

The Heart of Christ – the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

“...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end”(John 13:1.)

The Sacrificial Savior – Part 3

John 13:31-35

31 Therefore when he had gone out, 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 will glorify Him immediately. 33 Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 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, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.’”

We have been camped out here in John 13:31-35 noting some of the remarkable truths that are the result of Jesus pending death on the cross. In these verses we see Jesus as the Sacrificial Savior, who gives His life so two things might be made know, first, the glory of God as we saw in verses 31-33 and second now, the love of God which we see in verses 34-35. Over the past couple of weeks we have taken the time to see how both Jesus, the Son of Man as well as God the Father are glorified, how they are both honored and magnified through that which would otherwise be shameful and horrific, death on the cross. This morning I wish to look at this second accomplishment of the Sacrificial Savior’s death on the cross, namely how the love of God is manifested. And to this end, I submit to you three thoughts concerning the love of God manifest by the sacrificial Savior:

- I. The importance of love
- II. The intimacy of love
- III. The illustration of love

The cross of Christ reveals to us the love of God, a love that is embodied by the life and death of Christ and is to be exemplified in the lives of His followers.

I. The importance of loving one another (13:34a)

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...”

I am really not sure how to relate this emphatically enough – namely that on the very night that Jesus was to be betrayed, just hours before His arrest, to be taken to a farce trial held in the wee hours of the night, a brutal beating with a Roman flagrum, a whip donned with leather, bones, stones and glass with which to tear apart the flesh of its victim, and the subsequent horrors of being nailed alive to a cross; events that Jesus was painfully aware awaited Him; that even in the light of all these things; the focus of the heart of Christ was to communicate the truth His disciples would need in order to fulfill the commission He was to give them to take the message of His gospel, namely that the love of God was revealed in the Son of God who would take the punishment due the sinner on the cross so that the sinner might, by faith in this act of Jesus to purchase his soul from the dominion of darkness and the damnation of an eternal hell; and by faith then to live according to the precepts of kingdom of the Son would experience and

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exemplify this love of God as shown by the cross to other redeemed saints. How important was the subject of loving one another to Jesus. Let us consider:

A. Important enough to communicate

First, it was important enough to communicate. Rather than focusing on His own “problems” and pains as it were, Jesus was more concerned for the welfare and encouragement of His disciples. At a time when it would seem that the disciples should be comforting and encouraging Jesus, we find Jesus unselfishly and sacrificially doing such things to them. And then, when we consider all the things that Jesus could have spoken about in His last hours; of all the truths to be communicated and ultimately of all the practices He would have His disciples perform, what virtue, what life principle, what key subject does Jesus impress upon them? Jesus says, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...”** The virtue is love. Jesus calls them to the most important topic to be considered by anyone who would be a follower of Christ – that topic being the knowledge and the practice of the love of God as manifested by Jesus Christ. How important is this subject of loving one another to the heart of Christ?

B. Important enough to clarify

Second, it was important enough to clarify. Beloved, note in the text how Jesus refers to this commandment. He says, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...”** There is certainly an aspect of loving one another and of the command to love that is not new. The disciples would have been fully aware of the command of Deuteronomy 6:5 –

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

The disciples would have been very familiar with the teaching of Leviticus 19:18 -

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.

In fact, Jesus Himself had already spoken these very words to the disciples, exalting these truths to the status of the first and second greatest commandments of the Law as it is recorded in Matthew 22:37-40 –

37 And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.” 38 This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 The second is like it, “YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.” 40 “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.

There was nothing “new” about the commandment to love then in this sense. But I believe that that word “new” would have caught the attention of the disciples. The Law was fixed. It had been established. The law of love settled. So then, how important was the subject of love to

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Jesus? It was important enough to add the clarifying adjective, “new” – *kainos* in the Greek, a word that carries the idea of freshness; newness and vitality. It is not so much that the commandment itself is so “new” but rather the newness will be seen in how the old commandment is to be now practiced.

It was new because He had only then come to explain it; it was new because it could not have been conceived before His life exhibited its meaning; it was new because the love which He showed was something altogether beyond the power of man to have imagined for himself; and as in science we reckon him to be the discoverer of a new law, who rises above the guesses and glimpses of His predecessors, and establishes upon new ground, and in a manner which can never afterwards be questioned, some great principle which had been perhaps partly conceived before, so I think we may say, that the law of brotherly love, as illustrated by the example of the Lord, which stamps the great principle of selfishness as a vile and execrable principle, might be truly described as a new commandment which Christ gave to His disciples. (Bp. H. Goodwin.)

