

## **Loving the Unfaithful (John 13:21-38)**

**Matthew Williams**

Hypocrisy – saying one thing and doing another – is a curious thing. We despise it in other people. “I can’t believe they would do that! I thought I could trust them.” We excuse it in ourselves. “You have no idea how much pressure I’ve been under. At least I’m less of a hypocrite than that guy over there.”

When I’m talking to a non-Christian about their disinterest in going to church one of the common reasons is Christian hypocrisy. “Sure, they shake your hand and smile and talk about loving others on Sunday morning. But at home? At school? The rest of the week? They’re no different than anyone else.”

Here’s the truth. All of us are hypocrites in one way or another, Christian and non-Christian alike. There is a gap between the ideals to which we aspire and the choices we often make. One of the most important and humbling things about the Bible is that it doesn’t hide or whitewash our hypocrisy. Jesus is brutally honest about the reality and wickedness of disloyalty to God and men, even among his own followers.

And he doesn’t speak as an outside observer. He’s intimately familiar with the pain of betrayal for he too was betrayed – not once, but again and again. The passage before us is framed by two of the most sobering examples of human infidelity and betrayal in Jesus’ life. And our unfaithfulness only serves to make the Savior’s loving response and charge to us in the middle all the more striking.

Whether you are angry about someone else’s hypocrisy or grieving the pain of betrayal, the Lord has a word for you this morning, friend. A word of warning, comfort, admonition. **The glory of Christ is displayed when we love the unfaithful as he has loved us.**

All of us have been unfaithful to God. In response, he has lavished his love upon us to the praise of his glory. And when we confess our need for his mercy, and follow his example of loving the unlovely, of faithfulness to the unfaithful, through the power he supplies, we discover a life and joy nothing in this world can provide, and we become, both corporately and individually, a signpost to the same glory.

The core message of Christianity is the gospel, the good news of who Jesus is and what he's done to rescue us from sin. So what does a gospel-centered response to hypocrisy, disloyalty, and betrayal look like? Jesus' words in the second half of Jn 13 provide at least three answers.

## **1) GUARD YOUR HEART: SPIRITUAL PRIVILEGES DO NOT ENSURE SPIRITUAL LOYALTY**

V. 21 gives us yet another glimpse into the depth of our Lord's humanity. He didn't just live in our world. He carried our sorrows. "After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit..." which of course begs the question, "What did he just finish saying?" Look back at vv. 18-20. Immediately on the heels of exhorting his disciples to serve one another as servants of Christ, he adds:

"I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' I am telling you this now before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he."

The spiritual reality that fills the Lord's heart with anguish is that not all who appear to be following him on the outside, are part of his chosen people. One of them is about to rise up in enmity and opposition against him. As it was with King David in Ps 41, so it will be with David's greater son, Jesus.

And Jesus isn't surprised. In fact, he announces his betrayal to his disciples before it happens. Why? So that when it happens, they wouldn't conclude Jesus finally met his match and succumbed to forces outside his control. He predicts his betrayal so that when it happens their faith in the truthfulness and authority of his Word would be strengthened, not diminished. So that they might believe, even in the midst of tears, that Jesus is indeed the great I AM – Yahweh in human flesh, the Sovereign Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

And yet, he is still deeply troubled by what's about to take place. Why? Because he lacks faith? No. His trust in the Father is perfect. He's "troubled" because he's about to experience one of the greatest sorrows of life. Betrayal hurts, especially when it's someone close to you. In v. 21, Jesus tells his disciples it's not a known enemy who will betray him. It's an intimate friend. "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

It's not someone out there. It's someone in here. Someone who looks on the outside like one of my most committed followers, but whose heart is far from me. The fact that the disciples have no idea who it is should sober us. Why? Because it reveals the hidden and deceitful nature of sin. You can fool everyone around you, friend. But you can't fool the Lord. So Jesus says, "It's the one to whom I give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it."

Eating or breaking bread together was a symbolic act of friendship in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. For a final time, the Savior extends an offer of fellowship with God to Judas. In that moment, he could have humbled himself and cried out to the Savior for mercy. He could have renounced the sinful desire Satan had stirred up in his heart back in Jn 13:2 to betray the Lord. But he didn't. He receives the morsel (v. 30) and runs out into the night.

His actions are a sober warning. Judas had experienced the blessing of untold spiritual privileges. He had spent nearly 3 years of his life, day and night, living with Jesus. He had seen all the miracles. He had listened to all his teaching. And he failed to take it to heart. Eventually, he came under the direct influence of Satan himself, not in a way that absolved Judas of responsibility for his actions, but in a way that intensified the spiritual power of evil animating his enmity toward God.

