



Jesus Face Times With His Disciples

[John 13:34&35]

The Issue: *Doing Evangelism Jesus' Way*

At a Next Generation Summit, the moderator introduced me with these words:

"Dr. Bob is going to share techniques on how to reach your children, grandkids, and others for Jesus." I appreciated the introduction. But, when I got up, I said, "I'm not here to give you techniques. I'm here to give a radical paradigm shift; to change *everything*



about the way you share Jesus. That's what Jesus did with his disciples in the Upper Room. These are words of a man on his deathbed. We should take them seriously.

Some 30 days later, the One who said he came into the world to seek and to save the lost will give his final words before leaving this world: his disciples are to go to the whole world seeking the lost and pointing them to the Savior. But now, in the Upper Room, he tells them and us how to do it.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” —Jesus, *John 13:34&35 NIV*

A RADICAL PARADIGM SHIFT ON EVANGELISM

Jesus didn't say, “By this will everyone know that you are my disciples *if* you tell them how much I love *you*...or how much I love *them*.” Two thousand years later, we still do it wrong. We think that the best evangelism is button-holing people and sharing with them a gospel presentation based on how much God loves us or them. Don't get me wrong: we should share. St. Paul wrote, “And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” [Romans 10:14&15]



People have to *hear* the gospel. But Jesus says to his disciples, “All men will know you are my disciples *if* you love *one another*.” In other words, before they can *know* the gospel, we have to *show* the gospel. Before they will believe the power of the Risen Savior, they should *see* the power of the Risen Savior in us. The gospel is *caught* more than it's *taught*. The best evangelism is not in what we *tell* non-believers, but how we *love* believers. Jesus was clear about that: “**all people** will know you are my disciples if...you love one another (meaning other disciples).” For most folks, seeing is believing.

Isn't that exactly what 1 Peter 3:16 says? “But set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to those who ask you to give a reason for the hope you have. But do it with gentleness and respect.”

- First of all, “*set apart Jesus as Lord*.” Our Lord says in John 13:34, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.” He says, “*As I have loved you, so you must love one another*.” He defines what love

looks like. The dictionary doesn't define it. Nor does our culture. Nor do we. He, and He alone does. It's his command to us as our Lord!

- Secondly, we have to be ready to give an answer to **"anyone who asks."** Notice, we are called to give answers *after* they ask questions. We don't barge into their lives with gospel answers to questions they aren't even asking. How rude and presumptuous is that?
- Thirdly, they are asking us because they *see* something in us they find to be unusual, inexplicable and even otherworldly: **"the hope you have."** They see in us an uncommon life, an unnatural response to hopeless things (and we know that hope is not unnatural as much as it is supernatural). It compels them to ask us for the reason, "What makes your life so different?" And now we can give them an **"answer"—with gentleness and respect."**



IRRESISTIBLE EVANGELISM

That's what Jesus is saying to his disciples in the Upper Room: Let "all people" (the watching world) see you love one another and it will attract them to your Faith like an irresistible magnet. Listen to Luke's description of the Early Church: "All the believers were together and had everything in common.

They sold property and possessions to give to everyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of *all* the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." [Acts 2:44-47]

Sure, they did street evangelism. There were signs, wonders and miracles. But, mainly, they loved each other the way Jesus loved them. And **"all the people"** saw it. And, it was because of what the watching world saw them *do* (and not just what they heard them say), they gained the favor of **"all the people"** and the church added converts every day.

PEOPLE NEED TO SEE IT AGAIN

Here's the crisis today: the Church in America isn't growing daily. 4,500 Protestant churches closed their doors in 2019. Attendance has dropped by 15% since the COVID pandemic. 47% of Baby Boomer attenders have dropped out of church in the past 13 years. 65% of church kids exit the church after they go to college. Only one-in-five high schoolers has ever attended church.



In 1972, 92% of Americans said they were Christians. In 2022 the number had dropped to 64%. The number of "nones" (no religion) and "dones" (done with religion) is accelerating at a rapid rate. There are lots of reasons why, but the two main ones are: 1) hypocrisy in the church, and, even worse, 2) what they experience in churches had little relevance to their everyday lives.

