

Christ's New Commandment

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[0:00] John 13 and I'm going to look at two verses verses 34 and 35. 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 love for one another. Now we're all very much aware of how powerful an influence example can be, whether it's an example that leads people in the right direction or otherwise, an example a life that leads people to consider things which are good or else an example that leads people astray into a different type of lifestyle. But example itself can be a very powerful tool, a very powerful influence and I'm sure we've all found that. Many of us I'm sure tonight can actually look to our own background and upbringing and find examples there that helped us towards where we are now in relation to our faith and our coming to know the Lord.

But the example of Jesus of course is by far the most powerful of all because there is a perfect example. Everything that he did as an example to his disciples and to us as we read his word comes across to us as a perfect human life and there is no other example like that. It is an infallible example. It's an example in which he himself is set before us indeed as he says to the disciples here in this chapter that he is setting an example to them by what he has done in their presence here in this incident where he washed their feet. And yet of course we remember that we're actually not saved by Jesus as our example or by following his example only. It's there for us and it's precious to us but following Jesus as an example is not itself going to save us. We need Jesus as our atoning sacrifice between ourselves and God before we come to follow him as our example. And the basis of our standing before God is not by our following Jesus' example but by our coming to embrace him as our substitute redeemer who came into the world to save us from our sins. And having been saved, having come to embrace him, having come to know him, we then have his example as something that we set before us to follow. And in this instance we have an example of loving one another. As Jesus loved them so he is saying this now I am saying to you, I'm commanding you, that you love one another just as I have loved you. So that's the first thing we're looking at is that loving one another is as far as Jesus is concerned and our relationship with Jesus. It's a new commandment from him for us to love one another.

Second thing we read is that loving one another is to be as Jesus loved us. We love one another because he's commanded it and he calls it here a new commandment and we love one another because through that we come to reflect on and reflect out Jesus' love for his people. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love one for another. So love for one another, a new commandment, and then secondly love for one another as Jesus loved us. So obviously the first of those love for one another as commanded by Jesus is a requirement on our part. He requires that of us.

A requirement on his part that we actually love one another. Now he's saying here it's a new commandment. Why is he calling it a new commandment? Because when you go back to the Old Testament it's obvious that God taught his people Israel to love him and to love one another as well. You find that in some of the great texts of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy chapter 6. Behold the Lord your God is one.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your strength. Go to Leviticus 19 verse 18. It speaks about loving your neighbor as yourself. So the two things are combined in the New Testament. You actually find them coming. You love the Lord your God with all your heart and your neighbor as yourself as Jesus taught on another occasion. But why is it called a new commandment? If it's been in existence for all these centuries, if the people of Israel knew it, if it was there in the time of Christ himself on earth, why is he calling it a new commandment?

[4 : 52] Well one reason I think is that it has never been seen in this way before. God commanded his people in the Old Testament to love him and to love one another, to love their neighbor as themselves.

But it had never been seen visibly like this in the person of a human being. And I know Jesus is more than a human being, but this is God in the flesh, God in our nature. The word become flesh. And through that, God is actually giving this great example, Jesus himself giving this example of what it is and how it is there to love one another. They have never seen God's love this way before. They've heard about it. They've known about it. They have never seen it in action in the way that it's now revealed in Christ. So from that point of view, it is a new commandment. Not because it's entirely new.

Not because they didn't know anything about the substance of it, but because they had never seen it as God himself present amongst them. Through Jesus here, went on bended knee to wash their feet.

That was something not only unexpected, but unparalleled, something that had never been seen by them before. And it's new in that respect, at least. And therefore, you find it's also new in the sense in which there's a movement from the Old Testament emphasis there. You love the Lord, your God, and your neighbor as yourself. So Jesus is really saying now, you love the Lord, your God, but you love one another. And he's emphasizing the love for one another to add to what he said about loving our neighbor in previous contexts. And you see, it's not just to love your neighbor as yourself. You love one another as I have loved you. So he's extending the dimensions, really, if you like. If you think about what he said in the Old Testament about loving God and loving one another and loving your neighbor, if you think about that as the first edition of the Book of Love, if you like. Well, here is the new expanded enlarged edition. And he's added these details so that it takes on an extra dimension, if you like, as Jesus taught it, as Jesus showed it, as Jesus is the example of it. So this is the new edition, this new commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. Just as I have loved you. Of course, that is such an enormous statement in itself.

