

# A New Command

by Rev. John C. Cheek



## Scripture: John 13:31-35 (NIV)

<sup>31</sup> When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. <sup>32</sup> If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

<sup>33</sup> "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

<sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

*The grass withers and the flower fades,  
but the Word of God endures forever.*

## SERMON – A New Command

### Introduction

John's gospel emphasizes:

- The work and power of the Holy Spirit.
- The relationship among God, Jesus, and the community of faith.
- The nature and power of love.

The teaching of Jesus we're looking at today takes place in the context of the Passover meal which we often refer to as the Last Supper. In chapter 13, the things that precede today's text are:

- John tells us that the devil had already put in the heart of Judas Iscariot a plan to betray Jesus.
- They have reclined at the table [description of how the benches would have been placed and of how they would have reclined on them].
- Jesus has washed the disciples' feet.
- Jesus announces that he will be betrayed by one of them.
- The disciples are mystified about who he's talking about.
- Jesus tells Judas, "What you are going to do, do quickly."
- Judas leaves the meal, and it was night. John here uses the image of light and darkness to symbolize the spiritual darkness that, according to the scholar Dale Bruner, begins with the betrayal and lifts with the discovery of the empty tomb on the third day.

### Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that we may approach it.

We pray that your Holy Spirit will be here moving among us,  
moving within us, and teaching us what you have for us today.

We pray in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen.

### The Text

(v. 31a) When he [Judas] was gone, Jesus said,

(v. 31b) "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him.

(v. 32) If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the son in himself, and will glorify him at once." *[Jesus speaks here as though the coming events, the crucifixion, the burial in the tomb, and the resurrection, has already occurred. I believe that this is Jesus' way of communicating that those events are so certain, and the outcome so set, that it is a completed reality even at the beginning. Further, Jesus is saying that these coming events will show the magnitude of God's love and of Jesus' obedience, thus honoring and glorifying them both.]*

(v. 33a) "My little children, I will only be with you a little longer.

(v. 33b) You will look for me,

(v. 33c) And just as I told the Jews *[referring to the Jewish leadership based in Jerusalem]*, so I tell you.

(v. 33d) Where I am going, you cannot come." *[The work of Jesus, giving himself as a sacrifice for our sins, is a work which we cannot do. Jesus alone is capable of defeating the eternal power of sin. Jesus alone is able to destroy the eternal power of death in his resurrection.]*

(v. 34a) "A new command I give you. *[At this point I envision the disciples looking at one another and wondering, "Wait, a new command? What's it about? Is it about foods to eat or avoid? Is it about where we can go and who we can see? Somebody ought to write this down"]*

(v. 34b) Love one another. *["That's it? Love one another? Easy peasy. Nothing to it." But then Jesus goes on.]*

(v. 34c) As I have loved you, so you must love one another. *[Well, that makes it harder, doesn't it? Considering what Jesus has done, and what Jesus is about to do, all of a sudden this new command looks a lot more daunting, doesn't it? And then Jesus says the most audacious thing of all.]*

(v. 35) By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." *[Does it take your breath away? Do you get it? Jesus doesn't say that the world will know that we are following him by getting our doctrine right, or by praying enough or worshipping in some particular way or by our generosity or by anything else. The sign to the world that we are Jesus' disciples is that we love one another. That's how important real love is.]*

### **What shall we take away from this?**

I have always both cherished and grappled with this text. Jesus is at the end of his earthly ministry. He has a limited amount of time to teach his followers the things that they will need to know. And so, he tells them to love one another, to love one another selflessly and sacrificially, and that their love will be the sign to the world that they are faithfully following him. So, what does that love look like?

In the seventy years I've lived on this planet, one of the things I've learned is that there are people who are very easy to love and people who are, for one reason or another, very hard to love. Wouldn't it have been great if Jesus had been just a little more specific and told us to love those people who are easy to love? But that isn't what he did.

We are to love all one another, not just some. And we're to love them selflessly and sacrificially and unconditionally, because that's the way Jesus has loved us. So, let's start.

What does it look like to love those who are easy to love? We care about their dignity, which is an important issue for me. We assume the best of them, not the worst. We care about their circumstances, whether they're safe, whether they're secure. We care about their hearts, whether they're sad or happy. We commit to being with them, regardless of the circumstances. They don't have to be happy or positive or upbeat for us to remain in relationship with them. If there are problems between us and them, we work to bring about reconciliation, coming from a place of humility and grace. And it's not too hard, is it?

But what about those people who are hard to love? And I know it's not us who are hard to love, it's those other people. And concerning us and them, Jesus tells us that we are to love them

selflessly and sacrificially and unconditionally, because that's the way he has loved us. And so what does that look like? And this may sound a little bit familiar.

We care about their dignity. We assume the best of them, not the worst. We care about their circumstances, whether they're safe, whether they're secure. We care about their hearts, whether they're sad or happy. We commit to being with them, regardless of the circumstances. They don't have to be happy or positive or upbeat for us to remain in relationship with them. If there are problems between us and them, we work to bring about reconciliation, coming from a place of humility and grace. And all of a sudden, it sounds a lot harder, doesn't it? So, why should we work that hard at loving them.

Sisters and brothers, here's my answer to that question. God loves us. God doesn't love us only some of the time. God doesn't love us only on our best days. God doesn't love us the bare minimum. No! God has loved us, continues to love us, and will always love us. And that love is extravagant! And our only possible faithful response is to love others, the easy to love and the hard to love, extravagantly. And as we do that, as the world sees us not following the pattern of loving our tribe and hating the other tribe, as the world sees us loving one another across preferences and ideologies and principles, they get just a glimpse of the love that God has for us and for them. Will you be a part of it? Will you seek to love not only those who love you back, but also the ones who are so difficult to love? Will you work, every day, to show by your love that you are indeed a follower of Jesus? May it be so.

Amen

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