

Love One Another

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Bible Text: John 13:31-35

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Tonight I am going to preach on John's gospel chapter 13. We are going to read two verses from John's gospel chapter 13. So if you are really getting excited about the passage the fields are white, you are just going to have to come back next Lord's day. I know if you are visiting from Mineola that will be really easy for you. You just jump in the car and drive for whatever length of hours that will take and then be here. We are willing to provide some food for you.

I want to read from John's gospel the verses 31 to the 35. The context is that Jesus is with his disciples here on the night about which he is going to be betrayed. He has just washed the feet of the disciples. They have all sat and looked at each other as he has done that thinking to themselves, somebody else should have done that other than Jesus. But none of them figuring I should have done it other than Jesus. He has spoken to them of the fact that one will betray him. They are all sitting thinking to themselves, well, that can't happen. That won't happen surely. And we pick up the reading from verse 31.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."¹

And we end our reading there in the 35th verses.

Jesus speaks to his disciples and says:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."²

¹ John 13:31-35.

² John 13:34.

Jesus refers here to the giving of a new commandment to his disciples. And the Greek word is right at the very beginning of the sentence and there for that signifies the stress or the emphasis on the word new. The thing that we are seeing here that this is a new commandment that is being given by Jesus to those who have lived and worked and breathed with him for the previous three years. And the heart of that new commandment is love one another.

Those of you who know the Word of God will surely be asking at this point: Well, how is that a new commandment? If you go back into the Old Testament of the history of the people of God we know that that commandment runs as a thread through the Word of God continually. In Leviticus chapter 19 verse 18 we have these words:

“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.”³

There are Christians today who in their thinking processes believe that the idea of Christians loving one another is a New Testament reality. But anyone who knows the Old Testament knows that God teaches his people in the Old Testament to love one another. So why is it here that the Lord Jesus when he is with his disciples in this last night, why is he saying to them, “A new commandment I give to you”? Well, there are two Greek words that mean new. There is the word that means new in the meaning of something that is brand new. It has just been created. And then there is another word that means new in the sense of something that has existed but is endued with new life.

Before coming to the States I packed clothes. And among those clothes I packed a pair of long shorts. My wife is still waiting for me to put them on having been here for five weeks. She will get that joy of seeing the bottom ends of my legs this week at some point. She will know that we are on vacation then, because I will be wearing shorts. They are new. They are new in the sense I probably bought them two or three years ago and I brought them home and set them in the bottom of a drawer and before I came here I pulled them out. The tag was still on them. They have never been worn. They were new, but they will be endued with new life this week, believe you me, when I get out and into them. Maybe we will even take a photograph of them and put them on Facebook and those of you who are on Facebook will see the bottom ends of my legs for the first time in your life. What an experience that will be.

They are new. They have been endued with new life. And what Jesus is saying here when he says, “A new commandment I give to you,” is he is expressing the fact that this commandment that has run through the entire Word of God, he by his death is going to endue it with a fullness and a reality and a vigor and a newness that it has never had before. He through his death is going to endue it with a newness because he is going to give it a new purpose. He is going to endue it with a newness because he is going to give it a new pattern. And he is going to endue it with newness because he is going to give it a new priority. Jesus’ death brings a new purpose to this command to love one another.

³ Leviticus 19:18.

To do anything we need motivation. Some of us need more motivation than others at times. But we all need a reason for doing that which we do whether it is remuneration, whether it is the joy of the participation. Whatever reason we need, we find that in this command to love one another a new purpose that is ended in it by cause of what Jesus Christ brings to this command.

You see, often when we read a command that we are to love one another we think of it in terms of us mustering up the energy that we need to draw from it in us to love one another. And because the reality is that we find it very difficult to love anyone else and sometimes not even ourselves, when we read a new command to love one another we think that is a beautiful idea, that is a wonderful thing. But the reality is that if I go into the actual recesses of my own heart and life I know the truth is that I will not be able to love other people. I may like some people. I may love my family. But to actually love other people. Let's be honest. That is not something we can do. Our hearts are so sodden in sin. We are so self oriented that the idea of loving other people, really loving them is something which we might think is a good idea, but the reality of it is a long way off from our daily living.

And Jesus here is giving us a new purpose, a new motive, a new reason, a new warrant for loving one another. And it all centers on him. We are to love one another, first, because he has loved us. Verse 34.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you.”⁴

The reason why many people today find it so difficult to love is because they have never truly experienced love. I know that probably in your judicial system—when I speak of the judicial system in the UK—on many occasions when a defendant is brought before the court there are reasons given why the person has fallen into the lifestyle that they have. And generally there was a home that they were brought up. It was a local social conditions that they had to experience as a child. And there were many contributing factors that led to the position they are in today and, therefore, you need to go easy on them, because although they are guilty, it is really everybody else's fault.

