

The New commandment

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We have been studying the book of Philippians and you notice today we are not studying Philippians. We are going into a different text. It is a text that I have preached on before, but the reason I wanted to bring it up today is that it fits into the studies in Philippians that we have looked at recently.

If you remember the passages that we have looked at most recently in Philippians are passages that talk about our concern for one another, placing other people above ourselves and demonstrating that kind of caring and that kind of love that demonstrates, in fact, the love that the Lord Jesus Christ had for us, that was the last passage that we talked about in the book of Philippians.

And so I wanted to look with you at John chapter 13 where the Lord emphasizes very much the same thought. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ and he says this.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.¹

The first thing we need to ask ourselves is: What is this new commandment? When we hear “commandment” most of us think of the 10 Commandments or we will think of commandments given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ in the gospels where he told us of certain things that he expected us to do and how we are to live our lives for his glory. And now here he says, “I have a new commandment for you.”

Now as I see the word “new” my first reaction is, “This is something that I haven’t heard before.” I know that when my wife is going out shopping and she comes home and she says, “I bout a new dress. “ I am going on the assumption that that dress that she is going to put on is one that I haven’ seen before. It is something that is new. It is different. It is not the same.

And so when I read “A new commandment I give to you,”² my first question that I have to ask is, “What is this new commandment? And in what way is it new and different from the commandments that God has given to us before?”

¹ John 13:34-35

² John 13:34

The first thing we need to understand is that the new commandment is not simply that we love. That is not the new commandment because there is absolutely nothing new about that. We have been commanded to love over and over and over again in the Word of God, absolutely nothing new.

In 2 John John said, “Now I ask you, lady, not as though I were writing to you a new commandment, but the one which we have had from the beginning, that we love one another.”³ This is a commandment that we have had from the beginning. There is nothing new about that.

If we go back to the Old Testament we find it in the book of Leviticus, the third book in the Bible. We read in chapter 19, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.”⁴ Nothing new about this commandment to love. It is an old commandment. It is one that we had from the beginning.

We might even say: Is it new that we are to love everyone, even our enemies? No. That’s not new either. You can go back to the Old Testament and find that. In Exodus chapter 24 we read:

If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying helpless under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release it with him.⁵

Not too many of us are concerned about whether we are going to take care of donkeys or oxen, but you understand the point. It is that our concern is not only for those who care about us, but even if it is our enemy. Even if it is someone with whom we have had a clash. If there is something we can do to help we go ahead and we do it.

In Proverbs chapter 24 we read, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles.”⁶ This is in essence saying to care for those who are even our enemies.

The Lord Jesus Christ earlier in his ministry said this in Matthew chapter five:

You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father.⁷

³ 2 John 1:5

⁴ Leviticus 19:18

⁵ Exodus 23:4

⁶ Deuteronomy 24:17

⁷ Matthew 5:43-45

And so on and so forth.

Nothing new about the commandment to love.

Then what in the world is the new commandment? The new commandment is not just that we should love, but that we should love as Christ loved. That is the new commandment. He says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”⁸ That is the new commandment, that we love as he has loved.

Jesus had mentioned this through his disciples in the Word of God. It says in Ephesians chapter two, “And walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us.”⁹

You see, our love is to mirror the love of Christ. In John chapter 15 he says, “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love.”¹⁰

John chapter 15 and verse 13, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”¹¹

And then in Romans chapter five and verse eight, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”¹²

We need to understand that his concern is that not only that we love—that is not the new commandment—but that our love mirror the love of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not the fact of love that he is talking about, but the quality of love that he is referring to. We love because he first loved us.

Now we need to ask the question. How in the world are we to mirror the love that Christ demonstrated in caring for us? First of all, we need to ask the question, “What kind of love did he demonstrate? What is it that we are supposed to mirror? What was that love like?”

Well, the Word of God tells us that he loved us with the kind of love that made him willing to come down to earth. We read of this in Philippians chapter two, the passage that we have been discussing, to come down to earth to give up the privileges of heaven, to take on the form of humanity, to be willing to undergo that which we undergo, hunger and thirst and need for sleep and all the things that we experience from day to day and then to die the most horrible death that human beings have ever devised by which to put a person to death, crucifixion.

⁸ John 13:34

⁹ Ephesians 5:2

¹⁰ John 15:9

¹¹ John 15:13

¹² Romans 5:8

And why did he do that? He did it because he loved us. He loved us in such a way that he would give up everything, that he would die in horrible pain so that through eternity we would never be separated from him.

