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## A New Commandment

### John 13:31-38

**Intro:** As we have seen, **ch13** records the *significant events* that occurred during the Last Supper. The next 4 chapters (**14-17**) record the various teachings that Jesus delivered at this time but before the teaching could begin, Jesus had to capture the disciple's attention and "clear the air" so to speak. He successfully got their attention by washing their feet then He cleared the air by identifying His betrayer and sending Judas on his way.

Although it wasn't clear to the rest of the disciples, there was someone in their midst who was not really with them in spirit. Judas' true character was not known to the other disciples but Jesus knew it and He seems to have held back on His teaching until after the traitor's departure. Now that Judas is gone, the spiritual atmosphere has cleared and Jesus is free to speak. He begins to share with them the things that are on His heart. He talks about His coming glory, a new commandment, heaven and the soon-to-occur outpouring of the Holy Spirit on His followers.

**31-32-** It's interesting that the first of these heart revelations Jesus is about to share with His disciples concerns His own glorification. Of course, when Judas left the group, Jesus knew that everything was now set in motion for His arrest, trials, humiliation, condemnation, beatings, crucifixion, death and burial. He had previously spoken of His coming death as glorification, now it was about to happen. We should also notice the intensity with which He speaks of this glorification. He refers to it 5 times in just 2 verses. We should also understand that the root word for glory has 2 different meanings and both are used by Jesus in this passage.

The 2 meanings of glory are related to the 2 major uses of the Greek word for glory: **doxa**. The first meaning has to do with internal glory. The word **doxa** came to mean "to hold a good opinion of" something or someone. So, to hold a right opinion of God is to be orthodox. To ascribe right opinion to God is to praise or worship Him. Thus, we can say God's glory consists of His inherent worth which is embodied in His character. God is glorious because of who He is and what He is like and the acknowledgment of His worth by His people is worship. True worship consists of an element of spirit

and truth. Both are necessary. It doesn't matter how spiritual in nature your worship is, if it's not based on a right opinion of God then it's not true worship. You're merely worshipping a god of your own making.

The second meaning of doxa relates to external glory. This is the glory that is associated with light. The OT reveals a God who dwells in unapproachable glory. This glory was veiled by the cloud that covered Mt Sinai, where God came down to talk to Moses, causing Moses' face to glow with transferred brightness. This is the glory that Jesus set aside in His incarnation, the glory He took up again briefly on the Mount of Transfiguration. In each of these events, glory is the outward brilliance that is appropriate to and normally accompanies a revelation of God.

These distinctions in meaning are necessary for understanding our text because when the present tense is used, Jesus is referring to a revelation of His own true worth or character. In this case, it refers to the revelation of God's character in and through the crucifixion. When it occurs in the future tense, it refers to the future glory Jesus would receive as a result of His resurrection and ascension into heaven.

From a normal human viewpoint, it's hard to see the cross as a glorious thing. Despite being a painful and gruesome way to die, the world looked on a cross as a humiliation, a disgrace and a curse. How was the cross a glorification? The answer is found in the meaning of the crucifixion. 1<sup>st</sup>) The cross is the pivotal, most significant event in all of world history. Nothing that's happened before or after it can ever compare with it, until Jesus returns to the earth. It was at the cross of Jesus Christ that the great drama which God had planned before the foundation of the world came together and was acted out. People of all races, all levels of society and understanding have been saved by it.

2<sup>nd</sup>) On the cross, Jesus reversed the failure of Adam and turned the sad history of humanity around. When Adam chose to disobey God, it's as if he fell over a cliff dragging his entire string of descendents down with him. Like mountain climbers tethered together, one by one, each is pulled over the side by the one before. But at the end of the rope is Jesus and He stands fast. Since Jesus doesn't succumb to Satan's temptation, since Jesus didn't sin, He is able to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice for human sin and does so. He becomes the only stable, safe point of humanity. Thus, all who

are united to Him by faith are saved by Him. The fall of Adam, which led to destruction, is reversed in Jesus Christ. By His atonement, Jesus leads those who are His own to safety.

3<sup>rd</sup>) Jesus death on the cross also reversed and brought an end to the power of Satan ([Heb 2:14](#)). Christ is glorified in this. “The sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law” ([1 Cor 15:56](#)). But Jesus provided an atonement for sin and thus broke the power of sin over those who are His own people.

