

THE NEW COMMANDMENT
(John 13:34-35)

³⁴ A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. ³⁵ By this shall all *men* know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

If I had to briefly characterize our church, two very important qualities come to mind. First of all, our worship of God is centered in the Word of God. Our pulpit is front and center. The preaching and teaching of God's Word is paramount above all other things. We do love to sing the old hymns and we offer public prayers to God and we perform the two church ordinances as prescribed in the Scriptures. But at the core of it all is our high opinion and our deep concern for the preservation and the promulgation of the truth of God as found in his Holy Scriptures. Before I became your pastor I handed out index cards and I asked you to list one or two things that you sought in a pastor. And, almost every one of you wrote, "Preach the Word of God."

But there is a second characteristic of our church that I think stands out and marks us as a true New Testament Church and that is, we love one another. There is a real feeling of family among us. And there is love flowing toward one another.

This morning we have come to a passage of Scripture where Jesus commands his church to love one another.

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 13:34, 35

I want you to know this morning that as I preach this message, I believe and I thank God that our church is exemplary in following this command of Christ. I can preach this message with great joy, because as I consider our church body, I can honestly report that there is nothing but love for one another. When I consider your care for one another; when I consider how you look out for one another and help one another; when I see how you genuinely enjoy one another; when I see how you sacrifice to help one another; it makes me very thankful to be the pastor of such a people.

And so, I preach this message this morning believing that we do follow this command of Christ here at our church and I only pray that we will be reminded of our duty to love one another and I hope that we may increase in this grace more and more as the days go by.

You will remember that in our context, Jesus is saying goodbye to his beloved disciples. As you can imagine this is one of the most passionate and tender moments in the life of Christ. He has called his “little children” to his death bed so to speak. In a few hours he will be betrayed and arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, led away in the hands of sinners, beaten mercilessly and crucified on the next morning. And after Jesus sent Judas away, he turned to his disciples and spoke some last words to his new church.

In our message this morning, I am going to want you to understand that this moment, this moment of Christ’s death, is the moment which would bring about a great eschatological divide. The death of Christ is really the focal point in the history of human redemption. If you pick up your Bible, you will quickly notice that there is an Old Testament and there is a New Testament. Now both Testaments are the very Word of God. They are both God-breathed. They were both written by the hands of men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God. They are equally God’s Holy Scriptures.

However, there is a major difference between the two. Everything in the Old Testament looked forward to the cross. If you read the Old Testament with your eyes open and with understanding, you will see Christ and the cross prefigured. The Old Testament in many ways is a picture of true redemption in Christ. Israel being redeemed out of bondage in Egypt is a picture of how Christ redeems his people from the bondage of sin. Moses delivering the people is a picture of Christ delivering his people. Joshua leading the people into the Promised Land is a picture of Christ leading his people into that real Promised Land in heaven. Lambs being slain on the altar were pictures of Christ being slain on the cross. When the blood of lambs was poured out, it was a picture of the blood of Christ which would be poured out.

And so, when Christ finally came, and when his blood was poured out and he died, all of those types and pictures were fulfilled. And suddenly, all of those things before Christ became old things. When the true substance of things arrived, then the pictures became obsolete. Not that the significance of these old things is done away, they always pointed to Christ and that will always be their significance. And we study these things in retrospect for greater understanding of the meaning of Christ and his saving work. But now that Christ has come those old ways are obsolete as a continuing practice and way of life.

So do you see how with the death of Christ there is a fulfillment of all of those old types and shadows? All of those old things have reached their conclusion. And they are now old and obsolete. The moment Christ died there was no need to continue to offer lambs. Suddenly, the offering of lambs was an obsolete practice. The real Lamb of God was offered once for all. And so, we lay aside those old practices. We lay aside that old economy which was only designed as a temporary prelude to Christ. We lay aside those

old Jewish practices which were only types and pictures. We lay aside that old rule of life called the Mosaic Law.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.
Romans 10:4

I want you to understand that when Christ came it marked the end of the Law. Now by that, do not misunderstand. It did not mark an end to the eternal, holy standards of God. God will forever hate lying and stealing and idol worshipping and he will forever despise sin of every kind. God's moral standards will always be the same because they reflect his holy and unchangeable attributes. But there is a new way of doing things now that Christ has come. And one of the great benefits for believers is that they are no longer under the law.

