

**Sermon File # 445**

**Scripture text: John 13:34-35**

**Scripture reading: John 13:31-38**

**Sermon title: *A New Command for the New Year***

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## ***A New Command***

### **Introduction:**

Open your Bibles with me to John 13:31-38. Our primary focus will be on verses 34 and 35. On this first Sunday of the year we will divert from Matthew's Gospel, to which we will return next Sunday, as the Lord continues to lead.

Chapter 13 through 17 of John's Gospel feature the Upper Room Discourses, what James M Boice called the Holy of Holies of the Bible. In these chapters, Jesus bares his heart to his disciples as he washes their feet, shares his Last Supper with them, and teaches them about the blessed hope, the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit, and then gives the great High Priestly Prayer in chapter 17. This is followed by his arrest, trial and crucifixion. The final chapters are about his resurrection and his charge to his disciples to continue the work he began with them.

In chapter 13, after Jesus washes his disciples' feet, he predicts his betrayal by Judas Iscariot, who went out from the Upper Room to carry out his treacherous plan to betray Jesus. Follow as I now read Jesus' words to the remaining eleven disciples, as he speaks of his coming glory of the cross, and then gives Peter a

solemn warning about his denial. As we consider the words of Jesus to his disciples in the Upper Room, in the Holy of Holies of the Bible, we need to do so with great reverence and with a sense of the importance of these teachings. Surely those things Jesus shares in the shadow of the cross are of utmost importance to him and to us. This morning, on this first Sunday of the New Year, I want us to look specifically at verses 34 and 35. Follow as I read verses 31 through 38, focusing on....

### **John 13:34-35.**

It's human nature to love the new. From childhood we learn to enjoy the new, whether toys or new adventures with new friends. As adults, we enjoy our new and bigger toys, such as clothes and cars and houses, whenever possible. Perhaps during the past weeks you were given some new things as Christmas presents. Our family's greatest new gift has been our grandson, who was born 10 months ago and who has been our special guest this Christmas Season.

As with the arrival of our grandson, Aedric, the new sometimes represents a new beginning. Even with lesser gifts, such as a new car, the owner takes great pride, and at least for the first few months protects it from scratches and dents and follows maintenance guidelines assiduously. But as things get older we sometimes become careless (Hopefully not with a child!). In fact, after time the old becomes comfortable, like an old pair of shoes. Then we are reluctant to change to the new. Old routines, which have become comfortable, often lose their meaning and even important matters become mere "matter of fact." There is a saying that "familiarity breeds contempt." Also, routine can become meaningless ritual and our lives can easily get into a rut and become a "grind." This had happened to the religion of Israel.

Even the first disciples, the followers of Jesus, belonged to the traditional religion of Judaism that had lost its sense of excitement about the new. Leland Ryken and others speak of "the new" as one of the great themes of biblical revelation. God is always about doing new things, in his creation and especially in the New Covenant, that brings new life and the hope of the New Heaven and Earth (see "New" in *The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, et. al., IVP). After he warns about the betrayal by Judas, Jesus says he is giving his disciples, and us, a new command. When he said this command to love one another is new, no doubt the disciples wondered just how it was a new command. The Jews were taught from childhood the verses of Deuteronomy 6, the Shema, that they were to aver that the Lord God is one and that they were to love him with all the heart, soul and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4-5). They also knew they were to love their neighbors as oneself (Leviticus 19:18). These two formed what was known as the Great Commandment, which Jesus said is the most important in all of the law (Mark 12:29-31). But the disciples needed to be taught about the *newness* of the Great Commandment.

Even though the disciples knew about the Great Commandment to love God and one's neighbor, Jesus said this command he is now giving is a new one. His life and now his approaching suffering and death on the cross would demonstrate the depths of his love. And now, here in the Upper Room, Jesus tells them this love command is a new command.

I believe Jesus is saying that this love command to us his disciples is, first of all...

