

Text: John 13:31-35; 1 John 4:7-12¹

Series: *Life in His Name* – The Message of John’s Gospel

Title: Part 29 – Jesus’ New Commandment

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As I mentioned last week, “love” becomes a prominent theme in the closing chapters of John’s Gospel. Mentioned only twelve times in the first twelve chapters, the word “love” appears forty-six times in the closing nine chapters of the Gospel. These last nine chapters bring us into the shadow of the cross and as Jesus prepares his disciples for that momentous day love flows from his teaching and his example and as John recalls Jesus’ words and his work on the cross, love flows from John’s pen as he recounts the final hours of Jesus’ life on earth.

One of Jesus’ most profound teachings on the subject of love is the one we’re about to read and consider together this morning. Its impact on the disciples was profound and in a few moments I want to demonstrate that to you, but before I do that I invite you to hear it with me. Jesus’ word here is one that I have always found hard to hear, not because I don’t understand it, but because I do and I know how poorly I live it. It’s simple, it’s direct and it’s convicting and I invite you to hear it this morning with me because it is God’s holy, inspired and authoritative Word to us. I’m reading from John’s Gospel, chapter thirteen, verses thirty-one to thirty-five.

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.”

Love – Jesus’ New Priority

This morning, I want us to consider together Jesus’ new commandment. As I said, this word had a profound impact upon the disciples. The word “commandment” made the disciples sit up and listen. They had lived all of their lives in connection with the commandments of God that had been them through Moses. The commandments of God were precious truth to them. They were God’s gift to his people. So when Jesus used “commandment” language he was telling his disciples that this was vital, central truth for them.

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When Jesus called his commandment “new” we need to understand that “love” was not a new truth that he was revealing. Jesus recognized that love for God and love for others was commanded in the Old Testament. Jesus had summarized all of the Old Testament commandments into two commands: to love God completely and to love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:36-40). What was “new” about Jesus’ commandment was the priority that Jesus placed upon love and the fact that he establishes himself as the model for love: “just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” For those who are believers in Jesus, his loving self-sacrifice on the cross will always be our model for love. That’s why his command is so hard to hear at times. We know that Jesus’ love calls us to a costly, self-denying sacrificial love and we hang our heads knowing how far we fall short.

Jesus’ priority on love was a word that penetrated deep into the souls of his disciples and found expression in a multitude of ways in their lives and in their teaching in the years to come.

For example, Peter, who was there that day, later wrote this in one of his letters.

“Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8

Peter was writing about the soon return of Jesus Christ and he stressed to his readers how important loving one another was in our preparation for the day that we must stand before Jesus and give an account of our lives. God never takes sin lightly. The Bible teaches us that we are to confess it, we are to repent of it, we are to abandon it but here Peter tells us that love “covers” sin. What does he mean? I think what he means is that sin among believers never justifies payback. When a believer wrongs me I don’t have the right to wrong him in return. Jesus calls me to love him even if I’ve been wronged by him. And when Peter brings this principle into the context of the return of Jesus he is saying the love is crucial to our preparation for the day we must stand before Jesus.

Let me give you another example of the impact of Jesus’ teaching. This one is from John, who of course was there that day. John’s First Letter is full of instruction on how we can know that we have come to faith in Jesus Christ. John’s question is: What does the life of someone who believes in Jesus look like? And we find love coming up again and again. John wrote...

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.” 1 John 3:14

In other words, love is crucial to our assurance of salvation.

Let me give you an example of the impact of Jesus' teaching on the life of someone who wasn't there that day. This teaching of Jesus was so crucial that it became the life blood of the followers of Jesus, so much so that even someone who wasn't there that day understood its centrality.

Paul, the apostle, was not there that day but he understood Jesus' priority on love. In his Letter to the Colossians, Paul was answering the same question that John answered in his First Letter: What does the life of someone who believes in Jesus look like? And he wrote...

**“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”
Colossians 3:12-14**

Notice the same “above all” priority that Peter had given to love. In other words, Paul understands that love is crucial to living the Christian life. Without love, as he wrote in his First Letter to the Corinthians...

**“If I ... have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” 1
Corinthians 13:1**

Without love, it doesn't matter if I have profound insight into spiritual truth or have mountain-moving faith or give everything for the poor or die the death of a martyr. Paul wrote...

“if I ... have not love, I am nothing ... I gain nothing.” 1 Corinthians 13:2, 3

And then Paul wrote what has become one of the most abiding descriptions of love that has ever been penned. The words are so beautiful that they have been read at countless weddings but they are among the most challenging of all Scriptures.

“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

I need to learn about love – I am not “competent” to speak to you this morning about this subject.

