

# The Essential of Love

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's turn now this evening to John chapter 13, the final part of the passage we read there from verse 34. John 13 at verse 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. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have loved one for another.

We are all very much aware of how powerful a tool, example can be. Not just for good, but also for bad. People's lives, as they are an example of one thing or other to others who look at them, are an example to them either of the things which are right and good, or the things which are wrong and bad.

And that example is set before us here in the person of Jesus, because more than any other example, that example of Christ is a powerful tool in the lives of those who seek to follow it. It's powerful because it's perfect. It's powerful in the way that it's challenging. It's powerful because it's perfect. Because you don't have to look for faults in it, or look at it in some way inconsistent.

[ 1 : 31 ] It is an example in the way he lived. And here, as he especially focuses on love, it's an example to us as we seek to love one another.

And you can see from this and from everything else in the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels, that what he required of others, he did perfectly himself.

None of us can say that. We're very conscious as preachers of the Gospel, that yes, it's the Word of God that we're setting before you. It's not our own will.

It's not our own mind. It's not our own understanding of how things should be. It's the teaching of the Word of God. But we're very conscious of the fact that when the Word of God tells us things that we have to do and be in our lives, as we convey that to others like yourselves, we are very conscious that we are not ourselves perfect in the things that we are setting before others.

That's something that we have to live with. But it's something that affects us all as we come to the example of Jesus, because none of us can match up to that example.

[ 2 : 45 ] This is the sixth in our series of essentials that we're looking at from Scripture. The things the Bible itself tells us are essential for us to live as Christians, particularly.

We've seen the other five before this, things like justification, holiness, and so on. Tonight we're looking at love, but particularly the essential of loving one another.

Here is Jesus, after Judas Iscariot had gone out, coming to actually summarize what he had just done, as he had washed the feet of the disciples, and said that this was an example he was giving them.

That's why we're seeing it such a powerful example. When you turn back, as we read in the early part of the chapter, that I, your Lord and Master, that's what you call me, and you're right in saying so.

But if I have done that, that was Peter's problem. He just couldn't fit the way that Jesus, as his Lord, needed to stoop so low as to wash his feet. That's why he resisted it.

[ 3 : 50 ] It wasn't that he didn't want Jesus to do things for him, but he just didn't think this was right. He thought things were the other way around. He thought that Jesus should not be actually stooping so low and doing such a servile thing as to wash feet.

Well, of course, that's exactly what Jesus had come to do in his ministry, and his relationship with the Father was one of serving him. Well, that's what he said.

I have given you an example that you also should do, just as I have done to you. And you pick up these words as you come to this new commandment, as he calls it, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.

In other words, it's not just any kind of love. It's not just an example from a prominent Christian. It's not an apostle. It's not an angel even. It's the Lord Jesus Christ, in the perfection of his service, in the way in which he showed such a perfect example of love.

Well, he's saying, just as I have done, so you are to do to one another. And we can't avoid the challenge of that, because it simply hits us really straight.

[ 5 : 08 ] It confronts us. We have to reckon with it. There's no way around it. But we're thankful it's there, because the Lord is telling us that, as his people, this is what he requires to follow his example.

Of course, he's more than an example to us, but he is that here. So this is the sixth essential we're looking at, that we are to love one another. But then he adds something very significant.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. When you go about doing this, he says, something comes to the fore.

Something comes out of that. Something of that is, as it's noticed, something actually comes to the mind of those who see you, and that is that you are my people.

So we'll look at two things. First of all, we'll ask the question, why is loving one another unessential? Why is it unessential? Secondly, what does loving one another involve?

[ 6 : 08 ] And we're not going into any specific detail. We're going to try and just look at the big principles of it, and then you can work out the details from that yourselves. If you know the principle of something, then when you begin to ask about the detail, the thing you do is you bring the principle with you, and all the details that are involved in, whether it's loving one another, or forgiving one another, whatever it is, you take the principle as your basis, and then you ask, well, how does my actual detail of working this out, how does it fit with the principle of what God has told me?

That's what we want to do. Why is loving one another unessential? For two reasons. First of all is that it's required by Christ. This is actually a commandment, and it's not just put in the form of a commandment, the Lord specifies it as a commandment.

A new commandment, I am giving you, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Whenever you come across a commandment of God, it of course requires our obedience completely.

