

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

13 ³¹After [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, Now the Son of man shall be glorified, and God shall be glorified in him. ³²God shall glorify him with himself, and shall glorify him [very soon]. ³³Little children, I will be with you for only a little while longer. You will miss me; but what I told the Jews, I now tell you, Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴I give you a new commandment, Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. ³⁵All men shall know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another. (Jn. 13:31-35)

Introduction

Ruth had often made the statement, “Love isn’t love until it goes out of its way for another.”

One day an example of such love was vividly impressed upon Ruth as she was reminded of just such an act of love performed by her own father. The incident was brought to mind the day Ruth encountered an old college friend with whom she had spent ten weeks touring Europe as part of a college choral group some 25 years earlier. As they reminisced, Ruth’s friend said, “I’ve never forgotten that, out of almost 60 women in our group, you were the only one whose father came to Montreal to see us off.”

This comment led Ruth to reflect on that scene from 25 years ago—the scene of a father expressing his love for his daughter, the scene of a Christian expressing his love for a sister in Christ:

The scene of my father standing on the dock alone, waving good-bye replays itself once more in my mind. At the time Dad was a part-time pastor without pay. Money was scarce. He cut meat at a grocery store to put food on the table for his family of seven. There was no money for luxuries, such as a 500-mile trip to Montreal just to watch a daughter sail for Europe. But there he was, down at the ship terminal on the morning of our departure.

I had seen him coming through the crowd. His topcoat was wrinkled, and his eyes were red from an overnight ride on a Greyhound bus. But I knew he was thrilled to be there. I don’t remember ever having felt so loved. I knew that as soon as our ship sailed he would return to the bus station for another eight-hour ride home. There would be no sightseeing, no shopping spree, no dinner out. He had come for his daughter even when he couldn’t afford it.

Other fathers could have come. They could have hopped a plane, booked a hotel room, enjoyed the outing. But it seemed that the one who could afford it least gave the most.

Our Lord Jesus Christ instructs us and commands us to love one another. Ruth's father provided an example of such love, an expression of love that left an indelible imprint upon the recipient of that love and upon at least one other witness to it. Ruth goes on to say,

I think of my easy platitudes about sacrifice. I give when it is convenient, when the bills have been paid, when my schedule has an opening. And I wonder: Is it love? True love—the going-out-of-one's-way kind of love—leaves no doubt in the mind of the loved one. (*POWER*, 11/19/89, p. 8)

Because we tend to be self-centered and self-serving, we need to be exhorted to love one another.

I. Let Us Love One Another, Because This is Christ's Commandment to Us as His Disciples

Note that our Lord Jesus gives this charge to His disciples after Judas has made his exit:

After [Judas] had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of man shall be glorified, and God shall be glorified in him ... ³⁴I give you a new commandment, Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another." (Jn. 13:31,34)

The commandment expressed in verse 34 is exclusively given to Christians and is focusing upon the love that is to be exhibited by Christians for fellow-Christians.

Jesus declares that this is "*a new commandment*"—in contrast to the Old Testament commandment recorded in Leviticus 19:18, "*Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am Jehovah.*" The Old Testament commandment to love one's neighbor is referring to a broad, all-inclusive, neighborly love. It is a commandment that calls upon us to practice love towards all those with whom we come into contact in the community. It is a commandment that is patterned after our natural love for ourselves, as the Lord Jesus indicates,

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? ³⁷Jesus replied, Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself. (Matt. 22:36-39)

We are all concerned for our personal welfare and well-being, as the Apostle Paul reminds the Ephesians, "*no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it*" (Eph. 5:29a.) This is the type of love and concern we are to have for our neighbor, namely, promoting his welfare and preserving his well-being.

But this new commandment to love our brothers and sisters in Christ is referring to a restricted, exclusive, brotherly love. This is a commandment that calls upon us to practice love towards those who are fellow-believers in Christ—brothers and sisters for whom Christ died. This is a commandment that is patterned after the divine love of Christ for His church, *“I give you a new commandment, Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another”* (vs. 34.) Christ’s love for us is a voluntary, self-sacrificing love: *“Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her”* (Eph. 5:25b.) Therefore, this is a commandment that calls upon us to voluntarily and sacrificially give of ourselves for the sake of fellow-Christians. Note: This new commandment does not nullify our obligation to obey the Old Testament commandment, the Lord Jesus made this clear when He proclaimed, *“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”* (Matt. 5:17.) On the contrary, in addition to that Old Testament commandment, we are obligated to exhibit this sacrificial love for fellow-believers in Christ.

