

Jesus' New Commandment of Love (John 13:31-38)

John 13:31-38 serves as an introduction to Jesus' Upper Room Discourse, setting the direction for that masterful message. Jesus declared that His work on the cross would glorify the Father. He instructed His disciples to let love characterize their lives. He warned Peter about his impending denial. Even though Jesus would soon leave His disciples, they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit and make an indelible mark on the world. But in the mean time they needed to understand the nature of Jesus' death. Glory, love, and denial—these three themes are interwoven into Jesus' conversation with those who were closest to Him as He introduced His Upper Room Discourse. According to Jesus, love must be the preeminent characteristic of His true followers.

The basis of love—Jesus' redemptive death would glorify the Father (13:31-33).

Before revealing His new commandment of love, Jesus explained that the time had come for Him to glorify the Father by fulfilling God's redemptive plan. Jesus' death would serve as the basis for love.

Jesus declared that the time had come for Him to be glorified and the Father to be glorified in Him (13:31-32).

After Judas left the Upper Room, Jesus opened an intimate conversation with His remaining disciples. He stated that now was the time for Him to be glorified. Earlier He had voiced this same concept in anticipation of His sacrificial death (John 12:23-24). To be glorified is to be honored or exalted. Jesus counted it an honor to give His life for lost people. Through His death He would be exalted. Furthermore, God the Father would be glorified in Jesus' redemptive act. Jesus used past tense verbs to describe this glorification—in His mind this redemptive sacrifice was as good as accomplished (compare John 17:4). Since God the Father would be glorified in His Son, the Father would in turn glorify the Son in Him, that is, the Father would honor Jesus due to their intimate, divine relationship. The Father would glorify the Son immediately. The glory of God is the highest purpose of Jesus' redemptive work, surpassing even the value of human salvation. By dying for human sin, Jesus displayed for all eternity the love, mercy, and grace of God. Therefore, God deserves our love, gratitude and praise. Jesus' death is the basis for love.

Jesus warned His disciples that He would not be with them much longer and that they could not go where He was going (13:33).

Tenderly addressing His disciples as "little children," Jesus warned them that He would be with them for just a little longer. Previously Jesus told the Jewish leaders that He would go away and they would not be able to follow Him (John 8:21). Now He told His disciples the same thing. He was going away. His disciples would look for Him, but they would not be able to follow Him. Jesus was describing His death and His return to heaven. Even after His

resurrection, the disciples couldn't find Jesus on their own terms. They had to wait for Him to appear to them. The disciples would, in fact, go to be with Jesus in heaven one day (John 13:36), but in the immediate future they would be separated. For this reason they would need to depend on each other and love each other. Jesus' death would serve as the basis for their love.

**The preeminence of love—Jesus' true disciples
would be recognized by their love for one another (13:34-35).**

In a word, that which makes Christianity distinct is love. God loves this fallen world. Because of this divine love Jesus came into the world to die for our sins. Those who follow Jesus must follow His example of love—love for God, love for neighbor, and love for one another. Here, Jesus institutes His new commandment of love for one another.

Jesus proclaimed His new commandment of love for one another (13:34).

In the Upper Room that night, Jesus said that He was giving His disciples a new commandment. While love wasn't a new concept, its centrality to the faith was a new and compelling priority. Jesus elevated the importance of love, specifically love for one another within the Christian community. Jesus told His disciples that they were to "love one another." Their love for each other was to reflect Jesus' love for them. "Just as" Jesus loved them they were to love one another. Jesus' love for us is the model, the example we're to follow. Jesus' love for us is unconditional, unlimited, and self-sacrificing. Christians are to love each other in this same way. So important was this new commandment that Jesus repeated it—"love one another."

Jesus explained that people would recognize His disciples by their love for one another (13:35).

Jesus' followers should stand out in the world for any number of reasons, including humility, high moral values, courage, dedication, zeal, hope, faithfulness, joy, and peace. But "the greatest of these is love" (compare 1 Corinthians 13:13). Unconditional, unflinching love for one another will capture the respect of an unbelieving world more than any other quality. Jesus stated, "All will know by this that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Too often we fail to reflect the love of Jesus in the way we treat others. But when the world witnesses true and tested love among believers they see a powerful reminder of the love of Jesus Christ. Love must be preeminent among Jesus' followers. We must absolutely learn to display love for one another. Beyond the emotional element of love, love must take on practical forms. First Corinthians 13:4-7 provides practical direction for showing love to one another. Practical love is patient, kind, devoid of envy and pride. It isn't rude or selfish and it doesn't easily become angered. Love doesn't keep track of offenses or take joy in evil. Instead, practical love takes joy in the truth. It protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. This kind of love must be preeminent within the church, the body of Jesus Christ.

The power of love—Jesus' divine discernment

would see beyond the failures of human weakness (13:36-38).

Love for Jesus prompts devotion to Him. But our devotion, while well intended, often falls short. Peter was deeply devoted to Jesus, but even he crumbled under pressure. Thankfully, Jesus' love for us never fails.

Peter asked where Jesus was going and Jesus explained that Peter could not yet follow Him (13:36).

Peter showed great concern over Jesus' statement about their impending separation. He wanted to know where Jesus was going. Jesus said that Peter could not yet go where He was going. Jesus was going to a cross, to a grave, and then back to heaven. Peter would eventually follow a similar path. He, too, would die by crucifixion according to church tradition. But for the present, Peter and the other disciples couldn't participate in what Jesus was about to experience. Jesus would die alone. Jesus alone could die for the sins of the world.

Peter claimed that he would lay down his life for Jesus, but Jesus predicted that Peter would soon deny Him (13:37-38).

Peter pressed the issue, asking why he couldn't follow Jesus to His destination and declaring, "I will lay down my life for you." No doubt Peter was sincere about his intended commitment to Jesus. Therefore, it must have felt like a crushing blow for Peter to hear Jesus say, "Truly, truly I say to you, before the rooster crows you will deny me three times." Within a very few short hours Peter would deny any affiliation with Jesus. How could this be? Jesus didn't mandate these denials. He merely foresaw Peter's reactions to the pressure of association and the threat of death. Jesus' words weren't meant to hurt Peter but to warn him about what lay ahead. Peter did indeed deny Jesus three times but Jesus' love for Peter never changed. After His resurrection, Jesus restored Peter to fellowship and service (John 21:15-19). But for that moment in the Upper Room, Jesus confronted Peter with the fact of his flagging faith. Even in our weakness and failures Jesus loves and restores us. The power of love, Jesus' love for us, inspires us to love one another. His love is the model for our love. His death is the foundation of our love. Jesus' new commandment compels us to love one another just as He loves us. Love must be the preeminent characteristic of Jesus' true followers.