

## THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." John 13:34.

Everything conspires to make these words impressive. They are from the lips of the world's greatest religious teacher and leader -- the Man whose name is above every name, and who spake as no other man has ever spoken, and whose words will outlive the stars. He is speaking to His followers, the little company of men whom He has trained to carry on His work after He has gone. It was on the night of many sorrows -- a very solemn night -- one that would live in the memories of the disciples for the rest of their lives. It was a night of surprise and of apprehension. The remarkable lesson in humility had just been given by our Lord washing the feet of His disciples. Then followed the warning to Judas of the awful treachery he was about to commit. When Judas had departed from the upper chamber, and his dark presence was no longer felt, then the Saviour prepared His true disciples for what lay before them. He sought to strengthen them to meet the events about to follow, showing that all had been foreseen and provided for.

Tragedy is in the air -- and the time for talk is now short. In fact, this is Christ's last opportunity of speaking to His followers privately. He is speaking on the last night of His earthly life. Death is looking on. The shadow of the cross lies athwart His face. What shall He say now? What new doctrine shall He teach? What shall be the nature of His final word to them? The text.

His language shows how deeply His own heart is moved. He calls these men "little children." He had never called them that before. He had usually spoken as a teacher or as a friend. He now speaks as a father. He has always been affectionate, but His affection now takes on a parental tenderness. There is a sweet and solemn tenderness associated with the expressed wishes of the dying. The counsels of dying friends have peculiar weight. We treasure in our hearts their last commissions, and to the measure of our ability we strive to fulfil them. Often have we heard men and women say, "I must do this because it was the dying wish of my mother, or my father, or my wife or my husband, or my sister or my brother." In this message I want to bring to you, as an individual believer, the dying request of your Saviour and your Lord. To make it more binding He puts it in the form of a command -- text. The ties which the Lord intended to knit His people together were three -- faith in Christ, love to one another, and benevolent efforts for the world's salvation. Here the Saviour lays stress upon the second -- love one another.

What is Christian love? It is neither sentimental, abstract nor inactive. It springs from the very heart of divine energy, and is far removed from sentimentalism. Fortunately for us, Jesus did not attempt to define love. Instead, He illustrated it. By drawing a picture of it He made it possible for us to see what it is. Love is a deep and abiding respect for the personality of other people, and it shows itself in a desire to help them to do their best. Love means helping people to be better than they are. Love is just getting out of ourselves and going into the lives of others, with no other motive but to bless, to heal and to help. It is a disposition contrary to that old nature which displays itself in coldness, suspicion, malice and envy. It is a disposition which reveals itself in good will, confidence and mutual helpfulness.

In this text three truths stand out prominently: --

1. Christ commands us to love one another.
2. Christ tells us how we are to love one another.
3. Christ tells us why we are to love one another.

The need of this hour is for a big supply of genuine love in every one of our hearts.

Jerome, one of the Latin Fathers of the fifth century, preserved a rich and touching incident regarding the practices of the Apostle John. He tells us that during John's last days here upon the earth he was too feeble to walk to church and too frail to speak at length after he arrived, but certain devoted friends would carry him to the house of the Lord and help him up into the pulpit. After he had rested a few minutes he would say: "Little children, love one another," and then he would walk tremblingly back to his chair. This he repeated week after week. Finally one of the less consecrated members grew tired of hearing him repeat these words over and over again, so he went to him and asked, "John, why do you keep repeating this one message over and over again?" He replied, "Because this is the last commandment of the blessed Lord, and if you obey it that will be enough."

How refreshing to go into a church where Christians love one another and where they have confidence in one another!

As a pastor, I have no intention of trying but one program -- the program of love. I shall ever love the saved and the unsaved, the rich and the poor, the educated and the illiterate, the consecrated and the worldly. I shall always preach the gospel of love.

#### I. The Pattern Of Love.

"As I have loved you." This is what makes it a new commandment. The old commandment was that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Never before had there been known a commandment like this. Never before had there been a society of men whose business it was to love one another because they were bound to Jesus Christ. Their bond to Christ created a new bond between them. They were knit together because they were first knit to Him. A new standard of love was set up -- loving after the manner of Jesus. His love to them was to be the pattern of their love to others. The master loved His disciples, not only for what they were, but also for what they might become. He knew their latent possibilities. We cannot understand the meaning of this commandment until we comprehend in some measure the way in which Christ loved His disciples.

##### 1. His love was self-denying.

His self-denying love is seen as He leaves His Father's house with all of its wealth and beauty and glory and comes to this sin-cursed world where He chooses a manger rather than a mansion in which to be born. His self-denying love is seen as He went up and down the earth without any place to lay His head. He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has not where to lay His head." The climax of His self-denying love is seen as He lies down on that rough old beam and permits wicked men to drive big nails through His hands and feet, and to press a crown of thorns deep into His brow and lift Him up before an angry world where He suffered and agonized and bled and died. And He died with this prayer upon His lips, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do."