And the commandments of Jesus are no less demanding. Every time you read of something the Lord requires of us, then it comes to us by way of an instruction commanding us, requiring our compliance, requiring our obedience.

This is one of them. This commandment I give you, that you love one another. Now why is he calling it a new commandment? Because when you go back to the Old Testament, and you find Jesus himself saying this, in his ministry as well, when he was asked about the law, the Ten Commandments, the summary of the moral law, in the Ten Commandments, he said, this is summed up in one thing.

[ 8 : 07 ] You shall love your neighbor as yourself. You shall love the Lord your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.

That was always the case. There's nothing new in itself, in essence, in the requirement to love one another. Because that's something that was very much the case all the way through the years of the Old Testament, ever since God revealed himself, and especially since he gave his law.

The summary of the law is, you shall love the Lord, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Why then is he calling it a new commandment? What's new about it?

Well, a number of things. It's never been seen performed before, in the way that it's been performed by Jesus the servant. Never has love for God been seen in a human life, in the way it was seen in the life of Christ.

It's new because the way he went about it meant that he did it perfectly. It's new in the way that he came to show what love was about, and we'll see that when we come to the substance of what loving one another involves.

[ 9 : 26 ] But it goes back to that, if we can just anticipate the point. It is a love in which there is self-giving, and in which there is service. It's a requirement of Jesus, and he calls it a new commandment, because they had just seen, it demonstrated, what love was really about, in the Son of God coming to wash their feet.

It's new because that had never happened before Jesus came to do it. It never happened in that way in which God was seen to do it in the person of his Son.

But it's new to, when you compare it with the Old Testament, because instead of saying you shall love your neighbor as yourself, the Lord here, because he's talking to the disciples, he's talking to those who are his followers, and instead of saying love your neighbor as yourself, he's turning that slightly, and he's saying that you must love one another.

It doesn't mean that loving your neighbor has disappeared, because Jesus elsewhere said you have to go so far in your love even as to love your enemies. But here he's confining it to those who are his followers.

And you can say largely that that's ourselves, all of us here, in that sense, are followers of Christ, even if we're not professed yet to be saved, even if not among those who are openly confessing that we are saved, that he is our Lord, yet in the sense in which we are gathered here and worshipping him and listening to his voice, just as these disciples were, they are followers in that sense too.

[11:05] We are followers in that sense too. And he's saying this is new because it's yourselves, it's one another that I require you to love. And the other way that it's new, you could say is instead of your neighbor, he's saying one another, but instead of as yourself, love your neighbor as yourself, he's switched that here as well and he's saying, you shall love one another as I have loved you.

as you have seen me do, as you have just witnessed, that's what I'm setting before you, he's saying, as the pattern and the great principle and the example of what I command you to do to one another and for one another.

You are to love one another as I have loved you. In other words, really, what he's setting before these disciples is, if you can use it as an illustration, you know that when you come across classic books, whether it's in theology or in novels or whatever, things that I regard as literally classics or theological classics, they're very often republished and sometimes they're re-edited and sometimes they're even enlarged.

Well, you could say this is the classic of God's requirement of loving one another by his people and loving others and it's been republished in the person of Jesus Christ and it's been enlarged in the way that they have seen him doing it.

It's a new enlarged edition. It's now been seen as never before in Jesus himself. A new commandment I give you and that's the pattern.

[12:59] This is our pattern. As I have loved you. You know, if the Lord hadn't included that, we might just say, well, I have loved my fellow disciples, my fellow people.

I've tried to love even those that don't love me back. I've tried to love even my enemies. But I really think I've gone as far as I possibly can. So I'm quite satisfied with what I've done, with what I've achieved and I just have to leave it at that.

I just can't do any more. But you see, because the Lord has said, as I have loved you, you can't say that. You have to say to yourself all the time, I need to improve on this.

I need to get nearer to what I see in my Lord. I need to extend what I've already done. I need to build on what I've already done. because my pattern is as He has loved us as people, that's the pattern that means I must keep improving in the exercise of my love, in the showing of my love.

I must actually love my fellow disciples more tomorrow than I love them today. You can never say, you've reached the pinnacle, you've reached the very limit, because the limit is just as I have loved you.

[14:18] And if you can measure that, you're a better person than I am. And I've seen that anyway. But what I mean is, you cannot actually come to see the limit, the final boundary of the love of Christ.

The love of Christ is described elsewhere in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, that you might know the breadth and the length and the depth and the height, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge.