This little word, as or just as, these two words, not very big words, but they're really significant and filled with meaning. It's not just any kind of love. It's not just any type of following the example that Jesus has set for us. It's not just trying to follow his example in love up to a certain degree, and then when it satisfies ourselves, we leave it at that. No, he's saying, it's as I have loved you, as you have seen my love in action, as you have seen what it meant for me to love you, this is how you are to love one another. It's required by Jesus, patterned upon his own wonderful love, as he has shown that to the disciples, and we'll come back to that in a minute, when we see the nature of that love, as he washed the feet of the disciples. But it's love for another, a new commandment. In other words, it's required by Jesus. And you know, it really should be enough for us, shouldn't it, that we know that our love for one another is commanded by Christ, and we should say, well, if it's commanded by him, that's enough. That really should be enough for me to persuade me that I need to love my fellow Christians, that we together need to love one another. It's his command, as much as any command. Whatever he has commanded has the same status as any other command.

[9:01] It's something of an imperative from him, from his authority, and that's what lies behind our need to love one another, one of the features of the need to love one another. But then secondly, this love of one another as a new commandment, it isn't just required by Jesus. You can see here, it's a reliable indicator of something. It's a reliable indicator because he says here, by this shall all people know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. It's a distinguishing mark of God's people, that they love one another. It's one of the main distinguishing marks of God's people, that they love one another. Now, sadly, as you and I know very well, it doesn't always come to that, and we don't always match up with that. And I'm sure every one of us has to say of ourselves, there are times when I have failed to meet that standard. And when we together as a church have failed to meet that standard, and it's no excuse for us that there's no perfect church on earth in this world.

The fact remains, this is still the standard. Whatever our past has been, whatever our present is, whatever our circumstances are, this commandment from Jesus, this new commandment, it's to be a reliable indicator for that world out there as to what a Christian life and what the Christian church is about.

There's a sense in which the world out there meets with God when they see us loving one another.

And as we've said already, there is a powerful example in the example of Jesus to us, but you and I have to follow that in the life we live in relation to each other, as well as individually, but in relation to each other. This is what Jesus is, by this, all people will know that you are my disciples. If you have love for one another, he's focusing on their love for one another as a reliable indicator for the world of what discipleship for Christ really is about, what the church of God is about, what the people of God, who they are, what they're like, what their life is all about.

And that's why I'm saying there's a very real sense in which the world out there, they don't meet with God through the Bible. Most of them never read the Bible. Some of them, many of them don't even know what the Bible contains. They would know very little about Jesus himself, about the way of salvation.

[11:44] And we meet them, as we heard in prayer, in the supermarket or wherever around us, in our neighborhoods and our interaction with them at work or whatever, day by day. But this is particularly what Jesus is emphasizing. Because they don't read their Bibles and because they don't know God from that, and because they don't know what the church is like by reading about it in Scripture, they have to see it in us.

They have to actually come to know what true love really is about and what it looks like. Let's face it, we're living in a world where the word love is perverted, where the word love has been taken and out of context altogether, even in the ordinary sense of human or married love, taken and actually made into something that is contrary to what we know genuine true love is.

And certainly biblical love and the love of God. Because we live in a situation, and we say this very often, but it's there for us always to remember and always to note, where sadly so much of what passes for the church and the world is really just the importing of the culture of the world into its practices. Now, that's not holding ourselves up and saying, aren't we much better than other people than other Christians who confess to be Christians, but are obviously very worldly and have imported things of the world? We're not doing it for that sake. We're doing it because it saddens us, because it really grips our heart that people pass off being Christians as just the world dressed up in the dressings of the world.

By this, all people will know that you are my disciples. Not when you decide to become as like the world as possible. Not when you import the values of the world into your thinking and into your practice. Not when you really give the impression that actually there's not that much difference at all between a Christian lifestyle and the lifestyle of everybody else. Not when you give the impression, as the church sometimes gives, that really out there the best way we can actually live for Christ is to try and attract the world by becoming like them.

By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you love one another as I have loved you. And there is no compromise there on the part of Jesus.

[14 : 14] The world, friends, has to come to meet with God through what they see in us. This is to be our witness. This is our wonderful privilege to live Christ-like lives, challenging though it is, hugely demanding though it is, time-consuming though it is.

Everything else about it that's difficult is difficult. But then it's our great privilege. Because God has given, not just to you individually, but to us collectively, in this locality itself, he has given to us collectively to be the means by which the world gets a reliable indicator as to what true love is about.

And what the people of God look like and are like to each other. It's a great privilege. We should thank God for that.

That he has taught us this way. That he has brought us to appreciate this. That this, in fact, is what he's emphasized for us. And, you know, when you go to John's other writings and his epistles, especially his first epistle, let me just point you to that for a moment.

