

John 13:1-17,31b-35**Love one another**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Through our midweek Lenten devotions this year, we have been looking at the role of the 10 Commandments in the life of the Christian, and tonight I just want to briefly summarise that as we reflect on Jesus' new commandment to love one another. One of the repeated themes through our five studies, although they were disrupted by extreme rain and by covid, has been that the new covenant at times looks very different to the old covenant. Strictly speaking, the 10 Commandments were given to the people of Israel as part of the old covenant, and don't directly apply to Christians who live under the new covenant made in Jesus' blood. But when Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you", we must ask ourselves what that looks like. And for the most part, it does look like the second table of the 10 Commandments, the ones that are all about how we treat other people.

Jesus' new command to love one another isn't really that different to the Old Testament commands to love the Lord and to love your neighbour as yourself. Jesus did add that we must love even our enemies, something not really present in the old covenant. And he did make it harder to claim that we have upheld any of the commandments. Jesus said that even hating your brother in your heart is the same as murder. And that having lust in your heart is the same as committing adultery. Again, this is not so much a new thing, but a clarification of how perfectly the commandments must be upheld to claim that we are righteous in God's sight.

So, the command to love God and love your neighbour is not brand new, but there is something different in what Jesus said. "Love one another as I have loved you." What is new about this commandment is not found in the command itself but in the source and example of the love. It arises from Jesus' own caring for the community—'as I have loved you.' The model and source of love is Jesus' death, the supreme expression of love. Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends (John 15:13). The disciples are not left on their own to figure all this out or to come up with the willpower to do this but are empowered to love by themselves being loved. That is the new aspect to it, not that it's something that never existed before this moment.

This love Jesus has for his followers cannot be duplicated by them in one sense, because it affects their salvation, since he lays down his life for them. It was a special act of love that gives life to people. He is the only truly innocent one who could do this. He is the once-for-all sacrifice for the sins of the world. None of us can or should repeat that. But in another sense, we can follow his example. Jesus' disciples are to love one another by following his example of sacrificial service to one another, to death if necessary. One opportunity for us to put this into practice comes courtesy of our Prime Minister and the upcoming federal election. Loving one another in this self-sacrificial way means voting in such a way that benefits our neighbour, even if it's detrimental to ourselves.

So, this new commandment, with its new source of love, the love Christ has for us, also has one other new thing. This is perhaps the most difficult and shocking aspect – it has a new judge. Under the old covenant, God was the judge of whether his people had upheld their side of the covenant. But under the new covenant made in Jesus' blood, God allows the world to judge whether people are truly Jesus' disciples by the way they behave toward one another. Sadly, the church has not done very well on this point.

Some of our struggle to love in such a self-sacrificial manner is because we're just not sure how people will respond. They may very well take advantage of our willingness to give, and we don't like the thought of that happening. We don't want to love and then get walked all over. But Jesus knew what was coming and still chose love. He knew the price he would have to pay and went through it anyway. This is the example we are called to follow. To love, even when we know without a doubt that our serving others will be used and abused. To love, even if we'll get nothing in return. And to love, even when it will cost us everything.

To be able to do this we need God's help. We need the Holy Spirit dwelling within us and filling us with God's love every day. And we need to make use of another great gift from God – prayer. To be able to love one another as Christ first loved us, we must pray. We have to, we need to, we can't possibly love like this without prayer.

And so tonight, right now, that is what we shall do:

Lord Jesus, help us to love as you have first loved us. When we struggle to love others, strengthen and empower us through your great love for us. Fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can see those who are in need and desire to act in love towards them. Thank you for choosing love and laying down your life for us. Amen.