

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

INTRODUCTION

Before Jesus returned to heaven He gave His disciples a new commandment to obey:
“Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another.” John 13 v 34
He then told them the result of obeying this command:
“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” v 35

Love for other Christians is to be the hallmark of Jesus’ followers. It is to be their distinguishing feature in a world that desperately needs their example.

We know we need to love, as Jesus commanded, but how we express that love is often a point of disagreement between Christians. Does showing unconditional love mean that we have to accept any type of behaviour from other Christians? What about our responsibility, given in 2 Timothy 4 v 2 to “correct, rebuke and encourage” each other, how do we do that in a loving way? How do we love when we disagree with other Christians, or when one person’s words or actions are causing hurt or harm to another?

Jesus gives us the key to putting His command into practice in the phrase “AS I HAVE LOVED YOU”. If we are to love each other in anything more than words, we need to see how Jesus showed His love and to follow His example in our own daily lives.

The four studies focus on particular characteristics of Jesus’ love :

- * Loving through giving up.
- * Loving through serving.
- * Loving through forgiving.
- * Loving through obeying and dying to self.

However, as these studies only examine parts of Jesus’ life and teaching, I would suggest that in addition to doing the studies each person reads through the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, to get an overview of Jesus’ life. This is the best way to see how He showed His love for us. There are many modern translations and paraphrases of the Bible which make reading flow more easily. I suggest that you use one of these to read the Gospels, and then return to a recognised translation to do the studies. The New International Version was used in their preparation.

We may not think that the world sees the Christian church as a body of people who love each other. In fact, all too often it is the divisions and disagreements that are presented for the world to see. The task of changing this seems too much for our small group of people, but remember that although Jesus left only 11 disciples to start His church, they were given the same Holy Spirit who indwells each of Jesus’ true disciples today.

By ourselves we can do nothing of eternal value, not even love each other, but through the Holy Spirit God works with each Christian individually. Let each of us listen to His guidance and choose to use His strength to love other Christians AS JESUS LOVED US. That is our part, the rest is up to God who can do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”!
(Ephesians 3 v 20)

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

SUGGESTED HYMNS AND SONGS

Theme A New Commandment Australian Hymn Book 571

STUDY 1

Australian Hymn Book (AHB)

- 170 At the Name of Jesus.
- 173 I will sing the Wondrous Story.
- 522 O Master let me walk with Thee.
- 137 Jesus Thy Blood and Righteousness.

Psalm Praise

- 49 Empty He Came.

Ring of Praise

- 145 Meekness and Majesty.
- 171 Tell my People.
- 189 Let there be Love.

STUDY 2

AHB

- 172 It passeth knowledge.
- 206 Thou didst leave Thy Throne.
- 561 Kneels at the feet of His friends
- 401 This is my Will.

Psalm Praise

- 62 Blessed is the Man.

Ring of Praise

- 135 The Servant King.
- 216 The Servant Song
- 227 Prayer of St. Francis.

STUDY 3

AHB

- 257 My Song is Love Unknown.
- 320 Breath on me, Breath of God.
- 519 Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.
- 492 Lead us, Heavenly Father, lead Us.

Psalm Praise

- 114 Bless the Lord O My Soul.

Ring of Praise

- 50 Father I thank You.
- 160 Amazing Love.
- 183 Father Welcomes.

STUDY 4

AHB

- 531 Trust and Obey.
- 489 O Jesus Christ, Grow Thou in me.
- 497 Just as I am.
- 299 I know that my Redeemer Lives.

Psalm Praise

- 123 I love my Lord.

Ring of Praise

- 111 This is Love.
- 182 Father make us One.
- 269 Welcome to the Family.

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

STUDY 1: LOVING THROUGH GIVING UP.

Read Philippians 2 v 3 - 11

- 1) What was Jesus' status in Heaven?

- 2) From Colossians 1 v 15 - 17, give some extra things we are told about Jesus' position before He came to earth.

- 3) What did Jesus give up when He left Heaven and became a man?

- 4) What did Jesus make Himself, and what nature did He take? (Philippians 2 v 7)

- 5) What did Jesus achieve through giving up His rights as creator of the universe and becoming human? See Colossians 1 v 19 - 22.

Jesus was prepared to give up everything for us. He didn't do it because we were good or lovable. In fact we were dead in our sins when Jesus came. He came because of His great love, to remove our separation from God and to give us life.

