

A New Command

John 13:33-35

When I was in Washington D.C. as a seminary student, one of the Korean students told me about his journey to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. When he got there, he saw a sign at the front of gate that captured his attention. It read, "Do not feed the bears!" After touring the park, he prepared to eat the lunch that he brought with him in the rest area. All of a sudden, something frightening happened. A family of five bears came near him. They came because they smelled his food. Fortunately, a park ranger was near by to come to his aid immediately. The ranger gave him a warning. He told him not to feed the bears. Then the ranger threw some stones toward the bears so that they would run off. The student asked the ranger why he couldn't feed the bears. The ranger replied that if people started feeding the bears, the bears might then solely rely on them for food. Then as time passes, they would become dependent upon man's help to find food and they would lose their instincts to hunt. Once the bear loses their instincts to hunt, they would not survive in nature any more. I think that this advice is in the best interest of the bear.

If the bear loses their instincts to hunt, they would not survive in nature any more. All animals that live in nature must maintain their instincts. At the same time, if an animal loses its natural instincts from its contact with man; it still cannot be with man. Just as instincts are a special quality that animals have, there is also a special quality that Christians must have. If you don't have this special quality, you are not a real Christian. This is similar to a wild animal being bred in a zoo as opposed to the same species existing in the wild. They may look the same, but they act completely different.

Verse 35 says, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples." This means that the disciples of Christ must possess this special quality. In verse 34, Jesus mentioned it as a "new command" to His disciples. So people who keep the new command that Jesus gave are His real disciples. Then, what is the new command? In verse 34, Jesus said, "A new command I give you: Love one another." The new command is very basic. Quite simply it means to love one another. So when I mentioned that the disciples of Christ must have a special quality, that quality is to love one another. Worshipping, praying, offering, etc are all important things to become a good Christian. Sometimes we wrongly portray ourselves as a good Christian. Sometimes other people can say things like "you are a good Christian because you do this and you do that..." However, Jesus thinks differently than we do. There are more important things than worshipping and praying and offering, etc. What I mean by that is that there is one thing that as His disciples that we cannot forget. That is, loving one another.

I have a friend in Christ that I have known for a long time. He is a good preacher of the gospel. Because he is rich, he also devotes lots of his money to the church. He is always leading church activities. However, he is very dissatisfied. He believes that others don't respect him. He thinks that they are always pointing at him and saying bad things about him. In my opinion, he is correct. Nobody likes him. Everyone recognizes that he is good helper and an important person for the church's activities, but no one likes him. The congregation is not willing to respect or recognize him. There is a reason for that though. It's because he's always bragging about himself. He ignores others around him and sees them as people that are lower in stature than him.

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He doesn't have patience or understanding for shortcomings in others. He is always the source of arguments or trivial concerns.

Every time I see him, I think about the new command that Jesus told His disciples in this morning's scripture reading. Through him I have realized the most important thing in being a Christian. However, we have one more thing to think about. When we say "Love one another", I want to focus on the "one another" portion. This emphasizes a few important facts to us.

First, when we give our love to others, it should be in a manner that is appropriate.

One of the reasons that we fail when we try to love others is that we always love them on our own terms. Cats and dogs always fight each other whenever they meet. There is a reason for this. Dogs have a habit of lifting their tail up when they're happy. When fighting, they drop their tail down. On the contrary, cats have a habit of dropping their tail down when happy. When fighting, they lift their tail up. If a dog lifts its tail, the cat thinks that the dog wants to fight. On the other hand, if a cat drops its tail down, the dog thinks that the cat wants to fight. Since their way of expressing their emotions is different, cats and dogs always hiss or growl at each other. Even though we love one another, we should care about others. If our love is on our terms, we both may have trouble.

Second, we need to know how to receive love from others.

Sometimes we are likely to think that we have to focus on "giving" love. We should know that receiving love is more important than giving love. When I was young, there was a friend who had his heart broken. In Korea we have Teacher's Day every year. My friend was very poor so he couldn't buy any gifts or carnations as a token of his appreciation. So he tried to make a carnation by using red paper. Unfortunately, he wasn't very gifted in art. He did the best that he could to make the paper flower and gave it to his teacher with respect and love on Teacher's Day. In the afternoon on Teacher's Day, he ran an errand to the teacher's office. While passing the teacher's desk, he saw the carnation flower he gave to the teacher in the trashcan. There were lots of gifts from others on her desk, but only the paper carnation that my friend gave to his teacher was thrown in the trashcan. Since that day, he never had the same feeling for his teacher.

That's right. We need to know how to receive love from others. We should receive other's love thankfully and think of it as a treasure. This is another way to love one another.

Third, love gives us unity.

The church is like a group of firewood. There are long ones and short ones. There are upright ones and curved ones. There are thick ones and thin ones. Each of the church members are different. Do you know how to collect this firewood into one location? It is simple. We can bring it all together. If you have a rope, it is much easier to move it. The rope is necessary to bring the wood together so that it has a purpose. Colossians Chapter 3:14 says, "over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." "Love one another," means making unity by a loving rope. While Jesus told his disciples "love one another", He said this is a new command. A commandment is the Word from God given to us that we must keep. We

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are all very familiar with the Ten Commandments from the Old Testament. These commandments were also the highest law given to the people of God. The important thing to remember is that these commandments must be followed with specific requirements for compensation and punishment. Exodus 34:7 says, "Maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." This is the Word of God given to the Israelites after He gave the Ten Commandments to them. If we keep the Ten Commandments then He will bless us to the thousands. If we do not keep the Ten Commandments, he will punish our children and their children for our sin to the third and fourth generation. Once you receive a commandment from God, you must keep it. If you are against the commandment, you will be punished. That means that loving one another is not an option for a Christian. We who are disciples of Jesus Christ should do our best to love one another, just like the Israelites did their best to keep the Ten Commandments at the risk of their life. 1 John 2:7-8 says, "Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining." The command that Jesus gave to His disciples is not a new one. This command is a reinterpreted command from the past.

Luke chapter 10 tells us story about a "Good Samaritan". An expert in the law asked Jesus, "When you say 'Love your neighbor as yourself', who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied using a parable. A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. A Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. A priest and a Levite just passed by on the other side of the road. Why is that? It was because a man who fell into the hands of robbers was not the same kind of people as them. If a priest fell into the hands of robbers, they wouldn't pass them by on the other side road. If a Levite fell into the hands of robbers, they wouldn't pass them by on the other side road. The Pharisees and Jews who kept their old commands thought their neighbors were only those that were the same people as themselves. However, Jesus told them, people who are different than you are also your neighbor. Originally people only wanted to love people who looked just like them. Jesus asks us, "Who is your neighbor?" When we look at today's text carefully, it makes us feel that keeping the command is critical. Today's text is also Jesus' farewell sermon. Today's text is the core value of Jesus' message given to His disciples before He died on the Cross. These were some of His last words for them. There is a reason why we have to keep this command more than other command. Verse 31 says, "When he was gone, Jesus said..." Jesus told this message to the 11 disciples after Judas was gone. That means, He told this message to only His 11 beloved disciples who would do the heavenly work when he departs. We who wish to become disciples of Jesus and think that we love Jesus most of all, must keep this command more than others.

Beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, Jesus gave us His new command. That is, love one another. We should love one another in our church. We should love one another in our home. We should love one another in our place of work. I pray that your labor prompted by love will flow like a river wherever you go with the Word of God.