

Maundy Thursday

A New Commandment

John 13:31b-35

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A New Commandment

Scripture

On Jesus' final evening on earth he had just had supper with his disciples. During this meal Jesus inaugurated what we now call the Lord's Supper. After supper Jesus visibly demonstrated his servanthood by washing his disciples' feet. Then Judas Iscariot left them in order to go and betray Jesus to the Jewish authorities later that evening. After Judas left, Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment to love one another.

Let me read about a new commandment in John 13:31b-5:

³¹ . . . Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' 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.** ³⁵ **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**" (John 13:31b-35)

Introduction

In the ancient church the three days before Easter Sunday were known as the Great Triduum. Maundy Thursday was a Communion Service. Good Friday was a service remembering the crucifixion of Jesus. Holy Saturday was an Easter Vigil anticipation Jesus' resurrection on Sunday. These were days of fasting and prayer, days when the final acts of Jesus' saving work were remembered by the church.

Maundy Thursday gets its name from the Latin *mandatum novarum* ("a new commandment" in John 13:34). Robert Webber says, "A primary meaning of this service is to celebrate the giving

of the new commandment to love one another, a commandment given in the context of Jesus washing the disciples' feet."¹

Jesus gave significant and substantial teaching to his disciples on his last night on earth. I would like to isolate and briefly examine this new commandment that he gave to his disciples.

Lesson

Tonight, let's examine the new commandment that Jesus gave to his disciples.

I. The Priority of the Commandment (13:34a)

First, notice the priority of the commandment.

Jesus said in verse 34a, "**A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.**"

The Old Testament taught, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6:5), and also, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18).

When asked, "Which commandment is the most important of all?" Jesus answered, "The most important is, ' . . . And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:28-33).

So, if both the Old Testament and Jesus taught that the greatest commandments were to love God and also one's neighbor, what is so different about Jesus' **new commandment** to love one another? *The ESV Study Bible* note states, "The command to love one's neighbor was not new; the newness was found in loving one another as Jesus had loved his disciples (cf. John 13:1; 15:13). In

¹ Robert Webber, *The Services of the Christian Year*, vol. 5, The Complete Library of Christian Worship (Nashville, TN: Star Song Pub. Group, 1994), 316–317.

light of Jesus' subsequent death, **just as** implies a love that is even willing to lay down one's life for another (see 15:13)."²

Jesus wanted his disciples to love sacrificially. That is, love is not just a feeling. It is in fact an action that costs time and effort.

II. The People in the Commandment (13:34b)

Second, look at the people in the commandment.

Jesus said in verse 34b, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love **one another**."

John Butler says, "Disciples are to love disciples. Saints are to love saints. Christians are to love Christians. Some, of course, are not very loveable, but we are to love them anyway."³ In addition, in Matthew 5:43-44, Jesus also taught that his disciples must even love their enemies, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

The way to love one another is to put all the "one another" passages in Scripture into practice. Here are just a few of them: Be devoted to one another (Romans 12:10), honor one another (Romans 12:10), live in harmony with one another (Romans 12:16), accept one another (Romans 15:7), agree with one another (1 Corinthians 1:10), serve one another (Galatians 5:13), be kind to one another (Ephesians 4:32), be compassionate to one another (Ephesians 4:32), forgive one another (Ephesians 4:32), speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19), submit to one another (Ephesians 5:21), teach one another (Colossians 3:16), admonish one another (Colossians 3:16), and encourage one another (1 Thessalonians 5:11).⁴

² Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2052.

³ John G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor: John* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2009), 215.

⁴ Gareth Weldon Icenogle, *Biblical Foundations for Small Group Ministry: An Integrative Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

III. The Pattern in the Commandment (13:34c)

Third, observe the pattern in the commandment.

Jesus said in verse 34c, “ . . . **just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.**”

Jesus demonstrated loving “one another” by dying to pay the penalty for our sin. Jesus calls his disciples to a love that is even willing to lay down one’s life for another (cf. John 15:13). We love because Jesus first loved us. He gave his life to pay for our sin and to secure our salvation, and in response to his love, we are enabled to love one another.

We live in increasingly dangerous times. Terrorism is growing all around the world, and we should not be surprised when it strikes us again. How should we as Christians react to what we hear in the news? Do we love the enemies of Christ? Are we willing to share the love of Christ with them? Do we want to bomb them or love them? These are not easy questions, but they get to the heart of Jesus’ new commandment.

IV. The Proof from the Commandment (13:35)

And finally, look at the proof from the commandment.

Jesus said in verse 35, “**By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**”

When we love one another – and even our enemies – sacrificially, **all people will know that** we are Jesus’ **disciples**. Indeed, the most powerful apologetic to non-Christians is the love we have for one another.

Conclusion

So, let us love one another well. Let us put Jesus’ new commandment into practice daily in our lives. Amen.

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and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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