How can you get anything that passes knowledge? By that he means passes your ability to comprehend it all. He doesn't mean to know anything about it, that you can't know anything about it. What he does mean is supposing you know a whole lot about it, there's a lot yet that you can't just get into your puny little mind, because it's the love of Christ, it's the love of God.

And that's why it's such an amazing and precious example, because it keeps us at this matter of loving one another, and of improving, as we know our deficiencies, as they are brought home to us. [15:29] It's required, it's necessary, it's an essential, because it's required by Christ. Secondly, it's an essential, because it's a reliable indicator.

And you see here in verse 35, what we mean by that, by this shall all people know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. Far too often, it's the other way about, isn't it? Instead of seeing us love one another, the world actually sees us, fighting one another, complaining against one another, finding fault with one another, putting one another down, showing up the limitations or faults of other Christians, pointing them out, writing to the media about them.

All sorts of ways in which, instead of love, we have that critical, negative, bitter, that anything the world wants to see, to give it an excuse to lie in its sins, instead of being a prick to its conscience, a barb to its conscience, as you find when we love one another.

Well, this is what he's saying, by this shall all people know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. What is the distinguishing mark of a Christian?

[17:02] What is the distinguishing mark of a disciple of Christ? Is it ability to speak? Is it really having ability as we call it in prayer? Is it somebody who's known eminently for qualities like that?

Is it because they set up or are involved in programs that the church follows? Is it the ability in preaching that makes people have distinguishing marks as Christians?

No, none of these. The distinguishing mark of a Christian is love. And so much is it the distinguishing mark of a Christian that Paul, if you read 1 Corinthians 13, which we don't read often enough, a chapter that's all to do with love and what love is.

Paul goes so far there as to say some pretty remarkable things, things which are actually very difficult in a sense to give an exposition of. But you remember among the many things that he says there that if I speak in the tongues of men and of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge and if I have all faith so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I have and if I deliver up my body to be burned but have not love, I gain nothing.

[18:28] By any stretch of the imagination these are remarkable words and yet Paul is quite clear in the fact if love is missing from our lives it really doesn't matter what else is there.

You are missing the distinguishing mark of what marks us as the people of God. And here Jesus is using that for these disciples what they must be to one another, leaving aside what they must be in loving others outside of themselves and even loving their enemies as he puts it elsewhere.

He is confining it entirely to this but the same principle follows love and love for one another is the distinguishing mark of it. And Matthew Henry an old Puritan commentator who still has so much of course that is useful for us to consult in looking at the meaning of the Bible well he says this on this verse that we are to have love for one another in the root of our lives so that we will have it ready when it is needed.

What did he mean by that? He meant that we are not just to exercise love when the need for it arises that is to say when some situation arises where you have got to specifically love somebody even though it might at times be difficult what he is saying really means what he meant was something like this you have to think about this all the time you have to really carry it about in your consciousness as something that is required of you something that is going to distinguish you as a Christian have it in the root of your life always have it as a basic in your Christian life so that it will be ready for the use and that is why Jesus says by this all people will know that you are my disciple if love is the distinguishing mark of the people of God of the followers of Christ love for one another particularly then you see the world meets Christ when we love one another let's say that again the world meets

Christ when we love one another when we are seen to be loving one another when we are committed to loving one another he says by this shall all people know that you are my disciples how does the world out there know tonight that we are disciples of Jesus when they see our lives when they see what we are about in the world it is not when we are going about our business and speaking to people it is not in the abilities or gifts that God has given us in other ways we are known as the disciples of Christ we are distinguished as the disciples of Christ when we love one another that is precisely how we put it by this all will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another in 1st John and of course John had such a lot to say about love and about loving one

another in his 1st epistle and in chapter 4 he also said something quite remarkable remember in his gospel at the beginning near the gospel near the gospels beginning in chapter 1 verse 17 or thereabouts in chapter 1 no man has seen

[ 21 : 54 ] God at any time the only begotten that is Jesus Christ his son who is in the bosom of the father he has revealed him he has brought him into the open to be seen if you like to put it that way and John uses the same kind of language with regard to our love for one another in 1st John and chapter 4 verses 11 to 12 beloved if God so loved us we also ought to love one another no one has ever seen God if we love one another God abides in us and his love is perfected in us now why did he say no one has seen God at any time why did he say that in that context it's not maybe immediately clear but when you compare it to the use of these words in the gospel you realize it's to do with revealing God or God revealing himself or revealing something about God in other words he's really saying there if we love one another then God is seen in that people are conscious of God and I don't mean he's seen literally of course physically but he's seen in his qualities he's seen in something of his attributes the conscience of the world is hit it springs into action when the world sees