One of the purposes for which we have been redeemed is so that we might exhibit and practice this sacrificial, Christ-like love. As the Apostle Peter expresses it: *“Since you have, by obedience to the truth, purified your souls for a sincere love of your brothers, earnestly love one another from the heart, ²³having been born again”* (1 Pet. 1:22-23a.) Peter teaches us that as believers in Christ we have *“purified your souls”* for the purpose of practicing *“a sincere love of your brothers.”* Therefore Peter goes on to exhort us to *“earnestly love one another from the heart.”* In other words, we are to actually live out the new life to which we have been called, we are to actually put into practice this Christ-like love for our Christian brothers and sisters. Peter informs us that our being *“born again”* by the Holy Spirit is what enables us as Christians to practice such love for our brothers. The Holy Spirit’s work in our hearts creates within us the capacity and ability to love our brothers and sisters in Christ with a Christ-like love: *“the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³meekness, self-control”* (Gal. 5:22-23a.) The Holy Spirit creates within our hearts a spiritual affinity (identity with and love for) with our brothers in Christ, note 1John 3:10,14,

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother ... ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 Jn. 3:10,14)

Although it is regeneration—the work of the Holy Spirit creating new, spiritual life in us—that creates within us the ability to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to be exhorted to actually practice such love and cultivate such love for one another in Christ. Therefore, not only the Apostle Peter, but also the Apostle John, exhorts us to put this brotherly love into practice: *“Beloved, let us*

love one another, for love is of God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 Jn. 4:7.)

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, let us love one another with a brotherly love, because this is Christ’s commandment to us as His disciples.

II. Let Us Love One Another, As Christ has Loved Us

Just prior to issuing this command, and just prior to Jesus’ dramatic act of service (His washing of the disciples’ feet), these very disciples were arguing among themselves as to which of them was the greatest: *“When the hour came [to eat the Passover meal], Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ...²⁴Also a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be the greatest. (Lk. 22:14,24.)*

Our Lord rebuked His disciples with the words recorded in Luke 22:25-27,

Jesus said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. ²⁶But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. ²⁷Who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. (Lk. 22:25-27)

It was in this context that our Lord provided for His disciples a dramatic example of His teaching by taking upon Himself the humble task of washing the disciples’ feet. Having completed the service of foot washing, Jesus now issues the new commandment and explains that this type of love is to be the same type of love He exhibits toward us: *“I give you a new commandment, Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another” (Jn. 13:34.)*

What type of love did Jesus exhibit toward His disciples? It was a humble, serving love—the ministry of foot washing was an act of service. The Apostle Paul exhorts the church to exhibit the same humble, serving love as that demonstrated by our Lord Jesus Christ:

Have this mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus: ⁶existing in the form of God, he did not regard his being on an equality with God as a thing to be exploited; ⁷on the contrary, he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men. Being found as a man in appearance, ⁸he humbled himself by becoming obedient unto death, even death on the cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

How might we practice this same type of love within the church and toward our fellow Christians? We may do so by bearing one another’s burdens: *“Bear each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2.)* Consider the following example (however imperfect it may be) of such love, actually being demonstrated for us by an unbeliever towards his dear friend in need:

When I got a call that my alcoholic friend Jim's common-law wife had died, I went to his home ... I talked with him an hour or two and then went home that evening feeling useless.

The next morning I went over to see Jim again ... I walked in and saw him with another man sitting on the couch, both drunk. The other man had his arm around Jim's shoulder. They looked at me without saying anything ...

Finally Jim said, "My buddy came over last night and spent the night." The men had stayed up talking and drinking.

His friend said to me with slow, slurred speech, "I'm just an old drunk like Jim, but I thought the least I could do was spend the night with him."

Jim's friend's word "with" kept echoing inside me. I had worked hard to do something *for* Jim. His friend had understood that Jim needed someone to be *with* him.

I had failed Jim at his time of greatest need ... I knew that giving advice to Jim couldn't help him in his great loss, but I didn't know what else to do. I was in a position to help him for the first time as a friend. Instead, I fled ...

I had tried to do something for Jim—and failed. But he and his friend had given a gift to me. They taught me that it is more important to do something with other human beings than to do something for them ...

