

# **LOVE CULTURE**

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August 7, 2022

**Scriptures (NKIV):** 1 Cor:13; 1 John 3:10-18, 22-23; John 6:27-29; Mark 12:28-33; Lev. 19:18,34; Luke 6:31; 1 Cor. 13:4-7(NIV)

**Sermon in a sentence:** God has called us to embrace His unchanging culture that supersedes all others: the Love Culture.

If you happen to live in the city of Toronto or ever come to town for a visit, I encourage you to take a trip to one of our premier malls, the Yorkdale Shopping Centre. **Spoiler alert:** Most of the stores carry stuff commoners like us can't afford, so to avoid temptation, it's best to leave your credit cards at home. But there are a few coffee shops around where you can grab a coffee and a croissant, sit on a bench in the hallway, and get into some serious people-watching. Every time I'm there and I look at all the passers-by, it makes me think of heaven. Everybody from everywhere is in that mall, and all of them are there to have their needs and desires met. From my observation, all the people seem to be quite happy, and I figure they keep coming back because they know they can get what they need whenever they come. The parking lot is massive, and it's packed seven days a week. In this mall, you'll see people from every tribe and nation, kindred, and tongue.

As I hope you've heard by now, Pastor Adrian speaks a lot about his vision to foster and facilitate Cultural Liberty in our church. And certainly, I can tell you that cultural liberty is the order of the day at Yorkdale. People of every language, religion, mode of dress, age, ethnicity and economic status walk together, talk together, shop

together, serve and are served in a very natural and comfortable way. Some come to buy, some come to sell, and everything runs like a well-oiled machine. As I've said to some of you before, Yorkdale inspires me, and I pray that one day our church will look just like it. To quote one of Pastor Adrian's statements that I really love, he's said: "I want our church to *look* like Heaven and *act* like Heaven." That's a sentence we all need to internalize and live by. And yes, I truly hope to see the day that our church positively and intentionally looks like Heaven and acts like Heaven!

If we really want to see this happen, it means we will all have to go beyond our individual human cultures, and beyond our present church culture, and adopt the best culture one can be a part of: God's "**LOVE CULTURE.**" We all need to do this TOGETHER! God is love, and everything He does is based on this eternal reality. God is love and His culture is a culture of LOVE.

Just to get technical for a moment, let me tell you what I mean when I use the word "culture."

**Culture can be defined as all the ways of life that are passed down from generation to generation including codes of manners, dress, language, religion, rituals, art, norms of behavior (such as law and morality), and systems of belief.<sup>1</sup>**

So, when we hear terms like Canadian culture, hip-hop culture, cancel culture, pop culture, western culture, indigenous culture, post-modern culture, etc., this

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<sup>1</sup> <https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/mph-modules/PH/CulturalAwareness/CulturalAwareness2.html>, accessed July 27, 2022, paraphrased.

definition will help us understand the idea of culture a little more clearly.

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Now, let's get into the word of God, which is our solid foundation, forever settled in Heaven. As Jesus told His disciples: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away" (Matt. 24:35). I know you will hear many other messages from this pulpit on the topic of cultural liberty and how we need to live together with commonly held values and beliefs. But before that, I need to share some foundational scriptures with you. They are the bedrock we stand on, and they inform the ways in which we think and act. So, as we begin, I'm going right to the "love chapter," and I encourage you to read it out loud along with me.

1 Corinthians 13 Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> And though I have *the gift of* prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> And though I bestow all my goods to feed *the poor*, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Love suffers long *and* is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails. But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. <sup>9</sup> For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. <sup>10</sup> But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

<sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known.

<sup>13</sup> And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these *is* love.

This chapter never fails to challenge me whenever I read it. It's packed with both theory and application on how love needs to work in our minds, our hearts, and our actions. First and foremost, as verse 2 tells us, **if I do not have true, genuine love (i.e., God's love) in my heart, I AM NOTHING!** We must never forget this.

I'm going to move on to read a few more scriptures, but we'll be coming back to this chapter before we close. In particular, we'll focus on verses 4 to 7, and they'll give us some powerful and practical "dos and don'ts" of love, so we'll learn how to "live love," not just "say love." It would also be a very beneficial spiritual exercise for you to slowly read and meditate on *this* chapter every day this week and let the Holy Spirit seal it into your own spirit.

