

HEALTHY CHRISTIANS - PART 3

Healthy Relationships

Dr. Derek Morris

Preaching passage:	John 13:34-35
Subject:	What unconditional love for one another as Christ has loved us demonstrates to the world
Complement:	that we are His disciples
Exegetical idea:	Unconditional love for one another as Christ has loved us demonstrates to the world that we are His disciples.
Homiletical idea:	Love others as Jesus loves you.
Purpose:	To encourage my hearers to ask God to fill them with His unconditional love so that they can love others unconditionally as His disciples.

Introduction

We are surrounded by unhealthy relationships. This handsome young man, Scott Peterson, was found guilty of killing his wife and unborn child. These two little boys, Alex and Derek, were found guilty of killing the father with a baseball bat. This young mother, Andrea, admitting to drowning her five children in the bathtub. And then there's this fellow, (Michael Jackson), and whatever he did or didn't do, he is certainly not the model of healthy relationships.

We are surrounded by unhealthy relationships. And not just out there. Reported on the media. We have unhealthy relationships in our own lives, within our own families. Between husbands and wives. Parents and children. Work associates and neighbors.

We are surrounded by unhealthy relationships. But in the midst of those unhealthy relationships, God wants you and me to enjoy healthy relationships. Do you believe that? As healthy Christians, as healthy followers of Jesus, our Lord and Savior, God wants us to experience healthy relationships.

The secret for healthy relationships is found is a portion of Scripture that we will consider

this morning. A command that Jesus gave to His disciples and also to us. We are going to examine that command of Jesus today, and then consider what it would look like in real life.

The portion of Scripture that we are going to study today is recorded in the Gospel of John. These are the words of Jesus to His disciples, and also to us. And if we are to be healthy Christians who enjoy healthy relationships, we must not only hear these words of Jesus, but we must also live these words day by day.

Jesus is speaking to His disciples in the Upper Room. He has just instituted the Lord's Supper, and will soon be taken by an angry mob, put through the mockery of a trial, flogged, and nailed to a cross. But before leaving the Upper Room, Jesus turns to His disciples and says, "A new commandment I give to you..." Does anyone know what that new commandment was? The words of Jesus are recorded in John 13:34. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have love you, that you also love one another."

Some students of Scripture have suggested that this isn't a new command at all! Some suggest that this is just a restatement of a command given over 1400 years earlier through the prophet Moses. Hadn't the Lord instructed Moses, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"? Lev 19:18.

So is this really a new commandment? The answer is "YES"! This command of Jesus to His disciples IS a new commandment...not just because Jesus says so, but because of WHAT Jesus said. Let's read it again. "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have love you, that you also love one another."

The love that is spoken of here is agape love. This is the highest form of love. Agape love is selfless love. Self-sacrificing love. No one had ever demonstrated the unconditional love

of God so completely before. But Jesus fully revealed the perfect agape love of God. God is love, the apostle John tells us. And Jesus could say, “If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” Jesus was a perfect reflection of God’s unconditional love. And He said to His disciples, and also to us today, I want you to love each other unconditionally, just as I have loved you.

In fact, unconditional love is the sign that we are indeed disciples of Jesus. Listen to the words of Jesus in John 13:35. Having just said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have love you, that you also love one another,” Jesus continues by saying, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have agape love for one another.”

So what does unconditional love look like? Well let’s look at two case studies from the life of Jesus. Two case studies of how Jesus loved His disciples.

Jesus’ relationship with His disciple John demonstrates that when we have unconditional love, we love people in spite of their short-comings. John describes himself as the “disciple whom Jesus loved.” And there is no doubt that Jesus did love John....unconditionally. But John was far from perfect. John had many short-comings. Let me name just two. John had a bad temper. He had a short fuse. He was a hot head. However you want to say it, John had a personality defect. On one occasion when a Samaritan village did not welcome Jesus, John and his brother James said to Jesus, “Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?” Luke 9:54

Now maybe these disciples knew something that I don’t know, but as I read the story of Elijah, he prayed for fire to come down and consume the sacrifice, not the people! John has a personality defect. He has a short-coming...he has a bad temper. And Scripture says that Jesus

rebuked John and his brother and said, “You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them.” Luke 9:55-56

And that wasn’t John’s only short-coming. On another occasion, according to Mark, John and his brother James asked Jesus if they could sit one on the right hand and one of the left hand in glory. I’d say that was a bit conceited. What do you think? Scripture records that the other disciples were “greatly displeased”, but maybe because they wished that they had asked first.

John, along with his brother, and the other disciples, had many short-comings. And yet Jesus loved them unconditionally. And He said, ““A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, as I have love you, that you also love one another.”

In his book, *The Ten Commandments of Marriage*, Ed Young shares an example of unconditional love, of loving a person in spite of his short-comings. Apparently, a much loved grandmother was celebrating her 50th wedding anniversary. One of her daughters asked her, “Mama, what is the key to the happiness and joy that you and Daddy have known through the years?” “Well,” she began, “when your daddy and I first got married, I made a list of ten things I would overlook about his personality—things I just didn’t like. I made a promise that when any of those ten things came up, I would overlook it for the sake of marital harmony.”

“Granny,” one of her granddaughters excitedly replied, “please tell us that list. Tell us what those 10 things were!” I imagine Grandpa bowing his head and bracing himself for a list of his major short-comings! And then Grandma replied, “Well, honey, to be honest, I never did write them down. But every time your grandfather would do something to make me hopping mad, I would think, “Lucky for him it’s one of those ten things!”

Grandma was modeling unconditional love, wasn't she? She was following the command of Jesus to love others as Jesus loved her. Just like Jesus, Grandma was loving Grandpa in spite of his short-comings. And as a result, she had enjoyed 50 years of healthy marriage relationship.

