

33. Learning to Love One Another as Christ Has Loved Us

In our last topic, we saw that one of the ways we show the love of Christ is by learning to wash the feet of one another. We saw that it is possible to talk about serving others and even teach others the importance of serving others. However, we saw that our words will mean little or nothing until we begin to regularly demonstrate our love by our actions as we serve others even when it means doing something like washing the dirty, smelly feet of others. Love is shown by action and not just by words. That will be our focus today as we look at the new commandment.

Later that night, after Christ had washed the feet of the disciples, He said, in John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” Over the past thirty topics, we have seen many things that we are commanded to do in our relationship with one another as Christians. Some were only mentioned once. Others were mentioned three or four times. However, we see that the commandment to love one another is repeated more than a dozen times in the New Testament. Christ wanted to make sure that every Christian understands that our greatest witness to the world as Christians is our love for one another.

Christ summarized the entire Old Testament as He talked to the Pharisees one day after He had silenced the Sadducees. One of the Pharisees that was also a lawyer asked Christ to name the great commandment in the law. The answer of Christ is found in Matthew 22:37-40 which says, “Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.” Christ told the lawyer that the entire Old Testament was summarized by the command to love God and love your neighbor. Later, Christ defined a neighbor as any person in need.

Here, we see that as Christ ate the Last Supper with His disciples, He summarized the entire New Testament with one commandment. We see that command is to love one another as Christians with the same love with which Christ has loved us. This is a much greater love than the way we are to love our neighbor. We are to love our neighbor (every person) as much as we love ourselves. However, we are to love other Christians with the same love that Christ showed to us by His crucifixion and death to pay the penalty for our sin. That means that we are to show our physical and spiritual children by our personal example what it means to die to self so that we love other Christians in the same way that Christ loved us.

Christ knew that it was impossible for us to love other Christians like that in our own strength. As a result, He told the disciples later that same evening in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” He said that it is impossible to love others as Christ loves us in our own strength. In our own strength, we will accomplish nothing. Christ said it is only possible to bear fruit by loving others as we abide in Christ. Then, Christ gave a very vivid illustration of what it means to abide in Christ. The next time you want to bear fruit without Christ, go cut a branch off a fruit tree and

see how long you have to wait for the green fruit on that branch to ripen. That is how long it will take you to bear fruit in your own strength in your spiritual life.

Christ repeated the command to love one another at least two more times as He talked to the disciples the night before His crucifixion. John 15:11-12 says, “These things I have spoken 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.” In these verses, we see that Christ says to love one another so that our joy may be full. Many Christians never experience a life full of joy because they fail to obey the command to love one another as Christ has loved us. We see why we experience that full joy in 1 John 3:14 where we read, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.” Loving other Christians as Christ loved us gives us that peace and assurance that comes from knowing that we have passed from death to life. That joy is the result of the fact that we know we have a right relationship with Christ because we love the brethren.

Then, John 15:13-15 helps us to understand this love more fully. Those verses say, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you.” Christ said that a person shows this love by laying down his life for his friends. Christ modeled that statement the next day as He went to the cross and laid down His life for us.

However, there is another key example of that love in these verses. Christ elevated the disciples from servants to friends. He said that this meant that He shared with the disciples (and us through the Word of God) all things that He had heard from the Father. The day of His resurrection, Christ told the disciples that they had become full partners with Him in ministry. In John 20:17, Christ called the disciples brethren. Then, in John 20:21, Christ said, “So Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you.’” In this verse, we see that Christ elevated the disciples to full partners in ministry. True love shows humility and helps people grow to full partners in the ministry of the Lord instead of trying to lord it over others.

John 15:16-17 includes this command again as those verses say, “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, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you. These things I command you, that you love one another.” Galatians 5:22-23 tells us that the Holy Spirit produces the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Those verses say, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.” The Holy Spirit produces that fruit in our lives as we walk in the Spirit (5:16) and are led by the Spirit (5:18).

However, Romans 1:13-16 tell us that there is another kind of fruit that Christ produces in our lives as we are obedient to Him. Romans 1:13-16 says, “Now I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you (but was hindered until now), that I might have some fruit among you also, just as among the other Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to

barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” In these verses, we see that we produce fruit that remains as we share the Gospel with others and lead them to Christ. In fact, we have a debt of love because of the love that Christ showed us on the cross. We share that love with others as we explain the Gospel to them.

1 Peter 4:8 says, “And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.” Here, we see how we practice this love in our relationships to one another as Christians. True Christian love will cover sin. That means that we will forgive others and not hold past sins against them because Christ forgave us and does not hold our past sins against us. That also means we will not gossip about the sins that others have committed. Instead, we will talk to the Lord by praying for that person instead of talking to others and creating additional conflict.

We also see how we learn to practice this love in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 where we read, “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” Here, we see that God teaches us to show this kind of love. He gave us a great example of how to practice that love when He sent His Son. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Here, we see that God showed us how to practice that love by giving His only begotten Son so that we could receive eternal life. This love will increase more and more in our lives as we follow that example and learn to sacrifice our own desires for the spiritual benefit of others.

Finally, we see that our love is actually a response to the love of God for us. 1 John 4:10-12 says, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.” In these verses, we see that as we grow in our understanding of the fact that the Father was fully satisfied with the payment that Christ made for our sin, His love grows to maturity in our lives. 1 John 4:18 then says, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” When Adam sinned, he said that he was afraid and hid himself because he was naked. As a result, all people became driven by fear, guilt and shame. As the love of Christ grows to maturity in our lives, we become led by love and lead others in love. May the Lord richly bless you as you lead your physical and spiritual children in love instead of driving them with fear.