- 6) **(Personal: to think about, not necessarily to share)**
What am I telling God I can't give up?

Is there someone I am refusing to help, not for their good, but for my comfort?

Jesus didn't avoid confrontation. He gave up His own rights but was strong and uncompromising in protecting God's name. Refer to His encounter with the money-changers in the temple in John 2 v 13 - 17.

- 7) What was Jesus' reaction to the corruption that He found in the temple courts?

Where can I stand up for God, even at a cost to myself?

What will it cost and am I prepared to pay that cost?

- 8) In what practical ways can we support other Christians?

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

(Personal: to think about, not necessarily to share - but try to put a name against at least two)

Who does God want me to : pray for?
speak or write encouragingly to?
share my time with?
share my money with?
share my food with?
use my talents to help?

What else can I do?

It is important to make contacts with people who don't know Jesus, but we must remember that other Christians are our brothers and sisters in God's family. Jesus has told us that it will be by the way we love each other that the world will know we belong to Him. So let's not be so busy reaching out that we don't have time for other Christians. There are times when each of us needs help, correction and encouragement.

- 9) Philippians 2 v 8 points out that Jesus' obedience brought Him suffering and death on a cross. From verse 9, what further result did this bring to Him?
- 10) What was the result for us of Jesus' obedience? See Romans 8 v 17
- 11) What has Jesus called us to do in Matthew 16 v 24?
- 12) What promise does He make to us in John 14 v 3?

There are times when we have to stand up for God's truth and God's name, just as Jesus did. There are other times when God asks us to give up our rights and entitlements out of love for Him and to show love for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

*We need God's wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to show us what we should do in every situation we face. To receive this we need to spend time praying and reading God's word regularly, and we need to **ask God to give us a readiness to give up our rights just as Jesus did.***

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

SUMMARY - STUDY 1

Loving through Giving Up

Colossians 1 v 16 tells us that Jesus Christ created all things; things in Heaven and Earth, visible and invisible, thrones or powers, rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him and in Him all things hold together.

No-one on earth can even contemplate having the power that belonged to Jesus in heaven, and yet Philippians 2 v 6 & 7 says that Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

WHY? Because He loved us. He saw we were alienated from God, and He came to reconcile us by His physical body through death, and to present us Holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation. (Colossians 1 v 21, 22)

Jesus had the right to stay in heaven with God. He had never sinned and He was not alienated from God, but He chose to give up His own rights and position with the Father out of love for us. He came because of our need, not His own. "This is love; not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins". 1 John 4 v 10.

What am I prepared to give up for others, or more to the point, what am I NOT prepared to give up? What rights am I grasping onto? Jesus, the creator of the universe, made Himself NOTHING - where is my bottom line? Where do I say "Lord, you can have all the rest, but not this, you can't ask that of me" ?

What was the result of Jesus' humility and humiliation? Philippians 2 v 9 says "Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name."

Society tells us that we need to stand up for ourselves and fight for our rights. Jesus says we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16 v 24). In Romans 8 v 17 we see that the result of obeying this is that we become heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ if we share in His suffering in order that we may also share in His glory. Jesus never pretended that life as His follower would be easy. The world will treat us as it treated Jesus, but we don't look to the world for our future reward. Jesus said that He is going to prepare a place for us, and He promised that He will come back and take us to be with Him. (John 14 v 3)

What is more important to you, your rights here on earth, or your future place in Heaven?

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

STUDY 2: LOVING BY SERVING

Read John 13 v 1 - 17

- 1) What does v1 say Jesus showed to His own?
- 2) At what part of the evening did Jesus choose to start washing the disciples' feet?
- 3) Why do you think He didn't act sooner?

The job of washing the guests' feet was usually done by a servant as they arrived.

- 4) Why did Peter object to Jesus washing his feet?
- 5) Considering this happened just before Jesus was to die on the cross (v1), what sort of washing is Jesus talking about in v8 when He says "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me"?
- 6) In v13, what does Jesus point out to the disciples about His position and theirs?
- 7) What quality did He show by His preparedness to wash their feet?

(Personal, not necessarily for sharing)

Where do you need to show this quality in your relationship with God and with other Christians?