So what does loving unconditionally mean? It means loving people in spite of their short-comings. But that's not all. Loving unconditionally also means loving people in spite of their failures. Consider Jesus' relationship with Simon Peter. Simon Peter was always opening his mouth, and all too often he was putting his foot in it. He would have done well to pray with the Psalmist, "Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth. Keep watch over the door of my lips."
Psalm 141:3

His worst failure happened on the night when Jesus was betrayed. You remember the story. Judas came and betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Jesus didn't have to go with that mob. He could have called ten thousand angels to come to His aid. But He loved us so much that He willingly laid down His life. He said, "I will lay down my life, and I will take it up again."

And in the midst of a mockery of a trial, in the midst of physical and emotional abuse, Jesus suffered the worst injury of all. One of His own disciples publically denounced Him and said that he didn't even know Jesus. We can read the account in Matthew 26:69-75.

"....."

Judas had also denounced Jesus, and Judas went out and hanged himself. And it would seem that Peter might do the same. But later we find Peter in the Upper Room. The apostle Paul tells us that Jesus appeared to Simon Peter before He appeared to the rest of the disciples. And John records that Jesus reaffirmed Peter's call to be a disciple by the sea of Galilee.

Why didn't Peter end his life in despair, like Judas? Apparently, he caught a glimpse of the unconditional love of Jesus. And that unconditional love, that agape love, gave him hope. In my favorite book in the life of Jesus, *The Desire of Ages*, we read these words about those agonizing moments following Peter's denial of Jesus: "Since the death of Christ, Peter had been bowed down with remorse. His shameful denial of the Lord, and the Saviour's look of love and anguish, were ever before him. Of all the disciples he had suffered most bitterly." DA 793

Simon Peter experienced first hand the unconditional love of Jesus. He discovered that unconditional love continues in spite of our short-comings. And unconditional love continues in spite of our failures.

Years ago, over 30 years ago in fact, a song became a #1 hit on popular radio stations. It was entitled "Tie a yellow ribbon round the ole oak tree." Does anyone here remember that song? Why did it become a #1 hit just a few weeks after being released? It was a pleasant tune. It was easy to remember. But more than anything, it was a touching story about unconditional love. A story about loving someone in spite of his failures. According to the song, a husband was on his way home after 3 years in prison. He had written to ask his wife if she would forgive him and welcome him home. Do you remember the sign that she was supposed to give to show that she still loved him in spite of his failure? That's right. She was supposed to tie a yellow ribbon round the ole oak tree! According to the lyrics of the song, the ex-prisoner was taking a bus toward home, and he told the bus driver to slow down as he passed the old homestead. He explained to the bus driver that he was looking for a yellow ribbon. If it wasn't there, he would just "stay on the bus, forget about us, put the blame on me." Remember the words?! By this point, everyone on the bus is looking for the yellow ribbon! And what do they see as the turn the

corner? A hundred yellow ribbons round the ole oak tree! Some folklore historians say that the song was based on an old civil war tale. And perhaps that's true. But we all know that the story has repeated over and over again...sometimes with yellow ribbons, and sometimes without them. People have chosen to love as Jesus loves, to love unconditionally, to love others in spite of their failures.

You say to me, "Pastor Derek, I know that Jesus loved people unconditionally. He loved people in spite of their short-comings. He loved people in spite of their failures. But I can't love like that!" And you're right. You can't love like that. And neither can I. Such unconditional love is a gift from God. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul, recorded in Romans 5:5. "The love of God, the agape love of God, the unconditional love of God, has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

And do you know what happens when we given God permission to fill our hearts with His unconditional love, by the Holy Spirit? Do you know what happens? We experience joy! When we love people unconditionally, when we love people in spite of their short-comings, when we love people in spite of their failures, we experience joy! Listen to the words of Jesus, recorded in John 15:9-11. "As the Father loved, Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love." Verse 11: "These things I have spoken to you that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full."

Why are we filled with joy? Because we are reflecting the beautiful character of our loving Jesus. We are reflecting the beautiful character of our loving heavenly Father. We are loving others as Jesus has loved us.

This is the secret of healthy relationships. This is the identifying characteristic of healthy

Christians...they love unconditionally.

Do you have someone in your life who has demonstrated the unconditional love of God? Perhaps a parent, or a teacher, or a dear friend? Someone who has modeled healthy relationships, where people love unconditionally. If you have been blessed by such a relationship, I want to give you an assignment today. Take one of the yellow affirmation and appreciation cards in front of you, and write a note to that person. Perhaps she is sitting next to you. Perhaps he is at home, unable to come to church. Perhaps she lives in a far away city. Take time to write a note of affirmation. Say “Thank you” for that unconditional love.

If that person is here this morning, or lives here in the area, I want you to come up at the close of the service and get a flower to give to him, to give to her. Don’t wait until a funeral to give flowers. Give them now. Give them today. Say “Thank you” for the gift of unconditional love.

And if you’re sitting here this morning thinking, “I don’t have anyone like that. I don’t have anyone who has loved me unconditionally.” I want to remind you that there is One who loves you unconditionally. The same One who calls you to healthy relationships where you love others as He has loved you. Jesus loves you unconditionally. And He reflects our Heavenly Father’s unconditional love. If that’s you today, I want to invite you to write a yellow card to Jesus, and thank Him for His unconditional love for you. And then after the service, come up and get a flower to remind yourself that Jesus loves you unconditionally.

And let us go from this place committed to experiencing healthy relationships, where we love others as Jesus loves us, healthy relationships where we love each other unconditionally.