

A New Commandment
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We are in a sermon series entitle All Things New. Today I'm preaching on A New Commandment. My text is John 13:34-35 where Jesus says:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another. As I have loved you, so you must also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

I see three things in this passage:

1- Jesus gave us a new commandment

And that commandment is to love one another.

A commandment is a direct order from an authority. Some people think that instead of 10 Commandments, God gave 10 Suggestions! A command is not a suggestion or a good idea. Obeying a command is not dependent upon how you feel about it or even if you agree with it! A command is a directive from God that is given for our good and God's glory!

God gave us commands because God wants to protect and bless us! We obey God because we love Him and we know He loves us and wants only what is best for us. 1 John 5:3 says:

This is what love for God is: to keep His commands. And His commands are not a burden.

His commands are not a burden because they are things that a good God who loves us knows are best for us.

If you are a parent, think about why you want your children to obey you. Do you want your children to obey you out of fear of punishment, out of desire for reward, or out of love? What if they said they loved you, but never obeyed you?

We express our love for God through obedience. Why is obedience so important? Again, think like a parent. Why is obedience important for our children? Are we just tyrants who want to control little people? No, we want what is best for our children. We want them to obey for their own good, for their maturity, for their protection. If they don't instantly obey at home, they won't instantly obey when you yell "stop" as they're about to run into a busy street.

Obedience is what is best for the child. Likewise, God wants what is best for us – His children. He wants us to grow up, be blessed and be protected.

There is blessing and protection that comes through obedience. And obedience is based on a relationship of love. Listen to these quotes from Jesus – who said in John 14:15

If you love Me, keep My commandments.

In John 14:23-24 Jesus said:

If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching... He who does not love Me will not obey My teaching.

1 John 2:3-6 says:

We can be sure that we know Him if we obey His commandments. If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love Him. That is how we know we are living in Him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.

Do you see a pattern here? Love for God results in obedience – from the heart.

Obedience means to carry out the word and will of another person, especially the will of God. It's not enough to hear or know God's Word, we must do it.

It's amazing how people want to pick and choose what they believe in the Bible and pick and choose what they believe about God. People want to believe in God cafeteria style – where they can choose what they want to believe in the Bible and ignore the rest.

They emphasize the love of God and ignore the things God hates!

They emphasize the grace of God and ignore the holiness of God!

They want the forgiveness of God, but not the justice of God.

They believe in Heaven – but choose not to believe in Hell.

They emphasize the mercy of God to such an extreme that they no longer have any fear of God!

As a result, many people have an unbalanced view of God.

Many people believe in a God they make in their own image so they can do whatever they want, and God must do whatever they want. Excuse me?

Have we forgotten who is God and who is not?

Have we forgotten who is the Potter and who is the clay?

Have we forgotten who is the Creator and who is the created?

Do we really believe that God should obey us rather than us obey God?

NO! We love God and that love results in us obeying His commands.

2- Jesus commands us to love like He loved

Why is this a new commandment?

After all, the Old Testament commanded people to love each other. What makes it new and different is that Jesus commanded us to love each other as He loves us.

So, how did Jesus love? It helps to see the biblical definition of love. In English we are limited with only one word for love. So I can say, I love the ocean, to read, movies, chocolate, my wife. The word becomes almost meaningless because my feelings for my wife and my commitment to my wife are obviously different and greater than my feelings for and commitment to candy.

I looked up love in Webster's dictionary and it offered the following definitions:

Love is: A deep and tender feeling of affection
 Attachment or devotion to someone or something
 A strong liking or interest in someone or something

You can see that our word love is basically limited to the feelings and attachments we have. But the New Testament was originally written in the Greek language. The Greeks had four words for love—

Eros - This is the physical love reserved for marriage between a husband and wife.
 Phileo - Affection – fondness - love between friends –
 Philadelphia = “brotherly love”
 This love is reciprocal – I love you because you love me
 Storge - Family love – blood is thicker than water
 Agape – God's kind of love – a deliberate desire for the highest good of another, which reveals itself in sacrificial action towards others regardless of their condition or worth.