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

There were old commandments under the law. Moses came down out of the mountain with tablets of stone. And there were Ten Commandments written by the finger of God. These Ten Commandments, along with many other rules and regulations, were given to Israel in the Old Testament as a way of life. But this was the old economy. This was the administration of things before Christ came. But when Christ came, he was "the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth."

And when Jesus Christ came to this earth, he began to draw to himself a new people. And this new people would be under a new administration. Those old rules and regulations were designed for an earthly, typical people – namely, Israel. But there would be a new people and a new way of doing things now that Christ is here.

And so, I want you to see what Jesus told his disciples, his new people.

A new commandment I give unto you . . .

With this statement, Christ was setting this new commandment in contrast to those old commandments. In effect, Christ was saying, "I know you have been under those old regulations all of your life. I know that your life up to this point has been ordered by the Mosaic Law. But those things pointed to me. And now I am here and tomorrow I will fulfill the Law by offering myself once for all as the true sacrifice for sin."

And I can just hear the disciples asking, "Well Master, what law will be follow now? The Mosaic Law seems to naturally become obsolete now that you are here. All of the old rituals seem archaic and useless now that the real thing is accomplished. What regulations are we under now, Lord Jesus? What is our rule of life now that you have completely obeyed and fulfilled and brought to realization those old commandments?"

What is our rule of life now that your coming has brought those old commandments to its natural conclusion?

Now let's be clear. The obedient life and death of Christ has two effects upon that old Mosaic Law. Jesus fulfilled it and he put an end to it on behalf of believers.

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.

Matthew 5:17

Our Lord did not come to this earth thumbing his nose at the law. He didn't come saying, "I don't have to obey it." Rather, he was made under the law. (Galatians 4:4) His mission on behalf of his people was to completely obey it and thus fulfill it. And Jesus obeyed every jot and tittle of it on our behalf. And in the process of fulfilling it, Jesus also paid the just penalty which the Law prescribed for violators. He stretched out his arms and he died a hideous death to pay the price which the Law demanded of sinners. And now, the Law has been perfectly obeyed and the penalty has been fully paid and the Law has nothing to say against Christ's people anymore.

But when Jesus fulfilled it and died as a substitute for his people, paying the law's harsh penalty in full, he terminated that law as to believers. The law has no more effect upon those who put their faith in Christ. In fact, it is done away.

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances . . .

Ephesians 2:15

There was one great distinction, one great source of enmity between the Jews and the Gentiles and that was the Law. God gave the Law to the Jews and this created a great difference between Jew and Gentile. But when Christ died, the Law of commandments was abolished and this tore down the difference between Jew and Gentile.

I tell you, the world shook when Jesus Christ came to this world. And the great redemptive plan of God shifted from a pre-cross administration where there was a Law of commandments, where there was a distinction between Jew and Gentile, to a post-cross administration where the Law was done away and there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. And cognizant of this great eschatological shift, Jesus told his disciples,

A new commandment I give unto you . . .

You see, life as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is not like life under the law. Believers are no longer asked to serve God under compulsion. They are not asked to

serve God under threat of death for violating his law. Believers are no longer enslaved under the disciplinary eye of that old schoolmaster (the law). Believers are set free from that whole system of condemnation. And believers have been given a new heart, one that actually loves Christ; one that actually wants to serve Him. And that old set of commandments and the condemnation that came with it, was set aside with respect to believers after Christ died.

There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus . . .

Romans 8:1

So many people conceive of religion as being a system of dos and don'ts. The various religions of the world are law keeping religions. In fact, every religion other than Christianity is a religion of works and law keeping. And this suits the old nature. People are legalists from their heads to their toes because they still believe they must get to heaven by obeying some law. They haven't yet learned that there is only one result for man under the Law and that is hell.

But let me give you wonderful news. Jesus fulfilled the Law and he put an end to it for all those who believe in Him. And he set up a new way of life for believers. And that way of life is not the way of law, but the way of love.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

John 13:34

There is a new community in the New Testament. And that community is the church. That old community, Israel, had those old commandments. But to the church, Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you."

So, it is a new commandment because it is a new time, a new people and a new administration of the wonderful and marvelous and abundant grace of God.

