciples that evening, so His answer to John in this verse does not point to Judas in particular, but rather Jesus's point is that, whichever one it was who would betray Him, that one would receive a morsel of the lamb just like the rest.

Matthew's Gospel tells us that as Jesus passed out these morsels dipped in their dishes, He issued a solemn warning to His unrevealed betrayer: "The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born" (Matt. 26:24). As each morsel was passed out, the recipient asked, "Is it I?" When Judas asked, Jesus whispered, "Thou hast said," meaning, "You have made the decision; and the decision is still yours."

After the supper, after Judas had left, Jesus will institute the Lord's Table with the third cup and the second half of the unleavened bread of the Passover meal. Judas is not there for that, because the Lord's Table is a remembrance only for New Testament believers. But the sacrifice of the Lamb was offered to Judas. The death of Jesus Christ was for sinners, even sinners like Judas Iscariot. Sadly, Judas left in unbelief with his morsel untouched. He was rejecting the sacrifice of God's Lamb, as others have as well (2 Pet. 2:1).

4. The Teacher of love for one another can see Satan when no one else can (vv. 27-30).

To the disciples, it was their fellow faithful apostle, Judas, leaving to care for the poor or to purchase more supplies for the coming days of feasting that week. Jesus knew

better. Satan had entered into Judas, and addressing now Satan, Jesus instructs him to do quickly what he was about to do. It is like the Lord and Satan are facing off in a gunfight, and the Lord tells Satan to draw as fast as he can. Satan draws quickly, but that was the mistake that ultimately destroyed him.

Bryan Henderson's hymn, "Praise the Mighty King," celebrates this wonderful truth with some beautiful lines:

"To the cross our Lord was nailed and with each blow the darkness failed. Death has lost its sting today, as Christ has giv'n to us the Way.

"From the darkness Satan's zeal has bruised with death the Savior's heel. From a cross of crimson red, our Savior crushed the serpent's head."

Once Satan was gone, the classroom was clear for the teaching of the Teacher of love. Where we have been unable to learn from the Teacher of love, we must recognize that the room has not yet been cleared of Satan and his influence. We need to see our enemy the way our Lord can.

II. The teaching of love for one another (vv. 31-35).

I want us to notice four truths about this teaching of love for one another.

1. Jesus's glory is the goal of teaching love for one another (vv. 31-32). Judas's departure was in one sense the lowest point of Jesus's teaching career on love. One of His prize students did not learn as He had taught. And yet, it is this moment that Jesus calls the "Now" of His glory—now the Son of man was glorified, and God was glorified too (v. 31).

With the events leading to the crucifixion and resurrection of God's Lamb now set in motion, the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, and God the Father were glorified and would be glorified some more. The "some more" glory would be the restoration of the glory that the Son of God had set aside to become the Son of Man (v. 32a; 17:5). Very soon (v. 32b), the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ would give Him back the unveiled glory He had in Himself at the right hand of the Father (Acts 7:55). When we love one another, our relationship is more like that of the Father and the Son.

2. Jesus's absence creates the need for the teaching of love for one another (v. 33). Jesus had also told the Jews, "You shall not find me" (7:34). He did not need to tell His disciples this, for they would be able to find His love in their love for one another, but not without that love.

3. Christ's commandment is the authority of the teaching of love for one another (v. 34). Jesus is not suggesting that it would be nice if we love one another. He is commanding this. That we have fallen short means that we have broken His commandment and rejected His authority. We are His little children in this effort (v. 33). He knows our weakness, but He will never be satisfied with our disobedience. We must love one another to enjoy whatever blessing He has reserved for an obedient people.

4. An indisputable witness for Jesus is the promise of the teaching of love for one another (v. 35). Think of all the unbelievers who would be better convinced to be believers if only we loved one another more. Think of how emboldened our witness would be if we knew better that we were loved by one another. Jesus issues a promise that will unfailingly fix the fact that not many know that we are His disciples. That fix is that we love one another.

Conclusion: As we come to the end of our passage, we find that Peter treats its theme with some neglect (vv. 36-38).

What he really wants to understand is not how to love his fellow disciples, but rather how to convince Christ that he would follow Him whether or not anyone else did. Jesus's plan for following Him was to follow His example of love for fellow-disciples. Peter's plan for following Jesus was to follow Him alone in battle against those who deny His right to be king, to even die in that battle if necessary.

But though it was often the hard way, Peter did learn what truly following Jesus's example entails – to love one another. In fact, he became one of the Teacher's teachers of love for one another: "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently" (1 Pet. 1:22). May the Lord continue to patiently teach us that we might learn to love one another like Peter.

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching