

Mission, Values and Vision

*⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.
(Ephesians 3:8-10. ESV)*

Message 5

Loving Community

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John 13:31-15

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to John 13:31-35. We are in the middle of a series where we are looking at some of the Scripture passages that inform our sense of mission, value and vision as a church. Today we are looking at the primary passage behind our fourth Core Value which reads as follows:

We deeply believe that loving relationships should permeate every aspect of church life.

This is one of the Core Values that I think explains some of what is unique about this place. I have experienced churches that have a passion for the authority of God's Word that didn't have – at least it seemed to me – a commensurate passion for loving God's people. On the other hand, there are lots of churches, far too many churches I would say, that emphasize loving community at the EXPENSE of God's Word. It is a remarkably precious thing to find a church that values and prioritizes both in proper measure. We are certainly not saying that we have nailed that balance, but with this Core Value we mean to express our prayerful determination to seek it and to maintain it by God's grace.

Hear now the Word of the Lord from John chapter 13:

John 13:31-35 (ESV)

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, ‘Where I am going you cannot come.’

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Looking at the text as a whole we notice that just as with the giving of the original commandments there is a bit of a preamble that serves to prepare people to correctly receive the Word of God. The preamble to the original 10 commandments reads as follows:

Exodus 20:1-2 (ESV)

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying,

² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

That preamble served to remind the people hearing the 10 commandments that keeping these commandments was not about earning their salvation – they were already free; the 10 commandments were given to a redeemed people. Therefore keeping the commandments was not about earning redemption, rather it was about responding to redemption. It was a way of thanking God and loving God in response to his amazing grace in their salvation. Saved people love God by keeping his commandments. Missing the preamble changes the nature of obedience from love to legalism. Therefore the preamble is absolutely critical and so it is here. If we understand the preamble it will absolutely change how we approach the commandment itself and if we miss the preamble we will forever demote loving fellowship to third class status in the life of the church – it is literally that important. So let’s spend just a minute making sure we have understood the message of the preamble.

The Message Of The Preamble

Let me read it to you again:

John 13:31-33 (ESV)

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

³² If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once.

³³ Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'

There are two sequential indicators in the text, the word "when" and the word "now". The "when" refers to Judas. Look back in your Bibles to verse 26. The text says:

John 13:26-30 (ESV)

So when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.

²⁷ Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly."

³⁰ So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

That's what the "when" in verse 31 refers to. It refers to the immediate process of Satanic betrayal that will end in the death of Christ upon the cross. When the immediate process of his betrayal and death had begun, Jesus said:

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him (v.31)

Jesus is saying that God is most obviously glorified in his death upon the cross. God is glorified in a variety of ways – God is glorified every time the sun comes up, God is glorified every time a bird flaps its wings, God is glorified every time a baby takes its first breath – but God is ultimately and climactically glorified in the death of Jesus on the cross. To "glorify God" means to make a compelling display of God's character and nature. The cross makes THE compelling display of God's character and nature. It shows forth God's hatred of sin and his compassion towards sinners. There is no better argument for the sinfulness of sin and the holiness of God than the body of Jesus on the cross and there is no better argument for the mercy and grace of God toward sinners than the body of Jesus on the cross. Jesus is saying, in my soon coming death, God will be climactically glorified – he will be seen and displayed before all creation as infinitely holy and merciful – that is the work I go to do and in verse 33 he says: and you can't help me with that work – where I am going, you cannot go. You can't help me do what only I can do; but there is something that you can do. You can love one another.

The message of the preamble is simply this: **loving Christian fellowship partners with the cross in bringing glory to God.** That's what this commandment is all about! Its about GLORIFIYNG GOD! That's what makes it so important. What is the chief end of man? To

GLORIFY GOD and enjoy him forever. Loving Christian fellowship is not an add on – it is not an optional extra that may or may not be jettisoned depending on the mood of the moment. It is a primary thing. That’s the set up for this text and the Apostle Paul didn’t miss it even if we so often do. In Romans 15 we read:

Romans 15:5-7 (HCSB)

⁵Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement allow you to live in harmony with one another, **according to the command of Christ Jesus,**

⁶**so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ** with a united mind and voice.

⁷Therefore accept one another, just as the Messiah also accepted you, **to the glory of God.**

Do you see that? Loving one another, living in harmony with one another was commanded by Jesus because it partners with the cross in bringing glory to God. That is absolutely critical for us to understand! That immediately elevates loving Christian fellowship to the category of worship and mission. Loving one another IS WORSHIP – because it directly glorifies God, and it is MISSION because as Paul goes on to say in Romans 15:

Romans 15:9 (HCSB)

As it is written: Therefore I will praise You among the Gentiles, and I will sing psalms to Your name.

Loving one another is wrapped up in God’s plan to stir up praise and glory from among the Gentiles – that’s MISSION. That’s the meaning of this preamble – loving one another is worship, loving one another is mission and loving one another is commanded by Jesus because it partners with the cross in glorifying God. Now we are ready to read and understand this new commandment.

