

Walking in the *Jesus Way*



By Brad Jersak

John the Beloved distilled the *Jesus Way* to this: “And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love” (2 John 1:6).

By the end of the first century, the *Didache*, a very early Christian catechism / manual, summarized the *Jesus Way* as *walking in love*. It opens this way, recalling the words of Christ:

There are *two ways*, one of life and one of death, but a great difference between the two ways. The *way of life*, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, love your neighbor as yourself, and do not do to another what you would not want done to you.

The teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there for loving those who love you? Do not the Gentiles do that? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy...

If someone strikes your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you shall be perfect.

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two.

If someone takes your cloak, give him also your coat.

If someone takes from you what is yours, ask it not back, for indeed you are not able.

Give to everyone who asks you and ask it not back; for the Father wills that to all should be given of our own blessings (free gifts).

See how difficult *walking in love* can become? It sounds impossible—like “take up your cross.” Exactly. But Jesus meant it—walking in his footsteps of love is a real way of life. In his own words, “This is my command: love one another, in the same way that I loved you” (John 15:12).

A “command”? Yes. A tall order, yes, but it is, after all, *the Jesus Way*. Would you rather hack your own trail through the jungle of life with a machete of self-effort? No thanks. Rather, to walk *the Jesus Way* is to follow the Christ—the divine human—by the *Grace of Abba* through the power of the Spirit.

The *Jesus Walk* is a faith pilgrimage in the company and in the strength of triune Love. As the carol says, “their law is love and their gospel is peace.” Yes, sign me up for that, please.

THE WAY OF THE CROSS

On second thought...“Love each other as Christ loved us”? Give me a moment, please...But Christ laid down his life for us. Is John saying his followers will also lay down their lives?

“This is my command: love one another, in the same way that I loved you. No one has a love greater than this, to lay down your life for your friends.”—John 15:12-13

I get it now: the *Jesus Way* conjoins the *way of love* with the *way of the Cross*. The *Jesus Walk* is the Way of sacrificial love—*cruciform* (cross-like love) and *kenotic* (self-giving love), just like him.

But the Cross? That’s supposed to be a done deal. Why does Christ say, “If any of you want to come after me, you must say no to yourselves, and pick up your cross every day, and follow me” (Luke 9:23)?

Are Christians called to be crucified? Literally, hardly ever. Okay, we talk about “dying to self,” which means something like letting go of self-centeredness and ego. But it’s more than that.

I believe Christ intends the cruciform love of *Abba* revealed through him to become flesh in those who follow him on the *Jesus*

Way. Remember, cruciform love refers to God's self-giving, radically forgiving, co-suffering love. Those who've read *A More Christlike God* or articles I've posted about the Cross will recognize that three-fold refrain. It is typically how I summarize the nature and way of triune Love.

But now we add to that this truth: Christ-followers who truly follow—who walk the *Jesus Way*—will also manifest his love in our lives, “on the ground,” so to speak. Christ claimed his disciples would be known and recognized by this love (John 13:35). They are identified with Christ as they exhibit his cruciform love in this world...

By the *Grace* (transforming energies) of the indwelling Spirit, love becomes a law of nature—our *new* nature. We must not reduce this to an abstract righteousness declared in some hypothetical heavenly verdict. The love-righteousness of Christ-in-us must and will “show up” as the *way we walk—the Jesus Walk*.

THE WAY OF LOVE

John, the apostle of love, is utterly insistent on this point. His logic is unequivocal:

First, God is love because that love did not hunker down in God's heart in the comfort of Paradise. Triune Love is a divine verb Who entered

space-time history through the Incarnation.

Divine Love necessarily appears and acts or it is not love at all. That act of love is Jesus Christ—the eternal Word enfleshed as perfect, cruciform (cross-like) Love.

John the Beloved extrapolates: divine Love—Christ in us—is only real when it actualizes—when it appears and acts in the tangible world of our relationships.

Love shows up or it isn't love. John leaves no room for a heaven/earth, heart/hand, feeling/action dualism. As my firstborn once said to his youngest brother, “At some level, you are what you do.” Your identity and your walk—your faith and your love—are indivisible.

At the same time, John is no naïve perfectionist who believes we've already arrived. John knows this is a way, a walk, a journey. The “finished work” of the Cross has not finished working on me. For John and for Christ, the *Jesus Way* is a path we're walking one day at a time in fits and starts, stumbles and recoveries. Perhaps at best we're staggering forward, but as we imperfectly hear and follow—*imitate*—Christ's faithful footfalls, life is the venue where we're learning to love.