- this subject challenges me deeply – as it would any of us this morning

So where can I turn to learn about love? Well, I turn to God's Word to teach me about God's Word. It's a principle of allowing the Bible to interpret the Bible.

As I said a few moments ago, John's First Letter contains frequent references to love and there is a portion of his letter that is a kind of concise commentary on Jesus' new commandment. If you have a Bible with you turn to the First Letter of John, chapter four. We're going to read from verse seven to verse twelve. This is John's commentary on Jesus' new commandment. John wrote...

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

If we want to obey Jesus' commandment to love "one another" as He has loved us there are some crucial truths that we need to understand.

If we want to love like Jesus commands us to love...

We need to be connected to the source of love

"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God." 1 John 4:7

- 1) "has been born of God"
- whenever John speaks of "birth" in relat to God, he most often means "new birth," "born again"

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." John 3:3

- Come into relationship with God as Father through faith in Christ

"But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God..." John 1:12

- "has been born" – a once-for-all birth into God's forever family through faith in Jesus Chrst

- 2) "knows God"
- not just "knowing about God" but knowing him deeply in relationship

- cultivate that relationship through reading the Word and prayer & experience of walking with God and following the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- “knows” is a present and ongoing relationship with God – it began in the past but its ongoing today

If we want to love like Jesus commands us to love...

We need to understand that love is not an option

This “love stuff” is not an option – its serious business if I want to be a follower of Jesus.

“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.” 1 John 4:8

In his book, Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home, Richard Foster tells of an old wise man who asked his disciples, “How can we know when the darkness is leaving and the dawn is coming?”

“When we can see a tree in the distance and know that it is an elm and not a juniper,” one student responded.

“When we can see an animal and know it is a fox and not a wolf,” replied another.

“No,” said the teacher.

Puzzled, the students asked for the answer. The wise man replied quietly, “We know the darkness is leaving and the dawn is coming when we can see another person and know it is our brother or sister; otherwise no matter what time it is, it’s still dark.”

If we have no love for our brother or sister, our hearts are still in darkness. If we have no love for our fellow believers we need to question whether we’ve come to know the love of Jesus at all.

“We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.” 1 John 3:14

If we want to love like Jesus commands us to love...

We need to love in action, not just in words

As I looked for definitions of love, most of the ones I found sounded like this:

“a deep, feeling of affection”

“a feeling of intense desire”

“an intense emotional attachment”

“the object of deep, intense affection”

They dealt with feelings of love – but I observe something else here in the Bible. Love is most often described as an action rather than a feeling. There are very few, if any “feeling” words in Paul’s description of love in 1 Corinthians 13. John wrote...

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.” 1 John 4:9

Or as Paul wrote...

“God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

God’s love is not just spoken; it’s lived out in action.

Nelson & Virginia Bell – parents of Ruth Graham, the wife of Billy Graham.

- long and beautiful marriage
- Mrs. Bell developed Alzheimer’s disease and Dr. Bell cared for his wife

One day, Ruth Graham came to visit her parents and found her father on his hands and knees helping his wife to put on her stockings. Dr. Bell looked up at this daughter and said, “You know, the greatest privilege of my life is taking care of your mother.” He understood that God’s love is a love that finds expression in acts of love.

If we want to love like Jesus commands us to love...

We need to have Jesus’ example firmly planted in our hearts

I looked for a “definition” of love in the Bible, but I didn’t find one. Instead, I found pictures or descriptions of love.

For example, I referred to Paul’s statement about love in 1 Corinthians 13 as a “description,” because strictly speaking, it’s not a “definition.” It’s a description of what love “looks like” in action.

Jesus really set the agenda for the pictorial definition of love by saying...

“just I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” John 13:34

John picked up on that pictorial definition and we see that in several places. He wrote...

“In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” 1 John 4:10

The word “propitiation” brings God’s holiness into the picture alongside His love. Our God is a holy God who hates sin. His holy nature cries out for the punishment and destruction of sin and because sin is so deeply imbedded in our nature, His holiness demands our destruction. But our God is also a merciful God who loves sinners. His love cries out for reconciliation with those who have sinned against him. In the cross of Jesus Christ, God’s holiness and God’s love meet in perfect harmony. Dying in our place, Jesus bears the destruction that satisfies the holy wrath of God against our sin and opens for us a way into the merciful heart of God’s love.

If God had wanted to write an encyclopedia definition of “love” this is what I think the page in that book might have looked like:

God’s Pictorial Definition of Love

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” 1 John 3:16 (NIV)

- love is about giving ourselves
- love is about denying ourselves in the interests of another
- love is about sacrifice
- love is about the other, not about ourselves

- our lives are to be a reproduction of this picture – lives laid down in loving, living sacrifice.