##### 2. His love was gracious.

That means that He loved those who are indeed His enemies. That means much more than loving those who differed with Him. It means that He loved the people who hated Him. He prayed for the men who nailed Him to the cross, He directed love into a new channel, that through the lives of His own people the deserts of human selfishness and sin might rejoice and blossom as the rose.

##### 3. His love was universal.

The love of the Old Testament was but as the flickering of the candle in the window of a cottage, while the love of Christ is as the sun glorifying the dark corners of the earth, and weaving rainbows through the blackest clouds. The idea of a universal love must have sounded strange in a land and age where bigotry and selfishness were so common. Even the most devout Jew thought God was partial to the seed of Abraham and abhorred other nations. Into their midst came the Galilean who announced that God loved all men with an infinite and eternal tenderness and in that tenderness Jew and Gentile shared alike.

4. His love was condescending.

There was about His attitude neither pride nor selfishness. From the throne of His Father to His bed in the manger, and from the manger on to the cross, He passed without ever bemoaning the price He had to pay, or the pain He had to endure. When they lied about Him, He went on living the truth. He was so eager to bless the people that He had no time to listen to their sneers or to look upon their frowns. This stooping is not so easy as we sometimes think. It is not so hard to lift a man up to the place where we are standing, but it is a service worthy of the Son of God to go down to the outcast and take our place beside Him in order to lift Him up. When William Carey was beginning His great work, the British government offered to make him the king's representative to the people of India if he would give up his missionary enterprise and devote himself to the political uplift of the natives. It was a tempting offer. In a single day he could have passed from association with those without caste to a position of rank and influence in the empire. But he did not hesitate for a moment. Like his master, he left the trappings of royalty for the lowliest place in the world in order to help others into holiness and heaven. Let us not make the mistake, however, of thinking that lowliness and greatness are opposite conditions. To be lowly in the service of others is to be greater than being exalted in the interest of self. Real greatness crowns those who forget it in their zeal to bless others.

5. His love was bountiful.

All His earthly life was a giving in which He had no thought of self. He spent Himself day by day in the teaching and healing and comforting of those whom He was constantly meeting. And, even when He was dying on the cross, His thoughts were not for Himself, but for others. He prayed that His enemies might be forgiven, and told John to show kindness to His mother.

There is a thing called love that weighs and measures and calculates. But, the love that Jesus is talking about in this text demands nothing but the privilege of giving, and finds her ample compensation in the smile on the face of the one she has blessed.

6. His love was practical.

It was not a mere sentiment or profession, but a reality. Christ's love was active. It walked in His feet, spoke in His tongue, worked in His hands. The hands of His love washed the disciple's feet, the feet of His love walked about doing good, the eyes of His love wept tears of compassion with the two sisters at their brother's grave, and the voice of His love summoned Him back to life. The care of His love asked, "Children, have ye any meat?" Every impulse of His kindly heart was manifested in a corresponding deed or word of kindness.

7. His love was endless.

Yes, He loved with a love that would not let them go. "Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end." How refreshing to hear Him say, "I'll love you to the end, and then gather you to myself in glory."

## II. The Power Of Love.

1. It is a proof of Christian discipleship.

(1) It is an inward proof.

According to the Bible there are three outstanding biblical evidences of our being God's children.

(a) Cross-bearing.

Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." If you are willingly bearing your cross for Christ, you have satisfying evidence that you are a true follower of Christ.

(b) Fruit-bearing.

Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." When you are bearing fruit and God is blessing your efforts, you can know that you are His child.

(c) Loving God's people.

"We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." If we discover that we do not love others, we may know that it is because there is no real love for God in our hearts.

(2) It is an outward proof.

Love for our brethren proves to others that we are Christians. It is by our love for one another that we give evidence that we belong to Christ. Without real love for one another we can never prove to others that we are true followers of Christ. We are His friends only if we keep His commandments, and His commandment to all His followers is, "Love one another as I have loved you." This desire was His dominant longing in the last hour of His life in the flesh, and it is His dominant longing still.

2. It will change drudgery into delight.

Religion without love is one of the dreariest things in the world. If only we could put love for God and love for men into our services, then the drudgery would soon become delightful. For those who love Christ the work of helping others is one of the greatest delights of life.

3. It will add to your own enjoyment.

Just to feel that we have done something that Jesus approves is in itself a compensation for many unpleasant things. Love for Christ made Livingstone perfectly happy as he ministered to the tribes of Africa. Christ asks not that our love should equal, but resemble His; not that it should be of the same strength, but of the same kind. Real love can never do enough for its object. To be like Christ is to taste of the joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Years ago France began to build a tower of political emancipation, without the cement of the spirit of love. They inscribed on their banners, "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," but ere it was completed the victims of the guillotine were heaped about its base. Today Jesus of Nazareth is building a tower, and every stone is being cemented in its place with that love that seeketh not her own, and that is ready to bear all things, endure all things, for the glory of our Lord and our needy brethren. All Christians who will learn and practice the eleventh commandment will know the joy that held Jesus even unto the cross. This is the duty of every Christian and there is no exception.