That is why we can read in Romans chapter eight in that wonderful passage that man of us, I am sure, have memorized.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "For thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered." But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹³

That is the love with which he loved us.

Now, we need to ask the question, "How do we demonstrate that love?"

Well, first of all we demonstrate that love in different ways and different areas. How do we demonstrate that love in our home? Sometimes that is the most difficult place to demonstrate love, isn't it?

We live in a society where marriages do not last long on the whole, where disruption in the home is common, where it seems to be normal for children to disobeying parents, for spouses to be unfaithful to one another. This seems to be a common phenomenon in our society today where we see the family just breaking up all around us.

Not too long ago we were in a place that was unfamiliar to us and we were there and we were talking and one of the couples that we were talking to asked us how long we had been married. And I, with great joy because I love my wife very much, spoke about how we have been married for 44 years.

Now this was a couple about the same age as we are and his comment was that they had been married for just a few years. That seemed surprising at first. But then they went on to say, "Well, this is my third marriage and this is his second."

And I wondered how long will they remain married now? For it seemed to be their pattern as it is so much the pattern in our society today that marriages don't last. But God gave us a pattern for living in the home to make marriages and families work. There are those who will teach all types of different methods of making the family work and so many have not even considered the directions that God gives us in his direction book, the Bible.

¹³ Romans 8:35-39

How do we make families work? Well, Ephesians chapter five, a wonderful passage in God's Word that deals with that exact issue. In Ephesians chapter five we read of the pattern of a godly home and what it is that God wants us to do with in the home that the marriage might be successful and the family might be successful. I am going to just read it. We all know the passage.

In Ephesians chapter five we read beginning with verse 22.

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.¹⁴

And then for the children it says. "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour your father and mother"¹⁵ A pattern that God lays down for us for successful living in the home to demonstrate the love of Christ.

"Wives, be subject to your own husbands."¹⁶ Well, you know, ladies, you know what we men are like, don't you? I don't know. Somehow men seem to have a need that I think God has placed in them to be in a position of respect and authority. It just seems to be that way. And we find that according to God the best way for a wife to encourage the husband and to build the relationship is for her to lift him up, to build him up, to encourage him, to make him the head of the household.

Oh, that doesn't mean that he is going to make all the decisions. You know, I had... I could remember one particular family that I was working with and this particular man had a horrible difficulty with mathematics. I mean this guy could add up one and one and get six. I don't know how he did it, but somehow he could not deal with mathematics. But he insisted, "I am the head of the household. I am going to handle the finances."

Well, I want to tell you. Their finances were in total disorder.

Interestingly enough his wife had a degree in accounting. But he wouldn't let her handle the finances.

Now in my mind this was absolute idiocy. I mean, you know, to be the head of the family and for the wife to submit to the husband does not mean that the husband has to do every

¹⁴ Ephesians 5:22-17

¹⁵ Ephesians 6:1-2

¹⁶ Ephesians 5:22

thing or be in charge of everything. If the husband has a wife who is very good with accounting or mathematics, then why in the world should he handle the finances? It doesn't make sense. Under his authority as head of the household she should be doing that work. The same way...can you imagine the CEO of an organization says, "I am in charge. I am going to handle the books." He has a CPA who works for him. What an idiot that man would be. Do you see what I am saying? That we have to use common sense.

The wife needs to build up her husband, make him feel special and authoritative, make him feel like the one who is in charge and the head of the household. Now I will tell you. Husbands respond to that. That's a little secret. That is why God said, "Wives be subject to your own husbands."¹⁷

But then it goes on. You think that is difficult for a wife to do? If you think that is hard, look at what the husband has to do. It says, "Husbands love your wives just as Christ also loved the Church and gave himself up for her."

If husbands are those that God has created with a need to feel in a position of authority. It is wives who need to feel special in a relationship, who need to be hearing the words, "I love you. I care about you." Who need to have the husbands who will surprise them every now and then with a special present or just saying, "You have been working hard. Let me take you out to dinner," to make her feel special that she might know that she is loved by someone who loves her the way Christ loves the Church.

I can remember a story of a man who did not deal with this extremely well. He and his wife were celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary. That is a special event. That was really big. And they were sitting together that evening and she looked over at him and said, "Do you know, 25 years have passed and I can't remember a single time when you ever said I love you."

