

126. The Gospel of John—13:33-35

“A New Commandment”

(12/13/20)

As we enter the thirteenth chapter of John’s gospel, we have entered the day of Jesus’ crucifixion—which would take place at 9am the following morning.

The evening began in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem where Jesus and His disciples were celebrating the Feast of Passover together.

As the evening progressed, Jesus dropped a bombshell revelation that one of them would betray Him...(Finish)

After Judas left the room to carry out his betrayal of Christ—Jesus proceeds by giving the eleven remaining disciples (and the whole Christian church) a new feast to celebrate in connection with the New Covenant.

The memorial meal that God gave Israel to celebrate during the Old Covenant (Old Testament) period was the Feast of Passover (Leviticus 23:5)—which commemorated how God used the blood of the lamb, when applied to the door posts and lintel of their houses by faith, to cause the judgment of God upon the firstborn of Egypt to “passover” them.

This intern was used by God to deliver them out of their bondage (slavery) in Egypt to a new life of freedom and blessing as the redeemed people of God under the Old Covenant.

This *new* memorial meal that Christians would celebrate under the New Covenant would come to be known as “the Lord’s Supper” or *Communion*.

When Christians celebrate Communion together it reminds us of Jesus' death on Calvary's Cross and how His blood, when applied, not to our houses but, to our hearts by faith—causes the judgment of God to 'passover' us.

Remember that Egypt in the Bible is a type of the world, and the 'firstborn of Egypt' a type of all who are the 'firstborn' of this world thru physical birth.

The Bible says that all who are born physically into this world are born the children (descendants) of Adam—and that those who are born of Adam—all die (1Cor.15:22) in the judgment of God upon the firstborn of this fallen world (the curse of Gen.3).

However, once we apply the blood of Jesus (our Passover Lamb), to our lives by faith—it causes the judgment of God to 'passover' us.

The blood of Jesus accomplishes this by causing us to undergo a second birth (physical birth in Adam first then a spiritual birth in Christ second—John 3) and once we are 'born-again' or 'second born' in Christ—we are no longer children of Adam where the judgment or '*wrath of God*' is abiding on us—we are now the children of God, where the *blessings* of God now abides upon us!

And so, the blood of Christ our Passover Lamb delivers us out of our bondage to "*Egypt and Pharaoh*" (the world and Satan)—it gives us a new life of freedom and blessing as the redeemed people of God under the New Covenant!

Now, after Judas left the room and Jesus instituted Communion with His remaining disciples—He continues to teach them important truths they needed to learn about the New Covenant and their citizenship in God's Kingdom.

As Jesus had taught them repeatedly during His earthly ministry—in the Kingdom of God, servanthood would be its greatest virtue, and now He tells them—a new commandment would be its greatest law:

John 13:33-35 (NKJV)

³³ Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you. ³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Let me stop and say that the new commandment of the new covenant that Jesus gave to His disciples wasn't simply to *love* people—there was nothing *new* about that!

The Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love others—Leviticus 19:18, "...*you shall love your neighbor as yourself*".

The word "**new**" does not mean "*new in time*," since God had commanded His people to love others in the O.T. before Jesus came on the scene—this Greek word means "*new in experience, fresh*."

This command for Jesus' disciples to love one another was new because—it was built on a new *principle* and energized by a new *power*.

The New Principle—

John 13:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

In the O.T. God had commanded His people to love others—"*as they loved themselves*."

What makes *this* command new is that Jesus commanded His disciples to love each other—"*as I have loved you*" He told them.

How did Jesus love them? How did Jesus love us?—by going to the cross and dying for us!

That's how He wants us to love one another—by going to the cross and dying (not literally but figuratively) for one another—that's what's *new* about His command to love under the New Covenant!

Yes, the Old Testament is filled with commandments and exhortations to love—but Jesus here makes everything new when He says, “Love one another as I have loved you” or in other words, love others more than or above yourselves! (Phil.2:3)

And that's how unbelievers will know we are children of God—

John 13:35 (NKJV)

³⁵ By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love [agape love—God's love] for one another."

