

## The New Commandment

### Introduction:

- I. So far as practical Christianity is concerned, there could be no words more important than the ones found in our text for tonight. Our lesson is taken from John 13:34-35. Jesus is in the upper room with all of His apostles, except, of course, Judas, who by this time has left to do the inconceivable, that is, to betray the Son of God. In our text, Jesus addresses His apostles affectionately as "little children" and tells them that He will be with them only for a little while longer and that where He was going they could not come. So, knowing this, Jesus gives them an important command that they must follow once He has gone away. Here is what He said:

John 13:34-35

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."

- II. I want to emphasize four things from these royal verses that we have just read, keeping in mind that the words of Jesus here make up the heart of practical Christianity. First, however, I want us to fully plant in our minds this truth: If we are Christians, we recognize ourselves as being under the authority of Christ. When Jesus gives us instructions, they are not merely suggestions that are good to follow; they are commands that must be kept. People today have problems being under authority. Everyone wants to call his own shots and do his own thing. We live, after all, in the land of the free and so we should be free to live our own lives anyway we want to.

Let me tell you right now, ladies and gentlemen, that is an attitude contrary to being a disciple of Christ. It is not that we don't have free will. Of course we do. But as disciples of Christ we willfully place ourselves under the authority of our Master. We follow Jesus, not because we have to or because we have no choice, but because we want to. As Christians we have made up our minds, the dye has been cast, our decision has been made. We will follow Jesus.

So then, Jesus in our text has sent forth a command. Let's look together at four things that are suggested.

### Lesson:

- I. **The Passion in the Command: Love.**

By way of contrast, the cruelty of man is almost unlimited. From the Holocaust when six million Jews were murdered, to the Rwanda genocide where some 1,000,000 people were brutally executed in a span of 100 days, the evidence of how brutal man can be is overwhelming. The depths of man's

cruelty has stained the canvas of human history from Cain's murder of his brother Abel up until this very moment. But out of the smoke and ashes of man's unkindness arose the Cross of Calvary and the cry of love that changed the world forever. Now in a world of hate, there is a message of love produced by the salvation offered by Christ. A salvation that was planned by love, provided by love, given by love and finished by love. And now, the One who made it all possible; the one who died on that cross so that the meanness of man could be forgiven, says to us,

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love..."* Let me tell you, brethren, you can't be a follower of Jesus without loving people. Jesus is giving us a command to love and either we comply or we cease to be Christians.

*1 Cor. 16:14*

*Let all that you do be done in love.*

*Eph. 5:2*

*And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

*Phil. 1:9*

*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment,*

Before we go further, we need to be sure we know what kind of love Jesus is talking about here. The word love is the Greek word agape. The best definition of agape that I have ever heard, other than the one word God, for God is love, is this: "Love always acts in the best interest of whatever it is that is loved." It is not an emotional feeling that is exercised only when others treat us right. Instead, it is a determination to ALWAYS act in the best interest of others. This is what Jesus was commanding us to do in Matthew 5:44. He wasn't telling us to like our enemies. He wasn't telling us to have good feelings towards those who hurt and harm us or our families. He was telling us to always act in their best interest. This love doesn't need reciprocation. This love doesn't depend on the circumstances of life. It is constant and consistent and unmovable. It is a characteristic of a true Christian and without it there can be no Christianity. So, Jesus gives us a command and that command is simply to love. Now, let's notice the people in this command.

## II. The People in the Command: **One another.**

*"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another."* The people in this command are specific, aren't they? Jesus gives us a target at which to aim our love. Now, this is not to say that we are not to love those who are in the world. We most certainly are commanded to do so. But again in this statement, Jesus is talking about those who belong to Him. He is speaking specifically to His apostles and trying to get them to realize that if they are going to succeed

after He goes away, they are going to have to drop any feelings of competitiveness or strife and be free from discord. They are going to have to work together in love because there are going to be some tough times ahead. Now, by extension this new commandment reaches down to those of us who belong to Christ today. I know that because it is so often repeated throughout the New Testament.