Jesus seems to be rebuking the disciples for their lack of this quality, when He tells them they should also wash one another's feet. (v14)

- 8) How particular are you about choosing where you will serve God?

Do you decide what is reasonable and suitable or are you prepared to serve wherever God directs?

- 9) How do we know where God is directing us to serve?

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

From your own experience, could you share a way God has directed you in the past?

10) From Matthew 25 v21, what is God's attitude to how we do the "little things"?

11) How can we copy God's attitude to the little things He is asking us to do?

(Personal, not necessarily for sharing)

What trivial or unimportant task is God asking you to do at present? When will you do it?

Sometimes the best way to serve someone is NOT to do it for them, but to teach them to do the thing themselves.

12) How do we know when to teach, when to allow others to do it themselves and when we should do it for them? Give some guidelines.

Is there somewhere that you taking the easy way out by **doing** instead of **teaching**?

Following Jesus' example is not easy.

- * *We need wisdom to know when to act and when to allow others to learn by acting themselves.*
- * *We need to be prepared to be faithful by doing the little things wholeheartedly, out of love for God and for others.*
- * *We need to serve willingly, not grudgingly.*

All of this is only possible through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Is He present in your life? If you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Saviour He is there, even if you aren't conscious of His presence.

Will you listen to His guidance as He takes God's word and makes it meaningful to the daily situations you face?

Will you let Him make you more like Jesus? He won't force you, it has to be your choice.

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

SUMMARY - STUDY 2

Loving by Serving

Serving others can either be done willingly or grudgingly. When it is done willingly as a gift it is a blessing to both the servant and the one who is served. Grudging service blesses neither.

The disciples weren't guilty of serving grudgingly, they had refused to take on the role of a servant at all. The job of washing everyone's feet was a menial task, usually carried out by a slave as the guests arrived. As no servants were present, none of the disciples had volunteered to fill in. After all, it was not their job.

Jesus had waited until the meal was being served, giving them all plenty of opportunity. Then He gave them a lesson in humility and in serving. John 13 v1 tells us "He now showed them the full extent of His love." It seems strange that the phrase is used about a task as trivial as washing feet, particularly as very soon after this the depth of Jesus' love was shown very graphically on the cross. But Jesus had greater lessons to teach. They would need to understand their need for the total spiritual cleansing which Jesus' death on the cross would provide. They would also need to understand that, as His witnesses, they would have to constantly come to Him with the problems and sins of their day to confess and be forgiven, to "have their feet washed".

In verse 15 Jesus tells the disciples that He has set them an example that they should do as He has done for them. He reminds them that they are not greater than He, and His example was to give up His heavenly position and come and serve.

Jesus' lesson is the same to us. He gave up His position in Heaven to come and serve humanity. What service do I consider to be too low or too trivial and unimportant for me to do?

What is my attitude towards the areas in which I am serving at present? Am I serving willingly from a heart of love, or grudgingly with resentment? How can I change resentment into loving service?

How well do I try to do the "little things"? As well as I can, or is "near enough good enough"? In Matthew 24 v 21 Jesus quotes the master as saying "you have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness."

In what ways are you following Jesus' example of humbly serving, out of love for your fellow Christians and for the one who showed us how to express that love?

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

STUDY 3: LOVING BY FORGIVING

Read Exodus 21 v 24

- 1) What limit does God impose when seeking retribution for a wrong?

- 2 a) How does Jesus change this teaching in Matthew 5 v 38-41?

- b) Jesus appears to be contradicting God's principle from Exodus. Explain why He is not contradicting it, but is building on it.

Read Matthew 18 v 21-35

- 3) What was Peter's suggestion in verse 21, and was it a reasonable proposition?

- 4) What was Jesus' reply in verse 22?

Did He mean it literally, and if not, what did He mean?

In Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18 vs 23 - 35):

- 5a) What were the relative sizes of the two men's debts in verses 24 & 28?
(your Bible footnotes might give you an idea what these represent in today's terms)

- b) What does this say about our sin against God, compared to others' sin against us?

- 6a) How do the two men's responses compare when they were asked to pay back their debts?

- b) Compare the master's response in verse 27 with the first servant's response in verse 30 when both are asked for more time to pay.

- 7) What happened to the first servant when the master found out how he treated his own debtor?

Read Isaiah 64 v 6

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

- 8a) How does God view even our righteous acts when they are done apart from Him?
- b) What is the result of our sins?

