

The Key to Making God Known
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Today is the last sermon in our series called Knowing God and Making Him Known. Next week we are starting a new series called Relationships: A Mess Worth Making. Today's sermon is going to be a bridge between those two topics. It's called The Key to Making God Known.

You might think that you can see how relationships and evangelism are connected. For instance - we've also taught about friendship evangelism and how that the way we live can either attract people to Christ or repel people from Christ.

But it's more than that. Today I want to talk about what Jesus said is the main key in reaching unbelievers for Christ. This might surprise you, but:

1- The Key to Reaching Unbelievers is to Love Other Believers

I know you're probably thinking, "Wait a minute, the key to reaching unbelievers is to love unbelievers." And there is truth in that. For instance, in my sermon last week – One More For Jesus – I talked about how we need to have a love for lost people that gives us the desire to share the good news of Jesus Christ with them.

Loving unbelievers is a key to outreach – but it's not the main key. We must love believers and unbelievers, but Galatians 6:10 says:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Notice that the emphasis is on loving other believers first!

Jesus said that the key to reaching unbelievers is to love other believers. Listen to what Jesus said in John 13:34-35 :

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

The New Living Translation says it this way:

Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are My disciples.

The point Jesus is making is this:

2- People will know we are followers of Christ when we love one another

Love for other believers is the mark of a true Christian. It's not the sign of the fish bumper stickers on our car or the cross hanging around our neck. Those things are okay, but the true mark of a true Christian is love. The key to reaching unbelievers is the way we treat each other!

People will not believe we love Jesus unless we love each other. If we don't love each other, people will not think we are really followers of Christ, who is love personified.

Almost 100% of people believe Jesus was good and loving. If they don't see us living and loving like Him, they don't believe we are His followers. So – you can say you are a believer all day long, but if unbelievers don't see you loving your wife and kids and other believers – they won't believe you!

This is why relationships are so important to evangelism. This is why we will be teaching you why relationships are a mess worth making! People will not believe we are Christians if we don't love other Christians!

But the Bible teaches something even more amazing in John 17. This chapter records what is called the high priestly prayer of Christ. In the first part of this chapter, Jesus talks about knowing God. He said in John 17:3:

Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent.

This is why knowing God is so important – your eternal life depends on it!

The whole point of this prayer is knowing God and making Him known. In verse 26 Jesus prayed:

I have made You known to them, and will continue to make You known in order that the love you have for Me may be in them and that I Myself may be in them.

Jesus said that the way we make Him known is through love. Then Jesus begins to pray for His disciples – that God would protect them when Jesus left this world. And then in John 17:20-23 – Jesus prays for you and me and everyone who will ever believe in Him:

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in You. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.

I have given them the glory that You gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and You in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

Wow! This is one of the most powerfully disturbing thoughts in Scripture:

3- The world will know that Jesus is the way when we love one another

The world will not believe that Jesus is the way if we don't love each other!
The world will not believe that Christianity is true if we don't love each other.
The world will not believe God loves them if they do not see our love for each other.

The point is that the way we treat each other is a deciding factor in people believing in Christ. We can believe right, preach right, sing right, do everything right, but without love and unity, no one will believe us.

Love among Christians is a key to changing our world. We want to touch heaven and change earth – but it starts with us! World change begins by us loving each other. 1 John 3:16 says:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Love requires us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do this by sacrificially meeting the needs of those around us. This requires us to die to ourselves!

But when this happens – when our love for each other is obvious and visible – the prayer of Christ will be answered so that the world may believe that God sent Jesus to give them eternal life.

What a responsibility! But I want to ask you:
Is the church today showing the way or blocking the way to the Lord?
Are we an enlarging factor or a limiting factor to people coming to God?

There is a movement today of Christians leaving the church. Their mentality is – “I love Jesus, but I don't like the church.”

They have many different reasons why they quit attending church. Some were hurt or offended. Some are bored or unmotivated. Some don't like the worship style or the preaching. The list goes on and on. But ultimately – it boils down to selfishness. “My needs are not getting met – so I'm quitting.”

I even saw a blog of a Christian author who is quitting church because he doesn't like to sing. Really? You don't go to church to sing for yourself! You sing in church to praise and worship the Lord your God! He is the one who said in Psalm 149:1:

Sing unto the Lord a new song, and His praise in the congregation of saints.

By the way – praise is a part of evangelism! Psalm 40:3 says:

He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God: many will see it, and fear (revere and worship) and put their trust in the Lord.

When people see us praising God in the midst of trouble – it draws them to God. By the way - in case you need a New Testament Scripture about singing, Ephesians 5:18-19 says:

Be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts.

Too many people are focused on themselves and filled with themselves rather than focused on God and filled with the Holy Spirit. They have the totally wrong mindset. We should come to church to give. We give praise to God and we give ourselves in service to others. Out of that giving – we receive!

But many of Christians are going on social media and blasting the church – the bride of Christ – the pillar and ground of truth – the body of Christ! What message does that give to their unbelieving friends? That people who go to church can't get along and they certainly don't love one another. Is it any wonder they want no part of Christianity?

Spend two minutes talking to almost anyone outside the Christian faith and you're almost certain to hear a list of complaints about Christians. The problem has been around awhile. There are people who would've become Christians if it hadn't been for Christians!