Loving people as you love yourself (Old Testament or Old Covenant love) implies placing them on an *equal* footing with yourself.

But loving them as Jesus loved us means—to place them *above* yourself by dying to *your* needs and making *their* needs supreme.

This is the greatest kind of love—the love of God (sacrificial love) manifested in the lives of His people—

John 15:12-13 (NKJV)

¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

At this point in the discussion, it's critical that we understand that God's love is not a *feeling*—it is selfless *action* toward others in need:

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

And that's why nothing is more powerful, nothing is a greater witness to the world than God's love flowing through the lives of His people.

That is what Paul the apostle said in contrast to the gifts of the Spirit to end 1Corinthians 12 and open chapter 13—he called God's love "*the more excellent way!*"

He said that in the context of spiritual gifts—(agape) love is better than speaking in tongues. It's better than healing the sick. God's love is better than raising the dead—because those things are only beneficial for this life.

And while the exercise of these gifts can be exciting and emotionally moving (for the moment)—God's love can soften the hardest heart and change a person for eternity!

(Talk about the woman who wrote to the man in prison who had killed her whole family telling him she forgave him and sharing Jesus with him).

When Jesus commanded us to *love our enemies*—many people can't comprehend doing that because our concept of love is rooted in human love which is often based *on* feelings.

And so, when people hear that Jesus said we are to love our enemies, they immediately respond—"how can I love (*have feelings for*) my enemies!"

Well, you probably can't—but God's love isn't about feelings.

In 1Corinthians 13, Paul went on to give us the best description of God's love in all the New Testament—using all *verbs*, because God's love is not feelings, it's actions!

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

⁴ Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud ⁵ or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. ⁶ It does not rejoice

about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out.⁷ Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.⁸ But whether *there are* prophecies, they will fail; whether *there are* tongues, they will cease; whether *there is* knowledge, it will vanish away. But love [God's love] will last forever!

Human love often needs to be *earned*—as it's often based on performance (as when a parent's love is based on their child's obedience or academic achievements or athletic accomplishments).

The problem is that—many Christians bring that concept of love into their relationship with God and begin to think that God's love needs to be earned as well.

This causes many to think that God doesn't love them because they have failed so badly in life and therefore haven't *earned* His love—so how could He ever love them?!

How can He love you? Because it's His nature to love—and to love *unconditionally*, regardless of how much we fail and don't deserve it!

That is the whole message of the cross—that God so loved a world of sinners, failures, losers and reprobates that He sent His only begotten Son to die for them—all because of His great love wherewith He loved us!

If God commands us to love even our enemies—how much more should His love be applied to our marriages and to our relationships with our earthly families and our church families?

We are in the Christmas season, the time each year when we focus on the incarnation and how God the Son was born a flesh and blood member of the human race.

Why did He come to earth?—to save us from the consequence of our sins—to forgive us for all the wrongs we had committed against God.

This is a time when we need to forgive those who have wronged us—especially those closest to us (parents, children, siblings etc.).

Now, when Jesus announced a *new* commandment for the new covenant—I think His disciples might have secretly groaned within themselves.

You see, the Law of Moses already contained 613 commandments—many of which they hadn't yet memorized let alone were keeping—and now the Lord is going to add another one!

No Jew could ever hope to know let alone fully obey all those commandments given thru Moses.

And so, this gave way to an ongoing debate the scholars of Judaism and leaders of Israel were always having with one another—which law was the greatest of them all.

Matthew 22:35-36 (NKJV)

³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question, testing Him, and saying*, ³⁶ "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

As I said, this was not a new question—the Scribes and Pharisees had been debating it for centuries.

