



Tombstone Love

Sermons Presented By Stephen McIntyre
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A friend asked a newly married man a question. He asked the man, "How's everything going? Are you and your wife getting along all right?" The man said, "Well, my wife loves me about like a tombstone." The man seemed sorry for that answer. He had thought that the newly married couple were getting along just fine. He said: "So, she loves you like a tombstone, I'm sorry to hear that." The newly married man said, "Well, actually that's good, because a tombstone stands up for you when you are down and out. My wife is always there for me."

In this message, we will study "one another." Do you realize how many times in the Bible it says "one another?" We're going to discover a lot about "one another." Today we're going to find out about some loving relationships.

Love was so lacking in Jesus' day that He had to give them what is called a "new" commandment. It is issued by the same Person who wrote the original commandments. The same finger that wrote those ten laws on the two tables of stone back on Mount Sinai points to the heavens with a summarization of those Ten commandments. Look in **John 13:34**, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**" Here Jesus mentions it twice: "one another."

God wants loving and lovable Christians. God want us to love one another. There's nothing wrong with that, is there?

There was a big lightning and thunder storm. Frightened by the clamor of thunder in the middle of the night, a little girl came out of her bedroom into her daddy's bedroom and cried, "Daddy, can I get in bed with you?" Holding her securely in his arms he explained that she had nothing to fear. "God is going to take care of you because you are one of His children. He loves you. He won't let anything hurt you. You can go back to bed. She said, "I know God is going to care for me, and He loves me, but right now, Daddy, I want somebody with skin on." I will tell you, friends, that we, as Christians, are to be God's love with skin on. That's what we are to be. Representatives of the love of Jesus Christ.

Do we really love each other as Jesus wants us to love each other? We ought to. There once was a sign on a convent where the nuns live in southern California. The sign read: **Absolutely No Trespassing Violators Will Be Prosecuted to the Full Extent of the Law.** Signed, "The Sisters of Mercy." Is that brotherly love, or sisterly love?

Look back in **John 13:35**. It says, "**By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.**" That is how you know if you are a disciple and that is how everyone else knows if you are a disciple or not. If you love one another.

Do you know what kind of Christian you are? Do you know how much you love God? Can you measure or gauge what kind of Christian you are or how much you love God? Your love for your brother, your love for your sister is the yardstick of your love for God. That tells you how much you love God.

It's like an old wagon wheel. As the spokes in a wagon wheel approach the hub, each spoke gets closer to the next spoke. And when people come closer to Jesus Christ, who is the hub and the center of life and hope, they are drawn towards each other in brotherly and sisterly love. Together they journey toward heaven, toward Jesus!

The great lesson that Christ taught by His life and example was that of unity and love among brothers and sisters. This love is the token of discipleship, the divine credentials which the Christian bears to the world. "**By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.**" Love to God and man must be a heart principle in the soul; for there is no other way that the Christian can become a partaker of the divine nature. Look at **John 15:12**. Jesus says, "**This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.**" How did Jesus love His disciples? He died for them. That's the quantity of love we are to have for each other. So that is His commandment. That is the kind of love that Jesus wants to see in the home between husband and wife, between parents and children, between brothers and sisters in His church, and to share in the world. That's true love!

Now how does God love us? God loves us with an unconditional love. Look at **Romans 5:8**, "**But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**" While we were still sinners, He died for us! He didn't wait for us to become good. He loved us even when we were bad! That is unconditional love.

A small boy questioned his daddy, "How much does God love us?" The father said: "God loves us with an unconditional love." The little boy said, "What is that?" The daddy said: "Do you remember when the

neighbor boys got a new puppy last Christmas?" "Yeah, I remember that." "Do you remember how they used to tease that puppy? They would even throw sticks and even small rocks at it. Do you remember that?" Yes." Do you remember how the puppy would always greet them with his tail wagging and try to lick their faces?" "Yes." "Those contemptible boys did not deserve that puppy's love but the dog loved them anyway. That is unconditional love." That is how God loves us. Jesus came to this world. Men threw sticks at Him. They threw rocks at Him. They hit Him with sticks. They even killed Him, but Jesus loved them anyway. That is unconditional love. Isn't that great!

That is how we ought to love one another. As God has loved us. In a sense, Jesus' commandment that He talks about here is mostly copied. Look back in **Leviticus 19:18**, **“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”** Let's think about what Jesus says, because Jesus is the author of the law in the Old Testament, that He reiterates in the New Testament.

Jesus tells us to love our neighbors. Jesus also tells us to love our enemies. Probably because our neighbors and our enemies are often the same people. Shame on us! We ought to be friends with our neighbors. Love your neighbors and they won't be your enemies. Do you know that the problem with our modern world is that we have become a neighborhood without becoming a brotherhood. We build our houses within feet of each other. We're close together with our houses but are we worlds apart with our hearts? Shame on us if this is so!