➤ **New in its involvement**

Jesus said, "A new command I give *you*."

- *The New Command involves us*

Now Jesus was talking with eleven and not twelve disciples. Judas had gone out to betray him (verse 30).

It's interesting that Judas was with the disciples in the Upper Room as Jesus washed their feet. He also was an object of Jesus' love, even though he was the son of perdition, destined to be lost. The fact that Jesus washed Judas' feet is evidence that outward acts of devotion do not save. Judas was a member of the disciples' band, but not a true brother, just as today there are church members whose hearts remain untouched by grace.

The New Command is not for unbelievers, who cannot know nor experience this love that is known only in grace. Even as recipients of grace and followers of Jesus, we cannot love to the extent that Jesus loved us, but we are given grace to respond with the same kind or quality of agape love with which he loved us. Agape love is unique to both God and his children—a practical, sacrificial involvement in meeting the needs of others, regardless of their deserving.

I read recently some comments by psychologists who say it is impossible to love unless one has received love. And, even church members who have not experienced the love of Jesus will be unable to obey the New Command. Followers of Jesus love God because, as John says in his first letter, God first loved us (1 John 4:19). We who are heaven-bound are aware we were purchased by the blood of Jesus. Grace enables us to experience grateful love and the desire to love God and one another.

I don't doubt the fact that unbelievers and adherents of non-Christian religion can be kind, gracious and loving people. In fact, some of these kind and gentle people are a rebuke to those of us in the Christian faith whose kindness and consideration seems to fall short of theirs. Yet those outside of Christ cannot know the depths of his love for us, nor can they have the motivation to love as

Christ loves. They cannot rise about a love that will always be confined and restricted to humanistic and even self-centered motives.

Unless you have been converted by grace through faith in Jesus, who died for your sins, you will not understand or appreciate the command to love as Jesus loved us.

Also...

- *The New Command involves one another*

What a comprehensive term, “one another.” No doubt, after walking with Jesus for three years these disciples would understand that “one another” would include...

✓ Neighbors

Jesus had taught the disciples that “neighbor” is a very inclusive term. The disciples had been taught by a religion that was bigoted and restrictive toward all non-religious outsiders. The Jews had a narrow definition of “neighbor” that was restricted to fellow Jews who agreed with them, looked like them and shared taboos and customs with them. But Jesus redefined for them the term “neighbor.” Simply put, neighbor is anyone God puts in our pathway who has a need we can help to meet.

You know Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. An expert in the Law came to Jesus to test him about the way to eternal life. Jesus turned the tables and asked him what his answer would be. The expert religionist said the way to eternal life would be to obey the Great Commandment to love God and love one’s neighbor as oneself. Jesus replied that if he could do that he would have eternal life. And Jesus knew no one could obey those commands apart from his grace. Evidently the “expert” knew that too. He, wishing to justify himself, and thinking he had been a good neighbor to his fellow Jews, asked Jesus who his neighbor was.

The leaders of the Jews had watered down the teaching of the Law of Moses to the extent they could love whom they wanted to and even justify hatred toward others in the name of religious zeal. Perhaps, thought this religious expert, Jesus would say his neighbor was his fellow Jew or fellow legalist. Instead, Jesus told the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

In the parable, the religious professionals (priest and Levite) failed to show love to their fellow Jew who had been beaten, robbed and left for dead on the road to Jericho. The one who showed love, mercy and compassion was a despised half-breed Samaritan who of all people had the “right” not to love a Jew. Jesus was saying through this parable that if the expert begins to love anyone he meets who

has a need, including his enemy, he has experienced the love of God and the grace of God.

God puts neighbors in our path everyday, including and exceeding those we call our next-door neighbors. Neighbors are all those that God places before us to love. We never know what “neighbors” God might place in our way. Nancy and I believe God has placed us in our neighborhood for us to love these dear people into the Kingdom. And God has given us some practical ways to show them love and concern in meeting some of their needs. Our prayer is that our witness and ministry to them will bear the fruit of conversion to faith in Christ.

