

February 21, 2021

“A New Command”  
John 13:34-35

FCF: We run a great risk when we fail to love.

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples.  
(anchor) We must walk on it.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Francis Schaeffer was one of the intellectual and spiritual giants of the 20th century. He was a brilliant pastor, teacher, author, and defender of the Christian faith. It’s worth knowing Schaeffer went through a spiritual crisis in the 1950’s that lasted several months. He had to go back and rethink his very core beliefs. This experience gave him great compassion for others.

“What caused this crisis?” you ask. A lack of love shown between Christians, especially when there was disagreement. He struggled with the question (**READ**), “How could people stand for God’s holiness and purity of doctrine in the church, and in one’s personal life, and yet not have it turn out to be harsh and ugly?” The harshness and ugliness came especially from people within “the separated movement” of the time - Christians who were defined by what they were against and who inevitably fell prey to a great deal of infighting. It was an awful time.

Again, this caused Schaeffer to despair as to whether Christianity was even true. It points to the great risk we run when we fail to love. And it makes clear the need to go to Jesus’ words.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [John 13:34-35](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

In *The Silver Chair*, one of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C. S. Lewis, Aslan calls two children, Jill and Eustace, into Narnia to perform a vital task— to find a lost Prince. Because the children become separated soon after their arrival, Aslan presents the task to one of them, Jill. He gives Jill four signs by which he will guide them in their quest, and has her repeat them until she knows them perfectly. Just before sending Jill on her way, Aslan exhorts her (**READ**):

But, first, remember, remember, remember the signs. Say them to yourself when you wake in the morning and when you lie down at night, and when you wake in the middle of the night. And whatever strange things may happen to you, let nothing turn your mind from following the signs. And secondly, I give you a warning. Here on the mountain I have spoken to you clearly: I will not often do so down in Narnia... And the signs which you have learned here will not look at all as you expect them to look, when you meet them there. That is why it is so important to know them by heart and pay no attention to appearances. Remember the signs and believe the signs. Nothing else matters.

“Nothing else matters.” A strong statement. Jill and Eustace were sent on a mission. The great Lion had given them a task. The success of the mission was conditioned on heeding the signs.

You may know Aslan is an allegorical symbol for Jesus. So it should be no surprise there is a parallel to these words and our own experience. It is as essential to heed the signs in this world as it is in that one. Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples. We must walk on it.

How? By taking heed to what He has given - a command...to love...one another.

**I. A COMMAND**

First, the command. There are two things we need to observe here.

*A) Newness*

There is a newness to this command. Something heard and yet unheard before.

1. Intensity

It is new in its intensity. Elsewhere, Jesus calls not just for love for a neighbor but for an enemy. Not just love for the unlovely but the unloving. Not just for the oppressed but the oppressor.

2. Standard

Jesus calls for love that is new in its intensity. And a new standard. This is not just a call to love as we love ourselves but as He has loved us. The plan is to explore that in detail next week.

*B) Boldness*

So there is a newness to this. And a boldness, arresting the attention of the disciples.

1. The seriousness of the hour

It marks the seriousness of the hour. They did not know it at the time, but this was the beginning of what is referred to as Jesus' "Farewell Discourse," preparing the disciples for His departure.

2. The supremacy of His words

There is a seriousness to the hour. And a supremacy to Jesus' words (**READ John 13:34a**). This is not a new bit of advice but something on the order of what was inscribed by the finger of God on stone tablets and given to Moses. That's the idea and He's saying this with all seriousness.

Jesus is giving us a new commandment.

*Application:*

Are we prepared to hear it? Are we willing to hear it? Is our posture that of a creature before its creator? Of a child before his parent? Of a subject before her King? Is ours an honest preparedness to receive and pay heed to whatever Jesus says? We need to ask that question.

Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples. We must walk on it.

## **II. TO LOVE**

Which brings us to our second point. What is this command? It is to love.

*A) Survey*

Let's consider John's Gospel in particular and do a quick survey of what he says on this.

1. Statistics

Statistically, John mentions "love" more times than the other three Gospel writers combined. Looking at this particular word for love - agape - and surveying the New Testament, John's writings account for nearly one-third of the occurrences. That's a high concentration of agape.

2. Samplings

Then, if we start taking some samplings, we see this - the Father's love for the Son, the Son's love for the Father, and God's love for the world (**READ John 3:16**). This is a love moved to act.

*B) Summary*

Moving then from our survey, what do learn in terms of a summary of agape?

1. Stands out

There are other words and concepts of love. But this one stands out. It is not working for self-interest, self-gratification, or self-protection. It is not driven by attraction or seek to get its way.

2. Sacrificial

John is honing in on a sacrificial love, a love that seeks the highest good of another person, a love that never sees another as simply the means to an end but the end in and of themselves.

Jesus is giving us a command, a command to love.

*Application:*

A disciple of Jesus is to love God and those around them with this agape love. We'll get a bit more into that in just a moment. But let's stop and think about this. What would such love mean for you? Think in terms of how you give your money and spend your time. What would it mean for how Jesus is calling you to sacrifice yourself for the highest good of another? What treasured thing would you need to lay down, to forfeit and lay aside, for the sake of another?

Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples. We must walk on it.

### **III. ONE ANOTHER**

This brings us to our third point. Who are we to love this way? Who is Jesus speaking of here? There are two things that need to be said because the Bible has a great deal to say on this.

