

Love One Another

DISCIPLESHIP: PART 4 • JOHN 13:34-35

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Madison, Wisconsin
October 27, 2019



Over the past several weeks, we have been looking together at what it means to be disciples of Jesus Christ. We started by looking at some of the Lord's last words before he ascended back into heaven, and we learned that as we go out into the world, we are to make disciples by 1.) baptizing and 2.) by teaching. We looked at the word "*disciple*," and we learned that it refers to being a learner, and so we are to make people learners of Jesus; we are to make people students or followers of Jesus. We learned that the word "disciple" is found more than 260 times in the New Testament. But, before we go making disciples, we need to know exactly what it means to be a disciple. And so, over a period of several weeks, we are looking at five passages where the word is used, and we are looking at these five passages in chronological order.

We started with the passage in Matthew 10 where Jesus explains that when we as his disciples SUBMIT to his will, and when we IMITATE his way of life, we will be PERSECUTED. So, there is something of a warning here: We need to be prepared for at least some level of opposition.

The following week, we looked at two verses in John 8 where we learned that true disciples will CONTINUE in Jesus' word, leading to FREEDOM from sin. It is important that we do not go beyond the scriptures, but that we use the word of God as our guide, as our manual.

Last week, we looked at a passage in Luke 14 where Jesus warns a large crowd of potential disciples that they must first COUNT THE COST. He uses a number of word pictures to emphasize how important it is to go into this decision well-informed. As disciples, Jesus must always come first (even above our own families), we must take up our cross and follow him, like the builder we are to stick with it to the end, like the warrior king who is outnumbered we are to surrender everything to him, and like salt, we must always remain pure. These are things we need to understand as we contemplate making the decision to become disciples of Jesus.

This morning, we continue with another very important passage on discipleship, two verses in John 13 - John 13:34-35 (p. 1684). In John 13, we have now come to the night before Jesus' crucifixion. They are in the Upper Room, they have had the Passover meal, Jesus has washed the apostles' feet, and when we get to verses 34-35, Judas has just left the room. He is on his way to make the deal to betray Jesus later that evening for thirty pieces of silver. So, we are right near the end, and right near the end of his life, Jesus gives a command. In fact,

it has been described as the “Greatest Command,” the one thing Jesus desperately wants his disciples to understand. If you will, please look with me very carefully at John 13:34-35,

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.”

To give just a preview of where we’re going with this passage today, I want us to notice the COMMAND itself, I want us to think about what makes it a NEW command, and then I want us to close by noticing WHAT JESUS EXPECTS TO HAPPEN when we obey this command.

I. First of all, though, let’s notice the COMMAND itself, and the command is LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

If we look at the context, if we look at what is happening here, it seems that it all boils down to this. Out of everything Jesus has said over the past 3-1/2 years, this is perhaps the most important. There is so much we could say here, but we probably need to start by defining what “**LOVE**” actually is. As I understand it, the word Jesus uses here refers to the idea of considering the needs of others ahead of our own, doing what needs to be done, even if it requires some level of sacrifice on our part.

And this leads us to a closely related observation, and that is, this love has actually been COMMANDED. This isn’t a suggestion, or good idea, or something we should probably think about doing, but this is a COMMAND. And I don’t know whether you noticed this yet, but it is repeated three times in only two verses. Three times we are told to “**love one another.**” It’s repeated sixteen times throughout the New Testament. And there’s a reason for this being commanded. Often, we think of love as an emotion. We think of love as something enjoyable, a good feeling. And that might be a part of this, but not always. That’s why Jesus has to COMMAND it - if it were always fun, Jesus would not have had to tell us to do this! Nobody has to order me to eat a brownie. Nobody needs to command me to go down to UW SWAP every Friday morning. Nobody needs to demand that I eat bacon. Because I already love doing these things! But, the kind of love Jesus talks about here sometimes does need to be commanded. And the reason is: Sometimes the kind of love we are talking about here is quite difficult. This kind of love is a sacrifice. To love in this way, we might need to set aside feelings, we might need to do something uncomfortable, we might need to do something we don’t enjoy doing, we might need to express this kind of love to somebody we don’t even LIKE! By the way, this happens in marriage sometimes, doesn’t it? I might need to do something that I don’t like to do, simply because I have made a promise to LOVE this other person. But the point is: The love Jesus commands here is commanded. It’s not a feeling; it’s an action. In this context, love is doing what somebody else needs to have done, when they are perhaps completely unable to do it for themselves. So, what is true in a relationship like marriage, might also be true with our brothers and sisters in Christ. I might need to love you, even when I am annoyed with you, even when you are not really loveable. Love is commanded.

