

# Christmas Preparations

by Jim Cymbala

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*To prepare for Christmas as a real Christian, we need to be more filled with the spirit of Christmas, which is the spirit of Jesus, which is the spirit of love.*

**Duration:** 25:02

**Topics:** "Preparation"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the current state of society, acknowledging the presence of 'bad apples' in various positions of power. However, he emphasizes that as Christians, we are called to demonstrate something different. The speaker highlights the importance of love, urging believers to have sincere love, hate evil, cling to what is good, and honor one another. He emphasizes that love should be the defining characteristic of Christians, as exemplified by Jesus' sacrificial love on the cross. The speaker also encourages believers to rejoice with others and strive for a deeper love this Christmas season.

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## Transcript

We're having a rather ominous beginning to Christmas, and that's why I wanna talk about to prepare for Christmas, and I'm not gonna talk about gifts and a tree, obviously. I'm talking about how we as Christians need to celebrate Christmas. In the last few weeks, we have seen this horrific attack, San Bernardino, people doing it in the name of their religion, a view of their religion, leaving smashed lives, death, mayhem.

We've seen, I've seen, a police officer shoot a young person in Chicago and kill him like a dog in the street. We've seen a nine-year-old child on the south side of Chicago killed for no other reason than he was the son of somebody in another gang, and they had a beef with that person in that gang, and they killed a nine-year-old boy, and this is becoming the new norm. The statistics are horrific, and we're reminded that whether it's police officers or legislative leaders in Albany, there's some bad apples in every crate.

How many say amen to that? What the world is looking for is a demonstration of something different than what pervades in our society, and all of these things that are happening are giving us an opportunity now for the gospel. God, in his sovereign wisdom, has told us through the Scriptures that in the last days, perilous times would come. It would get so bad that the love of most of his own people would wax cold because when things get nasty, the tendency is to get nasty feelings yourself.

That's just the way it is. So this is a great chance for the gospel. The only thing is we need more than the verbal presentation of the gospel.

I'm convinced now that what this country and the world is looking for is not just the message of the gospel, but the spirit of the gospel, not just the message of Christmas, but the spirit of Christmas, because what's giving Jesus and Christianity a bad name in many places are Christians, Christians who don't have the spirit of Jesus, or it's hard to see it in them, who are celebrating Christmas and will fight to get a nativity scene in some public square, but what good is that if you got a nasty attitude? So I wanna talk about all of us preparing for Christmas, starting with the speaker, because I need this as much or more than all of you. Religion is a tricky thing. Going to church can be a real slippery slope, because you can be religious, but devoid of the thing that makes Christianity special, which is Jesus, which is love.

God is love. Jesus was God in the flesh, so Jesus was walking, talking, human love. That's all Jesus was.

That's why people were drawn to him, because he was full of love, and that's very easy to lose. In the book of Romans, we have the largest theological treatise found anywhere in the scripture, where, especially in the New Testament, of course, the apostle Paul lays out for us in a masterful way not only the plan of salvation, but so much more, because he shows that all mankind has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, that there's no righteous person on the earth, no one in this building can stand and say you lived a good life, or you could say it compared to someone else, but not to God, that God has put everybody under disobedience so that he could show mercy and woo them to himself, that the just shall live by faith, that the way you become a Christian is not by trying to live a good life, but by putting your faith in Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross, and the fact that like Abraham had believed God and he was accepted by God because of his faith, so you also and I also can know what it is to be forgiven and in right standing with God because we've put our faith in Christ, we've given him our lives. We learn also in Romans that with that belief in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to live inside of us.

We can now live the life God wants us to, not because of us, but because of the one who lives inside of us, the Holy Spirit. We also learn in Romans that there's a hope waiting for us. Though we are led like sheep to the slaughter, there's life beyond death.

Oh, Romans lays this all out in a masterful way, but starting in chapter 12, the theological part is over and now there's application. There's odd little groups of verses where in some cases there's no verb, it's just short little bullets of facts and I wanna focus on those as we look at how to prepare for Christmas. So the first one is, love must be sincere, hate what is evil, cling to what is good, be devoted to one another in love and honor one another above yourselves.

Love must be sincere, hate what is evil, cling to what is good. He's telling the Christians in Rome, be devoted to one another in love and honor one another above yourselves. So this is the thing, ladies and gentlemen, concentrate, I won't speak long, that is supposed to characterize Christians, not carrying a Bible, not coming to a building on Sunday, not being white or black or a Calvinist, Arminian, charismatic, evangelical.

