

Christian Love John 13:34-35

John 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Introduction: The Bible is filled with numerous teachings on love, emphasizing its significance in the life of a Christian. In John 13:34-35, Jesus provides a profound commandment to His disciples, encapsulating the essence of Christian love. This passage highlights the essential nature of Christian love and its significance in our relationships with one another and as a testimony to the world. The commandment to love one another, rooted in the sacrificial love of Jesus Christ, is a central theme throughout Scripture. It calls us to love with selflessness, humility, and forgiveness, setting an example for the world to see.

Christian love, as commanded by Jesus in *John 13:34-35*, is a defining aspect of the Christian faith. It is characterized by selflessness, sacrifice, and genuine care for both God and others. This love has the power to transform lives, foster unity, and bear witness to the world of the reality of Christ. However, it requires constant cultivation and overcoming obstacles such as pride, unforgiveness, and prejudice. As believers, we are called to embody this love, not only in our words but also through our actions. By abiding in Christ's love, practicing forgiveness, embracing humility, and extending love even to our enemies, we can become vessels of God's love and be a source of light and hope in a world desperately in need of genuine love.

In *John 13:34-35*, Jesus provides a powerful insight into the nature of Christian love and its impact on both believers and the world. This study aims to delve into this passage, examining the depth and significance of Christian love, and exploring its implications for our lives today. We will also explore a series of in-depth discussions that help us understand, know and embody the command of Christ in our central text. We begin with seeking to “**Understand the Commandment of Love.**”

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Understanding the Commandment of Love

A new commandment I give unto you (*John 13:34a*)... This command he gave them as he was about to leave them, to be a badge of discipleship, by which they might be known as his friends and followers, and by which they might be distinguished from all others. It is called new, not because there was no command before which required men to love their fellow-men, for one great precept of the law was that they should love their neighbour as themselves (*Lev. 19:18*); but it was new because it had never before been made that by which any class or body of men

had been known and distinguished. The Jew was known by his external rites, by his peculiarity of dress; the philosopher by some other mark of distinction; the military man by another. In none of these cases had love for each other been the distinguishing and peculiar badge by which they were known. But in the case of Christians they were not to be known by distinctions of wealth, or learning, or fame; they were not to aspire to earthly honours; they were not to adopt any peculiar style of dress or badge, but they were to be distinguished by tender and constant attachment to each other. This was to surmount all distinction of country, of colour, of rank, of office, of sect. Here they were to feel that they were on a level, that they had common wants, were redeemed by the same sacred blood, and were going to the same heaven. They were to befriend each other in trials; be careful of each other's feelings and reputation; deny themselves to promote each other's welfare. (See *1John 3:23; 1Thes. 4:9; 1Pet. 1:22; 2Thes. 1:3; Gal. 6:2; 2Pet. 1:7*). In all these places the command of Jesus is repeated or referred to, and it shows that the first disciples considered this indeed as the peculiar law of Christ. This command or law was, moreover, new in regard to the extent to which this love was to be carried; for he immediately adds, "As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." His love for them was strong, continued, unremitting, and he was now about to show his love for them in death. *John 15:13, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."* So, in *1John 3:16* it is said that "we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." This was a new expression of love; and it showed the strength of attachment which we ought to have for Christians, and how ready we should be to endure hardships, to encounter dangers, and to practice self-denial, to benefit those for whom the Son of God laid down his life.¹

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Understanding the Commandment of Love (John 13:34)

A. Love as a distinguishing characteristic (John 13:35a)

A distinguishing characteristic is that which gives a very specific meaning and adherence to an ideal's understanding. "Love", as a distinguishing characteristic in this instance sets alone what is to be understood as the one defining aspect of Christ's commandment. It is not donations, it is not missionary works, it is not intercessory prayer, it is not feeding the hungry, and it is not even preaching the gospel. Although all these things are good and important in their respective places of things to be done in ministry, relative to the chief commandment of Christ, they are all second in rank to the commandment of LOVE.

The late Archbishop of Canterbury, John Tillotson, put into context Jesus' commandment of love in this manner...

"This commandment of loving one another is by our Lord and Saviour so much enlarged, as to its object, beyond what either the Jews or heathens understood it to be, extending to all mankind, and even to our greatest enemies; so greatly advanced and heightened as to its degree, even to the laying down of our lives for one another; so effectually taught, so mightily encouraged, so very much urged and insisted upon, that it may very well be

¹ Albert Barnes NT Commentary on John 13:34

called "a new commandment:" for, though it was not wholly unknown to mankind before, yet it was never so taught, so encouraged; never was such an illustrious example of it given, never so much weight and stress laid upon it by any rules of philosophy or religion previously existing."

Finally, but not conclusively, the commandment of love must be understood by knowing what it is as defined by its progenitor, God.

- *1John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*
- *John 3:16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.*

Speaking from His eternal context, God would show us definitively what love is by the explicit expressions in these preceding verses: He first loved us and he gave his son to express the same. Simply stated, he fulfilled His own commandment.