I would make another observation here, and that is: Love is PRACTICAL; love is an ACTION. We think of what John would go on to write in 1 John 3:17-18, “**But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.**” Love often means that we do something. Love is practical. Love is sending a box of cookies to a college student. Love is letting somebody at church have your car for a few weeks while theirs is in the shop. Love is dropping off a pan of lasagna after surgery. Love is cleaning somebody’s bathroom while they’re in the hospital. Love is washing a sink full of dishes when everybody in

the family has the flu. Love is personally covering a power bill when a fellow Christian is looking for work. Love is stopping by to chop ice off of a driveway at 4 a.m. before a grieving family gets up to go to work the day after the funeral. Love is taking time to affirm a relationship with a brother or sister, even when we don't really have the time. Love is showing up - at a funeral, at a game, at the hospital, at the airport. Love is mailing a card, making a call, sending a message. Love is practical. But we need to go looking for these opportunities. Again, this is a command. We don't wait for opportunities to drop into our lives, we don't just assume that somebody else will take care of some issue, we don't just think about ourselves, but we actively look for ways to serve, for ways to love, for ways to do whatever needs to be done.

And the people who need our love are right here in this room. We are to love **"one another."** Yes, we must also love our enemies. Yes, we must also love our neighbors. But here, Jesus demands that we love **"one another."**

II. **As we go back to our text, however, there is another significant part of this, and it comes with Jesus' statement that this is a NEW commandment.**

What is it that makes this **"new"**? After all, the command to **"love"** goes all the way back to the Law of Moses. In fact, at one point (in Matthew 22:36), a lawyer had challenged Jesus, asking him, **"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"** And Jesus responds and says to him, **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."** **"This is the great and foremost commandment,"** Jesus says. And then he continues by saying that the second is like it, **"You shall love your neighbor as yourself,"** a direct quote from Leviticus 19:18. And so the command to love was not actually new at all. What, then, did Jesus mean when he gave his disciples this **"new commandment"**?

It seems we have the answer when we go back and look again at what the Lord actually says in verse 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."** It seems, then, that the **"new"** part of this is the standard, the example that is given. The new part of this is that we are to love each other just as Jesus has loved us. And that is what brings this to an entirely new level. We are to love, not just "as we would love ourselves" (as the Law of Moses required), but we are to love each other just as the Lord has loved us. In other words, we are to love each other MORE than we love ourselves. We are to love each other with a self-sacrificing kind of love. We are to love each other just as he loved us. And this is **"new."** Never before had the Son of God come into the world to offer himself as a sacrifice for all people, even for his enemies, even for a betrayer like Judas who had just left the room moments earlier. This commandment is new in Jesus. Decades later, John would write again, thinking back to this night, and he would go on to explain (in 1 John 2:7-8),

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.

And so, the command to love was an old commandment, but it was new in Jesus. In Jesus, the old command had a new urgency to it. In Jesus, the old command had a fresh application to it. Because, in Jesus, we see this commandment demonstrated in a way that had never been seen before - loving, not just as we love ourselves, but loving even MORE than we love ourselves.

And Jesus demonstrates this love over and over again, including just a few verses earlier in this chapter. At the beginning of John 13 is where we have Jesus washing the apostles' feet, including the feet of Judas! Here they are (when we put this in chronological order), arguing about who is the greatest, and as they are arguing, Jesus picks up a towel, wraps it around his waist, pours some water into a basin, and he starts washing the disciples' feet. He demonstrates that love is not about who is the most important, but love is doing whatever needs to be done, with no real regard for my own needs or feelings. Real love sacrifices, as Jesus will go on to do the very next day. Later that night, in fact, Jesus speaks of love again (over in John 15:12-13), where he says, ***"This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."*** And that is exactly what Jesus did. He did for us what we could not do for ourselves, he did it at great personal expense, and he did it even before we could ask for it. He saw a need, and he filled it. In the same way, we also look for ways to do good. We don't wait to be asked, but we look for opportunities, and we do what needs to be done. It's not about us, it's not even really about the person we are helping, but it is all about Jesus. As his disciples, he has called us to love just as he loved. Just as he loved us, so also we ought to love one another.