We see that it is this idea of how one is to practice love that is new when we see how the Apostle John, who penned these words of Jesus, spoke of this subject in his first letter. Look with me at 1 John 2:7-8 where we read what can be seemingly confusing words. With reference to the love of God we read:

7 Beloved, I am not writing a new [same word for new as in John 13:34] commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining.

John goes on to describe how love is to be practice by those who profess to believe saying in 1 John 2:9-11

9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

How important is the subject of loving one another in the mind of Jesus? As we will come to see, the love manifested to one another becomes the very marker, the very means by which not only we experience the love of God, but also how the world evaluates the validity, the genuineness of the love of God among those who profess to be His people. So then, the clarification is this – it is not so much that the command itself is new but rather then the practice of the command. We will come back to this. How important is this subject of loving one another to the heart of Christ?

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C. Important enough to command

Third, It was important enough to **command**. Take this to heart, beloved for we who would be disciples of Jesus Christ must be careful to see that this new command applies to us every bit as much as it applied to those present with Him in the upper room. It is a command given to those who would be His disciples; His learners; His followers. Are you professing today to be a disciple of Jesus? If so then you must take heed and carefully execute the command of Christ as expressed in this verse. We must not tolerate pick and choose Christianity. Not only must we be wary of thinking we can choose whether or not to love one another; we must be even more wary of the thinking that we can pick and choose who among the brethren we will or will not love. Why is it that Jesus had to command those whom He would fill with His own Spirit to love one another? Because if left to ourselves, if determined by ourselves, we will reduce this command down to loving just a handful at best and perhaps no more than our immediate family at worse. We must be obedient to the command to love all the saints. It is interesting to note that Paul commends the church at Colosse because he had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and the love which they had for all the saints (Colossians 1:4). Could it be said of Hope CBC that we have a love, a visible, demonstrable love for all the saints among us?

How important is the subject of loving one another to the heart of Christ? It was important enough to communicate, to clarify and to command. But in addition to the importance of loving one another, let us consider our second point:

II. The intimacy of loving one another (13:34)

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 the use of the word “intimacy” I wish to expand upon the special and specific meaning of love as employed by our Savior in this verse. The word intimacy means “a close association with or detailed knowledge or deep understanding of something.” To “love one another” is the essence or epitome of intimacy. It implies that we have a growing care, concern, knowledge and understanding of one another. Jesus calls those who would be His disciples to the pursuit of really knowing and therefore truly serving one another. This is the idea behind Paul’s statement to the Philippians when he prayed in Philippians 1:9:

And this I pray, that your love [the love they had expressed toward Christ and toward Him] may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment [that their love may prove more and more intimate.

So then, how is it that we might pursue this intimate love that grows in real knowledge and discernment toward one another. Let us consider three things we can pull out of our text.

A. The practice of loving one another is continual

First, the practice of loving one another is **continual**. Jesus says by way of command that we “love one another.” The verb to love is in the present tense meaning that our practice of loving one another is to be a right now, in the present and continual action. Notice that Jesus does not say here that we are to love one another when we are together. Nor does He say that

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we are to love one another when it is convenient to us. No, Jesus simply says in effect, be always and continually in the practice of loving one another.

Now all this begs a question that we must answer. Just what does it mean to love. What are the implications of this verb to love? Jesus uses the Greek verb *agapao* from which we get the noun form of *agape*. I must confess that I have heard many sermons and even more definitions of what is *agape* love. I have also worked on and worked up many of my own descriptions of this love to which Jesus has called us to practice on one another. To practice *agape* has been defined by some as the practice of divine love. I have defined *agape* in the past in this manner – *it is a one-way, unconditional love that seeks the highest good for another regardless of the cost.* To be sure, God loved us sinners in such a manner. We did not love God, nor did we seek His highest good, but in Jesus Christ He has most assuredly done so for us. This is the love to which we have been called; a continual, 24/7 love of one another. And this leads us to the second consideration of intimate love:

B. The practice of loving one another is Church-concerned

Second, the practice of loving one another is to be **Church-concerned**. Again, note in our text that Jesus says we are ***“to love one another, even as I have loved you...”*** In other words, now that we are in Christ, we are called to love one another, and note from our text, even as Christ has loved us – and how did He love us? With this one-way, unconditional love that seeks the highest good of another regardless of the cost. Beloved, this rubs against some of our preconceived ideas of evangelism and outreach. Jesus moves His disciples beyond the second great commandment to love one’s neighbor as themselves; He moves them beyond the zealous quest of seeing sinners won over by the love of God. That is not what Jesus is talking about here, as important as that is. Here the concern is on what A.W. Pink has called, “the unselfish seeking of the good of the saints, as such in lowliness of mind.” In effect, Jesus is saying to His disciples and to us: Love had now been manifested; love has been personified, as never before. I have displayed a love superior to the faults of its objects, a love which never varied, a love which deemed no sacrifice too great. Now therefore, love another in this manner. In the life and example of Jesus, love has now been explained with new clearness, enforced by new motives and obligations, illustrated by a new example, and must be obeyed in a new manner.