John, 1 John chapter 4 and verses 11 and 12 especially. Because you read there as follows. Well, you can read from verse 10.

[15 : 42] In this is love. Not that we have loved God, but that he loved us. And sent to son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved.

See, there's the same emphasis coming through. If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. But he doesn't leave it at that.

That's pretty much the same as what he's saying in John 13. What Jesus said in John 13. But he goes on to say, no one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

We're not going to go into all of that. But the point I'm really concerned to put across to use this. No one has ever seen God is very closely attached to our love for one another being visible.

In other words, because no one can actually see God as he is. And especially that world in which we live does not see God.

[16 : 46] They have to see him in us. They have to see him through our love. Through our love for one another. Especially. That's the indicator.

And not only is it an indicator to the world. But let's not forget this. First John chapter 3 and verse 14. By this we know, or herein we know, that we have passed from death to life.

Why? Where's the indicator that we have passed from death to life? Is it because I can persuade myself individually, personally, that I'm a Christian? Yes, that may be part of it.

But that's not what John is saying. By this we know that we have passed from death to life. Because we love the brothers. We love the Christians. We belong to the church we belong to.

We love our fellow believers. We love our fellow Christians. Remember that was said in a time of real difficulty. Real Christian, real danger to Christians. In the days of the Apostle John.

[17:46] Real danger from all kinds of sources. Not just from these authorities. The governing authorities. But also from defections from the faith. All sorts of things like that.

By this we know. That we have passed from death to life. Because we love one another. We love the brethren. We love Christ's people. So it's an indicator to ourselves.

Who we are. That we have indeed come. To be saved by God. That we are his people. Because we love one another. And the implication is. We would not have this type of love for one another.

If that were not the case. And I'm sure you can follow that. In your own experience. Most if not all of us can say. Well there was a time when. I may have appreciated.

What some of God's people were like. I appreciated the life they were living. I could see they were different. But I couldn't say I loved them. But I love them now. Because I've come to be one of them.

[18:44] Because I belong to them. Because I see God in them. I see Jesus in them. And he has placed me as one of them. In this wonderful spiritual body. So loving one another.

It's a new commandment. Briefly in the sense we've said. It's required by Jesus. It's a reliable indicator. To the world. To ourselves as Christians.

That this is who we are. This is who God is. Now secondly. He goes on to say. Loving one another. Is as Jesus loved us. Loved his people.

A new commandment I give you. That you love one another. Just as I have loved you. And what does that mean? Just as I have loved you.

If that's the foundation. If that's the pattern. If that's the quality. If that's the nature of the love. That we are to have for one another. What does that mean in practice? Well first of all it means.

[19:44] Self giving. Giving of yourself. Because it's impossible. To define love. Certainly completely. By thinking of it other than love that's shared.

Or love that is mutual. Or goes between one person and another. Or a group of people. That share love together. That is exactly what he means here.

By as I have loved you. Jesus loved his people. In giving himself for them. And in giving himself to them. You go back to the beginning of this wonderful chapter.

You'll see that John very deliberately records some details for us there. Before the feast of the Passover. When Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of the world.

This world to the Father. He knew that that meant the cross. Knew that that meant the death of the cross. Sufferings of the cross. All of that entailed.

[20:44] He knew that that's what lay ahead of him. Having loved his own who were in the world. He loved them to the end. And during supper.

When the devil had put into the heart of Judas Iscariot already. To betray him. Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hand. That he had come from God.

That he was going back to God. He rose from his supper. Laid down his outer garments. And took the towel. And girded himself. He went through all of that action.

That really symbolized. If you like. The humbling of himself. In love. To the benefit of his disciples. And what that's really saying to us. Is that the mind of Jesus.

Was set upon what was waiting for him. In the sufferings of the cross. What was waiting for him. In leaving this world. And departing to go to the Father. After resurrection. But everything between that moment.

[21:39] That he spoke to them. And his ascension to glory. Is in the mind of Jesus. Including the cross. And what does it say? He loved them. To the end.

He loved them. To the furthest extent possible. He didn't hold back. Anything of himself. Though he knew that this was really. What was waiting for him.

Not only did he know that. But he also knew the kind of people there were. We read there that Jesus. Judas. Had already in his heart. To betray him.

Satan had put that desire. That thought in his heart. And. Jesus. At that stage. Knew this very well.

But he held. Nothing back. When you look to chapter 15. Verses 12 and 13. This is my commandment. That you love one another.

[22 : 37] As I have loved you. Greater love. Has no one than this. That someone lays down his life. For his friends. That's what he knew.