God's people loving one another do you want to influence that world do you want to influence that world for good do you want to really get through to that world of the by the with the truth of God well the best way and the most effective way is to let them see you love one another demonstrate that love to them show them meaningfully the love of God the love of Christ the mercy of God the grace of Christ the beauty of God the wonder of his grace show it to them in the very thing that Jesus here says by which we will be known to be his disciples that you love one another every time we fall from that every time we fail in that every time we move from that we fail to actually give notice to the world not just of what we are but of who God is and that's the burden of our hearts tonight not so much that the world would know who we are but that through knowing who we are the world would come to know who God is and what he's like and what he can do for them that he's already done for us it's an essential because it's required by Christ and because it's a reliable indicator and I would just mention that in respect to what he says here by this all people will know that you are my disciple if you have loved one for another you could have mentioned as well that it's an indicator to Christians themselves as to where they stand in relation to God again it's 1st John this time chapter 3 verse 14 just going to mention it take it with you look at it yourselves later in relation to this as well it's an indicator as you look inwards as well as indicators to people outside of the church and that verse says we know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren because we love our fellow believers our fellow Christians it's an indicator to ourselves that our life with God is as it should be at least to that extent so here it is it is an essential required and a reliable indicator secondly what then is involved what is loving one another involved well two things by way of principle very briefly first of all it involves self giving we think of love as something that gives things away to others when you love people genuinely you give something to them you show your love whether it's jewelry or whether it's giving to the poor but it's something that you actually show your love by but then you see you come and think that Jesus is our example and Jesus didn't just give things to people and things to his disciples he gave himself he gave himself and even if you go to God the Father

God the Father gave his only begotten Son he so loved the world that he gave and when the Son came into the world he himself fitted that exact same principle of love that it is essentially above everything else it's the giving of yourself it's the giving of yourself it's giving completely as he did of himself you read in the Gospels of how he did not you see here he's really saying in the beginning of the chapter here that it was when he knew that his hour had come he knew that he had come from the Father that he was going to the Father he knew what was involved in his mission he knew the stage that his mission was at he knew that the cross was just ahead of him he knew that he was going to go out from this meeting with the disciples to his death but you read there having loved his own who were in the world he loved them to the uttermost he gave himself he didn't hold back anything of himself in his love for his people that's our example just as

I have loved you you are to love one another now Jesus went out knowing this and knowing the kind of people he was dealing with yet he still loved them to the extent of washing their feet and he says I've given you an example that you should also do now it's sometimes difficult to love certain people some people we find easier to love than others some people find us difficult to love compared to what other people find I find people more difficult to love than other people it's like that

it's human life it's our experience that's how it is but Christ will not allow us to make distinctions as to who we are to love or who we are not because he does not allow us to think of those we are not to love there is nothing there at all short of loving one another loving every single one of those who belong to the disciples if we can pick up the terminology of what Jesus did some people's feet are dirtier than others they are not as easy to wash as others but Jesus did it literally and what he requires of us is to do it spiritually to do it morally to do it in a practical demonstration of love of help of assistance of direction of being there of giving ourselves and he will not allow us to actually think of others that were not to love and some that are by this shall all men know you are my disciple if you have love for one another and where you and I find it difficult to love certain people whoever they are they will not be the same kind of people for all of us we are all different but we have to be honest we are honest about it we have to pray that God will give us his grace and that in giving us of his grace he will give us the necessary sincerity and patience and humility and willingness to follow the example of Christ even if they are the most difficult people you have to love them I have to love them that is what Jesus did this was not an easy bunch of people to love but he loved them and he loved them perfectly and that perfect love is our example so again that is another reason why it is something we have to keep on improving and working at it is about self giving in other words you could say that looking at it in those narrower attempts or in terms of that principle of giving yourself in love and of course that is true in the sense in which you come into a relationship with someone that you love and especially end up being joined together in marriage with them it doesn't have to involve that for you to love someone of course but if it does come to that whatever it is something you give of yourself you actually give yourself to the person you say to that person I'm yours