These men had determined that the Law contained 613 commandments—

- 248 were positive—things that God said His people must do like: "*loving Him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength*"; and "*honoring their fathers and mothers*".
- 365 were negative—things that God said His people were forbidden from doing like: "*worshipping false gods*", "*stealing*", "*lying*", and committing "*adultery*".

No person could ever hope to know and fully obey all of these commandments.

So, to make it easier, the *experts* of the Law (lawyers) divided the commandments into “*heavy*” (important) and “*light*” (unimportant).

A person could major on the “*important*” commandments and not worry about the “*trivial*” ones—this is very much like how many people in our society think of sin. (Explain)

The fallacy behind this approach is obvious: You need only break one law, ‘*heavy*’ or ‘*light*’, to be guilty before God—“*For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all*” (James 2:10).

But the question itself was a valid one and so Jesus answered it—

Matthew 22:37-40 (NKJV)

³⁷ **Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’** ³⁸ **This is the first and great commandment.**

Here Jesus quoted the *Shema* (“shem-a”—Deut. 6:4), the great Jewish statement of faith that was recited daily by every orthodox Jew.

The Greek word that Jesus uses here for **love** is *agapao* (the verb form of *agape*). (Explain)

Once you love God the way Jesus commanded, the second greatest commandment will naturally flow out of that love—

Matthew 22:39 (NKJV)

³⁹ **And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’**

It is impossible to really love God and not to love others, so Jesus also quoted Leviticus 19:18 and put it on the same level as the *Shema*.

The Pharisee who asked the question countered with—“*Who is my neighbor?*”—which Jesus answered by giving the parable of the good Samaritan.

In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus taught that anyone who has a need is our neighbor and we love them by meeting their need.

Again, it is impossible to really love God and not to love others made in His image—at least as much as we love ourselves.

But then in the upper room the night before His crucifixion, Jesus took the second greatest commandment in the Law of God and elevated it above what they had been taught all their lives under the Old Covenant about loving others—“*as they loved themselves*” when He said:

John 13:34 (NKJV)

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

John, who recorded these words of Jesus in his gospel—went on to elaborate on this in his first epistle:

1 John 3:16-18 (NLT)

¹⁶ We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? ¹⁸ Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

1 John 4:7-11 (NLT)

⁷ Beloved, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. ¹⁰ This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other.

This is the love of the new covenant—this is the love of the King manifested in His sons and daughters who are members of His Kingdom.

And this is why James calls it—“**the royal law.**”

The royal law is basically the law of the King and His Kingdom—a law that governs how the King’s kids are to live our lives under the New Covenant.

For example, in the *Decalogue*, also known as the “Ten Commandments”, the eighth commandment that God gave was “*You shalt not steal*”.

So, the law could force me not to steal what belongs to you, but it couldn’t force me to share with you what belongs to me—the ‘royal law’ does both. (Explain)

As Christians, we are not under the law of Moses—we are under an even greater law, the law of love—the law of God’s Kingdom which commands me to love others like Jesus loved me—sacrificially (the Greek word for love here and in verse 34 of John 13 is “agape”).

Look, loving people as God commands with His agape love is impossible for us—it is beyond our ability.

This is not a love I can generate or imitate—it is not in me to love like this because this is a supernatural love that only comes from God!

So why would Jesus command me to do something that is impossible for me to do?

God never tells us to do the impossible without supplying the **power** to do it!

The New Power—

That **power** is ours by virtue of the Holy Spirit living within us when we got saved which, as we abide in Christ, allows the fruit of the Spirit to grow in our lives—and the first one on the list in Galatians 5:22-23 is God’s agape love!

Romans 5:5 (NKJV)

⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It is through our abiding in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit flowing thru us that this kind of love can become a reality in our lives to touch others around us.

But we must *'let it flow'*—God won't force us to draw from His agape love and let it flow to those around us.

This Christmas season purpose to draw near the Prince of Peace and be a 'peacemaker' by letting the love of God flow from you to those around you—first and foremost by forgiving those who have wronged you—for Jesus sake!