As Mahatma Gandhi famously (and sadly) said: "I like your Christ, I do not like your Christians. Your Christians are so unlike your Christ." When asked what the greatest obstacle to Christianity in India was, Mahatma Gandhi answered, "Other Christians." He said, "If all Christians acted like Christ, the whole world would be Christian!"

That's coming from an unbeliever! And he's not alone. The problem with many non-Christians getting involved in church is not that they don't know any Christians. The problem is they do.

And there are things about Christians that unbelievers despise. For instance, they despise the way Christians judge other people. They also despise hypocrisy. But one of the main things that repels unbelievers is the way that Christians treat each other!

Relationships are hard and messy. People in the world see how hard it is to make marriages work and friendships last. They know they need help and many times they turn to the church. And when they see that we are no better at relationships than they are – it drives them away.

That's why the way we love other believers is the key to reaching unbelievers!

That's how the early church did it! The early church was known for loving one another. Acts 2:42-47 says:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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.

People were drawn to the believers in the early church because of the gifts of the Spirit and the fruit of the Spirit! They saw the power of God and the love believers had for one another.

This continued throughout the early history of the church. In the landmark book, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal, Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force*, Rodney Stark shows how the church grew from a ragtag band of twelve disciples after the death of Jesus to more than six million believers in just a couple of hundred years.

He says that the growth of the early church can be explained by how Christians responded to the world around them. The early church was attractive to non-believers because it made the ancient world "a lot more bearable."

What Christians did was take care of each other. Christians loved one another, and took care of each other. When plagues struck the ancient world, Christians were the only ones who cared for the sick – which they did at the risk of catching the plague themselves. Meanwhile, pagans were throwing infected members of their own families into the streets even before they died, in order to protect themselves from the disease.

The way Christians selflessly cared for the sick left a powerful impression on their neighbors. At no other time in the history of Christianity did love so characterize the entire church as it did in the first three centuries. And Roman society took note. Tertullian reported that the Romans would exclaim, "See how they love one another!"

Justin Martyr described the early Christians love this way: "We who used to value the acquisition of wealth and possessions more than anything else now bring what we have into a common fund and share it with anyone who needs it. We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies."

It's no wonder that Christianity spread rapidly throughout the ancient world,

even though there were few organized missionary or evangelism programs. The love they practiced drew the attention of the world, just as Jesus said it would.

This kind of love, unity and commitment to God and each other changed the entire world. And we can touch heaven and change earth through our unity today!

When the world sees us changed from what we used to be – living for ourselves - and how we now live in love and unity, they will be ready to say, “We will go with you, for we see that God is with you.”

In a world where people unfriend each other very easily - people need to see us love one another enough to work through our differences.

In a world full of racial strife – people need to see different ethnicities in the church loving each other.

In a world full of political hatred – people need to see Christians of all political persuasions loving each other.

This might surprise you – but love can reach the hardest of hearts! The book *Son of Hamas* is the true story of Mosab Hassan Yousef, who is the son of one of the founders of the Islamist terrorist organization Hamas.

Yousef used to fight against the Israelis, and when he was 18 years old he was arrested by the Israelis and put in jail. While there, he saw how Hamas tortured and killed their own people.

Later Yousef was invited to a Bible study where he read the New Testament for the first time. He was thunder struck at the love expressed in the New Testament, especially the command of Christ to love your enemies. That was totally foreign to his upbringing in Islam – and it drew Yousef to Christ where he eventually converted. He had to move to the U.S. because his life was in danger due to becoming a Christian.

This life change started when he saw love rather than hate. That’s why we should be peacemakers and ministers of reconciliation. Unbelievers will not be reconciled to God if all they see is Christians who cannot reconcile with each other!

That’s why Paul appealed to us 1 Corinthians 1:10 that there may be *no divisions among us and that we may be perfectly united in mind and thought.*

That’s why he said in Colossians 3:12-14:

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

As we look around us – at our families, our friends, and our kids - we see that many are dying from a lack of love. Many people are looking for love in all the wrong places. And when they finally take a look at the church, what do they see?

They need to see relationship – not rules!
 They need to see friendship – not fighting!
 They need to see love – not legalism!

Scripture says, "They will know we are Christians by our Love." Where is God's love today? God's love doesn't just "fall out of heaven." His love must come through us. We are extensions of God's love to one another.

I know that relationships are difficult and messy. I know it's nearly impossible to love some people. That's why Romans 5:5 says:

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

That's why we need to be filled with the Spirit! How can we be Spirit-filled and yet not Love-filled? To me they're the very same thing! God's love is simply the glue that holds everything together.

Larry Crabb, in his book, *Inside Out*, shares that Christians can spend years in the Bible developing a real love for the truth; but if they come away without knowing God in a deeper and more real way and without His love for people, then they will have wasted their time.

The whole purpose of Bible is to make us more loving, not more scholarly.

It's only love that will bring our families, our husbands, our children, our neighbors, and our bosses to the feet of Jesus. Since God is Love, the only way these people will know that we are real Christians is by the real love that comes from us. I know it's difficult – but we have the power of the Spirit to enable us!

People are illogical, unreasonable, self-centered. *Love them anyway.*

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives. *Do good anyway.*

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. *Be honest anyway.*

People are sinful. *Love them anyway.*

People can be everything from inconsiderate to outright mean and cruel.

Love them anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them. *Help people anyway.*

Jesus gave the world His best and they killed Him. He knew it in advance, yet He loved them anyway. God is calling us to do the same. The key to making God known is to love each other!