

## "Prove It"

We live in a culture that demands proof. Gone are the days when someone could simply say something, and people would believe it. We don't believe *words* as much as we do *actions*. We need proof. If someone says, "I'm going to be there for you when times are tough," and that doesn't happen, we don't believe them the next time that they tell us how good a friend they are. If a person promises to do something and doesn't do it, then we don't believe them the next time they say they will do something. If a person says one thing and then does another, we remember that their actions speak louder than their words, and that what they *do* proves what they believe.

We want proof. People who don't go to church will hear Christians say "God loves you," and the only way they will ever believe that statement is true will be when Christians *prove* it to them. If we don't *show* love to people, even to those who don't know us, then we aren't *proving* that we are one of Jesus's followers. As the old song says, "They'll know we are Christians by our love."

The setting for our scripture is in the Upper Room; it was the night that Jesus met with his twelve disciples for his last supper with him. After sharing the bread and cup, John records that Jesus washed the feet of his disciples. All of them. He wanted them to know what it meant to be great in God's Kingdom—to be a servant. And after *showing* them what he meant, Jesus told them that one of the persons, whose feet he had just washed, would betray him; it was Judas. Once he was exposed, Judas left the Upper Room, and Jesus continued to teach the remaining disciples with the words I read from the Bible.

Immediately following our text, we find the account of Jesus predicting that Peter would deny him three times. Sandwiched between the story of Judas leaving to betray Jesus, and Peter declaring an unending devotion to Jesus, we hear Jesus offer a new commandment and also the proof of how someone will know that a person follows Christ.

Understanding what was happening when Jesus spoke the words from our passage help us to understand them better. These verses are easy to remember, but harder to live.

Jesus knew that his time with them was short; he realized that Judas was helping to have him crucified. So Jesus took the opportunity to teach them a great lesson; almost like a person making one last request before he died, Jesus gave them a *new* commandment.

Didn't they already know how important it was to love people? It is easy to love the people who love us. We love our family; we love the people who are nice to us; we love the people who are like us, who share our values. In light of Judas' departure to betray his master, Jesus told the remaining eleven disciples to love one another, as he had loved them.

He had just shown them how important it was to *serve* one another, but that was not enough. Serving people, helping them, showing humility is not enough. We have to love people like Jesus loves us, even those who don't like us.

For me, this truly is the *hardest* commandment; Jesus called it a *new* commandment. This love of which he spoke was more than a *feeling*; it was an *action*.

Some think that what it means to be a Christian is to keep the Ten Commandments. The word "Christian" actually means, "little Christ." So to act like a Christian means to act like Jesus. On the night before he died, Jesus gave his disciples a *new* commandment; being a follower of Jesus is more

than keeping the Ten Commandments. The mark of a follower of Jesus is to love one another, as Jesus has loved us. Earlier, he had told people that the greatest commandment was “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength, and the second greatest commandment is like the first one: love your neighbor as yourself.” Now Jesus was raising the bar a little higher by giving a *new* commandment: to love one another as he has loved them. We are asked to love people like Jesus loved people.

Individuals will ask, “How can we know that you are one of Jesus’ followers?” Some will say, “My picture is in the church directory.” Big deal; anyone can be photographed. Others will comment, “I was baptized at Hampton Baptist.” Not enough; water doesn’t make someone a Christian.

Jesus said, “Everyone will know that you are one of my disciples, if you have love for one another.” That is the test. This proves that the love of which Jesus speaks is more than a feeling. People *notice* how we act. We communicate all the time what is important to us. What we do, what we say and even *how* we say it sends messages. I can say that my family is important, but my behavior has to *show* it so that I can become believable.

Some might think that if they follow the Golden Rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” then they will be acting like a Christian. While following the behavioral mandate makes a person feel better and have a good reputation, treating people like you’d like to be treated could simply be indulgent, meaning the motivation could be selfish. If we decide to do something nice for someone hoping that they will return the favor, then we are not exhibiting love; we are brokering kindness. There is a huge difference between these two statements: “Here is what you should do” and “Do what you saw me do.” While Jesus offered the Golden Rule, he said, “They’ll know you are my followers if you love as I loved you.”

In his first letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul said, “If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don’t love, I’m nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. If I speak God’s Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, “Jump,” and it jumps, but I don’t love, I’m nothing. If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don’t love, I’ve gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I’m bankrupt without love.” (I Cor. 13:1-3)

We may think that we can keep the Ten Commandments, follow the Golden Rule, serve others by washing their feet, or perform any number of good deeds, but the bottom line is this: the only way people will know that we are one of Jesus’ disciples is if we show people love in the manner which Jesus showed his love for us.

He served his disciples the bread and cup and then washed their feet, showing that to be great in the Kingdom of God, a person has to serve. But let us all never forget, while it is important to serve others, the reason people will know that we are followers of Jesus is when we show them that we love them.

We are asked to show our love for God by how we love other people. Want to demonstrate that you are a follower of Jesus? Prove it by loving others as Jesus loves us.