The second reference to glory in our text is also in the present tense and it says that God is glorified in Jesus. This is significant because Jesus is still talking about the crucifixion. How is God the Father glorified in Christ’s crucifixion?

It reveals the justice of God. Paul declares this in [Rom 3:26](#). Throughout the OT, those who were looking forward to the coming of a redeemer were saved by God: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc. But someone at that time could argue: “How is God just in saving them?” Sure, He offers them forgiveness. He saves them from the penalty of their sin but what about the sin? Where is it punished? He justified these men but He doesn’t seem to have been just in doing so. But He was! He justified them on the basis of the death of Jesus which was still in the future. When Jesus died on the cross, sin was punished in Him and God is shown to be just in His previous acts of forgiveness. God’s justice in forgiving sinners was revealed in the cross of Christ. God is glorified in His justice by what Jesus did.

It reveals the holiness of God. When Jesus took the sin of the world upon Himself on the cross, the Father, in His holiness, had to turn away. The close fellowship they had enjoyed for all of eternity was broken. It was this that caused Jesus to cry out in agony, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” Never has God manifested His hatred of sin so much as in the suffering and death of His Only-begotten Son. In it He showed that it was impossible for Him to be at peace with sin. Christ’s death fully met every demand of God holiness, which sin had offended.

It reveals the faithfulness of God. All throughout the OT we see God promising a deliverer. He promised it to Adam and Eve in the Garden. He promised it to Abraham, Moses, David and others. God continually spoke of

this coming Deliverer through His prophets. Had God forgotten His promises? No, because Jesus came to earth and went to the cross and died to accomplish the long promised defeat of Satan. God is shown to be faithful and He's glorified in it.

It reveals the love of God. Nothing in all history reveals the love of God as does the cross of Jesus Christ. In fact, it does it so well, God Himself points to it as proof of His love (**Rom 5:8**). How do we know God loves us? We know it because Jesus gave His life to redeem us from sin. God is glorified in this.

In **vs32** we see the second meaning of glory used in the future tense. The gist is: if God is glorified by the special nature of Christ's death (which He is) then He will immediately proceed to bestow a new and special glory upon Jesus through His resurrection, ascension and exaltation to power at the Father's right hand. This is what Jesus yearned for at this point. He went to the cross because it meant salvation for us but He looked beyond the cross to the Resurrection, where the power of the cross would be evident. He looked forward to the time when He would ascend back to the Father and there, minister for us as our great High Priest, having presented the blood of His sacrifice as the atonement for our sin (**Heb 12:2**).

Of course, glory isn't the focus of Jesus' instruction to the disciples – it's love! The word love is only used 12 times in the first 12 chapters but it will appear 44 times in the next 9 (**13-21**).

**33-35**- **vs34** is the key verse of this section but in order to properly understand the full significance of it, we must look to the preface to this great declaration: **vs33**. Jesus begins by calling the disciples "His" little children (by implication). He wants to assure them of His tender love for them before He drops the bomb on them. He tells them straight up that He's about to leave them and where He's going, they cannot come. As shocking as this had to be for the 12, **vs33** actually provides greater context to understanding what Jesus declares in **vs34**. It does this in 2 ways.

1<sup>st</sup>, since Jesus was about to leave the world, the only example of true love the world had ever known was about to be taken from it. Jesus was the very essence of love and He was about to prove it by dying on the cross. But, this would be followed by His resurrection and ascension – He would be

taken from humanity! How could the lost world ever know what true divine love is? They would have to see it in His disciples! Jesus is being taken so now the disciples are to love as He loved. Jesus is in effect saying, "I'm going so you must be as I have been in the world."

2<sup>nd</sup>, the disciples were to transfer the love they felt for Jesus to one another. There's no doubt that each one of the disciples loved Jesus. They would do whatever He asked of them. But, just as certainly as they loved Him, it's also obvious that they didn't really love each other with anything close to the same intensity. The truth is they were actually jealous of each other. They still argued over who would be greatest. They certainly wouldn't wash each other's feet! Jesus is making the point here that this is precisely how they must love one another.