People are watching us, and what they are seeing is not compelling. Yet, most of those turned off to church still have a high view of Jesus himself. According to the largest survey in the history of the *Barna Research Group*, 60% of American teens want to know more about Jesus. Maybe that's why the *Chosen* film series on the life of Christ is so wildly popular among Gen Zs. Church won't win them back. But Jesus can, if they see him in our lives. And if we love one another the way he loved us. And, if we love them the way Jesus loved others when He was on this earth.



SO, WHAT IS LOVE? AND WHO GETS TO DEFINE IT?

Here's a typical dictionary definition: "an intense feeling of affection." Almost every definition in our culture has to do with "feeling." We hear it all the time, "I fell in love; I fell out of love." But C.S. Lewis, in his book *The Four Loves*,

wrote that love is more about "behaving" than it is "feeling." He added, "Don't waste time wondering about whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this, we find out one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him."

Perhaps one of the best descriptions of love comes from *The Fiddler on the Roof*. Tevye asks Golde if she loves him. She replies, “For twenty-five years I’ve washed your clothes, cooked your meals, cleaned the house, given you children, milked your cow. If that isn’t love, I don’t know what is.” But even sensible, practical Golde doesn’t get the last word on love. The Bible does:

- **God is love.** [1 John 4:8 & 16] St. John doesn’t say, “God loves.” Rather, “God *is* love.” His very essence is love. Do you want to know what love is? Then know God. Study his Person and acts.
- **Jesus fleshes out love.** [Colossians 1:15; John 1:18, 4:17] He is God in the flesh. He lives God’s love among real people in a real world. Study the Gospels to see perfect love in *his* day-to-day actions.
- **Christ’s Crucifixion is love’s greatest expression** [John 3:16] Love takes the initiative to give away that which is most precious to those who need it most but deserve it least.

THE **L** WORD. LOVE’S VERTICAL & HORIZONTAL LINES.

The English word **love** begins with the letter **L**. This illustrates the flow of love: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” [John 13:34 & 35]



The letter **L** has both a vertical and horizontal line. Take either away and there is no **L**. Without an **L** our English word for love is nonsensical. But God’s definition of love is fleshed out by Jesus. “As I have loved you...” [The **vertical** line] in the **L**. “...so you must love one another.” [The **horizontal** line]. Take away the horizontal line in **L** and you are left with **I**. There’s too much **I** in most of our lives. Take away the vertical and you are left with **_**, or a flatline. When the heart monitor shows a flatline, the person is dead. Without both vertical and horizontal dimensions, real love is as good as dead.

Jesus said, “A new command I give you. Some call this the eleventh commandment. But it’s not a new commandment. It’s just a new way of summing up the old Commandments. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your soul and with all your heart and with all your mind. And you shall love your neighbor as (you love) yourself. All the Law and Prophets hang on these two commands.” [Matthew 22:40]. There’s the **L** again: “Love the Lord your God...”—a vertical line relationship. “...love your neighbor as yourself...”—horizontal line relationships. You can’t have one without the other. They are inseparably linked. So let’s see how this works:



Vertical Love: How Jesus loves us

Jesus says, “Just as I have loved you...” That is the beginning of evangelism. He first loved us. He took the initiative to come to this earth, to die for our sins,



and then to seek us out, draw us to himself and redeem us. This is love from heaven that comes down to us. It is the vertical line in the **L** [love] word. There are many markers of that love, but I see at least five:

Jesus loves us with 1) an **initiating love**. St. John wrote, “We love him because he first loved us.” [1 John 4:19] Jesus said, “You did not choose me but I choose you.” [John 15:16] When we couldn’t see who He was, He opened our eyes to see. When we couldn’t hear his words, He opened our hearts to hear, and when our hearts were like stone, He turned them to tender flesh. In short, when we were dead in our sins, He gave us a new birth and we became spiritually alive. **Romans 5:8** sums up his initiatory love: “God demonstrated his love toward us that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for the ungodly.”