Look at **John 15:9-13**, **" As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. 10 "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. 11 "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. 12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. 14 "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. 15 "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. 16 "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. 17 "These things I command you, that you love one another.”** That is a beautiful section of the Bible, right there.

When new people walk in the church, it's heartwarming, isn't it? What would keep them coming back? It is probably not because of doctrinal issues. It is probably not because of the beautiful sanctuary. It is because they find genuine love and generosity here. They find the love of Jesus here. They find the love of God's people here. And on the other hand, more folk walk out the back doors of the church because of the coldness of so called Christians who should be loving each other rather than some theological controversy.

John 15:13, **“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.”** And **verse 17**, **"These things I command you, that you love one another.”** Are you ready to lay down your life for a brother or sister? Think about it! Listen to this true story: In September 1992, Jack Kelley, foreign affairs editor for USA Today, witnessed firsthand the famine in Somalia. One particular starving boy touched Kelley: "Our photographer had a grapefruit, which he gave to the boy. The boy was so weak he didn't have the strength to hold the grapefruit, so we cut it in half and gave it to him. He

picked it up, looked at us as if to say thanks, and began to walk back towards his village. We walked behind him in a way that he couldn't see us. When he entered the village, there on the ground was a little boy who I thought was dead. His eyes were completely glazed over. It turned out that this was his younger brother. The older brother knelt down next to his younger brother, bit off a piece of the grapefruit, and chewed it. Then he opened up his younger brother's mouth, put the grapefruit in, and worked his brother's jaw up and down. We learned that the older brother had been doing that for the younger brother for two weeks. A couple days later the older brother died of malnutrition, and the younger brother lived. I remember driving home that night thinking, I wonder if this is what Jesus meant when he said, 'There is no greater love than to lay down our life for somebody else.'

There's another verse in **Romans 12** that amplifies the meaning of Jesus' text on love. **Romans 12:10**, **“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another.”** That's loving kindness! That is what is languishing here in this world. We need more kindness toward each other. More love toward each other.

And what type of love does He want?

It is Silence when your words would hurt.
It is Patience when your neighbor's curt.
It is Deafness when the scandal flows.
It is Thoughtfulness for another's woes.
It is Promptness when stern duty calls.
It is Courage when misfortune falls.

Romans 13:8 says, **“Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.”** You know something, that is very special.

An incident is told about two soldiers who had been released from a Siberian prison camp following World War II. "We did our best," said an officer, "to send the men back to their countries as fast as possible, but many were still there when winter threatened to close up the port." Only a limited number could board the last small boat. Among those waiting to be transported were two who had been close friends all through the war. One of them was selected, but the other seemed doomed to remain behind. An order was given that those who were leaving could take only one piece of luggage with them. All other luggage would have to stay. So the two bade each other goodbye but then one of them said, "You know, I am emptying my suitcase." So he emptied his duffle bag of his prized souvenirs and his personal belongings and told his friend to "hop in my bag." Then he carefully lifted the bag on his shoulders, and boarded the boat with his friend as his single, most precious possession. This man truly loved his neighbor as himself. Would you do that for your friend?

Look at **1 Peter 1:22** in your Bible. **“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart.”**

Come with me to **1 John 4:7,8**. It says, **“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.”** Isn't that a beautiful verse?

We need to love as God loves us. Love is the distinguishing characteristic of a true Christian, the trademark of brotherhood. The trademark of sisterhood. We need to honor one another. **Romans 12:10** says, **“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another.”** That indeed is the qualifying trademark of the true Christian. Mother Teresa once said, *“I have found the paradox that if I love until it hurts, then there is no more hurt, but only more love.”*

You have heard of the fable of the wolves and the dogs. It seems that the wolves were afraid of the dogs because there were so many dogs. So the wolves sent out a spy to observe the dogs. The returning scout said, “It is true that the dogs are numerous and some are very big. I know they all hate us wolves, but as they came marching by, I observed that they were all snapping at each other. Every dog hates every other dog with all his heart. So don't fear the dogs for one minute because they hate each other.” The Bible applies the truth of that allegory to Christians. **Galatians 5:14, 15**, **“ For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 15 But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!”** What a horrible and devastating thought. To be consumed by one another because of resentments, jealousy and worldly ways! Beware of the dogs!

1 John 4:11, 12, **“ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”** I find that absolutely inspiring!

Our second last text. I hope this always will be the watchword of God's people everywhere. **1 Thessalonians 3:12**, **“And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you.”**

And now a final verse. Look in **Zephaniah 3:17**, **“The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.”** When you get to heaven, they are going to rejoice over you with singing. Isn't that great! And He is going to quiet you with His love. Like a tombstone, God always stands for you when you are down. His love is always there for you, and I pray we will continue to grow in love - in our families, to our brothers and sisters and to our neighbors. Only the precious Son of God, our loving Savior Jesus can instill within us the capacity to love as He loves. Let us truly and deeply desire to be just like Jesus!