

Title: The Eleventh Commandment

Text: John 13:31-35

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Our lesson from John's Gospel is directed to the disciples and also at those who follow Jesus down to today. This text is considered a part of Jesus' "Farewell Address," and Jesus' commandment to love each other reflects the core the message of what Jesus wanted us to remember. So, we must continually, at all times, hear its power and clarion call for us a body of Christ. We do NOT simply believe in Jesus. We do NOT simply worship Jesus. If we want to the body of Jesus Christ, we are to live our lives following his example of unconditional love.

Recently I read a story about a group of hikers who decided to climb up the beautiful Blue Mountains in Jamaica. The earlier parts of the hike were easy but the closer they got to the top, the more treacherous the path became. They could no longer walk in groups but in pairs. Then as they neared the top, they needed to walk in a single-file line. Halfway up the mountain, in the growing darkness, the leader said, "Now, follow my feet. Do not venture to your right."

After he said this, he reached into his pocket, retrieved a stone and asked for their silence. He threw the stone off the right side of the trail, and they waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited and waited, until finally they heard the sound of the stone reaching the bottom. From then on there was no question about everyone following close behind their leader. Everyone in the group leaned against the side of the mountain going up the rest of the way, trying hard not to venture to the right. It was a long difficult journey following the leader, but when they got to the top, it was nothing but glory.

Friends, to be a Jesus follower is not easy. Rather, to follow Christ is a difficult undertaking. Like the group of hikers on the mountain, Jesus calls us to follow him in the same dangerous way. While the path may be treacherous, if we stay close to him one day we will share his glory.

Our context drops us into a pivotal moment where the disciples are with their Master. We are in the moment just before Jesus was betrayed by Judas. The time is the Passover, and Jesus and his disciples have gathered to remember the freedom from slavery in Egypt and Israel's Exodus event. At the right moment, Jesus rises from supper and begins to wash the feet of his disciples. He says to them that if he, as their Teacher and Lord would wash their feet, they should follow his example and wash one another's feet.

Then Jesus does something curious and reveals that someone in the room will betray him. Notice Jesus does not identify the individual who will betray him. To do so might have jeopardized that person's safety. Jesus makes an off the cuff remark that goes through the group without much fanfare. After Judas departs, the events leading up to Christ's death fell into place quickly.

At this point Christ turns to the remaining disciples and says an intimate statement, "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come." To call the disciples "children" is interesting and important. His words to them are loving and sweet. These are big, tough men and grown women. And he calls them, "my little children." Feel the contrasting images and embrace the images Jesus offers us - INTIMACY!

Soon, they would be on their own. While in time, his disciples would be able to go where he is going, to that place he has prepared for them (John 14:2), they stay and endure a treacherous journey before reaching the summit of the mountain.

And it is in the context and at just the right moment in time, Jesus pauses and says, “*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.*”

Just like those hikers who survived the treacherous climb by staying close to their leader and following in his steps, the disciples would survive in his absence by following his example of love. From their witness through time and now into our lives, we too are commanded to love one another. So, let’s talk about this new teaching by Christ about love. What is this eleventh command from our Master and friend.

**Recall that the love Jesus calls us too is not a new commandment.** We see it in other places in scripture. Leviticus 19:18 teaches the principle of loving your neighbor as you love yourself. The disciples already knew they were to do that. In Matthew, Jesus adds to their love when he tells them to love their enemy. Loving their neighbor is mostly simple, but to love an enemy is so hard. The story of Jonah bears witness to that difficulty.

So, if this commandment is not new, why is love so difficult? Vince Lombardi, one of the toughest and greatest NFL coaches, talked about how hard it is among friends. He said, “*There have been a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still do not win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: If you are going to play together as a team, you have to care for one another. You have to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: If I do not block that man, Paul is going to get his legs broken. I have to do my job well in order that he can do his. The difference between mediocrity and greatness is the feeling these guys have for each other. Most people call it team spirit. When the players are imbued with that special feeling, you know you have yourself a winning team.*” (Laura Schaefer, *Man With Farm Seeks Woman With Tractor* (Thunder’s Mouth Press). Cited in *Reader’s Digest*, September 2005, p. 115).

