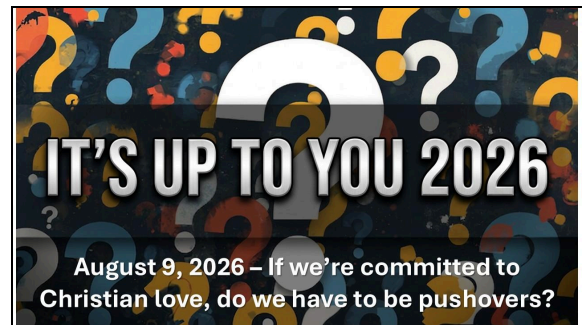


It's Up to You 2026 (Week 3) - If we're committed to Christian Love, do we have to be pushovers?

Yesterday's Sermon Summary

1. Our question yesterday was a follow up drawn from our post-Easter series on Christian love: "As a Christian, how do you stand up for yourself and not get walked all over?...It seems like being a Christian means taking the hate, no retaliation, no boundaries...Is there a way to be able to stand up for yourself, set boundaries, get fairness, as a Christian?"



2. Lots to be said in response to that great question - let's start here...C. S. Lewis once wrote that "Christ is our true north," meaning Christ is like the needle on a compass that will always point us in the right direction. Let's put that to the test about Christian love, especially given that Christ expects us to love others the very same way that He loves us ([John 13.34-35](#)).

3. So how did Christ love? Well, in the four gospels we observe that Christ loved by seeing and engaging with those others ignored or pushed to the margins, or befriended those others called outcasts and "sinners." But we also notice that Christ knew His capacity to love was limited: He regularly withdrew to rest and recuperate even when the crowds demanded more of Him (e.g., [Mark 1.35-38](#)) and He shared the ministry load with His disciples ([Luke 10.1-12](#)).

4. But we also notice that Jesus always did what was best for those with whom He interacted, but it didn't always fall into the category of what we label "nice." For example, it was out of love that He bluntly exposes the rich young ruler's chief allegiance to wealth and possessions, which left that man grieved and full of questions ([Mark 10.17-22](#)). Jesus' frequent, sometimes scathing public confrontations with the religious and political leaders are seen in an entirely different light when they're seen as an act of love.

5. The specific scriptural passage that prompted today's question is in the Sermon of the Mount at the end of Matthew. In these verses ([5.38-42](#)), we're told a) to turn the other cheek (don't retreat from a public insult), b) to give our cloak if someone is so petty as to demand our shirt as a loan payment which forces everyone present to face the insensitivity of the act as we stand there naked, and c) to go a second mile if a Roman soldier ruins your day by forcing you to carry his pack for one mile (the max distance allowable).

6. So this kind of love is NOT being a doormat or pushover, nor is it revenge for the sake of satiating our own anger. Rather it is love that is resistance, not retaliation, love that stubbornly exposes injustice that others won't or can't see, and love that patiently calls to the benevolent humanity of our assailants. This kind of love is an act of redemptive strength that invites enemies to reassess, reconsider, and redirect. In this love we aren't yielding our agency; we are acting but we are not acting out. And, yes, this is precisely how Christ loved; even His crucifixion can be seen as His ultimate commitment to this kind of obstinate, nonviolent love.

7. With all this reflection on Christlike love under our belt, now let's ask - if we want to love like Jesus, as He asked us to do, what do we need to keep in mind? First, is what I've been calling "love" something else? Is it Christlike love or perhaps instead conflict avoidance, peace at any price, codependence, fear, forced compliance, capitulation, or just playing it safe so we don't get hurt?

8. As one psychologist notes, our whole lives have been a training ground for love - for better and for worse. Your family of origin was where you learned what "love" was and was not, and often that definition was limited. Even today we are training each other about love, yes even at KirkWood, week in and week out. This makes us wonder - what diminished version of "love" have we been taught or trained to live by, and how can we expand beyond it to love more like Christ?

9. The litmus test for whether or not it's "love" or something else is what lies beneath it. Does what you're calling "love" leave you exhausted, quietly resentful, smoldering in frustration, or raising the white flag of surrender? Yeah, that's not "love"...it's something else a lot less healthy.

10. Also, to love like Christ requires us to ask, "Am I protecting the property lines (boundaries) of my life"? Can we tell the difference between "me" and "not me," where our responsibility starts and stops and where the other person's begins and ends? Does our inability to say "no" render meaningless or invalidate our many "yes"s? And are we living so busy, overextended, and put upon by others that we really don't have a self, or our best self, to give to anyone anymore? (On that last question, "agape" love, the highest form of love in the New Testament, is by definition "self-giving love"...which is a problem if you don't have a self to give on a regular basis.)

11. These two quotations do a good job of summarizing the rugged, expansive, obstinate, always best, not always "nice" kind of love we see in Jesus and that we are asked to imitate: "Love in action is hard work. It requires tremendous discipline of the heart," (Dorothy Day; Christian social activist, 20th-century) and "We must not confuse Christian love with a lack of spine. Love is not weak, passive compliance. Love is the most durable power in the world. It is a strong, active, demanding force" (Martin Luther King Jr.).

Explore More this Week

- The most fruitful follow-up to yesterday's sermon might be to spend some reflecting on the two questions in the last section: 1) Is it "love" or is it something else?, and 2) How am I doing with the "property lines" (boundaries) in my life?
- 7.5 min. video from The Bible Project on those ever-so-challenging words of Jesus at the end of Matthew 5 about loving our enemies: [Wisdom in Old Testament Laws | Oaths, Revenge, and Enemies](#)
- Here's a short reflection on how Martin Luther King Jr. understood nonviolent love to the centerpiece of Christian "agape" love: [An Experiment in Love: Martin Luther King, Jr. on the Six Pillars of Nonviolent Resistance and the Ancient Greek Notion of 'Agape' – The Marginalian](#)
- Thoughts on how to exercise Christlike love in any setting or context: ['Love in Context' equipping session offers biblical and historical reflections on the meaning of love](#)
- Here are two summaries of one of the great books on personal boundaries of the last 30 years (by Christian counselors Henry Cloud and John Townsend): [Book notes: Boundaries by John Townsend & Henry Cloud](#) and [Boundaries by Henry Cloud: 21 Minute Summary](#)
- On the connection between having good boundaries/"property lines" and our ability to love well: [Love with Boundaries: How to Have Compassion and Health](#)