If we are to succeed as the people of God, if our local churches are going to prevail over our adversary, the devil, we must love one another. Listen to me: of all the studies that I have done through the years with regard to church growth, there has always been one common denominator, one shared quality that seems to always exist in churches that are successful. That abiding element is not doctrinal soundness. Now I believe firmly in a church being doctrinally sound and in fact I would discourage Christians from being a part of any other kind of church. The truth is, however, there are a lot of churches that are doctrinally sound that are dying on the vine. That's right. The one quality that I have seen in all burgeoning churches that are thriving and increasing in membership is not conducting worship services scripturally or having strong preaching from the pulpit or limiting their work to authorized functions. Now again, all of these things are important, in fact, they more important than growing numerically. The fact is, however, we all want to grow numerically, don't we? And truth be told we don't have to choose between being sound in word, work and worship and growing numerically. We can do both! We can have local churches that are alive and well and functioning and being sound at the same time. How? By figuring out what that one common denominator is that exist in all successful churches. And it is here, right here in this new commandment that Jesus has given to us—love one another. This is what you find in all successful congregations.

### **Love**

Lee Iacocca once asked legendary football coach Vince Lombardi what it took to make a winning team. The book Iacocca records Lombardi's answer:

*There are a lot of coaches with good ball clubs who know the fundamentals and have plenty of discipline but still don't win the game. Then you come to the third ingredient: If you're going to play together as a team, you've got to care for one another. You've got to love each other. Each player has to be thinking about the next guy and saying to himself: If I don't 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," Lombardi said that night, "is the feeling these guys have for each other."*

In the healthy church, each Christian learns to care for others. As we take seriously Jesus' command to love one another, we contribute to a winning team.

And I'll tell you something else, not only is love a shared quality in successful churches, it is also present in the life of every successful Christian. You see, the more we love Jesus, the more we love each other. The closer we are to each other, the closer we are to our Lord. It's like the spokes on a bicycle wheel.

Close to the outer rim, the spokes are far apart, but the closer they get to the center hub, the closer they get to each other. Listen to me brethren, the hub of our life must be Jesus. So the closer we get to Him, the closer we will be to the other spokes of the wheel that we call brethren. This is not the way it might be, it is the way it is. Let me just make it plain to you, if we don't love one another, we don't love Christ. Period! How do I know this is the case 100% percent of the time? This is how I know:

*John 14:15*

*If you love me, you will keep my commandments.*

*John 15:12*

*This is my commandment, that you love one another...*

You see that? We can't love Jesus without loving one another. And the love must be real, it must be sincere. Listen to Peter on this:

*1 Peter 1:22*

*Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,*

The word *sincere* means without dissimulation or disguise. It is the exact opposite of the word hypocrisy. Let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, hypocrisy is the enemy of everything that is associated with God. You see with God there is no pretense. With God there is no concealment or camouflage. We can trust God because His love real and God expects our love for one another to be the same. Our love must be authentic, not fake, forged or fictitious because hypocrisy is despicable in all its forms, but never more so than when it attaches itself like a leech to love.

Picture in your mind Jesus in the peaceful surroundings of the garden of Gethsemane. His heart is overflowing with sadness. He prays that He can avoid drinking from an unidentified cup of sorrow, but concludes by saying to His Father, "*thy will be done.*" He goes back to his disciples, Peter, James and John and finds them sleeping. With the distinctive tone of His voice He wakes them up. "*Rise, let us be going,*" He says. "*Behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.*" And while Jesus is talking to His disciples, Judas approaches them with a band of armed people. Without remorse, he walks staunchly up to Jesus, looks him in the eyes and says, "Hail Master," and kisses Him. In an instant, this universal sign of love, the sign of a kiss, is distorted into a sign of betrayal. Never has hypocrisy revealed itself in such a despicable fashion. Yet Judas certainly wasn't the last person to ever fake love and betray Jesus with a kiss.

Listen to me: If you say you love Jesus and then gossip about one who belongs to Him, that's like betraying Him with a kiss.

If you say you love Jesus, but then you don't lift a finger to help Him advance His cause, that's like betraying Him with a kiss.

If you tell someone that you love them, but neglect to help them in their time of need, you are guilty of betraying them with a kiss.