Well, there is an element of which the context in which a child is brought up and it does affect their lives. It doesn't negate their responsibility personally to the things they say and do. But that also doesn't mean that it doesn't have an effect on them. It does. There are people who find it incredibly difficult to love other people because they have never been brought up or experienced the reality of a loving father or a loving mother. All they have ever experienced is abuse, ridicule. And so when they come to live their life they replicate that which they experienced as a child. And so the abuse that they received is handed down to the next generation. God comes to us in the person of his Son and he says:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.”⁵

⁴ John 13:34.

But the motivation for that is not to drag up from within yourself some extra likeableness. The reason why we are to love one another is because he first loved us. He first loved us. And we need to remind ourselves of that.

A Christian is someone who has received the saving love of Jesus Christ. Each day of our lives we should be reminding ourselves that I am loved by God. Therefore, I can love other people.

In 1 John, John writes:

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”⁶

So it is not that Jesus is coming to us and saying to us, “You must love one another. Work it out for yourselves and somehow you will be able to find somewhere in your heart an area where you will find surplus love. {?} to yourself. Well, you can use that to love other people.” No, he says to us, “I want you to love other people because you have experienced first hand from me what love is. You have not been dealt with as you deserve to be dealt with. Your sins have not been punished in accordance with what the degree with what they deserved to be punished. You have received mercy and you have received grace and because you have mercy and because you have received grace and because you have received love from me, you see, if we actually stop and think about who we are and what we have received in Christ, then that will enable us to love other people. If we merely live our Christian lives on the basis of receiving from God and we live a routine of a Christian life and we don’t stop and think about the enormity of our sin and we don’t stop and think about the punishment that was due to us and we don’t ever think about the reality of what God’s love was manifest in the cross at Calvary for us, if we live in that world of never really dealing with who we are and what we have received, then we will not love. We will not love. It is as we ponder the love of God we will then be able to turn and love one another.

The second motive we have for loving one another is because our fellow believers in Christ are those for whom Christ died for. Not everybody in the Church of Christ is attractive or pleasant. Not everyone in the Church of Christ is someone whom we like to spend time with. Some Christians are the most cantankerous, awkward, unlikable human beings on the face of the earth. They are. There are Christians who are unbelievably unlikable. Their personalities just grate and grind on us. But, you see, the Lord Jesus Christ took the punishment that was due for that cantankerous awkward person on the cross at Calvary. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered, experienced the shame and the separation from God for the eternal salvation of that individual.

Paul argues in Romans chapter 14 to a careless, irresponsible. He says:

“Do not by your eating destroy your brother for whom Christ died.”⁷

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 1 John 4:11.

Why are we to love them, because they are nice and friendly and affable, because they laugh at our jokes, because they sync with our personality? No, we are to love them because the broken body and the shed blood redeemed them for all eternity. And Christ lives in them now. He lives in them. By his Holy Spirit he dwells in every Christian. He who receives you, receives me. He who dwells in me, dwells in them. And there is coming a day when such people will stand in the glory and they will reign in Christ and Christ will reign through them. And all those personality disorders, all their idiosyncrasies will be gone. All the garbage that has affected them and their life will be taken away. Their souls will be perfect. There will be no more sin. They will live in a glorified perfect way and we will see them for who they are without the destructive, degrading, defiling and destructive reality of sin in their lives. And that is how we need to view each other now. We need to look at each other not as we see each other in our sin. We are to look at each other and see each other in Christ.

When Jesus comes here and says, "You are to love one another as I have loved you," remember that when God looked at us before the foundation of the world, he didn't see perfect human beings. He didn't see the most handsome specimens. He didn't see people who are always psychologically ordered. He saw sinners who rebelled against him, men and women who were brought up on the things of the Word of God and yet did not own them to be their own, men and women who say they love God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their mind. And yet with the other side of their mouth, they curse against people, they despise individuals. They say did you see what she had on her today? God looked at us and he saw us not for who we were, but who we would be in Christ. And so when Jesus comes to his disciples here and he says to them, "You are to love," He is not just thinking of those who are lovely, he is thinking of the most unlovely Christian that would be. And he says to him, "You are to love them, not just like them, not just spend time with the ones that you really get on well with. You are to love them and the reason why you can love them is because I have loved you and I have loved them, by the way. And is still love them."

The pattern with which we are to love those that Christ calls us to love is in the same way as he has loved them. Jesus says:

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."⁸

This is an incredible thought. Jesus is telling us to love each other in exactly the same way as he has loved us. He doesn't say to them you are to love one another according to your ability, according to the level of knowledge that you have, according to your particular personality disposition. There are people who are able to love people more than others. There are people who have a particular disposition in their character that would lead them to like other people more. Some of us have a character type which would lead us not to like anyone at all but ourselves. All of us who are believers in

⁷ Romans 14:15.