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, I find myself moving forward to be *with* a friend in the time of crisis. (*POWER*, 9/2/90, p. 8)

This silent, supporting love, was the type of love Job's friends extended to him, when they first encountered him in his agony:

When Job's three friends ... heard about all the calamity that had come upon him, they each came from their own home and, meeting together, they agreed to go to console and comfort him. ¹²When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him. They began to wail and to weep; each one tore his robe, and they tossed dust into the air and upon their heads. ¹³So they sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights. No one spoke a word to him, because they saw that his grief was very great. (Job 2:11-13)

Another way in which we may exhibit the kind of brotherly love Christ requires of His disciples is by being diligent to maintain the unity of Christ's body, the church, doing the things that make for peace:

... live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ²Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³Make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit by the bond of peace. (Eph. 4:1-3)

Yet another way of practicing such love is by being sensitive and alert to the needs of one another: *“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others”* (Phil. 2:4.) Such love is demonstrated by a grandson for his grandmother:

The phone rang. It was Bill, the eldest of my grandchildren.

“Grandma, this is Bill,” he announced. “Are you going to be home awhile?”

“Yes,” I replied, a cheery note creeping into my voice at the sound of his.

A short time later Bill backed his red pickup truck into my driveway.

“What do you have there, Bill?” I asked, assuming he wanted to use my garage for storage.

“I brought you some *apple* wood, Grandma. We were cutting down a tree at the place I work, and I asked if I could cut some of the old apple tree into fireplace lengths for you.”

“I remembered how you like to sit by the fire on a winter evening,” Bill went on. “And I thought how good this wood will smell—just like apples! You’ll like that a lot, won’t you, Grandma?”

“I will like that a lot, Bill,” I said, looking deep into his blue eyes. There I saw not only his unselfish desire to please, but also his love.

As he unloaded the apple wood, I breathed a prayer into the air. “Thank You, God, for my grandson—and for this expression of his love for me!” (*POWER*, 5/8/83, p. 8)

What type of love did Jesus demonstrate to His disciples? It was a sacrificial love—the foot washing was symbolic of His great ministry at Calvary. Shortly before departing for the cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus would declare to His disciples, *“My command is this, Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends”* (Jn. 15:12-13.)

How might we practice this same type of love within the church and toward our fellow Christians? We do so by giving of our financial resources, even if it means sacrificing our comforts and luxuries, in order to minister to fellow Christians in need:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

We do so by sacrificing our pride or wounded spirit and extending forgiveness to promote reconciliation with a fellow Christian who has wronged us: *"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the LORD forgave you"* (Col. 3:13.)

Let us love one another with a serving and sacrificial love, just as Christ has loved us.

III. Let Us Love One Another, So that the World may Know that We are Christ's Disciples

Jesus informs us that the practice of the love He here commands will serve as a witness to the world: *"All men shall know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another"* (vs. 35.)

This Christian love expressed towards one another is the evidence that proclaims to the world that we are truly Christ's disciples—because we are seen to be like our Lord: His character and His life are being reproduced in us. This is exactly what is the goal of discipleship, as the Lord Jesus teaches in Luke 6:40, *"The disciple is not above his teacher; but every one when he is perfected shall be like his teacher."*

This Christian love expressed within the church for one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is a demonstration to the world of the life of God and of life within the kingdom of God:

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother ... ¹⁴We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. (1 Jn. 3:10,14)

The presence and demonstration of Christian love causes the world to marvel. The church father, Tertullian, records the comment of the pagan community upon witnessing the love that existed among Christians: "See how they love one another!" Conversely, the absence of Christian love within the church and among fellow Christians causes the world to stumble. The church father, Chrysostom, complained of the lack of Christian love in his day and the adverse affect it had upon the pagan community: "There is nothing else that causes the heathen to stumble, except that there is no love."

Let us love one another, so that the world may know that we are Christ's disciples and be drawn to Him.

Conclusion

As fellow Christians, let us love one another, because this is Christ's commandment to us as His disciples. As fellow Christians, let us love one another, as Christ has loved us. As fellow Christians, let us love one another, so that the world may know that we are Christ's disciples.

Let us pray that God would make us like those Christians of Thessalonica who are described as being *"taught by God to love one another"* (1 Thess. 4:9.)