

Introduction:

- A. The church father, **Jerome**, around 400 AD, told a story that had been handed down to him, about John the apostle.

*The blessed John the Evangelist lived in Ephesus until extreme old age. His disciples could barely carry him to church and he could not muster the voice to speak many words. During individual gatherings he usually said nothing but, "Little children, love one another." The disciples and brothers in attendance, annoyed because they always heard the same words, finally said, "Teacher, why do you always say this?" He replied with a line worthy of John: "**Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.**"*

- B. Jesus' command appears twelve times in the New Testament, and is implicit many other places. Today we're going to focus on just two verses—**John 13:34-35**—where Jesus repeats that command three times. *"A new command I give you: **Love one another**. As I have loved you, so **you must love one another**. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if **you love one another**."*
- C. **When people come within the orbit of Village Church, let alone within our doors, the Lord wants them to realize, "These people really love one another and they loved me."**
- D. But how does that happen? Is it a matter of being *really, really* friendly? Not really. That can backfire with some people. The love that Jesus commands runs much deeper than being friendly. Let's look at these three statements because we must understand what Jesus said so that we can obey him.

I. “LOVE ONE ANOTHER” IS JESUS’ NEW COMMAND

A. A good question would be, “What’s new about it?” God taught Israel in **Lev. 19:15-18** to love their neighbor.

*“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but **love your neighbor as yourself.** I am the Lord.”* In the verses just before that God said,

“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the Lord.

Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.”

Notice a couple of things about these commands: 1) They demonstrate basic morality. They’d be appropriate for your Hindu neighbor, except for God’s references to himself. 2) They are mostly in the category of “do no harm.” “Behave yourselves.” If you’re choosy about who you call neighbor these commands become downright easy.

B. Jesus threw a monkey wrench into the Jews’ common understanding of this command when he told the parable of the Good Samaritan. “*Who is my neighbor,*” a Jewish theologian asked Jesus. So Jesus told a story about two Jews who kept the letter of the law but didn’t help the man in trouble while a despised Samaritan *did*. Then Jesus asked, “*Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?*” *The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”* [Lk 10:25-37] Instead of “do no harm,” **mercy became the measure of love for our neighbor, and our neighbor became anyone along our way in need.**

Jesus' "new command" here is like that. It takes God's original command, "*Love your neighbor as yourself,*" and brings a whole new meaning and significance to it.

C. It is new for several reasons:

1. Jesus foresaw a much different community than the disciples could, and one far different than what the people in OT times envisioned. Jesus saw the day coming when ethnic and geographic loyalties would be useless in holding God's people together because we would come from every tribe, language, nation and people. **In the Christian community only our love for Christ and one another will bind us together.**
2. The old command was to love your neighbor *as yourself*. Our love for ourselves was our moral guideline for loving other. But now, instead of "love your neighbor as yourself," we are able to love as the Father and Son love one another. At the very end of Jesus' prayer in **John 17** he asked his Father that, "*...the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.*" Till Christ, people could love one another only at a certain human level—"as yourself." But Christians can love one another with the very love of God himself, because we live in that love through the Holy Spirit. **That's what's new about it.**
3. What's more, since we can love as Christ did, our love for one another comes with divine effect—Christlike, healing, wise, servant-hearted, sacrificial. **1 John 4:16-17** says, "*God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus.*" This is like a superpower! **That's what's new!**

But we have to step into difficult relationships and messy situations *believing* that God will make his love come through us. We cannot wait till we *feel* loving. *Do* the loving thing, all the more if it is self-sacrificing, and people *will* see Jesus.

II. NOW WE MUST LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS CHRIST HAS LOVED US

A. In your Bible, notice how this chapter begins. It is the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet at the Last Supper. I hope you've stopped to look at the print this painting by Ford Madox Brown hanging in the foyer. Look closer for a moment. Look at Peter's concentration. Look at the astonishment of these disciples in the background. Is the one on the left Judas? Do you see the bag of coins on the table? Look at this one, already unlacing his sandals. There's John, looking in wonder over Peter's shoulder. And finally, Jesus, intent on his service.

In this act of service, the Son of God, the King of Israel, became a servant to his followers. John writes in **vv.12-16**:

*When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. **I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.** Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."*

Do you see that promise? "You will be blessed if you do them." Not just, *You'll be a good person.* No, "*You will be*

blessed.” Rewarded. Benefitted. Glad. Satisfied. It *seems* like a losing proposition—be love so sacrificially, but Jesus promises to *bless* us. Try it!