[ 31 : 31 ] I'm here for you I belong to you I'm in the possession of your love and I'm willingly in that place so in other words you can say the opposite of loving one another is selfishness if love is self-giving then the opposite of that is selfish you cannot love and be selfish at the same time they go against each other secondly it involves interaction that you love one another well obviously that's something that requires a company of people one another being together doing things together sharing experience it's one of the things that we are keen to cultivate more and more as a people as a congregation and that's why we keep saying to people when you meet them out there that don't go to church we don't just say to them why don't you go to church would you not like to come to church because that immediately sets off in people's minds a resistance to the idea of sitting under a sermon which is what they think about of course that's largely what they get as well but there's more than that too instead of saying will you not come to church with me would you not like to come to church we say to them would you not like to become part of this company of people would you not like to join us to do things with us as a people as a congregation would you not like to participate in the work of the congregation presented to them as a people and that it's good to belong to these people and that you're glad to belong to these people who worship god as knock free church and he's saying loving one another means interaction being together doing things together sharing experiences telling one another of what we've learned and what we come to know in Ephesians chapter 4 we have a great passage there dealing with unity and it's most interesting that Paul there in dealing with unity deals with how the ministry of the gospel through apostles prophets evangelists pastors and teachers that it's to equip the saints for the work of ministry that's your ministry your ministry as the people of god the ministry of the gospel feeds you for your ministry for your ministry to other people and to one another to equip the saints for the work of ministry for building up the body of christ till we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of god to mature man he's got a picture of the church there as a body spiritual body so he says that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro rather speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it's equipped this is a complex passage in many ways because you've got to look at it's just loaded with so much teaching but he comes to conclude this way when each part is working properly it makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love there's the great thing how do we build one another up we build one another up in love it's all about love love is the cement that joins the stones and the building together that's

why the apostle says elsewhere in Colossians above all of these things put on love which is the bond of perfectness which is the cement that holds the body together it builds itself up as they speak the truth to one another in love sometimes that will mean hurting people I remember being

told by somebody my previous congregation who had come to know the Lord that for a good number of weeks she hated me she hated coming to church to hear me because everything the Lord was saying to her through the preaching of the gospel hurt her conscience until the Lord showed her that it was about her need for her own life to change and of course things changed as well but that's how it is we grow in love we speak the truth to one another in love and the body edifies itself in love which is again fitting in with what we're saying here by this shall all people know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another and you remember

Hebrews and chapter 13 of Hebrews I think it's in chapter 13 just comes to mind just now where the apostle there counsels us we are not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together maybe it's chapter 10 anyway it says this let us not it is chapter 10 I think let us not forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the custom of some people is but let us stimulate one another to love and to good works great chapter great text great verse great topic we don't just gather together to just be here to worship God without any interaction and that's why we have other things like fellowship meetings and meetings where we can do things other than just formally worship God what is it about it's about stimulating one another stimulating one another for what to grow in love and in good works to love one another to let the world see what

Jesus means to us how precious God is to us how much we enjoy his love as we set about loving one another and as we've seen that the discipleship explored course Philippians 1 chapter 9 takes us right into the praying mind and heart of the apostle this I pray he says to these Philippians that your love may go more and more he goes on to speak about some of the detail following on from that but that's the main thing this he says I'm praying that your love will increase more and more we cannot pray for anything better than that our love increases love for one another is included in that in other words when you think of loving self giving and the opposite of that is selfishness love as interaction or involving interaction you can say the opposite of loving one another is isolationism or even individualism where everybody just focuses on themselves instead of on the body by this shall all men know how are we in this coming week how are we going to be spoken about by those who see us well

I hope from my life and from your life and especially from what we are together that they will come more and more to be convinced that we are Christ disciples because we do love one another let's pray Lord our God we give thanks for your love which is prior to any love that we have for you or for one another we acknowledge Lord that our love in its exercise is a response to yours and that this great love of God is that which stimulates our love in return we thank you for your love we thank you for its perfection we thank you for the example that you have set us in it we thank you for the great challenge to us in it we thank you Lord for your patience with us as we strive towards that great mark that we find in the love of Christ and we thank you for forgiveness when you overlook in your forgiveness and pardon the sin of our shortcoming in this as in all other things go before us now we pray and accept our worship for

[ 40 : 31 ] Jesus sake Amen now even ■■ a son son