God gives us “neighbors” in serendipitous ways. A witness relationship that God seems to be using began as a friendly exchange in my Dutch class two years ago. This young lady and single mother has become a friend of ours and has attended Alpha classes and worship here at IBC. She seems to have a growing understanding of the gospel. This all began the day she asked to borrow ten euros from me to pay for an inscription into the class. Neighbors are all around you, in our home, neighborhood, workplace and classroom. The New Command is a demand to love them, reaching out to them to meet needs.

The disciples also knew what Jesus had already said about loving even their...

#### ✓ Enemies

The Good Samaritan mentioned above gave evidence of saving grace through the way he loved his Jewish enemy (The enmity between Jews and Samaritans would not be unlike that between Orthodox Jews in Israel and Hamas Palestinians today). And Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, which we will consider in detail in this winter’s sermon series, gives an ethic that is possible only for those in the Kingdom of God. Nowhere is this more evident than in his command to his followers to love our enemies.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48).

Only those who are in the grace of the Lord Jesus can love their enemies, can actually desire their well being. I think of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, who while being stoned to death, prayed a prayer similar to that of Jesus’ prayer from the cross, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Once again I am reminded of the many who face persecution and martyrdom in our dangerous

world and the way they consistently ask prayer for their enemies (e.g. from reports from Open Doors, USA and The Barnabas Fund).

Loving our enemies is the most Christ-like thing we can do. Jesus loved us while we were sinners and also while we were his enemies (Luke 23:34; Romans 5:1-8). When we love our enemies, Peter makes clear in his first letter, we are acting like Jesus (1 Peter 2:13-25). The gospel is the story of God's so loving us he sent his unique and only Son to die for us (John 3:16). We are called to emulate that gospel love. And the grace that saved us while we were Christ's enemies is the same grace that enables us to love and pray for and do good to our enemies, who may be inside as well as outside the visible church (as Judas Iscariot was a member of Jesus' band of disciples).

The New Command involves also our...

✓ Brothers and sisters

When Jesus said we are to love one another, I think he was saying first and foremost we are to love our brother and sister in Christ. In fact, John seemed to understand, according to his first letter, that without true and sincere love for our fellow believer we fail one of the tests of assurance of our salvation:

"If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20).

The late Francis Schaeffer, great apologist for the evangelical faith and a true prophet of the church, said that this New Command gives disciples of Jesus the right to judge the church by the measure of its love. Jesus says in Matthew 7:15-23 that we have the right to inspect fruit, and if the main fruit of the Spirit, love, is missing, then the professing Christian is merely a fraud in the faith. If someone refuses to love the church, i.e. its people, then that individual is to be subjected to church discipline. This is exactly what Jesus was saying in Matthew 18:15-20.

The love for one another must begin in that part of the church closest to where we live—our own homes. How sad when Christians divorce on the pretext of "no longer being in love." We aren't married because we are in love. We love because we are married and have made a vow to God and one another to *do* love for one another. I counseled with a couple some years ago who were claiming the hopelessness of their continuing marriage because of "not being in love." When I got to the issue of their willingness to obey God I spoke of Jesus command to love, even our enemies. Even if you think of your spouse as your enemy, God can give you grace to do acts of love—practical, caring and sacrificial involvement in meeting the needs of the enemy in your own household.

Sometimes it is most difficult to love those who have been closest to us and yet have disappointed or deeply hurt us. Remember, Jesus is giving this New Command right before he warns Simon Peter that he will soon deny him three times. Jesus loved Simon even though he knew about his denial. And, after his resurrection, Jesus sought out Simon Peter to assure him of his forgiveness and to restore him to a ministry of showing his love for Jesus by feeding his sheep (John 21: 15-19).