If we want to love like Jesus commands us to love...

Our motivation must be as a response to God’s love for us

“Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” 1 John 4:11

“Beloved...” John calls us “Beloved” because “we have been loved.”

“Because God has loved us we love others.” It’s a simple equation.

I once read the story of a man who had been head of rescue mission for 40 years. He was asked what kept him going in what, at times, was a very frustrating work. He said, “All I’m doing is giving back to others a little of the love God has shown me.”

- He had once been one of those same men – BUT one day, at a rescue mission God’s love broken through into his life.
- And since then God’s love for him had been his continual motivation to love others.

The reality is that we are all “rescued sinners.” “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!” We all stood under God’s wrath against our sin – we were blind, hopeless and condemned, but God loved us in Jesus!

If we want to love like Jesus commands us to love...

Our desire must be that people would see Jesus and not us

“No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” 1 John 4:12

Cf. Former East Germany

Uwe Holmer

- 8 children always rejected when they applied to university
- Holmer was a Lutheran pastor in East Berlin
- Ministry of Education headed by Margot Honecker, wife of Eric Honecker premier
- BUT when the Berlin wall fell the Honeckers were thrown out of office AND out of their government-owned home
- Honeckers were suddenly friendless, homeless – no place to go
- None of former cronies showed concern
- BUT Uwe Holmer opened his home – Holmer reported that the Honeckers had not embraced faith in Christ BUT they did bow their heads when the family prayed around the table.

Who knows what impact that “picture” of love had in the lives of those hardened people.

- OR what impact that picture of love had on those neighbors who saw it!

Honecker, like most Communists, probably wouldn’t believe in God because he couldn’t see Him.

- materialists – only what I can put my hands on is really!
- the Holmers made God visible!

And that’s we can do as we love others in Jesus’ name – make God’s love visible to an unbelieving world.

Jesus said...

“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.” John
13:34-35**

I told you that I find this passage among the most challenging in all of Scripture and maybe you do, too. Typically at the end of a challenging message like this, the speaker is supposed to ease off the pedal, but I'm not going to. Jesus won't let me. His Word won't let me. His command won't let me.

Francis Chan is a pastor and writer who won't take his foot off the pedal, either. In his sermon titled "Think Hard, Stay Humble," he told the following story about a man named Vaughn who radiated the love of Christ to everyone around him. I'm going to close with this story because it's a picture of someone who has taken into his spirit and into his life the picture of Jesus' love for us. Chan wrote...

A few years ago, a missionary came to our church and told a beautiful story about sharing the gospel with a remote tribe in Papua New Guinea. At the end of the story this missionary said, "I should really give the credit to Vaughn, my former youth pastor who loved me and inspired me to live for Christ and share the gospel with others." The next week another guy came to our church and he challenged us to start sponsoring kids living in poverty. The second speaker also concluded by saying, "I'm involved in this ministry because of my youth pastor, a guy named Vaughn." I found out those guys were from the same youth group!

Then the next week another speaker named Dan told us about his ministry at a rescue mission in the inner city of L.A. After Dan's talk, I casually mentioned, "It was so weird: the last two weeks both of our speakers mentioned how much impact their youth pastor, Vaughn, had on them." Dan looked surprised and then he told me, "I know Vaughn. He's a pastor in San Diego now, and he takes people into the dumps in Tijuana where kids are picking through the garbage. I was just with Vaughn in Tijuana. We would walk in the city, and these kids would run up to him, and he would show such deep love and affection for them. He'd hug them and have gifts and food for them. He'd figure out how to get them showers. Francis, it was eerie: the whole time I was walking with Vaughn, I kept thinking, "If Jesus was on earth, I think this is what it would feel like to walk with him." He just loved everyone he ran into, and he would tell them about God. People were just drawn to his love and affection." And then Dan said this, "The day I spent with Vaughn was the closest thing I've ever experienced to walking with Jesus."

Hearing this made me think, "Would anyone in their right mind say that about me? Would anyone say that about you? ... As I thought about all this, I prayed, "Lord, that's what I want. I don't want to be the best speaker in the world. That doesn't matter. I don't want to be the most intelligent person on the planet. That's

not what I want to be known for. I want to be known for someone saying, "Wow, he's a lot like Jesus."²

How about it? Let's make it our priority because it's Jesus' priority. Let's allow Him to love through us so that the world can see Him.

- **Invitation to Prayer Ministry**
- **Final Song: All to Us**
- **Benediction**

² Francis Chan, "Think Hard, Stay Humble," PreachingToday.com | posted 1/24/2011 Copyright © 2011 by the author or Christianity Today International/ PreachingToday.com.