

Caleb Evans (7)

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Preacher: Fr. Caleb Evans

[0:00] Amen. So the church today in 21st century America lives kind of in tough times.

Let me be careful not to overstate my case when I say that. For example, the church in Nigeria, where our brothers and sisters were murdered as they were gathered for worship this past week, is really living in tough times.

The challenges that we face are quite a bit different. We might be subjects of ridicule, in some cases we are. But there's an even more fundamental problem that we're facing, I think.

And that's that so many people think that the church is basically irrelevant these days. It's kind of like we've outlived our usefulness.

How many times have you heard people express that they love Jesus but not the church? You've heard that? Or that they're spiritual but not religious? Heard that one?

[1:27] Or that they can worship God better on a hilltop by themselves while watching a sunset? You've probably heard that or something like it. And it's not just unbelievers.

Plenty of Christians hold attitudes similar to this. Chuck Colson once lamented, The greatest single scandal in evangelical assemblies, and I can really only speak for that, is the low regard individual Christians have for the church.

Ouch. Ouch. Why is this a problem? I think we could identify a number of reasons. Part of our problem is self-inflicted. People have been hurt by the church and have withdrawn because of it. I've known people for whom that's the case. But I don't think that there's all that there is. We also have to factor in the reality that the unbelieving world hates Jesus. The unbeliever might express admiration for Jesus, the good moral teacher, but doesn't want to submit to Jesus as the incarnate Lord.

But even then, that doesn't totally explain it. Here is what I think is the fundamental problem. We are tempted to believe that we can love God without loving our brothers and our sisters.

[2:45] That we can have fellowship with Jesus without having fellowship with the family of called-out ones that we call the church. But here's the hard truth.

We can't. We can't love God and not love our brothers and our sisters. We can't have fellowship with Jesus without having fellowship with our brothers and our sisters in Christ.

No. Loving our brothers and our sisters. Loving the church. And I'm not talking primarily about institutional structures here. Talking about loving the family.

Not just in word, but in deed. Is an essential mark of someone who really knows Christ. The 18th century evangelist and Anglican priest John Wesley put it like this.

There is no such thing as a solitary Christian. All who truly know Jesus love Jesus. And to love Jesus is to love his church.

[3:46] To love others who are saved through his blood. Because he loves them. I think we see that in our lesson from 1 John 3 this morning. Let's take a look there.

Our passage appointed for this morning picks up in verse 11. That's a continuation of what we read in verse 10. Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God.

Nor is the one who does not love his brother. Well, that's striking. We are not of God.

It is a sign that we really do not know God. If we don't love our fellow believers. Of course, Jesus is clear that we're to love even our enemies and pray for them.

But John has loving our fellow believers within the fellowship of the church. Particularly in mind in this passage. If we do not love our fellow believers.

[4:46] If we don't live in fellowship with them. It is a sign that our claim to know Jesus is false. Picking up in verses 11 and 12 we read.

Why should we love one another?

What is the motivation behind Christian love? The love that we have for each other. Let's think of it this way. When you have been loved beyond all measure.

Beyond all that you could imagine. All that you deserve. As believers know that they have been loved by the saving love of Jesus. That changes you. It fills your heart with love for God.

And love for your neighbor. Especially with love toward your fellow Christians. Who share in the same hope that you have. To be loved that much. To know that kind of love. As we know in Christ.

[5:57] Leads to love for others. Doesn't it? How could it not? Even others who might seem unlovable. Because Jesus loved us.

And saved us when we were unlovable. Jesus didn't love me because I'm a great guy. Not at all. He loved me because he's loving. Think about the Cain and Abel contrast.

Abel. Who was murdered by his brother. Was right with God. If we were in Christ. We are right with God as well. We're right with God through the atoning death.

And glorious resurrection of our Savior. And here we see the basic difference between Cain and Abel. Abel was right with God. And Cain wasn't. And that's why Cain hated and killed his brother.

If you're not right with God. If you don't know that you were accepted by him. How could you avoid being envious of what others have? Outside of Christ.

[7:00] We would see this life as an attempt to grasp at all that we can. To take it from others if we have to. Because outside of Christ there is no peace. But if you know.

You have acceptance with God through Christ. You have peace. You have joy. You know that you have all that you will ever need. And that means you don't have to be envious of your brother.

You don't need to hurt your brother. You don't need to kill your brother. Because if you have peace with God. You have everything. But if you don't have peace with God.

You hate and you hurt others. That's why John goes on to write. Do not be surprised brothers. That the world hates you.

We know that we have passed out of death into life. Because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death. Those are strong words.

[8:05] They're supposed to be strong words. The world is like Cain. John is saying. The world hates and the world kills. And those who don't have peace with God.

Hate those who do. But John is telling us. We know that we have life. We know that we really are in Christ. Because God has given us hearts.

