

Dear friend,

I want to take this opportunity to wish you a very merry Christmas. You might ask, "How can you reasonably think that this time in history has anything merry about it? Are you not reading the news?" Indeed, I am. And I find the similarity between the first Christmas and this one striking. In Luke chapter 2, most likely jobs were being lost, the economy was suffering, and people were being counted for the purpose of more taxation. And on top of all that, the Roman powers were imposing their concept of a superior society on the people of God.

In the natural it was, indeed, a gloomy time. How wonderful, though, that this was the time in which God chose to rend the veil between time and eternity with the most incredible chorus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." And then there was the cry of the most incredible child ever born. God had come to take us home!

Merry Christmas...a very merry Christmas!

Yours, in Christ,

Pastor Carter Conlon

A NEW COMMANDMENT by Carter Conlon

"Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you, A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:33–35).

The Lord is calling His Church to be an expression of love far beyond our natural ability.

In this passage of Scripture, Jesus was addressing His disciples not long before He went to the cross. It was an incredible scene: the One who was the embodiment of God's extravagant love for all mankind was commanding His disciples to follow Him into the depth of this love for others—particularly toward those who belong to the household of faith. Of course, this was not a commandment solely for those present with Him at the time; the Lord is issuing this same command to you and me today.

Note that the kind of love Jesus is referring to does not simply mean having affection or an affinity for one another. No, the Lord is calling His Church to be an expression of

a love so deep and so far beyond our natural human ability that it will stand as an undeniable testimony of the reality of God. Here is how the Bible defines love: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails" (1 Corinthians 13:4–8, NKJV). It is something that simply cannot be produced in a people apart from the Spirit of God.

Nevertheless, upon receiving this new commandment, the apostle Peter assumed he had the inherent ability to do what Jesus was calling them to do. He asked Jesus, "Lord where are You going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward" (John 13:36, NKJV).

In other words, Jesus was saying, "Peter, you do not have the strength now to go where I am going. You cannot be loyal; you cannot love the way that I love." Keep in mind that when Jesus issued this new commandment, He was at a tableful of people who were going to fail Him. Yet the love in His heart was compelling Him to go to a cross and lay down His life for fallen humanity. He was willing to endure the failings of

even those who pledged their love and loyalty to Him.

Still convinced of his own faithfulness, Peter asked Jesus, “*Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.*” Jesus answered him, “*Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say unto you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times*” (John 13:37–38, NKJV). Jesus was essentially saying to him, “Oh really? Do you think you are that strong? Will you really lay your life down for Me? I tell you that before morning comes, you will deny three times that you have even known Me. You simply do not have the inward strength to lay down your life for another. But don’t worry, you will later.”

It is only when the Holy Spirit comes upon us that we can fulfill this new commandment.

We, too, must recognize this weakness in ourselves. I cannot love people the way Jesus commands me to, and neither can you. Only God has this kind of benevolent love that we need. It is only when the Holy Spirit comes upon us—when the victory of Christ becomes our victory and God’s heart becomes our heart—that we can fulfill this new commandment.

■ A BENEVOLENT LOVE

After having denied Jesus three times—just as the Lord had said—Peter must have finally realized the impossibility of obeying this commandment in his own strength. It was not until the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 disciples in the Upper Room that Peter finally stepped into the place where he had been unable to follow. Suddenly he burst forth

into the marketplace and began speaking boldly to a blood-thirsty crowd. He was now enabled by the Spirit of God to be given for others—even those who were resisting their own salvation. It was truly an amazing moment.

As we do things God’s way, God will be our supply and meet our needs.

The Bible tells us that “*they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need*” (Acts 2:41–45).

The believers held all things in common! There was such a fervency, such a baptism of the love of God, that people even began to sell lands and houses and lay the money at the apostles’ feet for distribution to those in need among the body of believers. Wherever God pours out His Spirit, a benevolence comes into the hearts of the people. It is a generous and compassionate love that causes them to look away from their own needs and instead see the needs of others—which is what this new commandment entails.

I remember that when I first left my secular job in order to enter ministry fulltime, I put a certain amount of money into the bank from my retirement plan. I figured that if the whole ministry thing did not work out, at least I had

a slush fund to fall back on. One day, a friend of mine who was also in ministry came into my office and said, “Pastor, I don’t know what I’m going to do. The engine in my car just blew up, and I don’t have any money. I don’t even know how I am going to get to church.”

I knew that his need was legitimate, and I also knew that I had enough money in the bank to buy him a car. Yet suddenly I got very, very spiritual and said, “Well, let’s pray. God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, so He is well able to provide. Even David said, ‘I have been young and now I’m old, and I have never seen the righteous forsaken or His seed begging bread’” (see Psalm 37:25).

As he sat there across the desk, I bowed my head and we began to pray—yet it was as if my mouth was full of peanut butter! I could hardly pray, for all the while this little voice behind me was saying, “You hypocrite! If a man sees his brother in need and he shuts his bowels of compassion, how can he say the love of God dwells in him?” I kept trying to push it out of my mind as I was praying, “Oh, God, be kind! Provide a car! Just, just—” until finally I ran out of gas and said, “I have the money in the bank if you need it.”

In the not-too-distant future, there will be a great number of people in need around us.

I ended up buying him a new car. Shortly after that, the engine in my car blew up. At that point I said, “Well, Lord, I have obeyed You. That’s all I can say.”

Sometime later, we were renovating a church that we had purchased in

the country. I was up on a scaffold, helping to paint the ceiling, when suddenly somebody came in and said, “You have a phone call. It’s an emergency!” When I got on the phone, the man on the line introduced himself as a salesman at a local car dealership. Then he said, “A gentleman came in this morning and bought you a brand-new car. All you have to do is come in and sign for it!” I asked him the identity of the gentleman, but he told me that he had chosen to remain anonymous.