When considered this way, it becomes apparent that such a love cannot be practiced for just a few hours on Sunday; or for a couple of hours mid-week. It means to be mindful, prayerful, and seeking opportunities to serve others of the fellowship whenever and however we can. The love to which believers have been called is a 24/7 kind of love – a continual and constant love of the brethren. Why is this important? Because if we do not live out a visible love of the brethren, our evangelism will be weak and it will fail. Why would a broken person want to belong to something that was itself broken. To be sure, we are not perfect, but we are being perfected in and by the love of Christ in us as we live out with the brethren. This is the argument of John in 1 John 2:4-11

4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he

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abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. 7 Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard. 8 On the other hand, I am writing a new commandment to you, which is true in Him and in you, because the darkness is passing away and the true Light is already shining. 9 The one who says he is in the Light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now. 10 The one who loves his brother abides in the Light and there is no cause for stumbling in him. 11 But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

C. The practice of loving one another is to be Christ-centered

Third, the final practice of loving one another from our text is that it is to be Christ-centered. We have touched on this a bit already so I will not spend too much time, but Jesus said, **“even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”** What makes the commandment new and fresh is that never before in the history of humanity had such an intimate love been lived out. We know that generally speaking, those who grow up in truly loving families will tend to have truly loving families themselves when they grow up. And often, without any positive input, those who grow up in dysfunctional families will tend to have dysfunctional families themselves. Why? Because it is learned behavior; learned by imitation. Beloved, we are to imitate Christ. We are to practice the love of Christ. The same love – imagine this – the same love with which Jesus loved us, we are to practice now on one another. Even as Paul would express it in Ephesians 5:1-2 saying

1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; 2 and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.

Beloved, we are to love one another in the same manner and to the same extent as Christ loved us on the cross. Our love therefore must be Christ-centered.

III. The illustration of loving one another (13:35)

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Our love for one another, as expressed in the body of Christ, is to identify us – not simply to one another – but specifically to the world, as followers of Jesus. We are to be the living illustration of the love of God toward those who believe to the watching world. And so, even as Jesus revealed His love to “His own” – to His disciples and to use by being our sacrificial savior, our substitute who bore our punishment on the cross; we must, by visible, sacrificial and continual expressions of love for one another, reveal ourselves, show ourselves, indeed prove ourselves to be followers of Christ. A.W. Pink put it this way:

“Love is the badge of Christian discipleship. It is not knowledge, nor orthodoxy, nor fleshly activities, but (supremely) love which identifies a follower of the Lord Jesus. As the disciples of the Pharisees were known by their phylacteries, as the disciples of John were known by their

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baptism, and every school by its particular shibboleth, so the mark of a true Christian is love; and that, a genuine, active love, not in words but in deeds.”

We are to be known by Christ's love for one another. For what are you known for? Beloved, there are a number of things for which we might be known and to be sure many of them may be good and decent. But for what are you known? Are you the financial man; or the organizational person, or the good student, or the industrious housewife? You might be known to be kind, sympathetic, wise or generous. But we fail, we fail in exalting Christ and we fail in testifying to the world that we belong to Christ, that we are indeed His own, if we are not known by the world as “the one who truly loves the saints?” When Jesus says that “by this all men will know that you are My disciples...” He is not asking the church to identify us as lovers of the saints, but rather He is saying that our love must be so visible, so tangible, so real that even unbelievers would say – “that one loves the saints.”

Now listen carefully. In John 13:35, it is as if Jesus has given the world, the unbelieving world, your unbelieving family members, your unbelieving neighbors, your unbelieving co-workers and friends; the right to judge whether or not you are a Christian based solely upon the manifestation of love that Christian exhibits toward other Christians. In the words of Francis Schaeffer, “That's pretty frightening!” Schaeffer goes on to say, “In other words, if people com up to us and cast into our teeth the judgment that we are not Christians because we have not shown love toward other Christians, we must understand that they are only exercising a prerogative which Jesus gave them.” What would the unbelievers in your life say about such things?

Soli Deo Gloria

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