

Articles and Sermons :: A New Commandment - K.P. Yohannan

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In John 13:34-35 (NIV), Jesus said to His disciples, "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

We've all had times in our lives when we have been hurt, perhaps by someone we know very well or someone we know just casually, and we find loving that person to be very difficult. Hurtful and trying experiences that cause much pain are a part of life—even Jesus experienced them. What is important is how we respond in those times, for that determines the growth that will or will not occur in our lives. In seeing Jesus' response, we can gain the strength and grace to do the same and come one step closer to mirroring Him.

Steadfast Love

Imagine the topic of conversation among the disciples after the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. I'm sure their minds strained to remember each event and how it related to what came to pass, recalling their times with the Lord, the day leading up to the crucifixion and the dramatic and prophetic unfolding of every moment.

Perhaps they recalled their own Judas, remembering how he left right in the middle of the Last Supper. By this time, the disciples knew that Judas was the one who had betrayed the Lord and that he had hung himself from the guilt of it. I can just hear one of the disciples saying, "I can't believe Jesus didn't just throw Judas out from the start! He had to have known all along that he was stealing money. And certainly He knew that Judas was the one who would betray Him in the end. Why did He let him stick around? At least Jesus could have told us that he was the one who was going to betray Him, so that we would have known to stay away from him."

And then I can hear someone like Peter speaking up, saying, "Well, I'm not surprised at the way Jesus treated Judas. Jesus loved us until the very end and that includes him. I betrayed Jesus as well; I denied Him—and not just once, but three times. With His own eyes He saw me turn my back on Him. Yet when He rose again, He specifically called out my name and said, 'Go and tell Peter.' When He found me I was ashamed, discouraged and backslidden. But when I first saw Him after the resurrection, all I saw were His love and His mercy. Not once did He bring up my turning away or reprimand me and tell me how wrong I was. He simply came close and asked, 'Do you love Me?'"

"No, I'm not surprised He loved Judas. He loved each one of us. And we must never forget what He told us: that we must love one another as He loved us."

The disciples' lives were completely transformed by what they saw in Jesus. They watched Him respond to beggars, help old little children and heal the blind. But what impacted them even more was what they saw in Him after the resurrection—the forgiveness and love after the betrayal and turning away, the joy with which He showed them the scars in His hands and side (see Luke 24:39) and the camaraderie displayed as He cooked breakfast for them on the beach after a long night of toil (see John 21:9).

I believe that the only reason the disciples were able to impact their world in such a great way and endure such intense persecution was because of the unfailing love they saw in Jesus. It was this love that enabled Stephen to suffer and die for the Lord in Acts 7, crying out for his persecutors just as Jesus did, saying, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin" (Acts 7:60). "Love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8, NIV).

Only as we behold Christ, aware of His presence and remembering the ultimate love He always displayed, can we begin to reflect His love to those around us.

Love Is Costly

The story is told that when the apostle John was a very old man who could hardly walk, the believers would carry him and sit him before the congregation to share. It is said that the only thing he could say was repeatedly the phrase, "Love one another. Love one another."

In John 13, Jesus spoke directly to His disciples about loving one another: "A new commandment I give to you, that you

“You love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). Up until this point, the disciples had only seen how Christ loved them and those around them. This is the first time that He calls them to love one another just as they had seen Him love them. Jesus was essentially saying to them, “I’m just about to leave now. But I want you to understand this one thing—love each other. Love has been the foundation of everything I have done. So too it must be with each of you.”

Love was the bedrock of Jesus’ life, the very reason He came to seek and save the lost. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16). Therefore, love must be the bedrock of our lives. No matter what good we do in life, it all must flow from the spring of Christ’s love within our hearts.

Yet even in the familiarity of Bible verses, we still find it difficult to love one another. Why is that? One of the reasons is because we do not want to pay the price. You see, love is always costly.

John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that He gave . . .” (emphasis mine). Gave what? What was the price of God’s love? His Son, Jesus. The cross was the price God paid because of His love for us.

We can ask ourselves the same question: What is the price of our love? Put your name in that verse, “For _____ so loved that he/she gave . . .” Gave what? The price of love will differ in form for each one of us, but God will always bring us opportunities to display His love to others. But remember, the price will always be costly—it will always involve saying “no” to self in some way. It could be quietly suffering and not defending yourself. It could be going the extra mile and taking the slack when somebody else didn’t do the job. But whatever it is, God has brought these situations into your life to make you more like His Son, enabling you to display His love through your life.

One of our missionaries in India showed incredible love for a man in a remarkable way. While working in a particular village for a couple of years, this missionary was continually opposed by one certain man. The man would adamantly hinder the missionary as he preached the Gospel and won people to Christ, even gathering groups of people to destroy the Christian literature and beat up the believers in the village.

One day, the man who opposed our missionary and the local church had a horrible accident in which both of his legs were broken. Deserted by all his friends, he lay in his hut, penniless and without help.

When our missionary found out about this man’s accident, he didn’t let out a sigh of relief, glad that this man could no longer oppose him in his work of the Gospel. Instead, our missionary decided to seize this opportunity to show the love of Christ to the very one who opposed him. He called together the believers in the village, and each donated a few rupees to pay for the man’s hospital visit. Then our missionary visited him in his hut and carried him on his back for seven kilometers to the main road, where they caught a Jeep to the hospital.

After a month, the injured man fully recovered from his accident. The first thing he said when he saw the missionary was, “I cannot persist. I cannot oppose you any more. Jesus and His love, which I have seen and experienced through you and your church members, are so real. Thank you so much for loving me even when I hated you and hated Christ.”

This, my friends, is the love of Christ in action. Remember, “God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

Could you love like this? Could you love the one who has hurt you deeply? Could you love the one who is opposing you? When you feel that doing so is simply impossible, remember Christ. Look to Him and allow Him to take you by the hand and give you the grace to love like Him. We can love others only because He first loved us (see 1 John 4:19). Genuine love comes from Him; as we stand in His presence, it will flow from us as well.

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