

A New Twist on an Old Commandment

John 13:31-35

INTRODUCTION

If you and your fiancée were to come to me for premarital counseling, one of the conversations that we would have during those sessions would be based on a book by Dr. Gary Chapman, *The Five Love Languages*. In fact, it is a book that should be mandatory reading for every married couple and every parent. And I don't get a commission for promoting it.

In the book Chapman teaches his readers that every person on earth expresses and receives love in one of five ways:

- **Words of Affirmation:** This person needs to hear the words "I love you" spoken and thrives on unsolicited compliments.
- **Quality Time:** This person needs your undivided attention. They thrive on lots of time and lots of eye contact.
- **Receiving Gifts:** This person thrives on receiving something tangible, but more importantly on the fact that you thought about them when they weren't there.
- **Acts of Service:** This person thrives on anything you do for them, particularly something that adds value to their life.
- **Physical Touch:** This person thrives on such things as pats on the back or holding hands – anything where physical contact is expressed.

Chapman's theory is that if you want me to know that you love me, then you need to speak my language. It's "acts of service," by the way.

I thought about Chapman's book when I read verses 34-35:

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Chapman says "if you love me, you will express it like this."

Jesus says that "if you love like this, others will know that you love Jesus."

Chapman wants me to think first about you, and then express my love in a way you will understand. If I do that, you will be able to say "Tom loves me."

Jesus wants me to think about Him first, and then express my love in the way Jesus would do. If I do that you will be able to say, "Tom loves Jesus."

Chapman is a great book for family relationships, but our focus today needs to be on the loving relationships Christians have for one another and for others who need to come to faith in Christ.

Up to this point in biblical history – as early as Leviticus 19:18 – the commandment to love other people in the family of faith was typically phrased like this:

Love your neighbor as yourself.

But in this passage today, Jesus adds a new twist to this old commandment. He says:

As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Do you see the new twist? Not “as yourself.” But “as I have loved you.”

What does that kind of love look like? What does it mean to love “as I have loved you?” If you are like me, the first thought that came to your mind was a similar statement by Jesus:

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13)

That statement, however, doesn't appear for another two chapters (John 15:13). Here Jesus is not talking about the kind of love that we might describe as the ultimate sacrifice. Here He is simply saying “Tonight you have seen me love you. Now, you love others as I have loved you.”

So what did Jesus do? How did He demonstrate His love?

1. He started with the things they needed

This chapter begins with the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet.

He got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:4-5)

We often make a big deal of the servanthood component of this story, and so we should. But this was also a hygienic need for people in that day. Since people reclined as they ate, their feet were in the faces of other people. So washing feet was both hospitable and necessary. I can just picture Jewish mothers calling their kids to dinner by saying, “Joshua, time for dinner. Go wash your feet.”

What Jesus did for his disciples was not a difficult thing. It took no great skill set. There was no advanced planning that had to occur. He simply looked around the room and saw a need. It was clear that one else was prepared to wash the disciples' feet, so He did it.

In that action – in the meeting of a simple but important need – Jesus said “I love you” to those gathered in that Upper Room.

There are a host of these types of things going on in our congregation – far more than we as a staff can track or tally. Members of this congregation are providing food, running errands, taking others to doctors' appointments, mowing yards, listening to expressed concerns, and so on.

In the same way that Jesus said "I love you" to those first disciples by washing their feet before the Passover meal, we too say "I love you" to those whose needs we meet because of our love for Jesus.

The loneliest time in my life was a two hour span sitting the waiting room of Mt. Carmel West Hospital while Karen had a medical procedure following a miscarriage. We were new enough in that community I didn't know who to call, and no one knew how much sitting with me would have meant.

When it comes to the really big things that people need, individually you and I may not be much help. Those might take planning and recruiting. But the simple acts ... we can do those, right?

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

2. He was authentic with them

In John 13:21, we read these words:

After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

Focus on the words "Jesus was troubled in spirit." Based on the text, it was apparent to the rest of the disciples that something was bothering Jesus. And while they didn't immediately understand it – they eventually would – the authenticity demonstrated by Jesus resonated within each of the disciples. Except for Judas. His heart was already set in concrete. Each would ask, "Is it I?" and Peter – don't you love him – would by proclaiming "I will die for you" (only to be told that he would instead deny Jesus three times).

Being authentic allows our fellow Christians and those not yet a part of the family of faith to know and understand that real life happens to every Christian. Being "authentic," being "real" is both a way of experiencing love and a way of expressing it. But it is often hard work before you get there.

In the classic children's book, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, the Rabbit and Skin Horse talk about how hard it is to be real -- a frightening thought to the Rabbit. But the Skin Horse offers these words:

It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand."

Jesus showed His love for His disciples by being real right before their eyes. He didn't try to shelter them from the difficult times, but allowed them to be present when things were troubling. He didn't put on a fake smile. He was real.

You can do that, right??

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

3. He stuck with them even when they got it wrong.

The official text for today's sermon begins with these words:

When he was gone...

This is the phrase that got me thinking along these lines. When he was gone. The "he" was Judas, and the "gone" was Judas leaving the Upper Room to finalize the betrayal of Jesus.

In the words that follow, Jesus tells the remaining disciples that "tonight is the night." He plainly states that "*I will be with you only a little longer*" (v. 33). But He waited to say that until Judas was gone. Why?

I think it was because He loved Judas. He knew that Judas had a role to play, and He knew that the rest of those hot-headed disciples would interfere with it. Judas had it wrong, but even then Jesus continued to love him.

- Peter would get it wrong and deny Jesus. But Jesus continued to love him.
- Thomas would get it wrong and question the truth of the resurrection. But Jesus continued to love him.
- All of the disciples, except for John, would get it wrong and would hide as Jesus went to the cross. But Jesus continued to love them.

You and I get it wrong fairly frequently too. But Jesus continued to love us. And He asks us to continue to love in that way when those around us get it wrong as well.

You can do that, right? When people break their promises, when they make decisions that go contrary to what they and you know to be right, when you are

trying to help them but they won't let you. You can continue to stick it out and thus show the love of Christ, right?

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

APPLICATION

The famous British preacher G. Campbell Morgan had five sons who were also preachers. One day Morgan and his wife took their five boys to lunch, and during the meal he asked them "Who is the greatest preacher?"

In unison those five sons said, "Mom." Mrs. Morgan never actually preached a sermon, but her through the way she lived her life she impacted others more than any sermon her famous husband and five sons had ever preached.

Some people will only experience the God's love as they see it expressed by you and me.

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Let us love as Christ first loved us. Amen.