But for now, let's go on. The apostle John writes:

1 John 3:10-18,22-23 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: **Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.** <sup>11</sup> For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, <sup>12</sup> not as Cain *who* was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous.

<sup>13</sup> Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you. <sup>14</sup> **We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.** He who does not love *his* brother abides in death. <sup>15</sup> Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal

life abiding in him. <sup>16</sup> By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down *our* lives for the brethren. <sup>17</sup> But **whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?** <sup>18</sup> **My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.**

As we've just read, Love Culture is much more than nice words and cliches! It must be lived. Jesus acted out His love for us as He was being crucified for our sins on a Roman cross. And through John, He is telling us that we also ought to lay down our lives for our brethren. I know that in our case it may never come to that, but John was speaking about a reality so many of our brothers and sisters faced in the early church. Numbers of them were arrested and imprisoned, whipped, tortured, and persecuted. In many cases this was because they wouldn't reveal the names of their church leaders or the locations where they met. They endured intense persecution, barbaric conditions, prison, hunger, and even death, but they stood firm in their love for their brethren. And as John reminded them, it is also needful to share our worldly goods with those who are in need around us. That's something each and every one of us can do on a routine basis. That's part of Love Culture. Let's continue...

<sup>22</sup> And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. <sup>23</sup> And **this is His commandment: [1] that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and [2] love one another, as He gave us commandment.**

Verse 23 tells us that there are two very important commandments we need to obey. Originally, John gave us the first commandment in chapter 6 of his gospel. After Jesus had fed 5,000 men, plus women and children, they

all flocked to Him the next day, looking for more food. Jesus told them there were more important things in life than just chasing after food. He said:

John 6:27-29 Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you... <sup>28</sup> Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered and said to them, **[1]** "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

That's the first part of what we read in 1 John 3:23. We must believe in Jesus Christ. Who He is. What He stands for. The revelation of salvation contained in His word. And then we move to the second commandment John referenced. We'll read it from Mark's gospel:

Mark 12:28-33 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" <sup>29</sup> Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: *'Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one. [2]* <sup>30</sup> *And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'* This is the first commandment. <sup>31</sup> And the second, like it, is this: *'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'* There is no other commandment greater than these." <sup>32</sup> So the scribe said to Him, "Well said, Teacher. You have spoken the truth, for there is one God, and there is no other but He. <sup>33</sup> And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Here we have Jesus stating the greatest commandment, and we have a scribe accepting it as totally valid for his life. When he said this, Jesus said, 'my friend, you're not far from the kingdom of God'. I hope we'll all follow his

example today and understand how critical it is for us to embrace the Love Culture.

I know this concept of loving our neighbours as ourselves may sound very 'New Testament' to our ears, but it actually originates way back in Leviticus, the book that teaches priests and Levites how to do their job. Here's what it says:

Lev. 19:18,34 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.**

Then in verse 34 of the same chapter, the Lord expands our responsibility from just loving those of our own tribe to loving everybody else we come in contact with. He said:

**34 The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.**

This is core to God's character. Love your neighbour as yourself because I am the Lord! His culture, His manner of life does not change. Love is the key. And to add another crucial scripture to our readings today, let's remember the verse we have dubbed "The Golden Rule." Luke 6:31 says:

**Luke 6:31 And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise.**

So, just as we can summarize all of the law and the prophets in the commandments to love God and love our neighbour, Jesus now summarizes the practical application of these commandments in one short sentence. "Just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise." That's the outworking of Love Culture in one succinct verse. Whenever we're about to interact with

another human being, we need to ask ourselves the simple question: “Would I like someone to do to me what I’m about to do to this person?” If the answer is yes, carry on. If the answer is no, don’t do it.

And now, as I promised earlier, let’s finish with a short meditation on 1 Cor. 13:4-7, which I will read from the NIV translation of the Bible, just so we can get the concepts here a little more clearly. Please read this with me:

1 Cor. 13:4-7 (NIV) Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup> It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup> Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup> It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

There is no way I can adequately cover all of these aspects of love today, which is why I encourage you to read and meditate on this chapter every day this week. This is what Love Culture looks like, sounds like, feels like. This is how we act out the Lord’s instruction to do to others as we want them to do to us. And we need to engage in this every single day of our lives.

*\*\*\* Call to prayer for those who would like to experience God’s saving love today. \*\*\**