The thing that's supposed to characterize all of us is that we are people of love because our Savior is Jesus and we worship a God who so loved the world that he gave his son as atonement for our sin and that that Jesus, when he was on earth, was just so full of love that it's overwhelming as you read his story in the Gospels, every situation he's reacting in love and now Paul is writing and saying, what good is it to understand doctrine? What good is it to put a Christmas tree up? What good is it to come to church on

Sunday? What good is it for the choir to sway back and forth and sing if in everyday life, you're not gonna live a life of love? This is the thing that's supposed to characterize us. Notice what it says, let love be sincere. What's that mean? No fake love among God's people.

Don't say you love someone, he said really love them. The King James has it or the literal Greek has it, let love be without dissimulation. Don't be acting like you love people but you really don't care for them or you don't care about them.

So be devoted to one another. Be brothers in the sense that when you meet and you talk with this brother, you're interested in his life and what he's about. Don't dominate it yourself.

Prefer the other person more than yourself. Make yourself less important. Isn't that what Jesus did? Isn't that what God did when he sent his son into the world? Isn't that what Jesus did when he went to the cross? Who was he putting first, himself or us? Us.

He put us first. He died for us, he put us first. What Paul is saying now, if you're gonna be a follower of Jesus and have that name on your life, then be devoted to one another in love.

Let the people notice this about you, that you really love one another. Yeah, put up the tree if you want and exchange gifts, but be devoted to one another in love. This is a new concept.

While the Israelites called each other brother and ISIS can call themselves brothers, the concept of being devoted to one another in love and a family devoted in love, this is only found in Christianity. It's a new concept. Honor the other person more than yourself.

Love each other. Now why would it have to be sincere? Because insincere love is no love. Why would love be tempted to be insincere? For two reasons.

I'm so full of myself that I have no room in my life to love her. So I'm so full of myself, I can say, oh, I love you, but I don't really care about her because I only care about myself. Don't have that kind of love, Paul is saying.

Let love be sincere. You're gonna love someone, love them. Let God's love flow through you and love them.

There's another reason why love would not be sincere. Someone hurts you, but they're in the body of Christ. You know you're supposed to love them.

So what happens is a wall goes up. You don't talk about it, you don't discuss it, but there's a wall because you've been hurt or you heard that they said something. So now you're saying, hi, and we hug.

I wonder how many of our hugs were like really hugs, you know? So Paul is saying, let love be sincere. Show the world that you really love each other because you belong to Jesus who loved you even to the point of shedding his blood for you. So if you're here today, let's ask God, all of us, I want to love more this Christmas.

How many want to love more this Christmas? We feel that's how to prepare for Christmas. The tree and the cooking, what has that got to do with how God looks at it? He wants us to be children of love, loving each other sincerely. That's what people are needing.

That's what people are looking for. They're looking for love. And out there in the world, you're not gonna find love.

You can find sex, you can find money, you can find a lot of things. You're not gonna find love because the world is so preoccupied with self and can be so vicious. You think you're gonna find love in politics, among the Democrats, among the Republicans? Come on, be real.

Among the races? And this is what God is teaching us. Show the world that you're not like them. You really love each other.

Not only the people in your church, but the people who belong to Jesus who are in other churches and other denominations because a lot of us only love people in our church. I grew up in a church like that. As a little kid, I didn't even know there were Christians outside of my church.

I didn't. Love people who are another race, another denomination. They see doctrine a little bit differently than you do.

Love them. They're brothers and sisters in Christ. Love them and let it be sincere.

Really love them. Well, how can I do that? God will help you to do that. That's why he put the Holy Spirit in us so that we could love people.

That's what draws people to Christ. How can you be hateful or mean or selfish or disregard people? How can you put them down and just talk about yourself and then say, oh, let me tell you about Jesus. He'll change your life.

Yeah, if it's like your life, I don't even wanna know about Jesus. How many are with me, say amen. Amen.

So to get ready for Christmas this year, we gotta ask God to help us to put on love. Put on love. Yeah, quote verses, learn the Bible, but listen, some people know a lot about the Bible are meaner than a hornet.

Am I right or wrong? You can just know two verses. If you're full of love, you're a better testimony for Christ than someone who's got it all down. Next little portion in this same passage.

Look, bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Ooh, bless those who persecute you.

