

A New Commandment (John 13:31–38)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (4/10/2022)

Introduction

1. John 13:31 begins the “Farewell Discourse” that will run through John 16. Judas had gone to betray Jesus to the Jews. After Judas left, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, although John does not record this important event. Why? He apparently thought it unnecessary to his message. Also, as we have previously noted, when John’s Gospel was written, the ordinances (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) were fully established in the churches.
2. The washing of the disciples’ feet was not instituted as an ordinance for the churches to follow but a demonstration of what Jesus was about to do, as He had told them all along (Matthew 17:22, 23; 20:18, 19, 28; 26:2).

Jesus humbled Himself, taking the form of a slave in obedience to the Father to serve those whom the Father had given to Him. His service to His own included His death on the cross as a sacrifice to cleanse them from sin and guilt that they might be restored to the Father. This is how Jesus “*loved them to the end*” (John 13:1). It is this humbling in self-sacrificial service that forms the “pattern” Jesus gave to the disciples (vv. 14, 15). It is not washing feet but loving one another according to the new commandment: (vv. 34, 35).

I. The New Commandment— “*Love one another*” (vv. 31–34)

1. The new commandment, based on the New Covenant, is the summation of the whole law. A Jewish lawyer asked Jesus what He regarded to be the great (first or primary) commandment of the law. Jesus responded, “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.*” Then He added, “*And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets*” (Matthew 22:34–40). We cannot love God with the whole being unless we love His people as one loves himself.

One cannot keep this commandment if he selfishly cares for himself (Philippians 2:3, 4). He must, like Jesus, empty himself of self totally to serve God for the benefit of others. Paul then applied this principle to believers (Philippians 2:12, 13).

2. Love is selfless devotion to Christ and His purpose, not feelings and warm relationships. It is necessary to fulfill the Father’s goal of bringing a redeemed people back into His presence. Hebrews addresses this goal as entering the veil, the emblem of sin and self that separated His people from Him. God created us in His image, and sin destroyed that image. The new birth is God’s means to restore His people (Hebrews 10:11–13).
3. In the text before us, (vv. 31–38), Jesus announced His imminent departure. Verses 31 and 32 describe the purpose of this departure—to glorify His Father and to be glorified by His Father. Verse 33 tells the disciples they cannot follow Him at that time. This statement was in reply to Peter’s question, “*Lord, where are you going?*” (v. 36). This announcement of His departure provided the occasion for His introduction of the new commandment (vv. 34, 35), showing His own how they should live in His absence.

II. The New Commandment and Its Purpose— “*As I have loved you, you also are to love one another*” (vv. 31–34)

1. Christ evidenced that the old covenant was moving forward: “*Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in Him.*” This is why John argued that this commandment was not a new commandment but an old one (1 John 1: 7, 8). Christ glorified the Father by being the true Israel and enabling

His followers to do what old-covenant people failed so miserably to do (remember Philippians 2:12, 13).

2. The question is *how* God is to be glorified. The answer is simple: God is glorified by Jesus' full submission to His will. Further, in Christ, His followers also glorify God by their obedience to His will.
 - a. How does one love another in the will of God? The Old Testament teaches that the primary duty of all humans made in the image of God is to love the Lord with their whole being.
 - b. Christ provided His followers with His example of selfless giving of oneself for others. Jesus told the disciples to love others "*just as I have loved you.*" Also, it is necessary to understand that Jesus loved those He loved "*to the end,*"—to a purposed result: "*By this all people will know that you are my disciples.*"

III. The New Commandment Illustrated— "*Will you lay down your life for me?*" (vv. 36–38)

1. John employed Peter to illustrate why one must die to self before one is able to love the Lord with his whole being and, consequently, to love others rightly. Peter's first experience with Jesus (Luke 5:1–11) is of great significance in illustrating the plan.
2. Even though the disciples left everything to follow Jesus, their journey through the veil required their sanctification from self. Scripture traces the path the Lord used to bring Peter to come to the end of himself.
 - a. Peter's path was one of pride, self-reliance, lack of vigilance, and presumption, for example, Matthew 16:16–21 that records Peter's confession followed by his prideful presumption. Would Peter really lay down his life for Christ? Not filled with prideful self-preservation. This why Jesus told him, "*You cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.*"
 - b. Jesus warned Peter and prayed for him (Luke 22:31, 32). Again, Peter protested (v. 33), and Jesus corrected him again, "*I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.*" Only when Peter's self-life was destroyed in the humiliation that followed his denial of Christ was the Lord able to build true humility and submission into his life (Luke 22:60–62).
 - c. Peter's remorse, repentance, and restoration were necessary to God's saving him to serve Him. What Peter experienced all Christ's own will also experience. None will die to self on his own. John records Peter's restoration in John 21. We will save that for later.

Lessons

1. Like Peter, all God's children will be subject to divine discipline (Hebrews 12:4–11). How is Jesus bringing you to deny self and walk in His life for loving service to others?
2. The gauge of the progress of discipline is our loving others in the biblical sense. Are you truly loving Christ and your brothers and sisters in Christ?
3. Loving service to Christ in loving others is the core of the Christian Life. Read the following verses (John 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10, 13:8; Galatians 5:13; Ephesians 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 3:12; 4:9; Hebrews 10:24; 1 Peter 1:22; 3:8; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:23; 4:7, 11, 12; 2 John 1:5).