Yet, while Jesus would agree with Vince on the one hand, on the other hand Jesus would take love much further. Where Vince talked about his players loving his teammates, Jesus talked about loving our enemies, just as Jesus did. That kind of love is radical and hard!

**And that is what John adds that is new about loving like Jesus’ loves. We are not simply to love other people as we love ourselves. We are to love them as Christ loves us.** This love is a much harder standard to live by. Jesus’ love is perfect and unconditional. He extends it even to loving the “undeserving” and the “least of these.” That despite all our issues and problems, Jesus loves others unconditionally. That is the kind of love we are to have for our neighbor. Let me give you an example of that kind of love.

In her inspiring book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom tells the story of her family, a Dutch Christian family, who ended up in a concentration camp for trying to rescue Jews during the Nazi occupation of their country.

Corrie said her family carried a heart for the Jews over three generations. Her grandfather Wilhelm ten Boon started a weekly prayer group in the city of Haarlem, near Amsterdam for the salvation of the Jews. This weekly prayer meeting continued uninterrupted until 1944 when the

ten Boon family was sent to a concentration camp for their help in Jews flee from the Nazi persecution.

Corrie describes her father Caspar doing the unthinkable. When the Jews were forced to wear the “Star of David,” Caspar lined up to receive his star even though he was not Jewish. He wore it because he identified with his Jewish brothers and sisters. The Nazis called them vermin, but Caspar called them family. He so completely identified with the Jews that he was willing to wear their sign of shame and because he loved them. He did not have to wear the Star, but he and his family chose to. (Martin Dale, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/illustrations/sermon-illustration-revd-martin-dale-stories-59492.asp>) This act came at a steep price. In fact, so steep that Corrie’s sister Betsie died in the Nazi concentration camp. That is not simply loving your neighbor as you love yourself. That is loving as Christ loved. That is loving sacrificially.

Jesus tells us in Luke 6:27-36: *“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you... If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? But love your enemies.... Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because (Abba) is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Abba Father is merciful.”* In this passage Jesus is calling us as followers to a new kind of love.

**Yet, in praying through this passage, I found something even more amazing than love being old and new. I want us to notice that Jesus love is an active love.** Friends, our actions matter. We cannot in good conscientious say with our mouths “we love you” while our actions are different. Jesus says, *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, you must love one another. By this (insert the word ‘action’) everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.* We are to love one another as Christ loved us. This is how the world will know that we follow Christ. In our actions we show our love for one another.

Jesus did NOT say, “They will know you are my disciples if you believe the right things.” This active love is a litmus test. People are watching us, and our lives gives witness to the love of Jesus present inside us.

There is a story in Isak Dinesen’s book “Out of Africa” about a boy appearing to her one day asking for a job as a domestic servant. She hired him and was surprised when after three months he ask her for a letter of recommendation to a local Muslim who lived nearby. Dinesen offered to give him a raise and certain privileges, but the boy refused. Money and position were not his ambition. After a bit of an exchange the boy revealed his true purpose for working for her. He had decided to become either a Christian or Muslim, and his purpose for working for her was to see, up close, the way a Christian lived. Now that he had worked for Dinesen and see the ways of a Christian, he would go and observe the Muslim’s behavior; then he would decide who he was to follow.

The author makes a quick note at the end of the exchange that caught my attention. After their exchange, she reflects on how she wished he had told her that before he came to live with her. Friends, Jesus wants us to stay close and follow him. How do we know we are his followers? Hear Jesus say to us, *“Little children, love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples.”* Now go forth and share Jesus love to others – friends and enemies. In the name of the Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer. Amen.

### **Prayer of Illumination**

*Gracious and Loving God, as you once declared, “See, I am making all things new.” So now, through your Holy Spirit, open our hearts and minds to your transforming word in Scripture. Grant us a new vision of the height, depth, and breadth of your trustworthy and true love, that we may be inspired to live as faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, reflecting the new creation you have begun in us. Amen.*

### **John 13:31-35**

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”