Our willingness to forgive and to be forgiven and to be reconciled with our brother or sister is at the heart of the Christian life. The Christian life has to be lived in community and union with our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus. And yet, sometimes it's hardest to love those we call our fellow believers, especially if they have hurt us.

David lamented how his trusted close friend, with whom he had shared his bread, had lifted his heel against him (Psalm 41:9).

At times we can sympathize with the wag who said,

*To dwell above with saints we love,  
O, that will be glory!  
But to live below with those we know,  
Well, that's a different story!*

The New Command is comprehensive in its objects. It is new in its involvement of us, our neighbors, enemies and brothers and sisters. Also it is...

➤ **New in its intensity**

In our text Jesus is saying the New Command calls us to love with intensity...

- *As Jesus loved us*

When Jesus said his disciples were to love as he has loved us, he was saying something extreme and intense. As 19<sup>th</sup> Century British pastor/preacher FW Robertson said, these words of Jesus were to cost him his life. Jesus had been showing his disciples his perfect love, but nowhere had it been seen as it was soon to be seen—in the cross.

This is the heart of the gospel. This is the message of John 3:16, that God loved us so much that he gave his only Son to suffer and to die for us. Jeremiah says this love God has for us is an everlasting love (31:3). And he has loved his people since before the creation of the world itself, since he had chosen us in Christ (Ephesians 1:4). Only God could love his undeserving, helpless enemies (Romans 5:1-8).

In verses 31-33, Jesus spoke of his going where his disciples could not go. He could have been referring to his coming glory after his death and resurrection, when he would return to his throne of glory in heaven. But he was also speaking of the glory that he would reveal in the cross, with his shameful suffering and death. Here he would show dramatically and unmistakably his perfect love for us sinners. This is the glorious revelation of the cross that would provide for the salvation of all who will believe.

Jesus' love for us was intense but also practical. Our greatest need was for his gracious salvation. We were helpless and could not save ourselves. When Paul speaks of this salvation by grace through faith he reasons that we were dead in our transgressions and sins. What Jesus did for us on the cross is the most practical thing he could have done. His grace is what we so desperately need but could never deserve.

Jesus continues to love us in practical, gracious ways. But sometimes his love seems hidden and mysterious. Often we do not understand or easily see his love for us. But God is always good and merciful and loving toward all he has made (Psalm 145:13&17). Even though his ways are higher than ours and his thoughts than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9), we can and must trust his ways are designed for our good and for his glory (Romans 8:28). We must trust that he cares about our every need and burden, and that his grace will be sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Verse 33 reminds us that Jesus loves us, his children, as a perfectly loving and wise parent. Loving and wise parents know that love is not sentimental, and at times has to be what child psychologist James Dobson calls "tough love." Like a good parent, the heavenly Father takes the long look, and doesn't give us immediate gratification or even relief from pain when pain is needed to refine us, draw us closer to his love and grace, and prepare us for heaven. As he warned Peter of his denial Jesus said he couldn't follow him immediately to where he was going. But Jesus graciously assured Peter he would later follow him to heaven (verse 36). In the meantime, the Father would lovingly and wisely prepare Peter and the others for heaven, even through the things they would suffer.

The New Command says we are to love in the same kind of way he loved us—intensely and practically, and sometimes even toughly. His love cost Jesus in ways beyond our comprehension. And when we love as he loved, there will be a cost for us, as it is costing the martyrs I mentioned above. Our Jesus-like, Jesus-given love will often go unrewarded, unreciprocated, unappreciated, misunderstood and even unnoticed. CS Lewis said that the only place safe from the disappointments and hurts of love is hell. But if we are to obey Jesus we must love as he loved us.

But also the New Command means we are to love intensely...

- *As Jesus loves through us*

In our strength we cannot love as he loved us. Of ourselves we are self-centered and indifferent toward others. We selfishly want to keep for ourselves and keep to ourselves. It's natural to do good to those who do good to us. It's normal to keep what is ours and rationalize away any involvement in meeting the needs of others. It's a lot easier to ignore the needs and lost condition of our neighbors, here and also in other parts of the world. Yet God has placed around us all sorts of neighbors, enemies and brothers and sisters in Christ, and we are commanded to love them.