The first three Greek words for love are similar to our word for love. They involve affection, personal attachment, and feeling. However, agape is deeper and wider, involving the deliberate choice of the will and sacrificial actions. In other words, true love can only be known by the actions it prompts. I John 3:16-18 says:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Agape love is God's kind of love and is giving, selfless and unconditional. We know God loves because He did something – He gave His Son. It is not I'll love you if, or I'll love you because but, I'll love you period. In other words – God's love is “in spite of” not “because of.” God loves us in spite of who we are, not because of who we are. God loves us in spite of what we do, not because of what we do.

Most of us do not have much experience with unconditional love. Most of what we call love is conditional.

We tend to give love if we receive love and withhold love if our needs are not met. But, agape love is much more radical than that. It is doing what is best for the other person whether they deserve it or not. Love gives and love meets needs! This is the kind of love that Jesus has and that God commands us to have!

And since love is a command, then we can choose to obey or disobey – to love or not love. That means love is a choice. To understand that, we need to understand true love. This kind of love is described 1 Corinthians 13:4-13

Love is patient, love is kind. Love does not envy, does not boast, love is not arrogant. Love does not behave rudely, does not insist on its own way, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things... And now abide faith, hope and love, these three, but the greatest of these is love.

God actually commands us to love this way! This is not a command to have loving feelings toward other people – it is a command to do what Jesus did and meet their needs. Love involves dying to self and giving something up – giving yourself up – for those you love. For example, Ephesians 5:25 says:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her.

I heard about a man who went to his pastor to tell him he wanted to divorce his wife. The pastor asked him why and the man answered, “I don’t love her anymore.” The pastor said, “Don’t you know the Bible commands husbands to love their wives?” The man answered, “I just don’t feel close to her like a wife.”

The pastor responded, “Oh, she’s more like a sister? You know, the Bible commands us to love our families, so if you can’t love her like a wife, love her like a sister.” To which the man responded, “Well, she’s not really close as a sister.”

So the pastor said, “Oh she’s more like a neighbor, not family? You know, the Bible commands us to love our neighbors.” The man said, “Actually, she’s not really like a neighbor. We don’t get along, we fight all the time.” “Oh, so she’s more like an enemy? You know, the Bible commands us to love our enemies.”

Needless to say, this man did not get any easy out from his pastor on his lack of love. That’s because if God commands us to love – then He will provide the ability to love – in fact, He will love through us.

Loving like Jesus loves means dying to self to meet other people’s needs.

3- Love for each other shows we are followers of Christ.

Jesus is giving us the big key in reaching unbelievers for Christ. The key to reaching unbelievers is to love other believers!

I know you're probably thinking, "Wait a minute, the key to reaching unbelievers is to love unbelievers." And there is truth in that. Loving unbelievers is a key to outreach – but it's not the main key. We must love believers and unbelievers, but Galatians 6:10 says:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Notice that the emphasis is on loving other believers first! Remember our text – John 13:35 says:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.

People will know we are followers of Christ when we love one another. It is not our church facilities that will impact the world. They have beautiful buildings. It is not our music that will impact the world. They produce quality music. It is not our slick advertising or marketing techniques. The world is an expert at marketing and pours billions of dollars into it.

God's Word says that the world will know we are Christians:

Not by our Church attendance;

Not by our Bible knowledge;

Not by our giving;

Not by our worship or by our praying.

All those things are important and have their place in the Christian life.

But Jesus says that there is one quality that overrides them all: LOVE!

Love for other believers is the mark of a true Christian. It's not the sign of the fish bumper stickers on our car or the cross hanging around our neck. Those things are okay, but the true mark of a true Christian is love. The key to reaching unbelievers is the way we treat each other!

People will not believe we love Jesus unless we love each other. If we don't love each other, people will not think we are really followers of Christ, who is love personified. Almost 100% of people believe Jesus was good and loving. If they don't see us living and loving like Him, they don't believe we are His followers.