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B. Love as a new commandment (John 13:34a)

There is nothing old about LOVE. But when put into the context of the command of Christ, it is to be understood in a new context and fulfillment of what was once the moral standard. So what does it mean for Christ to state love as a new commandment?

[John 13:34a: A new commandment I give unto you...] In what sense are we to understand that this was a new commandment? Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, was a positive precept of the law, Lev. 19:18, and it is the very same that Christ repeats here; how then was it new? Our Lord answers this question, "*Even AS I have loved you.*" Now Christ more than fulfilled the Mosaic precept; he not only loved his neighbour AS himself, but he loved him MORE than himself, for he laid down his life for men. In this he calls upon the disciples to imitate him; to be ready on all occasions to lay down their lives for each other. This was, strictly, a new commandment: no system of morality ever prescribed any thing so pure and disinterested as this. Our blessed Lord has outdone all the moral systems in the universe in two words: 1. Love your enemies; 2. Lay down your lives for each other.²

If the commandment of Christ was a direct reference from Leviticus, then what makes it new. The newness of the commandment is eloquently spoken of by Lord Bishop of St. Asaph., Samuel Horsley...

The commandment was new, because it was generally neglected in the practice of mankind, and because it was for the most part omitted in the lessons of moral teachers of that age; but the novelty of it consisted more particularly in this, that the disciples were required to love one another, after the manner, and, if the frailty of human nature might

² Adam Clarke's Commentary, John 13:34.

so aspire, in the degree in which Christ loved them. "*As I have loved you, that ye also love one another.*" Christians are to adjust their love to one another, to the measure and the example of Christ's love to them. Christ's love was perfect as the principle from which it flowed, the original benevolence of the Divine character. The example of this perfect love in the life of man was a new example; and the injunction of conformity to this new example might well be called a new commandment.

The commandment of loving one another is strictly no new commandment, we find it in the law of Moses, *Lev. 19:18*; often pressed in the New Testament, *John 15:17*; *Eph. 5:2*; *1John 4:21*. *1John 2:7* saith, it is no new commandment,; see also *2John 1:6*. It is therefore called a new commandment, either because of the excellency of it, as new seemeth to be taken, *Ps. 33:3*; *Isa. 65:17* *Matt. 26:29*; or because it is expounded in the gospel in a new manner, pressed more plainly and in new arguments, and urged by a new example of their Lord and Master.³

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C. Love rooted in Jesus' example (John 13:35)

So, you say that you don't know how to fully execute the commandment of the Lord as expressed in John 13:34. Well, Jesus did not leave it to us to figure this out on our own. Some things, as elementary as they may be from the expressed set of instructions, ought imply what needs to be done. Better still, in some instances, no explanation should be needed. Explanation! No, we need an example. Who better to provide the example of what need to be done to best express this new commandment of love, other than Jesus himself.

"*By this...*" "This" is truly it. It is the measure by which people will know that you are a disciple of Christ. "This" is "if ye have love one to another." This, is what Jesus exemplified best. No only or just in his death, but by showing it as well in life. "This" would also become the moniker by which the disciples, and we for that matter, would be known. Let's look closer.

John 13:35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

To recommend the foregoing duty, of loving one another, with the greater advantage, our Saviour tells us here, that it will be the best evidence of our relation to him as sincere disciples: By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples. The disciples of John were known by the austerity of their lives, the disciples of the Pharisees by their habit and separation from other men. Christ will have his disciples known by their profound affection to each other, which in the primitive times was so conspicuous, that the very heathens did cry out and say, See how the Christians love one another! Here observe...

1. Our Saviour doth not say, By this men shall conjecture and guess that you belong to me, as being my disciples, but they shall certainly know it.

³ Matthew Poole's Commentary, John 13:34.

2. He doth not say: By this shall ye know yourselves to be my disciples, and one another to be so; but by this shall all others know it as well as yourselves.

3. He doth not say, By this shall all men know that you look like my disciples, but that you are indeed what you pretend to be, namely by your assembling often together in my house of prayer, by your frequent fastings, by your reading the scriptures daily, by your hearing all these put together, will be not sufficient evidence of your discipleship, if you keep up a secret grudge in your hearts one against another; but by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.

Learn hence, that one of the best proofs and evidences we can have of our relation to Christ, as his sincere disciples, is an hearty love and good will one towards another.

“By this shall all men(v.35a).” That is, your love for each other shall be so decisive evidence that you are like the Saviour, that all men shall see and know it. It shall be the thing by which you shall be known among all men. You shall not be known by peculiar rites or habits; not by a peculiar form of dress or manner of speech; not by peculiar austerities and unusual customs, like the Pharisees, the Essenes, or the scribes, but by deep, genuine, and tender affection. And it is well known it was this which eminently distinguished the first Christians, and was the subject of remark by the surrounding pagans. "See," said the heathen, "see how they love one another! They are ready to lay down their lives for each other."

In our next lesson, we will explore “The Nature of Christian Love”

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References:

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4. Stott, John. The Letters of John. IVP Academic, 2009.
5. Yancey, Philip. What's So Amazing About Grace? Zondervan, 1997.