What we need to do is confess we can't love them in ourselves and of ourselves. We must ask Jesus to love them through us, letting us see as Jesus sees, and having his mind and heart of compassion toward the needy and the lost.

When I read the words and intercession of Moses in Exodus 32:32 and the words of the first Christian martyr Stephen (Acts 7:60) and the Apostle Paul in Romans 9:1-3, I realize these are not just their words and wishes. Jesus, the Christ of the cross, is speaking and interceding through them.

And, maybe some here today don't have a dramatic story about Jesus' loving through you. In fact, you're tired of praying, loving and forgiving that ungrateful, unresponsive spouse or rebellious child. Remember, the New Command says we must love as Jesus loved us—sacrificially, perseveringly, practically, and intensely. Jesus loved even knowing these disciples would desert him and Peter would deny him. He loved even as he prayed for our forgiveness from the cross. If you are weary of loving you need to ask Jesus to love through you. He alone can enable you to act with love. You can never feel your way into loving but you can lovingly act your way into once again feeling genuine love, even for your enemies.

The New Command is also...

➤ **New in its impact**

In verse 35 Jesus says, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Certainly there is an impact...

- *On one another*

The love of God's people for one another is the most essential ingredient and component in the church. As Paul knew well and taught repeatedly, the spiritual

unity of the church, which was to be maintained at all costs, depended on the love the church had for one another (Ephesians 4:2).

Paul addressed the church at Corinth about its most pressing need—love. They were spiritually gifted, talented and charismatic, yet they had failed to love. So, Paul wrote as a corrective the great love chapter 13. In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that the church, and its ministries and giftedness and energy without love equals zero. He spoke of the emptiness of dedication and zeal and talented service and eloquent speaking/preaching without love for one another that would result in forgiveness and reconciliation and mutually submission and service to the Body of Christ.

The risen Christ walked among the churches of Asia Minor and the first church he denounced was the one at Ephesus, who had received Paul's admonition to "bear with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2). They were doctrinally correct and zealous for good works and a solid moral reputation, yet they had forgotten their first love. They had lost the love they had at first—love for God and one another. Therefore they needed to repent because they had become useless and fruitless without love (Revelation 2:1-7). The church of today is no better or worse than the first century church. And the local church body is a lab for learning to love even difficult people. God will always place people in the church who will not be easy or natural to love. But it's essential that we learn to love them. And, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer articulated in *Life Together*, we are to trust that God has placed us where we need to be to learn to love and live together in love. We must not look elsewhere than the very place where God has given us as a fellowship of love.

Some time ago I was visiting with one of you about the seeming contradiction between a Sovereign God of love and suffering in the world, particularly among the innocent, such as children born with disabilities. We concluded that "now we see in a mirror dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12, ESV); but we realize how sin introduced suffering into the world, and now God uses suffering redemptively. We shared that handicapped and disfigured children and adults somehow teach us about love in unique and powerful ways. In our fallen culture, the "body beautiful" is the ideal, to the neglect of the eternal soul, for which the mortal body is simply a temporal, aging house. God sees us all as unattractive physically, in contrast to what we shall be, and he knows the value of the eternal. Thus, as Christians, we learn to love the disabled, and experience from them their unconditional love. Ask any parent of a Down syndrome child, and she or he will tell you how they are most loving and lovable. We are called to love each other in the Body of Christ as God's handicapped, weak people.