The vertical love of the disciples for the exalted Christ must also be expressed horizontally in their love for all other Christians. Beside, the horizontal love, which can be seen by all, is proof of the vertical love they (we) claim to have.

new- Full disclosure: the command to love was not new, it was actually ancient. "Love your neighbor as yourself" ([Lev 19:18b](#)). If the command to love was old, how can Jesus call it a new commandment? It's "new" because Jesus raised the command to an entirely new level and gave it an entirely new significance. Jesus gave the command a new object. The command in Leviticus says the Israelite was to love his neighbor as himself, but this only applied to a Jewish neighbor. This was a physical, family relationship. But in Jesus' command, the relationship is spiritual, so the neighbor to be loved is any believer in Jesus. When the relationship was physical, the parameters were clear. The Jews weren't to love Gentiles as themselves and they didn't. In fact, one Roman historian called the Jews the "haters of the human race." But when the relationship became spiritual, the scope of love was broadened. We are to love everyone that Jesus loves. Obviously, this love is not to be withheld from unbelievers. True, they're not in the spiritual family of God but they all have the capacity to become part of that family.

This command was also new to the degree it was to be exercised. It's not just the run-of-the-mill love they were to show one another but the unconditional love that the God of the universe expressed when He took on

human form, suffered and died for the ungodly so that they might be redeemed from the chains of sin and brought into glory. The measure of this love is found in [1 Cor 13:4-8](#). This is the love Jesus brought and it was a new thing in this world.

It was also new because it was made possible by a new power. That's the power of the Holy Spirit, the very life of Jesus Christ in every believer. Without this, we can't love as Jesus loved; it can't be achieved by human effort. In short, we're to love as Jesus loved, He is our example. His love is to be the full measure of our love for each other. If you go back to [1 Cor 13](#) and substitute Jesus for love it fits quite nicely. Clearly, He is the embodiment of such love.

Now, if we substitute our name for love, does it fit? Not so much. In fact, we really don't even understand such love. The comparison should be humbling. It should cause us to turn to the Lord in prayer and ask Him to teach us to love others as He loves. When we pray this way, God will help us and we will start to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, this measure of love is an identifying mark of the true disciple and is applicable at all times and all places until Jesus returns. Anyone can call themselves a Christian (many do) but true discipleship is much different. True discipleship consists of giving oneself wholeheartedly to Jesus. True discipleship is fairly easy to spot. In fact, there are 3 texts in John Gospel that provide the marks of a true disciple: 1<sup>st</sup> is [John 8:31](#) – a true disciple continues in His Word. 2 things are necessary if we are to do this: we must hear His word & we must obey it (continually). We don't understand all that's in the Bible but we can understand what we know and we can follow (obey) that. The disciples didn't understand everything Jesus said but they believed what they knew and continued in His doctrine. When they learned more, they believed that too. That's the Christian life. Unquestioning faith is the 1<sup>st</sup> mark of the true disciple!

2<sup>nd</sup> is [vs35](#) – Jesus gives the world the right to judge whether or not a person is a Christian based on the love they show to other believers. If an unbeliever confronts us on our lack of love for other Christians, we can't get angry at them because Jesus gave them that prerogative. All we can do is fall on our knees and ask God to show us if they are correct or not. If they are, then they have the right to say what they said and we have our work cut

out for us.

3<sup>rd</sup> is in **John 15:8**. The 3<sup>rd</sup> mark of a true disciple is fruit-bearing. It's impossible to do without Jesus so in order to bear fruit, we must remain in Him. Judging from the Lord's own definition, are you a true disciple of Jesus Christ?

**36-38**- Peter was a true disciple of Jesus but we know what lies ahead for him. In fact, he should have known it too for Jesus had just told him. But sadly, Peter was overconfident. He believed the strength of his love for Jesus would see him through any difficulty, but it didn't. He failed because his overconfidence led to a failure to pray. Jesus even told him 3 times to pray so as not to enter into temptation but Peter decided he would rather sleep than pray.

The example of Peter teaches us that anyone can fall. The strongest disciple is as weak as water when they depend on themselves. God has ordered our lives in such a way that we cannot progress spiritually without leaning on Him, trusting Him to hold us up. If we don't learn to lean on Jesus, God will allow us to slip. He allows us to slip so we will come to trust in Him more and ourselves less.

The example of Peter also teaches us that if we fall, the Lord doesn't cast us off. On the contrary, like Peter, He prays for us and when we come to our senses and repent, He restores us to intimate fellowship with Him and He recommissions us back into His service. When we are standing in our own strength, we are about to fall. But when we conquer our pride and learn to lean on Jesus, we'll find Him to be all that we need. We'll find that His love is sufficient for all emergencies.

Are you a true disciple of Jesus? 😊