We know Jesus said that too, right? Here it's in Romans 12, verse 14. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse.

So now this love has to be so strong, it has to be so divine that it goes to adversarial situations. When people persecute you, they act ugly and nasty. You can't return in kind.

You can't justify acting nasty because someone was nasty. You can't insult because you were insulted. That's hard.

No, I'm wrong, that's not hard, that's impossible. Without the love of God, how many know that's not in us? I know it's not in me. You should've checked me out when I was growing up here in Brooklyn in the parks and playgrounds playing basketball.

You shove me, I'll shove you back. You elbow me, I'll elbow you back. But when Jesus comes in our life, we're not to treat people in kind, not to take revenge.

We're to bless those who persecute us. Many Roman soldiers and the authorities persecuting the church in the early centuries were won over to Christ because as they were burning the Christians or putting them in the Roman arenas with gladiators, their spirit was so sweet. A sweet spirit defeats hate.

You can't let hate overcome love. We gotta love. We gotta love all people of all races, of all backgrounds, even those who hate the name of Christ, we gotta love them.

What did Jesus do on the cross? When he was being crucified, did he say, Father, now bring down your judgment and wipe all of these people out? Did he say that? What did he say? Father, forgive them. How many wanna go deeper in that kind of love this Christmas? Lift your hand up high. Come on, let God see it.

Let's look at one other verse here. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Don't be conceited.

You ain't all that. Isn't that up there somewhere? No. I thought I saw that up there.

Tyron, wasn't that up there? Rejoice with those who rejoice. Mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another.

Don't be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Don't be conceited. The love that God wants us to have this Christmas and every day, we don't need Christmas, let's start today, is a love that makes for harmony and lives in humility.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Listen what that means. Mourn with those who mourn.

In other words, adjust yourself to the other person. Don't dictate the atmosphere. Love doesn't do that.

If you love yourself, you gotta dictate everything. But if you love the other person, you try to find out where they're at so that you can be a blessing to them. If they're hitting this note, ooh, you don't wanna hit this note.

That's a clash. If they're hitting this, then you hit this. Live in harmony with each other.

Fit in with the other person. What kind of future could any church or choir or anything have or a basketball team have if everything was like this? Live in harmony. Someone's mourning, don't be telling jokes.

Mourn with them. If things been going good for you, put it aside. Don't talk about it for a while.

They're mourning. That's gonna make them feel worse. If they're happy, by the way, it's much easier to mourn with those who mourn than it is to rejoice with those who rejoice.

Because we're all so selfish and insecure that mourning with someone who mourns, it's like, oh, pobrecito, I feel bad for you and all of that. But when someone's rejoicing and just got a raise, ha ha, jealousy and a lot of other things can right be here. And person say, you can't believe what happened.

Oh, I'm so happy for you. Yeah, I'm so happy. The Bible says, let the other person set the tone.

You adjust to it. The King James has it. Don't be conceited.

Are you a doctor, a lawyer, and you're with someone who dropped out of the fourth grade? Don't be so high and mighty and don't highlight the fact that you're a doctor or a lawyer. We don't care. We really don't care.

How many are with me on that? Say amen. You have a PhD. You have a PhD.

You have a master's. I'm very happy for you. But that doesn't make you better than anyone else.

Doesn't make anyone better than anyone. Associate with low people who are just regular people. There's a question about the translation there in the Greek.

It can mean, don't be afraid to do menial tasks. In other words, take a low position. You ain't all that.

That's the Jim Simba version of the New Testament. So God's blessed you. So you're better looking than the other person.

You have nicer clothes. You have a nicer car. You have more money or whatever.

Real love totally loses sight of that and you just wanna help the person who you love. Jesus had friends like Simon the leper. This is what made them reject him and kill him because they said, how could the Messiah hang out with losers? Oh, brothers and sisters, listen to me.

We live in a cursed age of celebrity. It's invaded the church. It's invaded the world.

Everyone wants to be a celebrity. The reason people are taking selfies all day, they think they're a celebrity. You ain't.

Can we say amen to that? I have no idea. Listen, I have no idea why people wanna talk about themselves all day and take pictures of themselves. Am I missing something here? How many are with me? Lift your hand.

I have no idea. What is that about? Someone says, oh, no, it's a new day. You gotta catch up.

I don't wanna catch up with that new day. What in the world? How full of yourself can you be? You gotta tell everybody what you're doing all day? No one cares, don't you get it? Nobody cares and people, listen, people have real problems. People have real problems and you gotta tell people, you know, I'm in Target now.