So – you can say you are a believer all day long – but if unbelievers don't see you loving your wife and kids and other believers – they won't believe you! This is why relationships are so important to evangelism. People will not believe we are Christians if we don't love other Christians!

Not only that, but Jesus prayed for all believers in John 17:23

May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that You sent Me and have loved them even as You have loved Me.

Wow! This is one of the most powerfully disturbing thoughts in Scripture:
 The world will know that Jesus is the way when we love one another!
 The world will not believe that Jesus is the way if we don't love each other!
 The world will not believe that Christianity is true if we don't love each other.
 The world will not believe God loves them if they do not see our love for each other.

The point is that the way we treat each other is a deciding factor in people believing in Christ. We can believe right, preach right, sing right, do everything right, but without love and unity, no one will believe us.

Love among Christians is a key to changing our world. We want to touch heaven and change earth – but it starts with us! World change begins by us loving each other. Remember 1 John 3:16 says:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.

Love requires us to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We do this by sacrificially meeting the needs of those around us. This requires us to die to ourselves!

If Christians do not get along and don't love each other - is it any wonder unbelievers want no part of Christianity? One of the main things that repels unbelievers is the way that Christians treat each other! People in the world see how hard it is to make marriages work and friendships last. They know they need help and many times they turn to the church. And when they see that we are no better at relationships than they are – it drives them away. That's why the way we love other believers is the key to reaching unbelievers!

In a world where people unfriend each other very easily - people need to see us love one another enough to work through our differences.

In a world full of racial strife – people need to see different ethnicities in the church loving each other.

In a world full of political hatred – people need to see Christians of all political persuasions loving each other.

Scripture says, "They will know we are Christians by our Love." Listen, I know that relationships are difficult and messy. I know it's nearly impossible to love some people. That's why Romans 5:5 says:

The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

That's why we need to be filled with the Spirit! How can we be Spirit-filled and yet not Love-filled? To me they're the very same thing!

Jesus gave the world His best and they killed Him - yet He loved them anyway. God is calling us to do the same and He gives us the power of the Spirit to enable us to obey the new commandment to love as He loves.

People are sinful. *Love them anyway.*

People will fail you. *Love them anyway.*

People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centered. *Love them anyway.*

People can be everything from inconsiderate to outright mean and cruel.

Love them anyway.

People will hurt you, use you and abuse you. *Love them anyway.*

People will take advantage of you. *Love them anyway.*

People you're counting on will let you down. *Love them anyway.*

People won't always love you unconditionally. *Love them anyway!*

People won't always meet your needs. *Love them anyway!*

Love people regardless of their condition or their worthiness. Love them in good times and bad. Love your family, love your friends and love your enemies!

You see, Jesus did not say, "Love people when they're loveable. Love them when you feel like it. Love them when it's convenient. Love them as long as they are meeting your needs." NO! Jesus allows no excuses. He says, "Whatever they do to you, you love them anyway!" That's the radical way He loved.

Think of the day He was crucified. He was beaten, mocked, a crown of thorns was pressed into His head and He was nailed to a cross. He did nothing to deserve any of this.

Yet He chose to love His accusers anyway.

He chose to love those who crucified Him anyway.

He chose to forgive them anyway.

That's the radical way Jesus loves. He loves anyway.

Aren't you glad He loves you anyway - In spite of yourself?

We have all sinned, but Jesus loves us anyway!

We have all failed, but Jesus loves us anyway!

We have all made mistakes, but Jesus loves us anyway!

We all are less than perfect, but Jesus loves us anyway!

We are all unlovable at times, but Jesus loves us anyway!

This is totally opposite of how the world loves. But this is how we are loved by God and this is how He wants us to love others.

I'm telling you right now, none of us can do this in our own strength.

We all fall short in loving others, but we can no longer excuse it.

We need to cry out to God to change our hearts and ask for God to love the unlovable through us and forgive the unforgivable through us!

We need to pray that God will enable us to obey the new command to love one another!