



Resolutions 4

Resolved: To Love Your Neighbor

In Resolutions 3: Resolved to Walk with Jesus, we discussed the metaphor of the vine. In the Old Testament, Israel was commonly referred to as a vine, but one that continually produced bad fruit. Jesus called upon this imagery from the Old Testament to make an important point. A Jew's association with the vine of Israel is not what saves them. Rather, it is a Jew's personal connection to God. Jesus calls Himself the True Vine because, being Himself God, if you are connected to Him, you are truly saved.

Our connection to the True Vine is evidenced by the fruit we produce. True born-again Christians will produce good fruit, a metaphor for good works. If connected to the vine, we will follow the commandments and moral guidance of the Bible. Failure to do so is perhaps evidence of a false connection, and Jesus warns us that bad branches will be cut off from the Vine.

In Resolutions 4: Resolved to Love Your Neighbor, our final part in the series, we look at what it means to truly love our fellow man in our words and actions. What does a Christian response to the world look like?

BELONG

Start the group with an opportunity for community. We want this to be a place where the body of Christ can **belong** by sharing their lives with one another in genuine fellowship.

- Any updates on current resolutions made for the New Year?!
- What are some things the group can be praying about or praising this week?
- Any lingering thoughts or questions from the previous teaching last week?
- How do you think the Church treats the rest of the world? Good or bad?

BELIEVE

Move into the relevant Bible passages and read along together. This is where the body of Christ can learn together to **believe** in Jesus more and love Him better.

Christians in the United States are many times seen by those outside the Church as some of the most judgmental people on the planet. In many cases, this assessment of the Church is accurate. Like all people, a Christian's natural inclination can be quick to judge in response to people who do not look or act like us. However, followers of Jesus are called by Him to live not like those of the world, but to demonstrate love towards others. In fact, Jesus says it is this specific characteristic by which the world will understand that we are His disciples:

John 13:35 (ESV)

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The world needs to see that we have love for one another. If we are not demonstrating this love, then we need to evaluate our heart and take the steps necessary to foster love in us. How do we love others then?

John 15:12-17 (NIV)

¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷ This is my command: Love each other.

The Father is the Source

God Himself is the source of all love. To know the Father is quite literally to know love. We cannot say that we know God and yet not have the love of God in us. John essentially says this verbatim in his first letter:

1 John 4:8 (ESV)

⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because *God is love*.

John, especially in his Gospel, speaks of the Father's love several times and is a common theme of his theology. As the Church we rightly emphasize the love we should have for the world, but many times we lose sight of the source where this love is drawn from. The New Testament paints a clear picture that the Father's love for us is that source. Further than this, it is the Father's love of the Son that Jesus wishes for us to emulate:

John 17:26 (NKJV)

²⁶ And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, *that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.*”

Jesus’ prayer is for the Father’s love to reside in His Church. The love the Father has for the Son is radical in a way that is not fully comprehensible to us. John says that the Father has loved the Son before the foundation of the world. He even loved the Son when He was forsaken on the Cross. Jesus is giving us the opportunity to share in this radical love and to show it to others. Only through our connection to the Father through Jesus can we demonstrate a love such as this to others.

The Son is the Example

Jesus’ strength came from His connection to the Father. By looking at the life of Jesus, we can see what a life lived connected to the love of the Father looks like. As Jesus was God Himself in the flesh, He represents the perfect example of what God’s love looks like in practice for regular people like us. We can’t be perfect like Jesus was, but He is no less the template by which we should judge our actions.

How does Jesus, the Son, show His love for others? Jesus tells us that there is no greater love than for someone to lay down his life for his friends. The love of God is sacrificial in nature. To truly love someone means letting go of our preferences and what makes us comfortable. Others see and know the depth of our love often by how much is sacrificed.

Jesus is the ultimate example of sacrificial love in that He not only commanded it, but He lived it by offering Himself as the ultimate sacrifice:

Romans 5:6-8 (NKJV)

⁶ For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous person; though perhaps for the good person someone would even dare to die. ⁸ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Before you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, you are considered an enemy. However, even though none had accepted Him as the Son of God, not even His disciples (one of which denied Him three times), Jesus still chose to die for us. Jesus said it was great love to die for a friend, but to die for an enemy? That is what Jesus did. That is what a real connection to the Father, the God of love, looks like.

Jesus also says that to love Him is to obey Him. We demonstrate our connection to Jesus by the fruit that we produce. Jesus modeled this as well for us. Jesus did everything that the Father commanded of Him without question. Once again, we can look to the Cross as the ultimate obedience, but everything that Jesus did on the Earth was the will of the Father obeyed. It might sound strange to tell a friend to obey you. Jesus is our friend, yes, but God the Father is, well, our father. A parent loves you in that He tells you how to live properly and if we love our parent, we do what they say. God is both friend and father in His relationship to us.

Our Fruit is Love

Often, we have described fruit as good works, but this phrase is meant to be a catch all for everything that God commands of us. Fruit is not simply action, but who we are. If we are connected to Jesus, and through Jesus the Father, our heart should change. We should be doing good deeds because Jesus has changed our heart to one that desires to love others. Love is perhaps the purest fruit we can produce and affects the other fruit that we produce in our life. The world has many ideas of what love is, but Paul tells us what love actually is:

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)

⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

You've probably heard it described like this before, but love is not primarily an emotion, but rather an action. Most of Paul's language when defining love speaks of things that describe a person's actions rather than a person's feelings. We are to love regardless of how we feel and how we love should not be determined by how we feel at any particular moment. God's command to love does not have any qualifiers attached to it. The answer to how we should treat any person or any group is love. This is how the world will know God is real. They will know God exists because the Church exemplifies a lifestyle that has no other explanation than that God resides in us.

You cannot be a Christian and hate your neighbor. This applies to all areas of life whether that be your family, your friends, your enemies, or your politics. Loving others can be painful, but a tried-and-true sign that you walk with God is that you walk with a limp. More often than not, the ones who have walked with God have the scars to prove it.

BECOME

Wrap up the discussion by asking some closing questions. We can **become** more like the people God is calling us to be by reflecting on what we've learned and applying it.

- Why is it important to understand God the Father as the source of love?
- Outside of the Cross, what are some examples of how Jesus modeled love?
- Are you known for your love? If yes or no, why?
- What area of life do you particularly struggle to be loving in?
- Who are some people you can think of that need to be shown more love? This can be people you know personally or broad groups of people in the world in general.