Understanding The New Commandment (v.34-35)

Let me read it to you again and hear it now according to this new level of urgency and priority:

³⁴ A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

To understand this commandment we need to discuss both its “newness” and its predicted result.

First of all then:

i. How Is It New?

As Jewish men the disciples were already operating under a command to love. Leviticus 19:18:

Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**: I am the LORD.

Here in the Old Testament God commands his covenant people to show mercy and love to their fellow Jews – “the sons of your own people” – and to love them as they would love themselves. That command is already on the books and Jesus himself said: “I did not come to abolish the law” (Matthew 5:17) so what is the nature and what is the newness of this command? It is clearly not a replacement of the old command it is an improvement. It is broader in scope and it is higher in standard. The old command had to do only with loving fellow Jews. Other than a very few exceptions, the entirety of the covenant community under the Old Covenant was Jewish. This was a command for Jews to show mercy and love to fellow Jews but under the New Covenant there are going to be people from every tribe, tongue and nation on the earth so this is a much broader commandment.

It is also a much higher standard. The old commandment said to love your neighbour **as yourself**; the new commandment says we are to love one another **as Jesus has loved us**. That’s the key improvement.

just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

That’s a much higher standard and as the story unfolds, its about to get a lot higher. Jesus has already this very night humbled himself and served them by washing their feet, he has taught them and been patient with their ignorance and lack of understanding, later this night he will endure and forgive their betrayal, later still he will suffer alone on their behalf and give his life as a ransom for many. You need to love each other like that, Jesus says. You need to love one another JUST AS I HAVE LOVED YOU. That’s is the nature and the high call of this NEW commandment

Secondly we need to look at the predicted result:

ii. What does it do?

We see that in verse 35:

³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

The immediate result of loving one another is that we are revealed as the disciples of Jesus Christ. The characteristic mark of God's people purchased in Christ is that they love one another. The Bible makes this argument again and again and again. Paul spends 3 chapters in 1 Corinthians making this point. Have you ever noticed that 1 Corinthians 13 – THE LOVE CHAPTER – falls right between 1 Corinthians 12 and 1 Corinthians 14 – two chapters on spiritual gifts; what is the significance of that? Paul is trying to say that LOVE IS UNIVERSAL and gifts are various. We do not all speak in tongues – Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:30 – but we do all love. Tongues is NOT the universal mark of the true believer – LOVE is the universal mark of the true believer. Paul says:

1 Corinthians 13:1 (ESV)

¹ If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

We have gifts that DIFFER according to the grace given to us, but every true Christian loves. Love is the Shiboleth of the New Testament, love is the universal marker. By this they shall know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

How Do We Keep This New Commandment?

Now, dividing a text like this into its component parts so that we can see it and understand it and even delight in it is obviously not all that we need to do with it if we are to tremble before the text. Obviously the most important thing is for us to talk about how we can obey it. Jesus doesn't say: "A new suggestion I leave with you", or "I'd like to offer some closing thoughts ...", no, he said: "A new COMMANDMENT I give to you and its really, really important". So let's take a few minutes before we close to discuss how we can obey this New Commandment. Let me suggest first of all that we keep this commandment:

1. By insisting that believing must precede belonging

I get this from two places in the text; first of all in verse 33 Jesus said:

‘Where I am going you cannot come.’

‘You can’t follow me down this path that I am going. You aren’t capable!’ One of the doctrines that we have lost in the church is the doctrine of inability. Your grandparents knew about this one. We used to talk a lot about how the fundamental problem of the Bible before Jesus is mankind’s inability to walk as God required them to walk. That’s a HUGE problem! If a holy God requires you to do something you are not able to do then you have a huge problem! The answer to that problem is the life and death of Jesus Christ. He does for us what we were unable to do for ourselves and he pays for what we have done in his body on the cross. The cross CHANGES EVERYTHING! That’s why just a few verses later in John 13:36 we see:

John 13:36 (ESV)

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered him, “Where I am going **you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.**”

The cross changes everything! The cross is a game changer! What was impossible for Peter on Friday is ALTOGETHER POSSIBLE for Peter on Sunday! Those three days change everything! When a person has rejected their own righteousness and has laid hold of the cross in faith and trust and love, their chains are broken, their sins are forgiven and their hearts are changed and filled with the Holy Spirit and now what was impossible for men becomes possible with God! That’s why you can’t participate in the fullness of Christian fellowship unless you have been born again. The fastest way to obscure the miracle of the church is to fill out the membership with a roster of unbelievers.

I told you that I got this from two places in the text; let me show you the other one. Look again at verse 31:

John 13:31 (ESV)

³¹ When **he** had gone out, Jesus said, “Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

Did you ever notice that? Who is the “he” in that passage? Judas. There was one disciple at the table who was not a real disciple. Jesus waited until he went out before he gave this commandment. Jesus enables that which he commands and Jesus did not die for Judas. The effect of the cross was not applied to Judas. Therefore, Judas remained unable to love anyone but himself. He betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver because he was a man who had not been changed by the grace of God in Christ. If the church is going to be a miracle that offers compelling witness to the power and goodness of God then believing has to precede belonging.