Jesus also loves us with 2) an **unconditional love**. He didn’t love us for anything we did, or withhold his love for anything we weren’t. He didn’t say that He would love us *if or because*. As St. Paul put it, He died for us when we were still sinners and ungodly. In fact, **Revelation 17:8** says our names were written in the Lamb’s Book of Life before He ever created the world. If He loved us eons before we were born, before we ever did anything good or bad, and even when we were ungodly sinners at our very worst, how can He ever cease to love us when we mess up in the future? His love is unconditional.

Jesus loves us with 3) a **definite love**. He didn’t just love the whole world as an indistinguishable mass of people, nor was his death efficacious for

everyone. In John 10:27 he says that the Good Shepherd knows *his* sheep, and he calls them by name. They hear his voice, and they follow him. Earlier in John 10:11, he says that the Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. He doesn't die for the thief, or the hired hand, or the wolf. He dies for those he knows by name—*his* sheep. He knows everything about us—the good, the bad, and the ugly—and still He loves us specifically just the way we are. This is definite love.

Jesus loves us with 4) an **irresistible love**. He doesn't drag us kicking and screaming into his kingdom with no choice in the matter. Instead, He opens our eyes to see and our ears to see how amazing his love is for us. He softens our hard hearts to feel the wonder of that love. When we do, we come running into his wide open arms. As St. John wrote, "We love him because he first loved us." His love is indeed irresistible in its wonder and beauty.

Finally, Jesus loves us with 5) a **persevering love**. St Paul wrote, "those He justified, He also glorified." [Romans 8:30] In short, if He declared us saved, we will be in heaven. **Philippians 1:6** promises, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion in the day of Christ." Jesus will make sure that those He saves stay saved. He promised, "I shall lose none of those the Father has given me." [John 6:39] This is the promise God makes to all his sons and daughters: "I will never leave nor forsake you." [Hebrews 13:5] Indeed, nothing can ever separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. [Romans 8:31-39] His love never lets us go. It is persevering love;



Horizontal Love: How we are to love others

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another." The same five markers of Christ's love for us is to be demonstrated in our love for others. We are to love with **initiating love**. The wisest man who ever lived said, if we would have a friend, we must first be a friend. [Proverbs 18:24] We often

wait for the other person to take the initiative to reach out first. If someone offends or hurts us, we often wall ourselves off from them emotionally, waiting for them to make the first move in resolving the conflict. But Jesus says that we are to go to our brother or sister. Jesus' love takes the initiative in reaching out to others.

Our love should be **unconditional**. Jesus loved us when we were still sinners. He doesn't turn his back on us when we sin again. In the same way, our love should never be conditioned by such statements as, "I'll love you *if...*" or "I love you *because...*" or "I would love you more *if only you would...*" Love should be more of an action verb than a passive noun. We love because it's the right thing to do. Unconditional love is not dependent on feelings. Unconditional Love takes the initiative. It doesn't wait for the other person to make the first move, to take the first step or to make amends first. Jesus' love is proven most when it is undeserved, unreciprocated and unappreciated. Unconditional love is expressed most powerfully when it is given to the least, the last and the lost. It goes against both human nature and cultural expectations to give unconditional love. It is rarely seen in this world unless, of course, people see us giving it to one another. At that point, they just might sit up and take notice of something supernatural in us.

Our love should be **definite**. Jesus loves us by name. He loves us for exactly who we are. If any of us had been the only person on this earth, Jesus would have come down and died for us. Here's the rub when it comes to a Jesus kind of love in us: it is so easy to love people in general; it is so much



harder to love specific people. We can declare, "I love everyone." It's another thing to love our obnoxious aunt, crotchety old uncle, crazy neighbor, gossipy co-worker, rebellious nephew; and the niece with the pink hair, nose ring and tattoos. Jesus is easy to love, but some of the folks at church aren't. Nor, in a polarized world, is it easy to love people on the other side of the political divide. General love is easy. Anyone can do that. But definite or specific love for those who are mean, nasty, obnoxious, irritating, smelly, dirty, judgmental, arrogant, stupid, foolish [the list is endless. You fill in the blanks] is almost impossible. Unless, of course, the presence and power of Jesus are in us.