III. As we come to the end of this passage, we notice why these two verses are included in our series on discipleship as we find that WHEN WE LOVE LIKE JESUS, WE PROVE TO THE WORLD AROUND US THAT WE ARE, IN FACT, DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST.

Our love proves our discipleship. For the most part, the world around us does not see what happens here in this building. They don't see us singing and praying. They don't see our family put a check in the basket. They don't see us studying the word of God. They don't see us taking the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. However, they do often see what we do to help each other. They see us bringing snacks to the local school. They see us dropping off food. They see us visiting in the hospital. They see how we live outside this building. They see us "being Jesus" to the world around us. When we love each other, that love proves to the world that we are who we say we are. Not that we need to go out there and brag about everything we're doing, but what we do is not secret. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus compared our good works to a city on a hill, to a light on a lampstand. We have the Lord's permission to be obvious, to teach by example, to let our light shine.

And this is something all of us can do. It doesn't matter how educated we are or how much money we make. Everybody has the ability to love. This isn't about winning arguments, but this is about being Jesus; doing what he would do; loving like he would love - caring, loving, helping, forgiving - actions speak louder than words, and the world will notice - the members of our own families, co-workers, classmates, friends, and neighbors.

And what's amazing is that this is exactly what the early Christians did. They had very limited resources, but they took care of each other, and the world noticed. Just a few weeks after this, you might remember how Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost, 3,000 people were baptized, and right after that, the Bible tells us that,

⁴⁴ ...all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵ and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. ⁴⁶ Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, ⁴⁷ praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

The world could see that the early Christians cared for each other. Their love was obvious, and it made a difference. Their love for each other proved that they were truly disciples of Jesus Christ. In a sense, loving each other is something of a badge of discipleship. Our love is proof of who we really are.

Conclusion:

As we close, I want us to go back once again to the Great Commission, the last words spoken by Jesus after his resurrection and before his ascension back into heaven, ***“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and MAKE DISCIPLES of all the nations, BAPTIZING THEM in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, TEACHING THEM to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”*** As we close today, I want us to focus in on Jesus’ command to teach these new disciples to observe everything that he has commanded. Today, we have looked at the greatest of all of his commands, the command that we are to ***“love one another.”*** As we teach, we teach by doing; we demonstrate; we show the people around us what Christian living is all about. As we sometimes sing, “they will know we are Christians by our love.” And so, today, we are looking for ways to love. We are looking for ways to “be Jesus” to the world around us. We make disciples by teaching, and we teach by example.

Just a week or so ago, I mentioned the new church directory online. Most of you have access to that, but if you don’t, please get in touch with me or with Silas Morris, and we can help get you connected somehow. But what if we used that directory not only as a guide for prayer, but what if we used it as a way to do what Jesus is telling us to do here. Some of you pray through the bulletin. Some of you pray through the directory. What if we LOVE our way through the directory? What if we regularly go through name by name, looking for ways to get to know each other, looking for ways to serve, looking for ways to love each other, just as Jesus has loved us - sacrificially, without looking out for our own interests, but looking out for the interests of others? If you have other Christians in your family, what if we do this together - prayerfully asking God for opportunities to serve each member of the congregation. I’m hoping we can take Jesus’ words here to heart, that we will obey what he’s telling us to do here, and that we’ll be examples to the world around us, proving that we are his disciples.

If you are thinking about becoming a disciple, we would invite you to make that decision this morning. If you have any questions, get in touch at any time. But you need to know that in response to Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection, he demands that we turn from sin and that we allow ourselves to be buried with him in baptism for the forgiveness of our sins. If we can love you in some way, if we can serve you in some way, if we can help in some way with your obedience to the gospel, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

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