

One Another

Lesson 1: Love One Another -- John 13:34-35

It is the last night. In a borrowed upstairs room, with the smell of roasted lamb still in the air and the shadows of betrayal already gathering, Jesus does something no one expected. He takes off his outer garment, ties a towel around his waist, and kneels at the feet of his friends. The Lord of glory washes the dust and grime from twelve pairs of feet, including the feet of the man who will sell him before sunrise. When he finishes, he takes his place again, and into that quiet room he speaks words that will outlast every empire on earth.

"A new command I give you," he says. "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." We have heard the sentence so often that it can slide past us like a familiar hymn. But stop and feel the weight of it. The Savior is hours from the cross. Of all the things he could have pressed into their hearts on this final night, of all the warnings and instructions he might have given, this is what he chooses to leave them. Love one another. He says it as a command, not a suggestion, and he stamps it with his own example.

Notice the measure he gives. He does not say, "Love one another as much as you can manage," or "Love one another when they deserve it." He says, "As I have loved you." The standard is not our feelings and not our culture's thin idea of love. The standard is a basin and a towel, and beyond that a cross. This is love that stoops, love that serves, love that bleeds. It is not sentiment that costs nothing. It is a love that already knows the worst about us and gives itself anyway.

Then Jesus says something startling. "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Not by your arguments. Not by your buildings or your programs or even your knowledge of Scripture, as good as those things are. The watching world will read the reality of our faith in the way we treat each other. This little study you are beginning is about that one love, traced through the many "one another" commands of the New Testament. It starts here, in the upper room, because every other command grows out of this one. Before we ask how to bear with one another or forgive one another or serve one another, we have to stand in this room and hear the Lord say, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

Group Discussion: When people in our culture say the word "love," what do they usually mean by it, and how is that different from the love Jesus models when he kneels down with a towel and then walks toward a cross?

Personal Reflection: Who is the one person in the family of God that you find hardest to love right now? As you begin this study, what would it mean to bring that relationship honestly before the Lord?

Read John 13:34-35

Study Questions

1. Jesus calls this a “new” command, yet “love your neighbor as yourself” was already written in the Law (Leviticus 19:18). In what sense is this command genuinely new? Consider the words “as I have loved you” as you answer.
2. Think honestly about the last week of your life inside the church family. Where did your love look more like polite tolerance than the active, stooping love Jesus describes? Name one concrete moment.
3. Look closely at the scene around these verses. Jesus has just washed his disciples’ feet, and he is hours from the cross. How does the setting itself define what he means by love, and why can we not separate this command from his example?
4. Jesus measures our love by his own: “as I have loved you.” Where is your love for fellow Christians still mostly a warm feeling, and where has it actually cost you something in time, money, comfort, or pride?
5. Jesus says, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” Why would the Lord make love among believers, rather than knowledge or zeal, the great identifying mark of his people?

6. If an unbeliever quietly watched how you speak about and act toward the members of your congregation, what would they conclude about whether you belong to Jesus? Be specific about what they would see.
7. Jesus gives this command on the very night Judas betrays him and Peter denies him. What does it tell us about the nature of this love that he commands it knowing his disciples will fail him within hours?
8. Is there a relationship in the body of Christ that has grown cold, strained, or distant? What is one step of love, not just feeling but action, that you could take toward that person this week?
9. Jesus issues love as a command, not as an optional emotion, yet he roots it in his own love for us and in the new covenant he is about to seal in his blood. How does grounding our love in Christ's love for us, and in our shared life in his one body, keep this command from collapsing into either cold duty or empty sentiment?
10. Look back across John 13:34–35 as a whole: a new command, the measure of Christ's own love, and love as the badge of discipleship. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow in love through this passage, and what you will do about it.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 John 3:16–18, where love is defined by Christ laying down his life and is to be shown in deed and not merely in word; 1 John 4:7–11, where we love because God first loved us in sending his Son; Romans 5:8, where God shows his love in that Christ died for us while we were still sinners; Ephesians 5:1–2, where we are called to walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us.