According to John, those who live this way—the *Jesus Way* of love—

know God. Here he is verbatim:

“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God, and *all who love are fathered by God and know God*. The one who does not love has not known God, because God is love.”—1 John 4:7-8 (NTE)

The next verse doesn't start with “but” or “if.” No caveats or flinching. John sets aside the question of whether we identify ourselves as Christians or not. He doesn't care who we presume to include as “saved” or exclude as “lost.”

For John, *those who love know God*. *Those who do not love, do not*. Period. To be blunt—and John is very blunt—you may be a confessing “Christian,” but without love, you don't know God, because God is Love. Confessions and claims to the contrary are lies.

He says, “If someone says, ‘I love God’, but hates their brother or sister, *that person is a liar*. Someone who doesn't love a brother or sister whom they have seen, *how can they love God, whom they haven't seen?*” (1 John 4:20).

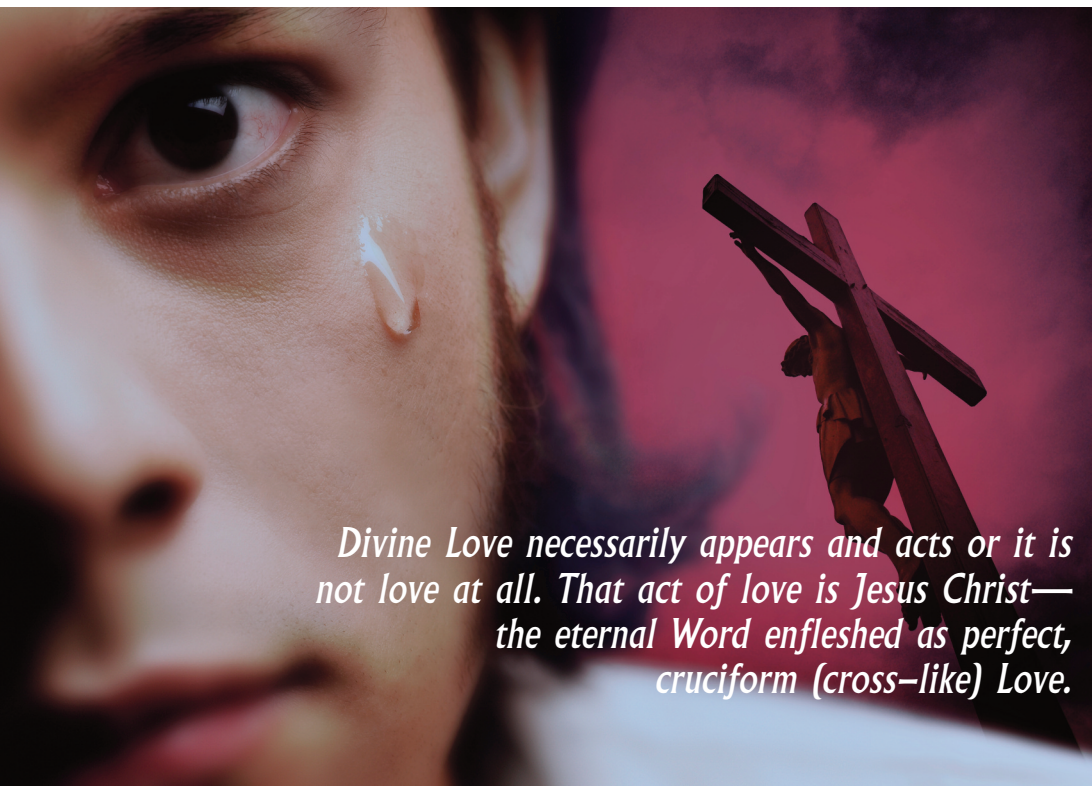
Why so harsh, John? Practically condemning! Probably because we need some sharp rhetoric whenever the name of Christ gets co-opted and associated with unChristlike ways, especially religious hate.

It's as if John foresaw our day, when Christian faithfulness is frequently associated more with *being against* rather than *standing with*, self-righteousness rather than humility, condemnation rather than compassion, and hate rather than love.

John must have been up against the same serious missteps that plague Christianity on a grand scale today. For John, any so-called “faithfulness” that divorces love and truth or love and faith is a blasphemous perversion and proof that we simply don't know God.

Conversely, John is entirely generous to those who live in the *Light* and on the *Way of Love*. For John, *anyone who loves knows God—anyone? Anyone who loves!* □

Adapted from *A More Christlike Way* (pp. 56-59), by Brad Jersak.



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