Our love should be **irresistible**. We love Jesus because he first loved us. When we first realized how much he loved us, we couldn't help but run into his arms. The love of Jesus is impossible to resist—once blind eyes are open, deaf ears are unstopped and stone hearts become flesh by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells his disciples that people will take note when they see them loving each other the way Jesus loves us. Imagine how irresistible

our churches would be to our NextGen loved ones if they saw real Jesus love in the way believers treated each other!

Our love should **persevere**. Jesus perseveres with us. No one can pluck us out of his hands. He won't lose one of those his heavenly Father has given him. Nothing in heaven, on the earth, or under the earth, neither demons, nor angels, nor any power can separate us from his love. He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion. Some call this the eternal security of the believer. Some call it the perseverance of the saints. I call it the perseverance of Jesus with the saints.



How then, can Christians not persevere with others? What does it say about the love of Christ in us when professing Christian husbands or wives bail out of their marriages? Or Christian fathers or mothers abandon their children? Or Christian adult children cut off their parents or grandparents from their children? Or Christian friends cut off

relationships with fellow believers because something hurtful was said? Or Christians leave churches because they didn't get their way or they refused to stay and resolve personal conflicts? Or even cancel one another over political, social or nonessential doctrinal differences? And, yet, this is the number one reason 65% of our church kids never return to church after college. 75% of pastors' kids drop out of church when they leave home. It's when we persevere in unfulfilling, painful or disappointing relationships that we have a wonderful opportunity to show the uncommon love that only comes from the presence and power of Jesus in us.

Platinum Evangelism

Jesus is unambiguous: the supreme testimony to our relationship with Jesus is in our relationship with one another. Do we love them as Jesus loves us? Of course, we can't in our flesh. But, as biblical Christians, we have made some bold faith claims: Jesus was God in the flesh. He died for our sins. He was buried. On the Third Day He rose from the dead. Through the baptism of the Holy Spirit we have been united with Christ. His presence and power reside in us. That power is supernatural. Those are crazy claims to nonbelievers.

So, they are watching us to see if our everyday lives prove our extraordinary claims. And the most compelling proof is when we love people others find impossible to love, and in ways unthinkable for them. We love them the way Jesus loves us. And that is only possible because Jesus lives in us.

When nonbelievers don't see us loving as Jesus loves, we declare our Faith to be a lie. An Apostle writes, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen." [1 John 4:20] This is why many Americans today see our religion as fake, impotent or irrelevant.

"Love Covers a Multitude of Sins" [1 Peter 4:8]

We may be uncool, or unsophisticated, or out of touch with the nuances of a changing culture. But we can love. It's not really rocket science. Jesus made it crystal clear so that even the simplest person can do Platinum Evangelism.

1. Love God passionately and consistently
2. Love your spouse with initiatory, unconditional, definite, irresistible, and persevering love, the way Jesus loves you.
3. Love your adult children the same way.
4. Love your grandchildren, and other family members the same way.
5. Love your fellow Christians the same way.
6. Love your neighbors [especially your enemies] the same way.

But it's easier said than done. It requires obedience, and *every* day, (sometimes *every* moment) asking for a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit. So let's attempt what only Jesus can do, so his words will be realized: "If I be lifted up, I will draw all people to myself." [John 12:32]

DR. BOB'S QUESTIONS TO PONDER



1. Why is *showing* evangelism harder than *telling* evangelism?
2. Do you agree that NextGens are leaving the church because they are turned off by the way we love (or don't love) as Jesus did? Is it possible your kids have left? What can you do about it?
3. How's your *L* doing? Vertically? Horizontally? Which comes first?
4. What changes do you have to make because of this FaceTime talk? How can you be the change you want to see in your family or church?