*1 John 3:18*

*Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

*Love in Deed and Truth*

*A young man spent an entire evening telling a girl how much he loved her. He said that he could not live without her; that he would go to the ends of the earth for her; yes, go through fire for her, or die for her. However, on leaving, he said, "I'll see you tomorrow night if it doesn't rain."*

Talk is cheap, isn't it? It's easy to say we love one another, but saying it isn't enough. The kind of love that Jesus is commanding is demonstrative. True love, ladies and gentlemen, is played out in real life. If we really love each other, we will:

- Spend time with each other
- Correct each other
- Accepted each other
- Help each other
- Restore each other
- Think about each other

This, ladies and gentlemen, is how sincere love acts. But our ultimate example in how to love is Jesus. So, consider with me the pattern in the command.

### III. **The Pattern in the Command: *Just as I have loved you.***

Maybe you have been wondering why Jesus called this commandment new. After all, the command to love really isn't new. The newness is found, not in the mere command to love, but in the quality of love under consideration. To love like Jesus loved is a new standard of love never seen by the world before. Think about it with me. Jesus gave up a glorious place in heaven to be persecuted as a man on earth, not for His own benefit, but for the salvation of humanity. That was a demonstration of love this world had never seen before. Think about it now. When Jesus was here on earth, He once took up a towel and washed the feet of His disciples. We are talking about the One by whom all things were created in heaven and in earth. We are talking about the one who was before all things and by whom all things consist. We are talking about God and when God took up a towel and served His servants that, ladies and gentlemen, was a love this world had never seen before. Come on now, think about it with me. When Jesus was in pain and agony on the cross, He prayed to His Father on behalf of the very ones who were crucifying Him. "Father, forgive them for they know not

what they do.” That was a demonstration of love never seen by this world. Indeed, the love that Jesus consistently showed when He was here on earth, was a new kind of love and now He says to His disciples, “...*just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.*” Just how did Jesus love?

- He loved unconditionally
- He loved sacrificially
- He loved selflessly
- He loved completely

#### IV. The Proof in the Command: ***We are disciples of Christ.***

*John 13:35*

*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*

It has been said that love is the badge of our discipleship, and Jesus indicates that such is a true statement.

Now, let me begin by saying that love alone doesn't make one a disciple. Jesus doesn't say we become a disciple by loving others. We know that obedience to the gospel is required for that. Paul didn't say that love was the power of God unto salvation, he that the gospel was the power of God. So, love doesn't make us disciples, it merely demonstrates that we are disciples. How is love a demonstration of discipleship. A disciple is one who follows his teacher. He emulates his action so that others can see the teacher in his disciples.

*Matt 10:24-25*

*A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. 25 It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master...*

So then, love should fill our hearts and all that we do should emanate from a heart of love (Col. 3:12-15).

Yes, those who are Christians are a part of the one body. The body is made up of people—people that must love and be loved in order to be what God expects and demands. And when we keep this new commandment from Jesus, it transforms us, not only individually, but collectively, and that in turn draws people to Jesus because it creates an truly unique atmosphere that is attractive to others. Listen to this illustration of an intensive care waiting room.

I have spent long hours in the intensive care waiting room... watching with anguished people... listening to urgent questions: Will my husband make it? Will my child walk again? How do you live without your companion of thirty years?

The intensive care waiting room is different from any other place in the world. And the people who wait are different. They can't do enough for each other. No one is rude. The distinctions of race and class melt away. A person is a father first, a black man second.

The garbage man loves his wife as much as the university professor loves his, and everyone understands this. Each person pulls for everyone else.

In the intensive care waiting room, the world changes. Vanity and pretense vanish. The universe is focused on the doctor's next report. If only it will show improvement. Everyone knows that loving someone else is what life is all about.

*One Inch from the Fence, Wes Seeliger*

Shouldn't our churches be like the intensive care waiting room? We are indeed waiting aren't we. We are all waiting for Jesus to come back and we are all in this thing together. In our churches, then, the distinctions of race and class should melt away. In the church, like in the intensive care waiting room, a man should be a Christian first and have no concern whether the one sitting next to him is black, brown, or white. All vanity and pretense should be left at the door of the church, I'm not talking about the building, I'm talking about the body. When we enter into the body of Christ everything should be different because now we love the way Jesus commands us to love and it's transforming. And when people come to visit us, they can feel that love and some at least will want to have what we have.

### **Conclusion:**

So then, we know why we should love. We know how we should. Now we must make application of what we have learned. Now, it's time love one another just as Jesus has loved us.