

The Way of Love according to Jesus (Jn 15:12-17)


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Abstract

The two words "love" are frequently overused, especially among Christians. However, in John 15:12-17, Jesus teaches us a new way to love based on His own example. His new approach to love is to do what is best for others, to love truly, and to initiate romantic relationships. Accepting all gestures of love is the ultimate manifestation of divine love. Love is present everywhere and dominates everyone's life. "Love one another" is also God's commandment. But love here is not love in a worldly way. People often only love those who love them, love those who seem to benefit them, and love according to their selfish nature. Jesus wants each of us to love one another as he has loved.

Keywords: Love, marriage, commandment, God

Introduction

From the past and until today, love has been the most exploited topic in different fields such as music, the movie industry, art, literature, and so on. It is also said: Love is as old as the earth. That is, love has existed since the earth or the old earth, the older love is. Like that, old love is so old! There are many topics about love. However, sometimes love is viewed from a distorted perspective, which makes love today like walking on the edge of an abyss with a degraded lifestyle, moral decadence, and broken marriage. In John 15:12-17, Jesus showed us how to love true based on the example of his love. The way of love, according to Jesus, is to do what is best for others, to love sincerely, and to take the first step in love.

¹² This is my commandment: love one another as I love you.

¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.

¹⁵ I no longer call you slaves because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father.

¹⁶ It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you.

¹⁷ This I command you: love one another.

(John, 2022)

The background of the passage

At the end of 15:1–11, dominated by the image of the vine (vv. 1–8), the disciples were told to keep the Father’s commandments in order to abide in the love of Jesus (vv. 9–10) and have the fullness of joy (v. 11). What are these commandments they must keep in order to abide in his love? The heart of the discourse (vv. 12–17) provides the answer. Jesus has shown love in 13:1–38. He now tells them of the need for their response to that love (15:12, 17), built on his prior love for them (vv. 13–16)¹.

The ways of love

Reading the Gospel of John, we enjoy a beautiful love song in which “love” is considered as the main “tone”. He loves us with a love which no words can tell, above all our thought and imagination. All of Jesus' words and deeds express self-sacrificing love to obey the will of the Father and give his life to atone for the sins of mankind. Jesus came to earth to love people to the end. He came to share in the joy of the wedding feast at Cana and also came to the table with sinners, despite all the scornful whispers of life. Jesus forgave people’s sins and cured all sicknesses and diseases of the body as well as the soul of men. He is especially concerned about widows, children, the abandoned, and so on² (Faber, 2012). In the passage Jn 15:12-17, we can see some outstanding aspects of how to love:

First, to love as Jesus loves is to do the best for the person whom you love. Love is not only wanting what is good for the person you love but also expressing that desire by doing the most concrete things. In true love, there is no half-heartedness or limitations. To love is to love to the end. If there is calculation and comparison, it is not love. The border of love is love without borders. True love is ready to give one’s life as the Lord himself said: “*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends*” (John 15:13). These are not only great and beautiful words of God, but God said and then God did. Here he shows the efficacy of love, which is that one undergoes death for his friends; this is a sign of the greatest love³ (Aquinas, 2010). The cross demonstrates the extent to which God’s reconciling love in Christ is willing to go. It is a love without limits, a love “to the end”. Indeed, God “sacrificed” his life for his friends when he washed their feet, and especially when he loved to the point of sacrificing his precious life. His price for loving us, for wanting to redeem us so that we might have life and

¹ Francis J. Moloney, *Love in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical, Theological, and Literary Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 97.

² Frederick William Faber, *All for Jesus - The Easy Ways of Divine Love* (Charlotte, North Carolina: TAN Books, 2012), 18-20.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Gospel of John - Chapters 13–21*, Translated by Fabian Larcher, O.P., and James A. Weisheipl, O.P. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 107.

have it abundantly. In reality, when we go out to meet a friend's need or when we are willing to spend time with someone and give ourselves up for him or her, we are laying down our lives for that person like Jesus.

Second, to love as God loves is to love others with sincere love. A person is called a friend either because he loves or is loved⁴ (Aquinas, 2010). One of the special marks of favor shown in the scriptures is being called the friend of God. Abraham is called the friend of God (cf. Isaiah 41:8). God also speaks with Moses as a man speaks with his friend (cf. Exodus 33:11) (Long, 2018). Jesus, the Lord, and Master, in turn, call the disciples his friends rather than his servants. Jesus said: "*I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends*" (John 15:15) (John, 2022). This sincere love does not stop at words when calling each other, talking to each other with "friends", but especially through the way, they behave with each other, containing content that speaks of equality, respect, openness, and wholeheartedness. Of this, Jesus spoke and demonstrated in his actions. Jesus shared with the apostles the Lord's knowledge of his Father: "*I have told you everything I have heard from my Father*" (John 15:15) (John, 2022). Jesus also desires and requires a true friendship that is sincere attachment to one another and with noble values: "*You are my friends if you do what I command you*" (John 15:14) (John, 2022). Therefore, to love as God loves is expressed through sincere acts of love.

Finally, to love as God loves is to love with a love that precedes. The initiative is a sign of someone willing to take the first move in a relationship. The Bible presents God as the one who always takes the first step in showing love to people. According to the Bible, God is the one doing this. He stays at Zacchaeus's home, even though Zacchaeus does not talk (cf. Luke 19:1-10). Living in love cannot sit and wait. There are still arguments to justify that there is not enough talent, not enough strength, or not yet the time, and so on, for those who do not know how to love. The nature of true friendship and love is the willingness to give all for the beloved. Having loved, there is always work to be done. For instance, Paul affirms that Christ died for us while we were rebelling against him. Who among us dares to think and dare to hope that we will be friends of God, will be loved by Him to the point of sacrificing our lives for us? If we don't dare to think and dare to hope, God himself has thought, wanted, and done it for us. Jesus said, "*It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you*" (John 15:16) (John, 2022). The disciples, through no acts of the will or physical effort on their part, have been drawn into a new relationship⁵ (Moloney, 1991). Moreover, Jesus expects and prepares for that love to mature and bear much fruit (cf. John 15:16). Indeed, he wished that love would last forever as his disciples turned to his Father for help in his name as a guarantee of acceptance: "*Whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you*" (John 15:16) (John, 2022). So, always taking the first step in acts of love is a full expression of God-like love.

⁴ Ibid., p.109.

⁵ Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina 4 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1991), 425.

Conclusion

In short, the way of Jesus about love is to love completely selflessly and generously as God loves: A sincere love; a love that is thorough, wholehearted to the point of sacrificing one's life for the one you love, and a love that always goes first. It's not easy to love like that. Loving people as you love yourself is difficult. "Love as God loves" is even more difficult. It is a great challenge to our imperfect human nature. But difficulty does not mean impossible. Many of our brothers and sisters have heroically accomplished that difficult task by imbibing God's word. They were true disciples of Christ. Whose disciple am I? The answer depends on each of us, whether we love or refuse to love.

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Biodata

Br. Martino Nguyen Kim Danh is a brother of The Congregation of the Mission (C.M.) which was established to preach the Gospel to the poor. He vowed to the perpetual profession in 2021 and study the Master of Theology Program at the Catholic Institute of Vietnam, majoring in Bible.