But secondly, I would add, we keep this commandment:

2. By leaving no great gap between our believing and our belonging

Peter, after the cross and with the help of the Holy Spirit would later command his own people saying:

1 Peter 2:5 (NRSV)

⁵ like living stones, **let yourselves be built into a spiritual house**, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

As a true believer you are a living stone – the Holy Spirit is in you – now let yourself, let your stone be added to this house that we together might be a temple to our God and a witness to this city. Let go of your autonomy and allow yourself to become part of the miracle of our “loving one another”.

As Baptists, one of our main distinctives is that we believe in “believers’ church”. Meaning that we believe that you have to be saved to become a member – you have to be a living stone – and that if you’re saved, you have to become a member – you have to let your stone become part of the house. We believe that those two ideas are absolutely critical to the worship and the witness of the church. To obey this commandment you have to believe and you have to belong and you have to do it in that order.

Thirdly, we keep this commandment:

3. By guarding fiercely the unity of our fellowship

When I was a youth pastor the church that I was working at underwent a horrific church split. The issues were not theological they were demographic and stylistic. Essentially it was, as so many splits in the 80's and 90's were, a split about music and age. The older folks did not want to share influence and authority with the younger folks and the younger folks did not want to be patient and inclusive towards the older folks. The young viewed the old as out of touch and irrelevant and the old viewed the young as irreverent and incompetent. The church split. The young took the pastor and started a new work. It never took off and the pastor eventually left. The old stayed and died and shrank and eventually sold their building to Harvest. When I was there as a youth pastor there were 500 people on a Sunday morning. When all was said and done there were two dying churches that combined would not have numbered half that. That's a lot of people lost over nothing. Nothing. Listen, sometimes you do need to fight and sometimes you even need to separate and sever fellowship but in those very rare circumstances you better be fighting over something that matters. I'm talking the divinity of Christ or the authority of Scriptures or the reality of the Trinity – something BIG. Splitting a church over meaningless trivialities is an abomination against the Holy Spirit and if you have anything to do with it you make yourself an enemy of God.

I have a wife that I love and that God has given into my protection. There are only two reasons I can think of wherein you could take a knife to my wife and live to tell about it. One would be if you were removing a tumour and the other would be if you were severing a limb that was infected with gangrene and threatening her life. In those two cases you could cut my wife but if you cut her for any lesser reason you would make yourself my enemy. Do we think God less a husband than me? If you cut and wound the Bride of Christ for petty things you risk living the rest of your life as an enemy of God. There are churches in this town founded upon careless bloodshed that have never recovered the blessing of God. See that and tremble. Think upon that when next you feel inclined to gossip, slander and divide. We keep this command by guarding fiercely the unity and wholeness of the Bride of Christ.

Fourthly, we obey this commandment:

4. By bearing patiently the weaknesses of one another

Remember that the disciples would have heard this command as an amping up of the old command. The old command said:

Leviticus 19:18 (ESV)

¹⁸**You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people**, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

The old command said that loving others involved not taking revenge and not holding a grudge. The new command amps that up. Not only do we not take revenge or hold a grudge, here in giving this command, Jesus is preparing to die for the people who deny him. He's talking to Peter here, three verses later in John 13 Jesus says to Peter:

John 13:38 (ESV)

Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Jesus is preparing to DIE for people who abandon and deny him – that is the new standard for loving one another. Not only can we not take our own revenge, not only can we not hold a grudge, we need to be prepared to serve and die for those who hurt and betray us. I think a lot of us feel helpless before the demands of the old commandment – just being told we can't bear a grudge seems like an impossibly high standard – but here we are being told that we need to love and serve those who hurt and wound us deeply – if that doesn't drive you to your knees in search of mercy then nothing will. Pray for help from heaven to obey this command by bearing patiently and graciously the weaknesses of others.

Lastly, we obey this command:

5. By serving, sacrificing and suffering with one another

Jesus gave this commandment on the same evening that he had washed the disciples' feet. He served them. He gave this commandment on his way to the prison cell, on the way to the false trial before the Jewish authorities, on his way to the scourging and mockery of the Roman soldiers, and on his way to the cross where he would lay down his life as a ransom for many. He suffered and he sacrificed for them. That is how he loved them to the end. John used that phrase earlier in this chapter, he said:

John 13:1 (ESV)

¹ Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

Everything that Jesus did that night was about loving them to the **UTTERMOST** – loving them to the end! He had already taught them, he had already corrected them, he had already cared for them and provided for their needs – now he loves them to the end by serving them, suffering for them and sacrificing for them and he calls on them to do the same for one another. As I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

That kind of love is the definitive marker of the truly converted. That's the punch line of the sheep and the goats parable isn't it?

Matthew 25:34-40 (ESV)

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.' ...

'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.'

That's a picture of what loving Christian fellowship in the church looks like. That's how we obey the New Commandment and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.