

Love One Another As Christ Has Loved You

By Joel Wood

Bible Text: John 13:34-35

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We are not in Titus today. We are in the Gospel of John. If you would turn to chapter 13 with me. We'll be looking at verses 34 and 35. Allow me to read them for us, I'll be reading from the Modern English Version. John 13 verses 34 and 35, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." The grass withers and the flower fades but the Word of our God stands forever.

I need to start off with an apology because I don't have a sermon ready for you, today. I have a sermon ready for me and you get to listen in. A phone call from a dear brother, who loves me very much and thinks I'm pretty fantastic, this week confronted me with getting some things in check in my heart. And my mind was drawn to this passage because we're going to deal with tough things as a church, we're going to be confronted by things. And I realized that the frustrations that I might have with this person or that situation or whatever were just reflecting right back on my heart and my expectations and my pride. I was confronted with this question: do I love my brothers and sisters in the Lord? Brothers and sisters, let us love one another as Christ loves us.

First, we see Christ's command. Love one another. He says that it's a new commandment but we know that that speaks to quality, not timeline. There's a newness in the command because we are constantly falling away from it. We're constantly wanting to overlay our standards for love, our expectations in relationship, and we must be confronted with it again and again and again. This quality of newness is highlighted by the apostle John in his second epistle the sixth verse, and he says, "And this is love: that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it." John is saying this is a commandment as old as time, to love one another. Hopefully there is no debate that Christ DID command, that's he should have commanded this, and that we should hear this command, and that we should heed this command to love one another. Let us not allow our church life to begin to take on the tenor and tone of so many marriages in our society where people say, "Well, I can just be married and I don't have to love, I guess. I don't feel loving, they're not lovely. We can just press on in this contractual arrangement. Do we really need love? After all, what's love got to do with it?" No, Christ commands us. Love one another. It should go without saying by this point that I love Jay Adams, I love how he phrases things, I love how he puts things, and I love his story of the marital case that he was counseling when the spouses just say, "Why I just can't-- I can't love them. I can't love them." "Well.. tells you, husbands love your wives, I mean you have to, you have to love." "But I can't, I wish-- I wish they'd just go away, I wish they'd move out." "Well that doesn't do you any good because Christ told you to love your neighbor. They moves-- they move out, they become your neighbor and you've got to love your neighbor." "But you don't understand, I hate

them, we're- we're absolutely enemies!" "Well, Christ told you 'love your enemies.'" We- we can't avoid love, brothers and sisters. Christ has commanded us: love one another.

Secondly, we see Christ's clarification. "As I have loved you." That is massive. That is overwhelming. That is impossible. John 15 says [vs 9-17], "As the Father loved Me, I also loved you. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, even as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love. I have spoken these things to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment: that you love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. I no longer call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, for everything that I have heard from My Father have I made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, and that the Father may give you whatever you ask Him in My name. This I command you: that you love one another." Tucked away in there is verse 13. That is probably, I would guess, the most quoted Scripture verse since 9/11. "Greater love has no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends." And it's not utterly misquoted or misrepresented when it's used in the funerals of servicemen or women, or at the funerals of firemen or policemen. It is a general principle of life that if you love someone, you are willing to lay down your life for them. In the museum down in DC, there's a gallery of photographs that have won awards and one of them is in the mall attack in Kenya a number of years ago when gunmen rushed into that place and started shooting people and it was a siege that lasted for hour upon hour. And there is a photographer, when he saw what was happening, ran into the mall to try to capture the moment. And he has a picture there looking down upon what looks like a dead mother and two children. And what it is is a mother laying there, singing softly and gently to her children, so that they would lay perfectly still and not be killed. I'm not known for my quiet voice. I can't imagine singing softly enough that the gunman wouldn't hear me. But that mother was willing to lay down her life for her children. Which one of you parents wouldn't snatch up your children and protect them with your very life, you're very body, if a gunman were to come in here right now. If we love someone, we lay down our lives for them. It's not misapplied when it is applied horizontally in relationships in this life, but we miss something if we don't apply it vertically in the alternate relationship of this life, that Christ laid down His life for His friends. The one who in no way deserved any suffering of any kind suffered horrific tragedy for people like you and people like me. See, when Christ calls us to love one another, there is no clause that says: as you see fit. As is convenient. When Christ commands us to love one another, He holds up the perfect standard of love: "as I have loved you." He clarifies the command with this ultimate love, this sacrificing love, this love that, according to the world, makes no sense. But Christ commands us to love one another and He commands us to do it as HE has loved us.

So thirdly, we see the Christian's continuation as Christ says, "... that you ALSO love one another." Are we-- are we hearing this? Are we-- are we getting it? "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." We- we continue, we extend the love of Christ to those around us. If Christ, in His perfection, can love US, then we in our imperfection can and should love one another. We've been given the necessary gifts, we've been given the Word of God, and we've been given the Spirit of God, and we have not only been given the necessary gifts, but we've been given the command so that we know what to do with those gifts. We are to love. Let us, brothers and sisters, extend the love of Christ toward one another and outward from us to our community. As we read in Galatians [6:10], "... let us do good to all, especially those who are of the household of faith." And why? Why would we do this? So that the world may know that we belong to Christ.

