

The Love of Christ Compels Us

Andrew Marriott

So many recent changes in society, including many that directly challenge and oppose God's standards that have been the foundation of our culture and society for thousands of years:

- Same-sex Marriage; Abortion; Euthanasia; Gender Ideology
- Government and Media increasingly intolerant to the Christian worldview
- Rising levels of fear, anxiety and mental health issues in society
- Largely influenced by social media along with societal pressures
- Greatly intensified through the Covid pandemic: lockdowns, mandates, restrictions

When we consider the impact on our communities, we recall these words from 2 Corinthians 5:14: **... the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.** (NKJV)

Compels is to do what? To live a life not of self-interest for ourselves, but of serving others and ultimately being totally committed to Christ by living for him and being reconciled to Him.

And then these words of Jesus in John 13:34-35: **A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.** (NKJV)

Jesus didn't say we must, "agree with each other" but we must "love one another". Our effectiveness in reaching others is directly impacted through our ability to love one another.

And where does that love need to be demonstrated more than anywhere else? Through the church!

The High Priestly Prayer (John 17:1-26) is the Lord's Prayer for the disciples, and for us, today.

Jesus intercedes as our High Priest before his Father's throne:

- for Himself - that He may be glorified
- for the apostles - that they might be sanctified
- for the church - us, here, world-wide, today

What does this mean for the church in the community?

A speaker commented recently that people today are feeling dislocated. And he didn't mean that they are feeling out of place geographically (although many still are) – he was referring to people feeling dislocated physically, emotionally, relationally and spiritually.

People are tired ... hurting ... anxious ... alone – feeling that no one is listening ... at the end of themselves! It may not be evident on the outside, but if we spend enough time with them we'll get to know what's really happening inside their hearts.

A generation afflicted by loneliness'' ... recent statement by Nicky Gumble (Alpha founder):

A leading UK retail chain commissioned a survey by a team of psychologists into their key customer demographic: Millennials (those born between 1981 and 1996, and also known as Generation Y).

They interviewed 800 people. The results were so startling that they did not believe them. They interviewed another 800 and got the same results.

The results portrayed an alarming picture of an increasingly lonely and lost generation. More people live alone than at any other point in our recorded social history. On average, Millennials spend six-and-a-half hours a day on social media. Many who were interviewed considered work to be something they fitted in between social media and lunch!

They found people had a very large number of 'friends' but an increasing sense of loneliness.

There is nothing wrong with social media, but it is no substitute for real, face-to-face friendships. We were created for friendship with God (Genesis 3:8) and with one another (2:18).

We should also acknowledge there are more older people living alone – often with no visitors for days on end. And ... did you know there's now a Minister for Loneliness in the UK government?!

Jesus' prayer, recorded by John, gives us some obvious advice that we need to be reminded of regularly – that people are watching us, to see how we relate to them, to each other and to the world! It is in our demonstration of love for each other that the world will know that he is God!

There are six marks of the church that we can find in John Ch 17:

Joy | Holiness | Truth | Mission | Unity | Love

1. Joy

John 17:13 - "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves." (NKJV)

One key to joy is following sound (or true) doctrine. David wrote in Psalm 19:8:

"The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart" (NIV)

and then in Psalm 119:14:

"I will rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches" (NIV)

Another key to Joy is Fellowship. John wrote in 1 John 1:3b-4:

"... truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full" (NKJV)

Fellowship with the Father and fellowship with other Christians go together, and leads to an inexpressible joy that the world cannot possibly provide. Joy is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, and goes way deeper than momentary happiness or fleeting worldly pleasures. Many who have served alongside our brothers and sisters on missions in developing countries, or in places where there is persecution, often comment on the joy evident in the believers they meet. Yet, it is in God's nature to impart this fruit of the Spirit to believers everywhere – regardless of their circumstances (1 Peter 4:12-13):

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. (NKJV)

2. Holiness

John 17:14-16 - "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world." (NKJV)

In praying that His heavenly Father would keep us safe from the evil one, Jesus is calling us to be a 'holy' people and to 'follow after' holiness (1 Peter 2:19):

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light (NKJV)

When Paul addressed the church at Corinth, he referred to (1 Corinthians 1:2):

... those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (NKJV)

Holiness is found not in being perfect (all have sinned) but through being ‘sanctified’ – meaning to be set apart for special use. ‘Sanctify’, like ‘holy’, is from a Hebrew root meaning ‘separate’.

We are all saints here in this place. It’s not a status we confer only upon those who have passed away, or who have achieved high levels of spiritual office, but all of us who have put our trust and faith in Jesus are saints – now – set apart to belong to Him!

3. Truth

John 17:17 - “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” (NKJV)

Would agree that we’re living in the last days? Can you see what Paul wrote from prison to Timothy about happening today? (2 Timothy Ch 3):

v1-2: ... in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves ...

v5: ... having a form of godliness but denying its power ...

v7: ... always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

v13-17: ... evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction ... (NKJV)

One of the biggest lies today is that truth is relative. That your truth can be true for you even if I have a different truth – one that I know to be true.

As believers in and followers of Jesus, we can be confident that the Holy Spirit will guide us into truth – its not something that the world can claim for itself as Jesus Himself – as the word, sent by God - is truth. We can discern God’s truth through studying and knowing God’s word.