That's what was in his heart to do. The selfless love. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Knowing all this. At that moment. Still he loved them to the end. He loved them. To the extent.

That he needed to love. That they needed to be loved. In order to be saved. And you know. It's. It's very much symbolic.

As you read. What he did with the clothes. His outer clothes. And so on. In fact. It's really. Pretty much the language. Of Philippians chapter 2. Isn't it? In the form of God.

He. Thought it not. Something to grasp. Or to hold on to. But made himself. Of no reputation. Taking the form of a servant. He. He. He left.

[23 : 33] If you like. The form of God. That he had been in. From all eternity. The place that he had. In the Trinity. And glory. He took.

Something else. The form of a servant. Didn't cease to be God. But he took something. He didn't have before. You compare that to. To John 13 here. And that's what you find. Isn't it?

When he knew that. His hour had come. He laid aside. His garments. His outer garments. And he took a towel. And girded himself.

Round his waist. With it. He might have said. Look at these disciples. Here's one.

Who's going to betray me. Here's one. Who's going to deny me. Here. The whole lot of them. And they're not going to be faithful to me. To the end. They're going to be bewildered.

[24 : 28] Most of them are going to turn their back. When it comes to the cross. And when it comes to my death on the cross. How can I possibly be. Expected to love. This kind of person. These kind of people.

He loved them. He loved them to the end. Truly I'm saying to you. A new commandment. That you love one another. Just as I have loved you.

What kind of difficulties. Do you and I have. In loving Christ. In serving Christ. In being Christians in this world. Yes there are difficulties. Of course we don't deny that.

What are the challenges we have. To actually showing our love for one another. In the face of a hostile world. There's so much isn't there. So much that you have to endure. So much that you have to expect.

So many difficulties that come your way. So many challenges. So many persecutions. Even at times. But then you go to this.

[25 : 28] And you say well. Whatever I face in this world. It's as nothing. Compared to what he knew. And he faced even at that moment.

Yet what did he do. Was he deflected. From his love for them. Was he put off going through. With his love. And finishing what he had come to do. Just because he knew the kind of people they were.

No of course he wasn't. He might have found it. Easy to say. I can't wash the feet. Of all of these. Sinners. And undoubtedly.

Some of our fellow Christians are easier to love than others. But Jesus does not qualify our love that way.

This is my commandment. That you love one another just as I have loved you. Just as I have loved you.

[26 : 29] I daily failed. In meeting that standard. I'm conscious of that. I have to confess that before God. And I'm sure you do as well.

But this is what we're always drawn back to. This is really the crux of the issue. This is the supreme example. This is what we've patterned our lives on. As I have loved you.

So you. Now must love one another. It's self-giving. We give of ourselves in love to others.

To our fellow Christians. As well as to the Lord. That means our time. Our gifts. Whatever way God has gifted us. Our talents. Our use of time.

Our priorities. It's all for his sake. But it's as he has loved us. That we are to love one another.

[27 : 28] And again. I don't want to labor the difficulty of it. By any means. I don't want to in any way give the impression that. We're making it easier than it really is. But I don't want to labor the difficulty. Because I want to focus on the privilege of it.

And the privilege of actually having it. For one another's benefit. But also for that world out there. To see what a Christian life is like. What a follower of Christ is like.

Not only that. But what followers of Jesus together are like. So you are to love one another. And that's the final point.

To love one another. Because this really is a love that's shared. I can't believe the time has gone. When you're talking about love. You don't notice the time. Do you?

Especially the love of Jesus. And the way that we're required to love one another. But let me just point you briefly. To another passage. In Ephesians chapter 4. And I'll be very brief.

[28 : 24] Ephesians 4. Verses 15 and 16 especially. Now Jesus. Paul rather here is talking about the growth. Of God's people together.

And how they are to grow. Until they find it reached the maturity. That God has designed them for. And how that is. So that especially they'll be. No longer tossed to and fro.

By the deceit of people. Who are trying to present them. With other than the truth. But speaking he says. Rather speaking the truth in love.

We have to grow up in every way. Unto him. Who is the head unto Christ. From whom the whole body joined. And held together. By every joint. With which it is equipped.

When each part. Is working properly. Makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up. In love.

[29 : 23] There's no way we could. Really deal with that sufficiently. In two or three minutes. Because it's got a huge amount. To teach us. What the growth of the church is. What the growth of God's people.

Together is about. But the point. We're emphasizing. In line with what we have. In John 13. Is the emphasis in the passage. On love. We are to grow up.