Sometimes we feel that our own sins aren't as bad as those committed against us. It's only when we realise how great an offence our sins are to God that we understand how great is His forgiveness to us.

(Q's 8 & 9 are personal, for you to think about, not necessarily to share)

- 8) Do you really believe that your sins could only be removed through the death of the blameless son of God, creator of the world? Read Romans 6 v 23.

- 9a) What is the worst thing someone has done to you?
- b) Is there anything that you feel you can NEVER forgive?

Think about how much God has forgiven you and at what cost.

- c) Will you ask Him to show you how to forgive the unforgivable? *He's already done it for your sins.*
- 10) What is the result to you if you don't forgive another? Matthew 18 v 35

Although we can only be reconciled to someone who has hurt or wronged us when there is genuine repentance on their part, Jesus doesn't put any limits or conditions on our forgiving them.

God's love is unconditional and He calls us to love others the same way. When we hold onto unforgiveness we become bitter and we suffer even more. We are to forgive out of obedience to Jesus' commands, and when we do, we find that we are the ones who benefit.

- 11) From Romans 5 v 8 what state were we in when God forgave us?
- 12) Do we have to wait for others to admit their sin before we:
- a) forgive them
- b) are reconciled to them? See 1 John 1 v 9

Remember sometimes we may feel wronged when the other person is unaware of having caused hurt. They may not be prepared to apologise for something they feel they have not done. This is another reason that we shouldn't let our forgiveness be limited by other people's reactions.

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

SUMMARY - STUDY 3

Loving by Forgiving

If we are honest we will admit that forgiving is not our natural reaction. When we have been hurt we want to retaliate, adding an extra bit of punishment to compensate for our “pain, suffering and mental anguish”. God knows us and the way we react. Back in Exodus 21 v 24 God limited His people’s retribution to “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot”. The Jews were restricted to exacting a punishment which was equal to the original injury. They were not to add extra to it.

Peter proposes to forgive his brother, but seeks Jesus’ guidance on where to draw the line. This sounds reasonable, because although we may be prepared to forgive someone who has wronged us once, we are much less inclined to forgive them if they do the same thing to us a second or third time, let alone a seventh. By Peter’s standards and by our own, Peter was being generous in his proposal to forgive seven times.

However, as often happens, Jesus has a different way of looking at things. He says Peter should forgive without a limit: Seventy-seven times rather than seven. Jesus then goes on to tell the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant. He reminds the Disciples (and us) how much we have sinned against God, that no matter what we have had done to us by others, it does not compare to the debt we owe God. We often lose track of just how serious our sin is in God’s eyes. We have a hierarchy of sin: murder is worse than theft, which is worse than lying, which is worse than being impatient. God says that we have all fallen short of His glory and that the wages of sin (“big” and “little”) is death. Romans 6 v 23. Jesus also says that because God has forgiven us so much, if we deliberately refuse to forgive another, we are asking God to treat us in the same unforgiving way. (See Matthew 18 v 35)

There will be times when the person we are needing to forgive does not want to be forgiven, either because they don’t feel that they have harmed us or because the harm was deliberate and they have no wish for reconciliation. It’s true that reconciliation can only be achieved if both parties want it, but Jesus put no conditions on our forgiveness. He knew that if we hold onto unforgiveness it will turn to bitterness, and this will bring us further hurt and damage, probably more than the original wrong did.

This is not what Jesus wants for His children, so He tells us to forgive others; for His sake and for our own sake as well as for the sake of our fellow sinners. Jesus whole mission on earth was to make it possible for God to forgive our sins, but God didn’t wait until we were sinless before He loved us. Romans 5 v 8 tells us that “God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us”. Jesus’ words on the cross ring out across the years “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” If Jesus can forgive those who crucified Him, He can make it possible for us to forgive EVERY wrong that has been committed against us. Will you ask for His enabling to forgive the unforgivable?

To forgive does not mean that we accept sin or that we remove the consequences of another’s sin. That is not God’s way with us. He forgives us our sin and guides us through the consequences of those sins, but He usually doesn’t take those consequences away. He knows that we need to learn the consequences sin produces. We are not doing our children or anyone else a favour if we remove the consequences of their actions. Allowing a smaller hurt now may prevent a much greater hurt later on. (See Matthew 5 v 29 - 30.) However we don’t have to leave them to suffer alone. We can encourage them to ask God to show them how to use those consequences for good, for them and for others. That’s God’s way too; see Romans 8 v 28.