He looked at her and said, "Well, you know, I said that on my wedding day. If I ever change my mind I'll let you know."

Ladies, that doesn't fly, does it? That isn't going to work.

You see that just as husbands need to feel as if they are the head of an organization, wives need to feel special and loved and lifted up and encouraged by their husbands.

Husbands, if you want to make your marriage work, you want to make it successful, love your wife as Christ loves the Church.

And then for children, "Children obey your parents in the Lord."¹⁸ Do you know, it is so important that children who want to serve God understand that they have a responsibility in this family relationship.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ephesians 6:1

Why do we have a world in which there are so many rebellious young people? Because children have not come to understand the grace of God and the responsibility that God has laid upon them that they might honor, lift up, encourage and obey their parents.

Well, we want to be successful in the home. There is a new commandment that I give unto you that you love even as Christ has loved.¹⁹

Well, what about the relationships you have in your place of employment? In Ephesians chapter six, talking to those who were servants or, in that day, most of them were slaves he says this.

Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.²⁰

What is he saying to us here? He is saying that when you labor—wherever it is that you labor, if you are a student in school, if you work for a company, working for that organization, if you are in the army as some of us have and I was for many, many years serving our country—wherever it is that you are working, we are to be obedient to our masters, but not just because we are afraid, not just because it is an obligation, but as if we were serving Christ. That is the concept that we have here.

I have heard so many people talk about work and the attitude is, you know, I have to do it. I hate it, but I have to do it. I don't like to go to work. I don't like the things that I do.

God says that our labor is to be that of serving Christ and not of serving men.

I have spoken of the little book that was written by a monk in the Middle Ages, a very interesting little book and I have a copy of it at home if any of you are interested in reading it. It tells a story of a man who worked in a monastery, but he was not an important person by most people's standards in the monastery. His job was the cook and he prepared the food. Any of you who have prepared food in your home, you know what that is like. Sometimes it is a mundane task. Sometimes you say, "Gosh, I wish I could just snap my fingers and the food would be there. That would be so much nicer."

Well, he prepared food for a large number of people every day. And at first he used to complain about it. And he would say, "This is something that is just a tedious task. All the other people are doing important things and I have nothing important to do. All I am doing is making food all day." And he began to look at it and see it as a task that was to serve the Lord. And he started describing in the little book he wrote how he came to see the place where he cooked, his oven and his stove as being an altar on which he could offer things for the glory of God. And he began to think of what he did as serving the

¹⁹ See John 13:34

²⁰ Ephesians 6:5-6

Lord and every meal he made would be better than the one before. And everything he did would be special because he was doing it for God and not for man. And he began to see himself as a servant in God's kingdom doing his work for the glory of God.

What a wonderful way to look at the labors that we have to be involved in. I mean, most of us for most of our lives go to work at least eight hours a day. We have to spend—what is the average—from nine o'clock to five o'clock or something like that working. What a sad thing it would be if every single day we would go to work saying, "Oh, I hate this. I can't wait until I get out of here and we are spending a third of our lives doing it."

How much better it would be if we would walk in and say, "What I am going to do, I am going to be the best at it. Whatever I am. I am going to do such a good job that my company will be the best company of its type in the world. They are going to look at me and they are going to be able to say, 'Whatever he or she does, he is doing it for the benefit of our company and the glory of God.' And I will tell you. They are going to look and they are going to know that I have a purpose and I am concerned and I am interested and I am doing it and I am doing it well."

Well, what about the person who is in a position of leadership? And many of us have been in leadership positions? Often we find that leaders, unfortunately, are less than concerned about the needs of those who work for them. I have had different types of leaders. I have had supervisors where I have worked who have been absolutely wonderful, really cared about me and the others who worked there. I mean they would do anything to advance us, to help us and encourage. I can remember leaders like that.

And, boy, I can remember a couple of the other kind. I can remember one who just seemed at every opportunity possible to find something wrong to say about somebody. Did you ever have a boss like that? I mean, I mean, that it seemed to be that this person was just living to criticize and not just me, everybody. I mean, anything they could criticize, that is what this individual would do.

What a wonderful thing when we are in leadership positions if we are the kind of leader that shows a real genuine and honest care for our subordinates, the kind of leader who would say, "I am going to do what I can do to help you advance. I am going to do what I can do to make your job easier and better and more enjoyable."

Boy, wouldn't that be special? Wouldn't that be wonderful?