In *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey retells the story of a popular book, drama and movie, *The Elephant Man*, about the life of John Merrick, who lived in England and died in 1890 at the age of twenty-seven. In the words of Yancey, "Merrick was possibly the ugliest man who has ever lived. A disorder known as

neurofibromatosis worked progressively from the earliest years of childhood to turn him into a human freak. At the age of four he was abandoned by his mother and sent to a workhouse. At fourteen a carnival showman discovered him and decided to make money from his freakish appearance. Onlookers would pay a few pennies to step into a booth and gawk at a person so misshapen that, at a certain angle, he resembled an elephant with its protruding trunk and leathery folds of skin.”

Yancey tells how Frederick Treves, a surgeon at a London hospital, wandered into the carnival after hours and discovered Merrick huddled in a corner of his filthy cage, in all his repulsive appearance. Dr. Treves ordered the hospital staff to give the now twenty-one year old “Elephant Man” an examination, and because of his facial appearance and reactions, he was assessed to be an imbecile. Merrick was returned to the inhumane and cruel treatment of the carnival owner for two more years, until the carnival was shut down for good by authorities in Belgium. Merrick was shipped back to London, where he was rescued from the cruelties of the public by the police, who tried in vain to communicate with him. His only hope was Dr. Treves’ card, which Merrick had kept. Treves took him to the hospital, just in time to save Merrick from starvation, and he was fed and bathed by those who at first were horrified by his appearance. Gradually, Dr. Treves learned to understand Merrick’s speech, and discovered that he was far from being an imbecile. Merrick was not only literate, but a voracious reader of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, Jane Austin and William Shakespeare. Treves noted how, despite Merrick’s being horribly abused, he had survived his *via dolorosa* as a kind and gentle man.

Treves persuaded an attractive lady friend of his to visit Merrick’s room just to smile at him and wish him a good morning”—in short, to treat him as a human being.” The doctor noted the surprising effect this simple greeting had upon the *Elephant Man*. Said Dr. Treves, “As he let go her hand he bent his head on his knees and sobbed until I thought he would never cease...He told me afterwards that this was the first woman who had ever smiled at him, and the first woman, in the whole of his life, who had shaken hands with him. From that day the transformation of Merrick commenced and he began to change, little by little, from a hunted thing into a man.” Yancey relates how Merrick’s next and final four years of life were of childlike wonder, joy and happiness as people learned to relate to him with kindness deserving of a human being. Merrick learned to use his only good hand, his left one, to construct an “exquisite model of a cathedral,” which he called an imitation of his life, “an imitation of grace flying up and up from the mud” (pages 191-195, *Rumors of Another World*).

In the eyes of God, who is more lovable, John Merrick or us? As the Lord reminded Samuel, whose first inclination was to select a king for Israel based on his outward appearance, “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). Who is more deserving or needful of God’s love? And has not God

placed around us “one another” who call out for our love, and who will show us the love of Christ for the unlovely and weak people of this world? Did not Christ die for us when we were much more hideous and undeserving than the *Elephant Man*? Are there not some people who are perhaps in this room this morning whom God has brought for us to love, and through whom God will teach us about his love, that is universal and unconditional?

As I reflected on this story, I couldn't help but think that the man who was most transformed by Dr. Treves' care of John Merrick was Dr. Treves. Certainly the church of the Lord Jesus will have assurance that we belong to Jesus, that we are his disciples if we have this Christ-like love for one another. Without this love for one another we will never know the blessing of God he would pour out upon us.

But Jesus says directly that the New Command is new in its impact...

- *On the world*

“By this *all men* will know you are my disciples....”

The world will not recognize us by our profession of faith but by our possession of love. Too many people are claiming to be Christians without living for Christ. The world isn't interested in our theology either. They don't care or understand about our theological debates. We gain their attention when they see us loving one another, and desire to be a part of that love for which their souls yearn. As is often said, “People will not care how much we know until they know how much we care.”

Tertullian, theologian and apologist from North Africa, wrote in the early Third Century, “It is mainly the deeds of a love so noble that lead many to put a brand upon us! ‘See,’ they say, ‘how they love one another. See how they are ready even to die for one another’” (quoted by Gary Burge, *John: NIV Application Commentary*, page 387).

