

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
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LOVING ONE ANOTHER

John 13:31-35

INTRODUCTION TO SCRIPTURE READING

We have been talking about matters of the heart the last few weeks. Two weeks ago, I spoke about the importance of guarding your heart, because it is the wellspring out of which all of life flows (Proverbs 4:23). Last Sunday I talked about the call to give your heart in love – to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength, and to love others as you love yourself. I pointed out that the Bible says that loving God and loving others go together. If you say you love God but you don't love people, your claim to love God is a lie. To love God with your whole self and to love your neighbor – to love others – the way God loves you is what life is really about.

Today I want to look with you at the command Jesus gave to His disciples in John 13 to “love one another.” The setting for this passage is the Upper Room. It takes place after Jesus had eaten the last supper with His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. The other Gospel writers – Matthew, Mark and Luke – all describe the institution of the Lord's Supper by Jesus that night. John does not. However, at the beginning of John 13, John tells of Jesus washing the feet of His disciples as an example to them of the way they are to serve one another in His name (John 13:1-17).

We begin reading at John 13:31, after Jesus has told the disciples that one of *them*, one of the twelve disciples, would betray Him to the religious authorities. Jesus knew which of them it was. He knew it was Judas. But Jesus did not panic. He never panicked.

Let's look together at God's Word as we read John 13:31-35. Hear the Word of God.

WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

I don't know if it is possible for me to say anything about love that you don't already know or haven't heard before. I don't know that I can say anything *new* about the “new commandment” Jesus gave to His disciples, the commandment in John 13:34 to “love one another.” My goal today is not necessarily to teach you something you don't already know. My goal is to remind you of what you do know, to enlarge and deepen your understanding of what it means to love one another, and to inspire you to live out this love in your life as a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To make sure His disciples got it, Jesus repeated this new commandment in John 15. First, in verse 9, He said: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.” Then in verses 12 and 13, He said: “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Which is what Jesus was about to do, not only for those who followed Him and believed in Him during

His earthly life, but for us, and for all who throughout history have put their hope and trust in Him.

The command to love one another is also one of the central themes of the letter of 1 John near the end of the New Testament. Again and again, John reminds us of the primary importance of loving one another. For example, in 1 John 4, after speaking of the way God showed His love for us by sending His Son into the world to give His life as a sacrifice for us (4:9-10), he says in verse 11: “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.” Because we are the objects of God’s love, because He first loved us (4:19), we are to love one another.

Here is a sampling of what the Bible says in some other places about loving each other:

Romans 12:10: “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” To be *devoted* to someone or something involves more than a casual commitment. It is not sporadic or shallow. Our devotion to one another in love is to be deep and consistent and persevering.

Romans 13:8: “Let not debt remain outstanding (in your life), except the continuing debt to love one another.” In *The Message*, this verse says: “Don’t run up debts, except for the huge debt of love you owe each other. When you love others, you complete what the law has been after all along.” Love, as Paul says in verse 10, is the fulfillment of the law.

Being in debt is not a good thing, especially if you’re in debt over your head. It is not good for an individual. It is not good for a family. It is not good for a government. But the debt of love we owe to God and then to others is something we can never repay.

Ephesians 5:1-2: “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children (which is what we are!), and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” In *The Message*, it says: “Keep company with (God) and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn’t love in order to get something from us but to give everything of Himself to us. Love like that.”

Love like that. Love one another as Jesus loved you.

1 Peter 1:22: “Love one another deeply, from the heart.” Peter says it again in 1 Peter 4:8: “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.” Isn’t that a good thing to remember? Love promotes forgiveness. And forgiveness is something everybody needs.

Love one another deeply. From the heart. Just like Jesus. What the Bible says is pretty clear, isn’t it? Love for one another is not an optional add-on to our lives. It is the central core value of the Christian life. You cannot be a follower of Christ without it.

WHAT'S NEW ABOUT THE NEW COMMANDMENT?

Someone may ask: “Why did Jesus call the commandment He gave to His disciples a ‘new’ commandment? What is new about it?”

In one sense, there was nothing new about it. The command to love others went back to the Old Testament, as we saw last Sunday, to Leviticus 19:18 and the imperative to love your neighbor as you love yourself. But Jesus gave it a new, enhanced, enlarged meaning. The disciples were to love the way Jesus loved them. We are to love one another the way Jesus loved us. And loves us, still. His love – sacrificial love, suffering love, self-giving love, love that took Him to the cross – is the kind of love He wants to characterize our love for one another. It is not just that we are to love each other. We are to love *as Jesus loved us*.

Notice that Jesus did not say to His disciples: “I’ve got a new idea for you.” He didn’t say: “Here is a new suggestion for you.” He didn’t say: “Here is a new possibility for you to consider.” Or: “Listen to this new church growth program I’ve come up with.”

That is not what Jesus said. He said: “A new commandment I give you.” It is a directive from our Commander-in-Chief to live out the love of Jesus in our relationships in our marriages, our families, our church, and beyond. His love for us is to be the pattern of our love for one another. And His love for us never gets old.

OUR WITNESS TO THE WORLD

Another thing to notice is what Jesus says in verse 35. He says there that our love for each other will be our greatest witness to the world of the genuineness of our faith in Him. The main evidence that we belong to Christ, the main evidence that we are growing in His grace and character, is the quality and measure of our love for one another.