And fourthly, we see the Christian's character. "All men will know that you are My disciples." Paul says in Colossians 1 [vs 4], "For we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints." In Second Timothy-- we'll tie in a pastoral epistle here somewhere. Second Timothy 1 [vs 13], "Follow the pattern of sound teaching which you have heard from me in the faith and love that is in Christ Jesus." Brothers and sisters, there is a change, there is a development, there is a growth that happens in the true believer that is rooted in the principles and truth of the faith of Jesus Christ, that is rooted in the Christian religion. But it never stops there, it always grows in an outward direction. You remember friendship bread, the gift that keeps on giving. I remember when I was a kid, women were passing out dough at church. I didn't understand but they take this dough home and they'd add this and they'd add that and this thing grows and grows. As a kid I had this imagination, you know, the fridge door popping open as, you know, this dough consumes the house. Like a little yeast leavening the entire lump, our love works through us and it begins to grow and it begins to work in an outward direction. And the world takes note because the world hates. The world hates. The world doesn't know what to do with true love. Any form or fashion of love that the world gets its hands on it distorts, it uses to manipulate, to get its own way. It doesn't know what to do with honest to goodness love. First John 3 [vs 11-12], "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning: We should love one another, not like Cain--" I mean so- so when John talks about the beginning, he takes it WAY back to the beginning. We're not talking about the beginning of Matthew, we're not talking about the beginning of Moses, we're talking about THE beginning. "... not like Cain, who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. Why did he murder him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's works were righteous." Brothers and sisters, the world hates. The world hates. Verse 13[-18], "Do not marvel, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love his brother remains in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. By this we know the love of God: that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. Whoever has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, but closes his heart of compassion from him, how can the love of God remain in him? My little children, let us not love in word and speech, but in action and truth." Brothers and sisters, we are called to love. This should be our character, this is what should mark us as individuals, as families, as a church, is love. And perhaps you're like me and you say, "but I DO love and I love them enough to say the things that need said, and to confront the things that need confronting, and I love them enough to stand with the standards of Jesus Christ." To which I say, amen! We are after- after all Reformed Presbyterians, we should believe and act like Reformed Presbyterians. Amen! But HOW do we do those things? I will not question the principles. But HOW do we hold to the principles?

Enter First Corinthians 13 [vs 1-3]: "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. If I give all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profits me nothing." Now I do want to draw our attention back to what the apostle John said, that it's linked with following God's commands. Our love is interacting with people in light of God's revealed will for human relationships. So in that way, there is that objective truth to the love, but then there's also that experiential reality of the love. I have some friendly, loving caricatures of- of North American Presbyterian bodies and one of them (who will remain nameless) they say, you know, they-- "Speaking the truth IS loving!! So therefore, every time I'm speaking the truth, I'm speaking it in love." No, you're not. Sometimes you're speaking the truth in jerky-ness. I'm guilty of that. What does First Corinthians 13 say? [vs 4-7] "Love suffers long and is kind; love envies not; love flaunts not itself and is not puffed up, does not behave itself improperly, seeks not its own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil; rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things,

believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." Brothers and sisters, when we talk about our character, we're talking about that experiential reality that is rooted and grounded in love but actually changes our behavior, changes our attitude, changes our tone. It doesn't necessarily change what we find to be important, but it changes how we interact with others in talking about what we find to be of utmost importance. That we do it out of broken hearts, out of patient minds. That we do not rejoice in iniquity, we rejoice in the truth but we rejoice. We bear all things, we believe all things, we hope all things, we endure all things. Brothers and sisters, to say that we are monolithic here would be just an absolute stretching of reality. We have broad, various views on a number of different topics. How do we interact on those topics? Do we believe our brother to be an idiot because they can't see what Scripture so clearly defines and describes? Well, if that's the case, remember that time in your life when you were an idiot. (Amen) Thank you. And that was for me. Brothers and sisters, we are all (should be) growing in the Lord. That brings about change of conviction, change of standard, as we are reformed toward Scripture, right? And it's not about not holding to Scriptural standards, it's about HOW do we hold to those Scriptural standards. Do we do it in loving ways, in gracious ways? Do we expect from ourselves the same thing we expect from one another? Do we come at a topic saying, "you need to hear me out, I don't need to hear you because you hold to an opinion that's just dumb! But you need to hear me out, you need to understand where I'm coming from." Verse 8[-13] of First Corinthians 13: "Love never fails. But if there are prophecies, they shall fail; if there are tongues, they shall cease; and if there is knowledge, it shall vanish. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect comes, then that which is imperfect shall pass away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, and I thought as a child. But when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see as through a glass, dimly, but then, face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know, even as I also am known. So now abide faith, hope, and love, these three. But the greatest of these is love."

Brothers and sisters, Christ has given us a clear command to love one another with a clear clarification that we are to love one another as He has loved us. He makes it clear, why? That we are continuing, we are extending His love toward one another. And He makes it clear that there is a morphing, there is a developing-- developing, there's a changing in our character as we come to grips with this love, understanding who we are in light of Him and how we interact with one another in light of that. Do we do so in love? Now I- I can apply this very specifically because I had already worked on and developed this before I knew that we were going to be having a meeting during the Sabbath school hour, today, on a topic which many of us have differing opinions on. Will we be loving? I'm not saying we shouldn't have differing opinions, I'm not saying that they're, you know, that everyone has to be monolithic today, right now, in this moment, on that topic. But will we love one another? And brothers and sisters, this comes from my heart as I have struggled through my- my side of these types of issues. Are we loving one another as Christ has loved us? Are we laying down our lives for our friends? Do we love the body of Christ? If not, we have to first check our hearts by asking: do we love Christ? Do we claim to love Christ, do we really perceive ourselves as loving Christ, can we love Christ and not love His body, the body that He sacrificed for, that He laid down His life for, are we willing to lay down our lives for our friends? And are we willing to reflect that love in a change of character that reflects that patience, that reflects that lack of envy, that humility, not pride. Brothers and sisters, let us love one another as Christ loves us. A sermon for your pastor as you get to listen in. But maybe it applies to you, too.

Stand with me as we pray.