But it is also a new commandment because the command to love one another, as spoken here by Jesus, goes beyond the instruction of the Old Testament. The Old Testament said,

Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

Leviticus 19:18

And in the Old Testament this concept of loving thy neighbor was generally expressed in the negative context of the law. Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt not commit adultery. That shalt not steal. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. (Exodus 20:13-17)

But to his new people, in this new administration, notice carefully the command of Christ.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

So, the love that is required in the new community is taken to a whole new level. We are to love one another as Christ loved us. My, oh my, what manner of love is that? It is a love heretofore unknown in the world. It is a new manner of love. It is a love that goes well beyond the compulsory requirements and the letter of the Law. It is the love of Christ himself.

We could spend the next 20 years analyzing the nature and the extent of the love of Christ toward his people and we could not uncover the depth of it. It is a love that is completely selfless and gives all. Needless to say, love such as this was never seen until Christ came. And so, the new commandment says, "Love one another as I have loved you."

Let me also say that Christ's unrelenting, sacrificial, redeeming love is unique because it is a selective love. He chose whom he would love from the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) and he gave his all for those special ones. Jesus did not love Herod and Caiaphas and Pontius Pilate with an all-out, efficacious, saving love. Jesus did not love the Jewish hierarchy with such a love. He told them, "You are not my sheep." (John 10:26) There was even one of his disciples that Jesus did not love with this kind of love. But his love applied in full to the other eleven.

And this new commandment to his church requires us to love **one another** with a very selective love. Are we to love our neighbor? Yes. Are we to love our enemies? Yes. But when it comes to one another, that is, the body of Christ, when it comes to our brothers and sisters in the Lord, when it comes to our fellow church members, we are to love them as Christ loved his disciples. That is, we love one another all out with a sacrificial, never-ending love. Now that is quite a new commandment, isn't it?

Now this is impossible for the natural man. If Jesus were talking to lost men here he might as well be speaking in a vacuum. There is no capacity for the natural man to love others in such a way. But Jesus was speaking to his own disciples. And he was speaking to men who would be filled with the Holy Spirit not many days hence. And when the Holy Spirit was applied to the hearts of the disciples, they became different men, men with a great capacity to love those in the household of God. And when the Holy Spirit is applied to the hearts of the elect in salvation, something is shed abroad in those hearts. It is the love of God.

And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 5:5

Loving one another is not left to chance. It is a miraculous benefit of the new birth. Christ gives us his own presence in the form of the Holy Spirit and when he does, the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts.

When you find a church that is infiltrated with the unregenerate you will find strife and bickering and arguing and contention and ultimately hate will rule in the congregation, because bitterness and envy and hate is what is embedded in the heart of the unregenerate man. But when you find a church composed of the regenerate, where the people have new hearts, where the people have the indwelling Holy Spirit and where love has been shed abroad in their hearts, there you will find the love of Christ flowing freely among the congregation and people will love one another as Christ loved.

This very fact, that loving the brethren is an impossible standard for the unregenerate, makes loving the brethren a sure mark of a true Christian.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13:35

How do you know that a person is a Christian? According to our text, it is if he loves the brethren.

It seems almost everyone claims to be a Christian. And what is the sure sign. Is it because he puts a fish on his car bumper? Ah, there goes a true Christian, look at that decal. Is it because he has a bumper sticker that says, "Honk if you love Jesus?" Is that how we know? Is it because a person wears a cross around his neck? Is that the sign of a Christian? Do we know a true Christian because he belongs to a doctrinally correct church? Do we even know a true Christian because he himself is orthodox in his doctrine? And the answer is that these things do not prove that a man belongs to Christ. Lost people can do all of these things.

Jesus said,

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13:35

Listen to what D.A. Carson said about this new command of Christ in connection to orthodoxy. "Orthodoxy without obedience to this command is just so much humbug."

Someone once said, "God is not going to put the tape measure around your head, but around your heart."

Remember what Paul said about the necessity of love in I Corinthians 13:1-3.

Love is the telltale sign of a Christian. If a man says he is a Christian and hates his brother, then he is a liar.

Did you know that the church loving one another has always been one of the greatest testimonies to the lost world? Tertullian, an early church writer, once commented about the world's perception of Christians. "See how they love one-another. How they are willing to die for one another."

Loving one another is a sure sign of regeneration. Anyone can put a sticker on their car, but a true Christian loves the brethren.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.

I John 3:14

Proof of your regeneration is not found in the fact that you have walked an aisle or prayed a prayer or been dunked in water or had some emotional experience. But proof is when you love one another in the church. When you look around at your church family and you say within yourself, "You know, I love these people. I love them as Christ loved me. I would sacrifice my own life for them." Then you know that you have passed from death unto life.

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

John 13:35