You may be familiar with William Barclay’s Bible commentaries. His theology cannot always be trusted, but sometimes he has good insights, and I think he is right on this point. He said that more people have been drawn into the faith and fellowship of the church by the kindness of real Christian love than by all the theological arguments in the world. And more people have been driven from the church by the hardness and ugliness of “so-called Christianity” than by all the doubts in the world.

It is not that theology is irrelevant, or that matters of doctrine are unimportant. That is not the case. Orthodoxy – right belief – matters. Don’t leave here today thinking it doesn’t really matter what you believe. It *does* matter what you believe. But Jesus Himself said that the way the world will know that we are His followers is by the love we show to one another. You can have all your theological ducks lined up in a row. You can make sure all your doctrinal i’s are dotted and all your t’s are crossed. You can believe all the right things. But if you neglect or refuse or otherwise fail to love one another as Jesus loved you, Jesus said that the world outside the church will conclude that your faith is phony. Or, maybe they will say: “If that is what Christians are like, I don’t want to be one.”

This is how people will know that we are Jesus' followers – by the love we have for each other.

Art Simon, the founder and long-time head of the Christian organization Bread for the World, has never forgotten what his father, who grew up on a farm in Wisconsin, taught him. His father said that even the cows should know you are a Christian by the way you treat them. If even the cows can tell, there is no question that the way we treat other people should bear witness to the love of Christ in our lives.

Our faith in Christ is proved genuine or fake by our love. Love is the test by which people will judge us.

NO HYPOCRISY IN LOVE

Notice this, too: There is no hypocrisy in love. Romans 12:9 says: "Love must be sincere." In the English Standard Version (ESV) it says: "Let love be genuine." Literally, what Paul says is: "Let love be *without hypocrisy*."

We all know what hypocrisy is. And we know it when we see it. Hypocrites pretend to be something they are not. They work hard to project an image on the outside, but the reality on the inside is a far different matter. Or, they will try to hide their flaws by drawing attention to the flaws or failings of others. Their goal is to look good and to receive praise from others. The three things a hypocrite is most concerned about are I, me, and my.

There is no place for hypocrisy in love. There was no hypocrisy or phoniness in the love of Jesus for us. And there is to be no hypocrisy, no pretending to be something we are not, no posturing for the praise of others, in our love for one another.

I like to look at bumper stickers when I'm out driving. Sometimes they make me chuckle. Sometimes they make me think. Sometimes I have other reactions, too. Some people use bumper stickers as a witnessing tool. This can be good or not so good. If you have a bumper sticker which says: "JESUS LOVES YOU AND SO DO I!" but then you lose your cool and angrily shake your fist at another driver, or you try to cut someone off because you don't like the way a particular driver is driving, or you're just plain frustrated and you take it out on other drivers, what does it say about the love your bumper sticker announces?

Let your love be without hypocrisy. Don't just talk the talk. You've got to walk the walk. Or, drive the drive.

Which leads to the last thing.

WHAT LOVE DOES

Love has to go beyond words and warm feelings. It is something you do. The word "love" is a verb. It is an action verb.

Ask yourself this: If we are supposed to love one another as Jesus loved us, how did Jesus love?

The answer: He showed His love by what He did. He showed His love in His actions. He didn't just talk about love. He incarnated love. He embodied love. Everything He did was motivated by love and infused with love. His suffering and death on the cross were expressions of love.

To love one another as Jesus loved us means that we've got to put our love into action. How do we do that? What does love do?

Love cares for the needs of others. Love helps a neighbor who is in a jam. Love takes a meal to a shut-in or runs errands for someone who isn't able to drive. Love doesn't just do random acts of kindness whenever the spirit moves (as God-blessed as they are). Love performs intentional acts of kindness as part of a lifestyle of love. Love treats all persons with respect and dignity, but shows special regard for seniors, children and people with disabilities. Love takes the time to help out a single mother by doing maintenance or repairs on her car. Love helps out in the church nursery, or in some other ministry in the church. Love contributes generously to ministries helping the hungry, the sick, the poor, and homeless. Love reaches out to the person who is lonely or hurting, and takes time to listen. Sometimes just listening can be a powerful act of love.

Listen to what the Bible says in 1 John 3:16-18 about *doing* love: "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 one another. If any of you has material possessions and sees your brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue (as if that would be enough) but with actions and in truth."

Love is something you do. But what do you do when you find someone who is hard to love? Or maybe you feel like you're surrounded by someones who are hard to love?

It is true: Not everyone is easy to love. Not everyone in our families is easy to love. Not everybody we work with, or go to school with, is easy to love. And not everybody in the church is easy to love. Not every Christian, not every person who has been saved by the blood of Jesus, who has come to faith in Christ and become part of Christ's church, is easy to love.

That is just a fact of life. And it is just as true here at Faith as it is in every church. We are all imperfect people. We all have our own flaws and idiosyncrasies. Sooner or later, you're going to discover something you don't like about every single person you get to know in the church. There is no getting around it.

So, the question becomes: When it happens, when somebody in the church gets under your skin, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to stop loving? Refuse to love? Avoid the person(s) you don't like? Become an adversary or a critic? Gossip about the person(s) behind their back?

Is that what Jesus would do? Is that what Jesus wants you or us to do? I don't think so.

CONCLUSION

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (John 13:34).

My friends, there is a lot of love in this church. I thank God for it. I thank God for you. I thank God for the love I have received personally and the love I have seen. But just think of the redemptive impact, the revolutionary impact, there could be in our lives and relationships, and in our witness to the world of the Savior's love, if we were to love one another as Jesus loved us.

Lord, let it be so. Amen.