J.C. Ryle, "On all the coasts of England there is not such a beacon to warn sailors of danger as Judas Iscariot is to warn Christians. He shows us what length a man may go in religious profession, and yet turn out a rotten hypocrite at last, and prove never to have been converted. He shows us the uselessness of the highest privileges, unless we have a heart to value them and turn them to good account."

You can grow up in a Christian home. You can sit under biblical preaching for decades. You talk like a Christian and appear to everyone around you to be a Christian. None of those privileges guarantee that your heart is loyal to King Jesus, that you are loving and following him as your greatest treasure. Looking like a disciple to everyone around you means nothing. Judas certainly did. No one said, "I knew it was you!" when Jesus identified him. They were confused. They were taken aback. V. 28, "No one at the table knew why he said this to him."

Heed the warning, friend, and tend well to the condition of your heart. Don't say, "If I come clean with my struggles, people will get hurt. Better for me to stay quiet and

suffer in silence for their sake.” You’re wrong, my friend. Terribly wrong. What the people around you need the most, what your parents or spouse needs the most, isn’t protection from the pain of hypocrisy revealed, but to see the redeeming power of the God triumph gloriously in your life!

Ask the Lord to search and know you, to reveal any area of disloyalty to him, and cry out for grace to repent. A gospel-centered response to hypocrisy starts with guarding our own heart.

## **2) WALK IN LOVE: THE CROSS DISPLAYS THE DISTINCTIVE MARK OF CHRISTIANITY**

After predicting his betrayal and watching Judas go out into the night, Jesus says something even more shocking in v. 31. “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.” How could anything remotely glorious come out of the most despicable act of betrayal the world has ever known? Because that’s what our faithful God has been doing from the very beginning – taking what men intend for evil and using it for good. He did it through Jesus’ death and he’s still doing it today if we are willing to take up our cross and follow him.

How does the cross of Christ glorify the Son? It displays the fullness of his love for his unfaithful bride. He died in our place, for our sins, so that we could be forgiven and come home to God. It reveals the perfection of his obedience. The infinite worth of his righteousness far exceeded the weight of our sin. And it magnifies his power over sin, death, and Satan, proving that no spiritual enemy is too great for the God who saves.

How does the cross of Christ glorify the Father? It displays the depth of his love in giving us the one thing he treasured most – his only begotten Son. It reveals the height of his wisdom in taking what was low and despised in the world – death on a cross – and using it to accomplish the greatest good the world has ever known. It magnifies the perfection of his justice as the Son receives in his body and soul the Father’s wrath against the sin of the world. And it confirms the trustworthiness of his Word. He brings to pass the deliverance he promised his people thousands of years beforehand.

If you want to see God’s goodness, wisdom, love, justice, righteousness, power, faithfulness, compassion, severity, holiness, and mercy, the utter supremacy of his



glory, join the host of heaven in looking to the cross. Rev 5:11-12, "Then I looked, and heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

Jesus' glorification to the right hand of the Father through death, resurrection, and ascension would soon take him out of the world. Jesus knew he was about to go home. V. 33, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you." So what does he do? He gives his disciples a parting word of instruction.

V. 34, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another." Christian love is radically distinct from the world's love. We don't start with what feels good or right to us. Nor do we start with what feels good or right to other people. We start with Jesus, with the way he defines love through his words and deeds.

How does Jesus respond in the midst of human betrayal, hypocrisy, and disloyalty in Jn 13? He keeps moving toward the cross where, a few chapters later, he lays down his life for us. He dies, so we could live. He is faithful despite our unfaithfulness. He is loyal despite our disloyalty. Though we betray him, he doesn't betray us. He perseveres in loving us, even to the point of death.

The "new" element in the command isn't the call to love in and of itself. It's "new" in the sense that the cross establishes a new standard for love, a new definition of love – love in the midst of enmity, love in the teeth of opposition, love in response to betrayal, hypocrisy, and infidelity, a costly love, a death-to-self kind of love, a cruciform love that is utterly impossible apart from a supernatural, life-transforming encounter with the love of Jesus.

Only his sacrificial love is able to melt our selfish hearts and empower us to love the unfaithful, to love the disloyal, even to love those who betray us, with the love we have first received from God. Our default setting is to treat people the way they treat us. We love to rewrite v. 34! "Love one another: just as they have loved you, you also are to love them." That's what the world does. But that's not Christian love.