God bless you, you're in Target. I don't care. Nobody cares you're in Target.

Good grief. If you're doing that, stop it. Just stop it for a week.

See if you don't feel better. How in the world can you love people and help them if you're always talking and looking at yourself? Someone told me the other day, you know, I'm on Facebook or whatever and this person just continually takes like 20 pictures of themselves a day. What are you thinking? You're in love but it's with yourself.

And then other people are lonely and you don't wanna give them the time of day because you're busy, we're busy thinking about ourselves. Take a humble position, don't be conceited. Don't be conceited.

I want God to make me more humble this Christmas. How many are with me? If you lift your hand one more time, okay? All right, listen. Last verse.

Sorry I went off there on that rant but if it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Listen now. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

So what have we learned here? That the only way to prepare for Christmas as a real Christian is to be more filled with the spirit of Christmas, which is the spirit of Jesus, which is the spirit of love. And those of you who are visiting with us, we're so thankful you're here. I hope you go back wherever you came from and you spread love because love begets love.

Love inspires more love. So we learn it has to be sincere. It has to be even against adversaries that you bless, you don't curse back.

You don't justify yourself. Well, you don't know what she said to me. I hear that all my life and I probably used it myself.

Well, they did that, I'll do that back. No, that's not for Christians. If Jesus treated us that way, where would we be today? Come on, where would we be today? If he said, oh, you're gonna be like that.

We learned that we're to live in harmony. Let the other person set the tone. Fit in with them, rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn.

Try to understand what they're going through. Just don't pour out everything that you think and your opinions. Don't be conceited.

Don't be proud. Associate with the lowly. Make friends of people that other people might say, you know, I heard this years and years ago from a minister who told me, the guy's still around, he's just totally off, whacked.

He said, never hang around anyone who can't help you. Now, that's a business principle. That's corporate America.

Somebody can help you, hang with them because you wanna get to the top. Jesus is the opposite. Hang with people who can do nothing for you.

Then that's real love. We also learned to stop taking selfies all day. Think about someone else.

Don't be conceited. Now finally, as much as it's possible, live at peace with everyone. Notice how honest the scripture is.

As much as it's possible, on your side. So let's say Vanessa here has someone who's got it in for her, was slighted by her. She feels that Vanessa slighted her.

So Vanessa finds out about it and she goes to her and she said, I see you acting sideways with me. Could we talk? And she said, I won't talk with you. Vanessa wants to live at peace with everybody.

But some people you can't live at peace with. So that's why the Bible says, as much as it's possible on your part, you never be the one to initiate the trouble. Oh brothers and sisters, wouldn't it be horrible if we're singing peace on earth, goodwill to men, and we're living fussing and fighting? I'm involved in some

situations, trying to help some churches around the country, different parts of the country, pastors call me.

Is there anything worse than fighting? And fighting among Christians? Fussing, fighting, just saps all your strength. Dishonors God. Makes people who don't believe in Jesus look and say, a friend of mine, a very well-known Bible teacher, told me that in a certain country that he's been in, that the church is notorious there where everyone sues each other.

The board sues the pastor, the pastor sues the board. Everyone's suing each other. And they do it in front of judges who are not Christians because it's a non-Christian country.

And the judges who are not Christians say to the Christians, can't you all get along? Shameful. Let the other person win. But as much as it's possible in your side, live at peace.

No peace means no joy, no nothing. It's just, it's a terrible testimony if we fuss and fight. I don't wanna do that.

How many want, last question, how many want the most peaceful Christmas we've ever had before? That means for your own family, and that means if the Holy Spirit should so lead you today, don't do tomorrow, do today, go and say, I'm sorry to someone, call them. And if they say, I don't wanna hear about it, you did what you should do. And who knows, you might melt them by your spirit.

Say, you know what, I'll take the blame for it, even though you're not sure you're really to blame. Take the blame, take the blame. Say, you know what, something's between us, we know that.

Maybe it's with the choir, maybe it's someone here in the church. Just go to the person and say, I don't want this. What in the world, good talking about Jesus, and then we don't have peace.

He's the prince of peace. Everybody stand. We're gonna close the meeting this way.

Every woman, just turn, find a woman, face her. Join hands and pray for each other that God will give you a good Christmas. Every brother in the building, face a brother.

Just pray for a minute, I'll tell you when to stop. Right now, everybody pray.

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