There is no chance that we can represent Christ on the Earth if we simply become hoarders like everybody else who lives outside of the kingdom of God.

Now please understand that I am not telling you that if you buy a car for a friend, you are going to get a new one in return. My point is simply that as we do things God’s way, refusing to hold back when we see a genuine need before us, God will be our supply and meet our needs.

It is important that you and I embrace this truth now, for in the not-too-distant future, there will be a great number of people in need around us. As you know, the coming days will be incredibly dark and difficult. In fact, I believe that we are going to go through some of the darkest moments in the history of mankind. Everything as we know it is going to change drastically. Fear will be in our streets. Many people will be violent and cruel for the sake of securing their own

provision, just as we have witnessed many times throughout history. Yet despite all that will be happening in the society around us, you and I will be invited by the Spirit of God to live in a manner similar to the early church. There is no chance that we can represent Christ on the Earth if we simply become hoarders like everybody else who lives outside of the kingdom of God.

■ THIS WILL BE THE EVIDENCE

Therefore, let me ask you a question today on God’s behalf: Are you willing to love others the way Jesus commanded us to?

Will you be willing to open your home to others if necessary—to give of what you have to meet the needs of others in the body of Christ? Will you be willing to be a vessel through whom God will give a drink to somebody who is thirsty? Food to somebody who is hungry? Clothing to somebody who is naked? Shelter to somebody without a home?

Now please don’t misunderstand me—I am not suggesting that you go out today and call a real estate agent, sell your house or your apartment, go to the bank to take out your savings and just throw it all to the wind. What I am saying is that God, foreseeing the days ahead of us, knows what we need to hear and consider, for this is what will earmark the true Church of Jesus Christ. Such was the case in the book of Acts: “*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved*” (Acts 2:46–47, NKJV). When it says, “*having favor with the people,*” I believe it was exactly what Jesus told His disciples in our opening Scripture: “*By this*

all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

People may take off in our moment of need, but will we let it stop us from being given for them?

Over the past few decades, many have gone to great lengths to try to prove God’s presence among them. However, it is obedience to this new commandment that is the evidence! Tongues can be imitated, gifts of the Holy Spirit can be faked, prophecy can be of the flesh. All of these things can be fraudulent, but an ongoing, benevolent, self-sacrificing love for one another cannot be faked—at least not for very long. That is why if people in the world see the body of Christ living in genuine fellowship—a stark contrast to the self-centeredness and the divisions of this generation—they will have no choice but to acknowledge that this could only be done by the Spirit of God.

■ EMPOWERED BY THE SPIRIT

Knowing that this will be the evidence of God with us, I am certain that it is the desire of every believer to love the way Christ does—to live what the Scripture says, to go the distance that Jesus was willing to go for lost humanity. And so we set out to obey His commandment to love others as He loves us... until we, like Peter, meet the limitations of our own ability to actually do so.

After all, opening your heart to other people always involves a risk. Many have loved deeply, only to be betrayed. They trusted, they gave generously, they opened their heart, and ultimately they got stabbed in

the back. Yes, sometimes these things happen. People may run away and deny they ever knew us; others who once leaned close and said they loved us will end up taking off in our moment of need. But will we let it stop us from being given for them?

It all starts with the willingness to say, “God, pour out Your Spirit, and help me to love like You do.”

Jesus once said to His disciples, *“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me”* (Matthew 16:24). There is no way you can take up your cross and escape the betrayal. There will come a point when people will spit in your face, but as a follower of Christ, you must continue to love them.

When Jesus said, “Love one another as I have loved you,” it was not a suggestion but rather a commandment. However, we must also understand that He was actually adding another commandment to a series of commandments that nobody had been able to keep. The law and the commands of God were meant to highlight the hopelessness and futility of our trying to become godly in our own strength. Therefore, I think you will agree with me that the great need of this hour is another outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We need the love, compassion, and benevolence that marked the early Church, and it must be birthed and sustained in us by God.

It all starts with the willingness to say, “God, pour out Your Spirit, and help me to love like You do. I thank You for the blessings in my life, yet I am aware that they have been given to me for a reason—so don’t let me be blind to that purpose. Don’t let me simply take everything and use it for my own benefit. Oh, God, open my eyes and my heart; give me the courage to care. Take me where I cannot go in my own strength. Enable me to follow You to the place where You went—where You were poured out for others!”

Pastor David Wilkerson once told me that although the coming days are going to be very dark, there will be a sweetness of fellowship in the house of God such as we have never known. So let’s open our hearts and allow the Lord to baptize us in this divine love, breaking all the bonds of selfishness. As we do so, it can become one of the most wondrous things that we will ever experience as believers in Jesus Christ. It will no longer be some program telling us to love people. Rather, it will be the divine love of God shed abroad in our hearts. Suddenly we will look out and realize that we really do care. We will see somebody in need, and we will be unwilling to bypass them without reaching out to meet their need and let them know that God loves them. We will have a love and compassion for one another that will be inexplicable apart from the presence of God amongst us. And as the Lord said, this love for one another will be a declaration to the whole world that Jesus Christ is Lord. Hallelujah!

Carter Conlon
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CARTER CONLON

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TIMES SQUARE CHURCH

Times Square Church was founded in 1987 by Pastor David Wilkerson, author of “The Cross and the Switchblade.” It is an interdenominational church located in the heart of New York City.

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WEEKLY SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sunday	10:00AM	3:00PM	6:00PM
Tuesday	7:00PM	Prayer Service	
Friday	7:00PM	The Gate*	

*Youth and Young Adult Service

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