*A) Every Person*

First, we are to love every person. Think in terms of the second greatest commandment.

1. Image of God

Every person is made in the image of God, according to His likeness. That means every person has been made with tremendous dignity and worth, of incomprehensible and undeniable value.

2. Our neighbor

Put another way, every person is our neighbor. That's Jesus' point in His parable about the Good Samaritan. The story is given when a questioner tries to restrict the extent of our love, how far it has to go. Jesus won't have it and tells this powerful story, pressing on who is our neighbor.

*B) Every Christian*

That said, we have to ask, "Who is Jesus speaking of here?" The answer is that we are to love every person but especially every Christian. Paul echoes this (**READ Galatians 6:10**).

1. No matter who they are

It doesn't matter who they are. We are to love them regardless of their group or party, regardless of their race or class, age or gender, schooling or occupation. It doesn't matter who they are.

2. No matter what they've done

Nor does it matter what they've done. Now, don't go spinning off into thinking of extreme cases. Even those are covered here in appropriate ways. Think with me in terms of our ordinary interpersonal disagreements and the need we have to confess our sin and to forgive one another.

We have a command to love one another. Most especially when it's hard.

*Illustration:*

I mentioned Francis Schaeffer a bit ago. A little book I'd urge you to buy and read is *The Mark of the Christian*. It's about this very thing. Towards the end, he tells this story (**READ**):

One happened among the Brethren groups in Germany immediately after World War II. In order to control the church, Hitler commanded the union of all religious groups in Germany, drawing them together by law. The Brethren divided over this issue. Half accepted Hitler's dictum and half refused. The ones who submitted, of course, had a much easier time, but gradually in this organizational oneness with the liberal groups their own doctrinal sharpness and spiritual life suffered. On the other hand, the group that stayed out remained spiritually virile, but there was hardly a family in which someone did not die in a German concentration camp. Now can you imagine the emotional tension? The war is over, and these Christian brothers face each other again. They had the same doctrine, and they had previously worked together for more than a generation. Now what is going to happen? One man remembers that his father died in a concentration camp and knows that these people in the other group remained safe. But those on the other side have deep personal feelings as well.

Then gradually these brothers came to know that this situation just would not do. A time was appointed when the elders of the two groups could meet together in a certain quiet place. I asked the man who told me this, "What did you do?" He said, "Well, I'll tell you what we did. We came together, and we set aside several days in which each man would search his own heart." Here was a real difference; the emotions were deeply, deeply involved. "My father has gone to the concentration camp, my mother was dragged away." These things are not just little pebbles on the beach; they reach into the deep wellsprings of human emotions. But these people understood the command of Christ about this, and for several days every man did nothing except search his own heart concerning his own failures and the commands of Christ. Then they met together. I asked the man, "What happened then?" And he said, "We just were one." To my mind, this is exactly what Jesus speaks about. The Father has sent the Son!

*Application:*

Where am I going with this? The angst of 2020 was nowhere near the terror of Nazi Germany. So what I want to suggest is not a comparison but a contrast. Or, better yet, an if-then statement. If such reconciliation and restoration of relationships could happen there in post-war Germany, how can we rule it out our context? How could it not happen in 2021? It surely needs to. Do the inventory. Everywhere we look, there are bruised relationships. We know this.

We have our opinions and have taken stances on COVID-19, race relations, and politics. Have we run roughshod over others with those opinions? A chill has come upon friendships, pre and post 2020. People have been hurt. Blood-bought brothers and sisters in Christ have been hurt. Those things didn't just happen. That chilling came from within those relationships.

(**READ Psalm 139:23-24**) Where the Lord is speaking to us, this is something we should mourn and earnestly seek to make right. Which can only come by seeking one another out in true humility, asking open questions, with a readiness to listen and absorb what we need to hear.

Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples. We must walk on it.

**CONCLUSION:**

(**READ John 13:34a**) These are words truly spoken by Jesus, then and now. They are striking and sobering. And, if we are honest, we have to admit we fall woefully short of them.

But think what they imply. Consider what the command assumes. There's an implication to this imperative. Imagine a teenager with a freshly minted driver's license. A parent says to

them, “I need you to drive to the store.” That’s the imperative. What is the implication? The parent believes the child can do it. It is not an impossible task. There is potential there. This thing can be done with this young driver’s involvement. Most often, to their great delight.

What if we were to hear Jesus’ command to us in this text in the same way? (**READ John 13:34a**) It’s not an impossible task. There is potential here. Just as the angel said to Mary on the eve of Jesus’ arrival (**READ Luke 1:37**). Just as the Apostle Paul said to his readers in Philippi (**READ Philippians 4:13**). These were not merely glowing words of inspiration empty of any context. The “all things” Paul was speaking of had everything to do with obedience to God and service to others. Do you see? Jesus never calls us to do anything He does not also give us the grace to carry out. Never. Which, applied to John 13, has to then include this command to love one another. Again, what if we heard the command in this way? (**READ John 13:34a**) “Ah, such is the reality of your presence and determination to change my heart that this could happen!”

It can be done. We have but to lean into, rely upon, and trust in Him moment by moment. Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples. We must walk on it. We must walk on it.

**PROPOSITION:** (magnet) Jesus has marked out the path for His disciples.  
(anchor) We must walk on it.