Through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit. That are not like that. If we have brotherly love. For those who are in Christ. If we want true fellowship with believers. It must be.

Because we are in Christ. Otherwise we would hate the Lord's people. And not want fellowship. But love for the brothers. Love for the family. That is called the church.

Is a sign that the Holy Spirit. Has been at work in our hearts. Bringing us from death. To life. And that is good news. There is a warning here too.

[9:06] Whoever does not love. Abides in death. If we do not love our brothers. And our sisters.

It is an indication. That maybe we don't have life at all. Regardless of what we say with our lips. Isn't that sobering? One of the essential marks of the true Christian.

Of someone who knows the love of God. And Jesus Christ. And is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. One of the distinguishing marks. Is love. On this life.

None of us love perfectly. We all fall short. But the Christian loves. Even if we don't always get it right. And we don't. But we love.

Because if the Holy Spirit. Is at work in someone's heart. They're going to start to love. Even if by nature. They're a royal grump. We have no love.

[10:07] What does it say about our claim to know Christ? That Christians love. Because we know what it's like.

To be loved. To be loved. Extravagantly. Even when we have done nothing to deserve it. John continues. By this we know love. That he laid down his life for us.

And we ought to lay down our lives. For the brothers. By this we know love. Can you imagine anything more loving.

Than Christ's death for us. Can you imagine anything more loving. Than his blood shed for us. Can you imagine anything greater.

Than the love that would cause God the Son. To step off his throne. Become one of us. And die a shameful death for us. When we were enemies of God. Can you imagine anything more loving than

that.

[11:10] By this we know love. And those who know that they are loved this well. Will love others. Especially those who share the same hope in Christ.

Love that would even go so far as laying down one's life. You know I'll never forget. In my church growing up. One member of the church was in desperate need.

Of a kidney transplant. Well. Long story short. Another member of the church. Went under the knife. To have his kidney removed. To give it to his brother.

That guy got it. This is the great. This is a great example. Of the way we should love one another. When the rubber hits the road. On the other hand.

We read in verse 17. If anyone has the world's goods. And sees his brother in need. Yet closes his heart against him. How does God's love abide in him? You know.

[12:12] If we love one another. It will manifest itself. In concrete and practical ways. Struck by a quote. I ran across recently. From Tim Keller. Keller says this.

The early church. Was strikingly different. From the culture around it. In this way. The pagan society. Was stingy with its money. And promiscuous with its body.

A pagan gave nobody their money. And practically gave everybody. Their body. And the Christians came along. And gave practically nobody. Their body.

And they gave practically. Everybody their money. The witness of the early church. Is that. While Christians give practically.

Nobody. Their bodies. They give practically. Everybody their money. This is especially true.

[13:11] When we think about. Our brothers and sisters. In Christ. Who are in need. We. Because if God's love. Abides in us. We realize that we have.

The greatest treasure. In the world. Don't we? Is there anything. That we lack? So we can give. And give generously. Even from where it might hurt us.

The most. From our bank accounts. And that's of course. Just one example. People. But it's a striking one. So we're instructed. In verse 18.

Little children. Let us not love. In word. Or talk. But in deed. And in truth. In other words. Talk is cheap.

It is easy to say. That we love our fellow believers. It's easy even to tell ourselves. That we love our fellow believers. But the proof. Is in the way.

[14:08] That we live. Do we seek to worship together. In truth. And in unity. Do we desire fellowship. With one another. Do we seek to love one another.

Indeed. Do we support one another. Do we serve one another. When conflict arises. Do we seek to be reconciled. With one another.

And when push comes to shove. Would we lay down our lives. For our brothers and our sisters. Or do we say with our lips.

That we love one another. When our actions say the opposite. Now. I'm probably about to embarrass some people. With some concrete examples.

Of what loving in deed. And in truth. Looks like in everyday life. So. I'll start with this. Last winter. I got a message. From my friend and colleague. Father Matt Kennedy.

[15:05] Rector of Church of the Good Shepherd. Down in Binghamton. There was a nasty snowstorm. Going on. He told me. That one of his parishioners. Was stuck in Syracuse. And probably. Would be stuck overnight.

So Matt was wondering. If we might have. Somewhere. For her to stay. I pick up the phone. And call Pat Daig. And I said to her. Basically. What do you guys think.

Of hosting someone you've never met. With absolutely no advance notice. And you know what. They just did it. I'm mentioning this particular situation.

First. Because of what Matt said to me. After I got back to him. And told him. That his parishioner. Had a place to stay for the night. Here's what he said. Thank you guys.

For proving. That what we say. About the church. Is actually true. I have to say. To so many of you. Thank you.

[16:01] For proving. That what we say. About the church. Is actually true. Day in. And day out. Even if you think. That no one sees it. You are bearing witness. To the gospel. By the love.

That you show. For one another. Love. That flows. From knowing. That you are. A redeemed child. Of the most high God. Can't count.