⁸ John 13:34.

Christ are called to love one another as Christ has loved us. And when we think of the way in which Christ has loved us, what are we confronted with? Well, we are confronted, first, with the unconditional nature of Christ's love for us.

When Jesus loved us he didn't love us on the basis of our loveliness or our worthiness. He loves us and he loves people who are unworthy and are unlovable. The Lord Jesus Christ loves those who hurt him, who offend him, who rebel against him. He loves those who have nothing attractive whatsoever in their character. He loves them because of who he is. He doesn't love because of who we are. He loves because he is love. He loves because he chooses to love. We don't deserve his love. We don't earn his love. We don't provoke his love. There is nothing in our characters or our demeanors that are lovely to God. But Christ who is love chooses out of his own heart, because he is God to love and the aspect of his love surely that strikes us the most is the unconditional or the sovereign aspect of his love.

He doesn't love us on the basis of us meeting certain criteria. He voluntarily, sovereignly declares his love upon us. We don't say to him, "Come and love us." Nor do we say to him, "Do not stop loving us." It is not within our power to exercise any influence over Christ's love for us. He loves us because he loves us. Otherwise we wouldn't be here tonight. There is none of us in this building, in this room, that have anything in our characters, anything in our heads, anything in our hearts that is attractive at all to God. All that is within us is hostile to God. All that is within us is at enmity with God. All that is in us is anti God because of our sinful nature and yet Jesus Christ died on the cross at Calvary because he loves us. And he gives us that love sovereignly and without any conditions.

Those of us who are believers in here tonight at no point did we come to Jesus and Jesus say to us, "Ok, I will love you, providing, A, B and C."

But how often is our love for one another like that? Is it not the case that our love is so often predicated on the condition I will love you in return for? I will love you if you do? Is it not so often that we put each other on a tight rope. We don't actually walk up and say, "I will love you if you do this." We are much more subtle about it. We give nods and winks. We withdraw our presence. We don't smile when the Word is spoken. Our love is shaped about. It is held within the context of conditionality. It is dependent on the other person pleasing us to a degree. And when Jesus comes to us and says, "I have loved you. You are to love one another. He says, "You are to love one another as I have loved you."

Now this is very difficult, because to love unconditionally Jesus lay down his life on the cross. For him love came in the shape of the cross. For him love cost him his life. Love broke him. Love destroyed him. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. And if we are to take what Jesus is saying here and we are going to really think about it, if we are going to think about sovereign love, loving people irrespective of what they can give to us, if we are going to dispose upon them our love because Christ has loved us, if we are going to communicate to them in the words and in the actions of our lives love

regardless and irrespective of how they respond, regardless and irrespective of how they react, if we are going to keep loving people who are unlovable or even unlikable, if we are to do what Jesus has done for us, if we are to do what he asks us to do and replicate his love for us, then it is going to break us. It is going to destroy us. It is going to take from us more than what we can offer. And we will only be able to do it if we rely on him.

That is why when Jesus gives us this command he gives it to us and says, “You have got to do it the way that I have done it for you.” He is drawing us back into him. All the time because the only energy source, the only potential contacts in which we can actually do that which Jesus is calling us to do is if we dwell in him, if we come to him and we say to him, “This person isn’t nice. I don’t like him. I don’t like the way they talk. I don’t like the way that they present themselves. I don’t like the way they dress. But they are a believer in Jesus Christ and you are telling me that I have to love them.”

Jesus is saying, “Yes, because there was a time that I didn’t like the way you dressed. There was a time I didn’t like the way you talked. There was a time I didn’t like the way you did thing. But I loved you then and you are to love them now the way that I loved you then. And you are to love them and you are to love them the way in which I love you and that is you are to pour your love upon them without any conditions.” But I can’t do that because it is going not take too much from me. And Jesus says, “I know. That is why you are with me. That this why you walk with me. That is why you talk with me. That is why you will be with me in eternity, because I was broken for you.” And if you want to try and take seriously these things that Christ would have you to do, it does cost.

Sometimes it will cost more than what you have got to give. And you have to get back to him and say, “This is more than I can handle. This is more than what I have got the energy for.” And he says, “I know. But go back.”

Thirdly, there is a new priority. Jesus says, “A new command I give to you. You are to love one another. You are to love one another. You are to love one another.” He says it three times as though he is taking out the red marker and in two verses he is underlining the importance of the fact that we are to love one another. He says it in verse 34.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”⁹

The second time. And then he says in verse 35.

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”¹⁰

He is saying to these men at the end of his life on the face of the earth that the most important thing that they are to take from what he has been teaching them out of the

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John 13:35.

previous three years is this idea of loving one another. He is about to go to his death. Jesus here could have said much about the organization of the Church. He could have said much about the role that they would play in the Church. He could say much about the worship of God. He could say much about what was important. But what he does is he underscores here time after time after time the fact that they are to love one another. And the reason why Jesus says they are to love one another as he has loved them was sovereign, unconditional, cross bearing love is because all people will know that you are my disciples.