Jesus had taken his disciples aside to explain what will happen to Him, and to them, and promised the Holy Spirit to make known to them the things of God and guide them in all truth. (John 16:13):

However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come. (NKJV)

We can’t expect those who don’t know Jesus, or abide in Him, to discern the truth.

John 8:31-32 - “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

John 16:13 - ... when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

John 18:37b-38 - (Jesus to Pilate) “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?”

1 John 3:19 - My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth. And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

1 John 5:6 - This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth.

3 John 1:3 - For I rejoiced greatly when brethren came and testified of the truth that is in you, just as you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

4. Mission

John 17:18-19 – “As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.” (NKJV)

So, we, the church, are to look **inward** and find **joy**, to look towards **Christ** and be **sanctified** (made holy), to look to the **Scriptures** and find **truth**.

Jesus was sent into the world on a mission by His Father. In turn, we, as believers, are sent into the world on a mission by Jesus, to make His Father known. In the same way that Jesus' prayer for the disciples was not limited to them only, this passage is similar to the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Every Christian is therefore a missionary whose task is to communicate God's truth to others.

The word 'mission' originated in 1598 when Jesuits sent members abroad and is derived from the Latin 'missionem' - the 'act of sending' or 'mittere', meaning 'to send'.

Three decades ago, NZ was the world's foremost mission sending nation, per capita. Today, the Pasifika communities are rising up within NZ and overseas and Latin America is rising up as a major sending region.

God wants to use each one of us for His Kingdom purposes, if we are willing and available to go ...

Into our community | To the nations | To the unreached | To the ends of the earth

We are ALL sent! Every one of us is called to be a disciple, and to make disciples! No exemptions!

Not sure where to go, who to support or how you can serve? Start with prayer!

Just let's careful not to go cross-culturally until we have first learned to minister (serve) among our own community and people, and how to minister in another culture.

5. Unity

John 17:20-23 – “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.” (NKJV)

When Jesus prayed for unity he already knew that we would have our differences and so asked for that great unity that should exist among us- his followers - in spite of them. But our unity cannot be found in our organisational structures. We already know that doesn't work. All they do is create a hierarchy and rules that hinder rather than promote fellowship.

Neither do we need conformity, where everyone in the church is alike.

So, let's reclaim and affirm diversity – the kind that God created and that reflects His nature!

There should be the greatest diversity among Christians. We know from God's word that one day there will be people of every tribe and tongue worshipping Jesus.

Not the immoral and unbiblical diversity that the world seeks, but diversity of personality, interests, lifestyle, and even methods of Christian work and evangelism. It's this that makes the work of the church, and its mission, interesting, not dull. Our rich unity in diversity is a demonstration of the character of our God.

The unity Jesus prayed for is not an organisational unity or a unity achieved by conformity, so how do we achieve it? The answer is found within the Godhead as we just read (v 20-23).

Paul points to the true unity we find in the body when he wrote to the Corinthians, (1 Cor. 12:4–6):

There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all.
(NKJV)

So, our Unity is found in:

- Our identity as brothers and sisters in Christ
- Our identity as part of the global church
- Intentional relationships through close fellowship and community
- Serving together as God's co-workers.

As Christians, we are called to be united in our love for each other as Christians regardless of our colour, nationality, ethnicity or language.

We are all one in Christ Jesus because of His blood shed for us on the cross, through which we have full forgiveness of our sins, and because of His glorious resurrection through which we have full assurance of our eternal hope.

6. Love

John 17:25-26 – “O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. 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.” (NKJV)

Love is the one mark that gives meaning to the others, the one without which the church cannot be what God intended. After writing about love in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul looks at the Christian life in v13 under the categories of faith, hope, and love—faith that looks back to the cross, hope that looks forward to the Lord's second coming, and love that looks about at the world and other Christians. Paul concludes that while all three are great and abiding virtues, nevertheless "the greatest of these is love."

It is with the same thought in mind that the Lord Jesus Christ, having spoken of joy, holiness, truth, mission, and unity in his high priestly prayer, concludes by a focus on love.

What does love for God the Father lead to?

Joy! Because we rejoice in God and in what he has so overwhelmingly done for us.

What does love for the Lord Jesus Christ lead to?

Holiness! Because we know that we will see him one day and will be like him; therefore "everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

What does love for the Word of God lead to?

Truth! Because if we love the Word, we will study it and therefore inevitably grow into a fuller appreciation and realization of God's truth.

What does love for the world lead to?

Mission! We have a life-changing message to take to our communities and the world!

Where does love for our Christian brothers and sisters lead us?

Unity! Because we are bound together in love as Christian community.

Final thought: How can we embrace our community or the nations unless we can first embrace each other?

Life Group discussion questions:

1. How would you define 'joy' in a biblical sense? Is there anything that can hinder us from receiving this fruit of the Spirit? Is it necessary to endure persecution and suffering in order to receive exceeding joy?
2. If it's only possible for those who believe and abide in Christ to know and discern God's truth, how then can we proclaim truth and counter 'relative truth' in the 'marketplace'?
3. One interpretation of the Great Commission is that we are to make disciples 'as we are going' – meaning that our neighbourhood, workplace, college or university is our mission field. So how far do we need to go to be 'on mission'?
4. What does it mean to love one another with the same love that God has for His Son, Jesus? Is it possible? What does it mean in the context of 'church'?