I remember in the army one experience that really concerned me. There was a non commissioned officer who needed to go to a certain school in order to get an advancement. This is often the case in the military. You have a progression of military education and you have to complete a certain school in order to get promoted. And this particular NCO went to his superior—to, I think it was a captain—and said to the captain, "Sir, I really need to go to such and such a school. I am not going to get promoted if I don't go."

The attitude of the captain was, “We need you too much. I am not letting you go.”

And I felt so sorry for this young man. I had no control over it. It wasn't within my sphere of influence. But I was so concerned for here was somebody, all this officer had to do was to give up this one person for about six or seven weeks and that person could get promoted. And he said, “No, I am not going to do it. I need you.”

Wouldn't it have been more wonderful if he had said, “You know, I care about you. I am interested in your well being. We will bite the bullet. You know, we will manage without you for the seven weeks. When you come back you are going to be even better than you are now.”

But that didn't happen. How wonderful it would be if whether we are the subordinate or if we are the boss we demonstrate a care for our organization and for the people we work with. Love as Christ loved us. And then, thirdly and not lastly I don't believe, last I am going to talk about, but not last in terms of importance. It is love in the Church, the kind of love that demonstrates the love of Christ.

In John chapter 10 and verse 16 we read this: “And I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock with one shepherd.”²¹

God talks about his Church that way. We are one flock, one shepherd here. What is he talking about here? Well, he is saying, first of all, that we in the Church should be concerned about others and not only others who are like us. We should be concerned about people who are different from what we are, people who may be of a different ethnic background, people who may be of a different educational level, people who may be different in one way or another, older, younger, whatever it means. We are to be concerned about them.

And we are to demonstrate a love in the Church that will be an example to the world around us. There should not be fights in God's Church. There may be differences of opinion. That's normal. But those differences should be handled in loving and caring ways so that we come together and make decisions together and do that which glorifies God together. That is what the Church is supposed to be like. People should be able to see a difference when they see us. We see fighting and disruption in the world. We should see love and caring in the Church of God. That is God's purpose for us.

Well, what is this all about? Why should we even care about these things? Why does it matter?

The last words in this passage that we read are so very important. It says this. “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”²²

²¹ John 10:16

²² John 13:35

How does the world know us? How does the world recognize us as the children of God, as the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ? What is the sign that the world should see? Well, you could say, “Well, the sign is that we go to church on Sunday.”

That is not much of a sign. It is wonderful that we go to church. I am not speaking against that. But I am saying that there are people to church for a multitude of different reasons. There are a people who show up in the church because that is the thing you do on a Sunday morning. Mom and dad taught me that. You know, I want to get in, get out as quickly as I can, but, you know, that is something I have to do. It is sort of an obligation.

There are those who go to church because—I hate to say it—because it is a place to argue and fight. I have seen that in some churches, not here, praise the Lord, but I have seen it in some places.

God says that the love that we have for one another in the Church, the love that we have for one another in our place of employment, the love that we have for one another especially in the home is that wonderful signal and sign that the world can see to say, “This is a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.” They are not going to care about other things. They are not going to care about whether we are doctrinally pure. I care about that. They are not going to care about that. They are not going to care about whether we have been baptized. I care about that. They are not going to. But they are going to care about what they see in our lives and if we want to be a testimony to the world around us we need to seriously look at this new commandment that we love one another even as Christ has loved us and that we make that a vital and an important part of our lives.

Two questions the Lord would have us ask. First of all, do we know Christ as Savior? If you don't know him, loving one another according to the new commandment is actually an impossibility. You can't love as Christ loves if you don't know Christ. If you haven't come to know him I would challenge you to trust in him that you might have everlasting life.

For those of us who are his let's look at our own lives. Let's look at our lives in all the areas in which we live in, in the family. When people look at our family will they see the love of God? Let's look at our lives at work where we spend so many hours of the week when people see us. Do they see a difference? Will they be able to look at us and say, “That's a Christian. That is the way I want to live”?

And when visitors come into our church can they see that love, that caring that we have for one another so that this can demonstrate to them that we are, in fact, the children of God.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, we thank you for you have loved us with an everlasting love. You have loved us with a love that is beyond anything that human beings could ever imagine or

understand. And we ask, our Father, that we might truly love you with a true love. But, Father, not only that we might love you, but that we might obey the teaching of the new commandment that our love in all the areas of our lives might be a love that demonstrates that love of God, that people who look at us might look at us saying, “Now, I know what Jesus is like.”

Help us to serve you well we pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.