- B. What does loving one another like this look like? To begin with, it always requires humility and it is always an act of self-sacrifice—of regarding someone else more highly than you do yourself. **Col. 3:12-14** says, “*Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*” I call these things “love’s coat of many colors.” Every act and attitude listed there costs us something. Every one requires my humility and sacrifice but that’s what love for one another looks like.

But notice what a high place we’re given: “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved...” Notice, too, that these virtues are like fine garments *given* to us in Christ. They are the natural wardrobe of the believer in Christ.

How do I act this way when it is really difficult? First, **respond to the Holy Spirit’s conviction.** No excuses. Don’t put it off. Resolve to address the relationship. Second, **let God teach you from Scripture**, like this passage or the footwashing story, what he expects of you. Finally, **pray and believe that God will enable you to be like Jesus**, and what’s more, that what you do for another person will have the same effect as if Jesus did it.

- C. Illus.: A friend sent me this picture the other day from nearly 10 years ago. There’s a story here I’m not proud of. I was going to preach on this foot washing story. After the

sermon, with that same painting on the screens, and someone singing Michael Card’s song, “The Basin and the Towel,” the plan was to have someone wash another person’s feet. Ed was one of our elders and he agreed to be the washed. But you know, I could *not* find *anyone* who was going to be there that morning to do the washing. I bet I called eight or ten people. Now, I didn’t want to do it because, as I told people, I am the focus of too much attention around here as it is.

But there was another reason. Ed had gotten under my skin. I don’t like being criticized, no matter how nicely it is done. So you can put the pieces together. Honestly, I had been nursing a grudge. So, even with all these people in church, no one was available to wash Ed’s feet except me. When Jesus washed Peter’s feet it was Peter who was deeply humbled. But in our case, it was me. I couldn’t wash Ed’s feet, of course, while still nursing my grudge. I had to let it go before I could serve him. It was an ugly thing that God and I had to deal with but I did it. You can’t tell this in the picture, but it was very hard to take on the posture of Jesus there. But in the end, Jesus served me more than I served Ed.



There is one more statement here in **v.35**, “*By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*”

III. OUR LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AUTHENTICATES THE GOSPEL TO THOSE AROUND US

- A. On the face of it, this seems like a pretty underwhelming outreach strategy. Of all the things we might do to draw attention to our faith in Jesus Christ, nothing—nothing—

will be so effective as loving one another in the new way Jesus had brought to life for us and in us. He doesn't even say it will be how we love the unbelievers, but how we love one another! We can surely do Christlike things for unbelievers but it **is our mutual love for one another—our loving *interaction and community***—as the people of God that will display Jesus most effectively.

- B. I think this is so powerful because people around us are starved for the kind of relationships that only Christians can enjoy. A couple of months ago I read this:

America is suffering an epidemic of loneliness.

According to a recent large-scale survey from the health care provide, Cigna, most Americans suffer from strong feelings of loneliness and a lack of significance in their relationships. Nearly half say they sometimes or always feel alone or “left out.” Thirteen percent of Americans say that zero people know them well.ⁱ

So imagine the impact it would have on such people if they could see genuine Christian love up close and personal.

Maybe we invite them to church where the love they see and hear in the foyer is more persuasive than our songs or sermons. Maybe we tell them about the grace we've experienced from a fellow believer, or the joy Jesus gives us when we serve others in the Body. Perhaps we could invite them to our Growth Group.

- C. **Christian love, this *new* kind of love only Christ can give us, can be so authentic, so humble and kind, so sacrificial, so wise, that people will look for an explanation.** And when they look for an explanation they will see Jesus. Look at what happened in the early days of the church, in **Acts 2:44-47**:

*All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. **And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

Conclusion

So what is expected of us? *“Love one another.”* **It isn’t okay to be isolated, disconnected; to keep your distance. These are our brothers and sisters and we must love them. The Lord Jesus has not given us a choice. And when we do this, we will be like Jesus in the world.**

We must be involved with each other. It’s pretty hard to love people whose names you don’t know and whose lives are a mystery to you. Get involved in a Growth Group. Serve with other believers here at church or elsewhere. When we send you word of prayer requests, *pray* for each other. And as God positions you to help, step into the messes in our brothers’ and sisters’ lives. If there are no relationships outside our family that cost us something, we’re not really loving one another as Jesus loved us.

Illus.: John, who recorded these words, and who wrote the three epistles that bear his name, and who described himself five times as *“the disciple whom Jesus loved”* couldn’t say it often enough. *“Little children, love one another.”*

“Teacher, why do you always say this?”

“Because it is the Lord's commandment and if it alone is kept, it is sufficient.”

ⁱ Arthur C Brooks, “How Loneliness Is Tearing America Apart, *New York Times*, 11/23/18