How many times. I've gone to visit. Someone who was in the hospital. Only to find out. That a whole crowd of you. Had been there. To see them before me. Yeah. I walk into a hospital. Or nursing home room.

And I hear. Neil and Suzanne were here. Hepsi was here. Hepsi doesn't drive. But she somehow. Visits the sick. Like. It's nobody's business. I'm never surprised.

To hear that Hepsi. Has been there. Or I'm talking to someone. And they mention. As if it's the most natural thing. In the world. Hey. The Mumfords are giving me a ride.

[16:58] To an appointment. This week. Or I stop in. At the church. At any given moment. And I'm sure to find. Jim. Jack. Tom. Or Norm. Working on the building. Or cleaning. Caring for our facility.

Simply out of love. For their brothers and sisters. After the service. We're going to go downstairs. For coffee hour. We'll find everything. Set up for us. But we might not recognize.

The work that Marty. Maria. Barb. And so many others. Have put in to serve us. Yet another example. Last fall. Eric and Karen. Hosted a Bible study.

At their house. Hosting and feeding. An absurdly high number. Of us. Week after week. At one point. I think there were 15. I don't know. If they knew. What they were getting themselves. Into. When they agreed. But.

Thank you. And then. We have the Steeles. Who drive an hour each way. To get here. As a large. And recently. Expanded family.

[17:57] Not just to serve. In obvious ways. They do plenty of that. But also to serve. In quiet ways. When people are unlikely. To notice. I use these examples.

And these are just a few. We could be here all day. And of course. Some of the examples. Of your love for one another. Are things that I can't really share. These are some of the ways.

You. My brothers. And my sisters. Are serving the rest of it. When it seems. As if no one is watching. I haven't even mentioned.

The service that is obvious. Or we would really be here all day. But thank you. For what you're doing. You. Are demonstrating. That the love of Jesus.

Fills our hearts. With love for one another. You are living out. The call. To love one another. In deed. And in truth. These are indications.

[18:54] Of the way. That Christians. Love one another. In our first John lesson. We read. This is the. This is his commandment. That we believe. In the name of his son.

Jesus Christ. And love one another. Just as he has commanded us. And these are indications. Of true faith in Christ.

Fruit of the salvation. We have in Jesus. Indications of the Holy Spirit's work. In our hearts. Because only the Spirit. Can give us the hearts. To do these things. These are indications.

This is evidence. That we believe. In the name of Jesus Christ. And we love one another. Loving one another. Means that this thing.

We call the Christian life. As I like to say. Is a team sport. That is why. We can't love Jesus. And not love the church. Love for our brothers.

[19:53] And sisters in Christ. Always accompanies. Living faith in Jesus. Jesus. I might enjoy sitting on the hilltop. Praying as the sun sets. But if I'm a Christian.

Once that's done. I need to come down off of that hilltop. And love and serve my brothers and sisters. In the fellowship of the church. And that's not always easy. It's easier on that hilltop. Watching the sunset by myself. I'm pretty good. At tolerating. And excusing. My own sins and failures. I'm not likely to find myself annoying.

The people who will find me annoying. Aren't up there. Watching the sunset with me. But I'm sure to find. At least a few of them. In the local church. As are all of us.

When we're called. Into fellowship. With other people. Who are very different from us. That's always going to be a challenge. We'll find ourselves perplexed.

[20:52] We'll find ourselves annoyed. Sometimes we'll find ourselves in conflict. With one another. But in all of that. The Holy Spirit. Is at work. Enabling us to love one another.

In spite of our shortcomings. And our quirks. In spite of our differences. And in the mess that is our life together. The Holy Spirit will work to smooth out. Our rough edges.

Sometimes it will hurt. But it will be for our sanctification. And for God's glory. So I want to leave us with a challenge. Go ahead and bring to mind.

The person in our fellowship. That you have the most difficult time loving. Just make sure you don't tell them. That they're your pick. As we come to our time of confession.

Especially confess to God. Your failure to love that person as you should. And ask him to help you love that person. Then ask him to show you practical ways you can love that person.

[21 : 58] Not simply in word. But in deed. And in truth. And if there is anyone. That you are not at peace with. Seek them out during the passing of the peace.

That's what it's for. Please do not come to communion. Communion without being reconciled. To one another. If we are not reconciled. And we come. We can be sure that we will eat.

And drink judgment upon ourselves. It's time to fess up brothers and sisters. If you're anything like me. You have failed.

To love your brothers and sisters as you should. Confess it. And receive the promise of forgiveness in Jesus. That's what I intend to do.

Let's do it together. And let's walk together. In the power of the spirit. To show the world. By our love for one another. That what we say. About the church is true.

[22 : 54] And that the gospel of Jesus Christ. That the church preaches is true. Because at the end of the day. It is all about his glory. In the name of the Father.

And of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. Amen.