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

STUDY 4: LOVING BY OBEYING AND DYING TO SELF

We are sometimes told that Jesus came to remove the old restrictions and replace them with His message of love.

Read Matthew 5 v 17-19

- 1) What does Jesus say about His relationship to the Law and the Prophets?

- 2) What does He say about our attitude to God's law and our responsibility towards others?

Read Matthew 22 v 37-40

- 3) What did Jesus say was the first and greatest commandment?

- 4) What did He say was the second?

- 5) Do you think that we can do the second without doing the first?

Many people try, and not all those who unselfishly help others are Christians, how do you explain that?

- 6) What is the difference between Matthew 22 v 39 & John 13 v 34?

It's quite easy to say that we should love each other, but actually doing it is not so easy.

Read John 12 v 24 - 28

- 7) What happens to a kernel of wheat that stays above the ground? v 24

- 8) What has to happen to the kernel before it can produce many seeds?

- 9) How does this relate to a Christian?

- 10) In John 14 verses 15, 21, 23, 24 & 31 what does Jesus say about love and obedience?

- 11) What does this mean for us, how can we obey Jesus? (See John 15 v 4 & 5)

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

Use the final question as a personal assessment of your current priorities.

Jesus tells us we must “die to self” if we are to be fruitful for Him.

12) What are the most important things in your life? List at least 6 things that are important to you.

Considering each one of them, is it bringing you closer to God, or is it becoming between you and God? Some activities do neither, but if none of your important activities bring you closer to God, you need to consider the next 2 questions very seriously.

Do you need to rearrange the order of things in your list?

Is there anything that needs to be removed?

Being totally honest, where did spending time with God come last week?

Where will you place it tomorrow?

It's true that we can't change the entire Christian church by ourselves. But God is not asking us to change the church, He is asking us to change our own attitudes and actions. He asks us to obey Him through loving each other. If each Christian obeyed God in this important area, we would see both the church and the community transformed.

Jesus makes it clear that there is no substitute for obedience. If we love Him we will show it by obeying His commands. Are YOU prepared to obey Him in this, regardless of what others do?

LOVE - AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

SUMMARY - STUDY 4

Loving by Obeying and Dying to Self

John 13 v 34

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another"

Jesus was not discounting the commandments that God had already given. God made us and He knows what is best for us. His commands are "for our good and not to harm us" Jeremiah 29 v 11, although we often consider they are restricting us rather than protecting us. Jesus made His attitude plain in Matthew 5 v 17-18 when He said "Do not think I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished".

However, Jesus did give a new command to His disciples. One of loving each other as He loved them. This is deceptively simple, as we have seen when we studied different aspects of the way Jesus showed His love for us. It is simple and yet incredibly difficult because the only way we can obey is by following His example in John 12 v 24 & 25. Here Jesus tells us that we have to be prepared to die to all our own wishes, hopes and plans; to "die to self", if we are to be used to bring others to know Him: "if it dies, it produces many seeds". This goes much further than yielding our rights, serving and forgiving. Jesus says our love for God must be so strong that, by comparison, all other loves are hatred. He wants us not to be so caught up with the things of this world that we aren't ready to leave them. When we belong to Jesus our lives are, for the present, here on earth. But our future is with God in Heaven.

Someone who is dead no longer has any control over their property or even what happens to their body. They may have left a will, but it is the living who will decide whether the instructions in the will are carried out.

When we have died to self we hold our life here on earth lightly. It is as though we have already handed control over to God. But then we can have confidence that the one in control of our lives knows the future and loves us enough to have given up His life for us. Are you prepared to die to your ambitions and to hand your life to Him to direct you wherever He chooses?

His command to love one another was to achieve another purpose as well. John 13 v 35 "By this all will know that you are my disciples if you love one another." Christians are not known for their outstanding love for each other. Could this be part of the reason other religions are proliferating and growing in our community? We become so busy trying to straighten out perceived errors within the Christian church that we have no time or energy left to give to the people who don't know Jesus at all. So often when outsiders look at the Christian church they see division, anger, criticism and intolerance. What do they see when they look at my life or yours?