

Passage: John 13:31-35  
Title: A New Commandment

JOHN 13:31-35

[31] When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. [32] If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. [33] 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.’ [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. [35] By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

INTRODUCTION: NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

The wisdom writer and the third king of Israel, Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes writes, “What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. [Ecclesiastes 1:9]

If you’ve been around long enough, you’ll realize that there is nothing new under the sun. It’s not to say that there aren’t new inventions or advances in technology or science. I don’t think that is what Solomon was referring to. Even in his day, there was great progress and innovation taking place. The earth is witness to a great deal of activity. Solomon's word-pictures in the book of Ecclesiastes confirm mankind striving to see and hear new things, but the reality is more repetition of the same old things. Perhaps what Solomon was saying is that conceivably there is nothing truly novel in existence. Every new idea has some sort of precedent or echo from the past. Nothing is said that has not been said before.

My oldest son will say to me, “I’ve heard all your sermons and they all sound the same.” He may be on to something.

There’s nothing new under the sun.

And yet, Jesus in the gospel of John tells his disciples, “A new commandment I give you, that you love one another.”

AN OLD COMMANDMENT

This was not a new commandment. There was always a command to love each other. It’s tattooed all over the pages of the OT.

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. [Lev.19:18]

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. [Lev.19:34]

The Shema: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. [Deut.6:5]

“And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, [Deut.10:12]

“You shall therefore love the Lord your God and keep his charge, his statutes, his rules, and his commandments always. [Deut.11:1]

If you type “neighbor”, you’ll find pages and pages of instruction for the care of and love of neighbor. The same is true if you type “sojourner”.

In Matthew 22, a lawyer asks Jesus a question to test him. [36] “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” [37] And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. [38] This is the great and first commandment. [39] And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. [40] On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

Even Jesus knows it’s not new. Jesus quotes the Old Testament and goes on to say that the whole of the Ten Commandments hang on these two commandments: to love God and to love neighbor.

So, what Jesus commands in the passage that we read together this morning in John 13 is not new one that we love one another. In one sense, there is nothing new under the sun. Nothing is said that has not been said before.

So, the question we must ask this morning is why does Jesus say that He gives a “new commandment” when it is obviously a repetition of the old? We all know that there is a sense in which this “new” commandment is not entirely new. So what, then, is so different about our Jesus’ command here that He can call it “new”?

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At this point in our story, Jesus was sharing in a last supper with his disciples. He had disrobed, girded himself with a towel and washed his disciples’ feet, something befitting of a servant. He prophesies the betrayal of Judas and even foretells the denial of Christ by Peter. And it’s in the midst of the last hours of Jesus, that Jesus gives this command to his disciples in the Upper Room at the last supper. “Love one another.”

Let's look at this verse a bit more closely. Jesus says, "A new command I give you."

## **1. AS WE LOVE OURSELVES**

First of all, the older versions of the commandment in the Old Testament all said that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

There's no one we love more than ourselves. 😊

But it's not just a love for ourselves in a prideful or arrogant sort of way. Loving ourselves includes all the longings that I have for my own safety and for my own health and for my own success and for my own happiness. And we are to love our neighbor with that same sort of concern and care and feel for that other person as though that neighbor were me.

If I may, let me illustrate by sharing a humorous illustration of how we view ourselves versus the way we view others. Pastor and author Bob Smith lists some of our self-deceptions: "Others have prejudices, but we have convictions. Others are conceited, but in me it's self-respect. When you spend time on your personal appearance, it's vanity; in me, it's just making the most of my God-given assets. In you, it's touchiness; but in me, it's sensitivity. In you, it's worry; in me, concern."

There is great caution that must be had that what we mean by loving ourselves is that we love those who look like us, talk like us, act like us and smell like us. We certainly know how difficult it is to love those who aren't like us.

The command to love others as we love ourselves goes beyond that.

## **2. AS I HAVE LOVED YOU**

The command that Jesus gave his disciples was new in the sense that it was fresh. It was not new in the sense that it was never introduced before, but that there was a different quality about this commandment that Jesus was giving. We find this commandment even in the Old Testament, but what differentiates this from the Old Testament laws, is what is found in the next phrase, "As I have loved you." This is what in essence captures why we should obey and follow this command, because He first loved us. We should love each other as Jesus loved us. "Just as I have loved you" is what makes this commandment new. The sacrificial work of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary is the "new" standard for the Christian's love for fellow-believers.

It's an understanding that love doesn't start with us. Love is ultimately about Jesus and begins with Jesus. The love Jesus' disciples are to have is to be like his love for us. The love that drove him to action. The love that drove him to the cross. See, love does not start or end with you.

How did Jesus love them? Even in the beginning of this chapter, we find that Jesus washed the feet of His disciples. And in that section, John describes that Jesus' reason for

doing this was because of His love for them. The text reads in verse 1 that “He loved them to the very end.”

It was a sacrificial love. An unconditional love. And unlimited love. A love in spite of love.

This commandment is juxtaposed in between two betrayals. There is the betrayal by Judas. And then there is the betrayal by Peter. Two of his disciples would betray Christ in these last hours of Jesus’ life and yet Jesus says that we are to love as Jesus had loved them.

How difficult is it to love? I might add that it is more difficult than you think. In a fallen, selfish, self-promoting, self-appreciating, self-serving world, it’s very difficult. We’re always looking out for number one. If we don’t take care of ourselves, who will? And yet, it was Jesus who laid aside His life so that we can have life. He exemplified it perfectly. And so Jesus showed them exactly how to do it, how to love, how to give yourself away.

If we are to love as Jesus loves us then we can’t put ourselves first. Love isn’t even about how you feel. It doesn’t give to get. It’s not about the satisfaction you might get from loving someone else. Love doesn’t start or end with you. Love doesn’t even draw a line in the sand and say, “I’m willing to do this for someone but not that.” I will do this but not that. And there is no limit to love. There is no ceiling or cap to love.

### **3. THE DISTINGUISHING MARK**

You see, Jesus was saying that love is the most distinguishing characteristic of those who are His. Jesus gave love priority over all other Christian values. He saw this virtue as the most important of all virtues when it comes to our public witness.

He didn’t say that the world will know me by your theology, or by your church attendance or by your denomination. He said the world will know by your love.

And when you begin to love and live your life much like the way Jesus so beautifully exemplified it, the world will see the amazing source of love that only God can give. The world will know. Why love? Why is love so important? Because it displays to the world what a loving God we believe. That’s why. The world does not know a love like this.

There’s a story I found about a little boy who attended a Sunday school. When his parents moved to another part of the city the little fellow still attended the same Sunday school, although it meant a long, tiresome walk each way. A friend asked him why he went so far, and told him that there were plenty of others just as good nearer his home.

“They may be as good for others, but not for me,” was his reply.

“Why not?” she asked.

“Because they love a fellow over there,” he replied.

If only we could make the world believe that we loved them, there would be fewer empty churches, and a smaller proportion of our population who never darken a church door. Let love replace duty in our church relations, and the world will soon be evangelized. (OC International [Moody’s Anecdotes, pp. 71-72])

Show me a church where there is love, and I will show you a church that is a power in the community.

The natural advertisement of our faith is first a realization of God’s love for us and second, an overflow of that relationship into the lives of others. May you love one another as Christ has loved you.