We are to grow spiritually. We are to mature. Keep on maturing. In the faith. Not individually only. But together. As a fellowship of God's people. How are we to do it?

Speaking the truth. In love. Love. And we are to grow up to him. Unto him. Towards him. And when each part of the body.

Each one. Such as we are here this evening. When each of us together. United together. When each part is working. Efficiently or effectively. Then together.

[30 : 18] That makes the body grow. So that it builds itself up. In love. You see. So tonight. The question for myself. Of course.

That's not just mere talk. A lot saying. Speaking the truth. In love. It's not just about speaking. It's not just in conversation. And it's just one side of it. First John again. Chapter 3.

Verse 18. Emphasizes. Let's not love. In speech only. In word. Or in tongue. But indeed. In action. And in truth.

There are two sides to it. Speaking the truth. In love. Acting in love. But it's always together. What he's saying. There is that. From that. We grow.

Or the body grows. Or edifies itself. In love. We're not just made. To love one another. Friends. We're made to grow.

[31 : 12] In love. For one another. We're made to grow. Together. As we speak the truth. In love. To each other. And that's the kind of growth.

That Paul has in mind there. In Ephesians. Chapter 4. So that. Each part. Does. Its own bit. The body grows.

In love. In other words. I'm not just to ask myself. Tonight. Am I growing in love? Am I growing as a Christian? And am I growing in love?

How difficult that may be. To quantify. Or define. It's something I need. From time to time. Regularly. To ask myself. And you do too. But it's not just that. It's not just.

Am I growing in love? Or how can I see. That I'm growing in love? What I have to ask myself too. Is. Am I contributing. To the body of Christ. Growing in love. Am I doing my part.

[32 : 13] As one. Member of that body. To contribute. To the overall growth. Of the body.

In other words. Am I concerned. Tonight. For the growth. Of God's people. Together. Of which I form a part. Am I as concerned. For that.

As I am. For my own personal growth. I should be. Because God has firmly. Firmly. Positioned me. And placed me. In the body of Christ.

And I have a responsibility. To that body. As I have to myself. Individually. To grow in love. To contribute in love. To love.

Others of the body. As I have been loved. By my Savior. In one of his books.

[33 : 08] In the collection. In the collection. Of John Owen's works. That great Puritan. Theologian. He says something. About scripture. Do you think we can.

Very easily. Apply to this particular. Topic itself. Of growing in love. Or loving. One another. And this is how he put it. We look on the scripture.

We might say. We look on. Love. And we've looked at tonight. We. This is how he put it. We look on the scripture. And receive it. Not as the word of men. But as it is indeed. The word of the living God.

In those very fords. And appearing shallows. Of this river of God. Scripture he's talking about. Where the lamb may wade. The elephant may swim.

Everything in the scripture. Is so plain. As that the least believer. The least able believer. May understand. All that belongs to his duty. Yet.

[34 : 06] Is nothing so plain. But that the wisest of them all. Have reason to adore the depths. And stores of divine wisdom in it. In other words. Let's just apply that to John's gospel.

And to that passage. That deals with our love for one another. And for Jesus as well. Loving as he has loved us. You can feel as you wade out into.

This. Stretch of water. If you like. The waters of love. You can feel. That they begin to. Wash around your ankles. And the youngest saint.

The youngest believer can do that. They can go out so far. They can do. As Owen says. They can paddle in it. But then I look out beyond that. And I see.

That the water gets darker. And I see that. If I do complete. The initial part. If I do complete. This preliminary part. This preliminary part.

[35 : 03] Of growing. Then I've got plenty yet. To get used to. And there are depths. That still go beyond me. That I probably will never see.

In this life. The full extent of it. Because it's love. It's the love of Christ. Christ. And it doesn't matter who you are tonight.

Or how long you've been a Christian. Even if you've just been a Christian for a short time. There's so much in here. That you can find. To paddle in. To try to grow in.

To apply to yourself. To love. Your fellow Christians. As God has loved you. And once you've paddled for a while. Then you realize that.

Actually there's a lot more to this. There are depths to this. Because what we're trying to do really. Is to follow. The example that Christ has set.

[36 : 01] Of loving as he loved. And if you can get to the end. And the furthest dimension. Of how he has loved us. And where his love for us ends.

Then you can say. You've reached the point. Of completion. But I guarantee. You'll never do it. Maybe not even in eternity. But certainly not in this life.

Because the example. Is Christ's. Perfect. Love. May he bless these words. To us. We're going to conclude.

Singing together in Psalm 133. Well known psalm. That talks about the unity. Of God's.