Is it not phenomenally said today in the Church of Jesus Christ when men and women who say that they have been brought together through the death of Jesus Christ who have been brought from darkness, who have been brought from futility, who have been brought into a new and living hope to dwell together for all eternity, is it not incredibly sad when those people can't even sit down and talk together?

Is it not incredibly sad that the world looks at the church today and too often all that the world hears from people in churches as overtones and undertones of statements that speak anything but love?

Surely if we understood the fullness and the gravity of what Jesus is saying here, if men and women grasped the truth concerning the magnitude of God's love and what he did to bring people from death to live, then the world would, as we lived that, would see that this is real. The world is crying out for real love. They sing about it in their songs. They write about it in the books that they write. They are desperate to see real love. They want real love. They want it because they know that they are creatures made in the created image of God and that they are to be loved. But because they are not willing to submit to God, because they will reject him, they seek to find it in other places. And they just cannot find that which they are searching for.

And God has brought us and brings us to dwell together in the Church for a purpose. And that purpose is both to worship and to manifest his love. We are to worship him because he is love and we are to manifest that love through our relationship with each other. And if we could really get this, if we could really get what it means to love one another as he has loved us, then that would speak to the world and they would see the reality of love.

I can remember an aunt of mine—and I have a number—after she became a Christian she told me that she used to love coming over to our home. She said because there was a peace about your home—my home as I was growing up as a child—she said that I knew nothing of. Now all I can remember as I child growing up was fighting with my twin sisters. I couldn't remember anything else, but just continually bickering and fighting. And normally what would happen is that they would fight with each other and I would try and intervene and say, "You shouldn't be fighting with her." And then the next thing I would find that I was {?} the two of them against me. But her recollection of our home that it was a place of peace and love. We don't understand the power of the love of God and I am not talking about the expression love. It is easy to talk about love. Too often in

the Church of Jesus Christ love is a substitute or talking about love is, in reality, just talking about things that should happen anyway. Oh, I love her so I am doing this. Well, that is something that is not doing that because you love her. It is just something that has to be done. Love when it is sovereign, love when it is given without any payback, love when it is unconditional without any strings attached, love when it is expressed, of course, love when it is expressed and time and effort and energy is a beautiful and an attractive thing. It speaks volumes. And I would ask you tonight in your life how much love are you giving to other people in this fellowship? Or is it the case that you use this as a place where you come to hear an excellent preacher from your pastor who will be back with you in a couple of weeks time, where you are fed in the Word of God and then you go home again? How much do you actually physically and emotionally engage with other people in this fellowship to communicate to them and to demonstrate to God and to show to the world that this is a place where we love each other? And I know that you do. Many of you do.

We experienced it when we came here to the first week and a number of you got food over to our homes. Now, those of you who didn't do that, don't feel guilty. I am not thinking any less of you. And I was so physically exhausted and I was so drained those first few days. I know I didn't even go and greet the people who brought the food. I was so tired I couldn't face anybody.

But I haven't heard anybody say, "You know, he never came to the door and said to us, 'I thank you for that.' Sent his wife out and his children out. But he was sitting up asking God to give him energy to cope with the next six weeks of work."

Will you love one another unconditionally? Will you go to Christ and say, "You have loved me. You love me now"? Will you tell yourself and remind yourself that you are loved not so that you can wallow in self love, because he will let you know that that is not the reason why he has loved you. But you wallow in his love for you. And then take the knowledge of his love for you and then say, "Now I will go and love other people. I will love them unconditionally. And I will love them and love them. And sometime one of them says to me, 'Thank you,' I will just love them and love them. And if one of them comes some times and says, 'I appreciate that,' I will just love them and love them. And if none of them say thank you and none of them say I appreciate that, I will love them and I will love them, because you know what happens then when that happens? Christ starts to bring people who need to be loved. He starts to bring people who are craving love. He starts to bring the lost into the community where there is love because, you use, it is not talking about how loving we are. It is about demonstrating to God the shepherd of the flock that we love each other and so then he will bring a lamb or two or a sheep or two who need desperate love and he will bring them and they will be loved unconditionally and sovereignly and others in their family will say, "You know, that church, they just love them and they love them. The people in that church love them." And when we ask them why do you love because Jesus first loved us. And then he will bring others in who need to be loved. And Christ says then they will know that you are my disciples because you have loved one another as I have loved you.

An Christ will build his Church. And he will build a church that is shaped in the form of a cross and spelled love. And in the day of judgment when the rest is burning as hay and stubble that community will stand in the presence of the glory. And Christ will say, "Well done, good and faithful servants." Amen.