Christian love is compelled by God's love and imitates God's love. 1 Jn 4:19-21, "We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Even when they're unfaithful? Yes. Even when they're hypocritical? Yes. Even when they betray us? Yes. Be honest. Who's setting the bar for your love for other people? The way they treat you or the way Jesus has loved you? The world will never ask the reason for the hope that is within you, Christian, unless they see something in your life they cannot explain. It's called giving the people in your life the opposite of what they deserve because Jesus has given you the opposite of what you deserve. It's what makes the church distinct from the world.

We don't attack them, avoid them, ignore them, or sabotage their reputation behind their back, whether in person or online. We speak and act in ways that affirm their intrinsic worth and dignity as an image-bearer of God. And then we give ourselves sacrificially to them in word and deed that they might become lovely as Jesus is lovely. gospel-centered response requires walking in love – it's the distinctive mark of a true Christian.

### **3) PRACTICE HUMILITY: SPIRITUAL SELF-CONFIDENCE IS A FALSE GOSPEL**

Peter doesn't understand what Jesus is about to do. V. 36, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replies, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." It's not yet time for you to leave this world and go home to the Father in heaven, Peter. One day you will die and go there. But not yet. This is my hour. My time. And you cannot do what I am about to do. You cannot lay down your life for the sin of the world. We have done many things together. This I must do myself."

V. 37, "Lord, why can I not follow you now?" I want to go where you're going! I want to do what you're doing! What it takes, whatever it requires, count me in! I'm really committed to you, Jesus. "I will lay down my life for you." V. 38, Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

Peter has many qualities to commend him, but he still lacks something of critical importance: humility. He thinks of himself as someone who is ready and able to do great exploits for God. Peter felt strong. Jesus knew he was weak. Peter was focused on everything he wanted to do for Jesus. Jesus knew what Peter really needed was for Jesus to do something for him. Peter thought he could remain faithful. Jesus knew he would not.

It's not just spiritual pretenders who need the Lord's mercy. It's all of us. Even as believers, we are beset with weakness, frailty, and sin. We can do nothing apart from him. We are all prone to wander. There's not a day of your life, Christian, where you don't stand in desperate need of the Lord's mercy. Our lives are riddled with spiritual infidelity.

"Oh come on, pastor. It's not like I've done anything scandalous." Maybe you haven't, friend. But did you love God more than your own comfort or reputation yesterday? If not, you were spiritually disloyal. Did you trust everything you say you believe about God this week or did you waver even slightly in unbelieving fear or anxiety? If so, you're a hypocrite. Is there anything last month you knew was wrong, but did it anyway? In that moment, friend, you betrayed the Lord.

Even as Christians, our lives are riddled with infidelity. I don't say that to condemn you. I say that to humble you. I say that because we need to experience the divinely-intended effect of honestly answering Jesus' question – Will you lay down your life for me? Is the glory of your good works the banner over your life? Or are you a sinner who never outgrows your need for mercy? Peter thought he was beyond betraying the Lord. In our pride, we do the same thing.

J.C. Ryle, "We fancy sometimes, like Peter, that there are some things we could not possibly do. We look pitifully upon others who fall, and please ourselves in the thought that at any rate we would not have done so. We know nothing at all. The seeds of every sin are latent in our hearts, even when renewed, and they only need occasion, or carelessness and the withdrawal of God's grace for a season, to put forth an abundant crop...A humble sense of our own innate weakness, a constant dependence on the Strong for strength, a daily prayer to be held up, because we cannot hold up ourselves – these are the true secrets of safety."

Peter needed to learn he was more like Judas than he realized. So are we, friends. We all need the sin-conquering, relationship-restoring power of God's grace. Jesus



knows it. He's eager to give it. The question is, will you confess your need? Pride says, "Look at me, Jesus. I can do it!" Humility says, "Lord, I can't and forgive me for thinking I could."

Rescue me. Help me. I need you. Only you can restore my relationship with God. Only you can give me the power I need to love the way you do. Only you can bring me back when I begin to wander. I cannot be the husband, father, pastor, or friend I'm supposed to be apart from you. A gospel-centered response to human hypocrisy and betrayal means practicing humility because spiritual self-confidence is a false gospel.

## **CONCLUSION**

Guard your heart. Walk in love. Practice humility. And as you do, friend, as you follow the Lord in loving the unfaithful as he has loved you, know this. Jesus will glorify himself through your life.

Hypocrisy isn't easy to deal with, whether in us or around us. Disloyalty and betrayal are deeply painful. But they are also the Father's chosen stage for displaying the greatness of his glory and the supernatural character of his love. He did it through Jesus. And Jesus is eager to do the same through you.