I pray that International Baptist Church will be even more the kind of place where folks can come and see how we love one another and will want to be included in that love. I want us to be the kind of place where you can bring your neighbor with you to our worship and to your home group and they will see how we love one another. It isn't important that they come and say, “See how they enjoy one another.” What is important is that they see how we love one another, and are willing even to die for one another. Too many have the idea that conservative evangelicals are known for their doctrinal battles and controversies. I pray we will be known for our love for one another. Loving one another isn't always easy nor does it happen without a price. But it is essential.

## Conclusion:

The command to love one another is new in its involvement, intensity and impact. I'm amazed by how comfortable I can be with the old, like old shoes and old routines and even old ways of hearing the Scriptures and the words of Jesus. I need to hear Jesus today telling me his command to love is new. I believe he has spoken to me with a new challenge to love those that to date have been outside my circle of love. He has said I need to love before they express love for me, and that I must take the risk that my love will be ignored, disappointed or despised. The world needs to see the newness of our love, what we do today.

I remember during my seminary days when I was a visiting preacher in the church where a seminary colleague was student pastor. It was a small, rural Kentucky church, and this little Baptist church did a lot of old things, including singing all the old songs. These bi-annual evangelistic meetings called "revivals" were an old tradition too. And it was traditional for the pastor to take the evangelist, in this case me, to visit all the church homebound elderly and sick. But since these were evangelistic meetings, we went to the homes of the few people in town who weren't church members, encouraging them to make a decision during the revival to join the church.

We went to visit the town unbeliever, and older farmer whose wife was an active member of the church. This man was known to be gospel-hardened. He had successfully resisted every appeal to get saved and refuted every argument presented by every seminary student pastor who had ever visited him. And there were many. Well, early in the week, my friend took me to visit this hardened sinner. And my friend began the conversation, and then turned to me to give my presentation of the gospel. I gave it my best shot, and explained his need and God provision, quoting all the pertinent verses from Romans and the four Gospels, and then explaining the urgency of his conversion while he still had opportunity. I then waited to see how he would respond to my fervent gospel appeal. I could tell he was totally unaffected as he broke an uncomfortable silence with, "Boys, tell me something *new*."

The world needs to see and hear something new—the new love of Jesus, through us. They will not listen until it's new to them—showing them our new and present involvement in their lives, giving them new understanding and hope and answers. I know I'm too old to learn and or to do many new things and some things, alas, I can never re-do. But it's never too late and we're never too old to learn to love in new ways, and to show the love of Jesus, by which we will finally be judged (Matthew 25:31-46).

I pray, that as we prepare to observe this Lord's Supper, we will remember how Jesus loved us, and how he commands us to love in the same way those who need his love.

**Questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:**

1. Give your definition of agape (pronounced “a-gah-pay”) love (the love of Christ that he has for us and that he commands us to have for one another).
2. The Apostle John was among the band of 11 disciples who received this New Command (John 13:34-35), and later, in his first letter, said that loving one another is one of the tests of genuine salvation. Read 1 John 4:19 and answer: “Do you believe only Christians can love in the same way that Christ loved us?” Discuss your answer and reasons.
3. In Jesus’ teachings, he speaks of loving our neighbors, enemies and one another. Who is included among our neighbors? Our enemies? One another?
4. Have you ever had to practice what child psychologist James Dobson calls “tough love”? In what ways does the heavenly Father practice tough love with us his children?
5. Has there been an experience in your life when you experienced someone’s unconditional love for you? What impact did this experience have on you?
6. Do you recall any experiences when you expressed unconditional love and forgiveness and sacrificial, caring involvement in meeting the needs of others? What impact did this experience have on you? On the person receiving your love?
7. Make a list of your neighbors, enemies and fellow believers for whom your love does not come easily. Ask the Lord to show you new ways he wants you to love them.

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